

COMPOSED IN DARKNESS

COMPOSED IN DARKNESS:  
TRAUMA AND TESTIMONY  
IN  
SEAMUS HEANEY'S *NORTH*

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Seamus Heaney's *North* attempts to bear witness to the prolonged political conflict in Ireland known as the Troubles. Drawing upon the intersecting discourses of trauma and testimony as theorized by Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, it argues that *North* operates as an experimental enterprise evaluating diverging methods of poetically representing and working through the experience of trauma. Though these methodologies seek to convey the Irish Troubles, neither is wholly effective and both are ultimately eschewed by the poet.

My first chapter examines Part I and the invocation of representative models—which are at times historical, imaginative and mythical—in order to render legible the experience of trauma. I suggest that the poem's invocation of human remains exhumed from Jutland bogs as one such model may not be ethical and then read this representation within a broader sense historiographical writing supplied by Michel de Certeau's *The Writing of History*. My second chapter looks at Part II and the poet's assertion of an autobiographical "I" in order to engage directly with the Troubles. I read this part of the collection primarily as a meditation on the limitations of community and poetry, which undercuts the poet's attempt to deliver testimony. In my conclusion, I suggest Heaney's testimonial enterprise may not fulfill its whole potential because of its publication in the midst of the Troubles, which forecloses the possibility of futurity, a criticism which may not hold true for the poet's later collections.

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## Introduction:

### Living and Writing the Troubles

In his 1974 lecture for the Royal Society of Literature, Seamus Heaney identified the riots in Belfast that had occurred some five years prior as the point at which “the problems of poetry moved from simply being a matter of achieving a satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament” (qtd. in Brown 192). Heaney envisioned an ethical obligation for Irish poets to locate an object as much as a language that might enable them to represent their nation’s recent atrocities. Published in 1975, *North* marks an attempt on behalf of the poet to bear witness to the Troubles in Ireland and account for the nation’s recent traumas through poetic testimony. The text’s bipartite structure permits Heaney to experiment with two discrete methodologies that might allow him to represent and work through Ireland’s traumatic history. Given the length of my project, to include here a complete or even thorough history of the Irish national conflict would not be feasible. Instead, I intend to provide a sufficient amount of context that might clarify the nature of the predicament, Heaney’s ambivalent attitude toward his nation’s sectarian violence and the critical treatment of *North* as a text pulled between partisan political statement and mythification.

The “predicament” Heaney mentions in his 1974 speech of course refers to the “Troubles that began in earnest after the Protestant ‘siege’ of Bogside (Derry) in August 1969, an incident that resulted in the British government sending troops to Northern Ireland” (Collins 56). However, the trauma and sectarian strife to which Heaney’s *North* responds predates the poet himself by centuries. The political affiliation between Ireland and England dates back to the 12th Century at which point the former nation was claimed during a Norman invasion, beginning centuries of British, Protestant-led oppression (Coogan 2). Following years of warfare, Protestant English rule was solidified toward the end of the 17th Century during the political and social shift known as the Protestant Ascendancy (Simpson 18). During the Ascendancy, the Roman Catholics and the Protestant dissenters, who together formed the majority of the population, had their property rights repudiated under the political Penal Laws. Moreover, the Penal Laws barred Roman Catholics from serving in the military, holding public office and participating in either the English or Irish Parliament, among other provisions (19). The Penal Law’s desired end was to coerce the Roman Catholic population to convert to the reformed Christian faith as practiced by the English Anglican Church and the Church of Ireland. British and Irish Parliaments both passed Acts of Union that, on January 1, 1801, legally codified the union of the Kingdom of Ireland and the Kingdom of Great Britain into United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (21).

Ireland thus saw itself divided between two factions delineated not only religiously but also in terms of a shared culture and heritage: the Protestant unionists who primarily occupied the northern half of the isle and the Catholic nationalists toward the south. While the unionists supported the unification of Ireland and Great Britain, the nationalists stood for a discrete, autonomous Ireland completely beyond the constraints of English colonial rule. However, it warrants mention that this Protestant unionist and Catholic nationalist binary was not without its exceptions or outliers. For example, many of the aforementioned Protestant dissenters participated within Irish nationalism. Likewise, there also existed a number of Catholic unionists who supported continued relations between Ireland and Great Britain (Coogan 194).

Throughout the 19th Century, Irish nationalists made continued attempts to secure the repeal of the Act of Union. The Home Rule League and later the Irish Parliamentary Party spearheaded the Irish Home Rule Movement, a term that has been variously interpreted and inconsistently applied (Coogan 140). In certain contexts, it referred to an attempt to ascertain complete autonomy from the Kingdom of Great Britain. In others, Home Rule simply signified a desire for an Irish legislature that might remain part of the United Kingdom but would possess at least partial self-determinacy. Unionists, however, did not want to see their Parliament locked under the thumb of the Catholic Church. As the Irish Parliamentary Party burgeoned in popularity toward the end of the 19th Century,

various bills and acts seeking Home Rule were introduced that were consistently stymied either by the House of Commons, the House of Lords or by the sudden arrival of World War I (E. O'Brien 50).

Attempts to secure Home Rule eventually lent themselves to the 1916 Easter Rising. On April 24, the nationalist military organization known as Irish Volunteers joined forces with the Citizen Army and occupied strategic points within Dublin as part of their efforts to ascertain an independent republic (E. O'Brien 67). Seeking to quell the rebels, whose numbers totaled approximately 1200, the British government enacted martial law and brought in approximately 15,000 troops from mainland Britain (68). On April 30, one week after combat ensued, the Rising ended with the rebels surrendering (Simpson 33). The death toll for the Easter Rising stands at approximately 450 to 500 fatalities while numerous more arrests resulted (33). Following the Rising, the republican party Sinn Féin was elected to power. In 1918, the Irish War of Independence ensued between the Irish Republican Army and the British Army (Brown 38).

In 1920, while the war was still ongoing, the Parliament of the United Kingdom legally codified the partition of Ireland into two discrete political states (Coons 176). Under the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, the Protestant unionists came to occupy Northern Ireland while the Catholic nationalists constituted what was then Southern Ireland, for which a government was never actually established (Coogan 121). In 1921,

the Irish War of Independence came to a conclusion as the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed and put into effect (122). Not only did the treaty stipulate the withdrawal of British forces from Ireland, but it also established a self-governing Irish Free State that would serve as a dominion of the British Empire. The Treaty also contained provisions that would allow the six northern counties that comprised Northern Ireland to secede from this Irish Free State, a power that was exercised on December 6, 1922 (123).

However, many nationalists remained dissatisfied with the fact that the Treaty only secured a “free state” and not, as they had hoped, a republic completely beyond the reach of British authority. Believing that the Anglo-Irish Treaty would not bring about their goal of an autonomous Ireland, a unit of the IRA opposed to the agreement stormed the Irish Four Courts and brought about the Irish Civil War, another confrontation between the republicans and the British (Simpson 97). The IRA itself was split into pro- and anti-Treaty divisions, though by 1923 the former group was severely dwindling in numbers (99). The respective capture and murder of republican leaders Liam Deasy and Liam Lynch helped bring about the ceasefire that ended the struggle after somewhere between 1000 and 3000 deaths (103).

In the late 1960s, the Troubles marked a new phase of Ireland’s attempt at self-definition, though historiography provides conflicting dates about the conflict’s beginning (Simpson 4). When the unionists believed the nationalists intended to revive the Irish

Republican Army, they formed a paramilitary organization of their own in 1966 called the Ulster Volunteer Force which declared war on the IRA. Attempts to end government discrimination against the Roman Catholic majority living in Northern Ireland culminated, on August 12, 1969, in nationalist demonstrations in Bogside that rapidly grew violent. After this violence, while the IRA intended to protect other key locations from loyalist attacks, a Provisional branch of the Irish Republican Army that sought more violent methods of responding to violence caused by the unionist community was established. According to Harold Bloom, this Provisional faction sought to “redirect Catholics’ indignation from their Protestant neighbours towards Britain and its ‘army of occupation’” (qtd. in Collins 56).

Irish cultural memory identifies the events of Bloody Sunday, 1972 as perhaps the Troubles’ most significant episode. On that day, after the violence in Bogside, the British army was deployed to the area and initially received welcome by the Catholic minority. However, after British soldiers fatally shot two rioters who were allegedly armed, relations promptly deteriorated (Coogan 304). The government of Northern Ireland introduced internment without trial in August 1971, promoting rioting and disorder across the nation (Murphy 12). After a period of dormancy, the Provisional Irish Republican Army was revived and committed the murder of seven British soldiers by mid-December (13). As civil outrage against the internments mounted, a march was planned

for January 30. Soldiers belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Parachute Regiment opened fire on the protestors, resulting in the deaths of 13 civilians with another 13 injured (E. O'Brien 53). The public responded to these deaths with significant levels of vitriol and an even stronger sense of renewed ties and communal bonding, perhaps in part because these deaths were not the result of paramilitary efforts but rather stemmed from the British army (54).

*North*, published in 1975, marks Heaney's first attempt to articulate the Irish cultural trauma of Bloody Sunday and the Troubles on a wider scale. Heaney's treatment of the Troubles is unique within the context of other writers at the time: his work, which embodies a "rejection of 'partisan politics' [...] can be contrasted with the attitude of other members of the minority community" (Parker 91). This refusal to articulate the struggle with a monolithic political voice speaks to a profound ambivalence on his behalf—not only in regards to the Troubles but also its constitutive binaries that pit Irish against British, Catholic against Protestant, nationalist against unionist, North against South. The multiplicity of experiences that comprise the collection asserts Heaney's desire to cleave a space between determined cultural signifiers, blurring distinctions in such a way that reveals his "idealistic hope that 'common ground' could be established between Catholic and Protestant" (91). In keeping with its divided nature, the work also suggests that such an endeavor might not be possible.

Heaney's ambivalent attitude toward sectarian lines perhaps stems in part from his upbringing, which did not foster the kind of total segregation that was relatively commonplace. Born in Northern Ireland, Heaney was part of the Catholic minority that subsisted under Protestant and unionist dominance (Murphy 3). As a child, he "attended the local primary school at Anahorish, which catered for both Catholic and Protestant children, a mingling rarely found in Northern Ireland with its primarily sectarian schooling" (Parker 8). There, Heaney imbibed schoolyard taunts that made the mounting sectarian strife palpable even to a child: "Up the long ladder and down the short rope / To hell with King Billy and God bless the Pope" (Collins 31). As he entered his teenage years, Heaney received an education at St. Columb's College in Derry, a seminary school that bolstered his sense of identity as an Irish Catholic; however, despite this newfound religious pride, Heaney nonetheless regretted the general Catholic tendency toward "obsessive poring over past wounds rather than tackling present injustices, a response which allowed the initiative to pass back to the 'men of violence'" (Parker 14-15). Despite his lack of affection for these Catholic tendencies, he also detested the Protestant- and unionist-driven Ulster Special Constabulary as he reached his fifth and sixth years as a student at St. Columb's. As a result, though he did not self-identify as a republican, "[i]t was during this period that Heaney locates his coming to political consciousness" (15).

This ambivalence took further shape as Heaney began his studies at Queen's University in Belfast (Murphy 8). Sectarian lines were especially strong as he started his first undergraduate year. Typically, "Catholics from the same school would bunch together at lectures and in dining halls, and would tend to mix with Protestants only at the Saturday night dances and at the popular Drama Society functions" (Parker 21). During this period, Heaney was drawn to the writing of James Joyce perhaps because "part of him identified with Stephen Daedalus's longing to escape the 'nets' of 'nationality, language and religion'" (41) that divided the warring sects. In 1963, as Heaney accepted a position as lecturer at Queen's University, he became conscious of the ways his position necessitated that he learn to occupy a precarious slippage between the categories of Irish and British. His ability to live and work in both circles necessitated a strong command of both groups' dialects:

Torn between rural outback and urban center, between a close-knit, semi-literate Irish Catholic agricultural community and the highly literate British-dominated culture of Queen's University in Belfast, Heaney tried to govern his tongue so he could thrive in both regions. To cross back and forth required the skill of a chameleon. (Hart 180)

The fact that he was able to move fluidly between two factions perhaps explains the fact that, in his poetry, Heaney "turns [...] at the midpoint between Irish and English literary traditions, Catholic and Protestant camps" (Hart 78). His poetry serves as a working point of the different types of dialect he learned to command.

