

SEAMUS HEANEY – THE POET AND HIS TRADITION

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Abstract. *This paper explores the influence that the English literary tradition has had on the poetry of Seamus Heaney, notably the work of William Wordsworth. That Heaney epitomizes the dilemma of the modern poet is evident from the tension between the two poetic modes that inform his writing, the "masculine" and the "feminine" mode respectively, or the poetry of the "makers" and "takers." Heaney oscillates between these poetic modes as he struggles to come to terms with his poetic predecessors – William Wordsworth, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce. He strives to reconcile the need to be true to his own poetic voice, to work from within the realm of his imagination, and the pressure imposed from without to deal with the social or political predicaments of our age. This paper aims to show the presence and relevance of the Wordsworthian tradition in Heaney's work, by focusing on those aspects of Wordsworth's poetry which Heaney has adopted or assimilated into his work, namely the "spots of time," or the function of memory, the visionary or transcendental aspect of poetry, the act of poetic creation, the fidelity to the simple and commonplace, and nature and the traditional or rural way of life as poetic subjects, to name the most obvious.*

Seamus Heaney, the contemporary Irish poet, epitomizes the dilemma of the modern poet. In his collection of essays, *Preoccupations*, Heaney embarks on a search for answers to some fundamental questions regarding the poet: How should a poet live and write? What is his relationship to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world?

As far as literary tradition is concerned, Heaney admits that he has inherited a "two-humped" tradition, the Gaelic tradition of Ireland and the literary tradition of England. Among the most important precursors that Heaney has accommodated into his work are William Wordsworth, Patrick Kavanagh, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce. They compose two kinds of poetry which Heaney, in his essay, *The Makings of a Music*, distinguishes as:

... *les vers donnés* as against *les vers calculés*; the poetry of chance and trance as against the poetry of resistance and perseverance; the poetry of 'sinking' or the poetry of 'coming up against'; the instinctual or the rational; the feminine or the masculine; the 'artisan' or the 'architectonic'; the epiphanic or the crafted; the 'ooze' of poetry or its 'spur of flame'; the 'lived, illiterate and unconscious' or the 'learned, literate and conscious'; the takers (Wordsworth, D.H. Lawrence, Keats, Patrick Kavanagh) and the makers (Yeats, Hopkins, Jonson, Lowell, John Montague, John Hewitt); poets who sense, surrender, dive, divine, receive and coax, or poets who command, plot, assert, labour and force.¹

This division is based on the two different ways of accessing the unconscious, as well as the poet's experience in general. He terms the first type "the masculine mode," the intellectual mastery of material, and the other "the feminine mode," which is a passive poetic posture that surrenders to experience. Heaney elaborates on this division in his essay on Gerard Manley Hopkins.

In the masculine mode, the language functions as a form of address, of assertion or command, and the poetic effort has to do with conscious quelling and control of the materials, a labour of shaping; words are not music before they are anything else, nor are they drowsy from their slumber in the unconscious, but athletic, capable, displaying the muscle of sense. Whereas in the feminine mode the language functions more as location than as address, and the poetic effort is not so much a labour of design as it is an act of divination and revelation; words in the feminine mode behave with the lover's come-hither instead of the athlete's display, they constitute a poetry that is delicious as texture before it is recognized as architectonic.²

Heaney pits the two poetic modes, as exemplified by Wordsworth and Yeats, against each other in the essay *The Makings of a Music*. The poet's response to his "donné," this haunting which occurs to all poets as an alertness, a hankering, a readiness, determines the quality of the music in the finished poem. If the poet surrenders to it, allows himself to be carried by its initial rhythmic suggestiveness, to become somnambulist after its invitations, the music will be like that of Wordsworth; hypnotic, trance-like or mesmerizing. If he, on the other hand, seeks to discipline or harness its energies, the music will be Yeatsian; affirmative, seeking to master rather than to mesmerize the ear. The poetic music is significantly determined by the poet's assimilation of the literary tradition, as well as by his "instinctual ballast" – his sensory perception and selection of details of the world around him and his responsiveness to it at a pre-verbal or unconscious level.

It is this trance-like state that Heaney admires in Wordsworth's poetry, which occurs when the verse has carried the reader forward and onward to a point where line by line he does not proceed but hangs in a kind of suspended motion, sustained by the beat of the verse. This generation of trance, of a momentary vision or profound insight, can be seen, for example, in "The Ruined Cottage," in which the cumulative movement of the Pedlar's lines does not so much move the narrative forward as intensify the lingering meditation. And in this entranced state, the casual concerns of the mind, the proper sorrow for the wounded life of Margaret imaged in the overgrown cottage garden, such things are al-

¹ Blake Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, [London: Methuen & Co., 1982], pp. 53-54.

² Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations – Selected Prose 1968-1978*, [London: Faber & Faber, 1980], p. 88.

laid by apprehension of a longer, deeper tranquility. Heaney cites "A slumber did my spirit seal," as well as the ice-skating passage in *The Prelude* for its overall musical effect, its *cheerfulness*, achieved by the poet's being attuned not only to his inner being but also to his natural surroundings as he, like a tuning-fork, registers the voice of natural objects and phenomena. The poet's receptiveness depends not only on his capacity to listen and observe but also on his ability to retain or absorb certain sense-impressions. Thus the murmur of the river blended with his nurse's song, sent a voice into his dreams which composed the poet's thoughts "among the fretful dwellings of mankind" by giving him "a knowledge... of the calm/Which Nature breathes among the fields and groves." The child is here depicted as a stilled consciousness, a living tuning-fork planted between wood and hill. Such clusters of sound and image prefigured moments which were definitive in his life as a poet and which found definition in his distinctive music. Wordsworth's great strength and originality as a writer, in Heaney's view, came first of all from his trusting the validity of his experience, and finding a proper voice for its articulation.

Heaney, in the sequence entitled 'Glanmore Sonnets' associates his art with the poetic tradition of 'takers.

Glanmore Sonnets (II)

Sensings, mountings from the hiding places,
 Words entering almost the sense of touch,
 Ferreting themselves out of their dark hutch –
 'These things are not secrets but mysteries,'
 Oisín Kelly told me years ago
 In Belfast, hankering after stone
 That connived with the chisel, as if the grain
 Remembered what the mallet tapped to know.
 Then I landed in the hedge-school of Glanmore
 And from the backs of ditches hoped to raise
 A voice caught back off slug-horn and slow chanter
 That might continue, hold, dispel, appease:
 Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground,
 Each verse returning like the plough turned round.³

Glanmore is an estate in County Wicklow, in the Republic of Ireland, where Heaney withdrew in 1972 after the Troubles in Ulster had started taking their toll. The uncomplicated rural life on this estate, a place renowned for the richness and variety of scenery, is compared to 'a hedge-school,' where the poet will be able to develop and perfect his utterance. The purpose of this schooling is to attain a kind of poetry which will be able to 'appease' passions and 'dispel' hatred; its task is not only to 'hold' and 'continue' a certain poetic tradition, but also to preserve basic human values.

The first line already reveals that "Glanmore Sonnets" are to a great degree a homage to Wordsworth: "the hiding places" from which the poet's inspiration emerges, allude to "the hiding places of power" in *The Prelude*:

The hiding places of my power
 Seem open; I approach, and then they close;

³ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* [London: Faber & Faber, 1990], p. 110.

I see by glimpses now; when age comes on,
 May scarcely see at all, and I would give,
 While yet we may, as far as words can give,
 A substance and a life to what I feel:
 I would enshrine the spirit of the past
 For future restoration.⁴

Finding a stronghold in nature and "the hiding places" of one's inner self is characteristic of both poets. Anne Stevenson, looking at Heaney's Romanticism, writes:

I assume we can agree without prejudice that Heaney... could not and would not have written quite as he has, had it not been for the example of Wordsworth (and only *after* Wordsworth, Yeats, Joyce and Patrick Kavanagh). For in Wordsworth we have the first instance in Britain of a poet in retreat from a corrupting society and a doubtful religion, digging in and fortifying the bastions of his own psyche. The poet as hero appears Romantically, of course, in Goethe and Byron; yet it is in Wordsworth that his *retreat* is most in evidence, his withdrawal from the world into a sacred area of personal sensitivity; opposing to the world not only Nature... but *in* Nature, a subjective, unrational self.⁵

In his book *the Redress of Poetry*, Heaney refers to his essay "Place and Displacement" in which he reflects on what the division and bilocation entailed for the Northern Irish writer and cites Wordsworth as an English literary parallel which nicely illuminated the typical case of the poet from the minority in Ulster. When England declared war on Revolutionary France in 1791, the young Wordsworth

suffered a dislocation which corresponded to much that still happens in the Irish situation. Here was this revolutionary sympathizer whose political ideals were French but whose nation was England, caught upon the horns of a dilemma. Wordsworth dramatizes the poetic predicament by recollecting the sense of alienation and traitorous disaffection which he experienced in church during prayers for the success of the English armies. No shock before or since, Wordsworth says, no blow administered to what he calls his moral nature equalled the disorienting force of this sudden fissure that had opened in his loyalties. And, of course, the poem in which Wordsworth reports the trauma is the very poem whose composition was part of the process of healing the trauma. *The Prelude* is about a conscious coming together through the effort of articulating its conflict and crisis. And the same could be said of much poetry from Northern Ireland.⁶

