“Lost, Unhappy and at Home”: René Girard's Theory of Mimetic Desire, Religious Violence and Apocalyptic Vision Applied to the Poetry of Seamus Heaney

by

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Abstract

The relationship between religion and violence in our modern world is problematic. In the post-Christian West, religion has been privatized and personalized as what scholars like René Girard call secular modernity emerged. The legitimate use of violence in the West has been restricted to the state. In other parts of the world, religion continues to be a strong influence on culture and politics. The separations between religion and state in Western secular modernity do not apply in many countries and cultures in Africa and Asia. This is particularly a problem in countries with Muslim populations. The events of 9/11, the subsequent War on Terror, and the more recent terrorist attacks in Europe and around the world have highlighted these differences.

This thesis is concerned with religious violence. Is religion violent? If so, is religious violence worse or somehow different than the violence of the secular state? Is there a possibility of peace between a secular state and a theopolitical state? I approach these questions with an interdisciplinary approach combining the study of religion and the study of English literature. My purpose is to examine critically these questions in this thesis. I argue that religion has the potential to express violence but it also has the potential to inspire peace. Religion continues to be important and the West will need to seek to understand and respect this reality as we move forward.

I begin by situating the terms “religion”, “myth”, “violence”, and “religious violence” in the context of Religious Studies and our broader Western culture. From a theoretical perspective, I am employing the work of historian, literary theorist, and scholar of religion René Girard. Girard’s work on mimetic desire, religious violence, and war provide some powerful tools of analysis. I am applying Girard’s insights to the work of Irish poet, professor, and translator Seamus Heaney. Heaney’s poetry was written during times of great sectarian violence

between Roman Catholic and Protestant populations in Northern Ireland. Heaney's personal experiences with and poetic reflections on this violence are important contributions to discussions of religious violence. Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* and Heaney's *North* are particularly relevant to this project's focus. I conclude with a chapter on 9/11 and the War on Terror. Heaney and Girard both provide critical analysis of these events in their work. They also suggest a way forward for the West and its neighbours through conflict to peace. In their own work, both Heaney and Girard acknowledge the continuing relevance and importance of religion in our world and the need to critically assess and respond to all forms of violence. Humanity's capacity to wreak great destruction has only increased in this new millennium and great care must be taken to avoid the worst.

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Chapter 1

Situating "Religion", "Myth", "Violence", "Religious Violence", René Girard's Early Theory, and Seamus Heaney's Early Poetry

I. Situating "Religion", "Myth", "Violence", and "Religious Violence"

The relationship between religion and violence is a vexed question in the twenty-first century. The West has, according to some observers, moved beyond its deep historical connections to Christianity into what might be termed a "post-Christian" culture. With this move, religion has been privatized and personalized in the West as public power, authority, and the legitimate use of violence have shifted to the state. This has created a separation between religious and political institutions in the West and limited the role that religion can play in expressing violence. Some observers, in contrast, see the West being challenged by a "post-secular" global culture as religion's influence is maintained or magnified in a global context. Non-Western areas in the world have not experienced modernity and its concomitant secularization in the same manner. The powerful political and social impact of religious traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam continues to be felt in many countries and cultures in Africa and Asia. These religious traditions have impacted the modern global political context and increased the sense among some that, in these cases, religion and violence are inextricably linked. The need to make sense of our current situation is dire.

The work of historians, literary critics, theorists of religion, and poets can help us to see our situation in more nuanced and informed ways. "Religion", for example, is a term and concept that needs serious scrutiny. Popular understandings of religion fail to account for the complexities and realities of the various religious traditions currently active in our world today.

What is religion? Closely related to the term "religion" is the term "myth". The term "myth" and its application in Religious Studies needs to be explored. Returning to the term "religion", popular understandings of religion can also fail to account for the historical dynamics of the study of religion. The role of Christianity in the creating, classifying, and assessing of various religious traditions needs to be highlighted. Religious Studies scholars have traced, for example, how Western Christian explorers and missionaries discovered and defined both Hinduism and Buddhism in ways that imposed a Christian religious structure on what were native cultural understandings and practices. Part of the important work that needs to be done on the relationship between religion and violence requires a focus on the term "religion" and the history of the classification of "religions".

The relationship between religion and violence also needs scrutiny. Are some religions inherently violent? Are some extreme expressions of religions more likely to inspire violence in adherents? Is "fundamentalism" in any religious context a precursor to hatred and violence? Recent historical events have inspired a number of researchers to focus on the relationship between religion and violence. While some researchers have been unclear in their definition of religion, others have been unclear in their definition of religious violence and how religious violence might differ from other forms of violence. The relationship between religion and violence may also suggest a new definition of religion defined specifically in terms of violence. Religion is, in this understanding, that for which one is willing to kill or to die.

For the purposes of my thesis, I have chosen to focus on the relationship between religion and violence as it is depicted in the poetry of Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney. Heaney's poems include an important critique of the violence between Irish Roman Catholic and Irish Protestant Christians in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. In addition to

focusing on Heaney's critique, I also want to set his work in relation to the work of French historian, literary critic, and theorist of religion René Girard. Girard's early work in history and literature resulted in a theory of mimetic desire. Girard suggested that desire is not spontaneous between subject and object because desire is copied (mimesis) from a third-party mediator. Girard expanded this work on mediated desire to address communal violence and the role of primitive religion in managing that violence. Girard's later work on archaic religions, Judaism, and Christianity focused on the unique power and the unique problem of the Christian gospel. Girard's most recent work focused on politics and war in our post-9/11 world. After reviewing the terms "religion", "myth", "violence", and "religious violence", I will present brief biographies of Heaney and Girard followed by a short introduction to their early work. I will end the chapter with a return to the question of "religion", particularly in the personal experiences, personal understandings, and early work of Heaney and Girard.

The term "religion" can be defined in both popular and academic discourse. The Oxford English Dictionary, reflecting popular understandings of the term, defines "religion", in part, as:

> …3. a. Action or conduct indicating belief in, obedience to, and reverence for a god, gods, or similar superhuman power; the performance of religious rites or observances. 4. a. A particular system of faith and worship. 5. a. Belief in or acknowledgement of some superhuman power or powers (esp. a god or gods) which is typically manifested in obedience, reverence, and worship; such a belief aspect of a system defining a code of living, esp. as a means of achieving spiritual or material improvement. (*OED Online*)

It is important to note the emphasis on "action or conduct". "Religion" in the popular understanding directs one's behavior in relation to the divine and in relation to the human. In the Christian tradition, for example, love of God is intimately tied with love of neighbor (*Concordia*

Self-Study Bible, Matt. 22.34–40). A certain sense of morality and moral responsibility is implied in the popular understandings of the term "religion". While these definitions are helpful in understanding the popular discourse about "religion", scholars in the discipline of Religious Studies have problematized the definition and classification of "religion".

The *Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, highlights many of the debates that exist in the field of Religious Studies in North America today. The question concerning the working definition of the term "religion" for Religious Studies scholars is highlighted in chapters by Willi Braun and William Arnal. Braun and Arnal underline the observation that in Religious Studies, the term "religion" is very hard to define. The locus of study for the scholar of religion is also problematic. How can one study a "belief"? How can one study an invisible divine being? How can one critically examine another's personal, spiritual experience? How can one maintain critical distance? One solution that scholars of religion have employed is to study religion from an anthropological perspective, viewing religion as that which religious subjects participate in that can be observed by researchers.

There are popular understandings and a popular definition of religion that serves to define religion for the public. For the Religious Studies scholar, the issue is more complicated. I use Arnal's citation of anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition of religion. Arnal quotes Geertz, defining "religion" as follows: "(1) A system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz qtd. in Arnal 26). Geertz's definition applies to religions that are focused on god or gods and religions that are not. In

Geertz's understanding, religion can deeply impact the religious adherent's understandings of self, society, and their larger world. This impact is supported and deepened by religious texts, religious rituals, religious spaces, and religious communities. This has important implications for both personal and group behavior in communities, in countries, and between countries.

Jonathan Z. Smith has written about the issue of classification in Religious Studies. Smith's account of the classifying of religions around the world due to the work of European explorers and Christian missionaries is especially interesting. The colonial elements of the discourse of "World Religions" raises serious questions about who decides what will be considered a "religion". In the chapter "Religion, Religions, Religious", Smith refers to the work of Melford E. Spiro and his anthropological definition of religion. Smith quotes Spiro, who defines religion as "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (Spiro qtd. in Smith 281). I appreciate the strong emphasis on religion as cultural artifact. Religion is impacted by the surrounding culture and religion can also make an impact on culture. As European explorers and Christian missionaries ventured forth, they imposed a shared cultural understanding of religion as expressed in Christian thought and experience that would situate the various native traditions and understandings they encountered in relation to their Christian religion. The fairness and accuracy of this imposition was rarely questioned.

"Myth" is an important term related to both the defining and the classifying of religion. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "myth" as:

> 1. a. A traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenom. 2. a.

> A widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief; a widely held misconception; a misrepresentation of the truth. (*OED Online*)

Scholars Russell McCutcheon, William Paden, and Claude Levi-Strauss have written about myth in the context of studying religion. Russell McCutcheon's chapter "Myth" presents a brief but reasonably comprehensive survey of the history of "myth" in Western discourse and in the more recent study of religions. McCutcheon notes a more recent shift in the attitudes of Religious Studies scholars towards religious myth. He labels the shift "myth as truth" (197) and observes that some scholars are willing to allow for religious myths as cultural literary constructions of what might be termed underlying truths. McCutcheon sees a concern in this shift: "If the academic *study* of religion is understood as something other than the *practice* of religion, then this sympathetic turn (and it's rightly put, *sympathetic* rather than *empathetic*) has profound implications for whether it is possible to study religion in an academic sense" (198). McCutcheon suggests a more scholarly and detached approach to the study of myths, focusing more on how they function than on what they ascribe to as "truth". "Myth" in both senses of the term (founding story and falsehood) plays an important role in the discussion of religious violence as well as in the work of Seamus Heaney and René Girard. Girard, in particular, argues that Christianity represents the demythologizing of archaic religion and he traces a return to pagan mythology in recent Western culture.

The term "violence" can also be defined and debated. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, violence is defined as: "the deliberate exercise of physical force against a person, property, etc.; physically violent behavior or treatment; the unlawful exercise of physical force, intimidation by the exhibition of such force…the abuse of power or authority to persecute or oppress" (*OED Online*). William T. Cavanaugh, in his book *The Myth of Religious Violence*, surveys much of

the current literature on religion and violence. He observes that the scholarship he has reviewed defines "violence" as "injurious or lethal harm" and this violence is "almost always discussed in the context of physical violence, such as war and terrorism" (Cavanaugh 7). Cavanaugh highlights the work of Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, referring to their book *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*. Marvin and Ingle define violence as "the level of physicality necessary to control someone else's behavior" (Marvin and Ingle 66). For a definition of "religious violence", Cavanaugh references the work of Charles Selengut. Selengut's book *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* includes the following definition of "religious violence": "activity leading to (1) physical injury or death, (2) self-mortification and religious suicide, (3) psychological injury, and (4) symbolic violence causing the desecration or profanation of sacred sites and holy places" (8). While Selengut retains the notion that religious violence threatens physical life and safety, he also acknowledges that religious violence can harm in psychological and symbolic ways.

William Cavanaugh, in his book *The Myth of Religious Violence*, challenges popular Western understandings about the relationship between religion and violence. Cavanaugh describes the "myth of religious violence" as:

> the idea that religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from 'secular' features such as politics and economics, which has a particularly dangerous inclination to promote violence. Religion must therefore be tamed by restricting its access to public power. The secular nation-state then appears as natural, corresponding to a universal and timeless truth about the inherent dangers of religion. (3)

Cavanaugh goes on to assert that this "myth of religious violence" is "one of the foundational

legitimating myths of the liberal nation-state" (4). This myth "helps to construct and marginalize a religious Other, prone to fanaticism, to contrast with the rational, peace-making, secular subject" (4). Cavanaugh argues that the "myth of religious violence" ultimately does little to curb violence at large. Instead, the "myth of religious violence" can serve as a distraction. He writes, "The problem with the myth of religious violence is not that it condemns certain kinds of violence, but that it diverts moral scrutiny from other kinds of violence. Violence labeled religious is always reprehensible; violence labeled secular is often necessary and sometimes praiseworthy" (121). Cavanaugh seeks to counter this myth, suggesting that secular violence, in a Western context, should be examined and critiqued as religious violence so often has been. Cavanaugh then turns his attention to the term "religion".

Cavanaugh situates his argument within the larger context of Religious Studies. As noted earlier, the definition of "religion" in Religious Studies is contested among scholars. Cavanaugh traces a larger story behind the term "religion". He writes, "If I can show that the very definition of religion is part of the history of Western power, then the idea that religion causes violence might not be simply a neutral, empirical observation, but might perhaps have an ideological function in legitimating certain kinds of practices and delegitimating others" (Cavanaugh 59). Cavanaugh begins his survey of the development of the term "religion" by making reference to the work of scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Smith's research has implications for both religion and politics. Cavanaugh notes, "In the course of a detailed historical study of the concept of religion, Smith was compelled to conclude that, outside of the modern West, there is no significant concept equivalent to what we think of as religion. Similarly, politics as a category of human endeavor independent of religion is a distinctly modern concept" (Cavanaugh 61). Smith traces the term "religio" from its Latin origins and usage, noting that it "referred to a powerful

requirement to perform some action" (Cavanaugh 62). This requirement included social and family obligations as well as religious and cultic obligations.

Cavanaugh, building on Smith's work, traces the term "religio" through the writings of thinkers including Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Nicolas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and John Locke. For Augustine, "*religio* means worship, the action by which we render praise" (Cavanaugh 63). Moving into the Medieval period, Cavanaugh observes, "*Religio* was not separable – even in theory – from political activity in Christendom. Medieval Christianity was a theopolitical whole" (68). In the writings of Cusa and Ficino, Cavanaugh traces the beginnings of shift from a public, exterior focus to a private, interior focus for the term *religio*. Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, early modern theorist of religion, attempted to essentialize the world's religions with his list of five "essential beliefs of religion": "1. That there is some supreme divinity. 2. That this divinity ought to be worshipped. 3. That virtue joined with piety is the best method of divine worship. 4. That we should return to our right selves from sins. 5. That reward or punishment is bestowed after this life is finished" (Herbert qtd. in Cavanaugh 75). Cavanaugh notes that Herbert's "interiorization and universalization of religion go hand in hand with his support of state control over the church" (77). Cavanaugh notes that John Locke argued that only the state should be allowed to use violence for punishment in the maintaining of social order. The church, according to Locke, had no need to use violence as it sought to follow Christ, the "prince of peace" (Cavanaugh 79). These historical developments are often ignored in the current discussions of religion and violence, clouding the shift in thinking about religion as the Enlightenment unfolded. Cavanaugh writes,

Transhistorical definitions of religion enforce the normativity of this new arrangement; as

> in Herbert's work, the modern definition of religion helps to define the 'normal mind'. The normal mind is one that is able to penetrate to the true inward essence of religion. Those who will not separate religion from politics – Muslims, for example – are often seen as less advanced and less rational than their 'normal' Western counterparts. (85)

The privatization of religious belief and practice in the West, accompanied by a split between religious faith and secular rationalism, exaggerates the divide and exacerbates the potential conflicts between the post-Christian West and its neighbours who identify with religious traditions like Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The conflicts are also informed by the history of Western colonialism in Africa and Asia.

Cavanaugh argues that the concept of religion was imposed by the West on the global community during the colonial era. He writes, "The concept of religion was introduced outside the West in the context of European colonization, and the introduction of the concept often served the interests of the colonizers" (86). Citing examples of European influence in the development of Hinduism and Buddhism, Cavanaugh suggests that classifying the natives as "religious" and ascribing religion to the private sphere aided the colonizers in retaining control. Cavanaugh cites the work of Daniel Dubuisson, who argues that religion "was and remains…a fundamentally Western concept…around which it has established and developed its identity" (Dubuisson qtd. in Cavanaugh 99). Cavanaugh goes on to suggest that religion actually "characterizes the West because it establishes a fundamental divide between religion and nonreligion that has determined the Western view of reality and the Western organization of the world. In the West, religion is a distinct domain, separated from the rest of life" (99). In this provocative comment, Cavanaugh enmeshes the question of religion in Western discourse, challenging the notions of a secular state and a secular space.

Cavanaugh returns to the notion that religion is, even in the West, a "widely contested notion" and he argues that "…the ability to define what counts as religion and what does not is a significant part of how public power is arranged in the West and in the rest of the world" (101). Cavanaugh cites recent efforts to study what is and is not considered "religion" in the West and why. Cavanaugh focuses on two basic approaches to defining religion: substantivist and functionalist. Substantivist definitions of religion "attempt to separate what Western scholars since the nineteenth century have identified as the world religions from other phenomena based on their beliefs about the nature of reality" (102). Early efforts focused on belief in God or gods but these were adjusted to include a broader focus on transcendence. Even the term "transcendence", though, is "almost inevitably modeled on Judeo-Christian theological definitions of transcendence based on the relationship of a Creator God to the created world" (103). Cavanaugh argues that this substantivist approach serves to be too limiting and too influenced by Judaism and Christianity to be helpful. Functionalist approaches, in contrast, constitute a "return to the broadest meaning of the word *religio* in classical Rome: any binding obligation or devotion that structures one's social relations" (106). Cavanaugh adds:

> Functionalist approaches have the advantage of being based on empirical observation of people's actual behavior, and not simply on claims of what they believe in the confines of some interior and unobservable mental state. They are also less inclined to bother about restricting religion to some exclusive and arbitrary set of world religions. The disadvantage of functionalist approaches is that they expand the category of religion so broadly that the category tends to lose meaning. (106)

Cavanaugh returns to the basic focus of his book as he writes, "The question of violence with which this book is concerned is a question of function: do certain ideologies and practices have

more of a tendency to produce violence than others?" (112) Cavanaugh asserts that religion is no more likely to inspire violence than other secular ideologies. For example, Cavanaugh suggests that nationalism functions, at least in the United States of America, as a religion. Referring to Marvin and Ingle's work on blood sacrifice for the nation, Cavanaugh asserts:

> The crucial test, however, is what people do with their bodies. It is clear that, among those who identify themselves as Christians in the United States, there are very few who would be willing to kill in the name of the Christian God, whereas the willingness, under certain circumstances, to kill and die for the nation in war is generally taken for granted. The religious-secular distinction thus helps to maintain the public and lethal loyalty of Christians to the nation-state, while avoiding direct confrontation with Christian beliefs about the supremacy of the Christian God over all other gods. (122)

Cavanaugh's reflections suggest yet another definition of "religion" in the broader discussion of religion and violence – "religion" is that for which one is willing to kill or to die. Cavanaugh highlights the great irony in the United States of America that nationalism supercedes Christianity in its demands for blood sacrifice. From a functionalist perspective, American nationalism is a religion. The violence of nationalism, however, is excused and celebrated as its religious nature is underplayed and its secular nature is emphasized.