Despite his slippage between Irish and English, Heaney nonetheless remained fundamentally concerned with the strife of his homeland. Indeed, his travels across borders during this period signal an inability to remove himself completely from the cultural milieu in which he was born. From 1970 to 1971, Heaney sought work as a Guest Lecturer in the United States, an opportunity that afforded himself and his family some degree of respite from the Troubles (Parker 92). However, despite his absence from Ireland, he continued to recognize uncanny similarities between America and the land of his birth. He noted that “Blacks, Hispanics and Indians were ‘demanding their say’ in American affairs, and Heaney was inevitably reminded of ‘the political and cultural assertions being made at that time by the minority’ back home” (Parker 92). He is quoted as saying that his return “was like putting on an old dirty glove again” and that America “gave me the idea that I would have to come back and say that this place is a kind of disease preventing personality from flowering gracefully. It is a very graceless community. A very stunted community” (qtd. in Parker 117). This rootedness, and his tendency to inhabit Ireland mentally if not in actuality, followed him “even on holiday in Spain in the summer, [where] for Heaney there was no respite from home thoughts. Television there brought him news of ‘death counts’ and domestic ‘bullfight reports’, while he suffered only ‘the bullying sun of Madrid’” (Parker 90). Heaney was therefore

caught between competing desires to leave a community he at times looked down upon and guilt that made such a feat impossible.

He was similarly stricken by another instance of guilt during his eventual departure to the Republic of Ireland approximately a year after returning from America. Heaney's relocation "from war-torn Belfast to the rural peace of Co. Wicklow in 1972, three years before the publication of *North*, was regarded by some as a rejection and a betrayal" (Andrews 80-81), though he defended this gesture. He is quoted as saying that "[i]n the late '60s and early '70s the world was changing for the Catholic imagination. I felt I was compromising some part of myself by staying in a situation where socially and, indeed, imaginatively there were pressures against reading the moment as critical" (qtd. in Parker 120).

Heaney's creative impulses flourished during this period of change. Over the span of one week, "he recalls writing in a rapid succession 'about forty poems', perhaps partly as a result of the acceleration in the political pulse at this time (Parker 90). Though Heaney's creative output burgeoned, he felt that his work was implicated in the constant embroilment between Irish and British perspectives. The Troubles and its concentration on sectarian and cultural lines "had heightened Heaney's ambivalent feelings towards the rich traditions of *English* literature, and while he is conscious of its role in 'founding' him

as a poet, he is acutely aware that its cultural triumph has been at the expense of other cultures” (Parker 95, emphasis in original).

Amid the violence that attended the Troubles, Heaney recognized another kind of threat with its own destructive potential. In an article for the Queen’s University magazine, *Gown*, Heaney warned People’s Democracy, a student organization, to “remember the real hinterland of prejudice which people on both sides are fighting and not lose sight of this reality in a fury of rhetoric” (qtd. in Parker 78). With this in mind, Heaney’s poetry thus embodies his attempt to circumvent monolithic, partisan forms of expression that convey only one singular experience of Irishness; instead, he chooses “to address Ulster’s violent Troubles, not with political rhetoric or propaganda but with poetry that exposes the diversity of language and speaks with many dialects in many voices” (Molino 187).

Further indication of Heaney’s ambivalence perhaps lies in the critical treatment *North* has received for its ambiguous, indeterminate representation of the Troubles. Much of the criticism focused around the collection concerns its oblique methodology and the way it apolitically mystifies and perhaps even occludes the Troubles rather than rendering them in plain sight. In “‘Inner Emigré’ or ‘Artful Voyeur’? Seamus Heaney’s *North*,” Edna Longley comments that the collection “often falls between the stools of poetry and politics instead of building a mythic bridge” (42) and that its binary structure

demonstrates the manner in which “Heaney sometimes asks too much of his myth, as if all statement has been shunted off to Part II, as if ‘archetypes’ remain above or below argument” (47). Henry Hart in *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progression* argues a similar point, claiming that “Heaney wrestles with the call to become more politically engaged and ultimately resists it for the safer, more private ardors of poetry” (76). Ciaran Carson’s review of *North* in the *Honest Ulsterman* echoes a similar sentiment. His “point here is that in assimilating contemporary political actions—killings, punishments, mutilations—to a mythic past, Heaney in some sense ‘naturalizes these actions, makes them seem somehow inevitable, part of an immemorial, tribal cycle that cannot be broken” (Murphy 52). Though these critics would seem to prescribe a style of poetry that serves as an objective window to the Troubles—a methodology that would perhaps risk reinscribing the monolithic rhetoric Heaney spoke against—they nonetheless point toward the fact that *North* speaks to divisions on behalf of the poet and his inability to reconcile Catholic pride with a desire to advocate common ground between two warring sects.

My goal in the coming chapters is not merely to establish Heaney’s poetry as a working point of his ambivalence or anxiety. Rather, I wish to examine *North* as an experiment in the representation of Irish cultural trauma. In his essay titled “In Praise of Subjectivity,” F.R. Ankersmit theorizes the manner in which the past comes to be

represented within works of historical writing. He argues against objectivist theorists who would suggest that there is one monolithic history and, thus, one method of representing history. Instead, Ankersmit embraces the idea that historiography might represent the past in numerous methods and that it is up to the historian to discern which of these methods might be most advantageous:

Historical writing is, so to speak, the experimental garden where we may try out different political and moral values and where the overarching aesthetic criteria of representational success will allow us to assess their respective merits and shortcomings. And we should be most grateful that the writing of history provides us with this experimental garden, since it will enable us to avoid the disasters that we may expect when we would have to try out in actual social and political reality the merits and shortcomings of different ethical and political standards. (22)

I would suggest that Heaney's *North* is an attempt to effect precisely the kind of "experimental garden" Ankersmit posits. The two parts of *North* each represent a different method of providing testimony on and thereby representing the otherwise incomprehensible traumatic experience of the Troubles.

As I will argue, Part I of *North* primarily foregoes direct engagement with the Troubles and instead "looks away" from Irish cultural trauma. This trope, which is signaled throughout Part I by literal and figurative references to the aversion of gaze, turns away from the unknowable trauma and instead looks toward alternative representational models. These models, which are often mythic and imaginative, transform the traumatic Troubles into an experience that is knowable. I proceed to suggest that there are ethical dangers of such an enterprise: namely, Heaney does not

necessarily treat the bog bodies with the same respect that he might afford to contemporary, Christian remains. Indeed, Heaney objectifies the bodies, feigns to lend them voice and transplants them into narratives of a nation from which they do not necessarily originate. Ultimately, I redeem Heaney's method by locating it within the broader scope of historical writing, as posited by Michel de Certeau. Finally, I suggest that Heaney's method is not necessarily complete and that the ending of Part I appears to suggest a need on behalf of the poet to bear witness to the traumas of Irish history through a more explicit, straightforward methodology.

In the following chapter, I shift my attention to Part II of *North* and the continuation of the project of demythification begun toward the end of Part I. Instead of "looking away" and offering testimony to the traumatic event of the Troubles through representational models, Part II attempts to directly communicate the lived experience of Irish sectarian strife. With attention to the way the poems privilege biographical analysis, I expose the function of myth as it facilitates the direct representation of trauma. Moreover, after exploring the criticism that has been afforded to Part II's lack of poetic artifice, I suggest that Heaney's direct representation of the trauma ultimately does not succeed. The concluding poems of Part II signal the poet's disillusion with community. Ultimately, the final poems speak to a profound mistrust in both poetry itself and the act

of giving testimony. As a result, *North* offers an experiment in bearing witness that remains as yet unfulfilled.

## Chapter One:

### A Dream of Loss: Trauma and Historiography in Part I of *North*

Oscillating between histories that are at times universalized and at others individuated, *North* appears as structurally ambivalent as Heaney's own national attitudes. The poet offers in "Part One a universalized image of the suffering that attended/attends the struggle for territory, while in Part Two he maps out the contours of a personal mythology, identifying formative moments from his Catholic past" (Parker 126). As my introduction indicates, critical assessments of *North* have consistently concerned themselves with Heaney's appeal to external narratives with only tangential connection to Irish cultural history: *Hamlet*, Norse Vikings, Greek myth and the human remains exhumed from bog-water. These critics purport that Heaney's lack of political specificity and his attempt to universalize the primal and atavistic struggles that mobilize the Troubles move away from the particular religious, classed and sectarian struggles that mobilize the violent conflict.

In this chapter, I will argue that Part I of Heaney's *North* offers an experimental attempt on behalf of the poet to articulate and thereby work through Irish cultural trauma. Indeed, the poet's attempts to communicate the incomprehensibility of trauma primarily structure themselves around the recurring trope of "looking away." This trope manifests

both microscopically—through repeated textual references to sight and averted gazes— and macroscopically—by shifting attention from direct representations of the Troubles to other histories and mythologies that function as sites of meaning. Rather than neglecting political involvement with the Troubles, this project of “looking away” provides a representational model that transforms the event of trauma into something thinkable. Finally, I intend to show that, by the conclusion of Part I, Heaney begins to express doubt about the efficacy of his representational model of trauma, which ultimately prompts a change in tactics for Part II.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). The issues of delay and control that attend trauma ultimately limit the degree to which the conscious mind might be able to access and thereby perceive such an event. In this regard, historical trauma “is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (18). As a result, Caruth’s text suggests that any attempt to parse the experience of trauma perhaps cannot be accomplished directly:

In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena.

Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. (91-92)

In response to Caruth's delimitation of direct sight as something that is problematic and ineffective, I pose what I believe to be an important question that speaks to Heaney's crisis of representation: what is the alternative to "direct seeing" and what kind of forms might such an endeavor take?

The immediacy-belatedness dialectic Caruth posits here speaks to the coded nature of historical memory. Through her reading of trauma theory, Caruth turns to Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, an attempt on behalf of the author to explain the persecution of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis by historically referencing ancient histories. However, Freud's project does not engage in a neutral and uncritical retelling of the Biblical Jewish origin story; rather, he writes against the grain of dominant historical memory by claiming that "Moses created the Jews" (qtd. in Caruth 12). Indeed, such a telling radically rewrites history: though Moses was a Hebrew in the Biblical telling of the story, Freud claims that Moses was not actually a Hebrew but rather an Egyptian. Moreover, Freud claims that the Hebrews rebelled against and murdered Moses and then repressed the deed. This retelling consequentially asserts that "[t]he most significant moment in Jewish history is thus, according to Freud, not the literal return to freedom, but the repression of a murder and its effects" (14). Through his account, Freud makes a profound observation about historical figurations of trauma: he suggests "that

historical memory [...] is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic repression, which makes the event available at best indirectly” (16). Ultimately, I suggest that Freud’s refiguration of Jewish cultural trauma provides an answer to my aforementioned question. In order to represent the traumas of an entire cultural group, Freud turns away from history and looks toward other sites that confer meaning—which is to say, he constructs a representational model. In this particular instance, he constructs his model from imagination and from fiction, which paradoxically allow him to come to a better instance of the traumatic event he does not or cannot directly witness. In this respect, looking away from the site of trauma allows him a better understanding of the event.

*Moses and Monotheism* may serve as a model for Heaney’s attempt to find the symbols and images adequate to Ireland’s predicament in *North*, which I similarly choose to figure as a kind of “looking away” that assumes various forms. By looking away from contemporary instances of violence and gazing toward external, historical sources of meaning, Heaney seeks to build a referential framework that might allow him to indirectly make sense of the Irish nation’s traumatic present. However, Heaney searches for an adequate verbal iconography not simply to ascertain some individuated understanding of the experience of trauma. Instead, he seeks to *represent* Irish trauma and thereby offer testimony for a presumably broad and heterogenous audience perhaps

further removed from the Troubles than the poet himself, a distinct undertaking in possession of its own layered complexities. That said, efforts to understand and represent the traumatic event are not mutually exclusive undertakings; rather, theoretical work on testimony and traumatic narratives indicates that the latter category often facilitates the former.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* formulates a theoretical relationship between the traumatic event and testimony. Testimony serves as a crucial component of traumatic experience: Felman and Laub suggest that "the victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence" (57). In this manner, both listener and speaker work in tandem to (re)produce and thereby attempt to understand the traumatic event:

The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the "knowing" of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. (57)

However, the issue becomes further complicated when one considers the issue of literality as it relates to testimony. There exists "a certain tension, a certain aporia that inheres between the allegorical and the historical qualities of the event: the allegory seems to

name the *vanishing of the event* as part of its *actual historical occurrence*” (103, emphasis in original). By moving away from the experience of trauma, allegory provides an alternative but nevertheless valuable means of understanding and communicating the event to a listener.