Centrally placed in this collection, *Field Work* (1979), the "Glanmore Sonnets" sequence shows Heaney's most obvious attempt to locate himself in the Wicklow landscape and to acknowledge his indebtedness to the English lyric tradition. The references to

⁴ Thomas Hutchinson, ed. *William Wordsworth -Complete Poetical Works* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936], p. 578.

⁵ Anne Stevenson, "Stations: Seamus Heaney and the Sacred Sense of the Sensitive Self" (Tony Curtis, ed., *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, [Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1994], pp. 47- 48.

⁶ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* [London: Faber & Faber, 1995], p. 189.

Wordsworth and Wyatt, the choice of a sonnet sequence itself, these are clear expressions of a need to draw on the strengths of mainstream English literature. That comparison with "Dorothy and William" in sonnet III is the most direct indication that the move to Eire may occasion a new phase in his writing. There is a sense of refreshment in nature, a practical realization of Wordsworthian aesthetics: "Now the good life could be to cross a field/And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe/Of ploughs. My lea is deeply tilled." (I, ll.6-8) Poetry there is an enactment of rural toil, "Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground,/Each verse returning like a plough turned round." (II, ll. 13-14)

The real action of "Glanmore sonnets" is contemplative, drawing from the present a recollected scene from the past. Memory here has a restorative function, reminding us of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." A Wordsworthian trust in the natural world, first in its attention to rural detail – "The head /Of a horse swirled back from a gate," "small buds shoot and flourish in the hush," "a new moon glimpsed through tangled glass" – and then in its recollection of simple pleasure connected with life in the country – sleeping out under the stars, fishing, observing birds – leads to hope of restoration.

Heaney's fidelity to the familiar, however, does not allow him to misrepresent for the sake of an idea. While nature does provide the desired healing – "outside a restling and twig-combing breeze/Refreshes and relents" (III, ll. 13-14) – it also threatens, as in sonnet 8 when a storm drives the poet indoors, or in sonnet 9, when life outside the kitchen window appears ominous, inspiring a pang of conscience. This is no easy pastoral idyll for there are constant threats from without: "outside the kitchen a black rat /sways on the briar like infected fruit" (IX, ll. 1-2). What is primarily celebrated in these sonnets is not so much an escape, but, rather, a respite from the Ulster conflict.

These sonnets show Heaney's indebtedness to Wordsworth because Heaney, in Terry Gifford's view, has built upon Wordsworth's allegorical pastoral poetry to develop a poetry that thinks through images of nature as a means to explore love, politics and his role as a writer.⁷ What Heaney admired in Wordsworth was the fact that he "was the first man to articulate the nature that becomes available to the feelings through dwelling in one dear perpetual place."⁸

Heaney's first collection of poems, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) exhibits the influence of William Wordsworth, Patrick Kavanagh and Ted Hughes among others and invokes the atmosphere and experiences of his childhood at Mossbawn in County Derry in a language of great sensuous richness and directness, which Heaney calls "a Keatsian woolly line."⁹ Digging potatoes and turf, picking blackberries, churning butter and ploughing are all rendered in poems which weave "a strong gauze of sound" around their occasions. The most obvious characteristics of this sound are its onomatopoeic and alliterative effects. The onomatopoeia – "the squelch and slap/Of soggy peat" in "Digging," "the plash and gurgle of the sour-breathed milk,/the pat and slap of small spades on wet lumps" in "Churning Day" – has been termed by Philip Hobsbaum as "Heaneyspeak ... the snap-and-crackle-and-pop of diction."¹⁰

Some of the central poems in this collection maintain a certain allegiance to Wordsworth. "Death of a Naturalist" itself, "The Barn" and "Blackberry-Picking" evoke such

⁷ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* [London: Routledge, 1999], p. 97.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁹ Neil Corcoran, *A Student's Guide to Seamus Heaney* [London: Faber & Faber, 1986], p. 153.