For the purposes of this project, defining "religion", "myth", "violence", and "religious violence" is important when discussing the theory of René Girard and the poetry of Seamus Heaney. How does René Girard understand and discuss "religion"? How does Girard deploy the term "myth"? How does Girard define "violence"? How does Girard define "religious violence"? Similar questions can be raised about the work of Seamus Heaney. How does Seamus Heaney understand and discuss "religion"? How does Heaney deploy the term "myth"?

How does Heaney define "violence"? How does Heaney define "religious violence"? Does Heaney, as Cavanaugh might suggest he should, separate religion from nationalism? Does the work of Girard and Heaney provide evidence of a growing or shifting understanding of "religion", "violence", and "religious violence" over time? In this and subsequent chapters, it will be important to return to these questions.

II. Biographies of Girard and Heaney

For the purposes of this chapter, I would like to briefly focus on the personal biographies of Girard and Heaney. The historical situation that they lived in and worked in has an important role to play in their work. I would like to continue with a focus on their earliest work. Finally, I'd like to return to the discussion of the definitions of "religion" and "religious violence". Girard and Heaney will refer to "religion" and "religious violence" in their own unique ways in their work and it is important to set these references in relationship to some critical thoughts underlying these terms.

It is important to note, at the outset of a brief biographical summary of both Girard and Heaney, that no comprehensive critical biographies in English currently exist for either man. Girard's basic biography is summarized below from introductions to the following texts: *The Girard Reader*, edited by James G. Williams, *Girard and Theology* by Michael Kirwan, and *Mimesis and Theory*, edited by Robert Doran. There are rumours that a critical biography of Girard's life and work to be written by Cynthia Haven has been commissioned by Stanford University Press. This will be very helpful for future research on Girard. In Seamus Heaney's case, the book *Seamus Heaney: The Making of a Poet* by scholar Michael Parker provides a very in-depth presentation of the poet's early years, development, and early career. Unfortunately,

Parker's book only covers Heaney's life to the year 1991, missing over twenty years of Heaney's later work and life. Other details of Heaney's life have been drawn from introductions to various critical works on Heaney including Andrew Murphy's text *Seamus Heaney*. I hope that a more comprehensive critical biography of Seamus Heaney with the level of quality of Michael Parker's work will be published soon. With this caveat in mind, I turn to brief biographies of Girard and Heaney.

René Girard was an historian, literary critic, and theorist of religion. Girard was born in Avignon, France on Christmas Day in 1923. Girard's father was trained as an historian and worked as a city archivist in Avignon. Girard's father was not particularly interested in Christianity while his mother was a devout Roman Catholic. From the ages of 10 to 36, Girard had little contact with the church and he identified both politically and intellectually with the Left in France. During World War II, Girard was involved in the French Resistance, and he was impressed by the young Christian Workers he met in the movement. He was particularly impressed with their ability to resist the temptations to both Communism and Fascism. Girard also met avante-garde artists like Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque during his years in Avignon and Paris.

Girard graduated as an archiviste-paléographe (specialist in medieval studies) from the École des Chartres in Paris before moving to the United States to complete a doctorate in history at Indiana University. His doctorate was focused on American impressions of the French during the Second World War. Girard taught French and French literature at various schools in the United States, including Duke University, Bryn Mawr College, Johns Hopkins University, State University of New York at Buffalo, and Stanford University. Girard's early published articles developed into several important and provocative books highlighting his theories of mimetic

desire, religious violence, and the apocalyptic. Girard retired from full-time teaching at Stanford in 1995 but continued to write and publish. He passed away in November 2015.

Seamus Heaney was an Irish poet, professor, translator, dramatist, and literary critic. Heaney was born on April 13, 1939. His first home was the Heaney family farm "Mossbawn" in County Derry, Northern Ireland (Murphy ix). Heaney's father was a "yeoman farmer" and "cattle dealer" (Parker 1) and his mother was kept busy working on the farm and caring for her nine children. The family lived a simple but comfortable rural life. Heaney's parents were not literary people and he later struggled with justifying his work as a writer and academic in contrast with his parents' work cultivating the earth and tending livestock.

Seamus Heaney, in addition to being raised in a farming family, was also raised in a devout Irish Roman Catholic family. His father and mother were actively involved in the local parish and a strong sense of Christian spirituality was important in the Heaney home. Seamus Heaney was able to benefit from changes in educational policy for Roman Catholic children introduced by the British government in the 1940s and the 1950s. Heaney attended the local Anahorish Primary School as a child. At the age of twelve, Heaney won a scholarship to attend St. Columb's College, a Roman Catholic boarding school in Derry that served as a "minor seminary" (Parker 11). Upon graduating from St. Columb's, Heaney studied English Language and Literature at Queen's University, Belfast. He was encouraged to apply for further studies at Oxford upon graduation but instead chose to complete his training at St. Joseph's Teacher Training College. Heaney began to write poetry and prose in college.

After graduation, Heaney began his teaching career at St. Thomas' Secondary Intermediate School in west Belfast. Heaney later returned to St. Joseph's Teacher Training College as a lecturer, followed by a stint teaching at Queen's University. Heaney's growing

success as a poet led to teaching posts at University of California-Berkeley, Carysfort Teacher Training College in Dublin, Harvard University, and Oxford University. Heaney retired from teaching in 1997 and from being Poet in Residence in 2006. Heaney continued to write and publish. He passed away in August 2013.

III. Girard's Early Theory

Robert Doran, in his introduction to *Mimesis and Theory*, provides a summary of the context of Girard's early work in the 1950s and the 1960s in the United States. Doran writes:

> In the 1950s and 1960s, literature departments in the United States were dominated by New Criticism, a type of formalism or aestheticism which isolated the literary text from non-literary disciplines and methodologies. In France, on the other hand, literary history was the dominant force. Strongly influenced by nineteenth-century positivism and diametrically opposed to New Criticism, literary history concerned itself primarily with the study of context and authorial biography, paying relatively scant attention to the literary works themselves. ("Editor's Introduction" xiii – xiv)

It is in this context that René Girard began to establish himself as an academic working in the United States. A brief review of Girard's early publishing indicates a shift from a focus on history to a focus on history and literature.

Girard's first article, titled "Marriage in Avignon in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century", was published in *Speculum* in 1953 and reflects the focus of his studies in France. Girard began to blend his background in history and his teaching of French literature, publishing articles in both French and English. Girard published "L'histoire dans l'oeuvre de Saint-John Perse" in 1953 in the *Romanic Review* and "Valéry et Stendahl" in 1954 in *PMLA*. In 1958,

Girard published "Classicism and Voltaire's Historiography" in *The American Magazine of the French Foreign Legion of Honor.* He published "Pride and Passion in the Contemporary Novel" in 1959 in *Yale French Studies* and "Stendahl and Tocqueville" in 1960 in *The American Magazine of the French Foreign Legion of Honor.* Girard published "Memoirs of a Dutiful Existentialist: Simone de Beauvoir" in 1961 in *Yale French Studies* and in 1962 Girard served as editor for the book *Introduction to Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Girard's work on Stendhal and Proust would serve as an important basis for his first major book. His essay "Pride and Passion in the Contemporary Novel" also presented an early version of his emerging ideas and early theory.

Girard begins his essay "Pride and Passion in the Contemporary Novel" by seeking both to define Romantic literature and situate its emergence in European history. Girard writes:

> Romanticism is a literature of the self and for the self. With Rousseau and the first romantics, love and passion were no longer treated for their own sake; these literary themes were called upon to glorify and justify a self perpetually threatened with anonymity and disintegration in the new democratic society. The first romantics tried to reach their goal by asserting the eternity and intensity of the passionate sentiments aroused in their beautiful souls by a chosen woman. ("Pride and Passion" 33)

Girard suggests that the Romantic seeks to replace God and even transform woman. He asserts, "It was the romantic soul, overflowing with beauty, which transfigured the object of its passion. The romantic was God, and his love was a communion with himself" ("Pride and Passion" 33). Girard then describes the modern Romantic, who is "almost convinced that he is God" ("Pride and Passion" 36). This vulnerable deity can be threatened, however, by the rejection of an "indifferent" woman, whose rejection suggests that "…she, and not he, is the Divinity" ("Pride

and Passion" 36). Girard's concern and critique of the Romantic and Romantic literature, as he describes it, will serve as an important basis of later work.

Girard presents another important theme of his work as he critiques the emphasis on the unique and different modern subject. Surveying recent French novels of the day[1], he observes, "Many of these new novelists seem to share their heroes' belief in the supreme value of individual 'differences'" ("Pride and Passion" 37). Girard is not convinced, and he challenges this modern notion as he writes, "It is clear…that everybody is a carbon copy of everybody else" ("Pride and Passion" 37). This great existential threat to the illusion of the unique and different modern self needs to be overcome if one is to be truly free on Girard's terms. Girard's identification of the author with the hero in the novels he refers to is also an important piece of his later work.

Girard refers to the authors Racine and Proust, suggesting a need for authors like them in the current moment. He asserts that author Albert Camus can't replace Racine and Proust but suggests that he might possibly serve as a "modern Dostoevsky" for the middle class. In what will become an important critical move for Girard, he compares Camus' later work *The Fall* with an earlier work titled *The Myth of Sisyphus* ("Pride and Passion" 37). Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* is dismissed as "naïve Don Juanism" while *The Fall* represents a "vigorous attack on the hidden smugness of post-war sermonizing literature, including, probably, Camus' own" ("Pride and Passion" 38). This will become an important technical move in Girard's work, comparing a great writer's earlier work with their more mature work. The mature author's willingness to critique or unmask his or her earlier self by critiquing his or her earlier work is an important element. Girard returns to a critique of modern individualism, writing:

[1] *Monsieur Jean* by Roger Vailland; *The Fall* by Albert Camus; *La modification* by Michel Butor; *The Voyeur* by Alain Robbe-Grillet; *Jealousy* by Alain Robbe-Grillet

> Individualism is not the unifying factor which the Promethean thinkers have described. Whatever it embraces in its search for justification immediately begins to disintegrate. The present exaltation of sex, like the exaltation of love in a former era, is not a cure but a symptom of a spiritual disease which has been steadily worsening since the beginning of Romanticism. ("Pride and Passion" 39)

Girard reads in the current literature that he reviews evidence of spiritual sickness and potential social collapse. With Girard's references to Cervantes (Don Juan), Stendhal, Proust, Flaubert, and Dostoevsky in this short essay and his sketch of the crisis of the modern subject, Girard has nicely set the stage for his longer and important first book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*.

IV. Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*

Published as *Mensonge romantique et verite Romanesque* in French in 1961 and as *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* in English in 1966, René Girard's first book represented an early and important presentation of his theory of mimetic desire. Girard's work with the novels of the novelists Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoevsky helped him to define both the great novelist and the great novel. Girard contrasts these writers and their work with the writers, novels, and literary critics of what he terms the neoromantic movement. Early in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard writes, "A basic contention of this essay is that the great writers apprehend intuitively and concretely, through the medium of their art, if not formally, the system in which they were first imprisoned together with their contemporaries" (3). The system that Girard refers to can be broadly described as mimetic desire. The willingness of the author to recognize the trap of mimetic desire and renounce its

illusions will define greatness for Girard.

In Girard's reading, he perceives that mimetic desire is triangular: there is the subject who desires, the object of desire, and the mediator of desire. While some would simplify desire to a relationship between subject and object, Girard argues that it is really the mediator who both inspires and frustrates the desire of the subject for the object. A great artist recognizes this reality. Girard asserts, "Only the great artists attribute to the mediator the position usurped by the object; only they reverse the commonly accepted hierarchy of desire" (*Deceit* 14). The subject under the influence of mimetic desire seeks to imitate or copy the mediator as he or she would seek to imitate or copy a model. The subject's desires, then, are those which the subject imagines the mediator's desires for the object to be. The subject both reveres and hates the mediator. The object of desire is pursued not for its own value but because the subject assumes the mediator also desires the same object.

Girard makes the distinction between what he will call "external mediation" and "internal mediation". In the case of "external mediation", the subject and the mediator occupy different worlds and are unlikely to ever be in direct contact and in direct competition with each other. An example of this, according to Girard, is the character Don Quixote and his mythical mediator, the fabled errant knight Amadis of Gaul (*Deceit* 1). The errant knight exists as an ideal for Don Quixote, helping Quixote to imagine a worthy object of desire. Amadis and Quixote will never be in direct competition for the object of Don Quixote's desire. In the case of "internal mediation", the subject and the mediator occupy the same world and are likely to be in both direct contact and in direct competition with each other for the object of desire. An example of this, according to Girard, are the characters in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Eternal Husband* (*Deceit* 45 – 47). The rich bachelor Veltchaninov meets Pavel Pavlovitch Troussotzki.

Troussotzki's recently deceased wife was Veltchaninov's former lover. As Troussotzki seeks a new wife, he enlists Veltchaninov's help and support. The two "friends" visit the home of a potential suitor and Veltchaninov succeeds in completely sabotaging Troussotzki's efforts by charming the young lady. Later, Veltchaninov meets Troussotzki and his new wife, accompanied by a handsome young soldier. Troussotzki seems unable to desire a woman without sensing the desire of a mediator (Veltchaninov or the soldier) for the same woman. Girard quotes Marcel Proust on the same topic: "It would fall to our lot, were we better able to analyse our loves, to see that often women rise in our estimation only because of the dead weight of men with whom we have to compete for them, although we can hardly bear the thought of that competition; the counterpoise removed, the charm of the woman declines" (47 – 48). Girard traces in the novels of Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoevsky a gradual shift from external mediation to internal mediation. This shift, in Girard's view, is also evident in recent history. As the mediators come closer and grow in numbers, modern man and modern woman are overwhelmed by internal mediation.

Girard traces the Romantic movement through the time of Cervantes up to today. In contrast to Girard's suggestion about the power of the Other, the Romantic figure sees himself or herself as completely self-directed and autonomous. As Girard writes, the Romantic figure "…does not want to be anyone's disciple. He convinces himself that he is thoroughly *original*" (*Deceit* 15). Desire, in this understanding, cannot reflect mimesis and imitation; it must be entirely spontaneous and directed at whatever object of desire the Romantic figure chooses. As Girard asserts, "Romantics and symbolists want a transfiguring desire which is completely spontaneous; they do not want to hear any talk about the Other" (*Deceit* 39). Girard senses, however, that the Romantic figure has merely hidden his or her fascination with the Other

beneath what might be a typical Romantic presentation to the public. He argues, "Romantic revulsion, hatred of society, nostalgia for the desert, just as gregariousness, usually conceal a morbid concern for the Other" (*Deceit* 15). Girard sees in this stance both the potential for self-deception and misdirected religious feelings. Girard employs an allusion to worship, writing "The romantic is always falling on his knees before the wrong altar; he thinks he is sacrificing the world on the altar of his Self whereas the real object of his worship is the Other" (*Deceit* 87). This temptation to embrace the Romantic exists for the writer, for the critic, and for the general citizen. Its dismissal of the power of the mimetic merely obscures the functioning of this dynamic.

Girard distinguishes between writers who have perpetuated the Romantic and those who have overcome and rejected the Romantic in their work. In a certain sense, all writers start with the Romantic posture. Their work is a "weapon aimed at Others" that seeks to provide them with the self-justification needed to affirm their originality, uniqueness, and autonomy (*Deceit* 143). While a romantic work might be entertaining on a surface level, Girard suggests that such writing does not present the important self-understanding reflected by the great writers. The great writer undergoes a dying to self and to pride in the process of creating the great work. Girard asserts, "Only slowly and with difficulty does the novelist go beyond the romantic he was at first and who refuses to die. He finally achieves this in the 'novelistic' work and in that work alone" (*Deceit* 29). Girard suggests that the author's breakthrough follows when he or she comes to see the power of mimetic desire and the basic similarity between the self and the Other. Girard employs the example of Marcel Proust's work in *The Past Recaptured* to illustrate his point. He writes, "Recapturing the past is to welcome a truth which most men spend their lives trying to escape, to recognize that one has always copied Others in order to seem original in their

eyes and in one's own. Recapturing the past is to destroy a little of one's pride" (*Deceit* 38). Girard suggests that a growing awareness of similarity can shift the author's understanding of self, Others, and even the hero of the work.