In this respect, Heaney’s search for images and symbols—which themselves function as allegories of a kind of history—enacts the aforementioned tension or aporia. Laub and Felman pose the question that mobilizes *North*: “[i]f the *literality* of a historical event is what is here at stake, why not designate this historical event by its literal, referential name?” (101). Ultimately, Heaney’s invocation of symbolic representations of suffering—which I formulate as an attempt to “look away” from the Troubles in Ireland—aptly demonstrate the impossibility of directly gazing upon the site of trauma and the difficulties in literally articulating such an experience through testimony.

*North* signals its obsessive interest in the act of looking away through repeated references to the aversion of gaze, which one can see operating in various poems such as “Belderg.” The second poem in Part I of *North*, “Belderg” depicts the speaker’s visit to the home of archaeologist Seamus Caufield (Hart 82). Examining the quernstones littered around the house, the speaker reflects on their antiquated origins and subsequently engages Caufield in conversation about the manner in which ambivalent lineages can become housed within language. They focus on the speaker’s homestead, Mossbawn,

which is initially described as nothing more than “[a] bogland name” (ln 27). However, the poem indicates what an essay by Heaney confirms: that the name “Mossbawn” itself is indeed linguistically divided along sectarian lines:

Our farm was called Mossbawn. *Moss*, a Scots word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and *bawn*, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses. Mossbawn, the planter’s house on the bog. Yet in spite of this Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss bann, and *ban* is the Gaelic word for white. So might not the thing mean the white moss, the moss of bog-cotton? In the syllables of my home I see a metaphor of the split culture of Ulster. (qtd. in Jackaman 151)

The ethnopolitical strife that attends the “split culture of Ulster” thus lingers in the subtext of “Belderg.” Though the poet figuratively looks away from the Troubles toward a site that seems to signal something separate from political conflict—namely, his home—he only ends up indirectly returning to the conflict. This roundabout way of representing the Troubles, I believe, signals the trauma of the event as something that resists direct forms of sight. It is only by turning away from the Troubles that the speaker is able to witness the cultural ambivalence that occupies even the most unlikely spaces.

Etymology is only one of the ways the speaker of “Belderg” turns from the Troubles only to return there indirectly; indeed, creative imagination occupies a similar function within the poem. Confronted with the ambivalent roots housed within Mossbawn’s name—roots that confront the speaker with the Irish cultural trauma—the speaker immediately recedes into a moment of imaginative thought couched within the language of sight. The speaker suddenly sees in his “mind’s eye [...] / A world-tree of

balanced stones, / Querns piled like vertebrae / The marrow crushed to the grounds” (l. 42-45). In these closing lines, one can see that the speaker has constructed a referential framework lifted out of mythology in order to make sense of the unknowable Troubles: he imagines himself into the role of “Yggdrasil, the ash tree in Norse legend, whose branches and roots extend through the whole universe” (Hart 82). To some degree, one might construe this imaginative tangent as therapeutic insofar as the speaker turns away from “a dim present clouded by a dimmer future” by looking toward “myths and histories that would explain his predicament and so comfort the sufferer” (Burriss 108).

However, there is also something about this resolution that defies comfort. The speaker’s imagination does not necessarily get him away from the Troubles; rather, the brutalism that inheres within the crushing of the vertebrae speaks to the violence that attends the Troubles. The poem seems to offer “an image of Heaney’s own self-reflexive consciousness, which, turning on his ties with historical opponents, grinds itself down with anxious questioning” (Hart 82). In this regard, the act of looking away from the site of trauma further brings the ideological ambivalence that inheres within the poet into greater focus. Moreover, by turning his mind’s eye toward myth and away from the Troubles, the speaker indirectly renders issues of violence and division knowable.

In many ways, “Belderg” seems to be about the privileging of multiplicity and heterogeneity over singularity. Indeed, both of my previous examples speak to this

interest: the speaker's discovery that "Mossbawn" is a word of English, Irish and Norse origins and his appeal to mythology as an alternative to dominant historical narrative reflect Heaney's goal to find universal images of suffering instead of any single, monolithic image or emblem. The poem's plenitude of literal references to sight and gaze also complement this overarching aim. For example, the text personifies the bog's quernstones by referring to them as "[o]ne-eyed" (l. 3) and a "pupil" (l. 7); however, rather than directing their gaze at the speaker, the quernstones look backward into the past while "dreaming / Of neolithic wheat" (l. 7-8). The speaker and his companion look from the quernstones toward the fossilized landscape, which repeats before their eyes up until the moment when the speaker "turned to go" (l. 20). In doing so, the poem validates multiplicity over singularity: by portraying a variety of seeing subjects that exercise their gaze upon multiple seen objects, the poem resists privileging any monolithic mode of perception and thereby lends legitimacy to both Irish unionist and nationalist ideologies. As well, this turn away from a single dominant ideology speaks to the collection's interest in appealing to multiple narratives and multiple sources of meaning as it builds a referential framework to make sense of the Troubles.

Placed immediately after "Belderg" in the collection, "Funeral Rites" gestures toward the same trope of averting gaze. The poem begins by referencing the speaker's exposure to funereal matters from a young age: he describes having "shouldered a kind of

manhood, / stepping in to lift the coffins / of dead relations” (l. 1-3). The poem then locates this individuated memory within a broader cultural focus. Despite the physical and figurative burden of having to participate in the ritual of a funeral, the poem suggests that such ceremonies are, in fact, desired and provide a familiar sort of comfort. Indeed, the speaker claims that “[n]ow as news comes in / of each neighbourly murder / we pine for ceremony, / customary rhythms” (l. 33-36). The speaker seems to believe that current ceremonies are no longer enough. He imagines a grand procession of numerous men carrying the bodies to the chambers of the Boyne and suggests that such a ritual would result in “the cud of memory / allayed for once, arbitration / of the feud placated” (ln 65-67). At this point, the poem alludes to “an incident from the Icelandic epic *Njal’s Saga* to suggest an analogue between the Viking code of blood vengeance and the ongoing cycle of retribution in Belfast” (Collins 88). “Funeral Rites” suggests that those who are buried might have died similar deaths to the hero of the epic, Gunnar, who died without his death avenged and thereby broke the cycle of violence. Ultimately, this connection between contemporary struggle and myth indicates that “[s]o intense is Heaney’s desire for the suspension of hostilities that he invests this ritual mourning with the power to assuage all factions” (89).

Of the poems that comprise Part I of *North*, “Funeral Rites” perhaps comes closest in its attempt to deal literally within the traumatic violence of the Troubles. However, the

collection's interest in looking away from the traumatic Troubles toward alternate narratives and other sites of meaning continues to operate here, namely *Njal's Saga* as well as, more broadly, Viking history. Additionally, the placement of "Funeral Rites" immediately after "Belderg" links the two poems through their emphasis on the creative imagination as the means by which individual consciousness can look away from the Troubles and articulate it in a removed, indirect manner.

The poem does not, however, suggest that this imaginative, indirect method of engaging with the Troubles can actually provide practical, political resolution. Just as the speaker of "Belderg" is unable to comfort himself through his imaginative vision of vision of *Yggdrasil*, the speaker of "Funeral Rites" suffers similarly. It is important to note the iconography that the poem uses as it portrays Gunnar's emergence from his burial tomb:

Men said that he was chanting  
verses about honour  
and that four lights burned

in corners of the chamber  
which opened then, as he turned  
with a joyful face  
to look at the moon. (l. 66-78).

Though Gunnar attempts to look away from the violent struggles that no longer persist and gaze upon a sight of beauty, the object of his gaze is none other than the moon—"that ancient symbol of cycles itself"—which suggests that "Gunnar's happy lunar gaze

implies its bloody perpetuation” (Hart 84, 85). In this respect, the poem is moving in two directions: it points toward the end of violence but negates this very possibility by also indicating the inevitable continuation of bloodshed. Such an ambivalent ending suggests that, while the creative imagination can provide a referential framework that allows one to indirectly gaze upon the Troubles, it does not offer resolution. Indeed, the poem “urgently desires an end to the terrible cycle, but it can imagine such a thing only in a mythologized visionary realm” (qtd. in Collins 89).

The poem is also rife with microscopic references to eyes and sight. Indeed, Gunnar’s aforementioned turn toward the moon perhaps serves as the poem’s most prominent example of such a trope. Just as *North* looks away from the Troubles only to indirectly return to the site of conflict, Gunnar’s turn away from violence and vengeance toward the moon indirectly implies the cyclic continuation of struggle. Moreover, the poem further indicates that the traumas of the Troubles cannot be witnessed in a straightforward manner. Indeed, the dead have their eyelids closed (l. 6), homes are literally and likely also figuratively blinded (l. 39) and mourning women are compared to sleepwalkers who cannot see but can only imagine the funeral procession to the Boyne (l. 50-53). These references further point toward the collection’s ultimate project: to signal the Troubles as a traumatic event that cannot be witnessed in any straightforward manner. The poem’s interest in blindness contrasts the multiplicity of seeing subjects that pervades

“Belderg.” Ultimately, while the multiple perspectives in “Belderg” represent the validity of the multiple political ideologies in Ireland, the examples of blindness in “Funeral Rites” uphold the devil’s advocate position that the warring factions are both unable to see the issue of their nation’s welfare clearly. The dual positions upheld by these two poems represent but one of the many moments of ambivalence that inhere within the collection.

Another poem that contemplates the issue of revenge, “Punishment” offers what is perhaps the text’s most significant portrayal of the literal act of looking away. The eleventh poem in Part I of *North*, “Punishment” begins as the speaker contemplates one of the many bog bodies that recur throughout the collection. He empathizes with the plight of a shaven, sacrificed Iron Age adultress and claims that he “can feel the tug / of the halter at the nape / of her neck, the wind / on her naked front” (l. 1-4). As the poem progresses, a shift toward the rhetorical device known as apostrophe occurs: the fictive speaker no longer speaks *about* the bog body and instead speaks *to* her. He describes his feelings for the adultress as “almost love” (l. 29); however, as the poem nears its conclusion, the speaker betrays these pseudo-amorous sentiments by offering a confession. Still addressing the bog body, the speaker says that he has “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” (l. 37-44).

The conclusion is ultimately one of ambivalence: despite the speaker's emotional reaction to the retribution being meted out here, part of him would comprehend the precise need for such retribution to occur in the first place. The speaker therefore cannot bring himself to speak in support of, nor revolt against, the punishment.

The poem's reference to the adultress's "sisters" insinuates a coded connection between ritualistic Iron Age violence and contemporary conflict:

The woman victim retrieved from the bog provides an image for those young Catholic women in Heaney's own Northern Ireland subjected to 'tarring and feathering' by members of their own community. The punishment was most often inflicted on those who became involved with members of the British Army. Like Glob's female victim, the women typically had their heads shaved, before having hot tar and feathers poured over them and being tied up in a public place, as an act of ritual humiliation. (Murphy 45)

The poem's invocation of the bog body, much like its appeal to the myths and histories that comprise "Belderg" and "Funeral Rites," again speaks to the trope of "looking away" that recurs throughout Part I of *North*. By looking away from the Troubles and turning toward the bog body, the poem finds a way to articulate contemporary violence in a manner that is decidedly oblique. Ultimately, the poem constructs a referential framework that facilitates its attempt to make sense of the traumatic incomprehensibility of the Troubles.

