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“Hurt Into Poetry: The Politics of Sentiment in Northern Irish Poetry, 1966-1998”

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An abstract of
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Abstract

"Hurt Into Poetry: The Politics of Sentiment in Northern Irish Poetry, 1966-1998"

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When W.H. Auden wrote in his elegy for Yeats "Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry. / Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still, / For poetry makes nothing happen" he aligned three strands that dominate twentieth-century aesthetics: sentiment, the nation, and poetry's apparent lack of political efficacy. Reconsidering the role of politics in Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles, this study argues that with its aspirations to rehabilitate human sensitivity, to advance an aesthetic ideal of order, and to foster public affections, Troubles poetry is *paradigmatic* of modern aesthetics. Moreover, I argue that Ireland itself is central to this development. In mapping out an "Irish" aesthetic, I posit Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* (1808), and the poetry of W.B. Yeats as foundational texts for the aesthetic contemplation of political events and contexts.

While focused on the specific case of Ireland, my project also points toward a general paradigm for understanding the relationship between aesthetics, postcoloniality, and the rise of contemporary human rights. At the center of this nexus, is the radical contrast between the claims of individual subjectivity and the impersonal force of violence. Combining postcolonial theories of cosmopolitanism and eighteenth-century theories of moral sentiment, my project explores how this complex dynamic informs the adamant commitment of Northern Irish poets to aesthetics as an antithesis to political and sectarian violence. I argue that the poetry of Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney, and that of Northern Irish poets more generally, establishes an alternative politics, in which an affective politics grounded in sympathy is used to critique more abstract modes of political reasoning that may promote violence. Finally, I suggest that Troubles poetry contributes to the contemporary discourse of human rights by finding in literary sentiment a kind of aspirational basis for universal justice. Specifically, by recasting national political conflicts as sources of moral feeling for international audiences, Troubles poetry suggests a model for the role of postcolonial literatures in shaping the current discourse of human rights.

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INTRODUCTION:

A TROUBLED POETIC: NORTHERN IRISH POLITICS, AESTHETICS, AND POSTCOLONIALITY

Looming over Northern Irish poetry of the past forty years is an unanswerable but nevertheless persistent question: what if the Troubles had never happened? Now, in this post-Troubles period, this question has become almost a reflex in retrospective considerations of a given poet's work. While there are limitless answers to the question, two very different ways of answering emerge, which profoundly influence the field of debate, albeit implicitly. First, one might suggest that if the Troubles had never happened a figure like Seamus Heaney would not enjoy such widespread acclaim, and much of what is interesting about such poetry would have been lost. Such readings tend to gravitate toward the "political" dimensions of the work, finding the work's "aesthetic" qualities to be at best extraneous and at worst naturalizing. Second, one might suggest that if the Troubles had never happened the virtues of a poet like Michael Longley might have been even greater — or at the very least less obscured by his historical context. Such readings tend to emphasize the work's "aesthetic" qualities, viewing the "political" dimensions of the work as either journalistic fabrications or the pathology for which art may be the cure. To put it simply, one strives to Trouble Northern Irish poetry, the other to *un*-Trouble it.

While numerous insights have emerged from both of these orientations, my goal in this study is not to take up sides again and claim that the poetry is either political or it is

not. Rather, I am interested in how this tension shapes both Irish poetry and criticism and its reception among a cosmopolitan readership. As I hope to show, alongside the poetry is an equally interesting history of reading. Indeed, the notion that a text can really be either "political" or "just a poem" seems to be a strange legacy of text-only approaches to literary criticism — strange because neither the “poetic” nor the “political” are distinct enough to actually locate in a text with any consistency. Few people would assert that a poem about a helicopter is any more political or less poetic than a poem about a hyacinth. My desire then to revisit what may seem to be a tired debate is to offer a new approach that treats politics and aesthetics not as qualities of a text, but rather as fields of discourse that have profoundly influenced the production and reception of the literary texts in question. After all, the debates surrounding and informing Troubles poetry are in the end about how we read.[1]

The question of how we read Troubles poetry leads to further questions about the relations among aesthetics, global politics, and market forces in the dissemination of literary texts, as well as in the determination of both the value and the meaning of these texts by culturally diverse interpretive communities. Moreover, by granting the importance of these extra-literary factors in the determination of value and meaning, one threatens the notions of transcendence and autonomy that are so central to our understanding of the aesthetic. That is to say, if Seamus Heaney, for example, did not get

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[1] Despite its controversial status, I often refer to the poetry of Northern Ireland written during the period of the Troubles as *Troubles poetry*. I have opted to do so because this study is as interested in the poetry itself as its reception. Moreover, as in the case of Michael Longley, his resistance to such a designation is in fact relevant to his poetic and critical strategies. By calling such poetry Troubles poetry, however, is not to suggest that it can be or should be read solely in terms of its historical context.

into our anthologies and on to our syllabi on literary merit alone, then, perhaps, he should not be in them at all. This dilemma, I believe, functions like a parable in understanding the *interaction*, rather than the *independence*, of aesthetics and politics in twentieth- and twenty-first century literature. For in the case of Heaney, what is the casual undergraduate to do with the checkpoints, place names, and depictions of violence? On the one hand they may be viewed *politically* as evidence of an actual political and historical circumstance in a particular place; but this reading risks obscuring the aesthetic quality that makes them more ambiguous and more richly complex figures than a simple political reading can allow. On the other hand, the material can be viewed *aesthetically*, and an "armored car in convoy, warbling along on powerful tyres" (Heaney, *Field Work* 15) can evoke, perhaps, Marvell's "wingéd chariot"; but this reading simplifies and obscures the importance of topicality in the work. The challenge of reading Northern Irish poetry, and postcolonial literature in general, is that both these possibilities of significance must remain in play.[2]

Further complicating, and deriving from, this collaboration of politics and aesthetics in Northern Irish poetry, is the figure of violence — both the violence that is depicted in the poems themselves and that which has come to constitute the international media's image of Northern Ireland — must be taken into account. Indeed, within the context of our culture's obsession with violence in general, and with documentary

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[2] For this perspective I am indebted to Deepika Bahri's *Native Intelligence*, which articulates this challenge more clearly: "postcolonial literature is increasingly read either without the sociolinguistic and area-based knowledge that illuminates its peculiarity and its more locally inspired struggles, or when historically grounded readings are parsed in so localized a way as to leave it no larger ground on which it may be relevant more expansively—to reveal, for instance, answers to what it means to be human at century's end and at the cusp of a new millennium" (14).

footage of particular instances of violence worldwide, the popularity of Northern Irish poetry should lead us to question how these images of violence can elicit a kind of pleasure that is variously aesthetic and humanitarian.

This collaboration between violence and aesthetics, however, is not unique either historically or geographically. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful (*1757), Edmund Burke emphasizes the pleasure of viewing violence from a distance as a critical category of aesthetic experience. Burke writes: "I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortune and pain of others" (92). Seeking to reconcile this troubling observation with the design of Providence, Burke binds this delight with a humanitarian urge, activated by sympathy, that leads one to redress the pain or misfortune: "The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer" (93). This almost absurdly optimistic account of human nature, however, strains against the rest of Burke's theory, betraying a prescriptive attempt to redeem what descriptively is deeply troubling. Burke's account relies on the assumption of a certain proximity that disguises the deeply mediated nature of most spectatorship. What may be true is that while our delight is often accompanied with a kind of humanitarian outrage, this outrage rarely leads to any direct action. This discrepancy between the outrage and the action may be even more apparent to modern readers for whom news of famines, civil wars, murders, kidnappings, forms a steady diet that can never be fully digested.

Burke, however, in attempting to provide evidence for his assertion, does not offer a

hypothetical scenario of witnessing violence followed by humanitarian intervention, but instead appeals to the reader's experience of *reading about* real events.[3] The pleasure we receive from real violence is predicated on a distance that renders that violence legible.

> Do we not read the authentic histories of scenes of this nature with as much pleasure as romances or poems, where the incidents are fictitious? The prosperity of no empire, nor the grandeur of no king, can so agreeably affect in the reading, as the ruin of the state of Macedon, and the distress of its unhappy prince. Such a catastrophe touches us in history as much as the destruction of Troy does in fable. (92)

Burke's emphasis here on literature and the act of reading expresses an alliance between the categories of literature and violence on the one hand, and the acts of reading and ethical reflection on the other. This alliance remains implicit but pervasive in the rest of his writing and suggests a paradigm for understanding the reading of violence in a media-saturated culture. As Burke argues, the reading of history, like literature, is fundamentally affective; in terms of pleasure, the reading of fact and the reading of fiction are indistinguishable — both "touch" the reader equally. This coordination of real history and fictitious literature, however, creates a problem in distinguishing aesthetics from ethics. In the case of literature, the pleasure of reading belongs to the category of taste and aesthetic judgment; in the case of history, the pleasure of reading should belong to the category of ethical judgment. Though literature and history are ontologically

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[3] By "reading" I wish to indicate more broadly the engagement with any representation — photography, moving pictures, painting, as well as literature.

different, phenomenologically they are identical, and, as a result, history can be mistaken for literature: where an ethical response might demand action to address a real injustice, a merely aesthetic response is endorsed by our delight.

As we have seen, when faced with this dilemma between ethics and aesthetics, Burke turns to sympathy to explain how the pleasure of viewing or reading violence can be reconciled with a benevolent providential design. "Pity," Burke argues, "is a passion accompanied with pleasure, because it arises from love and social affection." That is, we feel pleasure by design in viewing violence because it leads us to act against that violence and so conform to our nature:

> Whenever we are by nature to any active purpose, the passion which animates us to it, is attended with delight, or a pleasure of some kind, let the subject matter be what it will; and as our Creator has designed we should be united by the bond of sympathy, he has strengthened that bond by a proportionable delight; and there most where our sympathy is most wanted, in the distress of others. (92)

In addition to sympathy's centrality in social affection, the operation of sympathy circumvents reason because the reality of the violence is registered in our own bodies, leading us to act by reflex against suffering. "The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer; and all this antecedent to any reasoning, by an instinct that works us to its own purposes, without our concurrence" (93). In its pre-rationality, sympathy allows Burke to move from the affective experience of reading to a similarly affective experience of ethical action, but it also obscures the mediated nature of reading.

The instinct to action, one assumes, must be profoundly frustrated in the case of the "unhappy prince" of Macedon, or in the case of reports of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. What Burke fails to recognize is that sympathy may be the grounds both for a purely aesthetic pleasure *as well as* the grounds for ethical action, but that aesthetic pleasure may not necessarily lead to ethical action.

Nevertheless, Burke reveals the way in which reading very often becomes the site of ethical work — evaluation, judgment, and, often, absolution. Susan Sontag, in her 2003 essay on photography, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, continues Burke's emphasis on sympathy, but suggests its more malevolent function. The pleasure of reading violence, Sontag argues, derives from sympathy's ability to absolve the reader of any implication in the violence: "So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence" (103). Whereas Burke argues that our delight in viewing other people's pain derives from its ability to animate us to action, Sontag argues the opposite: we delight in the sympathy a poem or a photograph elicits because, on the evidence of our depth of feeling, it exonerates us from the burden of responsibility. We are not animated to action, we are excused from it. Indeed, this kind of exoneration goes a step beyond the duality of history and literature in Burke: the ethical in Sontag's argument is not replaced by the aesthetic, rather the ethical extends the pleasures of the aesthetic. In reading representations of violence, the ethical is very often co-opted into enriching the sentimental experience with the aura of history and the frisson of a vicarious victimhood.

Recognizing that sympathy can short-circuit the continuum that would connect

the reading of a representation of violence with the intellectual and ethical consideration with what it attempts to represent, places a special burden on the critic of Northern Irish poetry. The delight, mobilized by sympathy, that Burke and Sontag identify in the reading of violence, is the linchpin that joins political and aesthetic readings of Northern Irish poetry, for, as both critics show, delight does not make a distinction, but critical work can begin to map the complex collaborations between politics and art. As Sontag observes, critical reflection may in fact be stimulated by representations of violence and the sympathy they inspire, but one must work against the absolving undertow of sympathy:

> To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may—in ways we might prefer not to imagine—be linked to suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark. (103)

In light of Sontag's claim, one must examine the nature of the delight we receive from Northern Irish poetry, and, then, demonstrate how one can move from delight to awareness in contemplating representations of violence. This critical practice is no idle exercise; rather, as we are increasingly recruited into a spectatorial relationship to violence worldwide, poetry of the Troubles offers us lessons in how to think about our role as ethically engaged critics. In other words, any discussion of representing the Troubles should be qualified by how we read those representations. Not only must the political particularities of the poem be taken into account, but we must also take into

account the political implications of how we read such poetry. Sympathy may explain many of the pleasures that derive from the fusion of politics and aesthetics, of the particular and the universal, but when it is allowed to remain merely a source of pleasure, it exercises a negative effect on ethical action. Responsible criticism then must strive to trace the affective qualities of representations of violence as well as the way in which literature troubles both a simple aesthetic response to those representation and a merely political decoding of those representations. As Bahri argues, it is in this complex and generative nexus of the political and the aesthetic that literature acquires its radical potential—even when that potential may exceed authorial intent or a "work's transparent compliance with a recognizable program of deliverance" (7). Bahri continues:

> The struggle to release the potential truth-content of postcolonial literature places artistic production in a dialectic with history while exploring potential 'elements of change' [Adorno]. Thoughtful criticism must struggle to liberate the energy of the dynamic by attending more carefully to the processes of aesthetic mediation alongside literature's other mediations. (7-8)

In Northern Irish poetry, the allure of violence and the potential for a morally-satisfied complacency often couples with a similar tendency to reduce postcolonial literature either to mere aesthetics or to mere political information.

Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment" (originally published in 1973, collected in *North* in 1975) engages with precisely this complex of reading and offers a paradigmatic example for a new kind of reading. Moreover, the poem, which has become some of the most disputed ground in Northern Irish poetry, as well as one of his most often

anthologized poems, is particularly instructive because it is itself a meditation on the processes of sympathy that the viewing of violence initiates. The poem begins with the narrator gazing on another representation of violence, the exhumed body of an executed adulteress, and permitting himself the pleasures of sympathy:

> I can feel the tug
>
> of the halter at the nape
>
> of her neck, the wind
>
> on her naked front. (ll. 1-4)

The pleasures the narrator experiences quickly gain an erotic charge, suggesting that sympathetic delight in contemplating another's suffering is not far removed from the delights of pornography. (As Sontag observes, our appetite for images of violence is second only to our appetite for images of the naked body (*Regarding* 41).)[4] The question which seems to animate the progress of the narrator's reflection is What to do with this image of violence and the feelings it inspires? He moves then away from the erotic to imagining the circumstances of her execution. From there he moves to an evocation of a more contemporary context, the tarring and feathering of Catholic girls during the Troubles. The erotic, the circumstantial, the mythic archetypal: the narrator demonstrates multiple approaches to contemplating violence. Nor is the third-person distance that begins the poem adequate, as the narrator ultimately addresses the object directly, both accusingly ("Little adulteress" (l. 23)) and pityingly ("My poor scapegoat" (l. 28)). "I am the artful voyeur" (l. 32), the narrator then asserts, ambushing his own reverential

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[4] Sontag notes later that "All images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree pornographic" (95).

pleasure.

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

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge. (ll. 37-45)

Edna Longley challenges this paradoxical assertion in her essay on *North*: "But can the poet run with the hare, and hunt with the hounds?" ("*North*: 'Inner Emigré' or 'Artful Voyeur'" 78). I would answer yes -- and not only can the poet do so. Just such a paradoxical position -- both sympathizing with the victim and condoning the perpetrator -- is what sympathy enables, and it is this paradox that the poem seeks to expose. Ciaran Carson in his review of Heaney's collection goes even further than Longley: "It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened; they happened then, they happen now, and that is sufficient ground for understanding and absolution" (184-5). *Understanding* perhaps, but the poem does not presume any grounds for absolution. On the contrary, it seems to amount to a condemnation of the narrator's own complacency, a complacency that sympathy often promotes. At the close of the poem the narrator turns toward the unpleasant work of self-critique, in other words

away from pleasure and toward reflection, toward a critical awareness of his role in violence. The poem thus offers a paradigm of reading, of how to respond *responsibly* to representations of violence.

In the way that Heaney brings an understanding of his own historical moment to bear on the exhumed body of the Windeby girl, so does this study extend the scope of reading beyond the poem itself. That is, while it attends primarily to the texts, my study also seeks to understand the culture that surrounds these texts — that is, the conditions of production, dissemination, and consumption which collaborate in producing a text's meaning, or its "worldliness," as Edward Said has termed it.[5] In the case of Heaney's "Punishment," for example, I wish to examine the poem not only as words on a page, but also as an historical event and agent. Significant to our understanding of the poem are its composition in 1972, its publication in the volume *North* in 1975, its astonishing ability to incite critical debate, its frequent anthologization, its extensive international readership, etc. Implicit in this approach is the contention that a poem is never merely a thing *written*, but also, and perhaps most importantly of all, a thing *read*. Moreover, my very insistence on this approach indicates the existence of another critical approach, advocated by excellent critics like Edna Longley, Denis Donoghue, and Peter McDonald, which would insist on the poem's autonomy from these conditions. This energetic debate about the interpretation of the art object in Northern Ireland is in itself central to understanding a poem like "Punishment." As Pierre Bourdieu argues, "discourse about a work is not a mere accompaniment, intended to assist its perception and appreciation, but

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[5] See *The World, The Text, and The Critic* 31-53.

a stage in the production of the work, of its meaning and value" ("The Production of Belief" 110). The written text of the poem is a site for the inscription of numerous social, historical, political, and critical influences.

1. Paradigms of Politics: Northern Irish Poetry and Modern Aesthetics

Moreover, the poetry and criticism that emerged from Northern Ireland during the period of the Troubles, is not merely the stuff of a local row, but in fact brings to the fore a number of conceptual problems inherited from the enlightenment and the rise of both modern politics and modern aesthetics. The tension between universal humanism and the particularity of human sympathy, the reliance on the figure of the female body to coordinate aesthetic and social order, the use of suffering and violence for artistic ends, the discrepancy between cosmopolitan and local interpretive communities, the elision of political and artistic representation -- all these unresolved issues of the past three hundred years are urgently re-engaged in Troubles poetry and criticism. Indeed, the Northern Irish Troubles and the poetry of the Troubles, while unique from one perspective, depend significantly on a continuity with previous histories and aesthetic theories of engagement. In short, the poetic production of Northern Ireland, contrary to the journalistic claims that promote it, may not in fact be *exceptional* in literary history. Rather, with its aspirations to rehabilitate human sensitivity, to advance an aesthetic ideal of order, and to foster public affections, Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles may more accurately be categorized as *paradigmatic* of modern aesthetics.

Writing in the "Preface" to his 1802 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth diagnoses a particularly modern ailment:

> A multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind […]. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary events, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies.
>
> (599)

Wordsworth was writing his preface in the wake of the French Revolution, which had been, among other things, one of the greatest media events of its time; but the basis of his complaint will seem familiar to almost anyone in the centuries to follow. That is, while in Wordsworth's estimate the current situation of media saturation, and the proportionate popular hunger, may have been unprecedented, it certainly was not unsucceeded. Today an even more instantaneous system of global communication fans our own craving for violent spectacle. Nevertheless, despite this grim diagnosis, Wordsworth suggests in his preface a model for artistic engagement in such an environment, which should be familiar to readers of late twentieth-century Northern Irish poetry.

Poetry, Wordsworth argues, finds its *social* justification in its radical opposition to a media onslaught that favors sensationalism over sensitivity. "The human mind," Wordsworth insists, "is capable of being excited without the application of gross and

violent stimulants. […] To endeavor to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged" (599). What Wordsworth critiques is a society of spectacle, in which violence and representations of violence have ceased to provoke anything more than pleasure — indeed, pleasure has come to seek these violent spectacles and so undermine any ethical urge to protest or redress injustice. Attention, then, to social outcasts, sympathy, children, and most, importantly, feeling, Wordsworth counters, may in fact be a form of resistance to the desensitizing effects of modern media. This assertion, however, is not a kind of apolitical apologetics: "When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavored to counteract it" (599). Situating his own efforts within a broader language of resistance, Wordsworth allows, in fact celebrates, the possibility of actual revolution: "the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success" (600).[6] For Wordsworth, poetry finds its justification in social terms by reactivating sensitivity.

Similarly, Edmund Burke, writing in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), conscripts poetry into a critique of revolutionary violence. Poetry, for Burke, offers a model for the ideal state, and a counter to the tyrannical state that must resort to violence for its preservation. Referring to Horace, Burke writes that "The precept given

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[6] Seamus Heaney is attuned to this aspect of Wordsworth's work when he writes in his introduction to his selection of Wordsworth's poetry that "as a poet, [Wordsworth] was always at his best while struggling to become a whole person, to reconcile his sense of incoherence and disappointment forced upon him by time and circumstance with those intimations of harmonious communion promised by his childhood visions, and seemingly ratified by his glimpse of a society atremble at the moment of revolution" (xii).

by a wise man, as well as a great critic, for the construction of poems, is equally true as to states. *Non satis est pulchra esse poemata, dulcia sunto* [It is not enough for poems to be beautiful; they must also be sweet]" (78). The state, Burke suggests, can best achieve legitimacy by approaching the well-ordered condition of the aesthetic object: "To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely" (78). Writing against the practices of the French Revolution, though not against the substance of its principles, Burke's *Reflections* challenges an overly radical commitment to reason at the expense of public affections: "That sort of reason which banishes the affections is incapable of filling their place. These public affections, combined with manners, are required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to the law" (78). Adapting Horace's point, we might presume that Burke would concede the well-ordered beauty of the state that reason would approve, but he would also assert a more subtle category of sweetness, which represents the sublimation of that beauty into the texture of society. As a counter to the rational attractiveness of the French Republic, Burke finds the balance of reason and affection embodied most perfectly in the form of poetry.

Though reflecting different political viewpoints (at least initially), both Burke's and Wordsworth's comments reveal an essential conservatism in relation to modernity. For both writers, modernity affects a disruption in the natural order of things — be it through media saturation or rationalism. Moreover, poetry represents the crucial countervailing category to two preeminent (and often codependent) aspects of modernity: media and political violence. Accordingly, poetry, for both writers, represents the possibility of rolling back the perverse influence of modernity and recovering a more

natural ethical relation to others.[7] As Wordsworth believes that poetry can rehabilitate human sensitivity, Burke believes that social order can be preserved through the bonds of affection that art, and literature in particular, exemplifies and inspires.[8]

Almost two hundred years later, articulating responses to their own violent (and media-saturated) historical moment, poets in Northern Ireland reiterate an almost identical notion of literature's relation to politics as that which is propounded by Burke and Wordsworth. Two oft-quoted statements from Derek Mahon and Michael Longley illustrate this point. Writing in 1970, Derek Mahon makes an argument remarkably similar to Burke's, while arguing, as it were, from the side of poetry rather than the side of politics, as in Burke's case. Concluding a survey of Northern Irish poetry in 1970, Mahon writes:

> Battles have been lost, but a war remains to be won. The war I mean is not, of course, between Protestant and Catholic but between the fluidity of a possible life (poetry is a great lubricant) and the *rigor mortis* of archaic postures, political and cultural. The poets themselves have taken no part in political events, but they have contributed to that possible life, or to the possibility of that possible life; for the act of writing is itself political in the fullest sense. *A good poem is a paradigm of good politics* — of people talking to each other, with honest subtlety, at a profound level. It is a light to lighten the darkness; and we have had darkness

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[7] The ambiguous temporality of the term *revolution* itself accommodates both the sense of return, which Wordsworth champions, and the sense of radical novelty, which Burke condemns.

[8] For Burke's argument on the superior power of poetry see *A Philosophical Enquiry* 193-199. Burke identifies poetry's force in its superior access to sympathy: "We yield to sympathy, what we refuse to description. [...] By the contagion of our passions, we catch a fire already kindled in another, which probably might never have been struck out by the object described. Words, by strongly conveying the passions [...] fully compensate for their weakness in other aspects" (198).

> enough, God knows, for a long time. ("Poetry in Northern Ireland" 93 (my emphasis))

Like Wordsworth, Mahon diagnoses the ailment of his historical moment in metaphysical terms — a shift in register that he enunciates by permitting and then dismissing the initial ambiguity (e.g. "a war remains to be won") — and is able, thus, to accommodate a notion of poetry as political action. Also like Wordsworth, Mahon locates the effects of poetry in a heightened psychological engagement with others and the world. Moreover, like Burke with a more immediate historical situation in view, Mahon draws on an analogy between the literary/aesthetic object and the ideal state (in this case interpreted more loosely) in order to found a notion of public affections — "A good poem is a paradigm of good politics — of people talking to each other, with honest subtlety, at a profound level" (93).

Even more diligent than Mahon in his efforts to articulate a tenable position on art and politics, Michael Longley, by the end of the 1970s, had formulated a statement that over the years became a kind of motto, in which the values of poetic production are in direct opposition to political violence. In 1979, Longley writes in the *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* about "what I was trying to do" in his collection *The Echo Gate* (1979):

> Though the poet's first duty must be to his imagination, he has other obligations — and not just as a citizen. He would be inhuman if he did not respond to the tragic events in his own community, and a poor artist if he did not seek to endorse that response imaginatively. But if his imagination fails him the result will be a dangerous impertinence. In the context of political violence the deployment of

> words at their most precise and suggestive remains one of the few antidotes to death-dealing dishonesty.
>
> (Quoted in "A Tongue at Play" 120)

Longley's position here reflects both a Burkean notion of aesthetic order and a Wordsworthian notion of poetry as antidote — that is, it aims to restore, rehabilitate, or simply preserve human sensitivity against a corrupting and overwhelming force. In this sense, poetry's function in society is primarily conservative; to the degree that it is instrumental, poetry, in fact, does not make anything happen, rather it upholds certain values (sensitivity, sympathy, precision) against what *is* happening (media-saturation, violent spectacle, political ideologies). This position can be seen as early as 1970, when Longley makes a similar point in a lecture at the Yeats International Summer School: "the tensions of Ulster and Ireland might be considerably alleviated by a few deftly chosen subordinate adverbial clauses of concession" ("Yeats as Tragedian" 1).[9] More recently, Longley has observed that "Describing the world in a meticulous way is a consecration and a stay against damaging dogmatism." (AllenRandolph, "Interview" 305). What is unique about Longley's intervention, though, is the way in which it shifts the focus from aesthetics to language. While Longley replicates Burke's principle of an ideal aesthetic order, he eschews the language of taste and admiration that supports that principle (consider Burke's notion of the lovely state). Instead, Longley positions poetry at the level of discourse. Accordingly, instead of a lovely state, Longley suggests, we should

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[9] Longley continues: "And here, of course, Yeats and all true poets and all true poetry come in. They refresh language, making sure that words, in Edward Thomas's phrase, are 'worn new.' They remind us of the complexity and flexibility of language, providing for those who wish to use it as a flexible instrument for dealing with the complexities of human situations" (1).

want the language of the state (as well as of the population in general) to be precise. When Seamus Heaney describes Longley as "a keeper of the artistic estate, a custodian of griefs and wonders," he is describing the conservative instrumentality that is at the center of Longley's notion of poetry and politics, which finds its predecessors in Burke and Wordsworth.[10]

What the similarities between earlier modern writers like Burke and Wordsworth and later Northern Irish poets of the Troubles suggest is not a simple form of literary influence, though that may be true to certain extent in Wordsworth's case. Rather, the similarities reveal a more general pattern in literary history regarding the relation of literature to politics in the modern era, as it is shaped by the principles of the Enlightenment and the crisis of those principles that the French Revolution represented. More specifically, I would argue, Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles addresses the challenge in contemporary culture of moving from, in Luke Gibbons's phrase, "the private sphere of sensibility to the public sphere of justice" (*Edmund Burke and Ireland* 55). Indeed, the poetry, as in Burke and Wordsworth, positions itself on the border of private and public, of sensibility and justice, revealing the limitations of both positions. On the one hand, an event like the Troubles renders this first, private sphere, inadequate as the locus of poetry. Yet, on the other hand, the poets never fully trust the second, public sphere, as it threatens to dissolve particularities into abstractions. The implicit argument in the poetry is that a continuum must exist between the two positions: public justice must be grounded in private affections (so as to avoid mere ideology), but, also,

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[10] Seamus Heaney. [Cover Material]. *Collected Poems* [Michael Longley]. Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 2007.

private affections must point toward public justice (so as to avoid mere solipsism).

2. THE IRISH DISEASE: POLITICS AND POETRY

By suggesting, however, that Troubles poetry may be paradigmatic of modern aesthetics, I do not mean to generalize it to the point of universality. On the contrary, as the examples of Edmund Burke, Thomas Moore, and W.B. Yeats show, Ireland itself seems to play a strangely vital role in the development of the modern aesthetics that Troubles poetry inherits. Suggestively, Terry Eagleton notes in his history of modern aesthetics, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), that he "originally conceive[d] of the book as a kind of doubled text, in which an account of European aesthetic theory would be coupled at every point to a consideration of the literary culture of Ireland" (11). Kant and the United Irishmen, Nietzsche and Wilde, Adorno and Beckett, Heidegger and Heaney — Eagleton notes a number of possible pairings.[11] One wishes this project had come to fruition, but, as it stands in its tantalizing potentiality, it still reveals Ireland's role as a kind of historical ghosting of modern aesthetics — a phenomenon that has still to be explored. But this study attempts to trace at least partially this collaboration between Ireland and modern aesthetics by locating, from the retrospective point of the Troubles, new lines of descent in Irish literature. Accordingly, throughout the study, I try to draw illuminating

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[11] "Taking my cue from a passing reference of Kant to the revolutionary United Irishmen, I would have looked at Wolfe Tone and his political colleagues in the context of the European Enlightenment, and reviewed Irish cultural nationalism from Thomas Davis to Padraic Pearse in the light of European idealist thought. I also intended to harness somewhat loosely such figures as Marx, James Connolly and Sean O'Casey, and to link Nietzsche with Wilde and Yeats, Freud and Joyce, Schopenhauer and Adorno with Samuel Beckett, and (wilder flights, these) Heidegger with certain aspects of John Synge and Seamus Heaney" (11).

parallels between, for example, the strategies of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and Seamus Heaney's "Bog Poems," or the use of erotic desire in W.B. Yeats's and Michael Longley's love poetry.

What emerges from this longview of Troubles poetry is an abiding tension in Irish literature between a commitment to aesthetics and a commitment to national (and nationalist) politics. Troubles poetry, then, often takes shape in its efforts to slip free of political imperatives; but, because this evasion is never complete, the poets (and many critics) develop a sophisticated form of ironic double-speak, which invokes politics even in its dismissal. For example, Seamus Heaney, quoting a passage of Yeats (and, indirectly, Coventry Patmore) for his epigraph to *Preoccupations* (1980), endorses a private, individual, religious devotion to art as a politically productive orientation. In the passage from "Samhain: 1905," Yeats outlines a particular Irish predilection for matters of public opinion. "The antagonist of imaginative writing in Ireland," Yeats concludes, "is not a habit of scientific observation but our interest in matters of opinion" (197). Yeats pursues this point to challenge the notion that his play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) was written with any direct political intent in mind. Instead, he cannily deflects the question of intent by claiming that the story came to him in a dream, asserting both the primacy of individual concerns and, by extension the primacy of art. Yet, given the play's *aisling* (dream-vision) origins, Yeats's appeal to dreaming can also be read as a reaffirmation of the political, and, by extension the Irish habit of mixing art and opinion. In Yeats's formulation (and, by act of appropriation, Heaney's), the individual is placed in opposition to the political (or the collective), but also linked to the political collective by

a principle of representation:

> If we understand our own minds, and the things that are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root. Coventry Patmore has said 'The end of art is peace,' and the following of art is little different from the following of religion in the intense preoccupation it demands. (199)

Moreover, like Longley's "dishonesty" and "imagination," Yeats's (and Patmore's and Heaney's) notion of "peace" thrives off of its ambiguity — it may suggest spiritual peace or political peace according to one's preference. This ambiguity is no doubt appreciated by Heaney, whose choice of title for a collection that spans history, autobiography, and literary essay, "Preoccupations," troubles in its plurality the crucially *singular* importance of the religious "preoccupation" with art advocated by Yeats. Thus, on the one hand, we are invited to read Heaney's preoccupations as reflections on the art of poetry, while on the other hand, we are permitted to view the diversity of subject matter as a reflection of the continuity among art, politics, and the individual.

Crucially, though, the resolution of this apparent opposition is perpetually suspended. Heaney and Longley are both careful to preserve a double resonance that allows them to assert the primacy of art, even as that position is legitimated in political terms. Following Frank Kermode and Edward Mendelson in their discussions of Thirties poetry, this double resonance might be usefully described as "equivocal." The poems, and the commentary on the practice of poetry, actively develop a lexicon of multivalent

terms that can serve like double-agents between matters of politics and matters of poetry and aesthetics. In reassessing Auden's political poetry (like *Spain* or "September 1, 1939") Kermode, in his 1987 Clarendon Lectures, adopts *equivocality* as a positive and distinguishing feature of such poetry:

> *Spain* is not a marching song or a recruiting poster; it is an attempt to express what it feels like to confront a great historical crisis. At bottom such crises have elements in common, and in this respect Auden's poem resembles Marvell's "Horatian Ode." […] Both deal with the work of time and its ruin, with individual will and its relation to historical forces. […] Both are, in Mendelson's word, "equivocal."
>
> ("Eros, Builder of Cities" 78-9)

As Edward Mendeslon's use of the term shows, "equivocal" connotes both an aspiration to and achievement of a public, didactic, and political relevance and a simultaneous, more patently aesthetic, reflection on individual concerns.[12] In other words, the equivocal political poem succeeds by uniting the political and historical to the individual and seemingly timeless; it offers an emblem of the individual in confrontation with history.

While the use of equivocality by both Kermode and Mendelson emanates from an *apologia* for a particular kind of political poem — that of the 1930s British intellectual — the Troubles poetry of Longley and Heaney offers a slightly different equivocality, even as it gravitates toward a line of political poetry developed by the Thirties poets. What

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[12] "Poems like *Spain* and 'September 1, 1939,' which seemed questionably public and didactic, were in fact poetry of a very different and more equivocal kind" (*Early Auden* 203).

distinguishes the equivocality in Troubles poetry (and in Yeats) is its Irish quality, which grants it, as I argue above, a representational status. For the Thirties poet, on the contrary, there is a perpetually glaring problem of representation — which figures like George Orwell tirelessly and delightedly exposed — in that the experience of writers like Auden, Stephen Spender, or even Louis MacNeice could hardly justify any authority to speak *for* the people. Irish poets on the other hand — from Moore to Yeats to Heaney — enjoy to an almost overbearing degree the apparent right and responsibility of representing the political experience of Ireland to audiences beyond Ireland. Tellingly, in Kermode's largely nostalgic account, only Irish poetry seems to escape a general failure to continue what he calls "struggles" poetry ("Eros" 81).

But this privileged status granted to Irish poetry reveals an inverse problem: how does one save, in a sense, the poetry from the political? It is this predicament that Yeats bemoans in "Samhain: 1905:"

> The antagonist of imaginative writing in Ireland is not a habit of scientific observation but our interest in matters of opinion. … All fine literature is the disinterested contemplation or expression of life, but hardly any Irish writer can liberate his mind sufficiently from questions of practical reform for this contemplation. Art for art's sake, as he understands it, whether is be the art of Ode on a Grecian Urn, or of the imaginer of Falstaff, seems to him a neglect of public duty. It is as though the telegraph-boys botanised among the hedges with the undelivered envelopes in their pockets. … We all write, if we follow the habit of our country, not for our own delight but for the improvement of our

neighbours. (197-8)

It is my contention throughout this study that this Irish disease diagnosed by Yeats is one that is perpetuated in part by Irish audiences but is also activated in large part by a cosmopolitan appetite for accounts of the Irish experience, which can, in turn, be converted into sentimental pleasure. The equivocality then that is developed by the Thirties poets arises primarily from a failure of representation, while the equivocality of Irish poetry arises from an effort to circumvent an enforced representational responsibility. In other words, what is "political" in Thirties poetry is the aspiration to collective representation, while what is "political" in Irish poetry is, paradoxically, the "poetical," which allows one to assert the particularity of lived experience against the universalizing habits of a cosmopolitan readership.

The curious critical habit then of imagining poets like Heaney or Longley outside the context of the Troubles, can be explained as a symptom of this same phenomenon: it is an attempt, at least in part, to rescue the poets from a representational imperative. Accordingly, Michael Longley, for example, is not a Troubles poet, or even an Irish poet, but a nature poet or a love poet. What these speculative accounts obscure, however, is the ultimate impossibility of distinguishing in Irish poetry the poetic (or aesthetic) from the political, cultural, and historical circumstances from which it arose. That said, the effort to distinguish the poetic from the political should not be dismissed as a mere fallacy, but should itself be read as constitutive of a kind of poetics that depends on the rich figurative power of both the concept of the poetic and the concept of the political. In other words, as much as Michael Longley's identity as a love poet or nature poet emerges

in spite of the Troubles it also gains force *because of* its implicit opposition to politics as such. Admittedly, we are entering vertiginous territory here, but what such poetry demands is a kind of double vision. The poems should be read not as one thing or another, either political or purely aesthetic, but as accommodations between collective politics and individualist aesthetics, between representation and radical particularity.

Moreover, criticism of Troubles poetry should be read with a similar attention to the protean subtleties of poetry and politics. In many of the best readings of Northern Irish poetry, the dominant narrative-critical trope has been an evasive non-alignment: meaning is on the run, as it were, from sectarian propaganda. Edna Longley's reading of Paul Muldoon offers an excellent illustration of this approach:

> Muldoon subverts martys and goddesses, fixed ideas and "concrete" categories, by means of language that undermines its own solidity. [...] This suggests a political posture as of escaped prisoner-of-war, secret agent, double agent, saboteur. Muldoon's methods give the lie to the notion that language can operate politically in Irish poetry only by declaring firm allegiances. ("Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland" 207)

Such an assessment of Muldoon (and others — Derek Mahon, Medbh McGuckian, Ciaran Carson, to name a few) has become a stock method for recovering poetry's transcendent autonomy from the political realm, while also offering a soft critique of a certain politics (typified by the most extreme elements of Loyalist and Republican rhetoric) arguing that things are not so simple.

Implicit in this reading is a condemnation of poetry that does not achieve, or even

seek, such a non-aligned status — in Edna Longley's work it is often the poetry of Seamus Heaney and Tom Paulin that represents the bad other option. Moreover, the championing of double-agency and the condemnation of "declaring firm allegiances" regularly accompanies a similar condemnation of critical practices that would interpret the poems in political terms. Such interpretations, it follows, attribute too much solidity and too little subversive ambiguity to poetic language. Although this position offers a valuable reminder of the importance of close reading in the face of romanticized notions of political violence, it also verges on a form of academic quietism. That is, just as one should not presume to read a poem too simply as this or that, so one should not presume to read the political situation as either good or bad. In other words there is no "actionable intelligence" — only intelligence. To say, then, that poetry can be political *only* antithetically — only by undermining political motivations to action — prematurely forecloses the possibility of discovering other formations at, what Conor Cruise O'Brien has called, the "unhealthy intersection" of poetry and politics.[13] Indeed, Longley is right in suggesting that there is more to the politics of poetry than simply declaring allegiances, and that irony as a means for subverting political certainties is itself a political move. But there is another aspect of Longley's argument that may be more illuminating to our

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[13] See "An Unhealthy Intersection" 3-8.

understanding of the relation of poetry to politics: sympathy.[14]

In her seminal essay "Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland" (1986), Edna Longley not only champions the evasive strategies of Paul Muldoon and Derek Mahon, but she also traces an argument on aesthetic taste through the complex notion of identification. In an effort to coordinate good poetry with good politics (following Derek Mahon's equation), Longley seeks a coincidence between proper identification and poetic imagination: if poetry fails it is a failure of proper identification. In other words, what Longley elaborates in her argument that "Poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated" (185), is a correlative relationship between aesthetics and an ethics of sympathy.

> Empathy with one Ulster community, such as Heaney's in *North*, might constrain rather than release a poet's imagination. […] For Heaney, the umbilical cord between poet and tribe inhibits discrimination between positive and negative elements. The inhibition paralyses his imagination in "Punishment;" but a later poem, "Casualty," resolves any ambivalence towards victims of rough justice. Identifying with one who "broke / our tribe's complicity," the poet breaks it too. (203)

In a marked reversal of the usual mythos of bardic poetry (as well as of Edward Said's

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[14] By "sympathy" I wish to indicate the older usage of the term, which preceded and encompassed the later coinage of the term "empathy." As defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, sympathy is "The quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling. Also, a feeling or frame of mind evoked by and responsive to some external influence." Edmund Burke's definition comes even closer to the more modern notion of empathy: "For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put in the place of another man, and affected in many of the respects as he is affected" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 91).

"pact made between people and poet" ("Yeats and Decolonization" 234)), Longley suggests that the identification between the poet and "tribe" compromises both ethical discrimination and poetic imagination. Far from legitimizing or empowering the poet, identification misaligned fetalizes ("the umbilical cord") the individual, and makes a cripple of the imagination. Identification properly aligned, Longley suggests, has the opposite effect: it activates the imagination and challenges tribal orthodoxies. In Longley's reading, the only "tribe," so-called, to which identification can properly be applied is that of the "victims of rough justice."