As he did in the essay "Pride and Passion in the Contemporary Novel", Girard posits a strong link between the novelist and the hero of his or her work. In early drafts, the novelist may present the hero in ways to serve to justify the author. In the great works of literature, this posture is ultimately abandoned as the author comes to see that the hero, like the author, is just like everybody else. There is no essential difference. Pride must be replaced with humility. Girard writes, "There is novelistic genius when what is true about Others becomes true about the hero, in fact true about the novelist himself. After cursing Others, the Oedipus-novelist realizes he himself is guilty. Pride can never reach its own mediator; but the experiences of *The Past Recaptured* is the death of pride, the birth of humility and thus of truth" (*Deceit* 38 – 39). Girard's emphasis on the true and on truth might ring strangely in modern ears but Girard firmly believes that truth exists and that the best literature can truthfully and powerfully reflect the complexities and the contradictions of the modern human experience.

Girard returns to another theme from "Pride and Passion in the Contemporary Novel" as he seeks to summarize the position of the modern Romantic writer. He asserts, "The writer makes an anti-appeal to the public in the shape of anti-poetry, anti-novel, or anti-play. One writes in order to prove to the reader that one does not care about him. The main thing is to make the Other taste the rare, ineffable, and fresh quality of one's scorn for him" (*Deceit* 263). Girard highlights the irony, stating, "Never before has so much been written but it is all to prove that communication is nether possible nor desirable" (*Deceit* 263). Girard gestures to an emptying of content in modern romantic literature, describing the modern romantic author who

for "…a long time…has claimed to be speaking only to himself; today he claims to speaking without anything to say" (*Deceit* 264). Girard suggests this new strategy is an old seduction in new garments; "The writers talks in order to seduce us just as he did in the past" (*Deceit* 264). At the base of this crisis, Girard posits that desire continues to wreak havoc on the human heart. He affirms, "It is desire which puts into the mouths of the romantics exclamations of revenge and curses against God and men" (*Deceit* 265). Girard will return to both religious references and a religious frame in the final pages of his book.

As is clearly in evidence in the examples drawn from both "Pride and Passion in the Contemporary Novel" and *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard is carving out a unique position distinct from the dominant New Criticism and the dominant Literary History in his day. As Doran writes, "While Girard found useful elements in these two rival methodologies, he rejected both the anti-scientific aestheticism of the former and the scientific anti-aestheticism of the latter" ("Editor's Introduction" xiii - xiv). Doran observes that Girard's personal approach to literary texts is a unique one, setting aside the particular concerns of various schools of theory and relying instead on a close and careful reading of the text in question. Girard's theory "…derives its ideas from the texts it comments upon" ("Editor's Introduction" xiv). In a surprising way, argues Doran, "…what Girard offers us is not a theory of literature or a theory that makes use of literature for some other end, but literature *as* theory" ("Editor's Introduction" xiv). In his own way, Girard is offering a radical new way to read and interpret literary texts. In approaching texts in this manner, Girard is also seeking to illuminate particular historical moments and basic truths about the human condition.

Robert Doran points to three basic principles underlying Girard's critical practice. He lists them as:

> (1) the literary work reveals significant structures or forms of human comportment, which can be considered on a par with any of the human sciences (psychology, anthropology, sociology); (2) there is a dynamic and essential relation between author and work; and (3) literary theory and cultural theory are one, in the sense that the great literary text is concerned with what is essential in the human experience from the perspective of a specific historical moment. ("Editor's Introduction" xiv)

While Girard's mimetic theory offers an interesting and illuminating interpretation of modern literature and its relation to the contemporary life, his later work will build upon these insights as he begins to broaden his interests and study culture, religion, and religious violence in greater detail.

V. Heaney's Early Influences

Michael Parker, in his book *Seamus Heaney: The Making of a Poet*, provides a richly detailed account of Heaney's childhood, education, and career as a poet up to 1991. Heaney's basic biographical details have already been reviewed. Before looking more closely at Heaney's early poetry, I feel that a sketch of his context and early influences as a poet would be helpful. Heaney had started to write poetry and prose in his college years. These early efforts were encouraged and enriched by many and various influences. As Michael Parker writes:

> During the years from 1961 – 66, Celtic and Catholic influences in his personal life – such as Michael McLaverty, Marie Devlin, and T. P. Flanagan – and in his literary 'discoveries' – such as Patrick Kavanagh, John Montague, Daniel Corkery, James Joyce – helped him find and 'found' his sense of himself as an Irish poet, but did not prevent him from drawing water from English and American wells. (*Seamus Heaney* 29)

While an extensive presentation like Michael Parker's chapter is not possible in this project, I do want to highlight some of the key figures and influences in Heaney's development as a poet.

Heaney's first job after college was schoolteacher and his first headmaster was Michael McLaverty. In addition to being a headmaster, McLaverty was a "…distinguished, but much underrated, writer of short stories…" who would become a "key literary mentor and spiritual guide" for Heaney (*Seamus Heaney* 29). Parker adds, "Though regarded as an 'ineffectual dreamer' by some of his staff, McLaverty's generosity with his books and his time, and his long experience of and deep commitment to literature clearly made their mark on the apprentice writer" (*Seamus Heaney* 30). McLaverty encouraged Heaney's admiration of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, which had also been encouraged by a favourite highschool English teacher of Heaney's. The great gift that McLaverty shared with Heaney, however, was an introduction to the writing of the "Catholic 'master' Patrick Kavanagh" with the book *A Soul for Sale* (*Seamus Heaney* 30). Heaney was deeply influenced by the life and work of the Irish farmboy-poet Patrick Kavanagh.

Like Heaney, Kavanagh had roots in the country and, like Heaney, he had moved away to pursue new opportunities in the city. Kavanagh was a prolific writer, producing essays, articles, poems, an autobiography, and a novel. As Parker notes, Kavanagh's varied works "articulate feelings of spiritual and sexual claustrophobia, and dramatise his own 'contradictory awareness'" (*Seamus Heaney* 31). For both Heaney and Kavanagh, "…poetry is a 'mystical thing', demanding a religious commitment from its practitioners. A primary task for both is to bridge the physical world of the farm and the sacred world of literature" (*Seamus Heaney* 32). Kavanagh employed more direct Catholic allusions in his work while Heaney was more cautious not to exclude or alienate some readers in this way (*Seamus Heaney* 32). Both were farm boys.

Parker writes, "Originating from non-literary, small farming communities, both were at first inhibited by feelings of inadequacy, awkwardness, unworthiness before the Muse, and sought to protect themselves from ridicule and mockery with masks such as 'the Green Fool' [Kavanagh] and *Incertus* [Heaney]" (*Seamus Heaney* 33). Kavanagh proved to be a huge influence on Heaney. As Parker notes:

> Many features of Kavanagh's style – his use of traditional forms adapted to suit the modulations of his individual poetic voice, his anecdotal tones and colloquialisms alongside the heightening effects of classical and biblical allusion, his proud use of Ulster dialect words – seeped naturally into Heaney's work, as he began to turn his feelings into words. (*Seamus Heaney* 35)

In addition to the obvious influences from Kavanagh evident in Heaney's work, Heaney also later penned and published an article titled "A Placeless Heaven", discussing Kavanagh's important influences in his work and in Irish literature.

Heaney's return to graduate studies after teaching for a time allowed him to focus on Irish poetry. Heaney wrote an extended essay on Ulster literary magazines in 1962, coming into contact with the work of Irish writers such as W. R. Rodgers, and John Hewitt, who were writing poetry out of their "local and native background" (*Seamus Heaney* 36). The anthology *Six Irish Poets,* published in 1962, introduced Heaney to work by poets Austin Clarke, Richard Kell, Thomas Kinsella, John Montague, Richard Murphy, and Richard Weber. Like Hopkins, Kavanagh, Rodgers, and Hewitt, the poets in *Six Irish Poets* "…supplied Heaney with more examplars" (*Seamus Heaney* 36). Parker suggests that John Montague was particularly important to Heaney, as he "was the first person from north of the border to write in depth about the rural community in which he grew up. He identifies with the people he describes, but is also

sufficiently distanced from them by education to see them not only as individuals but also as representatives of a dying culture" (Ormsby qtd. in *Seamus Heaney* 37 – 38). Parker adds that Montague's important work has served to "…point the way for Irish poets since the Sixties to reconcile the claims of the parochial and the international, and to explore identity through a personal and racial quest into dark origins…" (*Seamus Heaney* 39). These themes proved to be important for Heaney in his work.

Heaney was also inspired by reading other important Irish writers from the past. Two works in particular that influenced Heaney were Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland* and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (*Seamus Heaney* 39). Corkery's important work on the history of Ireland included a recounting of past British discrimination and oppression of the Irish Catholic population of Ireland. Though the Penal Laws enforcing this oppression had mostly been repealed by the 1790s, Heaney could still trace the effects of this legacy in modern northern Ireland. Corkery's book also celebrated Gaelic civilization and culture in Ireland. In contrast to the negative depictions of the Irish by English writers like Edmund Spenser, Parker writes, "Corkery's book drew attention to the achievements of Gaelic civilization, preserved in the bardic schools, the big houses, and the works of major lyric poets such as Aodhagan O Raithaille, Eoghan Ruadh O Suilleabhain, and Brian Merriman" (*Seamus Heaney* 40). Dominated by the English, these Irish peasant farmer-poets would serve as important resources to the Irish people. The strategy of poetry, art, and culture as political resistance to colonial domination is an important tradition in Ireland that Corkery highlights and Heaney comes to adopt. Heaney also reads and comes to appreciate James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* during these formative years (*Seamus Heaney* 41). In his own way, Joyce uses literature as a tool to resist what he considers to be the oppressions of Empire, church, nation,

and family.

Michael Parker acknowledges that Heaney was also influenced by British and American poets and authors. Important British poets for Heaney from the past included William Wordsworth and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Important American poets included Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams. The American author Ernest Hemingway was also a Heaney favourite. More recent British authors also inspired Heaney. Parker writes, "R. S. Thomas, Norman MacCaig, and Ted Hughes were natural mentors for him to adopt, since, like Kavanagh and Montague, they were 'delineators of a rural parish', writers fired with a strong sense of place, who dwelt upon the intimacy of Man's relationship with Nature" (*Seamus Heaney* 42). Parker lists British poet Ted Hughes as one of Heaneys's most important discoveries in the early years of his poetic development. Heaney first read Hughes' poetry collection *Lupercal* in the late fall of 1962 (*Seamus Heaney* 44). Heaney found in Hughes' work a similar energy and approach as Gerard Manley Hopkins. Parker compares the two poets, writing, "Although their visions of the controlling Force or forces in the universe differ profoundly, Hopkins and Hughes share an intense reverence for creation, making words and worlds blaze with religious awe" (*Seamus Heaney* 44). If Hopkins represented the Roman Catholic creative, Hughes represented the ancient pagan creative. Michael Parker adds, as he discusses Heaney's references to Hughes in the essay "Englands of the Mind":

> Accurately Heaney defines Hughes's sensibility as 'pagan', asserting that 'he is a haunter of the *pagus*, heath-dweller, a heathen'. Perhaps after twenty three years of intense exposure and devotion to Irish Catholicism, the 'primeval' feel of Hughes's world appealed to the Oisin [legendary Irish poet-warrior] in him, with its ancient landscapes and its magical beasts, like the old Celtic gods, defiant and doomed. With its cast of

> outcasts, beggars, scavengers, perpetual refugees, *Lupercal* may have actually become 'celticised' in Heaney's imagination; its displaced souls resemble the deities of Irish mythology, and recall the impoverished geniuses of Corkery's lost world. (*Seamus Heaney*, 44 – 45)

Parker observes that Hughes and Heaney both loved to hunt and fish and they loved to write about nature (*Seamus Heaney* 45). In an important and formative time for Heaney, Hughes' *Lupercal* "… convinced him that poetry was a vocation, right and fitting, reinforcing his acute sense of the sacred, derived first from his mother, and subsequently affirmed by early literary influences such as Wordsworth and Hopkins" (*Seamus Heaney* 45). Heaney's sense of Ireland, Irish poetry, and the broader vocation of the poet grew in important ways during this time.

Michael Parker also highlights several important people who entered Heaney's life during this time. Terry Flanagan, Marie Devlin, Philip Hobsbaum, David Hammond, Michael Longley, Edna Longley, and Derek Mahon would all come to play different but important roles in Heaney's personal and professional life. Terry Flanagan was a Irish painter and became Heaney's friend. Flanagan was fascinated by Irish landscape in his work. Parker notes, "The lough and Lissadell were two of the sacred places of Flanagan's imagination, to which he frequently returned in his paintings of the early 1960s" (*Seamus Heaney* 46). Heaney and Flanagan spent time together outdoors, sharing friendship and discussing art. Marie Devlin, a schoolteacher from a prominent Irish Catholic family, met Heaney during this time. They were married in August 1965 and had three children together. In contrast to Heaney's family, Devlin's family "…had a history of ambition and academic achievement, and a strong sense of their Irish Catholic identity" (*Seamus Heaney* 47). The Devlin family was also religiously tolerant. Marie had studied English, Speech, and Drama at teacher training college and proved to

be a strong support for Heaney in his life and work. Philip Hobsbaum, a newly arrived lecturer in the Queen's English department, became an important influence and friend for Heaney. Hobsbaum had studied with the literary critic F. R. Leavis and the scholar William Empson. He had also been a co-founder of the London "Group", an important gathering of poets and writers. Upon arriving in Belfast, Hobsbaum sought to set up a similar group there. Hobsbaum spotted some of Heaney's poetry in publication and invited him to join the group.

October and November 1963 were important months for Heaney. In October, he started a new job lecturing on Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and the Romantics at St. Joseph's College of Education in Belfast (*Seamus Heaney* 51). In November, he attended the first meeting of the Belfast Group, hosted at Hobsbaum's home. Hobsbaum had gathered together writers, poets, and musicians to review and discuss each other's work. Parker writes, "On the 'neutral' ground of the Fitzwilliam Street sitting room, friendships and healthy rivalries developed across the sectarian divide" (*Seamus Heaney* 52). Hobsbaum was Jewish, Heaney was Roman Catholic, and attendees Michael Longley, Edna Longley, and Derek Mahon were Protestant. Michael Longley and Derek Mahon had attended Trinity College – Dublin, where, as Parker notes, "…Catholics feared to tread" (*Seamus Heaney* 52 – 53). Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, and Derek Mahon all focused on poetry, and they "were to become close competitors and friends" (*Seamus Heaney* 53). Heaney also met the Protestant musician David Hammond at this time. Hammond, Parker writes, "shared Heaney's profound love for Irish literature and consciousness of its neglect within the North, a passion for 'the hidden Ulster', for the folk customs and culture of their forebears, and sought through teaching and learning to sensitize their countrymen and themselves to their past and present inheritance" (*Seamus Heaney* 55). Parker suggests that the Longleys, Mahon, and Hammond represented some of the first Irish Protestants that Heaney

really came to know and love deeply. Parker posits that it was this influence, in addition to the influence of his wife's family, that helped Heaney to suppress the "angry Catholic voice" evident in some of his early poems (*Seamus Heaney* 55). Heaney's investments in the Belfast Group and the relationships that flowed from it nourished and sustained his early writing. It was Philip Hobsbaum who also helped Heaney to secure his first publication of a volume of poetry with the London publisher Faber & Faber. In contrast to Girard's figure of the Romantic artist, isolated and alone, Heaney was nurtured by family, friends, colleagues, and a strong sense of the living traditions of Irish poetry and literature.

VI. Heaney's Early Poetry

Seamus Heaney published his first collection of poetry, titled *Death of a Naturalist*, in 1966. Heaney focused on some broad themes in this collection: farm life, nature, family life, Irish history, the arts, and religious life. His poem "Digging" would bring many of these themes together.

> Between my finger and my thumb
> The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.
>
> Under my window, a clean rasping sound
> When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
> My father, digging. I look down
>
> Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
> Bends low, comes up twenty years away
> Stooping in rhythm through potato drills

Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.

I'll dig with it. (1 – 31)

Like his role model Patrick Kavanagh, Heaney found in these simple images of manual labour and farm life both a foundation and also a point of departure for his work as a poet. "Digging", like many of Heaney's farm poems, explored both the daily harsh realities of the farming life and the shifts occurring as farming modernized in rural Ireland. Heaney's description of his pen resting "snug as a gun" is a foreboding picture of the violence that would soon consume Northern Ireland's peace.

The theme of nature was also important in *Death of a Naturalist*. Heaney's depictions of the life and power of nature, overshadowed at times by nature's potential threat to human life, echoed the work of poets like William Wordsworth and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Family life was reflected in poems like "Mid-Term Break" (*Death* 28), which depicted Heaney's memories of his return from boarding school for his younger brother's funeral. Heaney's recent marriage was also the inspiration for "Poem" (*Death* 48), written for his wife Marie, and the poems "Honeymoon Flight" (*Death* 49) and "Scaffolding" (*Death* 50). As with his poems about farm life and nature, Heaney's family poems focused on the daily joys and struggles of family, love, and loss.

Heaney also included poems in *Death of a Naturalist* about Irish history and about the arts. His poem "At a Potato Digging" (Heaney, *Death* 31 – 33) begins with a modern scene of a potato harvest. This scene morphs, in later sections, into a depiction of the horrors and deprivations of the great potato famine in Ireland in the nineteenth century. His poem "For the

Commander of the 'Eliza'" is also set in the time during the great potato famine (Heaney, *Death* 34 – 35). Heaney recounts, in this poem, the harsh treatment of the starving Irish by British naval officers and colonial administrators. Heaney also included a poem titled "Synge on Aran" (*Death* 52). J. M. Synge was an Irish dramatist and writer who worked closely with W. B. Yeats to found the Irish National Theatre. Synge tried, in the late nineteenth century, to depict the life of the Irish farmers in rural Ireland. Heaney's suggestion in the poem is that Synge's depictions were written with a "hard pen / scraping in his head" (15 – 16). Heaney appears to be sympathetic to Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh's great dislike and dismissal of Synge's work. Other poems referencing Ireland include "Lovers on Aran" (*Death* 47) and "Gravities" (*Death* 43). The poem "Gravities" included a reference to Irish writer James Joyce, who is depicted as

> Blinding in Paris, for his party-piece
> Joyce named the shops along 'Connell Street
> And on Iona Colmcille sought ease
> By wearing Irish mould next to his feet. (9 - 12)

Joyce's ongoing interest and attachment to Ireland, despite his exile and passionate critique of Irish society, is highlighted in his novel *Ulysses*. In the poem "Gravities", the pull of Ireland for Joyce is likened to gravity. Joyce will return as a figure in other Heaney poems. Other poems in the collection that reference music and the arts include "Folk Singers" (55), "The Play Way" (56), and "Personal Helicon" (57). Heaney's interest in Irish history and in the arts will be reflected in later poems as well.