Much like "Belderg" and "Funeral Rites," "Punishment" further signals its macroscopic interest in the figurative act of looking away through a prominent reference to the literal aversion of gaze. One can locate this prominent reference in speaker's

aforementioned confession that he “would connive / in civilized outrage” (l. 42-43) in reaction to the women’s punishment. “Connive” is the operative word in this passage. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word means “[t]o shut one’s eyes to a thing that one dislikes but cannot help, to pretend ignorance, to take no notice” (OED). This instance of conniving complements the poem’s overall aim and the moment of comprehension that occurs in the final lines. Just as *North* looks away from the incomprehensible violence of the Troubles in order to make sense of it, so too must the speaker look away from the women and locate their punishment within a broader, primal drive toward violence before he can truly “understand” (l. 43) what is occurring before him. Indeed, “Punishment” offers a significant example of the manner in which looking away from the site of trauma can facilitate the individual’s attempt to comprehend it. The speaker’s movement toward understanding within the final lines ultimately serves as a metonym for the purpose of “looking away” that is employed throughout the entirety of Part I of *North*.

The slain adultress in “Punishment” is one of several bog bodies that recur throughout *North*. Multiple poems in Part I look away from the Troubles and instead gaze upon these ancient human remains in order to represent indirectly and make sense of the violent conflict. Much like “The Tollund Man” and “Nerthus” from Heaney’s earlier *Wintering Out* collection, *North* uses the bog bodies as key emblematic imagery in the

poems “Come to the Bower,” “Bog Queen,” “The Grauballe Man,” “Punishment,” “Strange Fruit” and “Kinship” (McHale 243). Heaney’s interest in the bog bodies arose out of his initial encounter with P.V. Glob’s *The Bog People*, an anthropological survey of Iron Age human remains exhumed from European bogs. Heaney claims that he sent for the book as soon as he saw the first photograph of a bog body and then developed an obsession with them for their evocation of his “deepest concerns—landscape, religion, sexuality, violence, history, myth” (Parker 91). That the bog bodies recur so frequently and prominently within the collection speaks to their role in the fulfillment of Heaney’s attempt to find the symbols most adequate to the predicament of the Troubles. Part of the reason why they so adequately fulfill Heaney’s search is that they function as “emblems of cultural predisposition to tribal sacrifice” (Vendler 39) which helps to make sense of the Troubles by locating them within a kind of ancestry, a broader historical context.

Heaney’s use of the bog bodies as a means of representing strife-ridden Ireland has not gone without criticism. Denouncing Heaney’s possible appropriation of the bog bodies, “some critics have implied that Heaney expropriated the bog as a symbol after reading P.V. Glob’s *The Bog People*, as if to accuse him of literary ‘sharp practice’” (Parker 7), which is simply to say that, by using the bog bodies, he has dishonourably taken advantage of them (OED). Others see pseudo-sexual proclivities manifest in the poetic depictions of the bodies and “‘recognize’ in them the poet’s ‘necrophiliac’

tendencies, or his ‘neo-sadism’” (Parker 134), a criticism perhaps born out of the detailed description of the adultress’s naked body at the beginning of “Punishment.” Such treatment has also lent itself to the criticism that “Heaney sexualizes the religious conceptions of Celtic and north European prehistory” (Andrews 130) and fixes the bodies under his distinctly male gaze.

Critics have also picked up on the fact that these bog bodies—images dressed as artifacts from an Irish prehistory—share at most a tenuous connection to Irish prehistory. While other images Heaney employs such as the Vikings and Norse mythology seem pertinent to the Irish culture given the fact that Vikings indeed settled Ireland and imported their myths and legends, the bog bodies differ. For example, the Grauballe Man, from which the tenth poem in Part I of *North* takes its name, was exhumed on 26 April, 1952 in Nebelgård Fen which lies less than a mile south of the village of Grauballe, Denmark (Glob 37). These circumstances bear similarities to another bog body known as the Tollund Man, from which Heaney’s “The Tollund Man” in his *Wintering Out* collection takes its name; much like the Grauballe Man, the Tollund Man was exhumed from Tollund Fen in Denmark (18). Ultimately, while Glob reports 166 bog people findings in Denmark as of *The Bog People*’s 1969 publication date, only 19 were discovered in all of Ireland (101). As a result, the tenuous connection between these bodies and Irish history limits their potential to serve as the emblematic imagery Heaney

desires in order to represent the Troubles; indeed, “a reading of this section of the book as focusing exclusively on the ‘tragedy of a people in a place’ seems to be undercut by the variety of cultures, languages, historical periods, and nationalities that comprise this ‘people’” (E. O’Brien 85). In response, I wish to pose the following question: bearing in mind the tenuous connection between the nation and bodies he invokes, what is Heaney’s ethical duty to these bodies and does his treatment of them constitute a misappropriation or transgression?

The issue of the bog people’s ethical treatment reverberates with contemporary discourse about the way these bodies have been handled and continue to be handled within the anthropological community. In her article “Iron Age bog bodies of north-western Europe. Representing the dead,” anthropologist Melanie Giles reviews criticism concerning the manner in which these bodies continue to be interpreted and displayed within contemporary museums. Raising the question of whether these remains have been afforded proper respect, she cites “concerns that archaeology fails to treat ‘pagan’, prehistoric remains with the same dignity and respect that Christian remains receive” (79). Giles claims that groups objected to the fact “that the remains of ancient British individuals are treated unethically since they tend to be regarded as archaeological objects (this is indeed literally the case under Irish law)” (79). However, Giles also suggests that

objections also arise out of the fact that the bog bodies' unique aesthetic place the viewer at an uncomfortably close proximity to history:

Goodnow (2006) makes the convincing case that the special status of fleshed and virtually complete bodies is due to the way in which they flout the norms of display. Rather than being fragmented, sanitized and stripped bare, such remains force the viewer to face the 'abject' (a concept she draws from the work of Kristeva). They threaten the sense of distance and containment which a museum normally promises the viewer. This is the source of their power as an exhibit and of the unsettling emotions they engender in the viewer. (93)

Despite the aforementioned criticisms, Giles seeks to promote an ethical method of displaying the bog bodies. She defends the continued presentation of these pagan remains because of their potential as pedagogical tools. Indeed, Giles suggests that these bodies "can reveal the ways in which the past was palpably different from the present, inhabited by people with motives and concerns which may shock us, but which we attempt to understand" (91). However, Giles remarks that, in order for the bodies' pedagogical potential to be realized, curators must properly display the bodies in such a manner that speaks to the greater historical and cultural milieu from which they arise. She claims "that it is by conjuring the historical and environmental context of these violent events that we begin to understand them not as alien or barbaric acts, but as meaningful—if brutal—strategies, adopted by people in times of social crisis" (90). Such a method reads against the grain of their legal status as artifacts and strives to remedy their perceived dehumanization.

Interestingly, Giles invokes poetry and, specifically, Heaney in her outline of a more ethical method of treating the bog people. In her only mention of Heaney's poetry, she claims that the ultimate end of her prescribed methods of display is to "conjure a sense of perceived agency of the dead by giving them a voice, as in Heaney's poetry (1990)<sup>1</sup>, where the bog bodies exude fertility and potency, speaking to us of their dreams, crimes or relationships" (91). Here, I wish to contest Giles's claim by pointing out the manner in which it fails to take into account Heaney's ultimate project: though the poet devotes himself to a thorough, detailed depiction of the bog bodies, Heaney's interest in them is limited to their function as a means to an end. *North*'s primary concern is not to restore agency to the bog people, but rather to curtail their agency by directing their portrayals toward the goal of representing strife-ridden Ireland.

Part of the issue stems from the fact that bog body poems in *North* seem intent on obfuscating the fact that Glob's bog people are, indeed, the remains of humans. For example, the poem "Strange Fruit" borrows the language of plant and peat as it describes a body exhumed from a bog: her head is an "exhumed gourd" (l. 1), her teeth are "prune-stones" (l. 2), her hair is a "wet fern" (l. 3) and her nose is compared to "a turf clod" (l. 7). Additionally, "The Grauballe Man" does something similar. It describes another bog body in a similar manner: its wrists resemble "bog oak" (l. 7), its heel is "like a basalt

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<sup>1</sup> The collection to which Giles refers is Heaney's *New Selected Poems 1966-1987*, which contains all the bog poems from *North* save for "Come to the Bower" and "Kinship." "The Tollund Man" from *Wintering Out* is also anthologized in this collection.

egg” (l. 9), its spine is “an eel” (l. 15). These comparisons figure the body as an object of the speaker’s gaze; the body in this poem is not an acting agent but rather is acted upon, transformed by the speaker’s perception. Indeed, the speaker makes explicit the denial of the bog people’s embodiment by asking “Who will say ‘corpse’ / to his vivid cast? / Who will say ‘body’ / to his opaque repose?” (l. 25-28). Such a question clearly works against Giles’s suggestion that poems such as “Strange Fruit” or “The Grauballe Man” lend these bodies any sort of agency. Ultimately, denying these bodies existence is tantamount to denying the bog people personhood and subjectivity. Just as the bodies are transformed into something other than a body, so too are they transformed into objects through which the poet completes his search for his desired symbolic and emblematic imagery.

Another ethical consideration that arises out of Heaney’s poetic invocation of the bog people concerns the issue of voice. Indeed, the poem “Bog Queen” offers an especially germane example of Heaney’s poetry lending voice to the bog people: it is the only one of *North*’s six bog body poems told from the perspective of an actual bog person. The titular bog body is the Bog Queen of Moira, “an aristocrat of the Viking culture occupying Ireland in the tenth century, [who] was hacked from a peat floe south of Belfast in 1781” (Collins 91), which makes her the only bog body in the collection exhumed from Irish territory (Andrews 86). She claims that she “lay waiting / between turf-face and demesne wall, / between heathery levels / and glass-toothed stone” (l. 1-4).

She tells of her own decay over centuries in peat before shifting focus and apprising the reader of the way she was “robbed” (l. 42): she attests that she “was barbered / and stripped / by a turfcutter’s spade” (l. 43-44). The turfcutter attempted to lodge her back into the peat until the wife of one of his peers bribed him into removing the Bog Queen from her rest (l. 45-53). In many ways, this poem serves as an effective counter to “Strange Fruit” or “The Grauballe Man.” Instead of becoming transformed as a perceived object of the speaker’s gaze, the speaker is afforded subjectivity and tells of her own exhumation as a disruptive, criminal process. The poem’s critical representation of exhumation gives dramatic voice to a claim made by Giles, namely that some individuals contend that disturbing the bodies from the site of their burial or internment might indeed be disrespectful. As a result, in contrast with the other bog poems, “Bog Queen” adequately functions as an attempt to advocate in the interests of the bog people.

Nonetheless, the respectful poetic treatment of the bog bodies seen in “Bog Queen” does not wholly redeem *North*. Though “Bog Queen” portrays the titular body as a thinking, speaking agent, the text nonetheless continues to treat her as it does the rest of the bog people: as a means to an end. As Henry Hart observes, “Heaney mythologizes the actual Danish Viking discovered by the turf cutter [...] into a symbol of Ireland possession by Catholics and dispossession by Protestants” (90). She has indeed been reduced to mythology, to a mouthpiece for “the collective or personal ideology or set of

beliefs which underpins or informs a particular point of view” (OED)—which, in this case, refers to Heaney’s own ambivalent take on the Irish Troubles. As such, though the poem affords the Bog Queen voice, she continues to be an object read and perhaps even exploited for the fulfillment of the collection’s particular agenda. The poem itself even signals her status as a read object through reference to the fact that her body is “braille / for the creeping influences” (l. 5-6), pondered over by “illiterate roots” (l. 12). Despite her ostensible agency, the Bog Queen continues to be a legible, serviceable tool for *North*’s ideological pursuits.

To evaluate the ethicality of Heaney’s poetic treatment of the bog bodies properly, I choose to locate it within a broader sense of historical writing. In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau works against a reductionist understanding of historiography as a mere narrative of past events. Rather than suggesting that historiography offers an objective account of history, de Certeau posits historiography as a form of praxis that ultimately lends itself to the creation of history (21). With attention to historiography as a process of production, de Certeau suggests that the writing of history does not uncover truths but instead produces symbols that organize the past into an intelligible discourse. Throughout his work, de Certeau traces the practice of historical writing from seventeenth century religious history to eighteenth century Enlightenment discourse. Ultimately, de Certeau suggests that, by examining historiography with specific attention to its role in

the production of history, it may become possible to develop better understandings of the past, culture and textuality.