¹⁰ Corcoran, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

passages as the boat-stealing scene in Book I of *The Prelude*, and the separate poem "Nutting." These are poems in which an enlargement of consciousness is enacted in some interchange between mind and nature. In the passage from *The Prelude*, the stealing of the poet – "an act of stealth/A troubled pleasure" – is repaid by the child's terror of a huge cliff which "As if with voluntary power instinct," seems to stride after him, leaving its aftermath in his imagination when

... huge and mighty forms, that do not live
like living men, moved through my mind
By day, and were the trouble to my dreams.¹¹

In "Nutting," the child's act of hostility towards nature, the destruction of a hazel copse, is succeeded by guilt and remorse. These moments in Wordsworth are part of the process of Nature's education of the poet, moments in which the child's knowledge of reality is extended. In Heaney's poem "The Barn" enforces a similar knowledge when it moves, towards its close, "Over the rafters of sleep," into a nightmarishly specific instance of "huge and mighty forms": "I lay face down to shun the fear above/The two-legged sacks moved in like great blind rats."¹² Both "Death of a Naturalist" and "Blueberry-Picking" come to an end with explicit statements of the new knowledge acquired during the incidents they describe. At the end of "Death of a Naturalist," after seeing the "angry frogs" which can develop out of jars of frogspawn, and hearing their bass chorus, (the child)

sickened, turned and ran. The great slime kings
Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.¹³

The reaction is exactly like that of the child in *The Prelude* – "with trembling hands I turned"; and Heaney's "I knew" is the terrified knowledge of the threat implicit in apparently benign natural forms. The guilty fantasy of the frogs' "vengeance" for his act of seizing frogspawn is prefigured by Wordsworth's fantasy of being hounded by the cliff.

At the end of "Blackberry-Picking," the knowledge comes not in fantasy but in the forced acknowledgement of actuality when the picked blackberries ferment:

I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.
Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.¹⁴

This knowledge is also heavy with sexuality : the first blackberry's "flesh was sweet," leaving "lust for/Picking," and the child's palms end up "sticky as Bluebeard's." The sexual metaphor is also present in "Nutting," where the hazel copse is "A virgin scene" in which the child "with wise restraint,/Voluptuous, fearless of a rival, eyed/The banquet before shattering it with "merciless ravage," a kind of rape leaving the copse "Deformed

¹¹ Frank Kermode & John Hollander, eds. et al, *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature (Volume II)*, [New York, London & Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973], p. 151.

¹² Corcoran, p. 48.

¹³ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966-1987*, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 5.

and sullied."¹⁵ In both Wordsworth and Heaney, therefore, the child grows up "fostered alike by beauty and by fear."

Like Wordsworth, who devoted a whole poem to the development of his poetic self (*The Prelude*), Heaney too addresses the poetic act in many poems ("The Diviner," "Digging," "The Forge," "The Harvest Bow," Hercules and Anteus," "Thatcher.") He finds many analogies in rural experience for the art of poetry. The poem which opens *Death of a Naturalist*, "Digging," not only memorializes the cycles of manual labor on his family's farm – digging up potatoes and cutting turf on the bog – but also shows the poet discontinuing with that tradition as he replaces the spade with a pen, a tool he will try to "dig" with as he attempts to explore his inner self and his origins, tradition and history. The poet, watching his father turn the soil in the flower-beds, recalls his grandfather working on the bog. Though the memory of the feel of potatoes and the sound of the turf links the poet to that tradition, he acknowledges that he has "no spade to follow men like them." The poet's sense of alienation from family tradition is counterbalanced by his decision to encompass that world within his poetry as he will "dig" not with a spade but with his pen; in other words, he can "dig" metaphorically, unearthing the details of the life of his family and community and honoring them by preserving them in his verse. Heaney conceives of art as labor, craft and production, precariously analogous to manual labor, a traffic with Nature mediated by verbal rather than material instruments.