Heaney's direct references to religious imagery and religion are relatively limited in *Death of a Naturalist*. His poem "St. Francis and the Birds" employs the figure of St. Francis preaching words into birds (53). These words from his "holy lips" are "released for fun" (53).

They “wheeled back”, “whirred”, “pirouetted”, “danced on the wing”, “played”, and “sang” much like a flock of birds might (53). Heaney describes this sermon of flying words as “the best poem Francis made, / His argument true, his tone light” (9 – 10). The poem suggests more about language and poetry than it does about religion, though it does pay some homage to the focus on the word in Christian tradition.

Heaney’s poems “Poor Women in a City Church” (*Death* 42) and “Docker” (*Death* 41) depict Irish Catholic and Irish Protestant Christians in their everyday lives. The women in “Poor Women in a City Church” are presented in the act of prayer and worship in an ornately decorated church sanctuary. They are described as “Old dough-faced women with black shawls” who “Drawn down tight kneel in the stalls” (6 - 7). Their prayers are described as “whispered calls” that “Take wing up to the Holy Name” (9 - 10). Their daily practices “still them” and Heaney suggests that in the “gloom you cannot trace / A wrinkle on their beeswax brow” (14 - 15). This depiction of these devout Roman Catholic women can be contrasted with Heaney’s depiction of an Irish Protestant dock worker in the poem “Docker” (41).

There in the corner, staring at his drink.
The cap just like a gantry’s crossbeam,
Cowling plated forehead and sledgehead jaw.
Speech is clamped in the lips’ vice.

That fist would drop a hammer on a Catholic –
Oh yes, that kind of thing could start again;
The only Roman collar he tolerates
Smiles all round his sleek pint of porter.

Mosaic imperatives bang home like rivets;
God is a foreman with certain definite views
Who orders life in shifts of work and leisure.
A factory horn will blare the Resurrection.

He sits, strong and blunt as a Celtic cross,
Clearly used to silence and an armchair:
Tonight the wife and children will be quiet
At slammed door and smoker's cough in the hall. (1 - 16)

Heaney's "Docker" is depicted enjoying a drink after work. Heaney highlights the simmering antagonism between the Irish Protestant and Irish Roman Catholic communities which had, and would again, erupt in violence. Mosaic Law, God, and the Resurrection are all set in the context of the docker's working world. The poem ends with an ominous reference to alcoholism and domestic violence that seems to bear no relation to the dock worker's sense of God, God's Law, and the Christian faith. Echoing James Joyce, Heaney gestures towards the great destructiveness of alcoholism in Ireland. Echoing Girard, Heaney's poem "Docker" reads as a "weapon aimed at Others" (*Deceit* 143) and represents an early angry Catholic poem in Heaney's work.

Heaney's second collection of poetry, titled *Door Into the Dark*, was published in 1969. Heaney returned to familiar themes with this collection, writing again about farm life, nature, family life, Irish history, and the arts. Heaney also explored writing from the perspective of a woman in two of the poems. His poems in this collection included numerous religious references but did not include any direct depictions of the religious life or subject. His references to religion included both pre-Christian and Christian themes.

Heaney explores the writing of poetry from a woman's perspective in "The Wife's Tale"

(27 – 28) and "Mother" (29) from *Door in the Dark*. In contrast to the poem "Poor Women in a City Church" (*Death* 42), where the poet placed himself as an observer of the women praying, in "The Wife's Tale", Heaney assumes the woman's voice and perspective. The poem depicts a farm wife feeding her husband and some other farm workers lunch during harvest. In a presentation that evokes, in style and tone, American poet Robert Frost, Heaney presents a woman who is somewhat alienated from her husband, his work in the fields, and the world of men in which he moves. Her role is defined by the feminine: she provides food, comfort, and ultimate approval for the work of the men. If she has more or other things to offer, the situation does not allow for her to express this. As the lunch ends, she quietly packs the food and leaves. Heaney also assumes a female voice and perspective in "Mother" (*Door* 29), imagining the thoughts of a young woman weighed down with the challenges of work, childrearing, and pregnancy. Heaney will continue to explore this as he imagines and writes from the perspective of the Other more and more in future poems.

Heaney's third collection of poetry, titled *Wintering Out,* was published in 1972. Heaney included familiar themes with this collection, writing again about farm life, nature, family life, Irish history, and the arts. Heaney included more poems about women and he added a new emphasis on the Irish language as a political, social, and historical marker. *Wintering Out* also represented a more direct engagement with the sectarian, political violence that was increasing between the Irish Roman Catholic and the Irish Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. He also returned more directly to the depiction of religious life and religious subjects.

Heaney introduced a new theme in *Wintering Out* with a special focus on the Irish language as a political, social, and historical marker. For the native Irish, the Irish words, the Irish phrases, and the ancient Irish place-names can represent a sign of difference and even a site

of political resistance when encountering others. In "Anahorish", Heaney reveals the meaning of the Irish place-name as "place of clear water" and he uses this meaning to describe the site (1). He also notes in the poem that the word "Anahorish" includes "…soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow" so that sound also evokes the misty darkness of that place (7 – 8). In "Toome", Heaney describes how his mouth "…holds round / the soft blastings, / *Toome, Toome*…" (1 – 3). The physical act of speech for this word includes his tongue and he explores what lies beneath both his tongue and the ground. Archeological items lie entombed as Heaney sees himself "sleeved in" mud and the underlying "bogwater" (*Wintering* 26). The English word "tomb" is evoked in his musings. In the poem featuring the place-name "Broagh", Heaney highlights both the "black *O*" and "that last *gh*" that "strangers found / difficult to manage" (8, 15 – 16). "Broagh" represents a conflation of the Irish words *bruach abhana* (O'Grady, 25) and also serves as a way to distinguish the native from the outsider. Thomas O'Grady notes that another phrase in the poem referring to the "windy boortrees" further accentuates the local terms and pronounciations (25). "Boor trees" refer to "bower trees" or "elderberry trees" and serve as another marker of nativity (O'Grady, 25).

In the poems "A New Song" (*Wintering* 33) and "The Wool Trade" (*Wintering* 37), Heaney contrasts the native terms with those imposed by outsiders. In "A New Song", Heaney describes meeting a girl from "Derrygarve" and this place-name serves as a "lost potent musk", reminding the speaker of the Moyola river (*Wintering* 33). Heaney imagines a vocal uprising, where

> …river tongues must rise
> From licking deep in native haunts
> To flood, with vowelling embrace,

Demenses staked out in consonants. (13 - 16)

The native language overflows and overwhelms the imposed language of the colonizer. Heaney's poem "The Wool Trade" includes an epigraph from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen Dedalus thinks, "'How different are the words 'home', 'Christ', 'ale', 'master', on his lips and on mine" (Joyce qtd. in Heaney, *Wintering* 37). Heaney uses the discussion of the wool trade by a foreign merchant to highlight Ireland's "lost syntax of looms and spindles" (14) where words and phrases "…hang / Fading, in the gallery of the tongue!" (15 - 16). Heaney ends the poem with the phrase, "And I must talk of tweed, / A stiff cloth with flecks like blood" (17 - 18). As Joyce noted through the character Stephen Dedalus in the epigraph, Heaney affirms the cultural, historical, and political power expressed in speech.

Heaney's most direct treatment of the contested issue of language in Ireland in *Wintering Out* is presented in the poem "Traditions" (31 – 32).

I

Our guttural muse
was bulled long ago
by the alliterative tradition,
her uvula grows

vestigial, forgotten
like the coccyx
or a Brigid's Cross
yellowing in some outhouse

while custom, that 'most

sovereign mistress',

beds us down into

the British isles.

II

We are to be proud

of our Elizabethan English:

'varsity', for example,

is grass-roots stuff with us;

we 'deem' or we 'allow'

when we suppose

and some cherished archaisms

are correct Shakespearean.

Not to speak of the furled

consonants of lowlanders

shuttling obstinately

between bawn and mossland.

III

MacMorris, gallivanting

round the Globe, whinged

to courtier and groundling

who had heard tell of us

as going very bare
of learning, as wild hares,
as anatomies of death:
'What ish my nation?'

And sensibly, though so much
later, the wandering Bloom
replied, 'Ireland,' said Bloom,
'I was born here. Ireland.' (1 - 36)

Heaney's poem is a dense and complicated critique of the effects of English power and attitudes on Irish speech, culture, and identity. A few terms and references should be highlighted. In the first section of the poem, the term "guttural" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "of or relating to the throat" (*OED Online*). The term "bulled" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "to make a fool of, to mock" (*OED Online*). Ireland's "guttural muse", having been "bulled", finds her uvula in her throat becoming "atrophied" like the coccyx, believed by some to be the remnant of a primordial tail in the human skeleton. The Brigid's Cross refers to a symbol of Ireland that has both Celtic and Christian origins. These origins, Heaney suggests, have been made obscure and ineffective. Heaney cites "custom" as that "most sovereign mistress", applying a phrase normally applied to the Queen of Heaven Mary in prayer. "Custom" forces the Irish into submission and "beds us down into / the British Isles" (11 – 12). The irony is even deeper as a Protestant nation lacking the cult of the Queen of Heaven Mary seeks to dominate and assimilate the Roman Catholic nation of Ireland.

In the third section of "Traditions", Heaney refers to both the work of Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. Edmund Spenser, Chief Secretary of Ireland from 1580 – 1582 under

the authority of Lord Grey of Wilton and English Poet Laureate from 1590 – 1599, wrote a pamphlet titled "A View of the Present State of Ireland" in 1596. Published after his death, Spenser's pamphlet depicted the Irish native population as uncivilized. Heaney makes reference to Spenser's judgments with the phrases "going very bare / of learning, as wild hares, / as anatomies of death" (29 - 31). Spenser argued for the destruction of the indigenous language and customs in Ireland. He advocated British violence if necessary to achieve this. In the poem "Traditions", Heaney suggests that the popular understanding of the Irish created by Spenser's pamphlet was supplemented by the Shakespearean character MacMorris. Captain MacMorris is one of three captains serving King Henry V in Shakespeare's play *Henry V*. MacMorris, along with captains from Wales and Scotland, is coded in the play primarily by his accent. In *Henry V* (*H5*), the character Gower describes MacMorris as "an Irishman, a very valiant gentleman, i'faith" (*H5* 3.2.65-66). When challenged to discuss his nation later in the play, MacMorris replies, "Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal? What ish my nation?" (*H5* 3.2.121-123) Heaney contrasts the harsh and dismissive representations of the Irish in Spenser's and Shakespeare's work with a reference to Joyce's character Leopold Bloom from *Ulysses*. Bloom situates Irishness with being born in Ireland. Although Bloom's ethnic identity includes Jewish and Hungarian elements, he simply sees himself as one born Irish.

Heaney's poetry collection *Wintering Out*, in addition to focusing on issues of language, also represented a more direct engagement with the sectarian, political violence that was increasing between the Irish Roman Catholic and the Irish Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. Heaney dedicates the book to his friends David Hammond and Michael Longley. David Hammond was an Irish musician who sometimes toured with Heaney. Michael Longley was a

Irish Protestant poet and a longtime friend. Along with the dedication, Heaney added the following poem in italics:

This morning from a dewy motorway
I saw the new camp for the internees:
a bomb had left a crater of fresh clay
in the roadside, and over in the trees

machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.
There was that white mist you get on a low ground
and it was déjà-vu, some film made
of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound.

Is there a life before death? That's chalked up
on a wall downtown. Competence with pain,
coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
we hug our little destiny again. (1 - 12)

This brief poem acknowledges the deepening crisis in Northern Ireland as sectarian violence increased and the British military response deepened. Heaney also included the poem sequence "A Northern Hoard" in *Wintering Out* (39 – 44). Heaney included as the epigraph a quote from Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner": "And some in dreams assured were / Of the Spirit that plagued us so" (Coleridge qtd. in Heaney, *Wintering* 39). The five sections of "A Northern Hoard" were titled "Roots", "No Man's Land", "Stump", "No Sanctuary" and "Tinder". In "Roots", the speaker in the poem watches his wife sleep unaware of the "din / Of gunshot, siren and clucking gas" (6 – 7). The options for the speaker and his wife are described as "petrify or

uproot now" (12). In "No Man's Land", the speaker in the poem describes himself as one who "deserted" and wonders if he needs to return to the scene of the violence (*Wintering*, 40). The speaker asks,

> Why do I unceasingly
> arrive late to condone
> infected sutures
> and ill-knit bone? (29 - 32)

In "Stump", the speaker in the poem describes himself as "riding to plague again" and notes that he feels "…cauterized, a black stump of home" (38). In "No Sanctuary", Heaney depicts a Hallowe'en nightmare of death, mockery, and fire (42). In "Tinder", Heaney depicts a depleted people:

> Huddled at dusk in a ring,
> Our fists shut, our hope shrunken?
> What could strike a blaze
> From our dead igneous days? (59 - 62)

He closes the poem sequence with the sentences:

> Now we squat on cold cinder,
> Red-eyed, after the flames' soft thunder
> And our thoughts settle like ash.
> We face the tundra's whistling brush
> With new history, flint and iron,
> Cast-offs, scraps, nail, canine. (63 – 68)

In addition to the dedication from *Wintering Out* cited earlier, "A Northern Hoard" represents

one of Heaney's first published attempts to address the violence in Northern Ireland in such a direct fashion.

Seamus Heaney also returned more directly to the depiction of religious life and religious subjects in *Wintering Out*. The poem "The Other Side" depicts the relationship between the speaker's Roman Catholic family and their Irish Protestant neighbour. The Protestant neighbour's speech is spiced with Biblical allusions and metaphors and the Roman Catholic speaker, following suit, understands his family's situation in Biblical terms. The Protestant neighbour suggests that his Roman Catholic neighbours pay little attention to the Bible. He suggests, "Your side of the house, I believe, / hardly rule by the book at all" (29 – 30). The Roman Catholic speaker imagines his Protestant neighbour's brain as a "whitewashed kitchen / hung with texts, swept tidy / as the body o' the kirk" (31 - 33). Heaney's reference to the "kirk" further confirms the neighbour's identification with the Protestant tradition as it echoes Scottish Presbyterian terminology.

In the third section of the poem "The Other Side", Heaney presents another facet of the neighbourly relationship. As the family prays the rosary, the neighbour stops by. He is aware and respectful of their time in prayer, waiting until the litany is complete to knock on the door. This gesture of respect and care between Protestant and Catholic suggests an important alternative for Ireland. In a surprising turn, Heaney then situates the speaker in the poem outside the home with his neighbour. As they overhear the "moan of prayers" (44) that suggest the intimacy and privacy of "lovemaking or a stranger's weeping", the speaker pauses to ponder his next step (48). The speaker asks himself,

> Should I slip away, I wonder,
>
> or go up and touch his shoulder

and talk about the weather

or the price of grass-seed? (49 – 52)

These daily shared concerns can provide neighbours with important points of connection even among what some assume to be great religious differences and potentially violent conflict. The poem ends with this question challenging both the poet and the reader.

Heaney includes two poems in *Wintering Out* that will prove to be an important early step in some new directions for his future poetry. Inspired by P. V. Glob's book *The Bog People*, Heaney writes of the "Tollund Man" (47 – 48).

Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country nearby
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time.
Bridegroom to the goddess,

She tightened her torc on him

And opened her fen,

Those dark juices working

Him to a saint's kept body,

Trove of the turfcutters'

Honeycombed workings.

Now his stained face

Reposes at Aarhus.

II

I could risk blasphemy,

Consecrate the cauldron bog

Our holy ground and pray

Him to make germinate

The scattered, ambushed

Flesh of labourers,

Stockinged corpses

Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth

Flecking the sleepers

Of four young brothers, trailed

For miles along the lines.

III

Something of his sad freedom
As he rode the tumbrel
Should come to me, driving,
Saying the names

Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard,
Watching the pointing hands
Of country people,
Not knowing their tongue.

Out there in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost,
Unhappy and at home. (1 – 44)

Heaney begins, in "Tollund Man", to suggest that the violence plaguing Northern Ireland is all too much like the ritual violence that sentenced the Tollund Man to be sacrificed to the Goddess. In section two of "Tollund Man", Heaney risks "blasphemy" as he considers praying to the Tollund Man to "make germinate" the dead victims of the Irish violence (48). He makes reference to a recent incident where four young Irish Roman Catholic brothers were dragged to death along the railway tracks. Although Heaney, in visiting Jutland, would be in a foreign place among people speaking a foreign tongue, he would also, "In the old man-killing parishes / …feel lost / Unhappy and at home" (42 - 44). As a companion to "Tollund Man", Heaney also included "Nerthus" in the poetry collection *Wintering Out* (49). A short poem, the title of "Nerthus" refers to a pagan earth goddess from Europe's earlier history. Heaney depicts a wooden "ash-

fork staked in peat" that is carved to represent a female sexual organ (1). This weathered wooden carving is a "seasoned, unsleeved taker of the weather" (3). Heaney will return to the images of the Bog people and the Goddess as he writes the poems in his landmark work *North*, published in 1975.