In lieu of an exhaustive engagement with the entirety of de Certeau's project, I am primarily concerned with his analysis of the writing of history as an act of fragmentation inherently linked to the process of forgetting. For de Certeau, the writing of history is understood in terms of what he calls the discourse of separation. Differentiated from the present moment, the past is fragmentary and Othered: it is distinct from the historian and therefore evades his attempt to seek it. Thus, there exists a disconnect or incongruence "between the analytical apparatus, which is present, and the materials analyzed, the documents concerning curiosities about the dead" (10). What arises out of historical discourse, then, is a type of construction. Rather, "[i]n the case of historiography, fiction can be found at the end of the process, in the product of the manipulation and the analysis. Its story is given as a staging of the past" (9). As a result, the writing of history is inherently linked to processes of forgetting and rewriting. In order for these intelligible models of the past to be maintained, pieces of history must be forgotten so that it can become thinkable.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> One can identify key similarities between this burial of history and Jacques Derrida's figuration of the archive in *Archive Fever*. Specifically, Derrida claims that the archive "keeps, it puts in reserve, it saves, but in an unnatural fashion" (7). Indivisible from the Freudian death drive, "the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory" (11). Thus, just as "[t]he archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself" (12), de Certeau's concept of historiography is similarly "[a] labor of death and a labor against death" (de Certeau 5). Both theoretical models ultimately posit memory and forgetfulness as coterminous categories.

This dual movement between forgetting the past while simultaneously constructing a fantasmic, fictive historiography bears implications for the dead. Any attempt on behalf of the historian to speak for the dead and lend them voice is yet another fiction. Speaking of historiography, de Certeau writes that “[t]he dear departed find a haven in the text *because* they can neither speak nor do harm anymore. These ghosts find access through *writing* on the condition that they remain *forever silent*” (2, emphasis in original). Thus, the historian cannot lend voice to the dead; rather, the historian only projects his or her own consciousness onto the dead and masks their alterity. As a result, rather than lending them agency, historiography merely “aims at calming the dead who still haunt the present, and at offering them scriptural tombs” (2). This burial is ultimately the work of the historian.

With de Certeau’s framework in mind, I wish to suggest that Heaney is not guilty of exploiting the bog bodies as objects directed toward *North*’s poetic agenda. Rather, his work exposes the limits of historical writing as an endeavor that cannot authentically apprehend or represent the alterity of the past. Moreover, though Heaney reads the bog bodies as objects rather than the remains of humans who once lived, *any* attempt to lend these bodies agency and subjectivity would merely entail the poet’s projection of his own consciousness onto the bodies. To do more would require him to grasp the otherness of these bog bodies. Because the apparatus of historical writing is located in the present

whereas the object—the bodies themselves—belong to the past, historiography does not permit Heaney to effectively lend agency to these bodies in a manner described by Melanie Giles.

I also wish to suggest that Heaney's decision to insert non-Irish bog bodies into a mythological exploration of Irish cultural history might indeed be an appropriate move. As de Certeau explores, history is incomprehensible until one possesses models that transform the past into something intelligible:

If therefore the story of 'what happened' disappears from scientific history (in order, in contrast, to appear in popular history), or if the narrative of facts takes on the allure of a "fiction" belonging to a given type of discourse, we cannot conclude that the reference to the real is obliterated. This reference has instead been somewhat displaced. It is no longer immediately given by narrated or 'reconstituted' objects. It is implied by the creation of 'models' (destined to make objects 'thinkable') proportioned to practices through their confrontation with what resists them, limits them, and makes appeal to other models; finally, through the clarification of what has made this activity possible, by inserting it within a particular (or historical) economy of social production. (43)

Though the bodies do not necessarily belong to Irish prehistory, per se, they nonetheless serve as exemplary subjects that fulfill Heaney's objective: to lend sense and understanding to a cultural event that is otherwise intelligible. Making sense of the present through a turn toward the past makes sense given de Certeau's suggestion that, "founded on the rupture between a past that is its object, and a present that is the place of its practice, history endlessly finds the present in its object and the past in its practice" (36). As a result, though Heaney's invocation of the bog bodies may seem exploitative,

his mythical model in truth simply exhibits some of the tendencies that often attend historical writing.

Though Heaney's model remains ethical when located within a broader scheme of historiography, it may nonetheless be incomplete. As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub suggest in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, liberation is the ultimate result of giving testimony. Indeed, they claim that the decision to articulate and voice traumatic experience is freeing, relieving the speaker of a burden while also revealing the conscious and unconscious effects this burden has had on the individual and all forthcoming generations (46-47). Ideally, such a process will have profoundly generative and therapeutic ends. However, though the representative models invoked in Part I of *North*—which I have framed as a productive process of turning away from the trauma in order to make it knowable—are ethical and germane within the greater context of historiography, the conclusion of Part I signals the fact that such a poetic enterprise may not alone possess the potential to liberate the author and Irish nation from their psychological burdens.

The intimation of this possible incompleteness arises in the final poem in Part I of *North*, "Hercules and Antaeus." The poem depicts a battle between two figures of Greek myth: Hercules, poetically venerated through references to "his future hung with trophies" (l. 4) and his "black powers / feeding off the territory" (l. 6-7), and Antaeus, a

humble “mould-hugger, / [who] is weaned at last” (l. 8-9). Ultimately, Hercules proves to be the victor. Antaeus is overcome by “a blue prong grasping him / out of his element / into a dream of loss” (l. 14-16) and thus must cede his territory of rivers, gullies, caves and souterrain to elegists (l. 18-23). Hercules, however, celebrates his conquest with a celebratory stance:

“Hercules lifts his arms  
in a remorseless V,  
his triumph unassailed  
by the powers he has shaken,

and lifts and banks Antaeus  
high as a profiled ridge,  
a sleeping giant,  
paw for the dispossessed.” (l. 25-32)

The poem’s concluding final line ultimately speaks to Antaeus’s entrance into martyrdom but suggests that he cannot provide anything of substance to those who draw inspiration from such figures.

Critics commonly read the skirmish between Hercules and Antaeus as an allegorical representation of England’s conquest of Ireland. Indeed, in *The Poetry of Resistance: Seamus Heaney and the Pastoral Tradition*, Sidney Burris suggests that Antaeus’s defeat at the hands of Hercules could represent “the brooding Ireland overthrown time and again by England” (97). As well, Burris even goes on to accuse Heaney of taking a reductivist approach, employing allegory as a means of simplifying history in such a way that renders it formulaic and obtrusive (98). Moreover, Brian

Hughes expounds upon this connection by suggesting the V formation made by Hercules evokes a similar gesture popularized Winston Churchill (Molino 95).<sup>3</sup> This allegorical reading would suggest that the poem lends its sympathies and its allegiances predominantly to the Irish, who are the poem's "dispossessed" deriving nourishment from martyr figures.

Despite the popularity of this allegorical reading, Michael R. Molino's *Questioning Tradition, Language, and Myth: The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* offers an alternate interpretation of "Hercules and Antaeus." His reading figures the poem as a meditation on the limitations of myth as an effective form of representation:

Antaeus, rooted as he is in the earth, is representative of the Irish tradition and the myth of origin; he is a voice of monumentality who imagines to speak as a unity. Hercules, on the other hand, is the force of discourse of demythification, the constant struggle of an Irish writer to circumvent monumentality; he is a voice aware that tradition is a teeming conflict of ideologies, perspectives, and systems. The struggle between the two, then, is a form of self-inflicted violence by the Irish writer, for Hercules severs what Antaeus attempts to unify. (95)

Locating Molino's reading within the traumatic framework I have provided, I suggest Hercules's victory casts uncertainty over Heaney's representative model by signaling a need for further experimentation. If Heaney's efforts to look away from the site of trauma were wholly successful in their attempt to facilitate the poet's delivery of testimony, why then does Part I of *North* end with an image of the inefficacy of myth?

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<sup>3</sup> The V popularized by Churchill is performed only with one hand as opposed to both arms. The gesture symbolizes victory as opposed to peace, which is the meaning it later adopted during the peace movement.

That Heaney disparages his own methodology suggests a need to incorporate other tactics in his attempt to bear witness to the event of trauma.

The inability for Heaney's mythical method to singlehandedly serve as a vehicle for his attempt to deliver testimony speaks to a desire to engage directly with the Troubles. Indeed, in an article for the *P.B.S. Bulletin*, Heaney expressed "a need to be explicit about the pressures and prejudices watermarked into the psyche of anyone born and bred in Northern Ireland" (133). Though Heaney's appeal to representative models has allowed him to render trauma comprehensible, it alone does not satisfy his testimonial enterprise. As Part II will demonstrate, Heaney desires a more explicit method focalized around his own autobiographical persona in order to effectively represent and work through his experience of the Troubles.

In this chapter, I have examined the manner in which Part I of *North* looks away from direct engagement with the Troubles in order to construct representational models that seek to render legible the incomprehensible experience of trauma. However, as I have suggested, such a project is not without its ethical pitfalls. Though Heaney risks misappropriating and objectifying the bog bodies his collection describes—bodies which already possess no more than a tangential connection to Irish history—I have nonetheless sought to redeem Heaney's project by locating it within a broader consideration of historiography, as supplied by Michel de Certeau's *The Writing of History*. Ultimately,

Heaney signals doubt in his own project toward the end of Part I, at which point he intimates that mythification provide a complete vehicle for the delivery of testimony. As a result, Part I concludes by opening a space for Part II and the poet's decision to represent Irish cultural trauma by appealing to a more straightforward, individuated methodology.

## Chapter Two:

### Escaped from the Massacre: Testimony, Community and Poetry in Part II of *North*

Whereas Part I of *North* looks away from the Troubles and turns toward a mythical representational model in order to make legible Irish cultural trauma, Part II explores an alternate mimetic strategy. In contrast to the mythic narratives that recur throughout the first half of *North*, Part II attempts to communicate the trauma of the Troubles through a discourse of demythification. Indeed, the text's reduced emphasis upon myth as a means of representing Irish cultural trauma occurs within its localized, individuated attention to personal narrative—that is, the agonies and anxieties of a lyrical voice Heaney offers as his own psyche. As Heaney provides personal testimony on the Troubles and attempts to use references to empirical reality as the means by which he makes the reader privy to his experiences, he simultaneously undercuts this initiative through a profound lack of faith in the potential of poetry and a foreclosure of the possibility of community. As I will demonstrate, the closing poems draw the reader's attention toward the manner in which Heaney condemns his medium and his community, which undermines the efficacy of his entire testimonial enterprise. As such, because of the poet's agonizing consciousness, *North* as an experimentation with different methods of delivering testimony remains unfulfilled.

Rather than invoking an unidentified poetic voice metonymous with the “common man” of Northern Ireland, Heaney instead draws upon a speaking voice comprising his own experiences, anxieties and persona: indeed, the audience is invited to bear witness to a man conflicted by his religion, his nation and his anxieties about poetry itself. Indeed, while a reader’s decision to conflate poet and speaker may often be erroneous, there exists ample reason to believe the speaking voice of Part II is none other than Heaney himself. For example, Michael Parker claims “in Part Two he maps out the contours of a personal mythology, identifying formative moments from his Catholic past” (Parker 126). One can see this suggestion at work in poems such as “Freedman,” which explores Heaney’s Catholic roots, and in “The Ministry of Fear,” which appeals to detail and specificity as it enumerates locations from Heaney’s past such as St. Columb’s College and Berkeley while also charting his friendship with Irish poet and critic Seamus Deane (Collins 102). Even the first poem in Part II, “The Unacknowledged Legislator’s Dream,” which does not recall any particular lived experience of Heaney’s, nonetheless invokes the poet’s anxieties over the fraught relationship between poetry and resistance. As a result, while Part I primarily explored the traumas of an Irish nation, Part II brings focus to Heaney’s figuration of trauma as it relates to his identities as both a Catholic and a poet.

The individuated biographical details which recur throughout *North* privilege lived experience over mythology and, in doing so, lend an enhanced sense of realism to

the testimony being delivered. However, potential difficulties arise when one considers the fact that trauma (and, by extension, testimony itself) does not necessarily correspond to an empirical reality in any linear, coherent fashion. Indeed, Laub and Felman's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* speaks to the manner in which realism and testimony can often operate at cross-purposes with one another:

The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of 'otherness,' a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of master. (69).