As the complexity of Longley's reading shows, the field of sympathy proves to be far more treacherous than the field of evasive non-alignment; nevertheless, the fine-line reasoning that a politics of sympathy demands indicates a potential critical productivity that may enable us to move beyond evasion as a ruling trope in charting the intersection of poetry and politics. Indeed, two comments from Longley's essay betray the centrality of sympathy even in her reading of evasion. Longley observes subtly that "Just as empathy may be a pitfall (Heaney), so may a total absence of sympathy (Paulin), since both stances preclude imaginative tension" (203). Imaginative tension we might infer then is that which exists between total identification (Heaney) and a kind of sympathetic, but still critical, impartiality. One should feel for others, but not too much. Longley concludes her essay with a quotation from Keith Douglas arguing that "to be sentimental or emotional now is dangerous to oneself and to others" (210). As these two quotations suggest, even the strategy of ironic evasion falls within the parameters of sympathy and affect. What Longley's essay reveals, even as it argues against a simple alignment of

politics and poetry, is the central question of Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles, indeed, (if we consider Burke and Wordsworth, among others) the question of modern poetics: how to move from the private sphere of aesthetic pleasure to the public sphere of justice — or, in the words of Harriet Beecher Stowe, how to *feel right*.[15]

3. EXCEPTION AND EXEMPLUM: IRELAND AND POSTCOLONIALISM

Finally, coextensive with the trajectories linking Troubles poetry to both modern European aesthetics and Irish intellectual and literary history, is the link between Troubles poetry and contemporary postcolonial literature more broadly. But while few approaches have been as productive and insightful in mapping the intersections of politics and literature, the suitability, however, of postcolonial theory to Irish and Northern Irish literature and experience has been challenged on various grounds. Indeed, the argument over postcoloniality and the Irish case has become a critical leitmotif in Irish criticism of the past twenty years, inviting the observation that, as a bracketed designation, "postcolonialism" has been one of the most heuristically productive terms in recent Irish literary scholarship. While I believe that Irish and Northern Irish literature fit most of the the criteria for postcolonial literature, my goal in the present study will be to consider postcoloniality as a dimension of the reception history of Troubles poetry. In particular, I argue that the reception of Troubles poetry, like postcolonial literature more generally, is

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[15] At the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), in response to the question "But, what can any individual do [to help the abolition of slavery]?" Stowe remarks cryptically "they can see to it that they feel right" (385).

shaped by an international readership that tends to recast local political realities as sources of moral feeling. A brief review of the debate on the question of Ireland's postcoloniality reveals much about the reception of Troubles poetry.

In its current form, the debate on Ireland's postcoloniality seems to center around what can be roughly classified as two critical points of departure: politics and aesthetics. Among postcolonial critics who oppose the inclusion of Ireland in the postcolonial paradigm, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in their foundational collection *The Empire Writes Back* (1987), supply what may be characterized as the prevailing argument against inclusion, based less on historical facts of colonization and more on subsequent political affiliations with the activities of the Second British Empire: "while it is possible to argue that these societies [Irish, Welsh, and Scottish] were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial" (33). Contrastingly, Irish critics such as Edna Longley and Denis Donoghue exclude postcolonial theory on the charge of reductive analogizing and its "sacrifice of literary understanding at the alter of politics" (Donoghue, "Fears for Irish Studies").[16] To put the distinctions simply, postcolonial critics tend to oppose the application of postcolonial theory to Ireland on social and political grounds, while other critics, mostly engaged in some form of practical criticism, do so on aesthetic grounds. In the first case, the contention revolves around historio-geographical practices, in the second it revolves around practices of reading. As such, both arguments are well-founded

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[16] See also Longley, *The Living Stream* 30-31.

and should serve as corrective checks on any overzealous application of theory, but none, I think, argues for complete incompatibility. Indeed, as the opposition to postcolonial readings of Ireland and Irish culture concerns itself primarily with the practical application of the the term and its theories, the question that should preface any discussion of Ireland and postcolonialism is not whether postcolonial theory should be applied to the Irish experience, but how.

Central to the consideration of Ireland's postcoloniality is the fact that the island is far from being a monolithic entity that can be categorized wholesale as either postcolonial or non-postcolonial; indeed, Ireland troubles and complicates many of the prevailing notions of postcoloniality. In terms of periodization, the colonization of Ireland belongs to a period of British imperialism that antedates the far more extensive Second British Empire, which reached its peak in the 19th century; moreover, Ireland won its independence before the great wave of independence movements following the second world war. Thus, from one angle, Ireland is both pre-colonial and pre-postcolonial. In terms of the often procrustean duality of colonizer/colonized, Ireland presents further complications. The Protestant/Catholic or British/Irish categories can be mapped on to the colonizer/colonized divide only loosely. Over the past two hundred years, Irish Protestants have played a disproportionately large role in the resistance to British imperialism, while Irish Catholics and Protestants have played a large role in the imperial administration of other colonies.

Furthermore, Northern Ireland presents numerous complications to any overly simplified ascription of the term "postcolonial" to Ireland. Limiting postcoloniality to its

historical political definition ("post-colonial"), Ireland, arguably, is made up of a post-colonial nation in the south and a British colony in the north.[17] Adding to this complexity are the effects of regionalism, especially among writers, which emphasizes an even greater national and cultural ambivalence in Northern Ireland. Ireland then can be termed pre-colonial, pre-postcolonial, and, in the north, colonial. Nevertheless, while granting Ireland's atypical status as a postcolonial region, this atypicality does not amount to a disqualification of postcolonial critiques. Despite its atypicality, the *coloniality* of Ireland persists; as such, Ireland fits squarely in to John Tomlinson's more capacious definition of colonialism as "the invasion of an indigenous culture by a foreign one" (23). Likewise, the definition provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* of "colonialism" seems well-suited to an understanding of Irish history: "The colonial system or principle. Now frequently used in the derogatory sense of an alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak peoples by a large power." Moreover, the definition provided by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* of "post-colonial" seems more than accommodating to the Irish case: "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft et al. 2).

Nevertheless, we should examine each category of objection with the goal of forming a sufficiently complex approach to the question of Irish postcoloniality. Deepika Bahri's analysis of the Irish case usefully lays out some of the primary grounds of objection: "it's the wrong place for it, they're the wrong color, the timing is all wrong,

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[17] Anne McClintock in her important essay, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism," makes this point: "The terms 'post-colonialism' is, in many cases, prematurely celebratory: Ireland may, at a pinch, be 'post-colonial,' but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland, not to mention the Palestinian inhabitants of the Israeli Occupied Territories and the West Bank, there may be nothing 'post' about colonialism at all" (87).

and they had or have the wrong politics. In objective terms, these would be termed the criteria of race, geography, history, ideology, and economics" ("Uncommon Grounds" 58). Reflecting Bahri's claim, Luke Gibbons observes that while Ireland has "a third-world memory," Ireland is ultimately "a first-world country"—"largely white, Anglophone and westernized" ("Ireland and the Colonization of Theory" 27). Similarly, Jahan Ramazani in his consideration of Yeats's postcoloniality notes the various grounds upon which critics might object to such a claim: "his Eurocentrism, his whiteness, and his affiliation with the centuries-old settler community of Anglo-Irish Protestants. Opponents on the left would find allies on the right in arguing that Yeats's writing flows within the mainstream of English letters" (64). From these accounts, three general categories of contention emerge — Race, Location, and Complicity.

The first of these categories, race, reveals a number of illuminating intersections and divergences. While indicating a potentially positive investment in an idea of transnational postcolonial community — *négritude*, or the category "people of color" for example — race as criterion of differentiation in the case of Ireland ultimately proves unstable. Deepika Bahri argues in her consideration of Ireland's postcoloniality that the criterion of race falls short on two counts: "first, because it privileges visible difference that is usually manifest only in a macroscopic view, preventing any experience with the intimacies of difference; and second, because the criterion of racial superiority and the prejudices attached to chromatism would disqualify not only the Irish but many hitherto uncontested postcolonials" ("Uncommon Grounds" 63). When the category of race is allowed its full spectrum of complexity, the "intimacies of difference," as Bahri terms

them, prove to be particularly interesting and instructive in the Irish case. In Northern Ireland, for example, where sectarian violence revolves around subcutaneous categories of difference, the visual bases of racial difference are replaced by nominal categories — thus, the important question: what is your name? — or, difference is determined by geography, where a street address can be as revealing as a surname. Moreover, as Clair Wills observes "despite some pseudo-Darwinian attempts to match Irish with black physiognomy, in general stereotypes of the 'wild Irish' have tended to concentrate on their habits and lifestyle (poverty, laziness, dirt and drunkenness" (*Improprieties* 80). If one is to follow Bahri's well-argued proposition that perhaps "it is race that is a latecomer in the vocabulary of colonial prejudice" (60), then a potentially more illuminating genealogy of difference may become available.

Juxtaposing, for example, Lewis Curtis's analysis of racial stereotypes, Irish-American racism and colonial participation, and Jimmy Rabitte's claim in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* that "the Irish are the niggers of Europe" (13) — Irish depiction *as* people of color, Irish oppression *of* people of color, Irish emulation of people of color — one begins to appreciate the complex operation of race in the service of colonialism and oppression more generally, and also in the service of resistance. As such, race as a criterion appears adaptable and mutable according to either its instrumental role in oppression, on the one hand, or in its role as a mobilizer of resistance. Indeed, if one were to map the migration of race alongside its respective treatment as either an instrument of resistance or oppression, one would find many strange collaborations: the figure of John Mitchell, a nationalist revolutionary in Ireland and an extreme advocate

and apologist for slavery in the US; the guiding example of Irish anti-imperialist resistance for other colonial countries; the racial violence between Irish- and African-Americans following desegregation in Boston; the adoption of African-American civil rights discourse and tactics among Northern Irish Catholics in the 1960s; and, even, the very currency of postcolonial readings in recent Irish studies. Furthermore, as Elizabeth Butler Cullingford observes, "Ireland is accustomed to being stigmatized as the feminized object of English discourse, but in women, gays, abused children, travellers and the working class is has produced its own internal Others" (*Ireland's Others* 6-7). To treat the operation of race macroscopically, as Bahri warns, would obscure the complexity of Ireland's relation to race as skin color, as well as the varieties of racism that support oppression.

The criteria of geography and history find one of their most revealing manifestations in the issue of language. While critics rightly point out the actual participation of the Irish in the colonial enterprise, the intersections of geography, economics, and history with language and literary production reveal much about the roots of literary cosmopolitanism. Spatial understandings of politics and history have privileged such categories as "the West" or "the Global South." These geo-political categories provide no way of treating the complex history of Ireland, which, as Luke Gibbons has argued, is "a first world country, but with a third world memory" ("Ireland and the Colonization of theory" 27). Regarding the issue of language, and literary production, Ireland is indeed both first- and third-world. The argument against Ireland's linguistic postcoloniality runs that because predominantly Anglophone and more or less

mainstreamed in the English literary tradition, the Irish do not suffer the linguistic oppression that other postcolonial peoples suffer. And, perhaps more to the point, Irish writers have been so thoroughly integrated into the British literary tradition, that the cultural imperialism inflicted on postcolonial countries often has an Irish face, such that the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o can critique the teaching of "British authors from Chaucer through Oliver Goldsmith to Graham Greene" ("Literature and Society" 4-5) without any qualification regarding Goldsmith's Irish background. In a pragmatic sense, Irish or British qualification does not pertain when the function of those writers is toward the same ends. In other words, what may be subversively ambivalent in an Irish-English context may be baldly imperialist in a British-Kenyan context.

Nevertheless, as has been shown by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983), his classic study of nationalism, language is far from being a stable entity, and, as much as it is used as a weapon of imperialism abroad it also serves as a coercive and hegemonic force at home. Anderson notes:

> Print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were 'closer' to each print-language and dominated their final forms. Their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable to the emerging print-language, lost caste, above all because they were unsuccessful or only relatively successful) in insisting on their own print-form." (45)

Within this paradigm of nationalism and languages-of-power, Ireland is doubly interesting. On the one hand, speakers of Irish, increasingly distanced by the dominance

of print-language and almost exterminated by immigration and the famine in the nineteenth century, continue to exert an influence on Irish culture; while on the other hand, a well-educated population of Anglo-Irish writers had established a firm foothold in British cultural discourse as early as the eighteenth century. Such a situation leads to remarkable paradoxes of postcoloniality. For example, in 1973 Ngugi can lament the teaching of Anglo-Irish writers like Goldsmith and Shaw in his son's school in Kenya, even as an Irish writer like Michael Hartnett rejects the English language on similar grounds in favor of writing in Irish—a move that Ngugi himself would make ten years later deciding to write in his native Gikuyu.

On the other end of the representative spectrum, Anglo-Irish writers enjoy almost too much representation in British and Irish cultural history, to the point where the Anglo-Irish Goldsmith can be regarded as the vanguard of British cultural hegemony. Jonathan Swift, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats—the list could serve as a syllabus for modern British literature. The pedagogical proof here requires historicizing, however. As Gauri Viswanathan argues, such constructions of Britishness, have their foundations in colonial pedagogical practice. As a means of fulfilling its putatively civilizing mission, infamously outlined in Macauley's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) as the effort to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect," colonial administrators turned to literature as the ideal vehicle for spreading English culture. Even more remarkably, as Viswanathan shows, it was this colonial pedagogical model that provided the template for Victorian education in England

("Beginnings" 431-7). Thus, an Irish writer such as Goldsmith can find himself first in London as a vagabond Irishman in search of hack work, then, years later find himself in India as a purveyor of English culture and then, in no time, find himself back in a Windsor schoolroom more English as such than the English school boy who reads him.

Nevertheless, as critics such as Srinivas Aravamudan and Edward Said have shown in Swift's case and as Declan Kiberd has shown in Wilde's, the Anglo-Irish writer, while traveling in the mainstream of English literary culture, often embodies and enacts a subversion of that culture and notions of Englishness by his or her outsider status.[18] This simultaneous reification and subversion in the example of these Anglo-Irish writers echoes Homi K. Bhabha's theory of mimicry, where a "double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" ("Of Mimicry and Man" 88). Such a formulation is similar to Kiberd's in his analysis of Wilde's work, where an outsider subverts the dominant discourses of Victorian England by revealing the theatricality of "real life," so called. Kiberd writes: "The trivial comedy [*The Importance of Being Earnest*] turns out, upon inspection, to have a serious point; the audience itself is acting each night and must be congratulated or castigated depending on its performance; and the world will be an imitation of the play's utopia, rather than the play imitating an existing reality" (*Inventing Ireland* 41). A similar point could be made for the Georgian comedies of Goldsmith and Sheridan, which also exploit the generic conventions of the comedy of manners to expose the theatricality at the heart of English identity. In the case of Swift, one beholds both the disturbing empiricism of the "Modest Proposal" (1729)

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[18] See Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans* 135-156; Said, *The World, The Text, The Critic* 72-89; and Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 33-50.

narrator, which ruthlessly satirizes English economic policy in Ireland, as well as the narrator of the *Drapier Letters* (1724) who, by speaking "the master's voice with self-emancipatory purpose" (Aravamudan 155), becomes the model of agency for such proto-anti-colonialists as Toussaint Louverture and Olaudah Equiano. At once outside and inside British discourse, Ireland again troubles the theoretical waters by involving with discourses of British identity its own ambivalent example and its own subversive deconstructions of that identity.

Such insightful readings, as those alluded to above, offer a counter-example to the purportedly reductive postcolonial readings that roil critics who reject the application of postcolonial theory to Irish literature on aesthetic grounds. For critics such as Denis Donoghue it is postcolonial theory itself that is the barbarian at the gate threatening to "sacrifice . . . literary understanding at the alter of politics" ("Fears"). For Edna Longley a similar corruption is at hand; Longley remarks that in *The Field Day Anthology*'s application of postcolonial theory "Irish history emerges as the author of Irish writing, rather than vice versa, whether vice versa signifies the aesthetic or the post-structuralist" (*The Living Stream* 27). For both critics what is at stake seems to be a loss of literary understanding, and particularly a loss of close reading as a methodology. In short, for these critics, postcolonial theory seems to weaken how we read. Moreover, as critics of poetry primarily, both Longley and Donoghue are particularly concerned with how we read *poetry*, something on which postcolonial theory is, admittedly, weak.

Postcolonial studies' disciplinary bias against poetry, like its difficulty with Ireland, has much to tell us about the unexamined assumptions of postcolonial studies as well as

about the operations of cosmopolitan literary production and consumption. In the past (and to a great extent in the present), postcolonial literary theory has tended to privilege the novel. The reasons for this privileging are twofold. First, as Benedict Anderson argues, the novel is the quintessential product of print-capitalism and, thus, bound up intimately with the rise of nationalism (*Imagined Communities*). Second, as Edward Said argues, narrative is central to both the operation of colonization and its resistance: "stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (*Culture and Imperialism* xii-xiii). While both Said's and Anderson's claims may be true in a number of postcolonial contexts, it is far from a universal feature of the so-called postcolonial condition. Aijaz Ahmad, for one, in his critique of Frederic Jameson's notion of third world literature as national allegory, notes the long history of Urdu poetry, which long pre-dates the influence of colonialism. Ahmad suggests that it may be less literature itself that offers cosmopolitan readers national allegories and more the practice of cosmopolitan reading that ascribes an allegorical function to third-world literary productions (95-131).

What Ahmad's critique reveals more generally is that there may be a system of value implicit in postcolonial studies that privileges those works that register colonization in some form and, often, completely ignores those works which may draw primarily from a pre-colonial literary tradition or may be responsive to political issues other than those related to colonization. Regarding the nineteenth century Urdu novel, Ahmad suggests that its preoccupations "had to do much less with the experience of colonialism and

imperialism as such and much more with two other kinds of pressures and themes: the emergence of a new kind of petty bourgeois who was violating all established social norms for his own pecuniary ends . . . and the status of women" (116). The novel as a form, being central to the history of colonialism, remains compelling and familiar to cosmopolitan audiences even when the setting is unfamiliar, because, in effect, cosmopolitan readers can still read into the postcolonial novel their own history. It either reminds the reader of himself through sympathetic identification, or surprises him with previously unknown (to him) histories of imperial involvement. Either way, the postcolonial novel preserves the cosmopolitan's position of power as a reader of the postcolonial other; as such, the novel conforms to Homi Bhabha's articulation of colonial mimicry, which "is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*" ("Of Mimicry" 86). On the contrary, to engage then with Urdu poetry, for example, is to forfeit the pleasure of seeing one's geo-political/historical *doppelganger*; instead, one may be required to consider unfamiliar literary histories and cultural contexts.

An uncritical postcolonialism itself becomes hegemonic in its position as a reader of foreign cultures by selecting for study and commendation only those works which conform to its disciplinary model. In such a practice, the "postcolonial" becomes that which conforms to a prescribed index of literary qualities, and those works which yield up best to cosmopolitan readings win an approval that eclipses less accessible works. This uncritical practice, of merely molding the field in the image of the discipline, replicates the dangerously amnesiac tendencies among "first-world" readers of "third-

world" texts that Gayatri Spivak critiques: "To consider the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation fosters the emergence of 'the Third World' as a signifier that allows us to forget that 'worlding,' even as it expands the empire of the literary discipline" ("Three Women's Texts" 797). Postcolonial criticism's fixation on the novel may be symptomatic of a petrification of the category of "third-world literature," and not due to an exemplarity as Said and Anderson claim. Indeed, in many instances, it may be poetry that is most central to both the processes of colonization and resistance. In Anderson's paradigm of nationalism, which imbricates nationalism inextricably with literacy, the novel (and the newspaper) is predictably central; but, when one considers the oral dimensions of resistance — both as a contemporary practice like spoken word, or as a precolonial site of recovery as in *négritude* — the overemphasis on the novel appears somewhat willful. Nor is there any shortage of worthy poets — Aimé Césaire, Louise Bennett, Kamau Brathwaite, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Linton Kwesi Johnson, to name only a few. The discrepancy, then, between the extent of postcolonial poetry and the criticism of that poetry, leads one to ask, adapting Fredric Jameson's controversial observation, could it be the case that postcolonial poetry will not offer the same satisfactions of Rushdie or Coetzee?[19]

As a site then of postcolonial literary production, Ireland represents a further instance of atypicality. Not only has much of its literature been absorbed into the

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[19] "Nothing is to be gained by passing over in silence the radical difference of non-canonical texts. The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce; what is more damaging than that, perhaps, is its tendency to remind us of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development and to cause us to conclude that 'they are still writing novels like Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson'" (Jameson 65).

mainstream of British letters, but also its most nationalist-inflected literary output is not in the novel so much as in poetry. Thomas Moore, James Clarence Mangan, Padraig Pearse, Samuel Ferguson, Thomas Davis, and, of course, W.B. Yeats — not to mention the tradition of nationalist popular songs and ballads — all bear evidence to a poetic literary tradition profoundly influenced by the experience of colonialism. But more to our present purposes, Troubles poetry seems to have exceeded other traditions of postcolonial poetry in securing an international audience. It is in this respect that Troubles poetry may be usefully compared to other postcolonial works — like Rushdie or Coetzee; not so much because of its content, or even its coordinates of origin, but because of how it is read, and, importantly, *who* reads it. That is, the production, dissemination, and consumption of Northern Irish poetry contributes to and benefits from a cosmopolitan readership.

As such, theories of cosmopolitanism may offer more useful insights into Troubles poetry and the way in which it engages with discourses of human rights. As Timothy Brennan has argued, cosmopolitanism is both ancient and new; it partakes of a sense of timelessness that gives it force both to motivate solidarity movements as well as to appropriate and minimize cultural difference and mystify geopolitical power relations (*At Home in the World* 1-9). As an ancient concept, cosmopolitanism extends at least as far back as the pre-Socratics and up through the early Christian church, Kant and the Industrial Workers of the World movement, to name only a few notable examples spread across an extensive timeline. But cosmopolitanism, in each of its iterations, is also always new and unique to its own historical moment. In the present case, then,

cosmopolitanism is a way of naming both a phenomenon of aesthetic taste that favors cultural productions in numerous media — music, literature, and film especially — from third-world countries (or, often, immigrants from those countries) as well as a world-traveler/Ten Thousand Villages life style celebrated by a certain class of privileged, often first-world, citizens (one might think of Erasmus in Europe or the various Study Abroad programs in the US).

But it is also a kind of euphemistic cultural gloss on developments in global politics, economics, and demographic migrations, such as the expansion of free market capitalism, corporate globalization, Wars on Terror, and guest worker programs — which are not so easily celebrated. Moreover, as Timothy Brennan argues, cosmopolitanism today serves often to mystify ongoing struggles for decolonization: "The new cosmopolitanism drifts into view as an act of avoidance if not hostility and disarticulation toward states in formation" (2). That is, the binaries that animated struggles for decolonization are rendered unfashionable in the more celebratory spirit of cosmopolitanism: "we have for some time now been witnessing a shift from a binary otherness to a single, internally rich and disparate plurality: a variety of levels within and sites between, rather than the lonely outposts on either side of belief's wall" (2). The rise of a new cosmopolitanism then may may tell us as much about the culture of reading that promotes it as it tells us about the literature itself. Indeed, readings of this global literature may even serve as a kind of literary Rorschach test revealing much about the psychological needs of the culture at large — about a need for ethical vindication as members of an increasingly unjust (and unjustifiable) imperialist superpower, about a

need for a more complex mode of humanist sentiment in a culture that regularly reduces feeling to its most basic and commodifiable forms, about a need for a discourse of ethics.

As such, cosmopolitanism today is not unambiguously vicious or salutary. Rather it is symptomatic both of a new form of cultural and political imperialism and of a potentially new grounds for resistance, both culturally and politically. What I will call a *cosmopolitan* readership is meant to indicate something both more particular and more uniform than a *global* or *international* readership. This readership is *uniform* because it demonstrates a virtual transnational consensus on the aesthetic (and, by extension, universal) value of certain literary works produced in a culturally specific environment, amounting to a kind of imagined community of transnational reading and literary taste. This readership is *particular* because it cherishes not an actual universality but one of its own invention — to say a *global* readership upholds the fiction which brings it into being. The cosmopolitan readership of global literature may be located primarily in the first-world where most of the major publishing houses are located and therefore positioned to cater to first-world readers. In the English-speaking world, London and New York remain the centers of literary cosmopolitanism. Consequently, the metropole/periphery distinction persists, despite cosmopolitanism's suggestion to the contrary.

4. IN SUM

In sum, by reconsidering the role of politics in Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles, this study argues that with its aspirations to rehabilitate human sensitivity, to advance an

aesthetic ideal of order, and to foster public affections, Troubles poetry is *paradigmatic* of modern aesthetics. Moreover, Ireland itself is central to this development. In mapping out an "Irish" aesthetic, I posit Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* (1808), and the poetry of W.B. Yeats as foundational texts for the aesthetic contemplation of political events and contexts. For Burke, sympathy is an aesthetic phenomenon that determines political action; for Moore, the political realities of Ireland are refigured as sites of sentimental identification for audiences beyond (but also within) Ireland; for Yeats, aestheticism itself becomes a kind of extremist politics.

But while focused on the specific case of Ireland, my project also points toward a general paradigm for understanding the relationship between aesthetics, postcoloniality, and the rise of contemporary human rights. At the center of this nexus, is the radical contrast between the claims of individual subjectivity and the impersonal force of violence. Combining postcolonial theories of cosmopolitanism and eighteenth-century theories of moral sentiment, my project explores how this complex dynamic informs the adamant commitment of Northern Irish poets to aesthetics as an antithesis to political and sectarian violence. I argue that the poetry of Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney, and that of Northern Irish poets more generally, establishes an alternative politics, in which an affective politics grounded in sympathy is used to critique more abstract modes of political reasoning that may promote violence. Finally, I suggest that Troubles poetry contributes to the contemporary discourse of human rights by finding in literary sentiment a kind of aspirational basis for universal justice. Specifically, by recasting

national political conflicts as sources of moral feeling for international audiences, Troubles poetry suggests a model for the role of postcolonial literatures in shaping the current discourse of human rights.

My first chapter, **"**Hurt Into Poetry: Burke, Sentimental Wounding, and Troubles Poetry," draws on theories of sentimentalism developed in the work of Edmund Burke and in American anti-slavery writing, to argue that Troubles poetry, while unique from one perspective, depends significantly on a continuity with previous world events and with previous aesthetic theories of engagement. In particular, Northern Irish poetry addresses one of the central question of modern aesthetics: how to move from the private sphere of aesthetic pleasure to the public sphere of justice — or, in the words of Harriet Beecher Stowe, how to *feel right*. In order to elaborate the role of sentiment in Northern Irish poetry, I consider the figure of the wound, a recurrent figure in American anti-slavery literature, but one that remains unexplored in Northern Irish poetry. This figure, I argue, takes four forms in Irish literature: the wounded nation, the wounded poet, the wounded body, and the wounded reader. Through an investigation of these various representations of woundedness, I propose that Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles, offers an alternative politics that places at its center sentimental identification and the promotion of intersubjective affective experience.

"We still believe what we hear," Heaney asserts at the conclusion of his poem for David Hammond, "The Singer's House." My second chapter, "Hearing Is Believing: Seamus Heaney, Thomas Moore, and The Figure of Music," begins by exploring the figure of music in Heaney's work, especially his well-known dichotomy of "song" and

"suffering." In the late seventies, music becomes for Heaney a critical figure for rethinking the relationship between poetry and politics. Indeed, in contrast to readings such as David Lloyd's or Edna Longley's which view Heaney's universalism and nationalism as opposing modes, I argue that Heaney's use of music reveals a connection, rooted in affect, between the discourses of nationalism and universalist humanism. This connection finds its origin in the sentimental nationalism of Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*. Analyzing both Moore's critical reception and his writings on music, I suggest that music becomes, for Moore and Heaney, a cipher for Irish political suffering as well as a means of converting local political realities into universal figures of sentimental identification. Finally, I argue that Heaney should be placed, most properly, within a tradition of Irish sentimental nationalism — extending from Moore through Mangan, Pearse and others — in which music becomes a means of bridging, through sentiment, aesthetic and political concerns.

As a response to this ambivalence between the political and the aesthetic, I argue in "Self-Quarreling: Autobiography and the "Troubles" Poem," that Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney radically redefine their notions of the poet's relation to society by refiguring the political as a quarrel with and within the self. This turn to autobiography, I argue, is symptomatic of much postcolonial literature, deriving from what Edward Said has characterized as "a pact made between people and poet," in which self-representation becomes both a means of authorization — gaining the authority to speak for — and a means of universalizing particular political realities. In the work of Longley and Heaney, however, autobiography also becomes a strategy for frustrating a simple representative

equation by asserting the particular as a foil to readings that seek too quickly to promote a universal significance to local political realities.

Finally, Yeats's late poem "Politics," with its juxtaposition of international political economy and erotic desire — "O that I were young again / And held her in my arms" — reveals a generative coordination of love poetry and political concerns in Irish poetry. Figures of the erotic, both of the licit conjugal variety and the illicit variety, recur in the poetry of Northern Irish writers. My fourth chapter, "Lovers' Quarrels: Longley, Yeats, and The Uses of Love" revisits Edmund Burke's early writings on aesthetics, to argue that this obsession with the erotic can be explained by the figuring of aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful in eighteenth-century writing in terms of desire and the female body. Moreover, beginning in the eighteenth century (and finding particular energy in the cultural conservatism of Ireland), conjugal intimacy becomes the grounds for a sentimental ethics, and by extension, for a peaceful social order. It is out of this genealogy, I argue, that the love poem in Irish poetry is able to register powerful political overtones.

CHAPTER 1:

HURT INTO POETRY: TROUBLES POETRY, SENTIMENT, AND WOUNDING

"But, what can any individual do? Of that, every individual can judge. There is one thing that every individual can do — they can see to it that they feel right."

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (385)

Existing at the intersection of literature and politics, sentimentalism has been an extremely fruitful area of study for American literature of the nineteenth century, as well as for British literature of the eighteenth century.[1] Sentimentalism, however, as an area of study in twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetry criticism has been largely ignored, due, understandably, to the pejorative connotations that the term has acquired since the nineteenth century.[2] To explore the sentimental dimensions of poetry then risks appearing as an insinuation of pandering, of a kind of parasitic emotionalism, on the part of a given poet. As a result of this critical taboo sentiment and the study of the complex uses of affect in poetry have all but disappeared from the study of poetry. In itself this may be a fairly innocuous oversight, but the disregard of sentiment has particular ramifications for our study of the relation between literature, culture, and politics.

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[1] See, for example, Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Janet Todd's *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986), Laura Hinton's *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sadomasochistic Sentiments from Clarissa to Rescue 911* (1999), Marianne Noble's *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (2000), Michael Bell's *Sentimentalism, Ethics, and the Culture of Feeling* (2000), Glenn Hendler's *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2001), Sophie Ratcliffe's *On Sympathy* (2008).

[2] For a useful history of the term see Raymond Williams's entry on "Sensibility" in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*.

By drawing attention to literature, culture, and politics, however, I do not wish to rehash the same critical disputes around poetry vs. politics. Rather, I wish to chart this disputed ground itself, which means viewing poetry and politics as *figures* that exist at the crossroads of individual subjectivity (experience as it is lived and felt) and political realities (both the material conditions of existence and the articulated ideologies that support or challenge those conditions). To be clear, I take it as given that literature's autonomy from political realities is a kind of fiction (though not necessarily a fallacy); however, I also take as a given that this *fiction* of autonomy has *real* consequences on those political realities.

Nevertheless, the resistance to considerations of a work's politics should not be dismissed. In the Northern Irish context, the accusation of reductionism leveled at more "political" readings has gained particular force; in light of the Troubles, reductionism seems to resonate with a more vicious form of actual violence — that is, the reduction of *humanity* that political and sectarian violence seems to imply. Accordingly, the poetry vs. politics debate often seems to suffer its own reduction into a debate between humanism and violence. Edna Longley, Peter McDonald, and Denis Donoghue may be considered the primary proponents of this anti-reductionist humanism, and Donoghue's claim that a political — particularly in this case *postcolonial* — approach to literature "sacrifices literary understanding on the altar of politics" may be considered that camp's rallying fear. "What goes unread," Donoghue explains in the case of Yeats, "is his writing, his genius, his craft, the ways in which he chose and organized his words, the new feelings he summoned" ("Fears for Irish Studies"). Naturally then, to claim a political function

for poetry summons fears of this kind of reductionism.

Granting the validity of these concerns, we might usefully define literature as that which exceeds theorization; in other words, literature is the articulation of a perpetual excess of particularity set against more abstract articulations of existence. Furthermore, and contrary to the claims of anti-reductionist critics like Longley, McDonald, and Donoghue, we might also assert that Northern Irish poetry — like all literature — is political, albeit not in any easily identifiable sense. In some ways, in fact, literature may be seen as even *more* political than many "political" approaches would grant — it may be that in most cases literature does not simply promote a certain already articulated party line (that is, it is not propaganda), but rather it plays a critical part in articulating a politics to come — in shaping "structures of feeling," to borrow Raymond Williams's term (*Marxism and Literature* 128-35). In a limited sense, literature is antithetical, although not always in a conservative reactionary way. Rather, as it attempts to articulate lived experiences, literature subverts previous theoretical certainties; and from these articulations readers begin to configure new models of political understanding based on their own affective responses. This process, while it is admittedly complex, is not, however, beyond the purview of literary study.

Glenn Hendler, in his work on sentiment in nineteenth-century American fiction, has provided a particularly useful framework for understanding the political dimensions of sentiment in literature more generally. Adopting Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling," Hendler admits that "the term is notoriously and deliberately slippery in Williams's work, but one which seems especially useful in linking the formal elements of

a narrative genre with a broader politics of affect" ("The Structure of Sentimental Experience" 149). Most important to the present study, Williams's concept directly addresses the problem of reductionism; he suggests a methodology for studying the political while also recognizing an irreducibility definitive of literature. Williams asserts that in literature

> The true social content is in a significant number of cases of [a] present and affective kind, which cannot without loss be reduced to belief-systems, institutions, or explicit general relationships, though it may include all these as lived and experienced. […] The unmistakable presence of certain elements in art which are not covered by other formal systems is the true source of the specializing categories of 'the aesthetic', 'the arts', and 'imaginative literature.' (*Marxism* 133)

Nevertheless, the "present and affective" experience of literature, while it may be experienced as "private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating," is ultimately of a deep social character (132). As defined by Williams, structures of feeling "can be defined as social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been experiences *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available" (133-4). The reductionist fallacy might be understood then as the mischaracterizing of the semantic articulations of experience embodied in literature by interpreting the a not-yet-precipated solution in terms of an older precipitated solution. That is not to say, however, that retrospect should enable a more acceptable and subtle correlation between structures of feeling and structures of thought or of material

existence. The structure of feeling, Williams contends, is "distinguishable from other social and semantic formations by its articulation of *presence*" (135). Indeed, this may be the most "slippery" (Hendler's term) aspect of Williams's hypothesis, but it also creates a stay against reductionism by preserving the tension between the aesthetic and the political, the personal and the social, even as it admits the ultimate fictionality of these distinctions: "If the social is the fixed and explicit — the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions — all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, 'subjective'" (128). That is, the social and the personal are *semantically* mutually constitutive, while, at the level of reading (in its ostensibly private nature), they are *experientially* opposed although *instrumentally* identical.

Moreover, Williams's hypothesis exposes in literature a fundamental connection to feeling, which opens the way for a more extensive application of theories of sentiment to works which may not be generically classed as "sentimental." This extension of the idea of sentiment supports Michael Bell's more pointed observation that sentiment persists in literature, culture, and philosophy well beyond the period of high sentimentalism in the late eighteenth century. For Bell, sentimentalism is not a historical artifact but a symptom of an ongoing process in the formation of what Lawrence Stone has called "affective individuality."[3] According to Michael Bell, this affectivity is so pervasive that it achieves ideological status, a "cultural unconscious":

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[3] See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*.

> Even now we are so thoroughly constituted by the affective turn as to make some of its major effects invisible. The impact of sentiment lives on as a cultural unconscious so that even those who nominally reject it are no less its products and only by appreciating the underlying cultural work it represents can its positive continuation in the present be understood. (*Sentimentalism* 11)

Northern Irish poetry, this study contends, should be viewed within this broader trajectory. Indeed, Northern Irish poetry, especially that written during the Troubles, seems to partake of a renewed engagement with concepts of sentiment such as sympathy while attempting to bridge, in Luke Gibbons's phrase, "the private sphere of sensibility to the public sphere of justice" (*Edmund Burke* 55).

To base a study, however, on the role of sentimentalism requires careful qualification of the term in order to preserve a strong division between its pejorative connotation and philosophical origins. Nevertheless, while one should keep this division constantly in view, one must also keep in play both aspects of the term, as both aspects operate in the formation and reception of Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles. Janet Todd, in her excellent study of sensibility and its related terms, accommodates both aspects of the term:

> Once employed pejoratively to suggest affectation and excessive emotional display, it ['sentimentalism'] was used by Sir Leslie Stephen in *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* as 'the name of the mood in which we make a luxury of grief.' More recently the word has come to denote the movement discerned in philosophy, politics and art, based on the belief in or hope of the natural goodness

> of humanity and manifested in a humanitarian concern for the unfortunate and helpless. (6-7)

This definition encompasses both the humanitarian ethos that informs much Northern Irish poetry and the potentially parasitic emotionalism that may characterize its global readership. Indeed, this duality defines more generally the way in which postcolonial cultural products, particularly those which depict suffering attributable to political realities (Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2004) for example, or Danny Boyle's film "Slumdog Millionaire" (2008)), may cultivate a frisson of moral outrage while *at the same time* serving as beach reading for many first-world audiences: "The Feel-Good Film of the Decade," beamed the British theatrical release poster for "Slumdog Millionaire." Sentimentalism may tend toward a pleasurable moral spectatorship while it simultaneously strives toward a cultivation of moral sensitivity toward injustice, which in the best cases may lead toward actual political activity to oppose (or at the very least a shift in the cultural legitimacy of) various forms of injustice. The present study adopts both of these aspects as definitive of sentimentalism.

Moreover, moving away from the philosophical definitiveness of the term, this study will apply the term "sentiment" as a more malleable concept that can may serve to encompass the various nuances of feeling's relation to the social and the rational. As Janet Todd defines the term, it contains multiple registers: "A 'sentiment' is a moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct. […] But a 'sentiment' is also a thought, often an elevated one, influenced by emotion, a combining of heart with head or an emotional impulse leading to an opinion or a

principle" (7). As Todd implies, the term "sentiment" harbors a useful ambiguity between thought and emotion, head and heart, principle and feeling. As Michael Bell observes, "sentiment" has served since the Enlightenment to conceal the fact that "beneath the optimistic attempt to identify 'reason' and 'feeling' lies the deeper, as yet unformulated, intuition that, if they cannot be simply identified, neither can they be completely separated" (19).

Bell identifies this kind of subliminally recognized ambiguity inherent in the term as "sentiment as 'principle and/or feeling" (18). "Sentiment as 'principle,'" Bell explains, "was invoked as if it had the intuitive and spontaneous impact of feeling, while sentiment as 'feeling' assumed the universal, impersonal authority of principle" (18-9). Sentiment, then, both reveals, exploits, and supports a kind of insufficiency of philosophical systems predicated on universalized abstractions; it affirms individual subjectivity by revealing its excessive nature to the systems which seek to explain it. Sentimentalism, a philosophical attitude dependent on the ambiguity of sentiment, is a system of ethics that perpetually performs the undoing of its systematic claims, and in this undoing proves again the priority of subjectivity — or "affective individuality" — which gives the system meaning. For the present purposes, *sentimentalism* may be taken as the concept informing both the ethos and reception of Northern Irish poetry, while *sentiment* may provide a language for addressing the various forms that both derive from and inform its particular form of sentimentalism.

Within the Northern Irish context, the debate between poetry and politics has consistently adopted the language of sentiment. Atavism, Humanism, Reason,

Irrationality, Civility, Tribal Allegiances — Michael Bell suggestively begins his study (which does not revisit the issue of Ireland again) with a reference to the all-Ireland referendum of 1998, which sought a resolution to the Troubles in which "politicians […] exhorted the people to put their feelings on one side and vote rationally" (1). Similarly, Edna Longley's well-known formulation on the separation of poetry and politics derives its moral force from a distinction between "rational processes" and "mysteries," while simultaneously condemning "ideology," which we might read as reason stripped of all emotion: "Poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated. And for the same reason: mysteries distort the rational processes which ideally prevail in social relations; while ideologies confiscate the poet's special passport to *terra incognita*" ("Poetry and Politics" 185). What this affinity between poetry, politics, and sentiment suggests is a deeply *political* dimension to Irish sentimentalism, which may be more generally *ethical* in most eighteenth-century conceptions of sentimentalism.

1. IRELAND AND THE SENTIMENTAL WOUND

In her 1997 essay, "The Ecstasies of Sentimental Wounding in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," Marianne Noble develops a concept of the sentimental wound, which places the figure of the wound at the center of sentimental literature. Noble defines this wound in terms of an embodied sympathetic identification, calling sentimental wounding "a *bodily* experience of anguish caused by identification with the pain of another" (295). By emphasizing the embodied nature of sentimental experience, Noble seeks to reveal in sentimental

literature a critique of intellectual detachment. "A wound," Noble continues, "is a site where emotions and senses intersect in pure feeling, and in attempting to produce affect in their readers, sentimental authors attempt to communicate through the presence of physical and emotional feelings, rather than through abstract detachment from the body" (295). This preference for the physical and emotional, Noble explains, is not incidental but strategic: "The sentimental wound represents a critique of abstract, disembodied notions of personhood," which lie at the root of a "symbolic epistemology that legitimizes slavery and other dehumanizing policies" (296). While Noble speaks out of her studies in nineteenth-century American sentimental literature, her insight may offer a more general theory for understanding the relationships between literature, culture, and politics. Similarly, her notion of sentimental wounding offers a valuable new approach to conceptualizing the relationship between the public and the private in Northern Irish poetry. Not only does it provide a model for understanding the textual figure of the wound, but it also illuminates how an aesthetic sensibility, embodied by figures like Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney, itself can be used to advance a critique of violence.