VII. Religion and Religious Violence in Girard and Heaney

I'd like to return, at this point, to the question of "religion" and "religious violence" as I discuss the theory of René Girard and the poetry of Seamus Heaney. For the purposes of this chapter, I want to return briefly to the biographies of Girard and Heaney before reviewing how they define and depict "religion" and "religious violence". The focus will be limited primarily to Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* and Heaney's first three books of poetry: *Death of a Naturalist, Door into the Dark*, and *Wintering Out*. These early definitions and depictions of "religion" and "religious violence" are important early elements of later work.

René Girard, as noted earlier, was born in France. His father was not overly interested in Christianity while his mother was a devout Roman Catholic. Girard reports that from the age of ten until the age of thirty six he followed his father's example and approached questions of God and faith as an agnostic. Girard returned to the faith of his mother after two important events in his life. The first event involved his work on mimetic desire in the novels of Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Proust, and Stendhal. In a much later comment on the situation, Girard claimed, "As far as I am concerned, the subject of literature and Christianity is literally the story of my whole intellectual and spiritual existence. Many years ago, I started with literature and myth and then moved to the study of the Bible and Christian Scripture. Great literature literally led me to Christianity. This itinerary is not original…" ("Conversion" 263). His experience

with what he would term the "conversion" novel helped him to be in a position to intellectually assent to the Christian faith. The second event involved a health scare with cancer for Girard. Girard relates the story in an interview published in the *The Girard Reader*:

> I went to a medical doctor, a dermatologist…He removed the bit of tissue which turned out to be cancerous. From that time on I was pretty scared, because he never told me that this type of cancer was eminently curable and usually did not return after it was removed. So to me it was as though I was under a death sentence…So my intellectual conversion, which was a very comfortable experience, self-indulgent even, was totally changed. I could not but view the cancer and the period of intense anxiety as a warning and a kind of expiation, and now this conversion was transformed into something really serious in which the aesthetic gave way to the religious. ("Anthropology" 285)

Girard returned to the doctor to find that he was healthy and cancer-free. Girard immediately went to confession, had his children baptized, and he and his wife were remarried by a priest. Girard would live the remainder of his life as an active Roman Catholic layperson.

Seamus Heaney, as noted earlier, was raised in a devout Irish Roman Catholic family. Heaney was especially influenced by the piety of his mother. Michael Parker writes, "Perhaps the most important qualities Heaney received from his mother issued from her deeply religious sensibility, qualities such as patience, humility, awe, and reverence which permeate his personality and writing" (*Seamus Heaney* 4). Heaney, in a 1981 interview with John Haffenden, said:

> My sensibility was formed by the dolorous murmurings of the rosary, and the generally Marian quality of devotion. The reality that was addressed was maternal, and the posture was one of supplication…Irish Catholicism, until about ten years ago, had this Virgin

> Mary worship, almost worship. In practice, the shrines, the rosary beads, all the devotions, were centred toward a feminine presence, which I think was terrific for the sensibility. I think that the 'Hail Mary' is more of a poem than the 'Our Father'. (Heaney qtd. in Parker, *Seamus Heaney* 4)

Heaney's poetic sensibility was strongly formed by his experiences as a young Roman Catholic boy participating in corporate worship and times of family devotions in the home.

At the age of twelve, Heaney won a scholarship to attend St. Columb's College, a Roman Catholic boarding school in Derry that served as a "minor seminary" (*Seamus Heaney* 11). St. Columb's featured a busy schedule with classes and schoolwork as well as daily Mass, nightly prayers and confessions on Saturdays. Heaney especially loved his Latin and his English courses. A favourite Senior English teacher at St. Columb's introduced Heaney to the poetry of William Wordsworth, John Keats, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins was especially important, Michael Parker notes, because "the fervour of Hopkin's faith would have struck a chord in Heaney, with its emphasis on the male (Christ) and the female (the Virgin Mary) and its mixture of gladness and guilt" (*Seamus Heaney* 19). Heaney was also very involved with *Gaeltacht*, a cultural and social movement which provided opportunities for students to explore and celebrate their Irish identity.

Upon graduating from St. Columb's, Heaney studied English Language and Literature at Queen's University, Belfast. Heaney was still very actively practicing his Roman Catholic faith. He was beginning, however, to struggle between the worlds of religion and literature. As he notes, "The blueprint for the spirit and the feelings which Irish Catholicism offered my generation was bound to become a straitjacket. 'The world' and 'the secular' besieged the true values and, of course, some of the most pervasive worldly forces and some of the most active

forms of the secular intelligence are to be found at work in modern literature" (*Poet* 604). Heaney found some help in the work of James Joyce as he weighed these tensions. In later years, Heaney admitted to having doubts about his faith but he never severed ties with the Roman Catholic Church of his childhood like James Joyce so famously did.

Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* is, in a very real sense, informed by and saturated with references to religion. In tracing the shift from Christian Europe to a modern secularized society, Girard argues that the religious impulse has not disappeared; it has merely been subverted and refocused from God to the Other. Girard risks sounding unfashionably moralistic as he denounces the pride of the modern subject. He writes:

> In Dostoevsky's eyes, the false promise is essentially a promise of metaphysical autonomy. For two or three centuries this has been the underlying principle of every 'new' Western doctrine: God is dead, man must take his place. Pride has always been a temptation but in modern times it has become irresistible because it is organized and amplified in an unheard-of way. (*Deceit* 56)

Girard situates true freedom not in pride but in a traditionally Christian framework as he states, "Christianity directs existence towards a vanishing point, either toward God or toward the Other. Choice always involves choosing a model, and true freedom lies in the basic choice between a human or a divine model" (*Deceit* 58). The illusion that modern man has forsaken the need for a model is challenged by Girard.

As Girard surveys the current situation, he challenges the assertions of what he terms "Promethean philosophy", which he primarily associates with Nietzsche and Heidegger. Girard suggests, contrary to Heidegger, that the "gods" have not "withdrawn": "…the gods are nearer than ever…Only the novelist looks behind the deceptive mask of the official cult and finds the

hidden gods of internal mediation. Proust and Dostoevsky do not define our universe by an absence of the sacred, as do the philosophers, but by the perversion and corruption of the sacred, which gradually poisons the sources of life" (*Deceit*, 203). Girard argues that in great literature deep truths about the human situation and condition are revealed that even metaphysical philosophers would struggle to recognize and affirm.

Girard shifts to an emphasis on death. He writes, "The truth of metaphysical desire is death…Novels are full of signs announcing death. But the signs remain ambiguous as long as the prophecy is not fulfilled" (*Deceit* 282). Girard sees a death wish expressed in the "will-to-power". He asserts, "The will to make oneself God is a will to self-destruction which is gradually realized" (*Deceit* 287). Returning to the climax of the great novel, Girard notes that often there is a physical death of the hero depicted, or an allegorical "death" which allows the hero to renounce old understandings and desires and embrace a new life. Reconciliation is invoked and, at times, a resurrection is depicted. Girard sees in these moments a merger of art, religious ethics, and humanism. He writes, "The novelistic dénouement is a reconciliation between the individual and the world, between man and the sacred….In this final moment the novelist reaches the heights of Western literature; he merges with the great religious ethics and the most elevated forms of humanism, those which have chosen the least accessible parts of man" (*Deceit* 308). Commenting further on the final section of Dostevsky's late masterpiece, Girard adds, "The conclusion of *The Brothers Karamazov* is borne on the highest crest of Dostoevsky's genius. The last distinctions between novelistic and religious experience are abolished" (*Deceit*, 314). In ways that Girard will later need to clarify and address, he aligns the novelistic and the religious.

Girard does not speak directly in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* to the questions of

"violence" and "religious violence". As he notes, mimetic desire can lead to mimetic rivalry and the threat of violence accompanies this rising conflict between subject and mediator. Girard will move more deeply into the question of violence in his book *Violence and the Sacred*. He will also explore more deeply the role that religion plays in the creation of culture and the management of the violence that mimetic rivalry can potentially inspire.

Seamus Heaney's first three books of poetry (*Death of a Naturalist, Door into the Dark,* and *Wintering Out*) contain few direct references to religion. As noted above, poems like "Docker", "Poor Women in a City Church", and "The Other Side" depict Irish Protestant and Irish Catholic characters. Heaney utilizes religious references and allusions in several poems, including both Christian and pagan references. Focusing on direct references and allusions to religion in Heaney's work may seem to be a relatively pointless exercise. This would be true if one employs, as William Cavanaugh noted in *The Myth of Religious Violence*, a substantivist understanding of religion. The discrete and unique expression of the world religion Christianity in its Roman Catholic form and its Protestant form is referenced directly very minimally in Heaney. Cavanaugh also suggested, though, a functionalist understanding of religion. He argued for the opening up of the understanding of religion to all that functions like a religion, even if it is not normally understood to be "religion". Cavanaugh's comments about medieval European Christianity are also relevant here, which he noted was a "theopolitical" whole. In an article from the 1970s, Heaney described his own understanding. He said, "As a northerner, my sense of my religion and my sense of my race or nationality or politics were inextricably twined together" (*Poet* 603). Heaney's comment suggests that religion may be implicated in many or even most of his poems; life in Northern Ireland might be understood, like medieval Europe, as a "theopolitical" whole.

The questions of "violence" and "religious violence" are complicated by Heaney's assertions above. Is the political violence which is depicted in *Wintering Out* strictly and only political? Are there racial overtones? Nationalist overtones? Religious overtones? Are these concerns all woven together in such a way that any solution to the problem of political violence in Northern Ireland must account for these varied concerns? Added to this is the question of history. How does the historical experience of the Irish impact any violent conflict that breaks out today? In the more recent history of Ireland, the colonization by the British Empire has religious elements, with a Protestant nation subduing a largely Roman Catholic nation. In the more distant history of Ireland, the arrival of Christianity and its impact on the pre-Christian religious practices of the Irish can continue to haunt the current struggles. Suggestions of human sacrifice in the pre-Christian religious practices of the Irish adds a further level of complexity to the question of political violence in Ireland. Heaney will choose to address these issues more directly in his later work *North*, which will be the focus of chapter two.

A final comment about Girard, Heaney, and "religion" is in order. Both men were raised in Roman Catholic families and both men had a least one devout parent. Their primary frame of reference for the term "religion" is Western Christian of the Roman Catholic expression. Their personal context includes the secular West and they lived and worked during a time of decline in the power and authority of the Christian church in Europe. The basic categories of Christianity for them include Roman Catholic and Protestant, recognizing the split in the Western church during the Protestant Reformation. The term "religious violence" also has meaning for them. Girard and Heaney were aware of the expressions of violence between the Christian groups in the history of Europe. They were also aware of the expressions of violence inherent in the colonial and missionary ventures of the Europeans. In addition, both men considered the

pre-Christian or pagan religions of Europe to be authentic forms of religious experience and expression. These categories and their application in the work of Girard and Heaney are important and will impact their work.

VIII. Summary

In summary, the term "religion" and the phrase "religious violence" represent contested understandings. An attempt was made earlier in the chapter to survey the current debates in both popular discourse and the field of Religious Studies about "religion" and "religious violence". I have suggested that the work of theorist René Girard and poet Seamus Heaney may provide some further insights to these troubling questions. The personal biographies of Girard and Heaney were summarized and a survey of their early work was attempted. While "religion" is discussed and depicted in different ways in Girard and Heaney, each thinker clearly understands that religion is of at least some historical, political, and even personal importance. As I begin chapter two, I will be focusing on Girard's provocative book *Violence and the Sacred* and Heaney's provocative book *North*. After situating "religion", "religious violence", Girard's early theory, and Heaney's early poetry, it is time to focus further on what a careful reading of their work can bring to discussions about religion and religious violence.

Chapter 2

Sympathy for the Victim: René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* and Seamus Heaney's *North*

I. Sympathy for the Victim in Girard and Heaney

Michael Kirwan, in the introduction to his book *Discovering Girard*, writes of humanity's ability to abuse the Other:

> When human beings behave cruelly and atrociously – 'man's inhumanity to man' – their actions suggest something like a catastrophic failure of imagination, a sheer incapacity to put themselves in the place of the victim who is being abused, tortured, or made to disappear. In the worst cases, such as genocide, there is even a refusal to acknowledge that the victims are human beings at all. (3)

Kirwan cites the example of the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, who presented himself as an intelligent person who was able to be sensitive to the plight of others. Kirwan suggests that Shaw may have been deluding himself in this respect and his protestations to the contrary only partially cover a deeper pride. Kirwan argues that René Girard, on the other hand, has a "tone" in his work that is "…different and more humble" (*Discovering Girard* 4). Kirwan traces Girard's interest in the "perspective of the victim" throughout Girard's work, beginning with Girard's close reading of important works of literature (especially Proust, Dostoevsky, and Shakespeare) and flowing through his close reading of anthropological and mythical texts (especially the Oedipus and Dionysus cycles) followed by close readings of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Kirwan continues:

> These varied sources have convinced him [Girard] that this power of empathetic imagining, far from being something that we should expect of human beings, much less

> take for granted, is actually something miraculous…if and when this sympathy [for the victim] comes about, it does so as the result of a titanic struggle within a person and within a society…and it is not just for the dull and unimaginative; it is a conversion which even some of the most sensitive and creative spirits known to humanity have had to undergo. (*Discovering Girard* 4)

For the purposes of this chapter, I argue that both Girard and Heaney display a "sympathy for the victim" in their work. My primary focus for this chapter will be Girard's important book *Violence and the Sacred* and Heaney's important book *North.* I will begin with a brief review of the term "victim". I will follow this with an overview of Girard's work in *Violence and the Sacred*, highlighting his presentation of the victim of communal violence. I will then present a brief summary of the religious and political history of Northern Ireland, raising the question of who the victims might be of the sectarian violence that troubled the region in the 1970s. This summary will be followed by an overview of Heaney's poetry in *North*. I will also refer to a chapter by Charles O'Neill comparing Girard and Heaney's work in these important publications and an article by Jonathan Hufstader about Heaney's poetry in light of the work of both Girard and Carl Jung. I will return to the question of "sympathy for the victim" in the work of Girard and Heaney as I conclude this chapter.

II. Defining "Victim" and Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*

The term "victim" serves as an important part of the discussion in this chapter. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "victim" as:

> 1. a. A living creature killed and offered as a sacrifice to some deity or supernatural power. b. Applied to Christ as an offering for mankind. 2. a. A person who is put to

> death or subjected to torture by another; one who suffers severely in body or property through cruel and oppressive treatment. b. One who is reduced or destined to suffer under some oppressive or destructive agency. (*OED Online*)

I am fascinated by the first part of the definition and its connection to religious sacrifice. This certainly reflects the direction that Girard and Heaney take with the term in their work. The motif of Christ as "victim" is especially important in Girard's later work. The second part of the definition represents what I assume to be the common understanding of the term today. The reference to being "destined to suffer", however, still situates the term in a larger cosmic sense of what it means to be a "victim". Both Girard and Heaney explore the human and divine mechanisms that select "victims" in their work.

After the publication of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: The Self and Other in Literary Structure*, René Girard continued to teach, research, and write in what was a rapidly changing discipline. Robert Doran observes that Girard's career continued to develop during a "crucial period in the development of literary studies in the United States. He witnessed firsthand the revolutionary changes of the 1960s and 1970s, which reshaped the field and led to a seismic shift in what had hitherto been a rather conservative discipline" ("Editor's Introduction" xii). Girard, along with his colleagues Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, organized the famous 1966 conference "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" at Johns Hopkins University. This conference featured the rising stars of French critical theory, including Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Girard was associated with these theorists for a season until his work moved in different directions. As Doran notes, Girard was likely encouraged by the interdisciplinary work of these French writers and thinkers in his own work ("Editor's Introduction" xii). Derrida's work, in particular, proved to be helpful in Girard's work.

Girard's next major work was *Violence and the Sacred*, published in French in 1972 and in English in 1977. In this project, Girard shifted his focus from great writers like Cervantes, Dostoevsky, and Proust to a focus on the practice of ritual sacrifice in primitive cultures. Girard's focus on anthropological texts was supplemented by his focus on the Greek tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides. Girard continued his practice of close reading and he dismissed the notions of modern scholars who discredited religion in general and ritual sacrifice in particular. Girard sensed that the problem of human violence and its management in the past, the present, and the future was and is deeply connected to the question of religion and religious ritual.

Girard began *Violence and the Sacred* with a focus on the ritual of sacrifice. He made reference to the work of scholars Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss and their text *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* from 1968. Girard raised a concern about the dismissal of the ritual of sacrifice as purely symbolic with no real function. He wrote, "Once one has made up one's mind that sacrifice is an institution essentially if not entirely symbolic, one can say anything whatsoever about it. It is a subject that lends itself to insubstantial theorizing" (*Violence* 1). Girard noted gaps in the research and theory, and he raised the question, "Why...do we never explore the relationship between sacrifice and violence?" (*Violence* 2) Girard leaned into this question, discussing ritual sacrifice in greater detail before presenting a theory of violence mediated by religion that suggests the origins of culture, society, religion, language, and human community.

Girard noted that human violence is a particular problem for primitive societies that lack the modern protections of law and punishment. In these communities, cycles of violence can include the initial violent act followed by efforts to seek vengeance. Left unchecked, this violence can overtake and destroy a community. Girard saw in the mechanism of ritual sacrifice

a means of managing and limiting cycles of human violence. The key to the efficacy of ritual sacrifice is what Girard termed the "surrogate victim". Girard wrote, "When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand" (*Violence* 4). This "surrogate victim" must be carefully chosen so as to bring the growing cycle of violence to an end. Girard wrote, "…society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificeable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect" (*Violence*, 4). The "surrogate victim" brings peace to the community by serving as a focus for its violence. During this crisis in the community, Girard argued, the "…elements of dissension scattered throughout the community are drawn to the person of the sacrificial victim and eliminated, at least temporarily, by its sacrifice" (*Violence*, 8). The "surrogate victim", as an outsider to the community, is unable to inspire the feared vengeance that might arise if a member of the community was sacrificed.