Because Laub and Felman suggest that trauma is "othered" from one's perception of empirical reality, a figuration of testimony framed within the kind of realism Heaney invokes may not provide an adequate framework for the representation of traumatic experience. Furthermore, Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* explores the limitations of realism as it corresponds to the representation of trauma:

I would propose that it is here, in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma—both in its occurrence and in the attempt to understand it—that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). (11)

If the traumatic history of the Troubles in Ireland is one that lies outside of experience and reference, as Caruth suggests, then Heaney's endeavour to represent trauma through

straightforward reference to his own individuated experiences is perhaps flawed from the outset.

Despite the inherent difficulties in offering a kind of testimony that preserves the realism of traumatic experience, there nonetheless exists value in one's attempt to transmit traumatic experience through reference to an empirical reality. Laub and Felman suggest that, as part of the process of overcoming trauma, "historical reality has to be reconstructed and reaffirmed before any work can start" (69). Indeed, through their analysis of testimony delivered by Holocaust survivors, Laub and Felman suggest that both speaker and witness must be "strong enough to affirm the reality of the terror of the extermination camps in actual *nonmetaphorical statements*" (69-70, emphasis in original). In doing so, the speaker reconstructs the historical, empirical reality that has been devastated by the experience of trauma and thus begins to work toward their return to such a reality. Thus, though the traumatic event may resist the kind of biographical and historical realism Heaney draws upon in Part II, such a straightforward and directly referential relation of experience fulfills a central component of the process of delivering testimony.

However, it is important to remember that the second half of *North* does not exclusively devote itself to the straightforward representation of empirical reality. For example, the first poem in the section, "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream," locates the reality of Heaney's experiences and anxieties within a hyperbolized and

dramatized frame. The poem, a contemplation of the role of the poet within the political arena, depicts an idealized figuration of Heaney as a rebel-poet who subverts the authority of the state in an overtly dramatic and cinematic manner: cheered on by his caged statesmen, he attempts to overcome guard-dog and armed soldier alike until his eventual detainment. When the commandant realizes the speaker's profession, he does not act intimidated but rather appears genuinely amused and remarks that he is "'honoured to add a poet to [their] list [of detainees]'" (Heaney 51). In doing so, the poem interrogates the idea that a poet "could ever offer anything more than a kind of brief and ineffectual display of political bravado" (54). Through its hyperbolized interpretation of lived experience, "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" ultimately suggests that poetry provides a poor form of political resistance when compared to more direct, immediate tactics.

What is particularly interesting in regards to this poem is the restraint employed in regards to any sort of mythical method. Instead of filtering the entirety of the poem through an allegorical lens, the poem's invocation of myth is fleeting. The text briefly compares the rebel-poet Heaney to Archimedes and Tarzan, replete with mentions of the former's world-moving crowbar and the latter's swinging creeper. In many ways, such an economy between past and present inverts the balance struck in such Part I poems as "Funeral Rites." Whereas "Funeral Rites" couches microscopic references to Irish funerals within the macroscopic frame supplied by *Njal's Saga* and Viking history, "The

Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" shifts the balance by locating its allusions within an individuated narrative of the poet/hero. Given the poem's placement at the beginning of Part II, the poem begins the shift from demythification to realism in the entirety of the second half of *North*.

Rather than detracting from Part II's attempt to articulate Heaney's personal experience straightforwardly without relying on a mythical model, these restrained examples of allusion in fact contribute to the discourse of demythification. In "Traumatic Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter," Kevin Newmark considers Walter Benjamin's analysis of individual experience and the manner in which such a phenomenon can be understood and communicated. Indeed, Newmark writes that "[s]ince experience (*Erfahrung*) in the strict sense, for Benjamin, always consists in the coordination of individual elements within a larger pattern or tradition, such experience would be possible only where 'certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past'" (236). With attention to this theoretical framework, one can see that an attempt to convey individual experience in a direct manner does not necessitate that all aspects of myth be expunged from the narrative. Rather, the occasional references to myth that inhere throughout Part II provide the reader with a pattern so that the experiences of the speaking subject become more comprehensible. Thus, though Part II invokes myth, it does so only in service to its larger aim of

communicating individuated experience. The text's dedication to the discourse of demythification ultimately remains intact.

The scarce references to myth that occur in "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" make no appearance whatsoever in the next poem in the collection, "Whatever You Say Say Nothing." Here, the text crystallizes its empirical frame by maintaining the integrity of time and space. Indeed, the poem begins by locating its own creation within a linear temporality and an identifiable location:

I'm writing this just after an encounter  
With an English journalist in search of 'views  
On the Irish thing'. I'm back in winter  
Quarters<sup>4</sup> where bad news is no longer news,

Where media-men and stringers sniff and point,  
Where zoom lenses, recorders and coiled leads  
Litter the hotels. (Heaney l. 1-7)

Continued establishment of time and place occur in the Orange drums that beat "[l]ast night" (l. 42) and the internment camp viewed "[t]his morning from a dewy motorway" (l. 77). Moreover, the poem's commitment to reality inheres within microscopic details to the daily lived experiences of surviving the Troubles. For example, the text outlines with a strong sense of detachment the culture of paranoia that has taken hold of Northern Ireland and the way acts as commonplace speech have been superseded within this new "land of password, handgrip, wink and nod" (l. 71-72). Furthermore, the poem also describes the manner in which one's identification becomes fixed within

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<sup>4</sup> Heaney is referring to his return to Ulster after a sojourn in America (Collins, 100).

“[m]anoeuverings to find out name and school, / Subtle discrimination by addresses” (l. 66-67). Here, the poem preserves reality by focusing on the Troubles as it comes to affect the site of the everyday.

Heaney’s shift toward a more direct, plain-spoken figuration of testimony in Part II has received its own share of criticism. For example, Floyd Collins’s *Seamus Heaney: The Crisis of Identity* compares the second half of *North* unfavourably to the first. Collins claims that the collection’s later poems achieve directness only at the cost of craftsmanship:

Confronting the Troubles in Northern Ireland directly, they eschew the impulse to link the violence to cultural precedents; as a result, they often lack the subtlety and artifice of the bog sequence. Here Heaney returns to a longer line and more regular metric, though the diction at times seems colloquial and slack. For the most part, these poems are too didactic, often lapsing into strict reportage of events. (99)

Additionally, Elmer Andrews in *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* offers remarks of a similar vein. Claiming that “[f]ew indications are given of any confidence in the art of poetry,” (108) the poems that comprise Part II at various points read more like “prose pieces” (108) and come off “patronizing” (109). He concludes that these poems serve to demonstrate “a measure of the doubt and uncertainty about his art which have latterly afflicted the poet” (115). Ultimately, the bog poems tend to enjoy the greater deal of attention out of all of *North* and the poems that comprise Part II do not receive the same reception.

Though I am disinclined to believe that Part II necessarily reads as patronizing, I agree with Andrews's suggestion that the poems display the poet's lost confidence in his medium. For example, as I have already suggested of "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream," the poem concludes with the suggestion that Heaney's hyperbolized figure of the rebel-poet who can effect political change is as much a myth or fiction as the figures of Archimedes and Tarzan to whom he is compared. Additionally, "Freedman" also hints toward the poet's doubts in his own craft. The text describes Heaney having found refuge from the Catholic tendency toward self-effacing humility through poetry, but then engages in a quick rhetorical turn:

Then poetry arrived in that city –  
I would abjure all cant and self-pity –  
And poetry wiped the brow and sped me.  
Now they will say I bite the hand that fed me. (l. 13-16)

Ambiguity comes to bear on the final line. Indeed, the conclusion of the poem could refer to two things: that Heaney will find himself accused of having betrayed his Catholic brethren by having written the critical poem or that he will find himself accused of having shown disloyalty toward his artistic craft. It is fair to suggest that both meanings may be operative within the text, underscoring the poet's lack of faith within the potential for poetry.

Further evidence suggesting that Heaney may have lost confidence in the art of poetry appears in "Summer 1969." In this particular poem, Heaney "proceeds to question the role of the artist in the face of such political and social violence" (E. O'Brien 44).

While in Madrid, Heaney is implored to return to Ireland and “try to touch the people” (Heaney l. 15). He then compares himself and his predicament to Francisco Goya’s “Shootings of the Third of May” in which the artist “painted with his fists and elbows, flourished / The stained cape of his heart as history changed” (l. 33-34). Here, “there is a sense that art will always be a mediating factor, not actually part of ‘the real thing’” (E. O’Brien 44). The poem returns to the issue raised in “The Unacknowledged Legislator’s Dream” about whether art can indeed function as resistance, but the comparison to Goya—whose paintings occurred alongside changes to history, but with no causal relation identified in the text—further confirms the poet’s belief that poetry and perhaps all art will remain feckless within the political arena.

Not only do the poems display a profound anxiety on Heaney’s behalf concerning the efficacy of poetry, but they also seem to foreclose the possibility of community. One can witness this foreclosure within his poetic treatment of his Catholic upbringing. For example, in response to Edna Longley’s suggestion that Heaney’s Catholic attitude dominates *North*, Michael Parker points out that “Heaney’s attitude towards his Catholic inheritance is not by any means uncritical or unquestioning. He had not simply slipped into a reactionary, nationalist, Catholic position” (151). However, “The Ministry of Fear” presents a position that is perhaps more than what one might expect from a Catholic who merely does not wish to remain uncritical or unquestioning. The poem’s trajectory of Heaney’s early life from St. Columb’s College to Belfast and Berkeley offers more than

criticism of policemen who read Heaney's private letters and threatened him with violence (l. 52-59). Indeed, "Irish Catholicism is a crucial element in the environment Heaney aptly terms 'The Ministry of Fear': priests wield their authority no less severely than the British" (Collins 102) as they punish and interrogate. Moreover, in "Freedman," Heaney describes practicing his faith as a kind of subjugation (l. 1) that exacerbated Northern Catholic inferiority by rendering his peers "earth-starred denizens" (l. 9) fed upon by "lampreys" (l. 12). Though he does not outright decry his faith, Heaney suggests "the Catholic Church had collaborated in and contributed to the political and spiritual repressiveness of the North" (Parker 145). In a time when various sects are warring against one other, Heaney is unable to find any redemptive form of community within his religion.

The final poem in the "Singing School" sequence, "Exposure," provides another image of a speaker whose promise of community has been foreclosed. Set during December in Wicklow, Ireland, Heaney portrays himself contemplating a lost comet that will again become visible at sunset. His thoughts then transition as he finds himself "[i]maging a hero / On some muddy compound, / His gift like a slingstone / Whirled for the desperate" (13-16). If this appeal to some mythical form of heroism too closely begins to resemble the poetic tactics employed in Part I, the text resumes literalizing the speaker's anxieties with surprising abruptness:

How did I end up like this?  
I often think of my friends'

Beautiful prismatic counseling  
And the anvil brains of some who hate me

As I sit weighing and weighing  
My responsible *tristia*.  
For what? For the ear? For the people?  
For what is said behind-backs? (l. 17-24)

As the poem concludes, Heaney appears to demonstrate a profound distrust for the possibility of communication with an audience; while he seems to have faith in those close to him, he grapples with the larger unnameable audience of “the people.”

Furthermore, the reference to *tristia*—which “puns aurally on Trieste, [James] Joyce’s initial place of exile in the mediterranean” (Collins 104)—expands upon Heaney’s sense of distrust to the point of self-imposed banishment. Ultimately, he concludes that he has become “[a]n inner émigré, grown long-haired / And thoughtful; a wood-kerne / Escaped from the massacre” (l. 31-33) who, attempting to warm himself off meager sparks, has “missed / The once-in-a-lifetime portent, / The comet’s pulsing rose” (l. 39-40). This image, which occupies the final lines of *North*, suggests that seclusion does not offer a productive, generative space but rather one where opportunities and promises cannot be fulfilled.

As Eugene O’Brien claims in *Seamus Heaney: Creating Irelands of the Mind*, there is a dual kind of exposure occurring in this poem. The title refers not only to the speaker’s exposure to the weather and nature but also to the manner in which he exposes himself and his alienation from community:

In “Exposure”, there is no loyalty to the past or to a personified notion of the past.