Noble's notion of the sentimental wound alerts us to a continuity between the tropes of the text and those of the reading experience: in reading the figure of the wound, the reader herself is "wounded." By recognizing such a continuity, the idea of the sentimental wound offers a way of conceptualizing a more general continuity between the literary and the political, representing, in Raymond Williams's terms, a kind of "social experience *in solution*" (*Marxism* 133). Glenn Hendler, in his response to Noble, makes

this connection explicit: "If the sentimental wound is a trope designed to provoke intersubjective experiences of sympathy, we need to examine more closely how the promulgation of sympathetic identification […] served to produce the broader social experiences that constitute not only new reading publics, but also political publics. It is that particular conjunction of the private with the social that defines sentimental experience" ("Structure" 151). Within the context then of Troubles Ireland, in which the private and the public are so tragically interwoven, the emphasis on wounds can be seen in a new light. That is, the centrality of wounds in the poetry of Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney should not be taken as only a reflection of actual events, but rather as an indicator of a continuity with the tropes, operation, and reception of sentimental literature more generally. The figure of the wound offers a means of bridging the private realm of feeling with the public realm of politics. Moreover, at the level of reading, to view Troubles poetry as a form of sentimental literature begins to suggest ways of understanding its global reception, which replicates a phenomenon shared by postcolonial literature generally in which literary success tends to follow political suffering.

But the turn to wounding in Troubles poetry should not be viewed as an importation. Indeed, the figure of the wound is ubiquitous in Irish literature and art, suggesting that history of sentimentalism and the development of modern Irish literature and art may be deeply allied. "The image of Ireland as a wounded body," Luke Gibbons writes, "pervaded the literature and art of eighteenth-century Ireland" ("'Philoctetes' and Colonial Ireland: The Wounded Body as National Narrative" 39). Moreover, it should be stressed that the image of Ireland as a wounded body is a profoundly political figuration.

"You may trace Ireland through the Statute-book of England," Thomas Moore writes in *Memoirs of Captain Rock* (1824), "as a wounded man in a crowd is tracked by his blood" (Quoted in Gibbons 39). As Moore's remarkable image suggests, the wounded body is a way of registering the ineffability of suffering that is initiated and sustained by political oppression — the blood, in this case, of the wound becomes a kind of language for suffering.[4]

Moreover, the corporeality of the oppressed nation suggests what may be an alternate model of politics that, like Noble's sentimental wound, critiques the abstract political reasoning of British law that perpetuates the suffering. This tension between the feeling body and the ineffability of suffering permeates Moore's *Irish Melodies* (1808-1834); similarly, one might interpret Edmund Burke's renowned rhetorical excess as an inversion of this phenomenon of ineffable bodily pain.[5] Perhaps the central trope of Moore's *Melodies* is that of the fallen nation whose great history ("alas for his country! — her pride is gone by" ("Oh! Blame not the bard")) can be registered only in the *feeling* hearts of its people:

> Thus Freedom now so seldom wakes,
>
> The only throb she gives,
>
> Is when some heart indignant breaks,

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[4] Elaine Scarry makes the point that physical pain is defined by its inexpressibility. See *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985).

[5] Burke also makes the suggestive comparison of the state itself to a wounded father: "To avoid therefore the evils of inconstancy and versatility, ten thousand times worse than those of obstinacy and the blindest prejudice, we have consecrated the state, that no man should approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution; that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion; that he should approach to the faults of the sate as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude" (*Reflections* 96).

To show that she still lives.

("The harp that once through Tara's halls")

As such, affect becomes a form of rhetorical eloquence. But not only does affect bear eloquent witness to a glorious past, it also attests to an ongoing political oppression. Suffering and its inexpressibility are both linked to that oppression: "O'er the ruin her children in secret must sigh, / For 'tis treason to love her, and death to defend" ("Oh! Blame not the bard"). As Moore's example suggests, the figuration of Ireland as a wounded body originates as a distinctly political trope that both registers the sublime nature of political oppression and underwrites literary production as a form of political redress.

While the wounded body of Ireland can be understood in terms of literary production, it can also be understood in terms of reception, specifically in the form of political persuasion. In most cases, the figure of the sentimental wound is designed to effect a change in its auditor — to, in Burke's words, "transfuse passions from one breast to another" (*A Philosophical Inquiry* 91).[6] This phenomenon of political persuasion through the figure of the wound finds its most paradigmatic form in the figure of Philoctetes, who, as Luke Gibbons reveals, surfaces repeatedly in Irish writing and art.[7] Gibbons, moreover, asserts that the figure of Philoctetes is central to the modern development of sentimentalism and aesthetic theory more generally: "The fate of

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[6] In the case of Moore, the sentimental articulation of suffering is designed to persuade an international audience and by extension Britain itself, that Ireland's political woes must be redressed: "The stranger shall hear thy lament on his plains," Moore writes, "The sigh of thy harp shall be sent o'er the deep, / Till thy masters themselves, as they rivet thy chains, / Shall pause at the song of their captive, and weep" ("Oh! Blame Not The Bard").

[7] See "'Philoctetes' and Colonial Ireland: The Wounded Body as National Narrative" (2003).

Philoctetes featured prominently in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debates on sentimentalism and tragedy, in paintings by Francois Boucher, William Blake, Jean-Germain Drouais, Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, and in literary works or translations by Herder, Wordsworth, André Gide and, closer to our own time, Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney" (40). Yet, while Philoctetes operates widely in modern thought, Gibbons argues that, in the hands of the eighteenth-century Irish painter James Barry, Philoctetes becomes a figure through whom an Irish emancipatory politics may be advanced: "One of the powerful legacies bequeathed by Philoctetes in Sophocles's play was the depiction of suffering body as a site of solidarity with others, rather than a narcissistic obsession with one's own wounds. In the work of Barry, this involved retrieving the injured body from romantic isolation and abjection, and reintegrating it into the emancipatory narratives of Enlightenment" (40). As Gibbons's account suggests, the figure of Philoctetes, while being central to the development of modern aesthetics, is from an early period deeply fused with a narrative of Ireland as a wounded body politic, which in turn serves as grounds for reconsidering the relationship between art and political justice.

2. TROUBLES POETRY, PHILOCTETES, AND THE POETICS OF SENSIBILITY

Sophocles' play *Philoctetes*, which depicts a wronged and wounded man winning the sympathy of another through rhetorical persuasion and against an abstract *realpolitik* logic, is emblematic of the modern notions of art as redress and of the triumph of human sentiment over abstract reasoning. Moreover, the story resonates in many registers with

Irish history — from the island setting to the play between political oppression and the advancement of justice through rhetoric and sympathetic identification. In Sophocles' play, the action begins on the island of Lemnos, where, because of a repulsive festering foot wound, Philoctetes has been marooned by his fellow Greeks, who squeamishly have sailed on to Troy. Ten years later, Odysseus and Achilles' son Neoptolemus have returned from the war in order to recover Philoctetes's famous bow, which is crucial to turning around the faltering Greek campaign at Troy. Odysseus, characteristically, devises a plan, whereby Neoptolemus will pretend sympathy toward Philoctetes in order to win his confidence, after which, Neoptolemus can steal off with the bow. Against Neoptolemus's protests, Odysseus argues that it is better to lie once than to jeopardize a whole nation. Neoptolemus, a true Greek, does his duty. The plan, however, goes awry when Neoptolemus's pretended sympathy for the much-suffering Philoctetes becomes real. Eventually, after much debate, Neoptolemus convinces Odysseus to recover not only Philoctetes's bow, but the man himself, and all three sail back to Troy.

Perhaps the most famous recent production of *Philoctetes* is Seamus Heaney's adaptation, *The Cure at Troy*, first performed by the Field Day Theater Company in Derry in October 1990. Heaney's play provides an illustrative link between the figure of wounding in Irish cultural history and the figure of wounding in the context of the Northern Irish Troubles. While early appropriations of Philoctetes elicited an anti-imperial analogy between the suffering hero and an Ireland oppressed by British penal laws, Heaney's appropriation shifts the emphasis to Protestant-Catholic tensions, pushing the conflict between human sympathy and tribal allegiances to the forefront of the play.

This shift is signaled by the play's epigraph, taken from W.H. Auden's "As I Walked Out One Evening" and printed in both the Faber volume and the program notes: "O look, look in the mirror, / O look in your distress; / Life remains a blessing / Although you cannot bless. // O stand, stand at the window / As the tears scald and start; / You shall love your crooked neighbour / With your crooked heart" (ll. 49-56).

Taking this love-thy-neighbor directive as its starting point, *The Cure at Troy* recasts the anti-imperial allegory of Barry and others as a parable about the failures of neighborly compassion and adequate self-reflection. Yet, a kind of interplay between an older notion of the wound as a figure for colonial oppression and a newer hope for a "cure" to sectarian and political violence, grounded in a broadening of sympathy, persists and animates the play. In an early comment on the production John Keyes, a theatre critic for the magazine *Fortnight*, reveals this double sense of wounding: "In Ireland there is a tendency to make the wound the basis of identity. To maintain the integrity of the wound. To dwell in a past that is wounded" (25). By adapting Philoctetes, Heaney operates on one of the critical tropes of Irish identity; he at once reconfigures the wound as a figure for internecine violence, while also evoking the older notion of imperial violence. The "cure" then proposes the potential for both a synchronic and diachronic healing. Perhaps deriving from this simultaneous cultural resonance and political relevance, the play's final chorus has become one of Heaney's most quoted poems, especially by politicians: "Once in a lifetime / The longed for tidal wave / Of justice can

rise up / And hope and history rhyme" (77).[8] Bill Clinton, Gerry Adams, and Mary Robinson, to name a few prominent examples, have all quoted the poem in speeches at one time or another.[9]

Nevertheless, while the play has a definite political and public dimension, as well as a rich heritage in Irish art and literature, it also serves as a parable of poetic labor and the individual artist in the modern era. Heaney articulates the importance of this dimension in his program notes to a 1995 Harvard production: "the essential travail is change; the essential conflict the one Neoptolemus exhibits, between truth of intuition and the demands of solidarity, between personal integrity and political expedience" ("Sweet Talk" 1). As it happens, the play originates through the collaboration of both political and artistic concerns: the play, written for the Field Day Theatre Company, found its impetus in the effort to "contribute to the solution of the present crisis" (*Ireland's Field Day* vii), but it found its way to Heaney through Edmund Wilson's important study of modernism *The Wound and The Bow* (1941), which adopts Philoctetes as the modern artist's patron ancestor.[10]

In "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," the title essay of his collection, Wilson elaborates a theory of modern literature in which genius is inseparable from disease, "like

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[8] Heaney remarks in a recent interview with Denis O'Driscoll that "As far as I'm concerned, public poetry of the sort I value springs from the poet's inner state and gives vent and voice to a predicament as well as addressing the state of the poet's world. Admittedly, there are writings of mine I'd think of as public in the megaphone sense of the term — things like the song I wrote after Bloody Sunday and the 'Human beings suffer' chorus of *The Cure at Troy*" (*Stepping Stones* 385-6).

[9] See *Stepping Stones* 354, and Heaney's "Sweet Talk and Miracles: Notes on the Cure at Troy" 2.

[10] In *Stepping Stones*, Heaney reports that he alone had chosen the play for translation and production: "I chose it. I'd read about it years before, in Edmund Wilson's *The Wound and the Bow*" (420).

strength and mutilation" in the case of Philoctetes (289), and interpretive insight is dependent of sympathetic identification; as such, Wilson offers a theory both of writing and reading. Regarding the figure of the literary artist, Wilson finds in Philoctetes's outcast woundedness an exemplar: "And now let us go back to the *Philoctetes* as a parable of human character. I should interpret the fable as follows. The victim of the malodorous disease which renders him abhorrent to society and periodically degrades him and makes him helpless is also the master of a superhuman art which everybody has to respect and which the normal man finds he needs" (294). Like the modern artist, Wilson suggests, Philoctetes is both necessary and deviant, and thus productive of a kind of dilemma: how to reconcile society with a figure so repulsive, but so necessary? Wilson finds in Neoptolemus's compassionate attention a model for the modern reader: "It is at the moment when his sympathy for Philoctetes would naturally inhibit his cheating him […], this moment of his natural shrinking that it becomes clear to him that the words of the seer had meant that the bow would be useless without Philoctetes himself" (294). For the modern reader, Wilson proposes, insight follows compassion; that is, sympathy must overcome the natural repulsiveness of the wound before the reader can understand the text. Wilson concludes:

> How then is the gulf to be got over between the ineffective plight of the bowman and his proper use of his bow, between the ignominy and his destined glory? Only by the intervention of one who is guileless enough and human enough to treat him, not as a monster, nor yet as a mere magical property which is wanted for accomplishing some end, but simply as another man, whose sufferings elicit

his sympathy and whose courage and pride he admires." (295)

Against the twin evils of economic abstraction and dehumanizing repulsion, Wilson proposes the alternative virtues of woundedness and sympathy.

It might be tempting to read these two precursors to Heaney's play as fundamentally at odds — surely Wilson does not have in mind the figure of wounded Ireland bloodying up the statute book, nor does James Barry envision Proust's asthma. But, in the work of Heaney, and through the figure of the wound, these two genealogies are crossed: the political plight of Ireland and the alienation of the modern artist become mutually informing, and interchangeable. As such, *The Cure at Troy*, in its alignment of the discourses of Irish politics and modern art, presents a kind of allegory of the Troubles poet.

What this dual heritage suggests is that authority (both political and artistic) may derive from the writer's own narrative of wounding — which in the case of Ireland takes on an especially potent form. Significantly, one of the most famous modern statements on poetry's political value derives from Ireland's rich associations with wounding. "Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry," Auden writes of Yeats, "Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still, / For poetry makes nothing happen" ("In Memory of W.B. Yeats" ll. 34-6). What Auden reveals is a fact that his elegy does not explore, that is, writing out of the context of a politically wounded culture, the Irish *poet* is in a sense doubly wounded. On the one hand, he or she represents the wounded body politic, but on the other, as a modern artist, an unsympathetic culture inflicts the artist with a second wound. But, through the ambivalent figure of Philoctetes, this crossing of genealogies affords the Irish

poet a kind of dual citizenship: by an analogical substitution, the artist's own wound at the level of poetry authorizes his attempts to redress the political wound at the level of national culture.[11]

This dynamic between the wounded poet and the wounded culture is dramatically reanimated in the context of the Troubles, where a slightly modified iteration emerges that casts History itself as the source of the wound. Two recent appraisals of Heaney's work may serve to illustrate this. First, in a 1995 review of Heaney's career in *The New Yorker*, Helen Vendler imagines a poet subject, but also responsive, to an unkind history: "Decades of unrelenting bloodletting forced a poet whose deepest impulse was celebration into an unsparing examination of violence" (84). Vendler adds to this narrative a kind of fall from eden: "Heaney's early poetry was full of delight," Vendler posits, "then came 1968" (84). Perhaps even more suggestively, Denis O'Driscoll makes the link to Auden, wounding, and Yeats explicit. He writes: "I tend to think of Seamus Heaney as a poet whose childhood — notwithstanding its 'sorrowing' aspects — had its days, agrarian cycles and ecclesiastical rites. The wound of expulsion from that tried, tested and trusted world hurt him into a poetry of evocation, yearning and elegy" (x).[12]

Implicit in both readings is the "what if?" proposal that suggests that history was

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[11] Elaine Scarry finds this interchangeability to be central to the discourse of wounding and terms it "analogical verification" or "analogical substantiation," by which "the sheer material factualness of the human body will be borrowed to lend the cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty'" (*The Body in Pain* 14).

[12] Heaney is not alone in this drama. Jody AllenRandolph and Douglas Archibald, in their introduction to a special issue on Michael Longley, apply the same narrative to the Longley's work: "Had he lived in different times he would have been a learned poet, a love poet, a botanizing poet, or […] Ireland's nature poet. […] But he was born in 1939, came of age in the 'Fifties, into politics with the Civil Rights movement in Ulster in the 'Sixties, and has survived the subsequent dangerous and difficult decades. Not only survived, but helped to shape, interpret, and inform" (189).

something imposed on the poet against his natural predilections. Vendler and O'Driscoll cast Heaney as the reluctant hero: history happens to him. The informing model for this narrative is a hard and fast distinction between the private and the public, which allows us to view Heaney (and others) before the Troubles as happy private individuals, who, somewhere around 1968, are conscripted into the service of history. Yet, paradoxically, this narrative works to legitimate the poet's work, whose power we latter learn lies "in the quarrel between the urgency of witness and the urgency of delight" (Vendler 84). Following the precedents of Wilson and Auden, these critics reformulate the wounding figure of Ireland as the wounding figure of History. And, like Ireland (according to Auden), history is both abhorrent and indispensable: *abhorrent* because it triggers the poet's fall from an edenic pre-public world, *indispensable* because it supplies the wound from which poetic authority derives. This is the Troubles poet's *felix culpa*.

While this narrative of wounding recycles the Philoctetes model of the modern artist formulated by Wilson, it also gestures back to an older model, developed by figures like Barry and Burke, which posits Philoctetes as a model for a sympathy that moves out of the private realm of aesthetic contemplation and into the public sphere of political justice. For example, what may be most revealing about Heaney's own engagement with the figure of Philoctetes, is where the writer's own sympathies fall. Contrary to Wilson's generative analogy, Heaney the writer finds in Neoptolemus the reader a figure for the artist that is more agile regarding the distinction between writerly inspiration and readerly interpretation. "The essential conflict," Heaney writes in the play's program notes, is "the one Neoptolemus exhibits: between truth and intuition and the demands of solidarity,

between personal integrity and political expedience." Heaney continues: "Of course, all that is very complicated: Philoctetes is 'cured,' but cured into the very loyalty and solidarity which Neoptolemus had to flout in order to bring the cure about" ("Sweet Talk" 1). In Neoptolemus, Heaney finds a fellow dweller of the cusp — between inspiration and interpretation, between exiled artist and normal man. Following Wilson's precedent, I would interpret the parable of *The Cure at Troy* in this way: While the wound of history (and of Ireland) grants the poet a certain authority, the effort to adequately redress that wound calls on the poet to be also a *reader* with the gift of sympathetic insight. In other words, the Troubles poet becomes both Philoctetes *and* Neoptolemus, not only wounded and stubbornly committed to aesthetic principles but also possessing a promiscuous sympathy — a kind of sensibility — that seeks to interpret the complicated text of sectarian and political violence. This tension between insightful reading and a self-justifying principle of artistic production is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the work of Michael Longley, whose 1973 poem "Wounds" offers a synthesis of the multiple tropological strands that emerge from an investigation of wounding in Irish literature: intersubjectivity, sympathy, interpretive insight, artistic integrity, the wounded poet, and of course the figure of the wound itself. In the poem, wounds take many forms: those of the father, those fatally inflicted on "three teenage soldiers" (l. 21) and on those inflicted by "a shivering boy" (l. 30) on a bus-conductor. But the most haunting wounds are those left upon the survivors: the "bewildered wife" (l. 33) the "shivering boy," and the poet-narrator himself. Thus, the wounds of the poem are not only those inflicted on bodies, but also, and more importantly, those inflicted on the psyches of the survivors, which

through a kind of intersubjective contagion can undermine a whole society. It is this form of wounding, that which manifests on a cultural level, that Fran Brearton emphasizes in her reading of the poem. Recalling Longley's earlier elegy for his father, "In Memoriam," Brearton notes:

> His father's 'old wounds' that 'woke / As cancer' in 'In Memoriam' reverberate in 'Wounds' in the wider context of Northern Ireland and the resurfacing of the Troubles, as well as in the unresolved historical trauma induced by the First World War. The word expands beyond the literal wounds in the poem, the cancer, the bullet-holes — to encompass the psychological wounds inflicted by violence; the open wounds of history (aggravated in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s; the wounding of the innocent; and the invisible wounds left on a society." (*Reading Michael Longley* 100)

As Brearton clarifies, their is an interchangeability between the physical wound and the psychological (at the level of the individual) or cultural wound (at the level of the collective), and, by virtue of this interchangeability, the physical wound may lend a form of presence to the intersubjective affective experience of sentimental wounding. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry finds this interchangeability to be central to the discourse of wounding and terms it "analogical verification" or "analogical substantiation," by which "the sheer material factualness of the human body will be borrowed to lend the cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty'" (14).

But perhaps the poem's most important presence is the tentative poet-speaker who wavers in the wings, eloquently uncertain and bewildered in his own enterprise. The

poet-speaker in his interjections emerges as a kind of responsible custodian, undertaker, reporter, and, ultimately, interpreter. Like Neoptolemus, he must engage sympathetically with all the troubling figures who populate the poem in order to read correctly the text of history and culture. As Longley puts it in a 1986 interview with Dillon Johnston, a kind of imaginative empathy is critical to his enterprise: "It seems to me [...] important [...] to imagine how one can be so brainwashed or so angry or in a sense perhaps even so innocent that one can drive in a car and go into somebody's house and shoot that person stone dead" (20). But, like Philoctetes, he must also find the poetic skill to represent his subject: "He would be inhuman if he did not respond to the tragic events in his own community, and a poor artist if he did not seek to endorse that response imaginatively. But if his imagination fails him the result will be a dangerous impertinence" (Longley, "Tongue at Play" 120). Attempting to navigate these two directives, then the poet-speaker in "Wounds" replicates the bewilderment he ascribes to his father and to the bus-conductor's wife. Managing the "two pictures from my father's head" (l. 1), which the speaker has "kept […] like secrets" (l. 2), the speaker delivers them with minimal commentary, most likely fearing the "dangerous impertinence" of a misstep. Similarly, the speaker's gesture of affection toward his father reveals a reticent anxiety about breaching his intellectual distance: "I touched his hand, his thin head I touched" (l. 17). Finally, following the speaker's interment of the "three teenage soldiers," the poem's last line typifies the bewilderment that permeates the poem: "I think 'Sorry Missus' was what he said" (l. 34). Here the young murderer's dramatically inadequate response, which is all the more affecting because of that inadequacy, reverberates off of the speaker's own

tentative "I think," and implicitly critiques and deconstructs the full-throated cries of "Fuck the Pope!" and "No Surrender!" from the beginning of the poem (ll. 4-5). Oddly and provocatively the poem suggest that the murderer's feeble apology may be a kind of first step toward reconciliation.

What lies, I would argue, beneath all this language of sympathy, sensibility, wounding, and reading, is a neglected literary history implicit in both Troubles poetry and, more generally, in Irish culture's emphasis on the wound. That is, Troubles poetry might best be understood as a kind of sentimental literature, in which sympathy itself functions as a principle of both composition and reading, bridging the private realm of feeling with the public realm of justice. Indeed, what "Wounds" or Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* offer is certainly nothing like a solution, nor even entirely a kind of solace; their most important contribution is the embodiment of a *sensibility*. Bewilderment in the case of Longley, or instinctive fidelity and sympathy in the case of Heaney, become autobiographical tropes that activate the authority of the wounded while modeling a mode of engagement grounded in sympathy.

As Janet Todd reports in her book-length study *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986), in the eighteenth-century "'Sensibility' […] came to denote the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering" (7). "Sensibility, " Todd continues, "an innate sensitiveness or susceptibility, […] is defined in 1797 by the Encyclopedia Britannica (3rd edn) as 'a nice and delicate perception of pleasure or pain, beauty or deformity'" (7). Michael Longley and Seamus

Heaney both contribute to the development of a poetics of sensibility that offers a new model for understanding the relationship between the individual and abstract political structures.

Moreover, Marianne Noble's concept of the sentimental wound, which emerges from her studies in nineteenth-century American anti-slavery literature, her insight may offer a more general method for understanding the relationships between literature, culture, and politics. The sentimental wound, Noble writes, "is a site where emotions and senses intersect in pure feeling" ("Sentimental Wounding" 295); moreover, by communicating "through the presence of physical and emotional feelings, rather than through abstract detachment from the body […] the sentimental wound represents a critique of abstract, disembodied notions of personhood," which lie at the root of a "symbolic epistemology that legitimizes slavery and other dehumanizing policies" (296). In other words, the feeling evoked by the sentimental writer and experienced sympathetically by the sentimental reader, is a means of countering the abstract logic that often supports forms of political and cultural violence. Noble's notion of the sentimental wound alerts us to a continuity between the tropes of the text and those of the reading experience: in reading the figure of the wound, the reader herself is "wounded." By recognizing such a continuity, the idea of the sentimental wound offers a way of conceptualizing a more general continuity between the literary and the political.

Within the context then of Troubles Ireland, in which the private and the public are so deeply interwoven, the emphasis on wounds can be seen in a new light. That is, the centrality of wounds in the poetry of Seamus Heaney (and in Troubles poetry more

generally) should not be read as a mere reflection of actual events, but rather as an indicator of a continuity with the tropes, operation, and reception of sentimental literature more generally. Furthering a critique developed in the works of Edmund Burke and Thomas Moore, grounded in Irish political history, and extended in others contexts such as nineteenth-century American anti-slavery literature, the poetry of Longley and Heaney offers an alternative politics that places at its center intersubjective affective experience. In works like "Wounds" and *The Cure at Troy*, both poets conceptualize and embody an ideal reader who is also an ideal citizen, susceptible to the effects and responsive to the insights of sentimental wounding. Accordingly, to be "hurt" itself becomes a figure for reconceiving the relationship between the "private" experience of writing and reading and the "public" imagination of political justice.

But this phenomenon is not limited to the context of the Troubles. In fact, the poetics of sensibility and the politics of sentiment exhibited in the works of Heaney and Longley should be traced back to a more general critique of "abstract, disembodied notions of personhood" (Noble 296) stemming from early modern moral philosophy of Edmund Burke. Like Noble in her consideration of sentimental literature, Edmund Burke seeks to ground the operation of sentimental identification in the body. By locating ethics in the body itself, Burke is able to not only to critique Enlightenment rationalism, but also to advance a definition of human nature itself. As Luke Gibbons argues, Burke develops in his writings a notion of sympathy that both gives it a more radical political role — countering Adam Smith's more circumscribed and individualist view of sympathy — and

critiques the political radicalism of the French Revolution,[13] which according to Burke revealed the latent perversity of rational abstraction: "This sort of people are so taken up with their theories about the rights of man, that they have totally forgot his nature" (*Reflections* 65). This is the same abstract political reasoning, which Noble identifies in anti-slavery literature, that fails to recognize the immediate embodied humanity of slaves. Instead, Burke asserts a more immediate experience of sympathy: "I am afraid it is a practice much too common […] to attribute the cause of feelings which merely arise from the mechanical structure of our bodies, or from the natural frame and constitution of our minds, to certain conclusions of the reasoning faculty on the object presented to us" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 91).

Moreover, like Noble, Burke identifies art as the primary means of this affective correspondence: "It is by this principle [sympathy] chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, *transfuse their passions from one breast to another*, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 91, my emphasis). As such, Burke's conception of sympathetic transfusion represents a theory of the sentimental wound *avant la lettre*. Burke's writings suggest that the sentimental wound, developed so richly in nineteenth-century American literature, should be considered as a more general critique of Enlightenment rationalism and its abuses of abstract political reasoning, which may be used to legitimate violence either in the *promotion* of human rights (in the case of the French Revolution), or in their *circumscription* (in the case of American slavery advocates). Moreover, as Burke's

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[13] See Luke Gibbons "The Sympathetic Sublime: Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, and the Politics of Pain" 83-120.

example suggests, the sentimental wound should be conceived not only in terms of the nineteenth-century American anti-slavery novels, but also as a figure central to the development of modern aesthetics.

3. THE CONFUSING LEGACY: EDMUND BURKE AND MODERN IRELAND

A philosopher of aesthetics, one of the major Whig politicians of his era, and an astonishingly, often unsettlingly, gifted writer and orator, Edmund Burke occupies a complicated position in philosophical, political, and literary histories. To confuse things further, in each of these realms, Burke occupies a contrarian position. In the field of aesthetics, Burke asserts the primacy of language over visual representations; in the field of politics, he is one of the first Whig politicians to oppose the French Revolution; in the field of literature, his rhetorical gifts are employed not for aesthetic but often for immediate and topical political purposes. To this we might also add that Burke was an Irishman who became the primary formulator and defender of English cultural values. As Ian Crowe puts it in his introduction to a collection of bicentenary essays on Burke, "His is a confusing legacy: too much a philosopher for politicians, and too much a politician for philosophers; the father of a party he never knew, with a name he never spoke; the ideologist of anti-ideology and philosopher of pragmatism" (12). In short, Burke has been a figure astonishingly resilient to easy explanation, even as he has been been equally available to co-optation — as Crowe points out, "few people in history can have been quoted more frequently out of context" (12). What this history of reception shows is that

despite, or perhaps because of his complications, Burke remains deeply useful and persistently relevant.

In recent years, Burke has enjoyed a resurgence, particularly among Irish intellectuals. For the politician-intellectual Conor Cruise O'Brien, Burke has exercised an abiding influence that culminates in O'Brien's "thematic biography" of Burke, *The Great Melody* (1992). But Burke has also figured prominently in the work of Seamus Deane, W.J. McCormack, and Luke Gibbons, who, for the most part, would differ significantly from O'Brien on most other issues.[14] For both Deane and O'Brien, arguably two of the most influential Irish intellectuals of the latter half of the twentieth-century,[15] this fact of common interest is particularly astonishing given the apparent ideological differences — even antagonism — between the two thinkers. Yet, what this contradictory reception suggests is that Burke's thought — particularly surprising in the case of a politician — perpetually surpasses the prevailing ideological boundaries. Indeed, the apparent interpretive plenitude of Burke's writing underwrites Seamus Deane's claim in his 1995 Clarendon Lectures that Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* represents a foundational text for modern Irish literature — and also, as the examples of

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[14] See: Conor Cruise O'Brien *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Seamus Deane. *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke*. Critical Conditions: Field Day Essays. Cork: Cork University Press, 2005. W. J McCormack. *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1985. W.J. McCormack. *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History*. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 1994. Luke Gibbons. *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

[15] Conor McCarthy has recently argued that "Seamus Deane is undoubtedly Ireland's premier critic. No other single figure, not even Denis Donoghue, has combined the same scholarship, critical acumen, and disciplinary influence as Deane, who can reasonably be described as having decisively shaped Irish literary studies over the last quarter-century Burke has exercised a shaping influence" ("Seamus Deane: Between Burke and Adorno" 232-48).

Deane, O'Brien, and others suggest, for modern Irish intellectual thought more broadly.[16]

This interest in Burke, however, is not incidental, but is deeply influenced by the events that have animated the thought of O'Brien and Deane, and that of the other intellectuals of their generation. Both Deane and O'Brien begin their engagements with Burke in the late 1960s. In 1968 specifically, O'Brien published his Pelican edition of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Deane published his first article on Burke, "Burke and the French Philosophes," which grew out of his doctoral work on the reception of the French Revolution in England.[17] 1968, of course, has come to signify a watershed in modern political history, seeing the Prague Spring and the subsequent occupation by the Soviet Union, the May general strike in Paris, the brutal suppression of the student movement in Mexico City, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy — to name only a few prominent events. Of course, Deane and O'Brien had begun their studies of Burke prior to 1968, but the year, nevertheless,

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[16] Deane writes: "I want to begin with Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) because I want to read it as a foundational text for a particular description of a contrast and contest between tradition and modernity that was to become routine in anti-revolutionary writing in Europe." Deane defines his term as follows: "A foundational text is one that allows or has allowed for a reading of a national literature in such a manner that even chronologically prior texts can be annexed by it into a narrative that will ascribe to them a preparatory role in the ultimate completion of the narrative's plot. It is a text that generates the possibility of such a narrative and lends to that narrative a versatile cultural and political value" (*Strange Country* 1-2). Stephen Regan supports this claim in his *Irish Writing: An Anthology of Irish Literature in English 1789-1939*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

[17] Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1968. Seamus Deane "Burke and the French Philosophes." *Studies in Burke and His Time* 10.2 (1968): 1113-37. Conor McCarthy has argued that Burke is foundational in Deane's development as a critic. He reports that "At a seminar on his work at NUI Maynooth in early 2003, Seamus Deane, in response to a question from Joe Cleary, suggested that he reckoned his most important intellectual influences to have been Edmund Burke and Theodor Adorno." "Seamus Deane: Between Burke and Adorno." *Yearbook of English Studies*. 35 (2005): 232-48. Deane's doctoral dissertation was published finally in 1988. Seamus Deane. *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789-1832*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.

denotes a series of brutal and spectacular culminations of an ongoing struggle between the state and revolutionary forces internationally. Reflecting the relevance of this context, O'Brien's introduction to *The Reflections* explicitly grounds the work in the milieu of contemporary events (the Cold War, African independence movements, Marxism),[18] with the implication that the tension between the authority of the state and the revolutionary drive for liberty, manifesting in violent, as well as non-violent, action, had resurfaced in a form as remarkable as that of the French Revolution itself — "the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world" as Burke put it in his time (*Reflections* 10).

But, particularly significant in the case of Ireland, 1968 also marks the beginning of the modern period of the Troubles, which would dominate Irish politics, history, and culture for decades to come. Simon Prince, in his study *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*, subtly describes the way in which a global spirit informed the more local politics of civil rights and sectarianism in the Northern Irish context, revealing 1968 to be merely the tip of an historical iceberg: "They [the civil rights activists] believed that they were part of a global struggle to free humanity from imperialism, capitalism and bureaucracy, not the individual from old-fashioned ways of living. Instead of a fleeting festival of liberation, '68 emerges as the climax of post-war radicalism. There was a 'long '68' dating back to at least the 1950s and continuing into the 1970s" (8). Moreover, as Prince argues, that ongoing discourse of radicalism also deeply influenced the character of the Troubles: "Sixty-eight was a

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[18] Conor Cruise O'Brien. "Introduction." *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1968. 9-76.

global revolt, but across the world it took place in national and local contexts. The Troubles is perhaps the most tragic coming together of international trends and historic divisions" (8).

Additionally, as Prince also points out, the spectacular quality of 1968, and of the Troubles that would follow in its wake, was intensified crucially by developments in television reporting. Burke's cynical observation that "plots, massacres, assassinations, seem to some people a trivial price for obtaining a revolution. A cheap, bloodless reformation, a guiltless liberty, appear flat and vapid to their taste. There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouze the imagination" (*Reflections* 65) seems equally well-suited to 1968. What this history shows, then, is that the abiding interest of two of Ireland's foremost Burkeans finds its origins in the radical spirit of the 1960s, while it finds its perpetuity in that spirit's reformulation into the sectarian and imperialist energies that shaped the Troubles. Thinking analogously and with admitted reductionism, the Troubles of Northern Ireland might have operated in Ireland as the French Revolution operated in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. That is, the struggle between the state and revolutionary radicalism, as well as the challenges of regulating the abuse of authority by a majority faction, which captivated the intellect of Burke, found ample illustration in the Northern Irish Troubles.

Despite, however, the political resonances of Burke's thought to the Troubles, what characterizes most recent studies of Burke by Irish intellectuals is an emphasis on the *literary* quality of Burke's thought. This tendency, however, is not simply a selection

bias; it is an interpretive point. Implicit in this approach, is the belief that Burke's major contributions to political thought, which cluster around the concepts of faction, liberty, and authority, are informed by and continuous with his more aesthetic interests in imagination, affect, and sympathy. Indeed, what seems to recommend Burke is his peculiar cross-application of aesthetic and political understanding — what R.B. McDowell calls "his infusion of poetry into the exposition of political practicalities" (Regan xvii). O'Brien goes even further in his biography of Burke, claiming the central role of *fantasia* in Burke's work. *Fantasia*, as defined by the historian Isaiah Berlin, is the application of "imaginative insight" to history and politics that goes beyond the limitations of mere facts; O'Brien, making a polemical as well as an interpretive point, asserts that "Burke was himself one of the world's great masters of *fantasia*, and no historian who lacks that quality will ever do justice to Burke. Those who despise *fantasia* will be Burke's enemies, *ipso facto*" (*The Great Melody* lx).

Moreover, Yeats's late fascination with Burke has provided a powerful endorsement for Irish critics to claim both the literary quality of Burke's writing and its essential Irishness. O'Brien's use of Yeats's poetic summation of Burke from "The Seven Sages" — "American colonies, Ireland, France and India / Harried, and Burke's great melody against it" — to advance both these claims is paradigmatic. First, O'Brien, like Yeats, insists on the fundamental importance of Ireland in Burke's thought: "Given the tremendous tensions of his upbringing, in the Ireland of the Penal Laws, if you can't understand Burke's relation to the land of his upbringing, you can't understand Burke" (xxvi). Second, O'Brien confirms Yeats's intuition and metaphor, that Burke's

writing exhibits not only a harmonious consistency, but also an eloquence that raises it above mere polemical discourse into the the non-verbal realm of music: "The melody is always 'against *it*' [the abuse of power, according to O'Brien] and is therefore a form of action […]. That action takes the form not only of rhetoric, but also of argument, aphorism, debate, logical and historical analysis […]. In certain conditions, Burke's utterance, both in speech and writing, attains to a glowing eloquence, unique in English literature and in the annals of oratory" (xxv). Burke is a strange figure indeed: not only does he unify political action and artistic excellence, but he does so, it would seem, because of his Irishness. In other words, Burke, by virtue of his Irishness, manages to defy the Yeatsian axiom that "we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" ("Per Amica Silentia Lunae" 331). Crucially for Burke, out of the quarrel with others comes poetry.

Moreover, central to the Irish reading of Burke is the assertion of intellectual consistency, which treats his political writings, especially his *Reflections on The Revolution in France*, as continuous with his early writings on aesthetics. The advantage of such a reading is its ability to substantiate the politico-literary hybridity of Burke. Seamus Deane, for example, in his essay "Factions and Fictions: Burke, Colonialism and Revolution," offers a particularly perceptive reading of Burke's critique of the abstract political principles of the French Revolution in terms of his early writings on representation and sympathy. As Deane argues, for Burke the aesthetic is not a world removed from everyday realities, on the contrary it is a theory of public affections by which the social is constituted. "As in the sympathetic experience," Deane observes, "'a

sort of substitution' takes place, whereby we put ourselves in the place of another or in some sense define ourselves in relation to others. Art is of great social importance because it is based on the principle of substitution, whereby the arts can 'transfuse their passions from one breast to another'" (89). That is, art and society both operate through the social ministrations of sympathy. Fortunately for the purposes of social harmony we are naturally predisposed, according to Burke, to prefer the actual to the fictional;[19] and, further, it is in our nature to try to redress the wrongs that we see. This similarity, however, between art and society, also creates a profound danger: could we not simply grow to prefer the pleasures of sympathy supplied by art to those supplied by society? Or, in the case of the French revolutionaries, might one grow to prefer the beauty of an idea or theory to reality itself? For Burke, as Deane argues, our ability to distinguish the real from the merely representational has a direct impact on the realm of political action and order: "When true feeling is elicited by a representation rather than by an actual event or sequence of events, then the natural constitution of the human world (and of the divine order of which the human world is part) is inverted" ("Factions and Fictions" 90). Again to adapt Yeats, Burke reveals in poetry itself, or its abuses, the root of the quarrel with others.

Finally, the Irish reading of Burke has revealed in his writings an affinity with anti-colonial struggles, which gestures toward a conception of Burke as a foundational figure in conceiving of a political aesthetics concerned above all with the effects of

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[19] "I imagine that we shall be much mistaken if we attribute any considerable part of our satisfaction in tragedy to a consideration that tragedy is a deceit, and its representations no realities. The nearer it approaches the reality, and the further is removes us from the idea of fiction, the more perfect its power" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 93).

oppression and the advancement of social justice. Again, even in cases as opposed as O'Brien and Deane the tendency is to recover a progressive Burke from conservative readings. But it is Luke Gibbons who has been the most thorough in his recovery of a progressive Burke. In his book-length study *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (2003), Gibbons extrapolates from Burke's writings what he calls "the sympathetic sublime," which acts as a counter to Adam Smith's emphasis on impartial spectatorship in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In this concept Gibbons finds a model for bridging "the private domain of sensibility" with "the public sphere of justice" and thus the realms of aesthetics and political action (55). Gibbons writes:

> One of the consequences of the dissociation between art and morality in Enlightenment thought was that the "aesthetic," and culture in general, was requisitioned to act as a consolation for politics, granting minorities or marginalized groups an exotic or imaginative after-life — "romantic Ireland," "the noble savage," the "last of the race" — to compensate for their exclusion from citizenship in the public sphere. By closing the gap between culture and politics, Burke cuts off this escape route, seeing in the imagination haunted by terror an unrequited rage for justice. (17)

What Gibbons finds in Burke is the alliance between the distress caused by the sublime and the compulsion to take action against injustice. Central to this reading is Burke's contention that the uneasiness inherent to witnessing spectacles of violence or injustice will motivate the spectator into action: "The delight we have in such things [violent spectacles], hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, prompts us

to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 93). Gibbons's argument serves as a necessary supplement to what is viewed as Burke's conservatism. While, on the one hand, the principle of order embodied by the ideal state inspires us by its beauty, on the other hand, injustice, whether perpetrated by the state or otherwise, compels us to action through its sublimity.