Another analogy for the art of poetry is that of the diviner in a poem bearing the same name. Here the diviner is likened to a poet since they both are in touch with what is there, hidden and real, and both have

a gift for mediating between the latent resource and the community
that wants it current and released. The diviner resembles the poet in
his function of making contact with what lies hidden, and in his ability
to make palpable what was sensed or raised.¹⁶

"The Forge" uses another rural craft, the blacksmith's, as a further analogy for poetry. Even though the blacksmith is presented as ordinary, peripheral, and outdated in the poem, he is also centralized, imagined as a figure for the poet-as-maker. "Thatcher" charts a similar sort of trajectory. Again the poem concerns a practitioner of a dying trade – the job of the thatcher is to tend to the traditional roofwork of cottages that are covered in straw or "thatch." Like the blacksmith, the thatcher is a figure for the creative intelligence who, though peripheral and rather outmoded, is nevertheless capable of producing from the ordinary something extraordinary, something wondrous:

Couchant for days on sods above the rafters,
He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together
Into sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,
And left them gaping at his Midas touch.¹⁷

Heaney, then, is in agreement with Sir Philip Sidney's formulation that whereas nature's "world is brazen, the poets deliver a "golden" world. Both Sidney and Heaney posit

¹⁵ Frank Kermode & John Hollander, op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁶ David Annwn, *Inhabited Voices – Myth and History in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill, Seamus Heaney and George Mackay Brown* [Somerset: Bran's Head Books Limited, 1984], p. 96.

¹⁷ Andrew Murphy, *Seamus Heaney* [Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers Ltd., 1996], p. 22.

a transformative power for poetry: the power to take the ready material of the everyday and to fashion it into something astounding.

"Hercules and Anteus" epitomizes the dilemma of the Ulster writer who looks toward the rational to control illiterate fidelities; in so doing so he risks separation from the local and the familiar, the very source that shapes and nurtures his writing. The conflict between Hercules and Anteus reveals what Heaney calls an advance-retire situation, in which the poetry moves toward the rational and then seeks to avoid it, thus striking a precarious balance. The essential ingredients of Heaney's own poetic struggle shape the poem: the rational intelligence, which tends toward heavenly abstractions, on the one hand, and the emotional instinct attracted to the natural world, on the other.¹⁸

In the collection of poems *Station Island* (1984) Heaney continues his engagement with the intimate, the domestic, and the familial, which he re-initiates in *Field Work* (but which is evident in *North* (1975) in "Mossbawn," the two dedicatory poems which evoke domestic and communal images of Heaney's own first Northern home, of human love ("Sunlight," which recalls his aunt baking bread) and agricultural continuity ("The Seed Cutters"). Various poems of *Station Island* recall the early days of his marriage or activities he had done with his children. One such poem "Changes" has the poet leading one of his children to an old pump (an image laden with significance in Heaney) and they share together the unexpected pleasure of discovering a bird and her egg nestled in its disused spout. In closing the poet urges his child to

"Remember this.

It will be good for you to retrace this path
When you have grown away and stand at last
At the very centre of the empty city."¹⁹

The gesture is strikingly reminiscent of numerous moments in Wordsworth, especially his observation in "Tintern Abbey" that the "beauteous forms" which he has experienced in the country near the abbey have often come back to him "in lonely rooms, and mid the din/Of towns and cities," affording him

sensations sweet

Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration.²⁰

What both Wordsworth and Heaney suggest is that what the rural experience, the intimate contact with nature, provides is a resource which can be drawn upon in other times and other circumstances.

Other poems in *The Haw Lantern* (1987) and *Seeing Things* (1991) show Heaney trying to come to terms with his relationship with his parents and their death. The attention to detail is characteristic of the sequence "Clearances" (*The Haw Lantern*) as a whole. Indeed, it is only through engagement with the details of a common – in the sense of "shared" and of "everyday" – life that Heaney is able to come to terms with his mother's death. What he recalls of his life with his mother, and what enables him to rec-

¹⁸ Robert Garratt, *Modern Irish Poetry – Tradition & Continuity from Yeats to Heaney* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986], pp. 238-239.

¹⁹ Andrew Murphy, op. cit., p. 74.

²⁰ Frank Kermode & John Hollander, op. cit., p. 147.

oncile himself to her passing, is a series of concrete tasks which they shared together. In the third poem of the sequence, for instance, he recollects times he spent with her on Sunday mornings peeling potatoes, while the rest of the family were at church. This simple task constitutes for Heaney a kind of intimacy which returns to the poet's mind and consoles him far more than prayer does at the point of his mother's death. While the priest, he says, was intoning the prayers for the dying,

I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives –
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.²¹

We are offered an image of a similar kind of intimacy in the fifth poem in the sequence, where Heaney remembers performing another domestic chore with his mother – folding sheets together as they took them off the clothesline. Again the routine, formal rhythms of the task provide a kind of structure within which their unspoken and unacknowledged connection can find a place:

... So we'd stretch and fold and end up hand to hand
For a split second as if nothing had happened
For nothing had that had not always happened
Beforehand, day by day, just touch and go,
Coming close again by holding back
In moves where I was x and she o
Inscribed in sheets she'd sown from ripped-out flour
sacks.²²