Girard situated religious ritual in his understanding of violence and religion. He suggested, "The function of ritual is to 'purify' violence; that is, to 'trick' violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals" (*Violence* 36). Girard extended his definition of ritual into a broader definition of religion as he highlighted a paradox. Girard wrote, "Religion invariably strives to subdue violence, to keep it from running wild. Paradoxically, the religious and moral authorities in a community attempt to instill nonviolence, as an active force in daily life and as a mediating force into ritual life, through the application of violence" (*Violence* 20). According to Girard, religion's power rests, in part, on its ability to obscure its origins and its function. He argued, "Religion in its broadest sense, then, must be another term for that obscurity that surrounds man's efforts to defend himself by curative or

preventative means against his own violence" (*Violence* 23). Girard posited a symbiotic relationship between religion and violence: "Religion shelters us from violence just as violence seeks shelter in religion" (*Violence* 24). In contrast to modern thinkers and critics who dismiss religion as archaic and without purpose, Girard asserted:

> Religion, then, is far from 'useless'. It humanizes violence; it protects man from his own violence by taking it out of his hands, transforming it into a transcendent and ever-present danger to be kept in check by the appropriate rites appropriately observed and by a modest and prudent demeanour. Religious misinterpretation is truly a constructive force, for it purges man of the suspicions that would poison his existence if he were to remain conscious of the crisis as it actually took place. (*Violence* 134 – 135)

For the primitive man and the primitive society, Girard saw an important personal and social role for religion in the restoration of peace and the preservation of the community.

Girard contrasted the primitive society with our modern world in *Violence and the Sacred*. The circle of personal and private violence and vengeance in modern culture has been "broken" by our judicial system, which dominates the disbursing of "public vengeance" (*Violence* 15). Judicial power in the modern state, however, is only able to exist "…in conjunction with a firmly established political power. And like all modern technological advances, it is a two-edged sword, which can be used to oppress as well as to liberate" (*Violence* 23). The relative peace and security enjoyed in the modern world has served to obscure the roots and persistence of human violence. As Girard asserted,

> Western civilization is hindered in its efforts to isolate and analyze the causes [of violence] and to examine them in any but the most superficial manner because it has enjoyed until this day a mysterious immunity from the most virulent forms of violence –

> an immunity not, it seems, of our society's making, but one that had perhaps resulted in the making of our society. (*Violence* 33)

Girard sensed that our inability to comprehend violence, ritual sacrifice, and the role of religion ultimately exposed our society to a vulnerability in terms of its ability to manage violence on both a smaller and a larger scale.

René Girard, in chapter six and following of *Violence and the Sacred*, directly connected his thesis about violence to his earlier work in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* on mimetic desire. Girard summarized the three elements of mimetic desire as: "identification, choice of object, and rivalry" (*Violence* 181). The subject identifies with his model/rival, choosing an object of desire based on his sense of the model/rival's object of desire, and entering into a rivalry with his model/rival over this perceived object of desire. This rivalry, in the right setting, can become violent. In the phase of rivalry, ironically, Girard posited that violence itself can become "simultaneously the instrument, object, and all-inclusive subject of desire" (*Violence* 144). Girard described the linking of violence and desire in this process as he wrote:

> Whenever he [the subject] sees himself closest to the supreme goal, he comes into violent conflict with a rival. By a mental shortcut that is both eminently logical and self-defeating, he convinces himself that the violence itself is the most distinctive attribute of this supreme goal! Ever afterward, violence and desire will be linked in his mind, and the presence of violence will invariably awaken desire. (*Violence* 148)

The violent opposition of the rival to the subject becomes the "signifier of ultimate desire, of divine self-sufficiency, of that 'beautiful totality' whose beauty depends on its being inaccessible and impenetrable" (*Violence* 148). The subject will strive to master the rival's violence by "mimetic counterviolence" (*Violence* 148). This violence and counterviolence can spin out of

control into what Girard termed the "sacrificial crisis" and would destroy the community "if the surrogate victim were not at hand to halt the process and the ritualized mimesis were not at hand to keep the conflictual mimesis from beginning afresh" (*Violence* 148). The "surrogate victim" supplants mimetic rivalry and violence by mimetic means articulated in ritualized, religious violence.

Girard painted a terrifying picture as he suggested the attraction between desire and violence. He wrote, "Desire…is attracted to violence triumphant and strives desperately to incarnate this 'irresistible' force. Desire clings to violence…because violence is the signifier of the cherished being, the signifier of divinity" (*Violence* 151). Girard referred to the Greek term *kudos* and noted that it has been translated as "talisman of supremacy" (*Violence* 152). He described *kudos* further as "…the fascination of superior violence…seductive and terrifying…an epiphany" (*Violence* 152). Girard argued, "For the Greeks, the issue of violence carried to its extreme was divinity itself…Man can enjoy this condition only fleetingly, and always at the expense of other men" (*Violence* 152). For Girard, a prime example of divine violence is the Greek god Dionysus, who "…has no proper being outside the realm of violence…" and whose original designation was the "god of homicidal fury" (*Violence* 133). Religious ritual as sacrifice serves to contain and deflect this violence onto the "surrogate victim", driving the violence (and its sacred associations) outside the community for the safety of the community.

In this early work on the "surrogate victim", Girard was careful to highlight the victim's innocence, powerlessness, and outsider status. While the community may need to place blame or guilt on the "surrogate victim", Girard argued that this was ultimately blame and guilt displaced from the truly blameworthy and guilty, members of the community who could not be punished directly. The primary factors for selecting the "surrogate victim" were powerlessness and

outsider status, guaranteeing that the death of the "surrogate victim" would provoke no reprisals or calls for revenge. Girard extended this work in his book *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, suggesting that Jesus Christ played the role of "surrogate victim" in his death. Christ's death effectively destroyed the efficacy of the mechanism of the "surrogate victim" in Christian cultures because Christ was presented as an innocent "surrogate victim". If the "surrogate victim" is innocent, the guilt and violence of the community remains. Girard's reflections on both primitive and Christian uses of the "surrogate victim" raise interesting questions when considering the religious violence of Northern Ireland as it is depicted in the work of Seamus Heaney. Before exploring Heaney's depictions, a brief review of Northern Ireland's religious and political history may prove helpful.

III. Religion and Religious Conflict in Ireland

Ireland has a long history of religious activity, dating back prior to the arrival of Christianity. Archeologists note evidence of settlement in Ireland in the Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic) followed by evidence of settlement by a new wave of settlers in the New Stone Age (Neolithic). Around 700 BCE, the Gaels arrived in Ireland from Western Europe. Mike Cronin reports that the Gaels adapted much of what existed in Ireland at the time, including the local religious beliefs and practices. He writes, "The old Neolithic gods (*tuatha*) who had underpinned the Irish belief system prior to the arrival of the Gaels were adopted, and over time became identifiable as Gaelic gods. In appropriating the old Irish gods, the Gaels also adapted and continued to use the important sites…as part of their own religious system" (2). Unlike Western Europe, Ireland was never invaded by the Romans and the island largely missed the civilizing influences of the Roman Empire.

Christianity was introduced to Ireland in the third century CE and soon replaced the old Gaelic religion as the dominant religion. The old Gaelic religion did persist in practice in certain places in Ireland. As the Roman Empire collapsed, Ireland became a safe haven for European Christians. Important monasteries and Christian communities flourished in Ireland. Saint Patrick was an important leader in the Christian church in Ireland, bringing the various religious orders, churches, and monasteries together as the Irish Church. As Mike Cronin notes, Ireland served an important role in Christianity's return to mainland Europe:

> Whereas Ireland had originally served a function as a safe haven for Christians and scholars fleeing Europe, it later became the launching pad for the re-emergence of Christianity across the continent. The religion had taken refuge in Ireland and had flourished there. In time, this solace was used as a source of strength, and later, when the time was right, Christianity was delivered to those lands from where it had first come. (6)

The Irish Church, under Patrick's direction, was modeled on the local Irish political structure. As Ireland's political structure weakened, both the church and the population were vulnerable to the invasions of foreign powers in Ireland.

The Vikings starting attacking Ireland in 795 CE, eventually settling and establishing towns. They intermarried with the local people and converted to Christianity. Irish Church leaders aligned the Irish Church more closely with Rome in the twelfth century, and the Pope formally recognized the Archbishops in Armagh, Dublin, Cashel, and Tuam. Local political squabbles in Ireland resulted in the invitation of the English to assist in 1169 CE. English kings and queens, along with leaders of the church in Rome and in England, played decisive roles in the religious and political life of the Irish people in the centuries that followed. English and Scottish settlers arrived in Ireland, farming the lands and building communities. The English

Reformation created a crisis in Ireland, with the native Irish continuing to embrace Roman Catholicism while the English and Scottish settlers in Ireland embraced the new Protestantism. Under English rule, the rights and privileges of the Irish Roman Catholic population were limited and restricted by various leaders and governments while the powers and privileges of the local Anglo-Irish Protestants were protected and extended.

Irish efforts to seek independence from England included numerous movements and risings, including rebellions in 1468, 1534, 1580, 1592, 1641, 1798, and 1916. The great famine that struck Ireland from 1845 – 1851 was handled very badly by the British administration, resulting in the deaths of almost a million Irish people and the forced emigration of almost two million Irish people. The War of Independence in Ireland from 1919 – 1921 was followed by a Civil War in 1922 – 23. The Republic of Ireland, constituted as a Roman Catholic Republic, was brought into existence in an early form in 1922. The Republic of Ireland included all the counties in the three Irish provinces of Munster, Leinster, and Connacht as well as three counties in the Irish province Ulster. Six of the nine counties in Ulster were designated Northern Ireland and remained under English rule. These six counties had a majority of Anglo-Irish Protestant citizens who wished to remain part of the British Empire. The Irish Roman Catholic minority in Northern Ireland remained British citizens.

Tensions between the Anglo-Irish Protestants and the Irish Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland were fueled by religious, political, and social concerns. Protestants in Northern Ireland were concerned that a merger with the Republic of Ireland would allow the Roman Catholic Church to assert its power and control over them. Issues of religious freedom were raised as a concern. The authority of the Pope was rejected and the emphasis on the freedom of the individual Christian was celebrated. Protestants also feared the Roman Catholic Church's

influence in the Republic of Ireland on issues including contraception, abortion, marriage, and divorce. Irish Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland resented the Irish Protestant Church's power and prestige, and they resented the restrictions and limitations placed on the Roman Catholic citizens in Northern Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Protestants were a majority in the six counties of Northern Ireland but would be a small minority in proportion to the Irish Roman Catholic majority in a reunified Ireland. Socially, the Anglo-Irish Protestants tended to be wealthier and have more access to political power in Northern Ireland while the Irish Roman Catholics tended to be poorer with little or no access to political power. There were separate education systems for each community. The differences between the two communities tended to be exaggerated in urban areas, where it was possible for the Irish Roman Catholics to live in self-sustaining "ghettos", relatively free from contact and personal knowledge of the Anglo-Irish Protestant citizens. There was more contact and neighborly interaction in the rural areas between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants.

Frustration with the political and social conditions in Northern Ireland led to some violent protests by the Irish Republican Army in the 1950s. These minor protests were largely ignored and not supported by the majority of the Irish Roman Catholic population in Northern Ireland. In 1967, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was founded, and marches were held to highlight the need for more equal rights for Roman Catholics. These protests were met with violence. Protests continued and regular rioting ensued. By 1969, people were being killed and the British Army was called in. Sectarian violence exploded, and Irish Roman Catholics killed Anglo-Irish Protestants as Anglo-Irish Protestants killed Irish Roman Catholics. At this point, it is important to return to the question of the victim. Who was the victim in Northern Ireland? The Irish Roman Catholic dominated by the English? The Anglo-Irish Protestant fearing

oppression by an empowered Irish Roman Catholic majority in a reunified Ireland? The Anglo-Irish Protestant victim of sectarian violence? The Irish Roman Catholic victim of sectarian violence? What about the revenge killings, followed by more revenge killings? In Girard's understanding, would any of these victims serve as a "surrogate victim"? Seamus Heaney's personal struggles with the violence of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and his depictions of the victims of violence are reflected in both his written work and personal life.

IV. Heaney's *North*

Seamus Heaney, in the months prior to the publication of his third book, *Wintering Out*, moved with his family from Northern Ireland south to the Republic of Ireland. The growing violence in Northern Ireland, including the notorious "Bloody Sunday" massacre in Derry in January 1972, raised concerns for Heaney about his family's safety. In November 1972, his book *Wintering Out* was published. Heaney spent the next three years working on the poems for his fourth collection of poetry, titled *North*. *North* represented a significant shift in Heaney's work, with traditional themes like farm, family, and Irish history being overshadowed by poems focusing on Norse and Viking themes, poems focusing on bog people, and poems directly addressing the conflicts in Northern Ireland at that time.

Heaney's focus on Norse and Viking themes in *North* included the poems "Belderg" (13 – 14), "Funeral Rites" (15 – 18), "North" (19 – 20), and "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" (21 – 24). In the poem "Belderg", a conversation about the relic quernstones recovered from a local bog evolves into a query into the origins of place-names (*North* 13 – 14). The speaker mentions Mossbawn, his Irish farm home, and asserts its "bogland name" (27). The other speaker in the poem connects the word "moss" with "older strains of Norse" (30). The first speaker's assertion

that the name Mossbawn is possibly either English or Irish in origin is shaken by this reference to the Norse. In the third section of the poem "Funeral Rites", the speaker imagines driving past "Strang and Carling fjords" as he pictures

Gunnar
who lay beautiful
inside his burial mound,
though dead by violence
and unavenged. (69 - 73)

Gunnar is depicted as chanting poetry in the moment of his death. In the title poem "North," the speaker depicts a return to the ocean shore with "…only the secular / powers of the Atlantic thundering" (3 – 4). He is interrupted by the "ocean-deafened voices / warning me, lifted again / in violence and epiphany" (17 – 19). These voices belong to the long-dead "fabulous raiders / those lying in Orkney and Dublin" (9 – 10). He imagines a longship

buoyant with hindsight –
it said Thor's hammer swung
to geography and trade,
thick-witted couplings and revenges,

the hatreds and behindbacks
of the althing, lies and women,
exhaustions nominated peace,
memory incubating the spilled blood. (21 – 28)

The speaker is encouraged to

Lie down

in the word-hoard

……...

Compose in darkness

……...

Keep your eye clear

……

trust the feel of what nubbed treasure

your hands have known. (29 – 30, 33, 37, 39 – 40)

In these poems, Heaney gestures to the violent history hidden in the ruins of language and locale. A poet who is willing to work this language and locale can draw dark new treasures from the past.

In the poem "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces", the speaker focuses first on bits of bone decorated by an artist from the past and then he slips into a reference to *Hamlet* and the violence of the Vikings. The little bits of bone "…could be a jaw-bone / or a rib or a portion cut / from something sturdier" (1 – 3). They have been decorated in an improvised manner by a calligrapher of the past. The speaker calls these tiny works of art "trial pieces" (17), and one needs to magnify the images to see the fine details of a "migrant prow / sniffing the Liffey" (27 – 28). The speaker in the poem imagines the boat "stuck fast / in the slip of the bank" (36 – 37). The boat's hull is described as "spined and plosive / as *Dublin*" (39 – 40). The speaker returns to the modern moment, drawing a "trial piece / incised by a child, / a longship" out from the ancient wreckage (45 - 47). The speaker shifts into another "worm of thought" (52), imagining himself as

Hamlet the Dane

skull-handler, parablist,

smeller of rot

in the state, infused

with its poisons,

pinioned by ghosts

and affections,

murders and pieties,

coming to consciousness

by jumping in graves,

dithering, blathering. (54 - 64)

Like Hamlet's Denmark, Heaney's Northern Ireland has its "poisons", "ghosts", "affections", "murders", and "pieties". All is not well in Northern Ireland and the art of poetry is one avenue for exposing the sickness and the death of the state. The speaker invites the reader to

Come fly with me,

come sniff the wind

with the expertise

of the Vikings –

neighbourly, scoretaking

killers, haggers

and hagglers, gombeen-men,

hoarders of grudges and gain. (65 - 72)

Heaney refers to an ancient violence as he writes,

With a butcher's aplomb

they spread out your lungs

and made you warm wings

for your shoulders. (73 – 76)

The speaker in the poem concludes this section with a prayer of sorts:

Old fathers, be with us.

Old cunning assessors

of feuds and of sites

for ambush or town. (77 – 80)

Heaney finishes the poem with a reference to old skulls and his words that "lick around / cobbled quays" (93 – 94). The symbols of skulls and bones permeate the poem.

Heaney's poems about bog people in *North* were inspired by the work of P. V. Glob. A Danish archeologist, Glob's book *The Bog People* was published in English in 1969 and featured the stories and photographs of recently discovered Iron Age men and women whose bodies had been preserved in the bogs of Denmark. Named for the areas or bogs where they were discovered, specimens like the Tollund Man, the Grauballe Man, and the Windeby Girl fascinated Heaney so much that he visited the museums and viewed the bodies where they were displayed in Denmark. In these Iron Age victims of what appeared to be communal and ritual violence, Heaney found a powerful symbol for the victims of sectarian violence left for dead in Northern Ireland.

The poems Heaney wrote focused on the bog people in *North* include "Come to the Bower" (31), "Bog Queen" (32 – 34), "The Grauballe Man" (35 – 36), "Punishment" (37 – 38), "Strange Fruit" (39), and "Kinship" (40 – 45). It should be noted that the poem "Tollund Man"

from Heaney's previous book *Wintering Out* serves as a precursor to this collection of "bog people" poems. The perspective differs from poem to poem. In "Come to the Bower", the speaker unpins and uncovers a bog queen, slowing freeing her from her grave in the bog. In "Bog Queen", it is the bog queen herself who speaks, describing her long resting and waiting beneath the earth until she was disturbed by a turf cutter and robbed of her hair. In the poems "The Grauballe Man", "Punishment", and "Strange Fruit", Heaney returns to the perspective presented in "Tollund Man", depicting the thoughts and reactions of an onlooker regarding the preserved bodies of the bog people. In "Kinship", the speaker enters the bog and digs down into the layers of history, grief, and violence, finding a powerful symbol of recent Irish violence in the echoes of events preserved in the bog.