What the examples of Deane, O'Brien, and Gibbons reveal, is a desire among Irish intellectuals to reclaim Burke as the founder of a new philosophical model, capable of subverting the easy dichotomy of poetry and politics. Instead of preserving this dichotomy, Burke exemplifies the generative cross-application of aesthetic and political ideas, which are, in fact, consubstantial. It is this line of thinking that informs Seamus Deane's assertion of the *Reflections*' foundational status. Indeed, viewing Burke less as a *political* precursor and more as a *literary* precursor provides a critical methodology to begin to reassess a number of major issues in Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles — both in terms of its production and its reception — grounded in the role of sympathy as the basis of both literary and political experience. More specifically, Burke's emphasis on the body, his insights into the strange pleasures of spectatorship, and his attempt to ground insights of universal significance in subjective observation all bear on Troubles poetry. To put it briefly, Burke presents a precursor for a sentimentalism of direct political import, that is, a sentimentalism that pushes the affective experience of reading out of the private realm of sensibility, to adopt Luke Gibbons's phrase, and into the public realm of justice.

4. PARTIAL SYMPATHIES: EDMUND BURKE AND SEAMUS HEANEY'S "PUNISHMENT"

Each of these features of Burke's political aesthetics is brought dramatically in to play in Seamus Heaney's controversial poem, "Punishment," which may serve as a paradigmatic illustration of Burkean aesthetics in Troubles poetry. Specifically, the poem exemplifies three major dimensions of the Burkean model. First, the poem presents itself as a meditation on the processes of sympathy that the viewing of violence initiates; it both instantiates and critiques the various modes of sympathy and their abuses. Second, the poem explores this process of sympathy primarily through the figure of the body. As such, the poem appeals to an idea of sympathy particular to Burke and distinct from a more intellectualized notion of sympathy elaborated by Scottish enlightenment thinkers, like Hume or Smith. Third, the poem, in its reception, incites a heated critical debate on the nature of spectatorship, which is predicted and theorized in Burke's own writings on aesthetics. Accordingly, the poem becomes a site for essaying the subtle (and, I would argue, unascertainable) distinction in poetry between the critique and the endorsement of violence.

"Punishment," from Heaney's 1975 collection *North*, has since its publication remained one of the most contested, and most anthologized, works in Heaney's oeuvre. Rand Brandes succinctly summarizes the reasons for the poem's controversial reception: "The poem has been used to accuse Heaney of various negative traits including sexism, atavism and violent nationalism" ("Seamus Heaney's Working Titles" 24). As an index

of the poem's troubled status, one might review the various mentions the poem receives in the recent *Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (2009) — the number of which is matched only by "Casualty" and the long sequences "Clearances" and "Squarings." In six out of the nine mentions, the poem, or its sentiments, are described as "unflinching" (6), "provocative and controversial" (24), "aestheticising, mythologising and glamorising the Ulster violence" (63), "controversial" (77), "notorious" (196), and, again, "notorious" (216). The paradigm for this reception was established early on with Ciaran Carson's withering critique of not only the poem but the poet himself — establishing an *ad hominem* habit of approach in the critique of Heaney. Beginning his 1975 review of *North* with the observation that "the poet seems to have acquired the status of myth, of institution," Carson writes, "Heaney seems to have moved — unwillingly, perhaps — from being a writer with the gift of precision, to become the laureate of violence — a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for 'the situation,' in the last resort, a mystifier" ("Escaped from the Massacre?" 183). Both the controversial nature of the poem, and the tendency that it prompts — to critique the writer as much as the poem — can be illuminated through a consideration of its affinities with Burkean aesthetics.

While the tenor of reception for both Heaney's *North* and Burke's *Reflections* is analogous, the similarities go further: what animates the controversies surrounding each work is the nature of spectacle and its uneasy relationship with art. Central to Burke's own meditations on aesthetics is the way that our instinctive pleasure in witnessing spectacles cannot adequately distinguish between what is real and what is merely a

representation. Of course, the intellect may make this distinction easily, but affect in this case is blind. Pushing this notion even further, Burke argues that real events actually supply a *greater* aesthetic pleasure than art itself: "I imagine that we shall be much mistaken if we attribute any considerable part of our satisfaction in tragedy to a consideration that tragedy is a deceit, and its representations no realities. The nearer it approaches the reality, and the further is removes us from the idea of fiction, the more perfect its power" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 93). Suggestive of the links between aesthetics and political violence specifically, Burke illustrates his point with a hypothetical situation in which the greatest of artistic talents have been brought to bear on a theatrical production, but "let it be reported that a state criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of the real sympathy" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 93). At the level of affect, political violence easily trumps aesthetic merit. Moreover, Burke asserts that this infringement of the aesthetic sensibility into the actual realm of politics and justice reveals a kind of innate hypocrisy that resides at the level of affect: "We delight in seeing things, which so far from doing, our heartiest wishes would be to see redressed" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 94).

These early insights into the nature of spectacle, condition Burke's later reading of the French Revolution, in which this confusion between reality and its representation allows representations to exert an influence over reality itself. Burke attempts to diagnose this influence in terms of value and taste: "Plots, massacres, assassinations,

seem to some people a trivial price for obtaining a revolution. A cheap, bloodless reformation, a guiltless liberty, appear flat and vapid to their taste. There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouze the imagination" (*Reflections* 65). Ultimately, Burke argues, this confusion creates a "revolution" in human nature itself: "This sort of people are so taken up with their theories about the rights of man, that they have totally forgot his nature. Without opening one avenue to the understanding, they have succeeded in stopping up those that lead to the heart. They have perverted themselves, and in those that attend to them, all the well-placed sympathies of the human breast" (*Reflections* 65). This taxonomy of the aesthetic experience of violence and its perpetuation relies on a complex understanding of sympathy, which, for Burke, operates aesthetically and politically. Sympathy is the source of our delight in aesthetic representations, as it is the impetus for action within the public sphere. However, because of this ambivalence in sympathy, the aesthetic is always threatening to pervert our "well-placed sympathies" by conditioning one's perceptions and actions in the political realm. This position is remarkably similar to Carson's argument or to Edna Longley's notion that "poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated. And for the same reason: mysteries distort the rational processes which ideally prevail in social relations; while ideologies confiscate the poet's special passport to *terra incognita*" ("Poetry and Politics" 185). The crucial distinction, however, is that Burke does not conclude that art and politics should be separated. On the contrary, for Burke, the aestheticization of violence is a *fait accompli.* What remains, however, is the possibility of employing the aesthetic *against* political violence through a

counter-appeal to sympathy. It is this strategy that Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* employs to such astonishing effect, and which earns Burke Novalis's paradoxical acclamation "Many antirevolutionary books have been written for the Revolution. But Burke has written a revolutionary book against the Revolution" (43).

Within the context of the Troubles, the appetite for a poetic response to the Troubles, which Carson notes in his review, reveals an already accomplished aestheticization of violence.[20] What remains then for Heaney is an engagement with the errant paths of sympathy that shape an aesthetics of violence and, by extension, acts of political violence. Indeed the poem, as a meditation on the processes of sympathy that the viewing of violence initiates, may be paradigmatic for a conflict that, due to the role of international media attention, remained perpetually in a closed circuit of reality and representation. Indicating the centrality of sympathy in Heaney's meditation, the language of affect asserts itself immediately in the poem:

> I can feel the tug
>
> of the halter at the nape
>
> of her neck, the wind
>
> on her naked front. (ll. 1-4)

Yet this feeling slowly gains an erotic charge, suggesting that sympathetic delight in contemplating another's suffering is not far removed from the delights of pornography. Fran Brearton, for one, notes this ambiguity: "one criticism might be that while the poem

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[20] "Everyone was anxious that *North* should be a great book; when it turned out that it wasn't, it was treated as one anyway, and made into an Ulster '75 Exhibition of the Good that can come out of Troubled Times. Heaney is too good and too sensible a poet to turn into Faber's answer to Georgie Best" (186).

professes empathy ('I can feel the tug / of the halter'), it slips rapidly into objectification ('I can see her drowned / body')" ("Heaney and the Feminine" 77). While it is true that the poem moves toward objectification, this does not amount to an aesthetic failure. The precise movement the poem dramatizes is the move from an immediacy of sympathy to the complacency of spectatorship. The poem asserts a first-person subjectivity — which is part of what is so troubling to critics — that critiques, even satirizes the presumption of objective spectatorship.

This critique of spectatorship is underscored by the implicit subtext (in a literal sense) of "Punishment," as well as of all the Bog Poems: P.V. Glob's study *The Bog People* (1969). This subtext is made explicit in the first American publication of the poem in the *James Joyce Quarterly* (Spring 1974), which included, from Glob's book, photographs of the Windeby Girl (subject of "Punishment" and other poems) and The Grauballe Man. This instance of transparency is not unique, however; Heaney in essays and interviews continually places his own bog poems in an intertextual, and intermediating, relationship with Glob's book and its striking photographs. What this intertextuality suggests is that there is, from the beginning, a countervailing *mediacy* to the poem's initial sympathetic immediacy. Despite the initial gesture toward an embodied sympathy, the poem ultimately is about looking at photographs. It forces into tension the moral pull of sympathy with the highly mediated nature of most modern conflicts. Accordingly, the question which seems to motivate the progress of the narrator's reflection is: How does one respond to *representations* of violence and the feelings they inspire? And, moreover, how does one avoid the Burkean fallacy of

replacing reality with its representation?

In order to answer this question, Heaney exhaustively records the modalities of sympathy, progressing methodically as though through stations. The poem, as we have seen, begins with the most basic form of sympathy — the act of substitution, which we now usually call empathy. But from here the poem begins to move steadily away into a more detached and cerebral contemplation of circumstances — "the weighing stone, / the floating rods and boughs" (ll. 11-12) — to acts of aestheticization: "her shaved head / like a stubble of black corn" (ll. 17-18), "her noose a ring // to store / the memories of love" (ll. 20-2), and, finally, "your / tar-black face was beautiful" (ll. 26-7). In early editions, the poem ends shortly thereafter; early editions also emphasize an ambiguous "they" who perform most of the tasks of witnessing and recording, and act as a liaison between the poem's speaker and its subject: "They have breached / her shaved head […] / spied / on her glutted furrows // and numbered all her bones" (*Broadsheet*). Moreover, the contemporary event that extends the poem into the present context of the Troubles — the tarring and feathering of Catholic girls in the mid 1970s — is kept at a distance from the speaker. Instead the Windeby Girl, victim of harsh justice, is herself made to act as judge: "into your meek gaze / I commit the stone-casters / and your punished sisters / weeping under the lamp-post" (*Broadsheet*).[21] Crucially, however, in later editions of the poem, the gaze is turned upon the speaker himself and used to probe the moral ambivalence of his own gaze. It is at this point that the poem gains its critical intensity in relation to sympathy, mediation, and complacency, as well as its provocative quality:

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[21] This notion of the judging gaze is revisited in "Strange Fruit" (*North* 32).

My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and the darkened combs,
your muscle's webbing
and all your numbered bones:

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

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge. (ll. 28-44)

What the addition of this final section to the original poem suggests is that Heaney is

interested primarily in deconstructing the speaker's own gaze, his own delight in sympathy, and his own imaginative liberties. What the poem exposes is how the representation of violence can subvert — through a diminution of sympathy from the corporeal to the intellectual — the moral impulse to take action, to move from the private sphere of sensibility into the public sphere of justice. The target of the poem's satire is not the perpetrators of tribal violence but the "civilized" spectators who look on with a kind of reverential pleasure.

In addition to the poem's profound engagement with the nature of sympathy and spectatorship, the poem also shares a Burkean emphasis on subjectivity, itself a critique of the complacency that objectivity often promotes. Much of what troubles readers of "Punishment" is similar to what troubled readers of Burke, a kind of psychological full-immersion of the writer into the subject matter. For critics of Burke, the literary excesses of his prose seem to eclipse the revolutionary excesses he seeks to condemn.[22] For critics of Heaney, his effort to imaginatively understand the nature of violence itself becomes an endorsement of that violence. Burke, at the beginning of his *Reflections*, makes his method (or anti-method) clear: "Indulging myself in the freedom of epistolary discourse, I beg leave to throw out my thoughts, and express my feelings, just as they arise in my mind, with very little attention to formal method" (*Reflections* 10). Heaney makes similar claims in his own writings, committing himself to what he has called his

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[22] Mary Wollstonecraft, in her response to Burke's *Reflections* supposes that if Burke had been French he would have been "a violent revolutionist" (*A Vindication of the Rights of Men* 78-9). Similarly, Thomas Paine compares Burke's *Reflections* (which dwell so much on spectacle) to a theatrical production: "I cannot consider Mr. Burke's book in scarcely any other light than a dramatic performance; and he must, I think, have considered it in the same light himself, by the poetical liberties he has taken of omitting some facts, distorting others, and making the whole machinery bend to produce a stage effect" (*Rights of Man* 39).

"instinctual ballast" ("The Makings of a Music" 62). While it is tempting to condemn this intuitive approach to such serious political issues as a shortcoming, the commitment of both Burke and Heaney throughout their careers to the truth value of subjectivity suggests that it is less of a shortcoming and more a point of philosophical principle. Seamus Deane's assessment of this tendency in Burke is instructive: "To some readers, Burke's weakness, to others his strength, is his capacity to find in subjectivity a universal dimension. For him, impartiality was founded in partiality, not in its repression. Certainly in the genre of the public letter he found an opportunity to profess personal attachment as a basis for political wisdom" (*Foreign Affections* 5). Heaney's own stubborn fidelity to his instincts should be read in these same terms.

The commitment to subjectivity offers a counter to a kind of universalist abstraction that keeps violence from breaching the defenses of civilized outrage. "Punishment" like the more uncontroversial poems of the Troubles — such as "Casualty" or Longley's "Wounds" — is counter-revolutionary in its critique of violence. But it is also counter-objective in its deconstruction of intellectual distance. The poem, which enacts a reflection on representations of violence, is itself a representation of violence. As such, the poem ramifies outward to encompass the act of reading itself, implicating poet, critic, and cosmopolitan audience alike in its charge of genteel complacency. Moreover, the poem undermines any position of objectivity by representing violence through the voice of a highly subjective first-person narrator. Thus, the poem, while it dramatizes the act of reading, replicates our own experience of reading, and, in Burke's words, our own "delight […] in the real misfortune and pain of others" (*A Philosophical*

Enquiry 92). The poem, in light of Burke's insights, offers us a paradigm of reading, of how to respond *responsibly* to representations of violence.

CHAPTER 2:

HEARING IS BELIEVING: THOMAS MOORE, SEAMUS HEANEY, AND THE FIGURE OF MUSIC

In early nineteenth-century England, Thomas Moore was one of the most popular drawing-room attractions, singing songs that conjured images of Ireland and nationalist sentimentality for the entertainment of upper-class Londoners. In recent years, Seamus Heaney has enjoyed a similar international popularity – the winner of numerous international prizes, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995, a highly sought-after lecturer and reader, and a fixture on academic syllabi. Though the content of their works may differ significantly, the reception of each poet is instructively analogous. For both, there exists a tension between the currents of cosmopolitanism and the currents of local politics and culture. That is, while Heaney and Moore may attempt to be faithful to the complexity of the local, the local – whether Bloody Sunday or the struggles for Catholic Emancipation – often becomes a site of sentimental identification for audiences beyond Ireland.

The affinities between Moore and Heaney, however, go deeper than the level of reception. Moore's portrait, for example, hangs above the mantle at the Heaneys' Sandymount home, and Heaney has returned to Moore again and again in his writings and in his radio broadcasts. In a 1979 introduction to David Hammond's selection Moore's *Melodies*, Heaney praises the *Melodies* as "the music of what happened in the sentimental national heart" (8). Despite the evidence, however, the affinities between

Moore and Heaney has remained largely unexplored. As I hope to show, a study of these affinities sheds light not only on Heaney's own work, but also on the international reception of Irish literature more generally. Moreover, such a study may begin to untangle the complex relationship between politics and aesthetics in Irish literature, the predicament W.B. Yeats diagnosed in 1905: "We all write, if we follow the habit of our country, not for our own delight but for the improvement of our neighbours" ("Samhain: 1905" 198). What the examples of Moore and Heaney reveal is that, critical to resolving this tension between private delight and public morality, is the figure of music.

1. MAKING A MUSIC: 1978-1980

From his earliest writings to his most recent work, Seamus Heaney has demonstrated a sustained interest in the tensions and collaborations between the claims of poetry and the claims of politics, community, and citizenship. One of the first essays to systematically and directly treat the relationship between the poet and politics is Heaney's essay "The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov's Cognac and a Knocker," which first appeared in 1986 and introduces his 1988 prose collection *The Government of the Tongue*. The essay elaborates the cases of three artists confronting political violence in an effort to illustrate the proper and generative tension between what he terms Art and Life. In the figures of Wilfred Owen, Osip Mandelstam, and Anton Chekhov, Heaney delineates a kind of primer and pantheon of the poet engagée. On the one hand, we have the examples of Owen and Chekhov who represent the artist who would "rebuke the sovereign claims

which art would make for itself" (xviii); while on the other hand, we have the example of Osip Mandelstam, who represents the artist, politicized by his context, that has "no immediate social aim," and for whom 'utterance itself was self-justifying" (xix). This dichotomy is one explored in other essays, but what is striking about this essay is the frame narrative that supports it, and which subtly inflects it by prompting the governing distinction of the essay, the distinction between "song" and "suffering."

Contrary to its primarily international tendency, the essay begins with a very local account of an evening in 1972, when Heaney and the singer David Hammond are interrupted on their way to a recording studio by a series of explosions in the city. Amid the wail of sirens and the static chatter of news reports, the two decide to cancel their session out of a sense of propriety and go home. Heaney justifies the inclusion of this striking anecdote by explaining that it illustrates what he views as the central tension in the whole collection of essays — the tension between what he calls *Art* and *Life*. Perhaps recognizing the excessive abstraction of the terms, Heaney quickly corrects himself: "Perhaps Art and Life sound a little distant, so let us put it more melodramatically and call them Song and Suffering." Heaney here is oddly self-conscious and transparent regarding the problems of his terminology, yet, aside from acknowledging this difficulty, he does little to qualify the terms — what is Art exactly vis-à-vis Life? and what is Song and Suffering? Moreover, the terms seem to correlate with what they are replacing only tentatively: to suggest that Life could be reduced merely to Suffering, and all Art equivalent to Song would make even the most uncritical reader uneasy.

Heaney's persistence suggests that the words, while problematic, are nevertheless best suited for the heavy-lifting at hand. For one thing, they subtly revise the ruling Yeatsian dichotomy of the Life and the Work, situating Heaney both as a descendent of Yeats, but also as a poet who is now, at the age of forty-seven, attempting to define his own ruling question. For another, the term "song" aligns his meditations on politics with an increasing stress on music in Heaney's essays and poems of the late 1970s. The goal of this essay will be to understand why Heaney chooses "song" as his emblem of art in its opposition to politics, and how the figure of music allows Heaney to articulate a union, albeit a tense one, between poetry and politics. Moreover, I will argue that the categories of song and suffering, far from forming a stable opposition, are in fact consubstantial.

While Heaney employs music as a figure throughout his early collections, the period of the late 1970s and early 1980s reveals a clustering of interest in song and music, coinciding with Heaney's reconsideration of his poetic principles following the publication of *North* in 1975. In the years following *North*, Heaney was exhausted and in search of new modes. In a letter to Michael Longley on 4 January 1978, Heaney remarks "I am stiff and dull as to verse. Cannot even muster the energy to type out things I have revised. Say a prayer for me" (1). Moreover, as Heaney has noted recently, in the mid-seventies he had reached a point of reassessing his direction in poetry:

> Sometime in the mid- to late seventies, I gave a lecture at the Yeats Summer School on *The Wind Among the Reeds*, one that I plundered for 'Yeats as an Example?' In the course of preparing it, I realized that that collection was the culmination of one kind of poetry and that – after its publication – the plainer,

> 'walking naked' Yeats had taken over. And although I was well aware of the dangers of inflation, I couldn't help noticing that a similar turn was occurring in my own work after *North*." (O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones* 194)

Reflecting this sense of stagnancy and transformation, Heaney's major essays of the period — "The Sense of Place" (1977, 1980), "Yeats as an Example?" (1978), "The Makings of a Music" (1978), and the first sections of his essays "Mossbawn" and "Belfast" (1978) — reveal a poet attempting to remake himself in the Yeatsian sense, both through a reconsideration of precursors and through a more calculated and self-defining engagement with place and memory than in previous collections. "I no longer wanted a door into the dark," Heaney explains to James Randall in 1979, "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" (20). Furthermore, as Heaney states in the same interview, in his new work he wished to depart from the introversion of his earlier work and to develop a more extroverted voice: "I wanted to turn out, to go out, and I wanted to pitch the voice out; it was at once formal but also emotional, a return to an opener voice and to a more—I don't want to say public—but a more social voice. And the rhythmic contract of meter and iambic pentameter and long line implies audience" (16). As the poems in *Field Work* (1979) demonstrate, this "turning out" occurs on the level of form, as Heaney returns to more traditional forms of English verse, and also on the level of content, as Heaney directly addresses the issues of local politics and violence in the early portion of the book.

From one angle these statements appear paradoxical: on the one hand, Heaney would become more personal, more autobiographical, more instinctual and grounded in place, while on the other hand, he would develop "a more social" extroverted and traditional voice. Indeed, in the interview these statements simply coexist in their apparent opposition. One must look to his important essay on the poetic voice, "The Makings of a Music," to begin to discover the unifying figure of "music" which attempts to resolve the opposition between the social and the personal.

Delivered in 1978 at the University of Liverpool, "The Makings of a Music" attempts to analyze both Yeats's and Wordsworth's processes of composition — their modes of making — in order to develop a theory of poetic voice.[1] What is more, by focusing on Yeats and Wordsworth, who are among Heaney's most important precursors, Heaney attempts to articulate a figure and genealogy for his own poetic voice — which, as we have seen, is at a point of crisis. The fact that Heaney does not turn to either Hopkins or Kavanagh suggests as well that Heaney's interest here is in disclosing the foundations of a *major* poetic voice or personality — and, moreover, a voice that deliberately traces the line from private experience to public utterance, that constructs and is constructed by autobiography. In the essay, as in so many others, the "amphibious" Heaney approaches his problem in terms of a duality. Adopting Paul Valery's distinction between the *les vers donnés* and *les vers calculés*, Heaney opposes

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[1] Heaney had used the phrase in an earlier essay, collected under the title "Belfast" in *Preoccupations : Selected Prose, 1968-1978*: "Many poets in this century, notably Austin Clarke, have applied Gaelic techniques in the making of their music and metres" (36).

the methods of Wordsworth and Yeats as described in their critical writings.[2] First, Wordsworth, as the practitioner of *les vers donnés* — the given line — demonstrates "a version of composition as listening, as a wise passiveness, a surrender to energies that spring within the center of the mind" (63), a kind of "instinctual ballast" (62). Moreover, he proves a certain organic compatibility between introversion and extroversion: "He is drawn into himself even as he speaks himself out, and it is this mesmerized attention to the echoes and invitations within that constitutes his poetic confidence" (63). As the notion of *vers donnés* suggest, there is a subconscious, irrational, unwilled and, because unwilled, a seemingly more natural and immediate quality to Wordsworth's poetry. Further: "It was not a question of the poet's voice performing a part but of the poet's voice being possessed; it was not a question of technical cool, of finding a dramatic pitch, rather a matter of sympathetic warmth" (71). This is the poet as feeling sympathetic listener; as between the poet and the subject, there is a perfect sympathy between the poet's instinct and expression. This sympathy, however, is not easily achieved, but requires a groundedness in one's childish apprehension of place: "the child composed in stilled consciousness, a living tuning fork planted between wood and hill" (70). The Wordsworthian Heaney shares this same planted quality; in the way Heaney hears the

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[2] "The Makings of a Music" should be viewed as a statement in the tradition of Wordsworth's 1802 "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*, or Yeats's "A General Introduction to My Work." The fact, however, that Heaney develops his own poetic manifesto through the example of precursors like Wordsworth or Yeats suggests a far more Borgesian talent for ventriloquistic criticism. And, like Borges, Heaney's evident humility belies a far more ambitious critical program. In the way that a steady attention to the Kafkaesque gives birth to the Borgesian, so, we may find, do Heaney's self-minimizing attentions to Yeats and Wordsworth, among others, ultimately produce the "Heaneyesque."

footfall on gravel in Wordsworth's poetry, so might we hear the slap and squelch of Heaney's childhood in his early collections.

The imagery of weight, groundedness, ballast that stabilizes Heaney's early work, however, is implicitly critiqued as inadequate by the contrary example of Yeats, whose *vers calculés* offers Heaney the basis for a more complex poetics that he will explore in his work to come. Indeed, at the juncture of the late 1970s, with the publication of *Field Work*, Heaney seems poised between the subterranean and the airy, between ballast and buoyancy, between instinct and intellect. In Yeats, Heaney discovers a poet that, unlike Wordsworth or young Heaney, "does not listen in, but acts out" (72). This is the "social voice" that Heaney speaks of to James Randall.

As a sign of Heaney's excitement at the new possibilities suggested in Yeats's example, his prose in the second section of the essay shows an energy that his relatively more dutiful treatment of Wordsworth lacks, for this is the *new*: "In Yeats, the voice muscles its way over the obstacle course of the form and flexes like an animated vine on the trellis of its metric and rhyme scheme" (73-4). Similarly: "The words fly off there like stones in a riot; this is not a region to wander in but a combat zone where rhymes collide and assertions strike hard music off one another like quarter-staffs striking" (74). If Wordsworth offers the organic music of the aeolian harp, Yeats offers the percussive music of strife and violence, hammering and striking. If there is an autobiographical foundation for this music, as there seems to be for Wordsworth, Heaney does not mention it — even though one would not need to look far beyond the Irish Civil War in Yeats's case, and the preoccupation with the sonic experience of Troubles Belfast in Heaney's

case. Yet, Heaney does not seem to want to grant a mere abstract principle of equivalency between poet and circumstance; he is after something more lasting, more particular (for the *artist* in Heaney is often as interesting as the *art*), and more complementary to his trust in the Wordsworthian sense of place. What Heaney emphasizes in Yeats is a model of the intellectual poet whose poetry floats free of the warm ground of Wordsworthian sympathy in order to grasp the historical in the individual, or "the relationship between the creative moment in the life of an individual and the effect of that moment's conception throughout history. … The power of the mind's motion along and against the current of history" (77-8). In these formulations we begin to see Heaney's fusion of the social and the personal, in which the tension between the conventions of form and the singularity of the poet's voice becomes an analogy for the tension between "the current of history" and the individual. In a sense, then, the two categories, the personal and the historical, are mutually illuminating in the space of the poem: the personal is revealed in its resistance to history, history is revealed in its imposition on the personal. Or, to put it another way, history gives form to the personal, while the personal substantiates the historical.

In this elaboration of the poetic process and its relation to both intuition and history, Heaney shows a conspicuous reliance on music as a figure for both the poetic process and the poetic voice, which, rather than illuminate, tends to obscure, or mystify, Heaney's theoretical paradigm. Indeed, music operates as a prismatic image that both interprets his early work in the light of Wordsworth and predicts his new paths in the light of Yeats. Nevertheless, rather than merely grant the conceptual validity of his

formulations, Heaney repeatedly insists on founding this complex interplay of intuition, place, intellect, and history within the body itself. As in so much of Heaney's critical writing, Heaney seeks to undo the rational structure which he has so painstakingly constructed in his essay, by asserting the aesthetic — in the most literal sense, the experience of the bodily senses — as a kind of counterweight to his philosophical critical argument. In another essay from this same year, Heaney makes this substitution of the bodily for the philosophical explicit: "Thomas Hardy once wrote in a preface to a volume of poems that no systematic philosophy was attempted in the pages that followed because, as an artist, he dealt in impressions. I have to enter a similar caveat here. I am interested in the 'impressions' that a certain kind of culture have left behind in my sensibility, the 'deposits' left by the 'mythos'" ("The Poet as a Christian" 603).[3]

To conclude his essay, Heaney reflects on Yeats's poem "The Long-Legged Fly," which brings to a head his notion of the artist as a concentration of being within "the current of history." Yet, in an effort to return to his expressed interest in "the relationship between the almost physiological operations of a poet composing and the music of the finished poem" (61). Heaney constructs a somewhat precarious bridge between the intellect and the body of the artist and the bodies of history and the poem. "The act of the mind, in Michael Angelo's case, exerts an almost glandular pressure on history and what conducts that pressure is the image in the beholder's eye. In a similar way, as I have tried to show, poetry depends for its continuing efficacy upon the play of sound not only in the ear of the reader but also in the ear of the writer" (78). In the space of two sentences

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[3] Even here, with Heaney's insistent use of scare quotes, the linguistic is maintained as a kind of background presence to the main drama of sense and intellect.

Heaney attempts to resolve the conflict between reason and feeling that has preoccupied Western thought from at least the Enlightenment; as one might expect, then, the statement requires extensive parsing. First, we have the act of the mind, in which Heaney seemingly equates artistic production with the operation of the intellect. This intellectual act then becomes metaphorically *embodied* as "a glandular pressure" in relation to history — the sub-organism of the artistic act is part of the larger organism of history, but can act upon that larger organism as a gland secretes chemicals to the body. Further, the gland-function of art requires not exactly the viewer, but rather the image itself as it is held in the viewer's eye. We have, then, three collaborating bodies: the work of art, the viewer, and history. Yet, aside from the original "act of mind" all intellectual agency is absent from the collaboration; the image is in the eye, the work exerts its pressure, and, from these inner workings, history, like a giant, presumably shifts a bit in his sleep.

In an essay that begins innocuously as a meditation on the process of composition and the construction of a poetic voice, or music, the reader is surprised to find, in the end, that Heaney has in fact constructed an organic model for the artist's relation to history: "In a similar way, as I have tried to show, poetry depends for its continuing efficacy upon the play of sound not only in the ear of the reader but also in the ear of the writer" (78). Poetry's efficacy, which we might assume refers to its own glandular pressure on history, depends on the same organic model as painting, but whereas painting inhabits the eye, poetry engages the ear. Such an assertion, the emphasis on sound in poetry, is conventional enough, but what startles in Heaney's formulation is that the aural function alone — without recourse to the intellect — is responsible for poetry's social role. As the

poet listens in to his footsteps in the gravel, or rattles his intellect against the confines of form, so does the reader listen in to the sound of the poem. The words, irrespective of semantics, become mere conductors of sound from the ear of the poet to the ear of the reader.

In this understanding of sound, as a kind of glandular secretion acting on the body of history and society, Heaney's desire to "pitch" his voice out, and, by attending more to his own voice and observing the contract of form, write a more "social" poetry.[4] Moreover, Heaney's curious correction — "it was at once formal but also emotional, a return to an opener voice and to a more—I don't want to say public—but a more social voice"— from public to social becomes clearer. *Public* implies a performance or mask of sorts — the kind of poetry from which Heaney wished to return to a first person singular that meant "me and my lifetime" (Randall 16). *Social*, on the other hand, appears more as a *function* of the individual, or, in organic terms, as the salutary and unwilled effect of the healthy lymph node of artistic production — *unwilled*, because the gland need only be itself to perform its task. It should also be stated that the register of Heaney's "social voice" is significantly below the abstract universalism of "society." Indeed, Heaney seems here to approach a Burkean model of society based on affections and attachment to one's immediate social group — "to be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind" (*Reflections* 46-7). To be social, rather than public, in Heaney's

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[4] See James Randall's "An Interview with Seamus Heaney," 16-20.

case then is to give voice to a music that is both expressive of a local reality, or "air," so to speak, and also audible to the constituents of that reality. In physiological terms, the poet's efficacy operates first as a gland within the immediate social body. The implication of this organic model of poetry and society is that Heaney removes poetry from the realm of discourse and situates it in the body.[5] In short, the ideological has become entirely submerged in the physiological.

In Heaney's collection of the time, *Field Work* (1979), this notion of art as a physiological operation returns again and again in Heaney's extensive meditations on the life of the artist. "Oysters" (*Field Work* 11) may be the most obvious exchange of the physiological with the ideological. Against the intrusion of political conscience ("the glut of privilege" l. 20), the narrator asserts: "I ate the day / Deliberately, that its tang / Might quicken me into verb, pure verb" (ll. 23-5). As in "The Makings of a Music," the poem embodies a strain in Heaney between conscience and the body, wherein, against the oppressions of a political awareness, a purely corporeal, almost hedonistic, existence is credited, if only *in potentia*. As such, the poem joins a long line of Heaney poems from "Whatever You Say, Say Nothing" (1971) to "Station Island" (1983) to "The Flight Path" (1992), wherein the poet relies on the straw man of politics as an object of protest against which he can better define his own subjectivity. Indeed, "the clear light, like poetry or freedom" ("Oysters" l. 22) indicates this confusing codependence: presumably,

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[5] This reorientation is particularly apparent in Heaney's notion of "erotic mouth-music" in reference to his place-name poems in *Wintering Out* (1972): "I had a great sense of release as they were being written, a joy and devil-may-careness, and that convinced me that one could be faithful to the nature of the English language — for in some senses these poems are erotic mouth-music by and out of the anglo-saxon tongue — and at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin, for me that is County Derry." Deane, "Unhappy and at Home: Interview with Seamus Heaney" 65.

since “poetry or freedom” are the hoped-for objects in the poem, the poem’s own poetry falls short of any emancipatory function. The poem, then, suggests that “poetry,” as such, is precisely the transcendence that Heaney’s own poetry can never achieve. Rather than transcendence — an emphatically non-corporeal “clear light” — Heaney’s poem enacts, with its juxtaposition of the cosmic and the corporeal (“My palate hung with starlight” l. 3), a turn to *in*scendence, to the senses, instinct, the body, the “intelligence in his bone” (l. 36), as Heaney puts it in “The Badgers” (*Field Work* 25-6).

Again, as in Heaney’s “The Makings of a Music,” music recurs in the volume as a trope that arranges the body’s potential disarray into the art object, but also preserves the body’s apparently non-discursive sanctity. Accordingly, Heaney attends to a number of musicians in the collection: Sean O’Riada, Davy Hammond, and John Field. In “In Memoriam Sean O’Riada” (29-30) first published in the summer of 1976 though O’Riada had died in 1971, Heaney finds an image of the artist in perfect sympathy with his environment, and through that sympathy able to translate, with hardly any loss of fidelity the felt reality of experience:

> ‘How do you work?
> Sometimes I just lie out
> like ballast in the bottom of the boat
> listening to the cuckoo.’
>
> The gunwale’s lifting ear—
> trusting the gift,

risking gift's undertow—

is unmanned now

(ll. 9-16)

Clearly, O'Riada has mastered the Wordsworthian "instinctual ballast." In the poem, the poet-speaker positions himself as an apprentice to the musician-master, reflecting Heaney's reconsideration of his own poetics following *North*. But unlike, "North" (*North* 10-11) with the viking ship's "swimming tongue" (l. 20), Heaney seeks a model of the individual as artist and the artist as individual, but also as an individual turning his intuitions toward the social.

As he stepped and stooped to the keyboard

he was our jacobite,

he was our young pretender

who marched along the deep

plumed in slow airs and grace notes.

O gannet smacking through scales!

Minnow of light.

Wader of assonance.

(ll. 29-36)

Unlike the poet, mired in commentary *about* society in "Whatever You Say, Say Nothing" (*North* 51-4), O'Riada the musician achieves a representative form, both embodying the naturalistic material of his art and embodying a figure of social

importance. By "trusting the gift," Heaney suggests, an artist like O'Riada can produce a work of national importance, like his *Mise Eire* of 1959, which, according to Heaney, contributed to his reputation as "the moving force in the revival of Irish music" (*Field Work* 66). In addition, O'Riada's social importance is underscored by the recurrent use of the first-person plural possessive — *our*—suggesting that O'Riada has become a rallying political figure, a modern day Bonnie Prince Charlie. Most notably, the artist as musician, achieves this efficacy by yielding the intellect to instinctive apprehension. Similarly, the bird in "Song" (*Field Work* 56) achieves an immediacy unattainable by language:

> There are the mud-flowers of dialect
> And the immortelles of perfect pitch
> And that moment when the bird sings very close
> To the music of what happens.
>
> (ll. 5-8)

These last two lines share the complex organicism of Heaney's metaphor in "The Makings of a Music," and are similarly defiant of logical apprehension. In a sense, Heaney is enacting his own principle of privileged listening: the music of what happens can be heard only by the sensitive artist, and the music (which we might also call the meaning) of poetry can be heard only by the sensitive reader, or auditor. In this case, the bird is both interpreter and instantiation, for, in the "very close" space between the subject and the object, the two become interchangeable. Like the bird that sings the music of what happens, and, in so doing, becomes that music, Sean O'Riada, as imagined

by Heaney, achieves an almost perfect sympathy, wherein the bodies of the artist, the art object, and history are in harmony.

This reliance on music as a unifying metaphor for Heaney's concept of the artist and society would seem merely incidental and mostly a borrowing from romanticism if Heaney did not pursue it with such energy. What gives the word such force in Heaney is its twin registers, both as a romantic figure for poetic beauty that circumvents the intellect and ideology, but also as a peculiarly Irish inheritance. Indeed, behind a seemingly British romanticist image like the bird singing close "to the music of what happens," is an Irish proverb that "The most beautiful music in the world is the music of what happens." Or, behind the high art of classical music in O'Riada is the traditional music of Ireland. It is this heritage that Heaney begins to recover most directly in his poem "The Singer's House" (*Field Work* 27) written for his close friend and Irish traditional singer David Hammond, and included as the sleeve notes to Hammond's album of the same name.[6]

People here used to believe
that drowned souls lived in the seals.
At spring tides they might change shape.
They loved music and swam in for a singer

who might stand at the end of summer
in the mouth of a whitewashed turf-shed,
his shoulder to the jamb, his song

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[6] This is the same David Hammond who accompanied Heaney on the night frustrated by bombings in "The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov's Cognac, and a Knocker."

a rowboat far out in evening.

When I came here first your were always singing,
a hint of the clip of the pick
in your winnowing climb and attack.
Raise it again, man. We still believe what we hear.

(ll. 21-32)

Here we have the artist as singer and Irishman, and music in the poem becomes definitively Irish music. Yet this cultural affirmation is accompanied with a sense of loss. Throughout the poem the speaker voices a concern for the preservation of folk tradition and for the preservation, as tradition, of current cultural practices: "What do we say anymore / to conjure the salt of our earth? / So much comes and is gone / that should be crystal and kept" (ll. 5-8). Among those things gone is old belief and the practice of song that seemed a complement to it. As a meditation on this loss, the question at the back of the poem is one of efficacy and relevance. What justification can a singer of traditional folk songs give for his life and work? And, likewise, has the belief in music's force (and by extension the force of all art) gone the way of an old superstition about seals? And, finally, perhaps the most troubling of all, has tradition itself become a relic? The speaker answers by making his own music, becoming a witness to sound: "So I say to myself *Gweebarra* / and its music hits off the place / like water hitting off granite. / I see the glittering sound" (ll. 13-16). The speaker, in an attempt to enact the continued efficacy of language and sound, hovers between the concrete reality of the river, the linguistic reality

of the place name, and the metaphorical reality of glittering sound. In such figures, as in "The Makings of a Music," the speaker attempts to recover a lost unity of place, artist, and the artistic object, which then becomes the vehicle bearing that unity through to future auditors — "my quest for definition," Heaney remarks elsewhere, "is conducted in the living speech of the landscape I was born into" ("Belfast" 36-7).

What Heaney sketches in his final meditation on Michael Angelo — the organic harmony of the individual (both the artist and the viewer), the work of art, and history — reveals itself here to be a figure for tradition itself. A quote from Heaney's essay on contemporary English poets, "Englands of the Mind" (1976) makes this connection between tradition and the artistic act more explicit:

> they are afflicted with a sense of history that was once the peculiar affliction of the poets of other nations who were not themselves natives of England but who spoke the English language. … A desire to preserve indigenous traditions, to keep open the imaginations supply lines to the past … to perceive in these a continuity of communal ways … — all this is signified by their language. (150-1)

The movement toward music in Heaney's work then indicates a complex of associations. It is a means of circumventing the discursive and ideological quality of language, it positions the body as the primary mode of apprehension, and it evokes the unifying figure of tradition. The last line of the poem — "We still believe what we hear" — resonates in each of these registers, and counters the sense of doubt that animates the poem. Tradition and the efficacy of poetry persist acoustically.

It is perhaps tempting to assert that Heaney's use of music to invoke aesthetics is a kind of mystification, perpetuating the bourgeois values of sentiment and individualism while obscuring any real engagement with political conditions with the pacifying notion of beauty.[7] In the context of Ireland, however, this formulation becomes more problematic. On the one hand, music can be viewed as perhaps the quintessential form of obscurantist aesthetics, abstracting all representation into innocuous universality — such as that advocated by the British Romantics; but, on the other hand, music, in a specifically Irish context, can be viewed as a deeply political art form bound up in the long history of colonialism in Ireland, specifically as a mode of anti-colonial cultural production.

As Leith Davis has pointed out, music is a preeminent figure in the formation of Irish cultural identity. Tracing this understanding of music back to Giraldus Cambrensis's recognition of the exceptionality of Irish music in his twelfth-century treatise, *Topography of Ireland* (1188), Davis argues that the association of the Irish simultaneously with barbaric unruliness and with a kind of musical genius, inaugurates a paradigm of hybridity that persists up to and beyond Matthew Arnold's famous meditations on the Celt and the Saxon (*Music, Postcolonialism, and Gender* 1-4). Extending the claim of music's centrality in Irish culture, Harry White, in his work on Irish music and cultural history, corrects Seamus Deane's assertion that "the enforced intimacy between literature and politics was unique and tragic in Ireland," by claiming that "the intimacy between music and politics was closer still" (*The Keeper's Recital* ix).