Another point of intersection between Heaney and Wordsworth is their concern with their natural surroundings. Nature prefigures largely in both poets; in Wordsworth as a source of inspiration, as a means of attaining a transcendental vision, as an integral part of the education of a poet's mind (as receptiveness to natural objects and phenomena varies with the poet's consciousness); in Heaney nature, the land, landscape serve to convey man's relationship to himself, his community, country, tradition, history and, of course, poetry. The land is laden with meaning in Heaney but it is rarely portrayed void of humanity. Man and Nature are linked and interdependent, as the poem "Gifts of Rain" gives evidence. The poem begins as an evocation of the flooding of the Moyola, the local river of Heaney's first home, and discovers, in the wading man's reaction to the flood, a compelling image of interdependence between man and land, an image of circularity and reflexivity: the man's "hooped to where he planted," the sky and ground "running naturally among his arms/that grope the cropping land."²³

The natural world in Heaney is seen as feminine – a fecund, pullulating maternal principle, an all-absorbing, threatening power. The male poet's attitude towards this role is "one of supplication," a mingled need and fear, erotic in its intensity. Unlike the child in "Death of a Naturalist" who flees when confronted with such fecundity, the adult's reaction is to outstare the darkness and then to attempt to come to terms with it and explore it. This exploration, this peering down into wells, digging, fishing, exhumation,

²¹ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* [London: Faber & Faber, 1990], p. 229 (ll. 12-14).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

²³ Seamus Heaney, *Selected Poems*, op. cit., p. 22-24.

rescuing from oblivion, probing of secrecy and inwardness, concern with the subaqueous and subterranean which is so typical of the poems in Heaney's first three books, is not carried out in a spirit of explication and explanation but of a communion with mystery.

"Undine" and "Rite of Spring" are perhaps the first two examples of an attempt to project sexual feelings into a landscape. They are ancestors to the more famous bog poems, but differ from them in using the model of male activity and female passivity. They project unto a water-pump and a stream respectively the figure of a sexually willing woman, who waits to be coaxed into satisfaction by farming skill. Undine is a female water spirit who, by marrying a mortal and bearing him a child, might receive a soul and thus become human. Heaney makes the poem "a myth about agriculture, about the way water is tamed and humanized when streams become irrigation canals, when water becomes involved with seed."²⁴ This intercourse between man and nature is conveyed in vividly sexual terms. The monologue of Undine is the voice of a woman responding sexually to a man; it describes an encounter which reaches its climax and resolution in an evocation of sexual interdependence:

... And I ran quick for him, cleaned out my rust.
 He halted, saw me finally disrobed...
 Then he walked by me. I rippled and churned...

 He explored me so completely, each limb
 Lost its cold freedom. Human, warmed to him.²⁵

The images of blocked or clogged water channels (pump, ditch) suggest a pent-up energy suddenly freed and suggest parallels with the act of poetic creation, a feeling of impulse or inspiration.

"Bogland" looks forward to the ways in which Heaney later used the preserving waters of the bog as an image of "the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that had happened in and to it."²⁶ Thus, the subaqueous and subterranean elements in his poetry have a function other than depicting the potency, both destructive and fecund; namely it is an attempt on the part of the poet to enter the quality of the past, to record and evoke "the memory of the landscape."

Similarly, in *The Haw Lantern*, the natural world is inseparable from man. Again it bears evidence of man's influence, as it has fallen under man's technological progress. When the poet looks at his natal earth, he finds machinery there as well as organic matter:

When I hoked there, I would find
 An acorn and a rusted bolt

 If I lifted my eyes, a factory chimney
 And a dormant mountain.

 If I listened, an engine shunting
 And a trotting horse.²⁷

²⁴ Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations*, p. 54.

²⁵ Michael Allen, ed. Seamus Heaney, [Houndmills, Basingtone & London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1997] p. 193.

²⁶ Seamus Heaney, "Feeling into Words," *Preoccupations*, p. 54.

²⁷ Tony Curtis, *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, p. 168.

In other instances, for example, in the poem "At the Water's Edge," the poet struggles to establish the idyllic natural world of the sacred islands of Northern Ireland's Lough Erne, but the tranquility is troubled by "the thick rotations/Of an army helicopter patrolling." As in the case of "The Toome Road," an alien element intrudes itself into the natural landscape.