"The Grauballe Man" depicts the body of the Iron Age man as "poured / in tar" (1 – 2) and lying on a "pillow of turf" (3), seeming to "weep / the black river of himself" (4 – 5). Heaney uses natural metaphors to represent the various physical features of the Grauballe Man, describing certain features of his body like "bog oak", a "basalt egg", a "swan's foot", a "wet swamp root", a "mussel", and an "eel" (*North* 35). These natural descriptors present the Grauballe Man as a natural thing found in nature. The next stanza, however, jars the reader with the image of the "vent / of his slashed throat" (19 – 20). The Grauballe Man is depicted as a victim of violence. The poem continues, describing the "cured wound" (22) that "opens inward to a dark / elderberry place" (23 – 24). Is the speaker suggesting that the Grauballe Man has experienced a healing of sorts in the bog, his ancient burial place? The speaker then questions the use of the words "corpse" and "body" for the Grauballe Man's "vivid cast" and "opaque repose" (*North* 36). The Grauballe Man's "rusted hair" is compared to that of a fetus's (*North* 36). The speaker recalls seeing the Grauballe Man first in a photograph, emerging from the peat

and "bruised like a forceps baby" (36). These suggestions of birth and new life, however, are pushed aside as the Grauballe Man hangs "in the scales / with beauty and atrocity" (41 – 42). The Grauballe Man is compared with the Greek statue of the Dying Gaul before the speaker returns to the reality of "…each hooded victim, / slashed and dumped" (47 – 48). Ultimately, the Grauballe Man is not merely a physical specimen of nature or a work of art. He is instead a victim of violent death, killed and dumped into the bog. It is only an accident of nature and history that his murdered body has been preserved and rediscovered.

Heaney's poems "Punishment" and "Strange Fruit" from *North* both depict female victims of violence. In "Punishment", the speaker begins by describing the feeling of the "tug / of the halter at the nape / of her neck" (1 – 3) and the feeling of the "wind / on her naked front" (3 - 4). The speaker continues by describing her "nipples" and the "frail rigging / of her ribs" (7 - 8). This suggests that the speaker is imagining the female victim after she has been stripped naked in the cold wind and before she has been cast in the bog. The poem shifts to a point later in the action, with the speaker imagining her "drowned / body in the bog" (9 – 10), held down by the "weighing stone" (11). The poem shifts again, and she is "dug up" (15). The speaker goes on to describe her

> shaved head
> like a stubble of black corn,
> her blindfold a soiled bandage,
> her noose a ring
> to store
> the memories of love. (17 - 22)

The speaker addresses the woman as "Little adulteress" (23), suggesting that she was punished

with death for the crime of adultery. The speaker addresses the woman as "My poor scapegoat" (28) and admits that "I almost love you" (29). This love, however, is mitigated by the admission that the speaker "would have cast…the stones of silence" (30 – 31). This allusion to "stones" in the context of punishing an adulterous woman brings to mind the biblical story in John 8: 1 – 11 where Jesus is presented with a woman caught in the act of adultery. Jesus is encouraged to condemn the woman to death by stoning and he responds by saying, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8.7). In the story from John, the accusers slowly drop their stones and leave, sparing the life of the woman. Jesus also refuses to condemn her, telling her to "go and leave your life of sin" (John 8.11). In "Punishment", however, the speaker admits that he would most likely have participated in the punishment with silent judgment.

The speaker then admits to being the woman's "artful voyeur", looking over her exposed brain, muscles and bones (32). In her nakedness before death, in her drowning, and in her exposure after being unearthed, this woman is laid bare before the eyes of the other. The speaker ends the poem by connecting her punishment with the more recent punishment of Irish Roman Catholic women who had been discovered consorting with British soldiers. The speaker describes them as her "betraying sisters, / cauled in tar" who "wept by the railings" (38 – 40). The speaker admits to standing by "dumb" as these women were punished (37). While he might quietly and thoughtfully "connive / in civilized outrage" (41 – 42), he admits that he would "understand the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge" (43 – 44). In this poem, Heaney masterfully gestures toward both Irish sectarian violence and the deeply problematic issues of violence against women, particularly where the body and the person of the woman is exposed to hostile male scrutiny. Adultery is not a sin one can commit alone and yet both the poem and the Gospel

text present the woman as the sole recipient of the punishment. The speaker in the poem both addresses his community's "tribal" revenge while at the same time admitting his potential complicity through silence.

In the sonnet "Strange Fruit", Heaney focuses on the head of a girl exhumed from the bog. Her head is described as an "exhumed gourd. / Oval-faced, prune-skinned, prune-stones for teeth" (1 – 2). The girl's hair is "unswaddled" (3) and they make "an exhibition of its coil" (4). Her "leathery beauty" (5) is exposed to both the air and those who observe her and she is described as a "perishable treasure" (6). The second quatrain and final sestet introduces a darker theme, highlighting the violence of her experiences; her nose is broken and she is described as "murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible / Beheaded girl" (11 – 12). In contrast to the woman in the poem "Punishment", however, the speaker sees in this girl's gaze from "eyeholes blank as pools" (8) a certain defiance and resistance to both the violence of the ax of beheading and the violence of those who would later expose her, revere her, and impose a certain kind of "beatification" on her (13). There is no known reason for her death and it is possible that she was a victim of ritual violence. Heaney also refers to the Roman Diodorus Siculus, who lived among the Celts and who admitted, after a time, to coming to a "gradual ease" among them in their horrible violence (9 – 10). Is the speaker suggesting that one can become used to violence? Was this a real danger in the situation in Northern Ireland? The title also alludes to the song of the same name recorded by the American jazz singer Billie Holiday. The Irish Roman Catholic community was strongly attuned to the struggle for civil rights for African Americans in the United Stated in the 1960s, seeing in this struggle an inspiration for their struggle for civil rights in Northern Ireland.

The final poem in this sequence of "bog people" poems is "Kinship", a longer piece with

six separate sections. In the first section, the speaker suggests that he has been "Kinned by hieroglyphic / peat on a spreadfield / to the strangled victim" (1 - 3). The peat suggests a bog and the reference to the victim suggests a former site of ritual human sacrifice. He describes the site further as a "love-nest in the bracken" (4), making reference to the romantic allusions suggested by human sacrifice as a marriage to the goddess. The speaker writes, "I step through origins…" (5) as he continues to walk deeper into the physical site. He states:

I love this turf-face,
its black incisions,
the cooped secrets
of process and ritual; (13 – 16)

The speaker adds a further reference to execution with the words "each bank a gallows drop," (19). In the second section, the speaker seeks to designate the bog as distinct from the terms "Quagmire, swampland, morass" (25). The speaker focuses on the word "bog", meaning "soft" (29 – 30). The speaker continues by describing the bog as:

Earth-pantry, bone-vault,
sun-bank, embalmer
of votive goods
and sabred fugitives. (37 – 40)

The bog serves both as repository and preserver for the mundane goods of daily life and, in a darker sense, the bones and bodies of the human dead. The speaker returns to the marriage imagery of the first section, designating the bog as "insatiable bride" (41).

In section three of "Kinship", the speaker in the poem discovers a "turf-spade / hidden under bracken" (37 – 38) and he uses this spade to split the soft, wet ground. He leaves the

spade standing in the bog as an “obelisk” (52). The focus shifts to a discovery in the bog, focused on a second “obelisk”. A “love-nest” (55) has been disturbed and the searchers have raised up “the cloven oak-limb” (58), originally designed and constructed to represent the earth goddess Nerthus. The speaker states, “I stand at the edge of centuries / facing a goddess” (59 – 60). Section four of “Kinship” describes the bog in a manner that echoes W. B. Yeats’ poem “The Second Coming”. Where Yeats writes, in his darkly apocalyptic vision, that “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold” (3), the speaker sees a different reality in the bog. The speaker describes the bog, saying,

> This centre holds
> and spreads,
> sump and seedbed,
> a bag of waters
> and a melting grave. (73 – 77)

After describing the bog further, the speaker states,

> I grew out of all this
> like a weeping willow
> inclined to
> the appetites of gravity. (93 - 96)

The bog is both a place of death, dying, and rot as well as place of life, living, and growing. Section five features a shift in voice and perspective. The speaker in section five of “Kinship” appears to be the young attendant of a “hearth-feeder” of the past. As they deliver the fuel for the hearths of the local homes, they are “saluted, given right-of-way” (116). The section ends with the speaker’s pride in being addressed by his master.

The final section of "Kinship" includes an address to the Roman historian Tacitus. Tacitus, whose full name was Publius Cornelius Tacitus, was a Roman orator, public official and historian ("Tacitus" *Encyclopædia*). Tacitus' father-in-law ruled Britain on Rome's behalf and Tacitus included descriptions of Britain and its native peoples in his father-in-law's biography. Tacitus also made mention of the island of Ireland in this work, suggesting that the Irish people were much like the British. In section six of "Kinship", the speaker asks Tacitus to

> observe how I make my grove
> on an old crannog
> piled by the fearful dead:
>
> a desolate peace. (122 – 125).

The word "crannog" suggests an old Irish and Scottish term for "an ancient lake-dwelling" (*OED Online*). The speaker in section six is aware of the gaze and power of the Other in the creating of the public self. He includes both the British and the Irish in the domain of the conquered as he asks for recognition from the Roman historian. Section six continues with the following:

> Our mother ground
> is sour with the blood
> of her faithful,
> they lie gargling
> in her sacred heart
> as the legions stare
> from the ramparts.
>
> Come back to this

‘island of the ocean’
where nothing will suffice.
Read the inhumed faces

of casualty and victim;
report us fairly,
how we slaughter
for the common good

and shave the heads
of the notorious,
how the goddess swallows
our love and terror. (126 – 144)

Heaney alludes to the image of Ireland as the mother of the nation. He conflates both the pagan and the Christian as he refers to the “sacred heart”, a popular notion among Roman Catholics referring to the sacred heart of Jesus. Here the speaker suggests that Ireland herself also has a “sacred heart” (130). He returns to the gaze of the conquerors as “legions stare / from the ramparts” (131 – 132). Those who die at the hands of their own people are described as both “casualty and victim” (137) while the Roman soldiers watch incredulously from a distance. The speaker in the poem asks that the Roman historian “report us fairly” (138) and then describes both the “slaughter / for the common good” (139 – 140) and the shaving of heads, bringing the reader back to the earlier poem “Punishment”. The island of Ireland is depicted as “the goddess” who, in soaking up the blood of the victims, “swallows / our love and terror” (143 – 144). The speaker’s deep ambivalence about this sacrifice and the speaker’s shame in the gaze of the

conquering Other gives the final section of "Kinship" an especially dramatic sense.

Heaney addresses the topic of the recent sectarian violence in Northern Ireland very directly in the poetry collection *North*. In addition to the poems featuring Norse and Viking themes and bog people, Heaney writes more directly of the situation in Northern Ireland in the poems "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" (*North* 56), "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" (*North* 57 – 60), and "Singing School" (*North* 62 – 73), which references the poem by William Butler Yeats titled "Sailing to Byzantium" (2040). Heaney's poem "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" makes, in its title, a reference to the assertion made by English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in his influential essay "A Defence of Poetry" that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (363). Heaney begins the poem with a reference to Archimedes seeking to "move the world" (1) with a well-placed lever and moves to a reference to Tarzan, who "shook the world when he jumped down out / of a tree" (4 - 5). This blend of the classical and the popular shifts to an historical reference to the French Revolution, as the speaker describes himself swinging not on a jungle vine but on a "creeper of secrets / into the Bastille" (8 - 9). Once inside, the speaker describes his "wronged people" who "cheer from their cages" (10). The speaker is discovered and arrested by a soldier with guard-dogs and a gun. He is standing "blindfolded with my hands / above my head until I seem to be swinging from a / strappado" (12 – 14). The dream shifts to a scene where the speaker stands before the "commandant" who asks him to be seated. The commandant speaks, saying "I am honoured to add a poet to our list" (16). The commandant, described as "amused and genuine", speaks again, assuring the poet "You'll be safer here, anyhow" (17). The dream shifts to a scene where the poet is in a cell, testing the strength of both the wall and the floors for possible weaknesses and possible avenues of escape. The speaker ends the poem with the question: "Were those your

eyes just now at the hatch?" (20) With this question, the speaker draws the reader into the dream prison. Will the reader help the speaker escape? This dream, which could arguably be termed a nightmare, comments both on the role of the poet in a time of conflict and the need to resist even in a somewhat congenial captivity. Is Heaney's reference to Shelley's essay ironic or not? Do poets lead in times of conflict? Can they serve to highlight the moral and the ethical in times of violence and war?

Heaney's poem "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" includes four sections and returns to the epigraph of *Wintering Out* in the final section. In the first section, the speaker expresses frustration with the "politicians and newspapermen" (10) who seek to understand, comment upon, and ultimately dismiss the violence of Northern Ireland. The speaker in the poem is "back in winter / Quarters where bad news is no longer news" (3 – 4). The speaker describes his alienation from both the "rosary beads" (8) of the Irish Roman Catholic church and the "jottings and analyses" (9) of the political leaders and the reporters. The speaker claims a personal stake in the conflict, stating, "I live here…" (16). He provides a glimpse of the rhetoric of neighbourly discourse in responding to reports of the recent violence. The conversation repeats with little impact and the speaker suggests "The 'voice of sanity' is getting hoarse" (24). What is being said seems to be having little influence on quelling the sectarian violence.

Heaney begins section II of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" with the stark phrase, "Men die at hand" (25). Heaney situates the violence in the Irish Roman Catholic community, making reference both to the Pope of Rome and his local flock. Religious conflict in history is invoked with the word "heretic" who has "come at last to heel and to the stake" (29 – 30). The speaker describes the flock who "tremble near the flames but want no truck / with the actual firing" (31 - 32). Heaney makes reference to sound when he refers to both the "liberal papist

note" (36) that "sounds hollow" (36) being "amplified and mixed in with the bangs" of the bombings (37). These sounds are contrasted and compared with the "eructation of Orange drums / Allergic equally to Pearse and Pope" (43 - 44). In this brief allusion, Heaney is referring to the annual parades of the Orange Protestants in Northern Ireland that commemorate the defeat of the Catholic king James II by the Protestant king William of Orange in 1690. These parades feature drummers and drumming and provide opportunity for Protestant leaders to make speeches about faith and politics. He also refers to Patrick Pearse, an Irish Roman Catholic playwright and leader of the Easter Rising of 1916. Irish Protestants have no interest in this Irish Roman Catholic hero and his death for the Irish people. Irish Protestants have no interest in the authority and influence of the Pope. The speaker in the poem observes "little platoons" (45) forming on both sides of the conflict and admits that both sides could be accused of both "bigotry and sham" (51).

Heaney begins section III of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" with the statement, "Religion's never mentioned here" (53). Heaney follows this statement with two brief statements that seem to undermine the first statement: "You know them by their eyes" (54) and "One side's as bad as the other" (55). While the speaker suggests the need to speak openly of religion and religious conflict, he also admits to being plagued by the "famous / Northern reticence, the tight gag of place / and times" (60 - 62). Heaney refers to physical safety, suggesting, "…to be saved you only must save face/ And whatever you say, you say nothing" (63 – 64). The speaker illustrates this in the delicate and often silent "maneuverings" (66) that constitute the methods and means used to ascertain and respond to the religious identity of others. The speaker uses names, schools, and addresses to situate those he meets as "Prod" or "Pape" (69 - 70). He depicts Northern Ireland as a "land of password, handgrip, wink and nod"

(71). He makes reference to the story of the Trojan Horse, suggesting that "half of us" (74) are "cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks, / Besieged within the siege, whispering morse" (75 – 76). The speaker, in this section, suggests that the differences between Protestant (Prod) and Catholic (Pape) are actually not physically noticeable. It is only by situating people according to name, home, and school that divisions are realized. The two populations communicate with stealth and secret signs.

Heaney returns to the epigraph of *Wintering Out* for the final section of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing". He includes the text from *Wintering Out* with one minor edit. In the third stanza, Heaney had originally written "Is there a life before death? That's chalked up / on a wall downtown" (*9-10*). In the final section of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing", Heaney writes, "Is there a life before death? That's chalked up / in Ballymurphy" (85 - 86). Heaney chooses to more solidly situate his reference in terms of a specific site in Northern Ireland. This graffiti serves, in a sense, a poetic and prophetic function. It turns the phrase "life after death" on its head, suggesting that life in conflicted Northern Ireland might seem more like death than life. This "turn-of-phrase" includes a poetic sense. The question suggests a need to assess the current crisis and to imagine a better future. In this sense, it functions as a prophetic word, both critiquing the current crisis and whispering the possibility of a peaceful and prosperous time where life exceeds death. Until this can occur, Heaney predicts, "Competence with pain, / Coherent miseries, a bite and sup, / We hug our little destiny again" (85 – 87). Has Heaney, in breaking through his "Northern reticence" with his poetry, enabled the conversation to open up and suggest new realities and a measured sense of hope?