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[7] David Lloyd is perhaps the best known proponent of this line of argument. See "'Pap for the Dispossessed': Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of Identity."

What both Davis and White argue is that music has been systematically ignored in the mappings of politics and culture in Ireland, even as it seems to surpass literature as the exemplar of political and cultural crossings.

This shadow history of Irish music suggests a distinctly political dimension to Heaney's use of music that seems to run directly counter to his elaboration of music as a figure of ideological and discursive transcendence. In Heaney's use of music, then, exists a kind of hybridity, on the one side evoking a particular Irish nationalist tradition of music, and on the other side promoting universalist claims of artistic transcendence. As such, music then represents a paradigmatic figure for what David Lloyd has called Heaney's "uneasy oscillation between local piety and universalist cultural claims" ("Pap for the Dispossessed" 4). But the example of music also corrects Lloyd's formulation by revealing that this oscillation is not peculiar to Heaney but rather belongs to Irish cultural aesthetics more generally, both on the level of production and on the level of reception. Moreover, this phenomenon is not so much an *oscillation* as a profoundly generative ambivalence, which allows a poem or song to sound in two registers — the universal and the local — which in turn sound off of each other, infusing one with the sentimental charge of real political injustice, and dignifying the other with an aura of monumentality. Finally, as the history of Irish music shows, particularly in the nineteenth century, song in all its universalist pretensions is intimately dependent on a very local Irish experience of suffering.

2. THE SENTIMENTAL NATIONAL HEART: HEANEY AND THOMAS MOORE

Presiding over this use of music as a hybrid signifier of the universal and the local is the figure of Thomas Moore, whose image hangs, appositely, over Heaney's mantle in his Sandymount home. Much critical attention has been paid to the influence of precursors such as Yeats, Kavanagh and Wordsworth, among others, on Heaney's work and on his development as a writer, but little attention has been paid to the influence of Moore. As a result, our readings of Heaney tend to place him in either an Irish modernist tradition on the one hand, or in a British romanticist tradition on the other.[8] Furthermore, such readings tend to obscure the complex relationship between cultural nationalism in Heaney's work and his commitment to a modernist aesthetic ideology, which he has taken such pains to parse in his critical writings.[9]

On the one hand, we are invited to view Heaney as the Irish poet, *par excellence*, inheriting the mantle of Yeats; while, on the other hand, we are invited to view Heaney as the culmination of the romantic pastoral tradition in British poetry (Wordsworth, Hardy, Hughes). These two genealogies, while illustrating Heaney's ambivalent position in literary histories, still miss another particularly Irish genealogy that extends beyond Yeats. The elision of Yeats and Irish cultural nationalism, which Yeats encouraged, perpetuates the occlusion of a more popular Irish tradition of sentimental nationalism extending from Moore through Mangan, Pearse and others. To equate the Yeatsian influence in Heaney's work too readily with the 'Irish' dimension, given Yeats's own

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[8] Surveys of modern British poetry very often begin with William Wordsworth and end with Heaney, much like surveys of modern Irish poetry often begin with Yeats and end with Heaney. Within the teleologies of British and Irish literary canons, Heaney serves double duty.

[9] See especially "The Government of the Tongue" (*The Government of the Tongue* 91-108).

prominence beyond Ireland, risks merely reinforcing Heaney's position in the British literary tradition while failing to read, even register, the influence of a more popular Irish cultural nationalism descending from Moore. Indeed, efforts to merge the concerns of British and Irish poetry in the twentieth century have relied on an Arnoldian idea of cultural production that programmatically overlooks, or simply ignores, the political concerns of Irish writing.[10]

To trace, then, the influence of Moore on Heaney's work is to begin to expand the often constricting narratives of twentieth-century literary history and attempt to articulate a complex and generative interplay of Irish cultural nationalism and British high modernism in Heaney's work – the both/and (as Heaney would have it), rather than the either/or, of Irish politics and British literary aesthetics. Furthermore, Moore's theories of music and his emphasis on feeling as a basis for politics (as well as politics as a basis for feeling) predict and theorize Heaney's own use of music and political poetics that hovers between the poles of song and suffering.

But most importantly, Moore and Heaney share a common bond of hybridity. On the one hand, Heaney and Moore, as Irish Catholics, are granted a representational status as quintessentially *Irish*, while on the other hand, both gain and maintain an enormous international popularity throughout their careers by converting local subject matter into

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[10] A similar critical phenomenon has been at work on the political concerns of British writing. For critics like Edna Longley or Peter McDonald, a more perfect literary union seemingly depends on the dismissal of politics in favor of aesthetic commonwealth. Even the notion that writing of the Northern Irish Troubles is simply an extension of the War Poets tradition in British poetry, contributes to a notion of art as a politically and ideologically neutral zone. For examples of such arguments see Edna Longley's introduction to *The Bloodaxe Book of 20th Century Poetry from Britain and Ireland*, Fran Brearton's *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W.B. Yeats to Michael Longley*, or Peter McDonald's *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland*.

material of seemingly universal appeal. As noted above, critics as opposed as David Lloyd and Edna Longley agree that this ambivalence in Heaney is somehow problematic. I argue on the contrary that this ambivalence is in fact constitutive of Irish literary production, through which figures such as Heaney or Moore, and to a lesser extent Yeats, can be read as *either* politically nationalist or benignly universal. Yet, critical to the work's appeal, these two readings bleed into each other; in Heaney's formulation, "suffering" (in this case, either post-Union Ireland or Troubles-era Northern Ireland) lends "song" (in this case, the transcendent universal) its affective force, while "song" lends to the "suffering" the air of meaningfulness.[11] In sum, we need to revise our narrative of Heaney, in order to read his work as part of a tradition of hybridity extending back to Moore (and encompassing Yeats and Joyce), in which the Irish writer adapts the native "authentic" material of Ireland to the appetites of a modern and often non-Irish readership.

Perhaps there is a justifiable anxiety about incorporating the complicated and often maligned figure of Moore into a genealogy of Irish literature. To suggest a continuity between a figure like Moore and contemporary poets in Northern Ireland threatens the belief in the radical break made by Joyce and Yeats from their precursors,

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[11] By emphasizing the act of reading rather than the act of writing as the site of hybridity, I wish to remove the writer from the slightly moralizing critiques of Longley and Lloyd. Rather, I would ally myself with Leith Davis in her observation that "a text like Moore's *Irish Melodies* […] which was seen by some as promoting political resistance, was also constrained by its position in the marketplace as a commodity for eager bourgeois consumers of Irish culture. Conversely, a text that appears ideologically complicit with the colonizing power, such as Bunting's last version of the *Ancient Music of Ireland*, can also be seen as figuring resistance in the marketplace by representing a continual revising and refashioning of Irish identity. Hybridization […] does not serve unconditionally as either a complicit or a liberatory strategy, and […] must be considered in relation to the particular material circumstances of its articulation and the interest of its perceivers" (*Music, Postcolonialism, and Gender* 10).

upon which so much Irish literary history has come to depend. Similarly, any simple narrative of progress is troubled if one accepts that contemporary poetry could be bypassing Yeats's proscription and eclipse of Moore as national bard. As W.J. McCormack has acknowledged, there is a startling disjunction between the accepted "greatness" of a poet like Yeats and his "so merely competent" precursors that renders pre-modernist writing, particularly of the nineteenth century almost illegible: "To move from a discussion of Charles Lever to the work of Joyce, or from a discussion of early Irish lyrics to the poetry of Yeats, is to cross seismic lines of demarcation" (*Ascendancy and Tradition* 241).

Moreover, as Terence Brown has shown, the challenge of recovering Moore's critical reputation has become nearly insurmountable. Despite Moore's astonishing popularity in his own time, writers from Yeats to Patrick Kavanagh to Tom Paulin have spared little venom in their assessments of Moore's work.[12] Even Brown himself confesses an inability to approve Moore on exclusively aesthetic grounds. Yet, as Brown points out, this current critical distaste for Moore contradicts both his critical success in his own time and his continued popularity today ("Thomas Moore: A Reputation" 17-18). To understand this divergence of critical and popular taste in the twentieth century one must analyze the way in which the foundation of modern Irish literature, and specifically of the lyric tradition at the hands of Yeats, relied heavily on a contradistinction to the nineteenth-century sentimental nationalism epitomized by Moore. For it is not sufficient to say that Moore fails merely on aesthetic grounds without historicizing the paradigms

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[12] For Kavanagh's and Paulin's comments see Kavanagh's "A Wreath for Tom Moore's Statue" (*Collected Poems* 85), and Paulin's "A Professional Irishman."

of taste that have shaped twentieth-century literary aesthetics. As the various comments of Yeats and Joyce show, Moore's poetic failings were not merely aesthetic but were of a piece with his politics, his class, and his particular figuration of Ireland.

For Yeats, the example of Moore represented a powerful challenge to his fashioning of an idea of Ireland as a pre-modern realm of imaginative potency, which he sought to channel in his own work. Contrary to the organic vitality he affirmed in the ballad writers of the nineteenth century, Yeats accused Moore's verse of sounding "artificial and mechanical" (*A Book of Irish Verse* xviii). In his 1889 essay, "Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland," Yeats demonstrates this fine discrimination between the verse tradition of Moore and that of the ballad writers: he admits the aesthetic simplicity of the ballad writers but asserts that "a wonderful freshness and sweetness they have, like the smell of new-ploughed earth. They are always honest companions; no one of them wrote out of mere vanity or mere ambition, but ever from a full heart" (162). In opposition to this companionable disinterest, this spontaneous overflow of full-heartedness that agreed with the prevailing notions of the Celt as sentimental and innately poetic, Moore was "merely an incarnate social ambition" (Letters 447) and never a "poet of the people" ("Popular Ballad Poetry" 162). That is, despite Moore's evident popularity, his poetry earned him the wrong kind of audience: Moore "lived in the drawing-rooms, and still finds his audience therein" (162). This claim gained additional force from prevailing ideas of cultural identity: having neither the native purity of the peasant nor the heroic arrogance of the Yeatsian aristocrat, Moore's middle-class Whig audiences in Dublin and London had little identitarian capital in a romantic idea of nationalism.

In addition to the middle-class associations of Moore that embarrassed Yeats's aristocratic pretensions, Moore's association with Irish nationalist politics troubled the direct lineage that Yeats sought to draw between himself and a pre-modern bardic tradition. As Ronald Schuchard has argued in *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts*, "Yeats was determined that the continuance of the written and the renewal of the oral traditions in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century would no longer be diverted from craft and high art in the service of nationalist politics and sentimental patriotism" (24). Given Yeats's own life-long engagement with Irish politics, his criticism of Moore on these grounds appears disingenuous. One might assume then that it is not so much the fact of Moore's politics that troubled Yeats as the *quality* of Moore's politics. In other words, it is the sentimental and melancholic image of Ireland that Moore enshrines in his verse that Yeats must break before he can establish his own image of heroic Ireland. Yeats's observation that "Ireland was a metaphor to Moore" ("Popular Ballad Poetry" 162) applies equally well as a description of Yeats. Whereas Moore sought to depict Ireland as a figure of romantic melancholy, Yeats sought to adapt the spirit of Celticism first to a symbolist literary aesthetic and later to modernist aesthetics.

Significantly, both the *Melodies* of Moore and the poetry of Yeats are *representative* in the sense that both seek to represent Ireland aesthetically to audiences beyond (though inclusive of) Ireland. The cliché that one opposes most strongly that which is most similar applies in the case of Yeats's opposition to Moore, but it also indicates the degree to which Yeats felt compelled to recover nineteenth century Irish

culture for his own metaphor of Ireland, and in doing so had first to isolate and condemn the example of Moore that permeated the period. The purported aesthetic failures of Moore's *Melodies* should be understood within this context. Yeats's hostility toward Moore, and by extension the aversions of many of those following in the modernist tradition, derives in large part from Moore's bourgeois ambitions, his perceived political associations, and his threat to an image of 19th-century Ireland as an imaginative hinterland.

For Heaney, writing in the wake of Yeats, the figure of Thomas Moore bears this complicated history and, consequently, becomes a focus for Heaney's divergence from Yeatsian modernism and for his engagement with Irish traditional culture. If critical essays are a measure of influence, Moore's influence on Heaney would seem to pale in comparison to Wordsworth, Yeats, and Kavanagh. Moore, however, functions differently than these literary precursors. Because he is not a part of Heaney's self-selected literary pedigree, Moore operates less as a literary precursor and more as a cultural precursor, whose influence is all the more profound *because* it is not literary. In terms of aesthetic merit then, Heaney participates (with some important exceptions) in the amnesia perpetuated by Yeats, but Heaney diverges from Yeats in restoring Moore to prominence in the cultural sphere. Thus, to understand the influence of Moore one must interpret the image of Ireland constructed by Heaney and the role of Moore in that construction.

Writing in 1979 an introduction to David Hammond's centenary selection of Moore's *Melodies*, Heaney articulates the duality central to the modern reception of Moore. In terms of culture, Moore is the popular bard of Ireland and a critical figure in

Irish culture; while, in terms of literary aesthetics and modern politics, Moore is outdated and unsophisticated, and in direct conflict with the spirit of Irish modernism. Heaney writes:

> A nation whose conscience was being forged by James Joyce, whose tragic dignity was being envisaged by W.B. Yeats and whose literary tradition was being restored…, that nation could afford to rescind Moore's title as "national bard." His note was too light, too conciliatory, too colonisé. Yet this was the note I often heard coming over the wireless from Athlone in the forties, the note that John McCormack struck; the note that was struck in the schoolroom for generations. This was the music of what happened in the sentimental national heart, where Tara and Avoca and Lough Neagh's banks glimmered fitfully in the light of other days. Before I read my Corkery at St. Columb's College, I believe that my own sense of an Irish past was woven from the iconography of AOH banners and phantoms out of Moore's melodies. (8-9)

In this passage Heaney treads a fine line between sophisticated detachment and cultural identification. He steers shy of endorsing the aesthetic value of Moore's work, consigning it to the less critically troubling — but more nostalgic — environs of the schoolroom and living room. As an author like Joyce or Yeats, Heaney concedes, Moore is deficient; Yeats's comment on James Clarence Mangan – that "he was not a personality as Poe was. He had not thought out or felt out a way of looking at the world peculiar to himself" (*Letters* 447) – may apply equally well to Heaney's assessment of Moore.

Nevertheless, as a kind of diffuse presence in Irish culture in general Moore is second to none. That is, although he does not belong in the main narrative of Irish literary history, Moore's authority is sublimated into Irish culture itself. The gentle populist mockery in Heaney's use of the Fanonian "colonisé" underlines this rift between the high literary tradition of Yeats and Joyce and the more popular, but also more "low-brow," appreciation — even absorption — of Moore. The basis on which Heaney endorses Moore is his centrality in the "Mossbawn" culture that forms the imaginative grounds of Heaney's own vision. Moreover, by adapting to Moore's achievement the Irish proverbial phrase "The most beautiful music of all is the music of what happens," which he has used in varying forms elsewhere,[13] Heaney stresses the colloquial familiarity of Moore, suggesting that he can best be understood through, and in terms of, folk culture and tradition.

As suggested here, Heaney's sense of an Irish past and of the sentimental national heart differs markedly from Yeats. As Heaney notes, before his exposure to the poetically-rich 18th-century of Daniel Corkery's *Hidden Ireland* (1924), Heaney derived many of his signifiers of cultural identity from 19th-century Irish nationalism, which was steeped in the romantic imagery of sacrifice and the language of sentimental patriotism. The banners of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which figured prominently in Irish nationalist marches in Northern Ireland, depicted heroes of Irish nationalism — such as Robert Emmet, Henry Joy McCracken, and Hugh O'Neill — beside the mottoes "Erin Go Bragh," "Faith of Our Fathers," and "God Save Ireland." As Neil Jarman observes, the

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[13] See "Song" (*Field Work* 56), "Fosterling" (*Seeing Things* 50), and "The Rain Stick" (*The Spirit Level* 3).

banners were deeply political in their tenor: "The implications of the images of the banners were that all of these heroes of Ireland's past had gone to their deaths fighting for a Catholic nation, and the present generation were taking up their uncompleted tasks and were prepared to make the same sacrifices" (*Displaying Faith* 33-6).

The association of Moore with the banners of Irish nationalism in defining Heaney's sense of an Irish past markedly dissociates Moore from a literary tradition. The implication, however, of this dissociation is that Moore is in fact more in touch with the actual experiences of most Irish people than the doyens of Irish modernism. Yeats's claim that Moore was never a poet of the people is emphatically opposed by Heaney's assertion that Moore's melodies represented "the music of what happened in the sentimental nationalist heart." Moore represents for Heaney a kind of unmediated representation of Irish culture; in other words, Moore, as artist, both registers and creates the sentimental national heart, and not only that, as "modified in the guts of the living," so to speak, he embodies that heart.[14] Moore is a model of the organic (and thus unpremeditated) efficacy Heaney so prizes, in which the individual's perfect sympathy with the land translates into a "music," which in turn acquires its own reality and groundedness.

In Moore, we can trace what amounts to an alternate artistic tradition for Heaney that is more deliberately nationalist in its politics than the cosmopolitan modernist tradition of Yeats and Joyce; yet, all-importantly, despite this politicism, the work does not cede its affective force, rather that force is intensified through its appeal to sentiment.

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[14] In this way, Moore could be aligned with figures like David Hammond, whom Heaney celebrates in "The Singer's House" (*Field Work 27*) with his "hint of the clip of the pick / in your winnowing climb and attack," or Sean O'Riada, the "Minnow of light. / Wader of assonance" (*Field Work* 29-30).

The groundwork for adopting this lineage is laid in Heaney's re-calibration of literary aesthetics away from the discursivity of language back to a more physiological model of aesthetics, whose standard-bearer is music rather than poetry. The ruling figures of this aesthetic are resonance and sympathy rather than rhetoric or argument. As Heaney explains in his sleeve notes to Hammond's album *The Singer's House* (1978), "To raise a song as if it were a clenched fist is to underestimate the revolutionary power of song itself, its power to move and pleasure and affect those depths of the personality where attitudes begin. [...] So while there is nothing doctrinaire in his choice of material here, there is something more important, an instinctive sympathy."[15] In accordance with this emphasis on instinctive sympathy, the *words* of the songs of Hammond or Moore are eclipsed by the song's acoustical reality, which, like the bird in "Song," sings "very close / to the music of what happens," or, like the figure of Hammond in "The Singer's House," evokes a response from the seals, who, as we have seen, act as a synecdoche for Irish traditional belief and culture. For Heaney, it is the embodiedness of music that allows it to bypass the rational mind, and thus bypass the discursive register of the "jottings and analyses / Of politicians and newspapermen," or the "Northern reticence, the tight gag of place / and time" (*North* 51). Through the figure of Irish traditional

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[15] Heaney's notes here offer many interesting insights into his own aesthetic. For example, Heaney insists that "a singing voice" must evoke a sense of sentimental nostalgia if it is to be sufficiently effective, and affective: "[it] needs more than efficiency and definition, and the extra dimension in David's singing may come from a longing backward towards his Co. Derry and Co. Antrim ancestry, the line of the melody hankering for the line of what Louis MacNeice called 'the pre-natal mountain.'" Likewise, Heaney reveals in Hammond a simultaneously moral and sentimental relation to tradition that may be equally applied to himself: "[Hammond] is not a conservative in his attitude to tradition or traditions, but radically creative. It is not the 'purity' of the material that matters to him, not its ethnic culture quotient, its scholarly provenance: rather it is the scope it offers the voice for exultation or repining, for the play of feeling, for human touch. There is a moral vision implicit in the pitch of that voice, an impatience with systems, a calling into the realm of pure freedom."

music, through Moore and Hammond, Heaney invokes a tradition of Irish cultural production, whereby politics and artistic production are *both* elevated above the fray of the public discourse, and allowed to exert their "glandular pressure" on the body of history.[16]

3. A BLANK AMONG NATIONS: IRELAND AND MOORE'S *MELODIES*

This fusion of art and politics in an embodied aesthetics is, however, not peculiar to Heaney; it finds its origins in Thomas Moore's own writings on the relationship between music, nationalism, and sentiment. Moreover, the particular instability between the acoustical and the textual exemplified through the many editions of Moore's *Irish Melodies* (ten numbers were published between 1807 and 1834), prefigures and allows us to interpret a similar instability between sound and word in Heaney's own work. Indeed, this rich figurative confusion of music and text, animated by a sense of nationalist politics, may be the quintessential characteristic of Irish poetics. In this poetics, the political and the poetic, or musical, hover between their figurative uses and actual realities; the poetic/musical, as figure, represents an antidote to political oppression, while the political, as figure, provides the poetry with a charge of historical drama.

In his 1808 preface to his satire "Intolerance," Moore exhaustively knits together political history and aesthetic merit:

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[16] The fact that politics itself acts *figuratively* in the work of Heaney is central to an understanding of politics and aesthetics in Ireland. Politics is not merely the hostile other to poetic production, rather it is a figure for banality on the one hand (in the form of parliamentary politics), and a figure for cultural sentiment on the other hand (in the form of nationalism).

> The language of sorrow … is, in general, best suited to our Music, and with themes of this nature the poet may be amply supplied. There is scarcely a page of our annals that will not furnish him a subject, and while the national Muse of other countries adorns her temple proudly with trophies of the past, in Ireland her melancholy altar, like the shrine of Pity at Athens, is to be known only by the tears that are shed upon it. …
>
> Surely, if music ever spoke the misfortunes of a people, or could ever conciliate forgiveness for their errors, the music of Ireland ought to possess those powers. ("Intolerance, A Satire" 1057).[17]

This passage illustrates three dominant features of Moore's poetics, all of which shed light on Heaney's own poetics. Firstly, political oppression is translated into affect, and, as a bearer of affect, music functions as a surrogate for political history. Moore begins his note by lamenting the lack of an ennobling history in Ireland, which renders Ireland a "blank among nations" (1056). This blankness, however, becomes Ireland's greatest asset: not only does it leave Ireland open to inscription – to be made metaphor -- but it also awards Ireland an exemplarity founded on its access to melancholy, and thus music.

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[17] This preface is introduced with a short note that underscores the fluid traffic between history, music, and language in Moore's poetics: "To the foregoing poem, as first published, were subjoined, in the shape of a Note, or Appendix, the following remarks on the History and Music of Ireland. This fragment was originally intended to form part of a Preface to the Irish Melodies; but afterwards, for some reason which I do not now recollect, was thrown aside" (1056). The sheer quantity of prefatory notes that Moore attaches to the *Melodies* (and other poems in this case) emphasizes the textuality of Moore's writing; however, paradoxically, these prefaces spend most of their energies lamenting the lack of a textual history, for which only music may provide a supplement. Moreover, "the foregoing poem"' to which the note forms a preface, is "'Intolerance: A Satire," which directly satirizes the excesses of the Protestant Ascendancy, infusing music generally, and *The Irish Melodies* specifically, with an even greater political charge.

In effect, Ireland supersedes those nations with "trophies of the past," who are granted a relatively less poetic inheritance of national pride and triumphalist history. As Theodor Adorno observes, in the history of Western culture music regularly becomes a kind of index to political oppression: "Within the global development in which music shared in the progressive emergence of rationality, music at the same time always remained the voice of all who fell by the wayside or were sacrificed on the altar of the rational. This defines the central social contradiction of music [...]. The very element that raises music above ideology is also what brings it closest to it" ("Some Ideas on the Sociology of Music" 5-6). Tears, accordingly, become the affective evidence of history — "her melancholy altar […] is to be known only by the tears that are shed upon it" (1057). Like Heaney, Moore figures music as an embodied affect, which succeeds where discourse fails and makes oppression eloquent.

Secondly, affect, as it is evidenced by music, itself becomes a form of political agency. To illustrate his point, Moore concludes his preface with an account of the Emperor Theodosius the Great (c. 346-395), which recounts Theodosius's ruthless persecution of the Antiochans on the grounds of religious difference — this, according to Moore, "first set the example of a disqualifying penal code enacted by Christians against Christians" (1056). Yet, because of (significantly not *in spite* of) this persecution, the Antiochans give "utterance to their grief in dirges of the most touching lamentation" (1057). In other words, in direct proportion to the degree of their persecution, the Antiochans are compensated with the gifts of aesthetic merit — song is the reward for suffering. Finally, as the ultimate approbation of art, Theodosius is won

over by the affective force of the dirges: "The heart of Theodosius could not resist this appeal; tears fell fast into his cup while he listened, and the Antiochans were forgiven" (1057). Similar to Heaney, Moore insists on a physiological, and thus non-discursive or ideological, foundation for political efficacy. In effect, Theodosius relents when he becomes a feeling body: his heart cannot resist the appeal, which is evidenced by the actual overflow of tears. "And the Antiochans were forgiven" — Moore's nonchalant and almost paratactical conclusion, by its indifference to logical elaboration, suggests an absolute faith – or perhaps the need for an absolute faith – in the political power of emotion: the emperor wept and the people were freed. Not only, then, does music supplement (and thereby replace) history, but it also effects (*affects*) a political change in that history.

Thirdly, partaking of this confusion of history and music, in the form of the lyric, language and music become both exchangeable and mutually supporting; that is, music supplies an origin to the language of sorrow, while the language of sorrow interprets the music, which is a kind of speechless history. The music, however, faces the injustice of unequal representation, and is progressively absorbed into the language on which its representation depends. The persistent irony in the publication history of Moore's *Irish Melodies* is the sheer number of editions the *Melodies* go through, and Moore's habit of attaching to each edition further prefaces and appendices to what is meant to be a kind of material symbol for a whole oral acoustical tradition. In other words, the music, which is the surrogate of written history, is ultimately unrepresentable and thus generates volumes of text as a testament to its absence. As the "melancholy altar" of Irish history is to be

known by the tears of its people and its auditors, so is the music of Ireland to be known by the words of its poets.

Suggesting the way in which language and literature first draws its justification from the music then eventually eclipses it, the 1840-42 edition of the *Melodies* dispenses with music altogether. In his preface to the edition, Moore admits the necessity of eliminating the music while also asserting music's centrality in his aesthetic: "[I am] well aware that my verses must lose even more than the "animae dimidium" ["half of life," Horace, *Odes*, iii, 8] in being detached from the beautiful airs to which it was their good fortune to be associated" (1057-8). On a small scale, the exclusion of music in the edition of Moore's poems simply replicates the sense of loss which is Ireland's lot. While lamenting the loss of the music, Moore's 1840-2 edition fulfills what his project had always implicitly intended, that the poetry itself should be adequate to represent not only the music of Ireland but also its political history, and, as a result, also to channel the affective inheritance of both. By losing half of its life, the collection of poems itself becomes a site of melancholy on a textual level, and the absence of music is merely another iteration of loss.

Moore maps the way in which music acquires a figurative meaning that cedes to poetry the affective force of an absent history and the music which testifies to that absence. Song thrives off of suffering, while poetry thrives off of both and writes into itself the figure of loss. The sense of futility that informs poems like "In Memoriam: Sean O'Riada" or "The Singer's House," is not anomalous, rather it is a rephrasing of Moore's poetics. "Raise it again, man," Heaney urges Hammond, "We still believe what

we hear" (*Field Work* 27). The failure of Hammond to actually restore traditional folk belief and the importance of art in that culture, or the failure of O'Riada to reconcile European art music with Irish traditional music actually approves the foundational belief of an Irish aesthetics developed by Moore, in which failure ultimately renews its own source. To elaborate: music is the figure of the never fully representable reality of Ireland's political history, and affect is the physiological proof of all that remains unrepresented. Thus, to the degree that failure engenders affect, the failure itself of art to adequately address politics becomes proof of a subaltern political history.

4. CONCLUSION: SONG AND SUFFERING

As testimony to the collaboration between affect (as encoded in music), political history, and literary representation, Heaney's assessments of Moore regularly attribute to him a potentially disreputable sentimentality while also acknowledging his value as a bearer of a subaltern history. What these assessments implicitly demonstrate is how Moore's sentimentality is intimately involved with his legacy as a kind of representative for Irish history in the politically destitute years following the failure of the United Irishmen rebellion (1798) and the Act of Union (1801), all the way up to the famine (1845-52), and often beyond. In effect, as music became in Moore's prefaces a surrogate for an absent Irish history, so does Moore become for modern Ireland a surrogate for a seemingly unrepresentable early nineteenth-century history. In a recent BBC broadcast, Heaney makes this point:

> Moore was a growth ring in consciousness and the whole of Irish historical culture. From about 1808 to, I would say, 1908, he was like a kind of imaginative bridge that carried the sentiment of Irish belonging from penal days to the age of Padraig Pearse. Moore's achievement, his melody, not just the music, but the melody of sympathy and the melody of remembrance and the melody of what it meant to be Irish for that time. ("Twenty Minutes: The Bard of Ireland")

This observation from 2007 shares much with Heaney's comments in his introduction to Hammond's selection of Moore's *Melodies* in 1979. Again, Moore is seen less as an artist in his own right, and thus subject to critiques of aesthetic merit, but more as a cultural phenomenon that performs an essential task of conservation — in this case a conservation of "the sentiment of Irish belonging," much like the "music of what happens in the sentimental national heart." Heaney's recourse to music as a vehicle of that sentiment, is, as we have seen, prefigured by Moore himself in his prefaces to the *Melodies*. But, if we are to grant the notion that Moore is a kind of historical substitute and preservationist, we must also acknowledge the insubstantiality of that which he is claimed by Heaney to preserve. The sentiment of Irish belonging, sympathy, remembrance, what it meant to be Irish — cultural memory, identity, and tradition are preserved as *sentiment* — a kind of cultural feeling — and not as history in the literal sense. The last sentence in Heaney's comment is telling: the sense of artistic agency is lost in a grammatical elision, which obscures the verb that would explain Moore's relation to the various melodies of sympathy and so on. Like so many of Heaney's

artists, the relationship between artistic act and social effect is not causal but identical. Moore is both record and recorder of an affective history of Ireland.

In defining an alternative literary history that casts Moore as a precursor to Heaney — and conversely, Heaney as an inheritor of Moore — two points of convergence emerge. The first point is Heaney's self-acknowledged links with Moore; the second point is the unacknowledged sympathies between the two writers, which, because of their unacknowledged status, may in fact suggest a more general Irish literary aesthetic. In the first instance, Heaney identifies in Moore a popularity that gives him a representational status in relation to Ireland; and what he represents is an affective analog to an occluded history of suffering ("The true representative of romantic nationalist Ireland"). As such, Heaney tends to focus less on Moore's artistic merits, and more on his biographical example.

What a broader view of the two poets reveals is a sympathy that extends beyond what is explicitly acknowledged by Heaney. On the one hand, Moore represents the Ireland that Heaney wishes to access in his own writings and, on the other hand, he represents a figure who succeeds in bridging fidelity to the tribe, so to speak, and a more universal appeal to audiences beyond Ireland. It is a hybridity, activated through the figure of music, that allows the work to register as both national and universal, since the figure of music at once evokes a non-discursive and decentralized sentimentalism and partakes of a specifically Irish union of music and nationalism. Music in Heaney, like sentiment in Moore, acts a kind of catalytic converter of local political realities into universal figures of pathos. Contrary to Lloyd's reading of Heaney, which views

Heaney's universalism and nationalism as opposing modes, a closer investigation of Moore's and Heaney's similar use of the figure of music reveals that the emancipatory politics of nationalism are in fact constitutive of universalist humanism upon which is grounded an affective aesthetic response. In other words, in the work of both Heaney and Moore, the suffering makes the song.

CHAPTER 3:

SELF-QUARRELING: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE PUBLIC POEM, 1966-1975

In his seminal essay "Yeats and Decolonization" (1988), Edward Said attempts to elaborate a paradigmatic understanding of the postcolonial poet.[1] The essay – among the first efforts to expand the scope of postcolonial studies beyond the countries colonized during second-wave European imperialism – shuttles among numerous examples of more obviously postcolonial poets than Yeats (Neruda, Senghor, Cesaire, Darwish, Faiz, Soyinka, Tagore), as well as among revolutionary leaders like Nkrumah, Nehru, Nasser, Sukarno, and Nyerere. In formulating a paradigm of the postcolonial poet that would accommodate a figure as politically ambivalent as Yeats, Said enumerates a pantheon of postcolonial cultural heroes. This critical focus on the individual suggests a crucial aspect of twentieth-century postcolonial poetry (and politics for that matter): the postcolonial poet achieves a representative status internationally that converts the abstract notion of "the people," and a country's particular political realities, into a source of aesthetic, and often sentimental, pleasure. That is, the postcolonial poet tends to absorb the collective identity of a people into his or her own individual poetic voice, such that the poetic "I" comes to connote *all* of the Irish, the Palestinian, the Indian, the Nigerian (etc.) people. Approving the attention to "the anonymous man of the people" in Yeats's "The Fisherman" and Neruda's "El Pueblo," Said remarks that "the poetic calling

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[1] This essay was first published as a pamphlet, commissioned by Seamus Deane, for the Field Day Theater Company in 1988. It was subsequently collected with two other Field Day pamphlets by Terry Eagleton and Frederic Jameson in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (1990). The essay reached its final, revised form in Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Subsequent references to the essay refer to this volume.

develops out of a pact made between people and poet" (234). This observation, while ennobling, problematically conflates aesthetic representation with actual political representation; it implies a consensual relation between the poet and the people—a poetic contract. It would be more accurate to say that this pact between the poet and the people is purely figurative while the actual pact is that between poet and reader, who grants the poet an authority to represent a real "people." Moreover, as Said observes, through the vehicle of individual poetic subjectivity the local becomes universal, and the immediately political becomes timelessly poetic:

> The disquiet of what T.S. Eliot calls the "cunning history [and] the contrived corridors" of time—the wrong turns, the overlap, the senseless repetition, the occasionally glorious moment—furnishes Yeats, as it does all the poets and men of letters of decolonization—Tagore, Senghor, Césaire—with stern martial accents, heroism, and the grinding persistence of "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor." Thus the writer rises out of his national environment and gains universal significance. (233)[2]

The poet of decolonization, Said seems to suggest, is able to translate political history into a general rumination on time, and more specifically is able to confer upon himself the *style* of revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle.[3] Through this act of translation, then, the writer achieves universality and, thus, a kind of aesthetic legitimacy. Said claims that

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[2] This last quotation comes from Yeats's poem "The Magi;" the first comes from T.S. Eliot's "Gerontion": "History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors." My thanks to Ronald Schuchard for pointing this out.

[3] If one considers Thomas Moore or James Clarence Mangan one would want to expand the furnishings of this style beyond martial accents and heroism to also include the melancholic, depressive, and sentimental.

the writer "rises out" of his particular political and cultural circumstances; it would be more accurate to say that he *represents* (aesthetically) these (political) circumstances. That is, the postcolonial poet does not transcend his circumstances, rather they become constitutive of his aesthetic exemplarity.

What this phenomenon of identification, this poetic contract, indicates is that there is peculiar to postcolonial poetry in the twentieth century a special correlation between the autobiographical and the public (the pact between poet and people), that seems to run counter to most poetic theories of the twentieth century that privilege private vision over public agency or representation. Indeed, for critics like Fredric Jameson, postcolonial literature in general holds out the possibility of resolving the predominant binary of public and private. "One of the determinants of capitalist culture," Jameson writes, "is a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx" ("Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" 69). In contrast, "third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic — necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69). Whereas Jameson views all third-world texts as national allegories, we might be more particular to say that postcolonial poetry offers national synecdoches. Moreover, as critics like Aijaz Ahmad have been effective in pointing out, readings like

Jameson's reveal more about a particular practice, or habit, of reading than they do about the text itself. ("Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness"). Jameson famously asserts in the same article that "the third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce" (65). What satisfactions then can the postcolonial poem offer? The aesthetic pleasures of the postcolonial poem derive from a collaboration between subjective and collective representation.

Nevertheless, while critics have been, for the most part, ready to grant a public resonance to poetry from postcolonial regions, the opposite tendency has prevailed in regard to much mainstream Anglophone poetry.[4] Perhaps tellingly, critics of twentieth-century British and Irish poetry have been reluctant to address the public poem in any systematic way.[5] Such quintessentially public poems as Yeats's "Easter 1916" or Auden's "September 1, 1939" are often read in terms of the poet's own development, or as highly complicated and deconstructive engagements with the public role of the poet, which ultimately subvert the "public" intent of the poem.[6] The notion that the poems may be entities with a certain public agency, as statements with intent (whether political or cultural), is neglected. Instead, the poems are removed from a historically-specific public sphere and placed within the more politically neutral confines of literary biography. Such critical tendencies imply that good poetry, even that of public intent, ultimately comes to

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[4] I specify "mainstream" since poetry from minority groups within putatively first-world countries — Latino, Black, feminist, queer, etc. — has been particularly engaged with troubling the binary of the public and the private.

[5] By "public poem" I wish to designate those poems which seek to address themes of historical, political, or cultural significance, and which also seek to partake of the aura of a particular time and place.

[6] For an example of such an argument see Edna Longley's "The Rising, The Somme and Irish Memory": "Yeats's 1916 poems are not straightforward commemorations, but reflections on commemoration: on symbol, word and memory" (83).

rest in the realm of self-critique – in the seemingly timeless realm of the subject – and that bad poetry is that which is merely historical. Such readings indicate an attempt to recover seemingly errant poems to the dominant narrative in British poetry since the nineteenth century, which values private subjectivity as at once an antidote to industrial capitalism and also as a critique of any collectivist ideologies that would oppose it. As such, the public poem represents a potential conflict of interests: to write of public matters threatens to undermine the authority of the private utterance. Moreover, for modern audiences grown suspicious of grand statements, the public poem can seem presumptuous and even parasitic. Because of this inhospitable environment, the public poem in British poetry has remained a problematic genre, met often with more reluctance than conviction and requiring more guile than bombast — as in the cases of Auden or MacNeice. The postcolonial poet, then, seems to offer a third way, in which private subjectivity (represented by the poet) is harmonized with an abstract sense of public significance (represented in the figure of the people). The reception in London of Thomas Moore in the nineteenth-century, or of Rabindranath Tagore in the early twentieth-century attests to this phenomenon.

1. "THE TROUBLES POET"

The identification, however, of the poet with the people (Said's "pact") acquires an even greater complexity when applied to Northern Irish poetry during the period of the Troubles. Not only does it cut across the distinction between the colonizer and the

colonized, but it also prompts a resistance from poets to such an identification even as they benefit from its operation. Indeed, a dominant *topos* of Northern Irish poetry seems to be the assertion of an individual subjectivity *against* potential co-optation by more collectivist political or sectarian ideologies. Nevertheless, this identification seems to exert a pressure on these poets to either explicitly render their experience public, or to submit to readings which translate even ostensibly private material into matters of public significance.

Contributing to this phenomenon are the cultural trends of regionalism and a surge of interest among London publishers in writing from the provinces in the late 1960s, an interest that dramatically intensified with the rise of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.[7] Thus, even as Northern Irish poets resist the notion that their writing can be interpreted as anything more than private reflections, there is a simultaneous awareness in these poets of Northern Irish poetry's innately *public* character. Indeed, as in the case of a poet like Medbh McGuckian, the more a poet insists on, even enforces, a subjective privacy, the more that poetry is seen to comment publicly on a Northern Ireland plagued by sectarian violence.[8] It should be stressed that this correlation of Northern Irish poetry with public significance is not, however, merely forced upon writers by a sensationalist media, it is also promoted by the writers themselves. In an uncollected essay from 1975, Michael Longley, in asserting Northern Irish poetry's

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[7] Michael Longley noted in the 1970s that "the efflorescence of poetry in the provinces owes quite a lot to the circumspection and curiosity of several London publishers and editors" ("Untitled [contemporary poetry]").

[8] For example see Clair Wills's essay on McGuckian in *Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry* (1993).

exemplarity, also asserts the centrality of political issues and sectarian violence in the poetry:

> I would claim that most of the best contemporary Irish poetry is being written North of the Border. And when it deals either directly or obliquely with the Irish question, this poetry tends to focus more on Ulster than on the island as a whole; an indication that politically and culturally the situation is more complex than the one explored by Yeats and O'Casey (something they don't realize in the Republic). As a citizen I find it gratifying that *at least the poets here are trying honestly to reflect in their work the tragic complexities*. The Irish psyche is being redefined in Ulster, and the poems are born—inevitably, one might say—out of a lively tension between the Irish and the English traditions. (My emphasis; "Untitled [contemporary poetry]")

Indeed, much of Longley's work at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland was dedicated to promoting an idea of Ulster poetry that granted it a universal significance even as it explicitly associated itself with the circumstances of its regional production. Given this push and pull between a representative public poetics and a poetics of private subjectivity, Northern Irish poetry of the 1970s and 1980s can be viewed as a single sustained meditation on the nature of the public poem—its history, its purpose, its use, and its abuse.

In the study of Troubles poetry and its engagement with the public poem three dominant and interconnected aspects emerge.[9] First, Troubles poetry propounds a particular political consensus: sectarian and political violence is categorically vicious and must be opposed, and that poetry embodies a kind of principle of non-violent humanism. Second, not only is Troubles poetry definitively animated by political realities, but also, *poetry itself*, in the Northern Irish context, is redefined in political terms as a figure for what sectarian and political violence seemingly opposes: freedom, imagination, sympathy. Third, hovering over Troubles poetry is the fictional pact between the poet and the people, which leads poets to critique the phenomenon of identification — of political representation through aesthetic representation — by continually staging the self. As such, the self becomes the figure that mediates between a poetics of subjectivity and a poetics of public representation. In his 1917 essay "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," W.B. Yeats claims, famously, that "we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" (331). In Troubles poetry, the quarrel with the self becomes a mini-drama of public significance.