Significantly, the bog is demythologised succinctly by being called a ‘muddy compound’. Here there is no sense of the communal: the voice is individual and full of questions and doubts. (51)

Indeed, though Heaney has found merit in a variety of communities while refusing to play into partisan politics by valorizing one over another—north/south, unionist/nationalist, Protestant/Catholic—the conclusion of “Exposure” demonstrates the ultimate outcome of such ambivalence. As a result, though Heaney has been unable to find comfort within community, there is no relief in seclusion. In a moment of pathetic fallacy, the rain from which Heaney cannot shelter himself “[m]utter[s] about let-downs and erosions” (l. 27) and here Heaney must become a figure “who looks within for the true source of identity” (Collins 105). Having shirked the possibility of finding comfort in community, there is no form of identity for Heaney to find but one that is, much like the entirety of Part II, strictly individuated.

Heaney’s individuated rejection of community bears significant implications for the testimonial enterprise embodied by *North*. According to Laub and Felman, the entire possibility of testimony hangs upon the necessity of a connection formed between speaker and listening audience:

Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*—in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking *to somebody*: to somebody they have been waiting for for a long time. (70-71, emphasis in original)

For Heaney to posit himself as a figure exiled in solitude suggests a breakdown of the speaker-listener relationship and the foreclosure of testimony. Indeed, “the absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story” (68, emphasis in original). Because Heaney forecloses the possibility of testimony, he also rejects the opportunity to strengthen communal ties. According to Caruth, it is through testimony that the distinction between two separate individuals can be elided. She claims that testimony evokes “the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (Caruth 8). As a result, testimony possesses the potential to lend unity and solidarity to a group of disparate others. While Heaney’s poetry possesses the potential to evoke such solidarity, his rejection of community and, by extension, the possibility of a listening audience limits the possibility for such to occur.

Heaney’s anxieties about the efficacy of poetry signal his uncertainty about the medium as a means of delivering testimony. As part of their analysis of the connection between testimony and poetic verse, Laub and Felman examine French Symbolist poet Mallarmé’s meditation on free verse and the potential that attends the deviation from a fixed meter. According to Laub and Felman, Mallarmé delineates free verse as “an *art of*

*accident* in that it is an art of rhythmical surprises, an art, precisely, of unsettling rhythmical, syntactic and semantic expectations” (19, emphasis in original). Mallarmé extends his analysis by describing this act of unsettling as a figuration of violence that takes place within the breaking of verse. Therein lies the potential for testimonial poetry, according to Mallarmé: “[a]s the testimony to an accident which is materially embodied in an *accidenting of the verse*, poetry henceforth speaks with the very power—with the very unanticipated impact—of its own explosion of its medium” (19, emphasis in original). Ultimately, Mallarmé suggests that testimonial free verse performs the very disruption it attempts to contain and express, which explains the form’s unique potential to serve as a vehicle for the articulation of traumatic experience. By shirking poetry for its inefficacy in the political arena, Heaney also betrays his attempt to use it as a medium to articulate his testimony. As a result, without faith in community or poetry, Part II of *North*, like Part I, offers a testimonial enterprise whose promise and potential have not been fully realized.

The poet’s lack of faith in community and poetry is intensified when one examines the collection’s “Singing School” sequence—encapsulating the poems “The Ministry of Fear,” “A Constable Calls,” “Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966,” “Summer 1969,” “Fosterage” and “Exposure”—specifically through its relation to W.B. Yeats and other poets. Indeed, the title of the sequence references Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium”—“Nor is there singing-school but studying / Monuments of its own

magnificence” (l. 13-14)—and “refers to the Platonic idea of the soul enriching itself through the contemplation of great works of art” (Parker 146). As well as personal refinement, the lines also suggest “that art very often thrives through its interaction with other forms of art” (E. O’Brien 44). Furthermore, the sequence begins with a quotation from Yeats’s *Autobiographies of William Butler Yeats*:

He [the stable-boy] had a book of Orange rhymes, and the days when we read them together in the hay-loft gave me the pleasure of rhyme for the first time. Later on I can remember being told, when there was a rumour of the Fenian rising, that rifles were being handed out to the Orangemen: and presently, when I began to dream of my future life, I thought I would like to die fighting for the Fenians. (qtd. in Heaney 57)

Immediately, it becomes apparent the sequence uses Yeats’s poetry to get at the divide between the written word and direct involvement with the world.

In addition to their connection to Yeats, the poems that comprise the “Singing School” sequence “embrace allusions to Kavanagh, Joyce, Woodsworth, Hopkins, Katherine Mansfield, Graham Greene, Lorca, Goya and Osip Mandelstam” (Parker 146-47). Here, one might recognize a negation of Heaney’s previous sentiments. By crystallizing his poetry within a series of connections to other artists, Heaney appears to locate himself within a kind of community—the possibility of which Part II of *North* has already resisted. Moreover, these allusions may also suggest poetry as a positive, useful space if it is able to foster such a communal social environment. Ultimately, the numerous poetic allusions at work in “Singing School” invite the following question: if Heaney has lost faith in the potential of his own poetic voice, is he suggesting that they

might still exist some possibility for redemption immersed within a community of his peers?

Given the nature of his poetic persona and his politics, Yeats functions as an effective emblem for the division between poetry and political action. Serving as an important precursor to Heaney and various other Irish poets, Yeats possessed an “assertive personality both as a writer and as a public figure” which he directed to “the cause of national independence” (McCormack 131). As well, though Yeats’s poetry is often reflective in nature, “[t]he backward look of his poetry is not a retreat from the present. Yeats loved a quarrel too much to retreat to where all the warriors were ghosts” (Frazier 69). Though Protestant, Yeats, like Heaney, often transcends sectarian divides in his writing: he “manifested an uncanny ability to become the voice of Irish feeling, both Catholic and Protestant” (Frazier 74), which gave him “the ability occasionally to speak for all Irishmen” (Frazier 75). However, it is important to note that this multitudinous voice waned over time:

By the end of his career Yeats had thus identified himself completely with the Anglo-Irish and as completely alienated himself from the Catholic Irish. [...] The masks he chooses in *Last Poems* are of gold, stone, and bronze--rich materials but immobile ones, signifying his unrelenting sense of identity. He speaks as a wild old man, a wild wicked man, a fool, a foolish passionate man, emphasizing his self-ostracism from tame and sensible society. These are the politics of a hermit. (Frazier 81).

Rather than lending Heaney a sense of artistic community, Yeats serves as a figure whom Heaney can—and, indeed, does—emulate toward the end of *North*. Just as Yeats’s career

commenced with poetic involvement and developed toward a hermit-like political stance, so too does “Singing School” begin with a quotation about the galvanizing power of verse and end with “Exposure,” an exilic meditation on the inefficacy of poetry. As a result, the sequence’s allusion to Yeats merely serves to further crystallize Heaney’s already salient position of non-involvement.

In addition to Michael Parker’s aforementioned list of writers and artists to whom “The Singing School” alludes, I wish to add Percy Bysshe Shelley. Indeed, this particular connection is certainly tenable given the fact that Part II of *North* has already once referenced Shelley: the title of “The Unacknowledged Legislator’s Dream” derives from Shelley’s observation that “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (qtd. in Murphy 54). Given the fact that “Singing School” already contains numerous references to other nineteenth and twentieth century poets, I believe “Exposure” may also allude significantly to Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind.” Heaney’s motivation for such an allusion may lie in the fact that “Exposure” and “Ode to the West Wind” both arise out of similar circumstances. Just as Heaney wrote “Exposure” after his relocation to the Republic of Ireland (Parker 149), so too did Shelley write “Ode to the West Wind” as an expatriate living in Italy (King-Hele 258). Thus, Heaney may have felt an affinity toward Shelley as a perceived fellow exile. Indeed, Heaney’s agonizing reflection on the potentials and limitations of the poetic form as well as the manner in which his poetic persona is written to be “feeling / Every wind that blows” (l. 35-36) noticeably evoke

Shelley's work, which engages with a similar subject: the poet as a catalyst for change in the world. I wish to suggest that Heaney's appropriation of Shelley's text signals his continued distrust in poetry as an agent for testimony.

"Ode to the West Wind" aligns the poetic spirit with the image of a westwardly wind. Shelley addresses the Wind and implores it to "[d]rive [his] dead thoughts over the universe, / Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth" (l. 63-64). Here, the leaves serve as an emblem for the possibility of change effected by the poetic spirit. "Exposure" similarly invokes leaves as an image, though with significantly less optimism. Heaney comments that he "walk[s] through damp leaves, / Husks, the spent flukes of autumn" (l. 11-12). While Shelley's withered leaves represent a latent vitality and a potential that may indeed be realized, Heaney's leaves lack such promise: they are feckless and inert, husks as opposed to seeds, unable to instill the kind of change Shelley imagines. As a result, Heaney invokes Shelley's poem only to subvert and reverse the latter poet's philosophy, directing it toward his goal of demonstrating the inefficacy of the poetic spirit.

Another direct correlation between Shelley's poem and "Exposure" occurs within the reference to sparks. Shelley instructs the Wind to "[s]catter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!" (l. 66-67). Here, Shelley seems to affirm the possibility for his words, the sparks, to inculcate change; indeed, his work validates the poetic imagination as a vehicle for social and political

action in the world. In contrast, though “Exposure” depicts Heaney feeling the wind blowing against him, it is he—not the wind—who is “blowing up these sparks / For their meager heat” (l. 37-38). Thus, though Heaney can sense the poetic spirit and feel its influence, he does not put faith in its potential as a catalyst for change. Ultimately, the ending of the poem provides no confirmation as to whether such an attempt is successful, though it is clear that poetry plays no role in Heaney’s efforts.

I wish to suggest that Heaney’s appropriation and inversion of Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” does not outright signal a complete rejection of the latter poet’s philosophy. Rather, Heaney is perhaps suggesting that poetry fails to effect change only when attempting to account for and work through issues of trauma. Indeed, in a December 1973 interview, Heaney gestures toward a kind of distortion that occurs when poetry is made to contain something akin to a traumatic history:

In Ireland at the moment I would see the necessity, since I’m involved in the tradition of the English lyric, to take the English lyric and make it eat stuff that it has never eaten before [...] like all the messy, and it would seem incomprehensible obsessions in the North. (qtd. in Parker 123)

If one recognizes “Ode to the West Wind” as a specific example of the English lyric, Heaney appears to suggest that trauma distorts the poetic word—perhaps to the point of preventing the kind of generative change Shelley imagines. As a result, Part II expands upon the doubts raised in Part I. Whereas Part I suggested that mythification may not lend itself to the representation of trauma, Heaney ultimately aligns himself repeatedly

with the suggestion that poetry itself may be insufficient as a vehicle for traumatic histories.

In this chapter, I have examined the manner in which Part II of *North* continues Heaney's experiment with testimony and the representation of trauma. While Part I constructs representational models that seek to represent the experience of trauma, Part II directly engages with the Troubles and attempts to portray them in a manner that does not draw upon the discourse of dymythification. By invoking the autobiographical "I" while portraying his own experiences of the Troubles, Heaney does more than bear witness to cultural strife: he also demonstrates a profound distrust in both the potentials of community and in his own poetic craft. As a result, by distancing himself from both the vehicle and audience for his testimonial project, Heaney undermines his entire enterprise. Furthermore, though Heaney's references to poets such as W.B. Yeats and Percy Bysshe may appear to negate his distrust in both community and poetic verse, they nonetheless crystallize Heaney's position of non-involvement and his distrust in poetry as a means of representing trauma. Much like Part I, Part II begins by successfully exploring a representative methodology for the experience of trauma and concludes with intimations of distrust and the possibility of failure.

## Conclusion:

### Heaney's Coming into Consciousness and the Shift toward Futurity

This project has sought to fill a gap in Seamus Heaney criticism by articulating a method of reading the poet's *North* collection that draws upon the intersecting discourses of trauma and testimony. As Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman argue, text and context—in this case, *North* and the Troubles and in Ireland—are mutually involved: the former does not merely comment on the latter but rather both conceptual categories share the potential to yield insight into one another (xv). Thus, my goal has not been merely to assess *North* as an artistic attempt to represent the Troubles; rather, I have also endeavoured to examine the manner in which Heaney has experimented with and expressed skepticism of various artistic practices while seeking to express an intelligible truth, whether universal or personal in nature, about the unintelligible event of Irish cultural trauma.