Heaney's fidelity to the land, and to his origins is also exemplified by numerous place-names poems, which led him inevitably to recognisable deities, firstly to the Anteus myth and then to Nerthus. Heaney's use of myth and nature not only attempts to address the political predicament of Ireland, but it also allows him to find his own voice and poetic stance by his imaginative encounters with his poet-predecessors (*North, Station Island, Sweeney Astray*).

Heaney's poetic heritage, therefore, has presented two distinct directions, the Joycean and the Yeatsian, which offer the poet a choice. The poet must be faithful to experience to give his poetry authority and authenticity, but he must also be careful to allow some subjectivity in order to provide a personal and unique shaping of material. Heaney has explained this dichotomy as

the need for a structure and a sustaining landscape and at the same time the need to be liberated and distanced from it, the need to be open, unpredictably susceptible, lyrically opportunistic.²⁸

It is possible to see Heaney straining towards both these literary traditions. One part of his sensibility inclines naturally toward Joyce and his admirer Patrick Kavanagh, who drew from simple details of everyday life, believing that real poetic strength came from a trust in the local and the familiar. Heaney alludes to this tendency in a recent interview: "Whatever success I've had has come from staying within the realm of my own imaginative country and my own voice."²⁹ At the same time, another part of him recognizes the need for detachment in favor of the cultivation of a poetic persona and the creation of intellectual poetry, both of which were characteristic of Yeats.

As an Ulster poet Heaney sees Kavanagh's Joycean practice as an important and liberating phase in Irish history. Kavanagh's insistence upon the importance of the parochial and his celebration of life in Monaghan in a sense justify the treatment of Northern Ireland subject matter in Heaney's early work. Furthermore, Heaney pays tribute to his predecessor, Kavanagh, whose achievement was "to make our subculture – the rural outback – a cultural resource for us all; to give us images of ourselves."³⁰ As his criticism makes clear, he sees Kavanagh as an important theorist whose poems discuss the process of poetic composition.

What we have in these poems are matter-of-fact landscapes, literally presented, but contemplated from such a point of view and with such an intensity that they become "a prospect of the mind" ... Their concern is, indeed, the growth of a poet's mind.³¹

²⁸ Garratt, op. cit., p. 240.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 243

³⁰ Neil Corcoran, op. cit., p. 20.

³¹ ibid, p. 243.

Despite his assimilation of Kavanagh's poetics, however, Heaney does not dismiss or eschew Yeatsian practice. In fact, Yeats provide Heaney with both substantial and theoretical directions for his poetry. The Yeatsian distinction between poetry and rhetoric has become part of Heaney's conceptual framework: "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."³² An example of the poet who is truthful to his artistic sensibility is Yeats.

I think Yeats's example as a man who held to a single vision is tremendously ennobling – he kept the elements of his imagery and his own western landscape, the mythological images, and he used those and Coole park, he used those as a way of coping with contemporary reality. I think that what he learned there was that you deal with public crisis not by accepting the terms of the public's crisis, but by making your own imagery and your own terrain take the colour of it, take the impression of it.³³

Heaney attempts to ease this tension between the need to be true to the recognitions of the emerging self and the need to be faithful to a collective historical experience. At one point the need to address the political predicament of Ireland took priority. "From that moment on the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament,"³⁴ by finding "befitting emblems of adversity."³⁵ Heaney found "befitting emblems" in P.V. Glob's *The Bog People* for the situation in Northern Ireland and in "the idea of the bog as the memory of a landscape or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in or near to it."³⁶ "Tollund Man" and the other bog poems in *Wintering Out* (1972) give Heaney the first opportunity to bring into relation the Iron Age victims of ritual sacrifice to the earth goddess and the killings of recent Irish sectarian atrocity.

The burden of the Yeatsian tradition, which involves shaping the public conscience through the force of the poetic personality, is relieved considerably in *Station Island* (1984) where the ghost of Joyce advises the younger poet to liberate himself from the responsibility of public poetry so he might concentrate on the familiar world.

The main thing is to write
for the joy of it...

..... And don't be so earnest,
so ready for the sackcloth and the ashes.
Let go, let fly, forget.

..... Keep at a tangent
..... it's time to swim
out on your own and fill the element

³² Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations*, [London, Faber & Faber, 1980], p. 34.

³³ Tony Curtis, ed., op. cit., p. 125.

³⁴ Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations*, p. 56-57.

³⁵ Seamus Heaney, "Feeling into Words", *Preoccupations*, p. 57.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 54.

with signatures on your own frequency,
echo soundings, searches, probes, allurements...³⁷

The shade of the master tells him to make his own way, to use tradition only to inform his work, being careful not to be bound by it.