From an early date, a sense of civic duty and political engagement animates Troubles poetry. Critical calls for the separation of poetry and politics should not lead one to assume that the poets themselves sought an apolitical stance. Indeed, the journal which was most closely identified with the Northern Irish poetic renaissance of the late

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[9] By Troubles poetry I wish to designate poetry written by poets from Northern Ireland in the period from roughly 1966 to 1998. In this sense I am, to a degree, following Michael Longley's designation of Ulster poetry as a distinct entity. I am aware that this designation privileges an historical reading of the poetry of this period, but, as I contend, it is the historical events of the Troubles that critically shape the interpretive communities in which these poems are read, and certainly in which these poems are produced.

1960s, the *Honest Ulsterman*, touted itself as "a monthly handbook for a revolution."[10] Similarly, Derek Mahon writing to Michael Longley in 1967 insisted that, contrary to the apoliticism he saw in American poetry, which tries "to make literature seem to be about itself," poets must speak out against injustices like the Vietnam War: "it is for people like us, the self-appointed custodians of sensibility, to keep the distinctions between imagination and fantasy, humanity and brutality, for if we don't the best lack all conviction" (January 1967). Like Mahon, Heaney, in a 1986 interview, criticizes American apoliticism: "The problems of social justice do not seem to concern the intellectual community very much here. The fulfillment of the self seems to be the priority" (Beisch "An Interview with Seamus Heaney" 167).

It is important to stress that these poets formulated political stances and conceived of the poet's civic duty outside the context of sectarian violence (the revolution, as Simmons conceived of it in the *Honest Ulsterman*, was one of enlightened sensibility brought about by culture – not what developed in the North during the 1970s), that is, in the context of civil rights and not in the context of Republicanism vs. Unionism. This contextual distinction goes a long way in explaining the subsequent resistance to politics, which should be qualified as "sectarian" politics; the more universalist humanism 1960s politics of civil and human rights seems to agree well with Northern Irish poets from the very beginning. This prejudice toward a universalist politics of human rights seems to

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[10] See *Honest Ulsterman,* May 1968 [1:1]. A listing of the issue's themes on the cover showed wide-ranging interests: "Love, Exile, Humanism, Hashish, Courage, History, Louis MacNeice, Education, New Song, Mary O'Malley."

align the poets unanimously against its contrary: the "death-dealing" logic of sectarian politics.[11]

The sum of Northern Irish poetry's engagement with the public poem, then, can be tallied as a representative expression of an outraged liberal humanism at the rise of violence, which seemed to be the living contradiction of universalist politics.[12] Writers of the 1930s, determined to shock a bourgeois readership out of complacency, had a more accepting relationship with violence – "the necessary murder."[13] Contrastingly, for Northern Irish writers during the Troubles Auden's necessary murder had lost its buffer of political abstraction. The action, then, at the center of the Northern Irish public poem is violence, and conversely, its opposite: the potential of non-violent action. Significantly, there has been no repeat of Auden's "Spain 1937" or "September 1, 1939" in Northern Ireland; rather, Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles actively questions the assumptions of these earlier forms of public poetry. The public poetry of the Troubles eschews the didacticism of earlier public forms in favor of a poetry that serves as an medium for autobiographical contemplation.

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[11] See Michael Longley's comment on his volume *The Echo Gate* (1979) in the *PBS Bulletin*: "Though the poet's first duty must be to his imagination, he has other obligations – and not just as a citizen. He would be inhuman if he did not respond to tragic events in his own community, and a poor artist if he did not seek to endorse that response imaginatively. But if his imagination fails him the result will be a dangerous impertinence. In the context of political violence the deployment of words at their most precise and suggestive remains one of the few antidotes to death-dealing dishonesty."

[12] Discussions of violent vs. non-violent action tend to reduce the difference to a matter of means. What Northern Ireland, for example, exposes is the radical difference in the two approaches.

[13] Auden later revised this line: "The conscious acceptance of guilt in the fact of murder" (*English Auden* 212). See also John Fuller' s *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* for discussion of the reasons for Auden's revision.

The year 1966 represents a critical juncture in the history of Northern Irish politics and poetry, around which time the Northern Irish public poem begins to take shape. In the political sphere, the commemorations of the Battle of the Somme and of the Easter Rising, reignited two of the most potent sources of Unionist and Republican identity; Elizabeth II's visit revealed a diminishment in the unifying force of state ritual; and the first killings of the modern period of the Troubles deepened a sense of foreboding. In the cultural sphere, however, an opposite movement was underway: with the Belfast Festival in 1965, which saw the publication of pamphlets by Derek Mahon, Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney, with the Derek Mahon's and Michael Longley's joint receipt of the Eric Gregory Award, and with the publication and warm reception of Seamus Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), the sense had taken hold that a cultural renaissance in Northern Irish poetry was legitimately afoot.[14] Commemoration, ritual, violence, and poetry—1966 offers a template for the issues that would preoccupy Northern Irish poetry for the next thirty years. In an article in *The New Statesman*, Seamus Heaney took stock by noting both the "renaissance" in local writing and the growing "atmosphere of the Troubles" that lent a new insecurity to life in the North ("Out of London: Ulster's Troubles" 23). This coincidence of poetical flourishing and political disintegration elicits from Northern Irish poets a parochial investment in politics and a renewed interest in the public poem. Furthermore, this interest leads to the development of a new kind of public poem in Northern Ireland that draws on the sentimental charge of

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[14] Heather Clark's *The Ulster Renaissance: Poetry in Belfast, 1962-1972* provides an astonishingly rich account of this period.

personal private experience to challenge the "public" and ideological nature of both establishment politics and of militant sectarianism.

It has become a persistent refrain in the essays of a number of astute critics who tend to minimize the political dimension in the work of Northern Irish poets, like Fran Brearton and Edna Longley among others, to point out that those who are now often deemed Troubles poets, like Derek Mahon and Eavan Boland, as well as Longley and Heaney, had already developed strong poetic identities by the time the Troubles were recognized as an historical period (around 1969). Fran Brearton notes in her essay "Poetry of the 1960s: the Northern Ireland Renaissance" the way in which the simultaneity of the political violence and the poetic renaissance has led critics to impose a narrative of causality on the poetry:

> any reading of 1960s poetry in Ireland may succumb to more than one temptation, not least of which is to read the story from a post-1969 perspective, and bring expectations about poetry engendered in part by the Troubles to bear on writing from the early and mid-1960s (among which, notably, are the first collections by Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon). Critics scour the early collections by these poets for poems about violence. (94-5)

Certainly, a reading of Northern poetry that would ascribe to it a simple representational transparency in relation to the Troubles distorts its aesthetic complexity; moreover, Brearton rightly challenges the critical tendency to equate the poet and his or her entire *oeuvre* with the Troubles, and thus promote inaccuracies on the level of literary biography. But Brearton's critique inverts the practice she would rectify by insisting too

much on 1969 as the historical watershed, and minimizing the role of historical events in shaping the poetry of Northern Ireland. As correspondence and articles like Heaney's show, the poets shared the heightened political ethos of 1960s more generally, which in turn conditioned their responses to the more vicious politics of the Troubles. Readings that suggest a kind of mutual support system between the Troubles and Northern Irish poetry are certainly misleading, but these should not be countered with a notion that the Troubles were only a backdrop to already established poetic careers. In a sense, the poets of the "Ulster Renaissance" were ideally prepared by a 1960s political-sensitivity to respond to the Troubles when they did arise. What this pre-Troubles period really shows is an active political engagement (which actually lessened, significantly, as the Troubles wore on), suggesting that political concerns played a part in the poetry of Northern Ireland *before* as well as during the Troubles. Indeed, it is equally anachronistic to read the early work in terms of a latter-day apoliticism. As Derek Mahon writes in 1970 of the early work of himself and his contemporaries, "The poems in these collections, if not the collections themselves, antedate the political events of the last two years, but not the spirit that inspired them" ("Poetry in Northern Ireland" 92).

2. SEAMUS HEANEY: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IS NATIONAL

For Seamus Heaney, the burden of postcolonial representation and the commitment to a British romantic poetics of the self have been operative concerns throughout his career; moreover, they are particular manifestations of the politics/poetics duality that has

animated his work and its reception more generally. On the one hand, Heaney appears as the quintessential engaged poet speaking out for the oppressed minority of Northern Ireland, and against British imperialism more generally. On the other hand, Heaney's poetry invites readings of his work that transform particular figurations, grounded in personal memory and autobiography, into sources of sentiment for an international readership. Heaney's famous poem "Digging," for example, may be read at once as a meditation on a particular Northern Irish Catholic concern with violence, land, and the tension between cultural labor and physical labor faced by the postcolonial writer, and also as a more universalist expression of nostalgia for a simpler past and the comforting analogical creation of continuity — "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it" (ll. 28-30). This ambivalence at the level of reading is not merely a kind of shibboleth poetics by which the "authentic" reader alone has access to the cultural particularity of the poem and the "inauthentic" (non-Irish) reader softens the poem into sentimental universalism; on the contrary: this ambivalence extends through the majority of Heaney's own writings on poetry and should be read accordingly.

In his important self-making essay "Feeling into Words" (1974), Heaney positions this ambivalence at the center of his poetics: "poetry as divination, poetry as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself; poems as elements of continuity, with the aura and authenticity of archaeological finds" (41). This credo Heaney describes as "a view of poetry which I think is implicit in the few poems I have written that give me any right to speak" (41). If we are to understand Heaney's poetry then we must understand it in terms of a generative continuity between autobiography and cultural/

political representation. While Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles often fosters and is interpreted as a kind of *de facto* public poetry, that is a poetry that addresses and self-consciously acknowledges its links to a particular historical context, Heaney and other Northern Irish poets have also written poems with explicit aspirations to public significance. While Longley has worked primarily in the genre of the elegy, Heaney's public work has been more various generically: commemorations, documentary pieces, and more general meditations on sectarian violence have, along with the elegy, been regular modes in Heaney's public poetry. By focusing on these explicitly public poems during the period of 1966-1973, I hope to show how the confusion between individual subjectivity and collective representation typical to postcolonial poetry becomes definitive of Heaney's poetics, serving to both lend it an aura of historical importance and to undermine reductionist political readings that would too easily ascribe to Heaney's poetry a kind of representational equivalency.[15]

Departing from the rural aesthetics of his first collection (poems written in the period of 1960-1966, roughly), Heaney's poems written in 1966 show a more active political interest than those collected in *Death of A Naturalist* (1966). In particular, "Antaeus," "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966," and "Requiem for the Croppies," all written

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[15] This tendency is helpfully critiqued by Deepika Bahri in terms of the postcolonial text: "Unfortunately, alertness to sociopolitical relevance [in postcolonial literature] is often transformed into the perception of the postcolonial literary book as a primarily documentary social text, with scant regard for its aesthetic dimension" (*Native Intelligence* 11). This cautionary observation, however, must be balanced with what David Lloyd has called Heaney's effort to ground "his poetic in the concept of identity," which allows "the writer, like the analogous figure of the martyr, [to attain] 'saturation' with meaning, and hence representativeness, for nationalism by partaking of that which he represents, the spirit of the nation." ("Pap for the Dispossessed" 14-15). Certainly, with its preoccupation with cultural and personal identity, Heaney's poetry often invites identitarian readings; but it also resists these readings. What Lloyd views as a merely reactionary commitment to bourgeois subjectivity in Heaney, also operates as a foil to what we might call "documentarian" readings.

in 1966, represent early attempts by Heaney to broaden his poetic to address more public subject matter.[16] "Requiem for the Croppies" shows Heaney experimenting with nationalist commemoration -- specifically of the Wexford rebels of the 1798 uprising -- in the form of a requiem. Heaney notes that the poem "was written in 1966 when most poets in Ireland were straining to celebrate the anniversary of the 1916 Rising" -- a context that underscores the public nature of the poem ("Feeling" 56). As Heaney has suggested, commemorations such as this one represent a kind of prelapsarian period in public poetry, which enjoyed a distance from the events of the post-1969 Troubles, a distance that would be erased by the subsequent rise of violence.[17] The poem, in fact, acquires a kind of dual identity -- existing as it does on the cusp of the Troubles -- that derives both from the slightly less charged atmosphere of its composition, which emphasizes its historical-cultural interest, and from the highly charged atmosphere of the Troubles, which reveals in the poem a contemporary, and potentially violent, political dimension. In the first instance, the poem can be read as merely an exercise in commemoration, and well within the bounds of the poet's office; in the second instance, the poem can be read as a piece of Republican propaganda.[18] In this sense the poem

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[16] "Antaeus" and "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966" do not appear in collection form until North in 1975, though Heaney places "Antaeus" directly after the selections from *Death of a Naturalist* in *Opened Ground: Selected Poems 1966-1996*, reemphasizing the date by placing it in brackets above the poem. For drafts of "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966" and "Requiem for The Croppies," (titled "Requiem for The Irish Rebels") see the Michael Longley Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

[17] Heaney notes the more open-minded conditions of the "Room to Rhyme" tour of 1968: "The fact that I felt free to read a poem about the 1798 rebels to a rather staid audience of middle-class unionists was one such small symptom of a new tolerance" ("Cessation 1994" 46).

[18] Neil Corcoran notes that "Heaney's poem makes its nationalist sympathies clear when its final line weaves into its image of seasonal renewal the sense of political resurgence. Irish Republicans were quick to read the implication here, and the poem became a popular one at Republican gatherings. Heaney has subsequently registered unease about how readily it could be appropriated" (*The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* 26).

stands at the crux of a major change in Northern Irish poetry's attitudes toward political action -- after the rise of non-violent protest tactics, and before the rise of sectarian paramilitary tactics. 1966 represents a kind of calm before the storm, when violence and political action can still be treated more or less unproblematically.

In 1966, or even in 1968, "Requiem for the Croppies" could be read as a rather harmless piece of nationalist nostalgia contributing to a burgeoning sense of agency among young Northern Irish Catholics protesting for civil rights. The fact that Heaney was able to read the poem in 1968 to mixed audiences suggests that it partook more of a peaceable nationalist nostalgia than of aggressive Republicanism. Indeed, the poem is published in the *Room to Rhyme* pamphlet under the strikingly apolitical category of "Seasons" alongside a far more obviously nature-oriented poem by Longley ("Freeze-Up") and a mournful love song ("The Seeds of Love") presented by David Hammond, a context which places more emphasis on the barley than on the fallen rebels whose pockets bear it.

Indeed, in the poem's unequivocal rehashing of a number of nationalist tropes -- agrarian Irish vs. militant British, the value of blood sacrifice, and victory-in-defeat -- it appears more like a practice piece, in which Heaney tries on the mask of the nationalist bard. The mythic trope of seasonal resurgence creates a tripartite linkage: the seeds of the 1798 rebellion flourish in the Easter Rising, whose spirit, in turn is reborn in the Northern Irish civil rights campaign. Heaney writes that "the oblique implication was that the seeds of violent resistance sowed in the Year of Liberty had flowered in what Yeats called 'the right rose tree' of 1916. I did not realize at the time that the original

heraldic murderous encounter between Protestant yeoman and Catholic rebel was to be initiated again in the summer of 1969" ("Feeling" 56).

The linkage, however, is strained by the violent nature of the first two historical moments with the avowedly non-violent nature of the civil rights campaign. As a result, the 1798 rebellion is emptied of its carnage, except for a rather romantic conceit wherein "the hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave" (l. 12). The fact of violent death is cast triumphantly, in a broad historical sweep: "twenty thousand died, shaking scythes at cannon" (l. 11). The poem, evoking the ethos of non-violent protest, represents the action of the rebels as uncomplicated and noble, and the extreme violence of the event is redeemed by images of reproduction. In retrospect, one can see how easily the poem could be appropriated for Republican causes, but within the moment of 1966, the poem appears to be merely an accomplished piece of historical commemoration put to the use of progressive politics. The poem itself emblemizes the notion that the hopeful spirit of the civil rights campaign was sibling to the spirit that degenerated into the violence of the Troubles; both sipped from the same cup of nationalist nostalgia.

"Antaeus" and "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966," which Heaney held back from book publication until much later in *North* (1975), show the use of two materials that complicate the depiction of action and violence in Heaney's public poetry: myth and documentary. Much critical attention has been paid to "Antaeus," no doubt due to its prominent position in *North*. The poem both begins the first section of the volume and provides a mythical patron for the earth-bound, dark work that follows. Moreover, the poem, paired with "Hercules and Antaeus," which closes section one, coordinates a

political allegory, wherein Antaeus represents the colonized native and Hercules the foreign colonizer. Henry Hart, for example, argues that "Hercules and Antaeus"

> expresses solidarity with the dispossessed and damned; with Balor, the one-eyed robber god defeated by the legendary invaders of Ireland (the Tuath de Danaan); with Byrthnoth, leader as the Battle of Maldon whose forces were massacred by the Danes; with Sitting Bull, emblem of the American Indians doomed by white colonizers; and ultimately with Catholic inhabitants of Ireland deracinated by Protestant conquerors. (97)

As Hart's reading demonstrates, the Antaeus poems and the collection in general have tended to be read publicly as statements on or representations of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

The poem's potential for political allegory, then, along with the deliberate noting of its date of composition, stress the public nature of the poem. Such an assumption of equivalency, however, is upset by both the mythical content of the poem and its dating before the Troubles have become the Troubles per se. Moreover, Heaney himself has stressed a more personal dimension to the poem. Heaney comments in a 1977 interview with Seamus Deane that the companion poem to "Antaeus," "Hercules and Antaeus," represents a struggle between two competing modes of poetic apprehension: "balanced rational light" on the one hand, and "the pieties of illiterate fidelity" on the other ("Unhappy and At Home" 63). Heaney goes on to comment that "in the case of almost every Northern Irish poet, the rational wins out too strong" (63), thereby shifting the

meaning of the poem even further from political allegory in the direction of literary criticism.

As the variety of these readings suggest, the poem achieves a kind of enabling ambiguity in which public concerns (colonial oppression, the Troubles, literary criticism) play off of private ones (the struggle to balance the rational and the mysterious). Moreover, the poem subtly challenges the masculine ethos of the 1930s public poem by speaking through the feminized Antaeus. Within the confines of an Augustan formal balance, Heaney posits a feminine intelligence. He writes in 1972 that the process of writing is "a kind of somnambulist encounter between masculine will and intelligence and feminine clusters of image and emotion. I suppose the feminine element for me involves the matter of Ireland, and the masculine strain is drawn from the involvement with English literature" ("Belfast" 34). "Antaeus" demonstrates this somnambulist encounter, an encounter that runs counter to the rational urbanity of earlier public poems like Auden's "September 1, 1939," or MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*.

In the vertiginous atmosphere of Heaney's mythic realm, the quarrel with the self masquerades as the quarrel with others and vice versa;[19] poetic struggle allegorizes colonial oppression, and colonial oppression allegorizes poetic struggle. This interpenetration of the public and private sets a precedent for Heaney's later public poems (e.g. "Casualty," "The Flight Path"), wherein the readability of seemingly accessible historical or political material is complicated by the inaccessible material of the poet's

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[19] Heaney repeats Yeats's dictum in his 1972 article for the Gaurdian: "You have to be true to your own sensibility, for the faking of feelings is a sin against the imagination. Poetry is out of the quarrel with ourselves and the quarrel with others is rhetoric" ("Belfast" 34).

own more private quarrels. As Deepika Bahri has suggested, the effectiveness of the poem lies in this resistance to representational equivalency:

> The poems, simply put, are unequal to the political task at hand. Lodged in this incommensurability, however, is the stuff of the poetic. It is the mismatch that allows the poetic any capacity it might have for transcending the *Lebenswelt*. The abundance of the poetic imagination exceeds the worldly purpose, freeing the text from a transparent auctorial intention. ("Uncommon Grounds" 80)

In "Requiem for the Croppies" the poet's imagination seems in hock to worldly purpose, with no excess of private concern to destabilize the poem's political force – the poem exemplifies what Heaney later condemns as "memory incubating the spilled blood" (*North* 11). "Antaeus," written in 1966 as well, demonstrates a method of public poetry far better-suited to the political complexities of the 1970s. The allegorical surplus of "Antaeus" slips the appropriating hold of a reading public, while not altogether removing itself from the realm of public events. Whereas "Requiem for the Croppies," in an effort to bolster the non-violent activism of the Civil Rights campaign, ultimately reinforces a Republican belief in the power of violent sacrifice, "Antaeus" is far more circumspect.

> Let each new hero come
> Seeking the golden apples and Atlas:
> He must wrestle with me before he pass
> Into that realm of fame

Among sky-born and royal.

He may well throw me and renew my birth

But let him not plan, lifting me off the earth,

My elevation, my fall.

1966

(ll. 13-20)

The poem achieves a less appropriable political status by limiting violence to the narrative context, while placing the mythical giant's meditations on violence firmly in the foreground. By displaying the psychology of a single violent agent as if it were a specimen, the poem invites the attentive examination of the reader. Indeed, Heaney's comments to Seamus Deane in 1977 regarding the companion poem "Hercules and Antaeus," suggest the exemplary, or emblematic, nature of the Antaeus figure.

> There is a poem in North which is a metaphorical consideration of this [the tension between the "balance" of the well-made poem and the depiction of violence]. I think it is a dangerous poem to have written …. Hercules represents the balanced rational light while Antaeus represents the pieties of illiterate fidelity. Overall, I think that in the case of almost every Northern poet, the rational wins out too strong. This poem drifts towards an assent to Hercules, though there was a sort of nostalgia for Antaeus. ("Unhappy and At Home" 63).

Unlike "Requiem for the Croppies," in which the reader is made to identify with the fallen rebels, "Antaeus" resists a sympathetic identification. Instead, Antaeus is represented as an emblem of violence, which the reader may examine with a "Herculean"

rationality. While we may not plan his elevation and fall, we may read it. In short, "Antaeus" presents violent action not as a cause for commemoration, but as a stimulus for reflection and even instruction.

The question remains, nevertheless: how do we read the poem's date of "1966"? The dating jars not only with the poem's conspicuously mythical material, but also with the temporal ambiguity of section one of *North* as a whole. As Heaney states in 1977, the two halves of *North* were meant to be distinct: "The two halves of the book constitute two different types of utterance, each of which arose out of a necessity to shape and give palpable linguistic form to two kinds of urgency — one symbolic, one explicit" ("Unhappy and At Home" 66).[20] Attached to the primary poem in the first "symbolic" section of North, the historicizing function of the date seems to trouble the symbolic multiplicity with evidence of "explicit" urgency. What at first appears as a quintessential "emblem of adversity" ("Feeling" 57), appears in the end to be also an historical document. Within the historical context of 1975, when the poem is published in *North*, "1966" seems to invoke a more promising period directly before the Troubles when violence does not yet seem ubiquitous and inevitable. In a 1968 front-page article in *The Listener,* Heaney describes the watershed moment that was the October March in Derry, and the previous sense of possibility: "Up until then, a Catholic might believe in shades of grey. Captain O'Neill was asking for better relations between the two

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[20] Heaney gives a similar but more elaborate gloss in his comment in the *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*: "Perhaps the first function of a poem is to assuage the poet's need for it to exist. For a while I found my needs satisfying themselves in images drawn from Anglo-Saxon kennings, Icelandic sagas, Viking excavations, and Danish and Irish bogs, and the result is the bulk of the poems in the first section of North. The second section is the result of a need to be explicit about pressures and prejudices watermarked into the psyche of anyone born and bred in Northern Ireland" (1).

communities, hoping to promote a gradual healing of the sectarian sores in the politics of Ulster. One trusted him because his personality is redolent of honesty and good will" ("Old Derry's Walls" 522). According to this historical narrative then, we might interpret Antaeus's plea — "Let him not plan, lifting me off the earth / My elevation, my fall" — as a plea for *detente* between the primitive and the rational, which seemed possible in 1966 and may now only be possible in the coexistence of two sections — one symbolic, the other "explicit" — within the covers of *North*. Similarly, the poem evokes the language of Edmund Burke's famous plea for sentiment versus calculation in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: "Oh! What a revolution! and what an heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall!" (*Reflections* 75-6).[21] Heaney's choice then to place the poem at the beginning of his 1975 collection, casts the poem as a kind of retrospective elegy to a period of lost potential, which annotates all that follows with a caveat that "it didn't have to be this way."

Reading the dating of "Antaeus" as symptomatic of a general effort, in the volume as a whole, to bring the historical into dialogue with symbolic, supports an allegorical interpretation of "Antaeus," as well as of most of the other poems in the first section. Indeed, much of the criticism of the collection stems from an assumption of the collection's supposed historical correlations and aspirations. In adjacent reviews in the winter 1975 issue of the *Honest Ulsterman*, Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson both admit the stature of Heaney, as both an accomplished poet — "a writer with the gift of

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[21] Indeed, as I argue, Heaney's *North* may find its most sympathetic predecessor in Burke's mixture of symbolism, sentiment, and violent representation in the *Reflections*.

precision" (Carson 183) — and as a representative figure for Ireland and Northern Ireland (though this point is troubled by Longley's self-distancing use of the possessive pronoun) internationally — "A poet who has already articulated so much of the experience of his people and country" (Longley, "Fire and Air" 182).[22] Both reviews, though, move quickly toward a condemnation of the collection's mixture of myth and history. Carson's depiction of Heaney has become well-known: "Heaney seems to have moved — unwillingly, perhaps — from being a writer with the gift of precision, to become the laureate of violence — a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for 'the situation,' in the last resort, a mystifier" (183). What seems to be at stake for both Longley and Carson is not only the representation of violence but also the *representativeness* of Heaney, which had conferred on Heaney an authority to represent the Troubles to audiences beyond Ireland. "Everyone was anxious that *North* should be a great book," Carson concludes, "when it turned out that it wasn't, it was treated as one anyway, and made into an Ulster '75 Exhibition of the Good that can come out of Troubled Times. Heaney is too good and too sensible a poet to turn into Faber's answer to Georgie Best" (186).[23] Tellingly, Carson moves at the end of the review out of mere aesthetic criticism and into a commentary on the troubling relationship between Northern Irish poetry, British readership, and violence. As Carson's and Longley's comments imply — unwillingly, perhaps — *North* is as much about the print culture and political climate that surrounds it as it is about the material, explicit or symbolic, within it.

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[22] Longley's review was primarily of Derek Mahon's *The Snow Party*, marking one of the earliest examples of opposing the two writers, which would later become commonplace.

[23] At the beginning of his review Carson observes that " the poet seems to have acquired the status of myth, of institution" (183).

Both from a print culture perspective as well as from a thematic perspective, Seamus Heaney's *North* is profoundly historical; cutting across this trajectory, however, is a concurrent preoccupation with autobiography, which tends on the one hand to support Heaney's representative authority and, on the other hand, to undermine an equation of myth and history by particularizing their representation. What is often missed in readings of *North* is the fact that the collection continues in the vein of much of his poetry by exploring a particular place through the medium of self-reflection and psychology — "I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing" (ll. 19-20), Heaney writes in his early *ars poetic* "Personal Helicon" (*Poems* 40). While the collection certainly strives for a public importance and resonance, it does so through a deeply confessional method of representation. What Heaney is exploring in the collection is an individual psychology (his own) in the midst of a culture profoundly inflected with a history of violence. Heaney makes this coordination of the public and the autobiographical clear in his comments on the collection in the Summer 1975 *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*: "During the last few years there has been considerable expectation that poets from Northern Ireland should 'say' something about 'the situation,' but in the end they will only be worth listening to if they are saying something about and to themselves" (1). Such a comment reveals Heaney's commitment to a romantic aesthetic of the self, even when attempting to address public concerns.

Throughout Heaney's career, there runs a tension between representation of a people (the political) and representation of the self (the aesthetic, by way of the romantic ethos); as such Heaney's comments on *North* do not depart significantly from either his

early assertion in "Personal Helicon" or his later assertions in poems like "The Flight Path": "'When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write / Something for us?' 'If I do write something, / Whatever it is, I'll be writing for myself.'"[24] In *North*, then, we find a similar tension between a kind of cosmopolitan representative-ness of the Troubles and a particularizing representation of the self. Taken separately, either mode of representation could serve as grounds for universality, but taken together the two modes of representation refract and distort each other. On the one hand Heaney exercises an authority to represent Catholic Ireland and the Troubles by emphasizing his Irish Catholic-ness, while on the other hand that representation is undercut by the particularity of an individual and limited perspective: I am Catholic Ireland *vs*. I am Irish Catholic. In a sense, every cosmopolitan postcolonial autobiography articulates this ambivalence: the account substantiates the writer's representative authority, but, in its particularity, also limits his synecdochal potential.

In many ways, then, by bringing the autobiographical into tension with the politics of cosmopolitan representation, *North* exceeds Heaney's other collections in its engagement with self-reflection (as Heaney's *PBS Bulletin* suggests, in terms of both representing and speaking back to the self). But not only is the collection's engagement evidenced in its complexities of representation, but also more explicitly in the collection's numerous autobiographical poems, both introducing and concluding the volume.

Indeed, "Singing School" may be Heaney's most autobiographical poem in his entire *ouevre*. While numerous other poems treat isolated events in the poet's life,

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[24] Published, respectively, in *New Statesman*, 19 March 1965 and *P.N. Review*, November/ December 1992.

"Singing School" attempts to be far more exhaustive and self-fashioning, moving from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood. Likewise, Heaney prefaces the poem with two epigraphs — the first from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and the second from Yeats's *Autobiographies* — that serve to both signal the autobiographical nature of the poem and its self-conscious effort to establish a literary genealogy. By providing such a long view of the poet's life, the poem encourages the divination of continuities, which run counter to the the collection's topical specificity. Much in the same way that the dating of "Antaeus" discourages a simple allegorical reading of the poem that would pair it with post-1969 Northern Ireland, so does the temporal scope of "Singing School" discourage a simple topical reading of the collection as a whole. Instead, what is anticipated as a major public statement by Northern Ireland's most famous poet, turns out to be a deliberately personal foray into autobiography — the narrative of self running steadily below the symbolic and historical.

The inclusion, moreover, of early poems in the collection, like "Antaeus" or "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966," reveal the poet of *North* as a documenter of his own response to history. Both poems, like the majority of the collection draw attention to poetic subjectivity through the medium of public events, and also seek to understand public events through the medium of self-analysis. Of all the poems in the collection, however, "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966" seems to be the most self-consciously historical. Indeed, the title of the poem operates like the caption to an historical photograph, and the poem concerns itself primarily with the depiction of the event. The language of the poem, however, is far from neutral — "drums preside, like giant

tumours" (l. 8), "every cocked ear, expert in its greed / His battered signature subscribes 'No Pope'" (ll. 9-10) – and opens up a truth about documentation, which photography tends to conceal, that no language is neutral. Moreover, the poem does not succeed well on its own merits, as a number of the metaphors seem forced (e.g., drums like tumours). The poem's description of the lambeg drummer seems appropriate to the poet in this respect – "he is raised up by what he buckles under" (l. 4) — that is, in the case of the poet here, under history. Still, documentary alone is rarely an adequate *raison d'être* for a poem, and Heaney no doubt recognized this fact, given that he withheld the poem from publication as long as he did. Rather, the poem earns its place, in the context of the autobiographical sequence "Singing School," as documentation of not the July 12 parades as much as the poet himself.

Again, as the poet offers up the figure of "Antaeus" as an object of contemplation, so does he offer up his own psyche for examination. (A poem entitled "Exposure" appropriately concludes the volume.) As the poems in *North* evidence, there is an almost scientific fascination with the self that complements Heaney's more intuitively figured process of composition. In a 1973 interview with Patrick Garland, Heaney analogizes his poetic process with the work of P.V. Glob, a Danish archaeologist: "My way and view of poetry has never been to use it as a vehicle for making statements about situations. The poems have more come up like bodies out of the bog of my own imagination. Now I want to wait until the violence comes out of the pores of my mind, naturally" (629). To view *North* then as self-study as much as public poetry, opens up an alternative reading of Heaney's taxonomic zeal in assembling a collection of poems from different periods in

his life. Granted, it is not unusual to collect poems written or published much earlier, but to deliberately indicate their historicity is — whether through dating or through adapting poems published in other collections, such as the final section of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing." This interest in a documentary history of the self, both as individual and representative, is underscored by comments made by Heaney regarding a contemporaneous series of prose poems published one month after *North* in the *Irish Times* as "Autobiographical Borings." Heaney's introduction to the poems sheds light on the larger project informing his work of the period: "I don't know if these can be called prose poems. They could be regarded as autobiographical borings, narrow shafts let down into one stratum of a northern consciousness, bits to drill the compacted years of G.A.A. [Gaelic Athletic Association] sport days and ceilidhe bands, that embattled culture of feiseanna and Gaeltacht scholarships, family rosaries, and Faith of our Fathers."[25] In his prose poems of the period, as well as in *North*, Heaney employs the self as an augur for national history. In other words, the collection reveals itself as an attempt to "understand the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge," as Heaney famously puts it in "Punishment," through an autobiographical survey of the poet's own life up until 1975. Heaney, instead of historicizing (or even mystifying) the Troubles, historicizes himself.

Indeed, the entirety of *North* demonstrates an obsession with and reflection upon the act of witnessing (or viewing, more generally), including, as here, the witness of one's own development. Over the course of the volume the poet gazes on photographs

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[25] *Irish Times*. 8 July 1975. Supplement, 1.

and the actual bodies of bog people, on the figure of his aunt, on the North Atlantic, on Orange Parades, on television news reports of Belfast. Where the radio-influenced public poetry of the 1930s heard the voice of conscience, the television-influenced 1970s saw images of violence, and the public poem became less a didactic forum and more a record of conscience. This change is signaled by the rise of documentary methods in poetry (often manifesting in an attention to the visual) on the one hand, and on the other hand a growing autobiographical interest in one's own response to violence. Seamus Deane's observation that "artists can often be more troubled by the idea that they should be troubled by a crisis than they are by the crisis itself" ("The Artist and the Troubles" 42) may serve as an epigraph for Heaney's oeuvre as well as for most Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles.

"I no longer wanted a door into the dark," Heaney explains to James Randall in 1979, "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" (20). While this is an implicit commentary on the representative function of autobiography in *North*, suggesting Heaney's departure from a cosmopolitan aesthetics of representation, *North* remains paradigmatic — far from anomalous, as contemporaneous reviews suggest — of Heaney's work as a whole. As Said's formulation of the postcolonial poet suggests, a fiction of representation also inflects Heaney's work, rendering the personal a synecdoche for the national.

3. MICHAEL LONGLEY: THE REGIONAL IS UNIVERSAL

By shifting away from the extrovert tendencies of didacticism or even of laudatory commemoration, the public poetry of the early 1970s drew the gaze of the reader to itself by emphasizing its own integrated autonomy as poetic artifact. As records of and reflections on the act of witness, the poems are presented as objects of contemplation, and poets begin to speak of poetry as a kind of non-violent action, or as an antidote to violence. As this dialectic relationship between poetry and violence deepens, writers represent themselves less as urbane men of the world (like MacNeice's everyday reader-of-newspapers), and more as devotees of poetry. Nevertheless, this turn toward aestheticism has strong and constitutive affiliations with politics. Not only does the aestheticism arise from the principles of 1960s political activism, but it also derives its force from a dialectical relationship to political violence. Poetry is the good politics to sectarianism's bad politics. Derek Mahon's oft-quoted assertion that "a good poem is a paradigm of good politics" ("Poetry in Northern Ireland" 93) exemplifies this position, as does the fluid movement between autobiography, history, and myth in Heaney's "Antaeus." Such critical formulations shift the location of politics in the public poem away from content to form; politics and poetry are related on the level of structure. Accordingly, aesthetics and politics become analogous and the quality of a poem is also an ethical quality — for if a good poem is a paradigm of good politics, then a bad poem suggests bad politics.

Similarly, politics, like poetry, is aestheticized, becoming a matter of taste. Yeats's admonition, "Irish poets, learn your trade, / Sing whatever is well made" ("Under Ben Bulben" ll. 68-9) acquires ethical force, and the attention to craft, which has been a hallmark of Northern Irish poetry and has its roots in the English poetry of the 1950s and '60s, becomes in Northern Ireland a guarantor of political responsibility. The evolution of this anti-political aesthetics has resulted not only in an increased dedication to craft, but also, conversely, in an increased attention to poetry at the level of content. Countless poems of Northern Irish poets thematize poetry, and poetry itself becomes the action upon which the poet reflects. The anti-political aesthetics of the Northern Irish public poem enacts, then, an inversion of the 1930s public poem ethos: poetic form becomes an allegory for politics, and poetic activity replaces political action on the level of content. In short, "poetry" itself goes public.

Michael Longley, both in his poetry and in his work at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, has consistently demonstrated and promoted the notion of poetry as an alternative to violent sectarian politics. Indeed, to avoid casting the development of Northern Irish aestheticism merely in the abstract terms of two interacting discourses, it should be remembered that poetry is not a kind of self-sustaining natural resource; on the contrary, it requires deliberate cultivation and maintenance, both by institutions and by the writers themselves. Moreover, these imperatives of survival are both conditioned by political and economic factors (positive and negative) and have a shaping influence on the poetry that the writers and the institutions seek to foster. Longley, by advocating literature's cultural centrality in the North, supplied an infrastructure and an incentive for

the antithetical aestheticism of Northern Irish poetry. Moreover, by uniting this aestheticism with a preexistent regionalism — advocated by earlier poets like W.R. Rodgers and John Hewitt — Longley cultivates a cosmopolitan view of the Troubles which makes Ulster paradigmatic of a seemingly universal antagonism between political violence and humanism, for which "poetry" itself becomes the primary representative. Accordingly, in his own work, Longley develops an aesthetics of resistance that reinterprets *difficulty* and *caution* (both in composition and interpretation) as political strategies.

Early on, Longley cultivates the identity of an aesthete and his early poems display an intricacy of craft that thwarts the easy apprehension of the non-specialist. Tellingly, in the group sessions of the early 1960s, Longley's poetry was greeted with far less enthusiasm than was Heaney's poetry. As Heather Clark notes, Phillip Hobsbaum championed accessibility and empirical reality as essential features of good poetry. "Nearly all testimony," Clark reports, "suggests that abstract work based upon a writer's private code of language – and hence inaccessible to the common reader – was discouraged" (62).[26] A poem such as "Epithalamion," which Longley workshopped with the group in the mid 1960s, demonstrates in its introversion an aesthetic antithetical to Hobsbaum's reader-centered aesthetics. The poem with its tortuous syntax and suspenseful enjambment winds the action in on itself:

> And everything seems bent

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[26] Jack Pakenham's account of the Group's aesthetic bears this out: "Honest-to-God Ulster down-to-earthness was encouraged, poetic flights of extravagant vision and imagination were frowned on as 'Pretentious.'" Likewise, Norman Dugdale: "Craft rather than Art seemed to be everything; it didn't seem to matter what the poem was about, and so week after week there was a proliferation of poems that a naturalist or a folklorist would have loved" (quoted in Clark 63).

On robing in this evening you

And me, all dark the element

  Our light is earnest to,

All quiet gathered round us who . . .

(ll. 21-5)

The increasingly hermetic world of the lovers furthers the introversion of Longley's narrowing gyre. The "garden's brightest properties" (l. 13), "aeons dwindling" (l. 20), "a train that's loudly reprobate" (l. 27) – the imagery of the poem taxes the reader's imagination and employs neo-Platonic abstraction as a means of magnifying the concrete and corporeal. Such a poem contrasts strikingly with a poem like Heaney's "Digging" with its simplicity of syntax, earthbound imagery, and accessibility.[27] Longley's poem seems to be a refutation of Hobsbaum's notion that "one's approach to a poem must necessarily be governed by what is available to the reader" (*A Theory of Communication* 58), while Heaney's poem seems to be a hearty affirmation of it.

The issue of difficulty, which the comparison of these poems evokes, bears directly on Longley's approach to the public poem. Even less than he seems an likely bureaucrat, Longley's poetic sensibility seems particularly inhospitable to the cosmopolitan colloquialism of the 1930s public poem and to any easy accommodation of political matters. Indeed, as early as 1969 Longley was being made out to be an aloof aesthete, emblematic of poetry's general distance from the Troubles. As he reports in his 1970 Yeats Summer School lecture, following the Bogside uprising, the Irish Times

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[27] Heaney workshopped "Digging" with the Belfast Group around the same time as Longley's "Epithalamion."

juxtaposed a series of representative quotations – from Ian Paisley, James Chichester-Clark, and Jack Lynch – beside the poet's own comparatively apolitical lament: "I am often depressed by the decline of the subordinate clause" ("Yeats as Tragedian" 1). In such a context the poet comes across as elitist, remote, and even disrespectful. Yet, in what would become a characteristic response to such undercutting, Longley responded first with humor and then with reappropriation and assertion (tools, incidentally, quite essential to the bureaucrat).

> For a few days afterwards the only stance I could possibly adopt was one of delighted embarrassment. But the fact remains that although so much has happened in Ulster to dwarf my grammatical depression, I must still assert my rights to lament the decline of the subordinate clause. Indeed, I could argue that my political and grammatical anxieties intersect at that point where the tensions of Ulster and of Ireland might be considerably alleviated by a few deftly chosen subordinate adverbial clauses of concession. ("Yeats as Tragedian" 1).

This quotation coordinates two key terms in Longley's critical lexicon – "rights" and "deftly" – and demonstrates the dialectical nature of Longley's aestheticism. Attacks on poetry's relevance would be met with assertions of poetic rights (a political term) on the very grounds upon which it was attacked. To put it another way, Longley counters accusations of deafness with affirmations of deftness. Indeed, in Longley's formulation, to deftly choose the right phrase becomes an act of immense political importance.