I began my analysis with Part I of *North*, which I examined with specific attention to the trope of “looking away,” the prominence of which is signalled by the text through recurring microscopic and macroscopic figurations of averted gaze. By looking away from the Troubles, Heaney turns toward representational models assembled by imagination, myth and (pre)history in order to render the Troubles thinkable. I questioned the ethics of such a tactic, specifically in relation to Heaney's portrayal of the

bog bodies, ancient pagan remains bearing no more than a tangential connection to Irish culture. Though critics have derided Heaney's use of the bodies as emblems of the naturalization of human violence, I questioned whether the bodies were themselves victimized in their portrayal. Though anthropologist Melanie Giles celebrates Heaney's poetry for its tendency to lend voice and agency to these poems, I suggested the collection primarily reads the bodies as objects; where the poems do seem to afford the bodies subjectivity, it is only as part of a broader attempt to speak to social ills of the contemporary moment.

Ultimately, I reconciled these claims invoking Michel de Certeau's *The Writing of History*. With attention to de Certeau's historiographical framework, I sought to redeem the ethicality of Heaney's work by remarking that historical writing can never truly lend voice to the dead and, moreover, that historiography inevitably takes the form of representative models much like the ones Heaney employs. Finally, I shifted my focus to the conclusion of Part I and suggested that the final poem, "Hercules and Antaeus," casts doubt on the efficacy of myth as a vehicle for the delivery of testimony. I concluded by suggesting that Heaney's attempt to look toward myths as vehicles for the delivery of testimony permitted him to contextualize the text but not to textualize the contest. By this, I mean that Heaney presented a model of trauma that made it legible to himself and the reader; however, it remained too far removed for him to dynamically work through and account for his personal experience of trauma.

I then shifted my attention to Part II, which presented a change in tactics to Heaney's testimonial enterprise. In contrast to the removed, universalized model of trauma constructed in Part I, Heaney appeals to a discourse of demythification as he attempts to account for Irish cultural strife directly and with specific attention to his own personal experience of the Troubles. This tactic is at once both effective and ineffective: Heaney draws upon fleeting references to myth in a manner that makes his appeal to realism more effective, but at times lapses into the incomprehensible unreality of dream language, thereby signaling continued difficulties in his effort to render the experience of traumatic knowable. I drew specific attention to the manner in which Heaney's writing speaks to a profound lack of confidence both in the possibility of community and the potentials of the poetic form. Because the promise of testimony hangs on a radical connection with an audience and complements the "brokenness" of poetic free verse, his lack of confidence in these two categories undermines the efficacy of his testimonial enterprise.

Finally, I examined Heaney's "Singing School" sequence and its allusions to W.B. Yeats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Though the sequence's interest in poetic allusion locates Heaney within a community and asserts the value of poetic verse, I suggested that these allusions merely intensify Heaney's foreclosure of community and the potential of poetry within the political sphere. Specifically, I showed the manner in which "Singing School" resembles Yeats's career—one that begins with idealistic devotion to the poet as

a figure of change and ends with a figuration of hermitic seclusion. Additionally, I looked at “Exposure” as a response to Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind.” However, whereas the latter poem extolls the poetic spirit as a vehicle for the poet’s thoughts, which themselves can effect change, “Exposure” takes the form of a rebuttal to such claims. Drawing upon and then subverting Shelley’s poem, Heaney divorces himself from the generative potentials of poetry and thereby limits his engagement with his own testimonial enterprise.

It bears mentioning that Heaney’s testimonial enterprise does not entirely fall short of its objective. Though *North* evokes an acute skepticism in the testimonial potentials of myth, community and poetry, one cannot overlook the fact that the text has obviously been written, published, bound and disseminated. Indeed, the poems have been read and studied extensively over the past several decades, precluding the possibility that Heaney has perhaps “failed” in his attempt to promulgate his articulation of Irish cultural trauma. However, one must remember that testimony endeavours to accomplish more than simply represent fraught histories; rather, it is within testimony that these histories “are reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text” (Laub and Felman xv). As a result, the possibilities of testimony are not merely oriented to the past: it is within this space that one can consider how to move forward in a culture and nation that has been touched by the experience of trauma. That Heaney has been unable to use testimony as a space where futures can be imagined follows logically,

given the near-total elision of futurity—or, as one might say, post-trauma—from the collection.

The absence of futurity is indeed a critical component of *North* that has recurred within the subtext of my previous close readings. Indeed, a primary function of the bog body poems from Part I is to foreclose the possibility of a futurity by locating contemporary Irish strife within a primal atavism or a recurring historical tendency toward violence. When the speaker of “Punishment” witnesses the public tarring of the slain adultress’s “betraying sisters” (l. 38), he claims to “understand the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge” (l. 43-44) of such a retributive act. His confession denies the possibility of a linear temporality that might usher Ireland into a post-Troubles future; instead, he sees the collective Irish consciousness cycling in upon itself, lifted by primal impulses back into the past. Furthermore, “Funeral Rites” offers a similar gesture toward cyclicity. As I expressed in my earlier analysis, the conclusion offers an ambivalent dual movement between suspended hostilities and the reoccurrence of violence as signified by the cyclic image of the moon. Despite these two possibilities, it is important to note that it is the moon which ends the poem as its final word. Ultimately, just as the funeral procession of the poem stretches into “the megalithic doorway” (l. 60)—which is to say, a portal into an ancient past—so too does the text validate the possibility of cyclicity over futurity.

“Whatever You Say, Say Nothing” similarly raises the possibility of a future only to subordinate it to an inevitable cyclicality. Following his description of a roadside bomb not far from an internment camp, the speaker contemplates the contemporary Irish psyche:

Is there a life before death? That’s chalked up  
In Ballymurphy.<sup>5</sup> Competence with pain,  
Coherent miseries, a bite and sup:  
We hug our little destiny again. (l. 85-88)

Though “destiny” bears intimations of a future, the poet negates the possibility of temporal progress with the adverb “again.” Here, the reader is made to bear witness as “an entire community settles down to the desperate mundanity of the reopened wounds of old conflict” (Murphy 30). Here, Heaney continues the project he began in Part I by demonstrating the inevitability of cyclic returns to the past. Finally, “Exposure” perhaps develops this recurring idea of an absent future most effectively by outright turning away from the future rather than invoking an inevitable cyclicality to history. It is important to note that the speaker does not miss just any comet while tending to his sparks; rather, the comet he misses is none other than “[t]he once-in-a-lifetime portent” (l. 39). He has been unable to permit himself to look toward an end he cannot yet envision. Because of the collection’s concern with past and present to the exclusion of futurity, Heaney’s testimonial enterprise lacks full realization. A version of Heaney’s testimonial enterprise

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<sup>5</sup> “Ballymurphy” refers to an area in Belfast, the site of the Ballymurphy Massacre (Murphy 30).

whose promise and potential have been fulfilled must then speak to the past, address the ills of the present and direct these conceptual categories toward the developing comprehension of an impending future.

Part of the reason why the text dwells on issues of past and present to the near-total exclusion of futurity stems from its publication *in media res*. Released in 1975, the text speaks to a historical conflict that did not reach its conclusion until more than two decades later. Thus, the text perhaps cannot begin to conceptualize a post-Troubles Ireland because it has not yet seen the conflict through to its conclusion. According to Caruth's summary of Freud's theorization of trauma, the traumatic accident is followed by a stage known as "*latency*, the period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent" (17, emphasis in original). However, Caruth advances this claim by identifying a period of latency within the experience of the accident itself; she writes that "the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself" (17). If one applies this critical assessment to Heaney, whose writing stems from the moment of the Troubles, it follows that he lacks the proper degree of consciousness—or, to phrase it differently, distance—that would permit him to complete his testimonial project. Because he is writing from the moment of the crisis, his writing is so utterly fixed in the contemporary moment and in historical events that speak to the contemporary moment for him to begin the move toward futurity. That Heaney is writing from the period of latency

that occurs during the accident itself prevents him from seeing his testimonial project through to its conclusion.

Returning to Laub and Felman, I wish to suggest my analysis speaks to an absence in their critical framework. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* explores testimonies which bear witness to events that have occurred in the past. Though the possibility of psychic recurrence is assumed, given the nature of trauma, the survivors whom the authors have studied deliver their testimony only in the relative safety of the aftermath of these events. Therefore, I wish to question how Laub and Felman's theoretical framework might shift when applied to a figure such as Heaney, who is bearing witness in 1975 to a form of cultural trauma which had not yet seen its conclusion by the moment of *North's* publication. The issue of testimonies to ongoing cultural traumas does not receive attention by Laub and Felman. As a result, if I were to consider future routes of exploration for my project, I might broaden my selection of theoretical texts examining issues of cultural trauma and testimony in order to provide answers to this gap in my project.

Additional opportunities to expand my project might also include Heaney's subsequent writing and the manner in which his later collections address changing perspectives—and, indeed, the poet's developing consciousness—as they relate to the Troubles. Though *North* represents Heaney's preeminent and most unflinchingly gruesome attempt to account for the Troubles in Ireland (Hart 6), it certainly does not

offer his only foray into Irish politics. In the years following *North*'s publication, Heaney has released eight volumes of poetry: five published before the 1998 Belfast Agreement implemented an end to the Troubles and three published afterward (Poetry Foundation). Though engaging with all of these collections with the same level of depth as my examination of *North* would be unfeasible, I would nonetheless like to explore whether Heaney's later collections bear the same testimonial influences as the work I have analyzed and whether these works evoke the poet's "coming into consciousness," as I have discussed.

In particular, Heaney's *Electric Light* collection—published in 2001, five years after the legislated end to the Troubles—might be especially apposite to the discussion of post-trauma and the poet's coming into consciousness. Describing the collection, Eugene O'Brien comments upon a shift wherein Heaney draws "an increasing focus on the present and future, as opposed to the past" (158). Whereas the conclusion of *North* left the reader with intimations of exile and the impossibility of community, *Electric Light* demonstrates a shift in Heaney's attitude. Indeed, O'Brien writes that "[t]he different experience, different perspectives, different connections and different languages signify the openness of the process that allows us to know different, complementary, worlds" (165). Additionally, in contrast to Heaney's perceived lack of faith in his craft that dominates Part II, O'Brien suggests that "[t]he note of guilt or questioning that has so

often marked his discussions of the poet and poetry is mitigated here by a sense of confidence in the importance of the craft” (163).

Ultimately, though a more thorough analysis would permit me to better examine figurations of futurity within Heaney’s *Electric Light*, I nonetheless suggest that one might be able to trace the poet’s developing consciousness as it relates to his experience of trauma from *North* to his later poetic works. As well, I believe there may be room for an even broader cultural analysis of the role of Heaney’s poetry (and, indeed, poetry itself) within the project of building and healing the Irish nation. If, as Laub and Felman suggest, text and context are mutually involved, what is the role of Heaney’s poetry within the Irish nation’s memory of the Troubles? More broadly, what is the role of the poet within the inception of a distinctly Irish national imaginary?

To conclude, I would like to return to the quotation I referenced at the beginning of my project: Heaney’s pronouncement in his 1974 lecture for the Royal Society of Literature that, with the riots in Belfast, “the problems of poetry moved from simply being a matter of achieving a satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament” (qtd. in Brown 192). Throughout *North*, Heaney has with no scarcity of doubt and self-deprecation attempted to fulfill such a search. Despite the poet’s ostensible uncertainty about the efficacy of his methods, I do not believe his enterprise has ended in failure—if only because I do not believe *North* functions strictly as a self-contained project. Instead, it represents one moment in a

broader process of Irish poets—and, indeed, the Irish people—attempting to bear witness to the atrocities of recent decades. As a result, *North* perhaps does not conclude with “Exposure” but rather continues with every attempt to offer testimony to the recent traumas that have become entrenched within Irish collective memory. Given the use and power that define the event of testimony, such a process has truly transformative potentials.

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