Heaney's work also testifies to the continuity of the pastoral tradition in poetry. Reviewing *The Penguin Books of English Pastoral Verse* (1975), whose editors, John Barrell and John Bull, maintain that "the Pastoral, occasional twitches notwithstanding, is a lifeless form,"³⁸ Heaney argues that this poetic form, whether it deals with "the potent dreaming of a Golden Age or the counter-cultural celebration of simpler life-styles or the nostalgic projection of the garden on childhood"³⁹ still figures largely in modern poetry. Heaney enumerates poems such as Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Harry Ploughman," Edward Thomas' "Lob," Edwin Muir's "The Horses," Synge's "Aran Islands," Patrick Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger," and John Montague's "Rough Field" as instances in which the pastoral tradition is still alive.

That Heaney's interest in the pastoral mode has not waned is evidenced by his revisitation to Glanmore, to natural or rural experience, in his most recent collection of poems, *Electric Light*, written under the influence of Virgil's *Eclogues*.⁴⁰ Heaney is of the conviction – his poetry is evidence of this – that the pastoral is still a viable mode, even in the twentieth century, even in the most devastating conditions.

It is evident then, in conclusion, that Heaney, like every poet who suffers from "the anxiety of influence,"⁴¹ who struggles under the burden of his poetic heritage, has successfully emerged from the shadow of his predecessors as a poet in his own right. His assimilation and use of the various strands of both the English and Irish literary traditions, as well as his literary talent, has given Heaney a highly individualized poetic voice, in which he is able to articulate all the doubts, tensions and uncertainties of the modern poet and his predicament.

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³⁷ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems*, op. cit., pp. 192-193.

³⁸ Seamus Heaney, "In the Country of Convention – English Pastoral Verse," *Preoccupations*, p. 174.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 180.

⁴⁰ Heaney talks about the pastoral mode in an interview with Rui Carvalho Homem, published as "On Elegies, Eclogues, Translations, Transfusions," *The European English Messenger* (Volume X/2, Autumn 2001)

⁴¹ Harold Bloom, the foremost critic of poetic influence with a series of books in the 1970's [*The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), *A Map Of Misreading* (1975), *Poetry and Repression* (1976)], sees tradition as a carrying-over of influence. To read or know a poem engages the reader in an attempt to map the psychological relations by which the poet at hand has willfully misunderstood the work of some precursor in order to correct, rewrite, or appropriate the prior poetic vision as his own. It is through re-writing a past poem that a poet achieves his/her own 'individual voice.' Countering T.S. Eliot's assumption (*Tradition and Individual Talent*, 1919) that the poetry of the past has a benign or inspirational 'influence' on future poets, Walter Jackson Bate argues, in *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1971), that poets find the poetry of the past a 'burden.' The Romantic poets tried to relieve themselves of this burden, made more acute by the self-imposed ideal of originality in poetry, by finding new creative spaces for themselves, allowing them to imaginatively join with the poets of the past. (See Tom Furniss and Michael Bath, *Reading Poetry* [London: Prentice Hall, 1996.], pp. 313-315.

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ŠEJMUS HINI - PESNIK I ENGLESKA KNJIŽEVNA TRADICIJA

Suzana Stefanović

Ovaj rad istražuje uticaj engleske književne tradicije na poeziju Šejmase Hinija, prvenstveno uticaj Viljema Vordsvorta. Da Hinijeva poezija oličava dilemu savremenog pesnika uočljivo je iz tenzije između dva poetska modusa suprotstavljena u njegovom stvaralaštvu. To su "muški" i "ženski" poetski modus, odnosno poezija "zanatlija" i "proroka.". On pokušava da pomiri dve kontradiktorne težnje; sa jedne strane, postoji pesnikova potreba da bude veran svom unutrašnjem glasu i, sa druge strane, da odoli pritiscima zajednice da se jasno izjasni o političkim zbivanjima u društvu. Ovaj rad ukazuje na značaj i prisutnost Vordsvortovske tradicije u Hinijevom stvaralaštvu, ističući one aspekte Vordsvortove poezije koje je Hini asimilovao u svom radu, a najočiglednije su "spots of time," uloga sećanja, vizionarski ili transcendentalni aspekt poezije, poezija kao stvaralački čin, privrženost jednostavnom i svakodnevnom, priroda i tradicionalni ili seoski način života kao predmet poezije.