As Longley's 1970 lecture demonstrates, he was a quick study in negotiating the discursive minefield of Northern Ireland; these skills come directly to bear on his work

with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland which began that year. Longley reports in his autobiography that his initial concern with the Arts Council was to promote the literary arts; the objectives were

> to provide publishing outlets for local authors; to facilitate the continuing existence of local publishing houses; to make available to the local community and to readers elsewhere the best of contemporary Ulster writing; to keep in print distinguished literature from the recent past; and to represent our generation to itself, the world at large, and to posterity. (*Tuppenny Stung* 52-3)

These objectives seem relatively commonplace, but their force lies in more particular concerns with regionalism, preservation, and generational self-awareness. Despite many poets' later resistance to regionalist identities, the Arts Council reinforced the notion of a distinct Northern Irish voice even as it sought to amplify that voice for a global audience. Moreover, Longley worked to direct funding to the literary arts, contrary to the usual practice of supporting the Fine Arts, particularly orchestral music. Longley's job then was two-fold: to promote the literary arts in Northern Ireland and to promote Northern Irish literature in the world. To accomplish this ambition, Longley had to find a way to articulate a relationship between the poetry of his generation and the historical events that provided it with a global stage: literature had to be at once *above* the Troubles in a local sense, and *of* the Troubles in a global sense.

Longley's first Arts Council event in 1970, *The Planter and The Gael* tour, featuring John Montague and John Hewitt, initiated a model for most of his subsequent work with the council. In a neo-Arnoldian manner, the tour cast culture both as

apolitical, so as not to encourage sectarian reprisals, and as politically restorative, so as to argue for literature's ongoing social value. The introductory notes to the tour's booklet emphasize, as does the title of the tour itself, the importance of cultural identity: "In the selection of his poems each poet explores his experience of Ulster, the background in which he grew up and the tradition which has shaped his work. John Montague defines the culture of the Gael, John Hewitt that of the Planter. The two bodies of work complement each other and provide illuminating insight into the cultural complexities of the province" (1). Yet, Longley steers the importance of cultural identity away from sectarianism. First, the poets are representative of their respective cultures only insofar as they attempt to define the traditions underlying their own work; that is, the investigation of culture is introverted and searching rather than triumphalist. Second, the singularity of each identity is quickly juxtaposed with the other as an illuminating duality, or complementarity: the planter *and* the Gael, not the planter *or* the Gael. Third, the tour derived its purpose from the notion that culture and cultural traditions could be a way of countering sectarian violence.

Following *The Planter and The Gael* tour, Longley began to ground this notion of culture (specifically literature) as an antidote to sectarian violence in the discourse of Ulster regionalism, already well-elaborated by older poets like W.R. Rodgers and John Hewitt. Longley, in an articulation of the work of the Cultural Traditions group, supplies the rationale behind much of his Arts Council work, casting it in regional terms: "to encourage in Northern Ireland the acceptance and understanding of cultural diversity; to replace political belligerence with cultural pride" (*Tuppenny Stung* 70); he continues,

"our aim should be to lift the community into consciousness and self-consciousness . . . since it is the intellectual (and, indeed, the emotional) vacuum that makes room for the violence. We are involved in cultural preparation, a constellation of conversions, gradual processes" (*Tuppenny Stung* 72). As Longley's parallel suggests, cultural pride (which, presumably, the appreciation of local art engenders) can be an adequate replacement for sectarian violence (which is glossed as political belligerence). Moreover, in a way that would become more common as the Troubles wore on, politics becomes synonymous with strife, while Longley seeks to make culture synonymous with constructive pride. The term culture, rather than art more generally, also allows Longley to emphasize the uniqueness of Northern Irish poetry, which both counters political strife and grows from the same soil. Culture is anti-political in the sense that violence *is* political, but culture is also political in the sense that it is an antidote to violence. Finally, tours like *The Planter and The Gael* served as models of intercultural solidarity based in artistic commitment. Not only did the tours further the idea that a cultural renaissance in Northern Ireland was indeed underway, but they also positioned themselves as counters to Northern Ireland's deep-rooted cultural sectarianism. In other words, the effort to promote a distinctly Ulster poetry to an international audience coincided well with more local political concerns.

But perhaps most important to the fortunes of Northern Irish poets was the way in which local political concerns gained an international significance. Ulster became a theatre wherein the drama of brute force and sensitive humanism was played out for a world audience. What had begun as a counter-metropolitan regionalism in the work of

Rodgers and Hewitt, took on a cosmopolitan significance during the period of the Troubles; the regional became universal. No doubt this transition derives from multiple, and difficult to trace, sources, but a burgeoning interest in poetry from the provinces, extensive global media attention, and the efforts of critics and writers contribute significantly to the ascent of Ulster poetry in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Indeed, what has been characterized as the Ulster Renaissance by many might be better understood as an aspect of a more general Provincial Renaissance in British poetry during the 1960s and 1970s. Douglas Dunn, Norman MacCaig, Tony Harrison, to name some of the better known, were all publishing in England during the time, primarily in London. Michael Longley articulates this shift in an article from mid 1970s:

> In a Belfast under Direct Rule from Westminster I am sometimes tempted to take wry pleasure in what could be diagnosed as the decline of literary London as magnetic south and ecclesiastical east, to celebrate the poetic UDIs in places like Hull, Manchester, Leeds, Orkney, Oben, Newcastle — and, of course,
>
> Belfast. But this involves a self-indulgent double-think: it still seems important to have a London publisher, to help fill the occasional column in the *New Statesman*. The efflorescence of poetry in the provinces owes quite a lot to the circumspection and curiosity of several London publishers and editors. Two or three have made it easier for me at any rate to stick it out in Belfast, in the armpit of Europe. ("Untitled [Contemporary Poetry]" 1)

What Longley acknowledges is a shift in metropolitan taste that can be compared with a similar surge of interest in commonwealth literature during the period, which, while it

privileges writing beyond the metropole, still preserves the metropolitan infrastructure of publishing. In other words, while the poetry is provincial, the taste is metropolitan, and a cosmopolitan readership still determines what deserves distinction and what does not.[28]

Given the continued centrality of English language publishing in the US and England, it becomes in the interest of writers in Northern Ireland to sustain its hold on the attention of this cosmopolitan readership. Longley, in his work with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, has done more perhaps than any other in sustaining that attention. Following the model of *The Planter and The Gael* tour, Longley continued in the early 1970s to formulate and promote an idea of Ulster that would cast the region as a kind of exemplary space for understanding cultural and racial difference. After the ridicule Longley had received for his seemingly detached lectures on Yeats at the Yeats International Summer School in Sligo in 1969 and 1970, Longley seemed to adopt a more forthright strategy by lecturing on Louis MacNeice in 1971 and on W.R. Rodgers and John Hewitt in 1972. Longley, in a letter to Heaney shortly after the 1972 summer school, makes his intentions clear:

> Thanks for thinking of me re: MacNeice, Rodgers, and Hewitt: they really do add up to something, and I began to focus on how important they are when I was preparing my lecture: important in the Irish context as the first voices of a third

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[28] A subtle protest against this fact can be seen in Longley's advocacy of John Hewitt, who "has yet to find acceptance within [the country's] mainstream" ("Untitled [John Hewitt]"). Longley no doubt sees a bit of himself in Hewitt as Heaney becomes "Famous Seamus" and eclipses many other equally gifted poets. Longley observes acerbically in his 1972 lecture on Hewitt and Rodgers: "Both are Ulster Protestants — Planters — Dissenters, and therefore excite in the English liberal (and, indeed, in the American liberal) none of the racial and cultural envy which inspires (partly, I think) the Englishman's bewildered and fascinated and continuing scrutiny of the personality of the Gael" ("'Roundhead and Cavalier': The Poetry of John Hewitt and W.R. Rodgers").

> world which I suppose we're (I'm) part of. […] I was politically motivated in Sligo: I wanted to define Ulsterness publicly in a lecture: I'm not sure I want to do this critically on the page: I think I might be writing about and eroding my future subject matter (i.e. Ulster, the new Hidden Ireland). (Letter to Heaney. 7 August 1972)

What Longley's comments suggest is an attempt to figure Ulster as something other than national — whether Irish or British. Longley terms it "a third world," echoing a more political term that is often more appropriately applied to Ireland — and even more appropriately to developing, often postcolonial, regions.[29] Additionally, Longley's allusion to Daniel Corkery's nationalist-motivated work on eighteenth-century Ireland, *The Hidden Ireland* (1924), further underlines his reframing of Ulster in terms of postcolonial politics. In his parenthetical correction ("we're (I'm)"), Longley reveals, however, what is the most problematic aspect of Ulster regionalism: that is, it relies for its distinction on the existence of an oppressed minority which itself chooses to identify with Ireland and not Ulster. The third world that Longley occupies prides itself on hybridity, while those native inhabitants who coordinate that hybridity also resist it in favor of a less ambiguous Irish nationalism. The general approbation for Longley's remaining in Belfast during the Troubles, and the condemnation of Heaney's move to the Republic in the early 1970s reveals this tension within Northern Ireland between regionalist and nationalist identities that an overly blunt emphasis on religion may obscure.

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[29] Longley also prefigures here a similar geo-political / creative nexus exploited in Field Day's notion of the Fifth Province.

Longley's exhaustive critical readings of MacNeice, Rodgers, and Hewitt in the early 1970s suggest a thematic index by which Longley's own poetry might be read, in which the regional peculiarities of Ulster are registered autobiographically in the poet's own person. Painstakingly elaborating the defining characteristics of an Ulster identity, Longley ultimately situates the regional in the self. Of Hewitt, Longley writes: "A discreet drama is inacted [sic] throughout his poetry as he debates with himself, tests his stance and position. Diffidence follows certainty, withdrawal follows assertion — an assertion which springs perhaps from the poet's realisation that the subterranean tunnels connecting him with his ancestors have been blocked. This is the cultural dilemma of the Ulster Protestant, of the Planter; he has to turn his back and come up again fighting his way into the light of day" ("Untitled [John Hewitt]") Longley's interests in schizophrenia, inheritances, hybridity, ambivalence, dual identity, are all evoked in this depiction of Hewitt. In short, the theatre of Ulster, in which "what you love often overlaps with what you hate" ("Untitled [John Hewitt]") is transmuted into the self.

Despite Longley's record as a political figure and promoter of literature in Northern Ireland, as well as his refusal to move away from Belfast during the Troubles, his poetry prior to *Gorse Fires* (1991) is often read as intensely private and removed from public issues like the Troubles. While Heaney has been readily taken up by critics as a politically engaged poet and a spokesman for Northern Ireland, Longley has remained peripheral to these critical mainlines. One tempting explanation for this difference in reception is to argue that Longley has been a willing retiree from public matters; this, however, is patently disproven by his manifest involvement in Northern Irish politics in a

way that far exceeds Heaney's involvement. Longley has not eschewed a public tendency in his poetry any more than Heaney has; instead, both have sought to work the same ground. But what this difference in reception reveals is both a different aesthetic (Heaney's reader-friendliness and Longley's baroque complexity were apparent even in the early 1960s) and also a different approach to the public poem.[30] What the public poems in Longley's 1973 collection, *An Exploded View*, show is an extreme obliquity, an emphasis on precision, and a suppression of the bardic voice, which all run counter to the expectations the genre promotes.

The volume, in its title as well as in individual poems, thematizes the difficulties of reading and the inadequacy of verbal representation to public events. Within the context of 1973, the year the volume appeared, the title suggests that the collection will contain numerous poems deeply engaged with the violence of the Troubles. However, when one finds the exploded view it appears buried in a poem on archaeology and quickly disabuses the reader of Troubles associations. Likewise, the poem "Casualty" parries our expectation that a Troubles elegy is contained therein (much like the poet's later poem "Ceasefire," which also misdirects the reader). Hobsbaum's notion that a poem should be governed by what a reader knows is turned on its head. One enters these poems having already misread, and the recognition of this misreading exposes our own prejudices. Yet, a poem like "Casualty," after its initial slip, slowly asserts a new relationship to the historical matter that had conditioned the reader's expectations.

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[30] During the early 1970s Heaney and Longley struck up and sustained an extensive correspondence in which the two exchanged and critiqued each other's poetry. This correspondence also shows a deep interest in Northern Irish politics, making more explicit the two poet's different approaches to addressing that political situation poetically.

Although the poem depicts not a victim of sectarian violence but the slow disintegration of a sheep carcass, the poem's final stanza opens out to a reflection on violence that extends it beyond either historical or naturalistic understandings alone by encompassing both. At the center of the poem is a growing sinister uncertainty about the operation of violence:

> And this no final reduction
> For the ribs began to scatter,
> The wool to move outward
> As though hunger still worked there,
>
> As though something that had followed
> Fox and crow was desperate for
> A last morsel and was
> Other than the wind or rain.

(ll. 18-20)

The poem's initial trajectory, which would provide a naturalized understanding of violence and wash it of moral implications, is upset in the final quatrains. The repetition of "as though," the drastic enjambment in the last quatrain, and the negative etiology of "other than wind and rain," denies the possibility of rationalizing violence as the poem itself denies the reader's expectation of elegiac consolation. The poem resists the reassuring didacticism, or even the pleasures of sympathy, which public poems often provide, in order to force the reader into his or her own contemplative work. Unlike

Heaney's "Requiem for the Croppies," Longley's "Casualty" is defiantly useless, at least in a limited sense: it supports no position, salves no wounds, prescribes no action. The obliquity of the poem's approach allows the poet to simultaneously engage public concerns and to undermine the emotional falsehoods that those concerns elicit.

Longley further departs from the generic expectations of the public poem by continually undermining his own bardic authority, especially in the volume's elegiac poems, which turn the form into a mode of documentary. In a form that begs for moralizing, sentimentality, or at least the exposure of the poet's own grief, Longley preserves the sense of existential inadequacy that is the fact of any untimely death. Longley refuses to supply an affirming flame, in the language of Auden, that would distract the reader from the subject at hand. Numerous critics have noted the lack of a stable unified voice in Longley's poetry, and its effect on his critical reception. Alan Peacock, for example, suggests that the resistance to critical appropriation in Longley's poetry derives from this incertitude of voice: "Longley's non-declaratory kind of writing does not lend itself uncomplicatedly to critical approaches where 'placing' within cultural and socio-political determinants is a central rather than an ancillary or constituent critical concern" (*The Poetry of Michael Longley* xi.) This resistance in Longley's work manifests itself most clearly in his elegiac poems, which actively undermine appropriation.

As Fran Brearton has suggested, non-elegiac poems in the volume, like "Alibis" and "Options," which trouble the notion of a unified autobiographical voice, and "Letters," which attempts to bridge private and public concerns, prepare the poet for his

work in elegy, where these themes reach their most effective manifestation (*Reading Michael Longley* 97). An elegy like "Wounds," while it begins with the assertion of an autobiographical first person — "Here are two pictures from my father's head — / I have kept them like secrets until now" (ll. 1-2) — quickly submerges that first-person authority in a multiplication of other figures. Indeed, the elegy is populated with more dead than the poet can adequately inter: the poet's father, an Ulster boy at the Somme, numerous dead from the London-Scottish division, three teenage soldiers, and a bus-conductor. Beside the dead there are even more figures: a London-Scottish padre, a shivering boy, and a bewildered wife. And many of these figures are allowed to speak, the shivering boy having the last word. Brearton has argued that the poem succeeds because it "mediates public utterance through private grief, and mediates between past and present" ("Reading" 98). The effect of the poem seems to be just the opposite, however: the juxtapositions of public and private, past and present, murder and grieving, memorial and bewilderment remain unmediated. The mirror structure of the two stanzas emphasizes the distance between the mediating analogies. Initially, one is drawn to a reductive analogy that the adolescent bloodlust of the Ulster boys at the Somme is the same as that of the dead teenage soldiers in Belfast; this is the assumption that the form encourages – we go to elegy for mediation.

But the subsequent analogies radically undermine the deceptive notion that violence is always the same – the consolation of historical transcendence. The London-Scottish padre, with his "stylish backhand and a prayer" contrasts with the poet's own laborious tending to the dead, which relies on an accumulation of quotidian minutiae –

badges, medals, compass, woodbines, a lucifer, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a uniform – as though nothing is quite sufficient for the verbal laying to rest, and that these totemic objects are merely objects. Additionally, the poet's attempt at bridging the distance between his life and his father's dying – "I touched his hand, his thin head I touched" – reveals in its repetition of "touch" a kind of bewilderment in the poet as to what act is equal to the moment of death. The entire second stanza of the poem suggests the inadequacy of this act. The poet attempts to illuminate his father's death with Troubles deaths, to shine historical light on dying, but ultimately the poet backs out of his own poem in deference to the bewildering facts of violence. What had begun as elegy concludes in ludicrous violence, and we are encouraged by the mirror structure of the poem to view this shivering boy as the poet himself. The boy's shamefully inadequate apology – "I think 'Sorry Missus' was what he said" – reflects the poet's own bewildered touch at the end of the first stanza and becomes a mocking criticism of the poet's wish to mediate death in poetic form. The poem does not mediate the public and the private, but shows rather the forced and bewildering intrusion of public grievances into the private sphere of the home. Putting on the public dress of elegy the poem ultimately offers up to the reader its own failure to suture the physical, psychological and intellectual wounds that violence opens.

In his elegies and in his work with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Longley has persisted in troubling any uncomplicated relationship between the public and the private on the one hand, or politics and art on the other. In his political and critical work, Longley has consistently promoted the notion of art as an antidote to violence; in his

poetry, however, Longley critiques our desire for such an antidote, or, at least, our hope that this antidote will be applied easily and that it will require little labor on our own part. It would seem then, that the drive of Longley's work lies in its ability to force the reader out of complacent sentimentality and into active reflection. A 1969 article in *Hibernia* suggests the centrality of personal responsibility in Longley's development: "Prior to October 1968, my attitude to the Ulster political scene had been ambivalent, well-laced with saving ironies. I see now that as a criticism of an unjust and, even at this late hour, dishonest regime ironies have proved pusillanimous, that in the context of lost lives and burnt-out houses they amount to an impertinence" ("Strife and The Ulster Poet" 11). By deploying strategies of obliquity that challenge the assumptions of readers and by subverting the poet's own authority, Michael Longley's poetry challenges readers to assume for themselves a responsible politics.

The work of Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley, from 1966 to 1975, shows a steady increase in political engagement, and, with that increase, a steadily increasing engagement with the public poem. In the years that follow, the poets become less strident in their political views, but the commitment to the public poem, especially the elegy, persists. The early writings of Heaney and Longley show an immersion in the liberal politics of the 1960s and an effort to bridge these political commitments with their poetry. With the outbreak of the Troubles in 1968 this effort to bridge politics with poetry became strained as the non-violent political energies of the sixties migrated to sectarian militarism. Unlike the 1930s public poem, with its effort to invoke a "capacity for

consequence," proved inadequate to an environment that had become perversely obsessed with such capacities, the Northern Irish public poem sought to enforce were contrary actions – contemplation, precision, self-critique – that merged with their own poetic concerns. Thus, by becoming acolytes of poetry as such, the poets could figure their work in opposition to sectarian civil war. Moreover, both Heaney and Longley revise Yeats's notion that "we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" ("Per Amica Silentiae Lunae" 331). In both poets the political is refigured as a quarrel with and within the self. This autobiographical turn collaborates with a cosmopolitan readership that seeks in non-metropolitan writers a fusion of aesthetic and political representation — a notion that Said perpetuates in his notion of a fictional pact made between the people and poet. But autobiography also frustrates a simple representative equation by asserting the particular as a foil to readings that seek too quickly to promote a universal significance to local political realities.

CHAPTER 4:

LOVERS' QUARRELS: LONGLEY, YEATS, AND THE POLITICS OF LOVE

It may seem that in recent years there has been a renewed interest in coming to terms with the poetry of Michael Longley.[1] But, in Peter McDonald's words, Longely's whole career has been distinguished by an "anxiety to pin down where exactly Longley is coming from" ("Michael Longley's Homes" 116). Longley, it appears, is a poet that demands a perpetual coming to terms. This indeterminacy, no doubt, has much to do with Longley's luke-warm relationship with the newspaper-ready designation of his work — and that of his contemporaries — as "Troubles poetry." To be clear, Longley initially invited the reading of his work in the context of the political and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. In an early article, "Strife and the Ulster Poet," Longley admits that "poetry is an act which in the broadest sense can be judged political," and predicts that "anything I may write in the future is bound to be influenced by the recent turmoil" (11). Longley makes this claim in 1969, no doubt still naive to the way in which "the recent turmoil" would begin to eclipse most other readings of his work. Throughout the 1970s, Longley steadily retreated from this early position. By 1994, Longley had reached an opinion in direct contradiction to that of his younger self: "I find offensive the notion that what we inadequately call 'the Troubles' might provide inspiration for artists; and that in some weird quid pro quo the arts might provide a solace for grief and

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[1] See, for example, Alan Peacock and Kathleen Divine's *The Poetry of Michael Longley* (2000), Eamonn Hughes's profile in Fortnight, "A Poet in His Prime," *The Colby Quarterly* Special Edition on Longley (2003), Fran Brearton's *Reading Michael Longley* (2006), Robert McCrum's profile in *The Observer*, "Michael Longley's Remarkable 'Britannic' Voice Sings Out Through 40 Years of Poetry" (2006), and, finally, Michael Longley's *Collected Poems* (2007).

anguish" (*Tuppenny Stung* 73). By 2006, Longley had almost completely distanced his work from "the recent turmoil;" as Robert McCrum reports in a review in *The Observer*, "Longley insists, rebutting the cliche about war and poetry, that the Troubles have nothing to do with his creativity" (2).

Reflecting this position in his poetry, Longley has developed a strategy of textual ambivalence. A brief survey of his titles alone — "An Exploded View," "Casualty," "Wounds," "The Butchers," "Peace," "Ceasefire" — reveals the way in which Longley has sought to encourage and then frustrate the reader's expectation of a poetic "harvest […] from the twisted branches of civil discord" (*Causeway* 8). "The Butchers" or "Ceasefire" can only be said to be *about* the Shankill Butchers or the 1994 ceasefire in the sense of a resonance, a note which an uninformed reader would scarcely hear. To the degree that Longley aspires to a Horatian posterity, these so-called "Troubles" poems can only be *ascribed* a topicality — in some hypothetical futurity they preserve their ambitions to timeless universality. The perpetual coming to terms with Michael Longley's poetry then should be understood as a product of his own critical and poetic strategies which rely on the Troubles to, at the very least, set in relief his own insistence on a politically "un-Troubled" poetic.

Longley's self-labeling as primarily a love poet, however just, must be read also in terms of this ambivalence and resistance — both expressed in his critical writings and enacted in his poetry — to political readings of his work. In a 2003 interview with Jody AllenRandolph, Longley asserts that "Love poetry is at the core of the enterprise — the hub of the wheel from which the other preoccupations radiate like spokes. [...] I wouldn't

mind being remembered as a love poet, a sexagenarian love poet" (294). In fact, the case for reading Longley as primarily a love poet is strong. From the opening poem of his first collection, "Epithalamion," to his most recent work, love poetry, and *eros* more generally, has been a constant in Longley's writing. Tellingly, in Frank Ormsby's anthology *The Long Embrace: Twentieth Century Irish Love Poems* (1989), only Yeats's contribution at twelve poems exceeds Longley's at eleven.

But there is also a submerged political charge to this designation of Longley as a love poet: it is often a way of asserting that Longley is a love poet to the degree that he is *not* a Troubles poet. According to this logic, his poetry should be read not in terms of historical context, but rather in terms of his continuities with, for example, Catullus, Donne, or Yeats. If, according to this line of thought, his poetry is to be read in the context of the Troubles it should be framed solely in terms of overcoming and even mastering. The editors of the *Colby Quarterly*'s 2003 special issue on Michael Longley, Jody AllenRandolph and Douglas Archibald, implicitly endorse this view when they offer a kind of "what-if" literary history:

> Had he lived in different times he would have been a learned poet, a love poet, a botanizing poet, or […] Ireland's nature poet. Who knows, were it in the eighteenth century he might even have been a vicar, his version of Dr. Primrose, or of the schoolmaster in "The Deserted Village," that Irish protest poem.
>
> But he was born in 1939, came of age in the 'Fifties, into politics with the Civil Rights movement in Ulster in the 'Sixties, and has survived the subsequent dangerous and difficult decades. Not only survived, but helped to shape,

interpret, and inform. (189)

The implication of such speculation is that the Troubles, or history and politics more generally, are somehow inherently foreign, and even hostile, to the poetic enterprise. Indeed, part of the critical celebration of Northern Irish poetry is predicated on a fundamental "in-spite-of": the successes of a poet like Michael Longley have been achieved *in spite of* the countervailing forces of sectarian and political violence.

Yet, as the inverse of this in-spite-of quality, there is a simultaneous elegiac note that accompanies this celebration, lamenting *what might have been* — even though what is lamented may have actually come to pass. As AllenRandolph and Archibald later admit, Michael Longley *is* a learned poet, a love poet, a botanizing poet, and certainly one of Ireland's best nature poets. Should we assume then the opposite, that these successes came about *because of* the Troubles, at least in part? What if the Troubles had never happened? In the space between the actual and speculative history emerges a strange coincidence of independence and dependency. On the one hand, the political and sectarian violence of the Troubles seems to exercise a hostile repressiveness toward poetry; while on the other hand, the political and sectarian violence of the Troubles seems crucial to our reading of that poetry and the "pleasure" we receive from it. The poetry remains *Troubles poetry*; even in its attempt to be something else — to un-Trouble itself — it appears more praiseworthy precisely *because* it has emerged in spite of the Troubles. Written over every Troubles poem is a meta-narrative of overcoming, which, of course, relies on the continued presence of an obstacle.

It is in this light that Longley's commitment to love poetry should be read in the

context of the Troubles — not only as a kind of in-spite-of resistance, but also as a *because-of* response. Moreover, love poetry (and Irish love poetry especially) is deeply political, emerging in the modern context as the literary genre *par excellence* for coordinating private sensibility and social order. In the Irish context, especially, the love poem is doubly politicized, serving not only as a bridge between the private and the public, but also as an allegory for nationalist sentiments — the love of Ireland. In Longley's poetry, as I will argue, there exists a continuity grounded in erotic desire between the seemingly "pure" love poems like "Epithalamion" and "The Linen Industry" and the more political poems like "Peace, "The Butchers," or "Ceasefire." For indeed much of Longley's best Troubles poetry is shot through with eros, as much of Longley best love poetry is shaded with political implications. In short, his love poetry is the product of a Troubles poet; it is, to revisit his phrase, the "harvest […] from the twisted branches of civil discord" (*Causeway* 8). This is not incidental, however. The interfusion of love and politics has a rich precedent in Irish poetry more generally. In fact, as I will argue, love and erotic desire have been the preeminent tropes through which Irish poets engage with politics.

The centrality of love and erotic desire in Irish political poetry may be traced to two sources, the first aesthetic and the second political. In terms of the aesthetic, love, of both the erotic and the platonic varieties, enjoys the prestige of the lyric tradition, and with that a kind of unassailable aesthetic imprimatur. Moreover, by configuring, at the level of the individual, a unity between the philosophical and the physical, romantic love is a kind of thematic synecdoche of the aesthetic itself. The history of the aesthetic, as Terry

Eagleton reminds us, is prompted by an effort to reconcile abstraction (often in the form of laws of governance) with particularity (the lived experience of an individual subject). In philosophical terms, this reconciliation becomes a matter of mind and body, of reason and passions. Love, as the neoplatonists have so successfully demonstrated, moves almost effortlessly between the registers of the physical, the worldly, and the universal. And like love, "Aesthetics," as Terry Eagleton observes, "is born as a discourse of the body":

> The distinction which the term 'aesthetic' initially enforces in the mid-eighteenth century is not between 'art' and 'life', but between the material and the immaterial: between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas, that which is bound up with our creaturely life as opposed to that which conducts some shadowy existence in the recesses of the mind. […] It is thus the first stirrings of a primitive materialism — of the body's long inarticulate rebellion against the tyranny of the theoretical. (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 13)

What Eagleton reveals in the aesthetic is a kind of perpetually unstable reconciliation: the aesthetic is at once a "minded" body and an embodied mind. Because of this instability the term achieves a kind of universal donor status, which, as Eagleton points out, "allows it to figure in a varied span of preoccupations: freedom and legality, spontaneity and necessity, self-determination, autonomy, particularity and universality, along with several others" (3). The aesthetic is a kind of discourse of excess, grounded in the body, whose own systematic openness makes it promiscuously useful, while also threatening to undermine whatever it comes into contact with. Irish poetry's emphasis on love and

erotic desire, as well as on the body, is symptomatic of a broader commitment to aesthetics as an antidote to abstract political reasoning.

But while the preoccupation with love and erotic desire may be a form of anti-political aestheticism, it also has its origins in the tropes of Irish nationalism, giving it the endorsement of political precedent. For a poet like Michael Longley this may be a submerged inheritance, while for a more nationalist-oriented like Heaney it may be more at the surface; it is, nonetheless, operative to varying degrees in both poets. In the tropological zone of Irish nationalism, Ireland is regularly figured as a woman — Mother Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan, Dark Rosaleen, the Shan Van Voght; accordingly, Irish patriotism is figured as first a form of erotic desire and then as an actual expression of love when the patriot takes up arms — like Michael in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Through these figurations, Irish nationalism is linked allegorically with love and erotic desire. Moreover, as a writer like Yeats demonstrates, around the linchpin of erotic desire there is a rich coincidence of aestheticism and Irish nationalism that grounds political action in the particularity of the individual body. In the context of Ireland, love and erotic desire have deeply political connotations.

Contrary to the opposition of love and erotic desire with the political in Irish poetry, love and erotic desire in Irish poetry are figuratively imbricated with politics, allowing poets on the one hand to refute a politics based in abstract ideology while on the other to contribute to the envisioning of a politics of the particular. This interest, moreover, in love and erotic desire is continuous with an emphasis on sympathy and affective intersubjectivity in Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles. As a kind of microcosmic

figuring of human relations, the love poem offers the ideal ground for reimagining human social harmony. Recognizing that this imbrication of love and erotic desire with politics has a long history in Irish literature, I begin with a reconsideration of Yeats's late poem "Politics," in order to explore the complicated politics of romantic desire, which not only orients Yeats's aesthetics, but also serves in early aesthetic theory to merge the private sentiments with an ideal social order. Finally, I will turn my attention to the work of Michael Longley, who among Northern Irish poets has been perhaps the most intrepid in the exploration of the nexus of love and politics, and who deserves equally (and, in a sense, synonymously) the title of "love poet" and "Troubles poet."

1. That Girl Standing There: Yeats's Politics of Desire

Positioned at the conclusion of one of modern poetry's most formidable bodies of work, Yeats's short lyric "Politics" seems disturbingly minor. Moreover, given how the subject of politics has become one of the most contested issues in Irish literature — not to mention in modern literary studies more generally — one arrives at the poem with a sense of relief and expectation: perhaps it will resolve, once and for all, that perplexing relationship between what we call "poetry" and what we call "politics." Even its title seems to promise a final and unequivocal statement. But that hope is radically frustrated

by the mischievous simplicity of what follows.[2]

Despite the poem's riddling methods, however, it still has something to tell us about poetry and politics, even though that something is not easily expressed in terms of our prevailing modes of discourse. The poem, of course, is not political in the sense that it promotes any particular agenda, or has any particular ideas about how a state should operate, or even offers any critique of certain power dynamics. Nevertheless, not even considering the poem's title and epigraph, whose political nature is hard to deny, the poem is very much suffused with what we would call "political" — political speeches, international war, ideological conflicts — even if the political is only there to set up the poem's final affirmation of subjectivity, individual longing, and romantic desire — what we tend to call *poetic* or *aesthetic*. In other words, the poem is concerned in the end with what the epigraph diagnoses — the modern political human — and how he or she may credit that which exceeds "politics" as such.

The question then becomes not whether the poem is political, but rather how the poem seeks to assert the *poetic* within the realm of modern politics. In *The Aesthetic*

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[2] Here is the poem in its entirety:

POLITICS

'In our time the destiny of man presents its meanings in political terms.'
Thomas Mann.

How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics,
Yet here's a man that knows
What he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has both read and thought,
And maybe what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms.

Dimension (1978), Herbert Marcuse offers a similar analysis of art's relation to politics, acknowledging political theory's general failure to honor what can be best categorized as the aesthetic: "It is all too easy to relegate love and hate, joy and sorrow, hope and despair to the domain of psychology, thereby removing them from the concern of radical praxis. Indeed, in terms of political economy they may not be 'forces of production,' but for every human being they are decisive, the constitute reality" (5-6). Yeats's "Politics," like his politics, can be read in similar terms, as an attempt to bring the aesthetic dimension (love and hate, joy and sorrow, etc.) to bear on the realm of politics. In so doing, Yeats both exposes the failures of modern politics, due to its overemphasis on universality, to grasp the more "decisive" aspects of human experience, and posits, by inscribing it in the public sphere, a politics founded on the particularity of erotic desire.

This politics of desire — which bridges for Yeats the realms of politics and art — does not, however, come without a cost. The politics of desire envisioned by Yeats (but traceable to the origins of modern aesthetics) critically depends on a very limited conception of woman as object of desire. This conception, however, is perpetually upset by the political agency of actual women in Yeats's life, resulting in an irresolvable contradiction in his work. Accordingly, the feminine becomes a site where Yeats must continually attempt, without success, to distinguish the political from the poetic. As such, Yeats's "Politics" both predicts the current efforts in criticism to make the same distinction and offers an exemplum of the modern political poem, which seeks to bring the aesthetic dimension of experience to bear on the political, often through the mediating figures of the feminine and desire. Yeats's "Politics" allows us, first, to think through the

role of politics in Yeats's work as a whole, and, second, to suggest a paradigm for thinking about the role of politics in modern poetry more generally.

Aside from its puckish deflation of the reader's hopes for resolution as to the role of politics in Yeats's life and work, the poem's demotic voice and everyman sentiments seem equally out-of-sync with the rest of *Last Poems* (1939) — a volume that collectively seeks, as James Pethica has observed, "a heroic closure to his life and a resonant and fitting culmination of his poetic self-figurations" (*Last Poems* xxiii). Indeed, the poem seems intent on subverting any heroic stylings. In the resulting attempt to bring the poem into a more dignified relationship with the rest of Yeats's work, critics have offered a few compelling interpretations. Stanley Sultan, for one, has argued that the poem harkens back to *The Wanderings of Oisin*, suggesting a reincarnative role for the poem (*Yeats At His Last* 43). For another, Mary Fitzgerald has argued that the poem, in its "Western Wind"-like simplicity, positions Yeats as a final inheritor of the English lyric tradition (quoted in Finneran, "Text and Interpretation" 36). Yet, these readings, while persuasive, remain inconclusive and have not established a strong line of interpretation for the poem; as Pethica admits, the readings only "add to the interpretive complexities 'Politics' presents, again leaving it unclear whether Yeats is deliberately poking fun at himself for his inability to break truly free of 'old themes,' or indeed simply questing for desire at his last" (xxxvi). Perhaps due to this interpretive stalemate, the poem has been the object of only cursory critical attention; for most critics, the poem is simply taken at face value as a refutation of politics and assertion of sexual desire.

What is so challenging about "Politics" is, in fact, its deceptive simplicity: the poem is both commonsensically what it is, and also much more than it is. On one level, the poem is certainly a refutation. If read, however, with a kind of double vision that grants the poem both its apparent meaning — the preeminence of immediate human experience, especially erotic desire, over worldly political concerns — and its various resonances with Yeats's *oeuvre* as a whole, the poem reveals a richer complexity and significance. As such, Fitzgerald and Sultan are right to read the poem with the level of import that its position in the *Collected Poems* suggests. But the poem should also be taken at its word: the poem is in fact about politics as much as it is about its refutation, erotic desire, the longing for youth, or the English lyric tradition. Indeed, the poem is remarkable because it exemplifies and exposes the fundamental consubstantiality of desire and politics that permeates Yeats's work. In particular, and paradoxically, the poem's coordination of politics and desire simultaneously undercuts a certain brand of public universalist politics while also advancing an alternative politics grounded in the particularity of the eroticized body. As such, far from being a categorical refutation of politics, Yeats's "Politics" represents both a return to his earlier conceptions of the political and also a prototype for Irish poetry and Irish literature in general in which desire is used to engage, extend, and often trouble political discourse. To understand the poem, then, both the poem's *intertextual* and *autonomous* meanings must remain in play.

When viewed in isolation the poem is fairly blunt in its condemnation of a modern politics. In the first draft of the poem, current affairs are categorically dismissed as "things / That benumb mankind" (Yeats and Wellesley, *Letters on Poetry* 180).

Moreover, in its use of an epigraph — an uncharacteristic practice for Yeats — the poem casts the speaker dramatically as an everyman, dialogically refuting the sanctimonious pedantry of Thomas Mann with a sort of beer-commercial appeal to sexual desire. Critics like Roy Foster, who read the poem as a final statement on politics, tend to favor this kind of reading. Touching on the poem briefly in his biography of Yeats, Foster argues that the poem encapsulates Yeats's "real feelings" about contemporary politics; "by the epigraph at the top of the poem," Foster writes, "WBY clearly intended an ironic subversion" of the notion that "In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms" (*The Arch-Poet* 622). Jonathan Allison, in his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats*, seconds this notion, observing that "as the terminal point of the lyric *oeuvre*, and so placed, 'Politics' is a final rejection of the claim that modern destiny (or poetry) is best understood in light of political processes" ("Yeats and Politics" 200). But more than a simple rejection of political paradigms, the poem is also "a valorization of romantic desire as an appropriate subject for modern poetry" (200).

The basis for this reading is indeed supported by some of Yeats's comments to Dorothy Wellesley upon his completion of the poem. In a letter from May 24, 1938, which includes his first draft of the poem, Yeats explains how the poem is meant to respond to Archibald MacLeish's claim, in an article published earlier in the year in the *Yale Review* called "Public Speech and Private Speech in Poetry," that politics should be the theme of what he calls "public" poetry, and that Yeats has inadequately addressed it in

his work.[3] Yeats's postscript to the letter suggests that the theme of politics is in fact inherently opposed to good poetry: "No artesian well of intellect can find the poetic theme [politics we presume]," Yeats concludes (*Letters on Poetry* 180). What we might conclude from these comments and this reading of the poem is that the poem attempts to prove through dramatization that the theme of politics has no place in poetry.

Such a reading, however, is troubled by a different link between Yeats's poem and MacLeish's claims about poetry and politics. Indeed, the tendency to read the poem in a literal sense as simply a cheeky dismissal of current affairs in favor of the great lyric theme, romantic love, is due in large part to the poem's deliberately *public* voice. For the poem Yeats employs a basic ballad meter, associating it rhythmically with popular ballads, more than with the rest of *Last Poems*. This opting for a more public voice — like the more often cited derivation of the poem's epigraph — is also prompted by MacLeish's essay. MacLeish advocates a return to "public speech," which he defines as "that human, living, natural, and unformalized speech, capable of the public communication of common experience, which, because it is capable of that use, cannot be confined to parlors or to proprieties or to those intimate whisperings in the personal ear which pass for purest poetry in periods of decline. It is a poetry capable of consequences. It is a poetry of action" (537-8). Against the negative example of nineteenth century British verse, and against the good but ultimately inadequate examples

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[3] "The later poetry of Yeats, because of Yeats's somewhat isolated situation in Ireland and because of Yeats's age, has not been called upon to employ the results of the poetic revolution at the point where those results may prove to be most useful. Yeats has moved only briefly and unwillingly at the point where the poetic revolution crosses the revolution in the social and political and economic structures of the post-war world" (MacLeish, "Public Speech and Private Speech in Poetry" 545).

of Pound and Eliot, MacLeish asserts that Yeats, among modern poets, has done the most to recover this public voice, and to offer a poetry that "is again an act upon the world" (544).

Upon reading MacLeish's essay, Yeats wrote to Dorothy Wellesley, praising the article and suggesting its impact on his own understanding of his work:

> There has been an article upon my work in the Yale Review, which is the only article on the subject that has not bored me for years. It commends me above other modern poets because my language is 'public'. That word which I had not thought of myself is a word I want. Your language in 'Fire' is 'public', so is that of every good ballad. (I may send you the article because the criticism is important to us all.) (*Letters on Poetry* 179-80)

Critics, in support of an interpretation of the poem as a mere refutation of politics, have been more apt to quote what follows in the letter: "It goes on to say that, owing to my age and my relation to Ireland, I was unable to use this 'public' language on what it evidently considered the right public material, politics. The enclosed poem is my reply" (180). While one must not dismiss the antithetical thrust of the poem that this comment suggests, one must also take into consideration the article's largely positive impressions on Yeats. The poem not only replies to MacLeish's contention that Yeats had not paid proper attention to politics in his work, but it also seeks to corroborate MacLeish's reading of Yeats's work as a whole: "That word ['public'] which I had not thought of myself is a word I want" (180). Viewed in the context of MacLeish's article, the deceptive simplicity of the poem reveals a consistency in the poem with the retrospective

efforts of *Last Poems* by casting Yeats, at the end of his career, as the public poet of his early work, steeped in Irish balladry and folklore.

This retrospective undertow in the poem creates a number of difficulties in its interpretation: on the one hand the poem seems to be, as Foster and Allison argue, Yeats's final statement on the perennial topic of politics and poetry, but the finality of such a statement on the other hand is subverted by the poem's intertextual return to the beginning of Yeats's career and his fascination with the tropology of Irish nationalism. As compelling as a terminal and autonomous reading may be in its ability to dispatch the unsettling presence of politics in Yeats's later writings in particular, it does not account for the poem's position and interpretive relation with Yeats's work as a whole. Pursuing the intertextual aspects of the poem, suggested in its recovery of the public voice, yields a number of insights into the relationship between politics and aesthetics in Yeats's work. Specifically, within the context of Yeats's work as a whole, "Politics" reveals itself as a kind of allegory for art's relation to politics. Yeats replies to MacLeish's claims about poetry and politics by effecting the constellation that permeates his entire oeuvre: erotic desire, aesthetics, and politics.

Within the context of the collection *Last Poems*, Yeats's engagement with politics in the collection's concluding poem is not surprising. Perhaps as much as the questions of mortality itself, questions of politics — the dangers of abstract ideals, the question of literature's efficacy, the future of Ireland — are repeatedly raised throughout the collection. In the opening poem, "Under Ben Bulben," the pattern of Yeats's final concerns is established: Yeats shuttles between a philosophical voice concerned with his

own legacy and a didactic voice seeking to articulate and instruct others on the artist's crucial role in the improvement of society, or "the race." "Many times man lives and dies," Yeats writes, "Between his two eternities, / That of race and that of soul" (ll. 13-15). Throughout the poem, and the collection as a whole, Yeats seeks to summarize and bring into alignment these two eternities — that of the race and that of the soul. This concern is first voiced in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley on June 22, 1938, shortly after completing his first draft of "Politics." In it, Yeats explains to Wellesley the foundational premise on which he works in writing his last poems: "This is the proposition on which I write: 'There is now overwhelming evidence that man stands between two eternities, that of his family and that of his soul.' I apply those beliefs to literature and politics and show the change they must make" (*Letters on Poetry* 182). It is worth noting that Yeats made this comment at the same time he was completing his political pamphlet *On The Boiler* — in which, Yeats wrote Maud Gonne, "for the first time I am saying what I believe about Irish and European politics" (*Letters* 910) — because it underscores the contingency of political and poetic concerns in Yeats's final years.

What Yeats's dual concern suggests is that the poet was seeking in the end a kind of unity between the imperatives of art and the concerns of family, race, and politics, which subverts the modern tendency to maintain a radical distinction between the artistic and the political, between the private and the public. For Yeats the quarrel with the self had begun to align itself with the quarrel with others. Within such a context, "Politics" reveals itself as much more than a refutation of politics as such, or a mere valorization of romantic desire; instead, the poem resonates significantly with, and offers a fitting

conclusion to, Yeats's *Collected Poems*. Not only does the poem configure the dual concern of *Last Poems* with individual and collective posterity, but it also evokes Yeats's abiding interest in the complex relations among eros, female beauty, and politics that permeates so much of his writing. It is in this nexus that the politics implicit in "Politics" can begin to be understood.

From his obsessive meditations on Maud Gonne, to the rantings of Crazy Jane, to the reflections on the corrupted beauty of Eva Gore-Booth and Constance Markiwiecz, the feminine (as it intersects with love and erotic desire) was used by Yeats throughout his career as a means of troubling political discourse.[4] In its interest in the relation between eros, femininity, and politics, perhaps the most obvious and interesting precursor of "Politics," and the early work that most haunts *Last Poems*, is Yeats's 1902 play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. In his writings, the play became a site for Yeats to assess his own relationship to the political history of Ireland and to juxtapose the claims of artistic integrity and political relevance. In "Man and the Echo" — which, according to Jon Stallworthy, was meant to be joined with "The Circus Animals' Desertion" and "Politics" to form a larger concluding sequence to *Last Poems*, and thus ground "Politics" in a far graver context (*Vision and Revision* 73) — Yeats famously asks "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?" (ll. 11-12). In the context of Yeats's deliberate stock-taking of "old themes" in "Man and the Echo" and "The Circus Animals'

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[4] Both Elizabeth Butler Cullingford in *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* (1996) and Marjorie Howes in *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness* (1996) offer brilliant explorations of the role of the feminine in Yeats's work.

Desertion," *Cathleen ni Houlihan* concentrates Yeats's reflections on politics and art.

The importance of the play for Yeats is both cultural and biographical. Culturally speaking, the *aisling* tradition, which personifies Ireland as a woman, deeply influences Yeats's conception of the play, and offers Yeats an early model for a unity of poetic and political concerns. In "Samhain: 1905," Yeats insists, with what we might view as an arch sense of paradox, that the play had come to him in a dream: "At the inquiry which preceded the granting of a patent to the Abbey Theatre I was asked if *Cathleen ni Houlihan* was not written to affect opinion. Certainly it was not. I had a dream one night which gave me a story, and I had certain emotions about this country, and I gave those emotions expression for my own pleasure" (199). As one can see, Yeats offers this dream defense in support of his claim that political intent did not factor in to his writing or production of the play; but, in so doing, Yeats also implicitly endorses a reading of the play as *aisling* — as a dream-vision of Ireland's political redemption. While this ambiguity might be troubling at first, it becomes more comprehensible when read in conjunction with Yeats's linking, in the same passage, of the personal concerns that prompt works of art and the broader political impact of those works: "If we understand our own minds, and the things that are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root" (199). From one perspective it seems dissonant to have Yeats's assertion of aesthetic autonomy emanate from his reflections on his most nationalist and political play; but, from another perspective, the resonance between aesthetic commitment and political commitment emerges.

In his 1909 diary, Yeats comments on the relationship between artistic production and nationalism, observing that "You cannot keep a nation alive where there are no national institutions to reverence, no national success to admire, without a model of it in the mind of the people. You can call it 'Cathleen ni Houlihan' or the 'Shan van Voght'" (*Autobiographies* 364). The role of the nationalist artist, Yeats implies, is to produce and disseminate such patriotic images, which alone can inspire action. Within this model, a play like *Cathleen ni Houlihan* becomes for Yeats a symbol of political struggle *and* a paradigm for art's role in the development of the nation-state, linking the individual aesthetic act with the collective body politic. While Yeats seems ultimately to have moved well beyond that brand of nationalist writing, which he associates most with the Young Ireland poets, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* remains very much of that nationalist milieu. As a result, the play looms over his work like a political original sin.

But more significantly than this instrumentalist evaluation of the play — which informs Yeats's concern for those "certain men" in "Man and the Echo" — the model of politics presented in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, which Yeats finds in Irish nationalism, is consistent with Yeats's own aestheticism. The particular urge that inspires Michael to abandon his family and to follow Cathleen in taking up arms against the British is not unlike the particular devotion of the poet to his work: both resist fidelity to abstract motives and respond instead to the immediacy of the emotional experience. Thus, in one sense, Michael's actions are not "political," rather, they are an individual impulse toward heroism — the political ramifications of such impulses are secondary, "because," we hear Yeats say, "all life has the same root" ("Samhain: 1905" 199). Indeed, Yeats remarks

pertinently in an earlier diary entry that it is precisely this resonance that drew him to nationalist politics: “The fascination of the national movement for me in my youth was, I think, that it seemed to be an image of a social ideal which could give fine life and fine art authority. One cannot love a nation struggling to realize itself without an idea of the nation as a whole being present in one's mind” (*Memoirs* 180).

Compounding this powerful coordination of aesthetic and political commitment/ sacrifice is the play’s biographical importance for Yeats, which creates a kind of parallel current of significance that flows in and out of the first: as much as the play is about Ireland as woman, it also about particular women in Ireland and close to Yeats. As a brief review of his biography shows, the play is linked to two of the most important women in Yeats’s life, and the two most captivated by politics — Maud Gonne and Constance Markiewicz. Maud Gonne, on the one hand, thought it among the best things Yeats had written, played the role of Cathleen, and, according to Yeats, seemed to infuse the play with its “weird power” (*Autobiographies* 332). Con Markievicz, on the other hand, imprisoned after the Easter Rising, reportedly read the play in her jail cell as “a sort of gospel” (cf. Cullingford, *Gender and History* 71). The play, then, is doubly significant in Yeats’s work: not only is it an exemplar of political art, but it is also a liaison between Yeats’s own enterprise and what he viewed as the corrosive radicalism typified by Gonne and Markiewicz. As such, the play becomes a convergence point for femininity, aesthetics, and politics in Yeats’s work. Specifically, it reveals the way in which the feminine becomes the central trope in Yeats’s elaboration of an aesthetic politics, precisely because of the irreconcilable difference between the representational figure of

the feminine that Yeats sought and the actual women that Yeats loved.

In other words, Yeats's obsession with the figure of the feminine — and with Gonne and Markievicz especially — can be traced to an irresolvable conflict between what he desires in actuality and what he approves of intellectually. As a result, throughout Yeats's work, both Markiewicz and Gonne are recurrently cast in a drama between the sibling rivalry of beauty and hatred, making the women act as emblems of politics' perverse influence on art. On the one hand, the woman as object of desire configures a politics of the particular wherein Petrarchan love can be seen as analogous to love of one's country (Laura becomes Dark Rosaleen). On the other hand, woman as political agent realizes for Yeats's a kind of nightmarish anti-art, in which the aesthetic object remains expressive, but expressive of something sinister. It was Yeats's apparent misfortune to have his own desire direct him to women who resisted their status as objects of desire in favor of political agency. Gonne and Markiewicz, problematically for Yeats, coordinate both desire and political agency, troubling the separation between politics and art. Examining two major works of Yeats's middle period — "Easter 1916" and "Prayer for My Daughter" — should make this conflict more apparent.

In "Easter 1916," among the most explicitly "public" and political poems in the oeuvre, Yeats's reflections on the Rising, and politics more generally, are suffused with a concurrent obsession with love, the feminine, aesthetics, and the role of the poet; indeed, in its coordination of these themes, the poem represents a microcosmic version of Yeats's work as a whole. Present in the poem, and offering a biographical substantiation of the poem's famous phrase "a terrible beauty is born," are the figures of both Gonne and

Markievicz. Coinciding as it does with Yeats's renewed hope of marriage to Maud Gonne (following her husband's death in the Rising), the poem is haunted by her shadow. As Declan Kiberd has observed, the poem is "a covert love-lyric, written to soften the heart of an unrelenting woman" (*Inventing Ireland* 214). Moreover, the "terrible beauty" that concenters the poem is deeply influenced by the example of Markiewicz, who is the standard-bearer of beauty in the poem. Dedicating seven lines to Markiewicz, more than he does to any of the other Easter rebels, Yeats suggests that perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Rising is the corrosive effects of politics on an ideal of feminine beauty, and, thus, art itself:

> That woman's days were spent
> In ignorant good-will,
> Her nights in argument
> Until her voice grew shrill.
> What voice more sweet than hers
> When, young and beautiful,
> She rode to harriers?
>
> (ll. 17-23)[5]

The fall from grace that the poem depicts is one couched in aesthetic terms. Markiewicz's political agency is condemned on the grounds that it has rendered "shrill" the Arnoldian sweetness she once embodied.

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[5] A similar sentiment is captured in "On A Political Prisoner," in which Yeats speculates: "Did she in touching that lone wing / Recall the years before her mind / Became a bitter, an abstract thing, / Her thought some popular enmity: / Blind and leader of the blind / Drinking the foul ditch where they lie?" (ll. 7-12).

Moreover, the phrase "terrible beauty" that punctuates the poem collapses the aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful. As a kind of conclusion to Yeats's searching ruminations in the poem, it renders the Rising itself as above all an aesthetic phenomenon — or, rather, a political phenomenon that can best be understood in aesthetic terms. Also, by grounding the ideal of beauty in Markievicz, Yeats makes the Rising into not only an aesthetic but also a personal event. The "terrible beauty" is that of Markievicz, and by extension Gonne, and more generally of a Medusa-like archetype enchanting hearts to a stone. Abstract political thinking, hatred, a misguided identification with the people — these all conspire to destroy the aristocratic beauty embodied by a Markiewicz or Gonne and replace it with blindness and shrill voices. One way to read the poem, then, is to view it as a brilliant attempt by Yeats to recover the particularity of an event that sought to frame itself in terms of universalist ideals like liberty, sovereignty, and equality. The immediate emotional experience that could reconcile aesthetic and political activity, which Yeats had articulated in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and "Samhain: 1905," was challenged by the Rising, and the figure of the female political agent became a symbol for this new dispensation.

Nevertheless, rather than abandon the figure of the feminine entirely, Yeats seeks in "Prayer for My Daughter" partly to recover and partly to revise his vision of the feminine, and by extension his understanding of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. Like "Easter 1916," the poem revolves around the ideas of beauty and hatred; but the poem attempts to move beyond the terrible beauty of "Easter 1916" to articulate a feminine ideal that can challenge what Yeats's own desire has privileged. As becomes

apparent in "Prayer for My Daughter," Yeats's own misguided desire makes him somewhat complicit in the new dispensation of post-Rising Ireland, and his own creative stagnancy mirrors that of the country.

> My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
> The sort of beauty that I have approved,
> Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
> Yet knows that to be choked with hate
> May well be of all evil chances chief.
>
> (ll. 49-54)

Tried on Yeats's own pulse of erotic desire, "Prayer for My Daughter" attempts to foster a new politico-aesthetic ideal, grounded "in custom and in ceremony" (l. 77), that revises the desirous model presented in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. As James Pethica points out, at stake in these poems is a debate between the values of Gonne and the values of Lady Gregory, or, to put it differently, between cultural nationalism and Ascendency values ("Lady Gregory and the Writing of 'Easter 1916'"). Notably, Yeats grounds his new ideal in a feminine figure that can circumvent the misleadings of his own desire — not only is the subject of the poem his own daughter, but she exists at this stage merely *in potentia*. Thinking through this prospective feminine model, Yeats posits a new basis for his political aesthetic in which ceremony and custom become the aesthetic ideal.

When viewed against this intertextual background, "Politics" suggests not simply an abstract romantic desire, or even a simple refutation of politics. Rather the poem belongs in a line of works — among Yeats's most important plays and poems — that

dramatize the tension between aesthetics and politics through the mediating figure of the feminine. The poem enacts its retrospective trajectory in two ways. First, by returning to the figure of the political woman, Yeats returns both to the muse of his early work and to the archetypal figure of the political woman, which preoccupies the work of his middle period — so preoccupied in its way with the politics of post-Rising Ireland, the "terrible beauty" dispensation. "That girl standing there" evokes that archetype, largely of Yeats's making, typified by a beautiful woman inhabiting the public sphere and being corrupted by its influence. Roy Foster's speculation that the poem referred to "a beautiful redheaded republican who used to sell newspapers at the Republican Congress meetings on O'Connell Street" (*The Arch-Poet* 623). supports this notion: "that girl standing there" could very well be a young Markiewicz or Gonne. Second, by returning to *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the poem emphasizes both the central theme of nationalist politics in Yeats's work and its profound imbrication with erotic desire. In the poem, Yeats casts himself as a Michael figure, prepared to hand over everything to the immediate emotional experience. Finally, as much as the poem evokes a nostalgia for youthful romantic desire, it is equally nostalgic for an older model of politics, in which aesthetic and political commitment are consonant. In a sense, the poem is a modern re-enactment of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* within the public sphere of contemporary political discourse; more generally, in "Politics," Yeats re-inscribes in the public sphere the politics of erotic desire. The refutation of one form of politics becomes the affirmation of another.

2. Burke and The Politics of Desire

This effort, however, to bridge aesthetics and politics through the figures of desire and the feminine, is not unique to Yeats. Rather it points back to the origins of modern aesthetics, even as it points forward to Northern Irish poetry of the Troubles. As such, the poem is illuminating not only in the context of Yeats's oeuvre, but also in the context of modern poetry more generally and in the context of Irish literature specifically. But to determine the nature of this significance we must begin by looking back to eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy in order to understand the way in which the figures of femininity coordinate the discourses of both aesthetics and nationalist politics around the values of the *particular*.

As Mary Poovey has shown in her account of the 18th-century breakup of moral philosophy into the now distinct fields of aesthetics and political economy, in the modern period, the female body became the ground upon which aesthetic taste ("providentially" programmed as male heterosexual desire) could be aligned with political and social stability ("Aesthetics and Political Economy" 84-91). As Poovey's essay reveals, Edmund Burke anticipates, as a kind of genealogical ancestor, much of Yeats's own formulations regarding poetry and politics. Burke's first major work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), distinguished itself from other aesthetic models of the time by its insistence on the preeminence of literature over philosophy as a methodological basis for a theory of art. That is, Burke sought to counter the abstracting drive of philosophy, which seemed to ill-suited to the particularity of the aesthetic experience. Terry Eagleton, in *The Aesthetic Ideology*, aptly

characterizes the problem that Burke sought to address:

> With the birth of the aesthetic, the sphere of art itself begins to suffer something of the abstraction and formalization characteristic of modern theory in general; yet the aesthetic is nevertheless thought to retain a charge of irreducible particularity, providing us with a kind of paradigm of what a non-alienated mode of cognition might look like. Aesthetics is thus always a contradictory, self-undoing sort of project, which in promoting the theoretical value of all its object risks emptying it of exactly that specificity or ineffability which was thought to rank among its most precious features. The very language which elevates art offers perpetually to undermine it. (2-3)

In other words, the philosophical method by which the aesthetic can be understood may actually be incompatible with its object of study. One is faced with the challenge of establishing a systematic understanding of art, whose virtue is its very resistance to systems

Burke's solution for dealing with aesthetic discourse's contradictory nature was to privilege the radical particularity of aesthetic experience as it is registered in the individual psychology of the auditor. It is not that Burke eschewed universalizing, but rather that he would begin with the particular and reason *a posteriori* toward more universal claims. In a summary of his 1747 speech at Trinity, Burke insists on the primacy of poetry over philosophy:

> That the provinces of Phill: & poetry are so different that they can never coincide, that Phill: to gain its ends addresses to the understanding, poetry to the

> imagination wch by pleasing it finds a nearer WAY to the heart, that the coldness of Philosophy hurts the imagination & taking away as much of its power must consequently lessen its effect, & so prejudice it. That such is the consequence of putting a rider on Pegasus that will prune his wings & incapacitate him from rising from the ground. (cf. Poovey 84)

Uncannily anticipating many twentieth-century assertions of the primacy of poetry over politics, Burke casts the matter of aesthetics in terms of liberty, imagination, and affective power. Ten years later, in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke pushes these ideas even further: beauty, sympathy, imitation, pain, terror — all providentially inhere in the human being in order to effect a just social order. In other words, there is an analogous relation between the artistic object and human society that is revealed in our private emotional experience: as an artist's power of imitation raises in us a feeling of satisfaction, so are we compelled to imitate others and thus be instructed in social behavior.[6] Philosophy, because of its abstraction, forfeits and even impairs the more "natural" operations of our aesthetic and social instincts. It is out of the private, particular realm of aesthetic experience, not of abstract philosophical contemplation, that right ideas of public justice emerge. Indeed, this fundamental belief of Burke's informs all of his work, finding its ideal subject in the French Revolution — which Burke depicted as a battle between universalist Enlightenment reason and the particular operations of human sympathy.

Perhaps as astonishing as the sheer ambition with which Burke pursues his analogy

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[6] "It is by imitation far more than by precept that we learn every thing; and what we learn thus we acquire not only more effectually, but more pleasantly. This forms our manners, our opinions, our lives. It is one of the strongest links of society; it is a species of mutual compliance which all men yield to each other, without constraint to themselves, and which is extremely flattering to all" (Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* 95).

between the aesthetic and the social, is the troubling foundation upon which he builds: like Yeats, Burke critically depends on the figures of sexual desire and the female body to drive his argument. As in Yeats, the two figures are keystones supporting the bridge between the aesthetic realm (characterized by emotions and sensations) and the political realm (characterized by manners and institutions). Defining the central concept of *beauty*, Burke founds his ruling analogy in the combination of desire and discrimination that human sexual desire — crucially that of a man toward a woman — seems to instantiate. According to Burke, the human being is defined by its ability to rise above mere animal lust to the more social feeling of love:

> Man, who is a creature adapted to a greater variety and intricacy of relation [than mere animals], connects with the general passion, the idea of some *social* qualities, which direct and heighten the appetite which he has in common with all other animals; [...] The object therefore of this mixed passion which we call love, is the *beauty* of the *sex*. Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal *beauty*. I call beauty a social quality; for where women and men […] give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them […] they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons. (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 89)

Burke's argument may be mapped as follows. First, man is defined as a species by his ability to discriminate in regards to sexual partners, and this discrimination is actuated by the presence of something called *beauty*. But, second, while the ability to recognize beauty is universal to all men, the actual *experience* of beauty is always particular. And it

is, in fact, in the particularity of the experience that its fundamental humanness lies, that allows it to surpass "the common law of nature." Thirdly, beauty is a *social* quality, not merely aesthetic: unlike lust, beauty inspires social behavior — "sentiments of tenderness and affection." As startling as Burke's argument may be it is not unlike Platonic notions of the ladder of love in its extrapolation of moral virtue from sexual desire. But where the Platonic model moves steadily from the particular to the universal, Burke insists on particularity as the *sine qua non* of judgment, beauty, and moral virtue — of humanness itself.

Moreover, humanness and beauty for Burke — and the beneficial convergence of aesthetic experience and social order — depends on a hierarchy of desire. Because Burke aligns the sublime with masculine energy and beauty with the feminine, the ameliorative operation of beauty depends on the woman's position as aesthetic object and on the man's position as viewer. The critical importance of this distinction becomes apparent when its opposite is imagined and sublime masculine energy (defined by terror, pain, and self-preservation) becomes the regulative ideal of society, producing what was so terrifying to Burke in the example of the French Revolution: "the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women" (*Reflections* 72).

As Mary Poovey argues, this founding of aesthetics and social order in a gendered hierarchy of desire exposes a more general model of power relations:

> Deriving preference from sexed beauty renders a man's relation to an aestheticized reading of sex and an eroticized reading of difference the basis for

> social distinctions and discrimination. […] Burke's use of (hetero)sexual relations to organize difference and judgment therefore restores the body to the center of desire but not simply as a referent or anchor of need. Instead, the sexed body and its aestheticized excess — beauty — becomes the occasion and mandate for differentiation, for judgment — indeed, for meaning itself. (89-90)

In other words, by casting human nature in terms of man's aesthetic evaluation of (or desire for) women, man's role as judging subject and the woman's role as judged object are naturalized. Moreover, this "natural" hierarchy then becomes a synecdochal vindication of social hierarchy more generally, such that "the abused shape of the vilest of women" or the innocent "voice [grown] shrill," suggests innumerable corruptions: "a terrible beauty is born." What this genealogy reveals is that romantic desire (specifically male romantic desire for the female) is not the opposite of political processes, nor is it merely aesthetic — rather it is the very figure that is expected to bridge the aesthetic with the political.

What Yeats's "Politics" reveals then is a tension that runs through all of Yeats's work between the figurative importance of women as desired object — as the link between art and social order — and the actual importance of women — such as Markiewicz or Gonne — who trouble the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful by their participation in radical politics. When James Pethica notes the difficulty of determining "whether Yeats is deliberately poking fun at himself for his inability to break truly free of 'old themes,' or indeed simply questing for desire at his last" (*Last Poems* xxxvi), he may

be even more right than he intends. Yeats is in fact doing both: he is returning to the old themes of desire and politics. And the *desire* for which he is questing is one that invokes a different politics than the "numbing" rhetoric of modern politics (*Letters on Poetry* 180). The desire that Yeats seeks is the desire that unifies the poet's dedication to his art and the young Michael's dedication to Cathleen ni Houlihan — that unifies the aesthete and the revolutionary. It is the desire for the Nation as woman. "We Irish," Yeats asserted in his Nobel acceptance speech, "had been, so long as our nation had intellect enough to shape anything of itself, good lovers of women, but had never served any abstract cause, except the one, and that we personified by a woman" ("The Bounty of Sweden" 400).

In this sense, the politics of "Politics" is both extremist and conservative — and, as such, shares much with the militant sectarian ideologies of the latter half of the century (and not only those in Ireland). On the one hand, by invoking the ideal of 1798 and the feminized Nation — as elaborated in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* — Yeats looks nostalgically on an extremist politics rooted in the figure of martyrdom. On the other hand, that same ideal endorses a conservative politics that intends not to destroy a social order but rather to restore it. A cursory review of Yeats's politics at this time would readily yield evidence of this position. But what is revealed by the genealogical connection between Yeats and Burke is that Yeats's position is not as idiosyncratic as we would like to think. Rather this brand of politics is predicted by the discourse of modern aesthetics — as well as by the tropes of Irish nationalism. Relying on the figure of the desired woman to align aesthetic order with social hierarchy, Yeats's "Politics" may be read not only as a

crystallization of his politics in particular, but also as a precipitate of the modern aesthetic ideology in general, exposing the complicated politics of romantic desire.

3. Lovers Quarreling: The Politics of Longley's Love Poetry

"Love poetry," Michael Longley has asserted, "is at the core of the enterprise — the hub of the wheel from which the other preoccupations radiate like spokes. [...] I wouldn't mind being remembered as a love poet, a sexagenarian love poet" (AllenRandolph, "Interview" 294). If Michael Longley is above all a love poet, he is a love poet of the rarest kind. Unlike the precedents of the Elizabethan sonneteers, the Metaphysical or Cavalier poets, or even Yeats, the love at the center of Longley's work is love requited. His is a poetry of conjugal love. As early even as 1969 in "No Continuing City," one can witness Longley dramatizing his dissociation with both the Petrachan and the Cavalier models of love: "It is time for me to recognise / This new dimension, my last girl" (ll. 2-3). And, notably, the poem that stands at the head of Longley's work, is "Epithalamion," a poem celebrating marriage. Accordingly, love in Longley's work becomes less an engine for transcendence — the Petrarchan sonneteer ascending to spiritual contemplation — and more a site for anatomizing the complexities of human relationships.

Moreover, Longley's emphasis on conjugal love coordinates it with another overriding concern in his work: the emphasis on home. As Peter McDonald observes in "Michael Longley's Homes," love poetry "expands to fill, not only the district, but the

entire range of concerns the poet comprehends. As the most obvious kind of intimacy at work in the situation of the home, love seems to mark an area of the utterly private, and sexuality itself appears to be a realm which it is difficult for an 'outside' world to disturb" (128). Indeed, in Longley's early work, love is recurrently framed in terms of the domestic space — whether the room that the lovers of "Epithalamion" "inhabit so delightfully" (l. 8), or, more surreal, the self as home: "To my girl, my bride, my wife-to-be" (l. 51), the speaker of "No Continuing City" advises "be sure of finding room in me / (I embody bed and breakfast) — / To eat and drink me out of house and home" (ll. 54-6). And even when the conjugal lovers stray into the less familiar territory of western Ireland, love becomes a means of imprinting the landscape with "landmarks" and making a "home from home" ("The West" l. 10):

> Though the townland's all ears, all eyes
> To decipher our movements, she and I
> Appear on the scene at the oddest times:
> We follow the footprints of animals,
>
> Then vanish into the old wives' tales
> Leaving behind us landmarks to be named
> After our episodes, and the mushrooms
> That cluster where we happen to lie.
>
> ("In Mayo" ll. 9-16)

As these poems suggest, for the poet so often defined by his between-ness, conjugal love

becomes a vehicle for home-making.[7]

Indeed, the concurrence of "love" and "home" in Longley's poetry should not came as a surprise, as both share a similar figurative operation in concentering the private and the public. "Talk of 'home,'" Peter McDonald has noted, "amounts often to a statement arising from intimacy: to say that a place is 'home' is to imprint the place with a personal meaning for the purposes of some more public kind of communication" ("Michael Longley's Homes" 113). In other words, home is conceptually both private and public; it allows one, through an act of public naming, to lay claim to a place — to stake out a private space within the public sphere. The home, then, is an exemplum of the codependency of the public and the private (which, of course, makes it especially suggestive as a site for addressing the internecine violence of the Troubles). Moreover, at the level of discourse, home, like love, enjoys an ambiguity that allows it to signify an infinite plurality of particular "homes," while also retaining a universal resonance.

But the cultural history of twentieth-century Ireland suggests another possibility: as conjugal love can be a vehicle for home-making, so can the home be a vehicle for nation-making. Indeed, "home," because of its ability to coordinate the private and the public, is the most politically impressionable of concepts. "The Ireland that we dreamed of," Eamon de Valera famously intoned, is a country "bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose

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[7] This in-between-ness emerges as a motif in Longley's work. "From an early age," Longley notes, "I drifted between Englishness and Irishness, between town and country, between the Lisburn Road with its shops and cinemas and the River Lagan with its beech woods and meadows where I fell in love with wild birds and wild flowers. I am still drifting. Perhaps a certain indeterminacy keeps me impressionable" (AllenRandolph, "Interview" 294.

firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age" ("The Ireland We Dreamed Of"). As de Valera's speech exemplifies, the home becomes both a way of domesticating national politics and a way of imprinting on the domestic space a narrative of national meaning. In this space, then, conjugal love, as the center of the home, and the nation by extension, is deeply marked with political significance. Although Longley's explicitly erotic poetry, for example, is a far cry from de Valera, it does not entirely transcend these political inflections of both home and conjugal love. On the contrary, Longley's work richly exploits these resonances, both in terms of his poetry and his own biography, in order to fashion from the love lyric a supple instrument for addressing the Troubles.

Amplifying the powerful resonances of home in Longley's poetry, is the prevailing critical narrative depicting Longley as the poet that stayed home, remaining in Belfast throughout the Troubles. As many critics are quick to point out, although Longley, born to English parents, lacks the strong identification with place afforded poets like Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon, he alone can be said to have "survived," as two critics put it, "the dangerous and difficult decades" in Belfast (AllenRandolph and Archibald 189). Similarly, Eamonn Hughes observes in his 2001 *Fortnight* profile, that Longley writes with "something which few other writers of Longley's generation (and even fewer academics) share," namely, "the concern of the citizen." That is, "Longley has remained in Belfast, has, to borrow from his friend Derek Mahon, lived it bomb by bomb" (29). But beyond this authorizing narrative, the "home" in Longley's poetry — whether the "home from home" in County Mayo or the domestic space of the familial home — is also shaped by Belfast. "Home is Belfast. Belfast is home," Longley tells Dermot Healy in response to his question "Where is home for you?" Longley continues: "I love the place.

The city, the hills around it, County Down, County Antrim. My home from home is in Mayo. But home is Belfast" ("An Interview" 559).

This equation of home and Belfast sheds light on the regularity with which Longley, in his more explicitly Troubles-oriented poetry, situates violence in the domestic space. For example, in early poems like "Kindertotenlieder" or "Wounds," violence is, in a sense, estranged by its juxtaposition with the familiarity of the home. "There can be no songs," Longley writes against the poem's allusion to Mahler's song cycle, "for the children who have become / My unrestricted tenants, fingerprints / Everywhere, teethmarks on this and that" ("Kindertotenlieder" ll. 1, 4-6). More memorable perhaps is the scene of the domestic day-to-day into which the "shivering boy" (l. 30) enters in "Wounds" — "Before they could turn the television down / Or tidy away the supper dishes" (ll. 31-2) — or the civil servant "preparing an Ulster Fry for breakfast / When someone walked into the kitchen and shot him" ("Wreaths" ll. 1-2). Even in the later work like "The Butchers," his translation of Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors, the violence is cast in the context of the home.

On one level, this domestication of violence serves as a counterpoint to Longley's interest in the war poets and his own father's experience in the Great War — that is, unlike the Great War, the Theater of the Troubles is without footlights. But on another level, by casting the Troubles as a kind of domestic violence, Longley enables a continuity between his work as a love poet and his responsibilities as a citizen. Belfast, as Longley claims, is home and the Troubles represent a house divided.

What emerges clearly from even a cursory consideration of Longley's poetry is a

chain of association between love, home, and Belfast, in which each is extended and complicated by the others: Longley's love poetry tends to ripple outward into the wider context of Troubles Ireland, while Longley's political poetry tends to pull inward around images of erotic reconciliation. Longley's poem "The Linen Industry"—which he has called one of his best love poems (Murphy, "Michael Longley" 123)—partakes richly of this constellation. Directly following "On Mweelrea" ("I had made myself the worried shepherd […] / Of the sheep that grazed your maidenhair" (ll. 13, 16)), the poem initially resembles one of Longley's numerous erotic forays in County Mayo: "Pulling up flax after the blue flowers have fallen / And laying out handfuls in the peaty water" (ll. 1-2). But the poem soon travels imaginatively eastward and back to Belfast: "We become a part of the linen industry / And follow its processes to the grubby town / Where fields are compacted into window-boxes" (ll. 5-7). As the poem reveals, the figure of linen, in all its dimensions (industrial, local, useful, ornamental), becomes a way for Longley to merge his primary poetic concerns: the west of Ireland, the natural world, conjugal and erotic love, and Belfast. And part of what makes the poem so successful is its ability to modulate seamlessly between the private and the public, the spontaneous and the ceremonial:

> What's passion but a battering of stubborn stalks,
> Then a gentle combing out of fibres like hair
> And a weaving of these into christening robes,
> Into garments for a marriage or funeral?
>
> (ll. 13-16)

Moving from the fields to the attic bed to the "grubby town" (l. 6), the poem expands to

encompass a wide range of human experience, drawing into its orbit the communal rituals of birth, marriage, and death while replicating the microcosm/macrocosm inversion used to such effect in "Epithalamion." Accordingly, the microcosm of conjugal love serves to relieve the "grubby" macrocosm of Belfast and to replant the pastoral in the urban space: "the bow on your bodice / A butterfly attending the embroidered flowers" (ll. 23-4). "The Linen Industry," then, offers a kind of poetic urban renewal, made more poignant by the poem's resonance with the elegy for the murdered linen workers in the same volume.

Admittedly, such a reading of "The Linen Industry" may strike some as a spoiling of the lovers' bed. But it illustrates well the way in which even an ostensibly private love poem draws significance from its links to the public context of Troubles Belfast. This interconnectedness between the private and the public in the poem is revealed in its intertextual relation with other poems in *The Echo Gate* (1979). An obvious intertext is the elegy "The Linen Workers," but also the poem's imagery of harvesting, which runs throughout the volume, links it with "Sulpicia," an envisioning of an erotic seduction of Mars.

> Were he to hover above me like a bird of prey
> I would lay my body out, his little country,
> Fields smelling of flowers, flowers in the hedgerow —
> And then I would put on an overcoat of snow.
>
> (ll. 5-8)

Much like Longley's earlier poem "Altera Cithera" — which asserts the ability of love poetry to bring all "to the ground / Like lovers" (ll. 20-1) — "Sulpicia" personifies the tension in Longley's work between love poetry and war poetry. Recalling the lovers in

"The Linen Industry" — "Draped with material turning white in the sun / As though snow reluctant to melt were our attire" (ll. 11-12) — and the poem's final image of the "butterfly attending the embroidered flowers" (l. 24), "Sulpicia" offers an interpretive key to "The Linen Industry" and Longley's love poetry more generally, in which political reconciliation (at a figurative level) is accomplished through the operations of erotic desire.

But while Longley's love poetry moves out from a private center of intimacy, Longley's political poetry tends to work in the opposite direction, figuratively undressing violence of its pomp and circumstance. As he puts it in "Altera Cithera," Longley aims at "bringing to the ground / Like lovers Caesar, / Soldiers, politicians / And all the dreary / Epics of the muscle-bound" (ll. 20-4). Expressed in terms of literary genre, Longley's strategy is to lyricize the epic, to privatize the public.

Perhaps the poem most paradigmatic of Longley's lyrical strategy is "Peace," written at the request of The Peace People and published in *The Echo Gate*. Boldly titled "Peace," the poem begins by undercutting its own importance. Reflecting the tone of its source, Tibullus's satire 1.10, the poem's chatty self-interested narrator brilliantly plays the fool to the high-flown rhetoric of both war and peace. Peppering the poem with modern diction, Longley seems to intermittently inhabit the speaker:

> I would like to have been alive in the good old days
> Before the horrors of modern warfare and warcries
> Stepping up my pulse rate. Alas, as things turn out
> I've been press-ganged into service, and for all I know
> Someone's polishing a spear with my number on it.

God of my Father's, look after me like a child!

(ll. 11-16)

As this passage demonstrates, much of the poem's satirical power derives from its speaker, whose reasons for opposing war are no more noble than self-preservation: "Someone else can slaughter enemy commanders / And, over a drink, rehearse with me his memoirs" (ll. 28-9). Moreover, in place of epic heroism, the poem offers an image of de Valeran domestic bliss, from which the rest of the poem emanates:

How much nicer to have a family and let
Lazy old age catch up on you in your retirement,
You keeping track of the sheep, your son of the lambs,
While the woman of the house puts on the kettle.

(ll. 37-40)

Having in its final stanzas shifted imaginative focus to the private realm of the home, the poem enters the realm of Longley's strengths. The digressive narrator, trusting the path of his reflection, moves easily from a bucolic image of a laborer drunkenly trundling home with wife and children to a scene of domestic violence: "Then, if there are skirmishes, guerrilla tactics, / It's only lover's quarreling" (ll. 51-2). Beginning with an everyman first-person narrator and moving to the realm of the home, the poem steadily draws itself inward, away from its public origins. Indeed, the poem seems dedicated to frustrating any drift toward the rhetoric of public importance. By the end of the poem the domestic space has fully eclipsed the public subject of war, and the speaker's conclusion comes as a response to the question of domestic rather than general violence:

But punch-ups,

Physical violence, are out: you might as well
Pack your kit-bag, goose-step a thousand miles away
From the female sex. As for me, I want a woman
To come and fondle my ears of wheat and let apples
Overflow between her breasts. I shall call her Peace.

(ll. 65-70)

Beginning with the broad abstraction of "peace," the poem at its close has turned inside-out the expectations of public statement and peace arrives like a new discovery: "I shall call her Peace." In this way, the poem seeks to reclaim and re-particularize the language of abstract political rhetoric. Personifying peace, as the poem does, may be as good a description of Longley's political poetry as any. As such, the poem epitomizes Longley's strategy of privatizing the public by exploiting the analogical drift between home and the nation.

But while the poem puts to good use the links between conjugal love, the home, and Belfast developed in Longley's love poetry, it also demonstrates the politics of desire so central to modern aesthetics. By not only personifying but also eroticizing peace as a voluptuous woman, the poem posits desire as a figure of social cohesion. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews has suggested that the poem "revises the traditional image of Irish woman as the revolutionary muse, Kathleen ni Houlihan, presenting instead a woman who is 'Peace personified,' associated with nature's beauty and bounty" ("Conflict, Violence" 89). Kennedy-Andrews is correct to a degree, but Longley as much as he revises revolutionary desire also preserves the unilateral trajectory of male heterosexual desire so central to Burke's aesthetic theory. As such, insofar as the poem challenges

political violence it also eschews any critique of the status quo. This is not to fault the poem — indeed much of the poem's force derives from the narrator's retiring quietism — but rather to reveal its genealogical links with a tradition of an anti-revolutionary conservative aesthetics.

Perhaps even more interesting in respect to the political uses of erotic desire is Longley's "Ceasefire." Published in *The Irish Times* two days after the IRA's 1994 "cessation," the poem has become one of the most famous of the Troubles. The poem, which translates an episode from *The Illiad* in which Priam pleads with Achilles for the return of Hector's body, instantiates Longley's lyrical deconstruction of the epic. And while the poem employs Longley's trademark eroticism and domesticity, it diverges from his other work by offering a homoerotic figure of reconciliation.

> When they had eaten together, it pleased them both
> To stare at each other's beauty as lovers might —
> Achilles built like a god, Priam good-looking still.
>
> (ll. 9-11)

It is tempting to savor this scene as a radical departure from the hetero-erotics of Burkean aesthetics, but the departure is, in a sense, never consummated: while the stare is that of "lovers" the interaction remains platonic. Indeed, what may be remarkable about the poem is not so much its homoeroticism but its assertion of an almost purely *aesthetic* desire. Unlike the overflowing physical bounty of Peace personified, the beauty of Priam and Achilles remains distant and purely visual. Accordingly, whereas the eroticism of Longley's earlier poems sought to expose violence against the backdrop of the domestic intimacy, "Ceasefire" proposes a more public model of reconciliation in which the erotic

union is replaced by a sentimental union, an intercourse of sympathy:

> Put in mind of his own father and moved to tears
> Achilles took him by the hand and pushed the old king
> Gently away, but Priam curled up at his feet and
> Wept with him until their sadness filled the building.
>
> (ll. 1-4)

Finally, the poem, in its emphasis on an aesthetics of sympathy, points toward a different model for reading poetry of the Troubles. Indeed, the poem coordinates multiple paradigms of reading: Longley's reading of Homer, our reading of Longley, and Achilles' reading of Priam. As such, the poem's first line — "Put in mind of his own father and moved to tears" — may serve as motto for all three of these paradigms, suggesting a kind of parallelism between the sympathy depicted within the poem, enacted by the writer, and experienced by the reader. While the erotic reconciliation may serve as a microcosmic imagining of peace, the sympathetic reconciliation, with its roots in sentimental literature, offers a means of bridging the private realm of feeling with the public realm of politics. Although the poem grows out of Longley's love poetry and its coordination of conjugal love, the home, and Troubles Belfast, it offers a very different model of intersubjectivity. The love poem, in its dependence on the figure of privacy, invites aestheticist readings. The reader of the love poem, cast as a kind of interpretive "third wheel," is unable to confirm or deny the radical singularity of the lovers' experience, and so feels obliged to grant the poem its aesthetic objectivity. The sentimental poem on the other hand incorporates the reader into a community of feeling for which the poem is the renewable catalyst. It should be stressed, however, that the

community of feeling instantiated by the sentimental text is not utopian. Indeed, it has its own rich and complicated politics.

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