Heaney's poem "Singing School" closes the collection of poems in *North*. Heaney includes two epigraphs at the beginning of the poem and follows with six sections titled "The

Ministry of Fear", "A Constable Calls", "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966", "Summer 1969", "Fosterage", and "Exposure". The epigraphs feature both William Wordsworth and William Butler Yeats. Wordsworth's epigraph from "The Prelude" makes reference to growing up and being "fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (Wordsworth qtd. in Heaney, *North* 62). He also makes reference to both his place of birth and that "beloved Vale" to which he was, as he grew older and encountered poetry, "transplanted" (Wordsworth qtd. in Heaney, *North* 62). Heaney's poetry speaks both to this close relationship to beauty and fear and the power of poetry to bring the reader to a new reality of mind and imagination. The epigraph from Yeats depicts the complicated relationship the Irish poet faces in his relationship with the larger tradition of English literature. Yeats describes reading what he calls "Orange rhymes" with a stable-boy and experiencing the "pleasure of rhyme for the first time" (Yeats qtd. in Heaney, *North* 62). Yeats goes on to describe the "rumour of a Fenian rising" that was being met with Orange guns (Yeats qtd. in Heaney, *North* 62). He writes of dreaming of a future life where he thought he would "like to die fighting the Fenians" (Yeats qtd. in Heaney, *North* 62). The young boy is unaware that the Fenians are an Irish revolutionary force in the nineteenth century who tried to liberate Ireland from British control. This tearing between the poet's allegiance to the larger tradition of English literature and poetry and one's Irish homeland and people is a very real one for both Yeats and Heaney. Both poets ultimately settle this question in their lives and in their art.

Heaney's first section of the poem "Singing School" is titled "The Ministry of Fear" and depicts Heaney's early years in boarding school, his early efforts at poetry, and times at home during summer vacation. Heaney begins with a reference to the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh, writing, "Well, as Kavanagh said, we have lived / in important places" (1 – 2). Kavanagh's assertion that Ireland can be considered a "real" place worthy of literary depiction and

consideration is an important encouragement to Heaney in his own project of depicting Irish life. The speaker in the poem describes his life as a student at St. Columb's College before shifting into a focus on the difficult task of writing poetry. The speaker returns to his life at the school with a reference to language as a sign of identity. He questions, "Have our accents / changed?" (31 – 32) Heaney switches voice, quoting a speaker from the past who asserts, "Catholics, in general, don't speak / As well as students from the Protestant schools" (32 – 33). The speaker asks the reader, "Remember that stuff? Inferiority / Complexes, stuff that dreams were made on" (34 - 35). Heaney shifts to a scene from summer break where the speaker as a young man with a young woman are interrogated by British police officers on their way home from a date. The police officers crowd around the car with their "crimson flashlamps" (53) as they are "pointing / The muzzle of a sten-gun in my eye" (54 – 55). He is asked for his name and identified by it. He remembers a different incident where his letters from a loved one were opened and read by the police at a roadblock. Heaney closes this section with the words, "Ulster was British, but with no rights on / The English lyric: all around us, though / We hadn't named it, the ministry of fear" (62 - 64). As he does in the poem "Whatever You Say Say Nothing", Heaney gestures to the silent shared understanding of the local Irish populace. The power and presence of the British policeman (and later soldiers) in Northern Ireland is one that stirs fear in the hearts and minds of the local Irish Roman Catholic population. While "ministry" can refer to the work of the church and its priests, it can also refer to the work of the government and its various officials. Heaney describes the work of the British government bureaucrats as one that creates fear.

Heaney develops and further illustrates his sense of the "ministry of fear" in section II of "Singing School". He depicts the routine visit of a local police constable in the section "A Constable Calls". The constable has come to collect a report on the farm's crops, described as

"tillage returns / in acres, roods, and perches" (79 - 80). The speaker in the poem is a boy, watching his farmer father report to the constable. The speaker sees in the constable's bicycle, helmet, gun, and baton symbols of threat, power, and violence. As the constable finishes his work, he rides away on his bicycle. Heaney extends the allusion to explosive violence as he writes, "His boot pushed off / And the bicycle ticked, ticked, ticked" (99 - 100). The ticking of the bicycle suggests both the ticking of a clock and also the ticking of a bomb. The violence threatened has been averted for the moment but further violence remains a real possibility. In section III, Heaney returns to the image and sound of the Orangemen's parades with "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966" (*North* 68). As he did in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing", Heaney uses the drum as both a symbol of impending trouble and a sonic reminder of the underlying conflict in his community. He also notes that the "battered signature" of the drummer is a statement of "No pope" (110). The air, in addition to the drum, is "pounding like a stethoscope" (112). While the date of the poem suggests a time of relative calm in Northern Ireland, it also portends of a time when the Orange parades and Orange drumming will be replaced by the booming of bombs and guns.

Section IV of "Singing School" depicts the speaker in the poem as a student spending the summer in Madrid, Spain. Titled "Summer 1969", Heaney uses this section of the poem to contrast the violence at home in Northern Ireland that summer with the speaker's leisurely summer of reading and visiting art galleries. His focus of reading is the "life of Joyce" (118) and this helps to register a note of longing for home by an exiled heart. As reports of violence arrive via the television, the speaker is advised to "Go back" and "try to touch the people" (127). The speaker finds refuge from the summer heat of Spain in the Prado and he is drawn to the paintings of Spanish artist Goya. Goya's depictions of "Shootings of the Third of May" depict the

"thrown-up arms / And spasm of the rebel" (133 - 134). Goya contrasts this with the "helmeted / and knapsacked military, the efficient / Rake of the fusillade" (134 – 136). A Goya painting the speaker applies to the situation in Northern Ireland is described as "…that holmgang / Where two berserks club each other to death / For honour's sake, greaved in a bog, and sinking" (141 – 143). The bog motif, like the reference to Joyce, connects this section of the poem back to Ireland. The speaker in the poem describes Goya as one who "painted with his fists and elbows, flourished / The stained cape of his heart as history changed" (144 - 145). In Goya, Heaney sees an artist who was willing to use his art to try and engage with the political violence of his day, not turning away from scenes and situations of suffering and death. There is a personal cost as the heart of artist is "stained" (145) by history.

In Section V of "Singing School", titled "Fosterage", Heaney includes a brief tribute to his first boss and early literary mentor Michael McLaverty. The term "fosterage" refers to the "custom of putting (a child) under the care of a foster-mother; esp. the now obsolete custom amongst the Irish and Scottish nobility of giving over their children to a tenant to be nursed and brought up" (*OED Online*). McLaverty, in a literary sense, serves as a fosterage father for Heaney in his literary endeavours. "Fosterage" begins with the phrase, "Description is revelation!" and provides the location (Royal Avenue, Belfast) and year (1962) (146 - 147). It is a "Saturday afternoon" and McLaverty is described as "glad" to meet the young man (148). Heaney describes himself as "newly cubbed in language" (149) and as being encouraged by McLaverty to "Listen. Go your own way. / Do your own work" (150 – 151). McLaverty suggests the writers Katherine Mansfield (152) and "Poor Hopkins!" (156) as models to follow. Heaney adds that he still has Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Journals*, "underlined" and given to him as a gift from McLaverty (156 - 157). Heaney concludes the tribute with the sentence,

He discerned

The lineaments of patience everywhere

And fostered me and sent me out, with words

Imposing on my tongue like obols. (158 – 161)

This tribute reminds the reader of the investment in Heaney's talent made by his many mentors and the influence of his many role models. It also reminds the reader of his sense of obligation in using his talent to do the work he was so strongly encouraged and inspired to do.

The last section of "Singing School" is titled "Exposure" and serves as the final poetic piece in the collection. The speaker is in Wicklow, an Irish town south of Dublin, in December in a cold and rainy season. He imagines the beauty of a comet and extends this into the wish that he could "come on meteorite" (171). A grand and glorious entry will not be his. Instead, he walks

through damp leaves

……..

imagining a hero

On some muddy compound,

His gift like a slingstone

Whirled for the desperate. (172, 174 – 177)

The speaker asks the question "How did I end up like this?" (178) and he considers both the encouragement of friends and the criticisms of foes as he sits "weighing and weighing / my responsible *tristia*" (182 – 183). Questions about the speaker's vocation as poet arise as he writes, "For what? For the ear? For the people? / For what is said behind-backs?" (184 – 185) As the rain falls, he is reminded about what he terms the "diamond absolutes" (190). He

describes these “absolutes” as he describes himself as

> neither internee nor informer;
>
> An inner émigré, grown long-haired
>
> And thoughtful; a wood-kerne
>
> escaped from the massacre. (191 - 194)

While he finds protection in the forest, he feels “Every wind that blows” (197) and he fears missing “The once-in-a-lifetime portent, / The comet’s pulsing rose” (200 – 201). Heaney’s return to the image of the comet at the end of this section of the poem reminds the reader that natural beauty can be missed in the distractions of human conflict and history. Can the speaker in the poem find that subtle balance between engagement and distance as he seeks to balance the demands of art with that of his people and country? As Heaney brings the poetry collection *North* to an end, it appears that he is struggling with these questions for himself and he is quite uncertain about the answers to these questions.

V. Critical Work on Girard and Heaney

Charles L. O’Neill’s chapter “Violence and the Sacred in Seamus Heaney’s *North*”, published in *Seamus Heaney: The Shaping Spirit* in 1996, stands as an early and relatively unique work of criticism that brings Girard’s theoretical work directly into conversation with Heaney’s poems from *North*. O’Neill describes *North* as “the most complex and problematic work of art provoked by the renewal of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. It has been praised for putting that conflict in a larger mythological perspective as well as criticized for appearing to impute to it a fatalistic historical determinism” (91). O’Neill suggests that Heaney, in writing the poems of *North*, has created a “myth” that “mixes violence, revenge, human sacrifice, and

religion" (91). This "myth" from *North* can be most helpfully examined, posits O'Neill, "in light of the ideas of nature and culture proposed by the critical theorist, René Girard" (91). O'Neill argues that Girard's work can "illuminate and extend the images and intuitions Heaney's sequence develops" and Girard's work "best explicates and endorses the image of man that Heaney implies in *North*" (91). What follows in O'Neill's article is a possible misreading of Heaney's poetry, the violence in Northern Ireland, and the theoretical work of Girard on religious violence.

O'Neill's references to "myth" and a "larger mythological perspective" in describing Heaney's work in *North* suggest a need to return to the meaning of the word "myth" as discussed in chapter one. "Myth" was defined as:

> 1. a. A traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenom. 2. a. A widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief; a widely held misconception; a misrepresentation of the truth. (*OED Online*)

O'Neill's suggestion that Heaney has created a "myth" that "mixes violence, revenge, human sacrifice and religion" (91) refers to the sense of "myth" as traditional or founding story. This raises questions for me. Is O'Neill suggesting that Heaney is providing a "traditional" or "founding" story for the ritual violence in Iron Age Europe? Is O'Neill suggesting that the references to Iron Age violence are a "founding" story for the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and onward? O'Neill overstates his case as he summarizes Heaney's and Girard's sense of the past: "For Heaney, as for Girard, the archaic processes of the past return to dominate the present, and politics, institutions, and individual actions are subsumed by the

recurrent and murderous compulsions inherent in man's basic nature" (100). I maintain that Heaney and Girard are aware of the dangers of the violence of the past but they are not completely fatalistic about man's ability to resist violence. For example, Heaney's linking of Iron Age violence with Northern Irish sectarian violence does not need to be read only as a pessimistic acceptance of recurrent historical cycles of violence; it can also be understood as a clear call to recognize the primitive and savage brutality in modern day Northern Ireland and categorically reject it. O'Neill mispresents Girard in this sense as well. Girard clearly states that modern man has moved beyond primitive violence with modern protections like the rule of law. For Heaney and for Girard, the "archaic processes of the past" can be overcome (O'Neill, 100). The need to regularly and routinely select and destroy a "surrogate victim" to maintain peace can be discarded by a community and culture as that community and culture move from the primitive to the modern. Heaney and Girard do allow for the fact that this modern peace can be threatened by a return to primitive violence.

O'Neill situates Heaney's poem "Punishment" in the context of Girard's work. Heaney's sympathy for the victims depicted in the poem is overshadowed by his admission that he might participate, actively or passively, in the community's dispensing of rough justice towards the women in the poem. As O'Neill notes:

> From Girard's perspective, Heaney is exactly right in stressing his personal complicity in the rites of tribal revenge: 'All are drawn unwittingly into the structure of violent reciprocity'. But the scapegoats of 'Punishment' can satisfy only one segment of the warring factions; no matter how many similar scapegoats are selected and 'sacrificed' in Northern Ireland (collaborators, unarmed 'suspects', British soldiers), none can end the circle of violence. (99)

In a certain sense, O'Neill is right to situate Heaney's complicity in Girard's notion that "violent reciprocity" functions in hiddenness in the scapegoat mechanism. The question arises: is Heaney's complicity hidden? Has he misunderstood the lure of tribal revenge? O'Neill's sense of the scapegoat (surrogate victim) in this context also ignores Girard's clear warnings that Christ has destroyed the scapegoat (surrogate victim) mechanism. Ireland's deep connection to Christianity threatens to render the scapegoat mechanism completely useless.

O'Neill returns to the notion of the "recurrent and murderous compulsions in man's basic nature" (100) as he suggests that the basic question in Girard's work and in Heaney's poems in *North* is the essential nature of man. Is man by nature violent and murderous or peaceful and protective? What is Heaney glimpsing in Iron Age violence that he is also glimpsing in Northern Irish violence? What is Heaney recognizing in the victimized bog people that he is also recognizing in the victims of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland? While Girard insists on man's basic inclination towards violence through mimetic desire, both Girard and Heaney are not willing to surrender to this inclination. O'Neill writes:

> With the poems of *North*, Seamus Heaney reminds his readers of the 'law of retribution'. The poems themselves deliver a recognition that Girard would second but which the poet himself, to judge from his later, more urbane poetry, might disavow: the man's nature is essentially murderous and that culture has been built upon it only the better to conceal it from his view. (102)

O'Neill once again fails to represent Girard's work accurately. In Girard's understanding, culture in general and religion in particular do not simply seek to conceal violence; culture through religion seeks to restrain and redirect violence to protect the community. O'Neill correctly notes a different strain in Heaney's work. Heaney's poetry in *North*, his later "urbane"

poetry, and his personal efforts to encourage a lasting peace in Northern Ireland suggest both a rejection of reciprocal violence and a personal faith that peace is the rational, ethical, and humane choice for all sides in the conflict.

Jonathan Hufstader, in his article "'Coming to Consciousness by Jumping in Graves': Heaney's Bog Poems and the Politics of *North*", employs Girard's work briefly as he reads the bog poems of *North* and analyzes them from a Jungian perspective. Like O'Neill, Hufstader invokes myth as he focuses on ritual, Christian mythology, pagan mythology, and the goal of a "shared political consciousness" in a secular space mapped by conscious rationality (74). Hufstader sees Heaney embarking on a ritualized journey into the deep, dark unconscious of his people as he travels through the sequence of bog poems. While Hufstader's reading of Heaney's work and his application of Girard and Jung is interesting, Hufstader remains strangely silent on the question of the "surrogate victim".

Hufstader draws the title of his article from Heaney's "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" and he refers to this poem as he describes Heaney's use of ritual. Hufstader writes:

> Heaney here imagines a ritual procedure (jumping in graves) performed for a purpose (coming to consciousness). He has, that is, designed a ritual whereby he may first identify himself with Ireland and its past, but then find liberation from that tribal past through attainment of consciousness. I read all of *North* as a sequence dominated by one person's thoughts of performing such rituals, a sequence comprising an entrance rite, central action, and the subject's emergence from the ritual in a new state of mind…I will focus on the bog poems (not all of which are found in *North*) as constituting the ritual's central act. (61 – 62)

Hufstader begins his analysis of Heaney's bog poems by focusing first on "The Tollund Man",

published in the collection *Wintering Out*. This early poem "provoked sharp criticisms of Heaney's implicit sympathies, as they were thought to be, for Padraic Pearse's political theology of blood sacrifice, then and now a tenet of the IRA" (62). Hufstader reads the speaker in the poem as one struggling with the lure of the primitive. He writes, "The pilgrim recognizes the pull of this primitive religion as being strong enough to replace Christianity" (63). Hufstader sees the allure of the goddess and sacrificial death "work strongly enough to lull the poet into a fascination with the ritual" (63). As the poet encounters the various bog people in the sequence of poems, he is led through a poetic ritual that helps him to understand himself and the surrounding violence in his culture in new ways.

Hufstader situates the violence in Heaney's poems in a Girardian context. He writes, "For René Girard…, violence is the original impulse which all communities must somehow contain" (65). Hufstader proceeds to set the Tollund man's ritual murder in Girard's understanding. He argues, "In a Girardian analysis, the bog corpse's death would not only guarantee the crop, but would also promise that that participants in the rite…would be free from compulsions to internecine slaughter, at least for another year" (66). While this understanding might apply to a primitive community like the one the Tollund man belonged to, this raises troubling questions for the Irish Roman Catholic community in Northern Ireland. What is one to make of the Sacrifice of the Mass, reenacted daily, which serves as a strong and powerful symbol of the human "blood sacrifice" called for by Irish Roman Catholic martyrs and heroes like Patrick Pearse? Hufstader highlights a paradox inherent in Pearse's call for ongoing Irish Roman Catholic "blood sacrifice" for the nation of Ireland. Hufstader writes:

> …it seems inconsistent that Pearse's theology of violent sacrifice should be characterized, from a Christian point of view, as *both* pagan *and* violent. The pagan

> rites, as analysed by Girard, were designed to abate violence, whereas Pearsian sacrifice is meant to propagate it. Christian sacrifice, while certainly not designed to propagate violence, has evidently done little to abate it. (66)

Hufstader questions the viewpoint of the speaker in Heaney's bog poems. Is the speaker ready to reject Christian "ritual", with its inability to curb violence, and consider embracing an "older ritual which, in its choice of a surrogate victim for the community's violence, did allay the community's propensity to destroy itself?" (66) While Hufstader raises an excellent question here, Heaney does not ultimately seem to suggest that primitive ritual violence is any more effective than Christian ritual in managing violence. It might plausibly be argued that Heaney employs the depictions of primitive violence instead to shame his Christian contemporaries in Northern Ireland, suggesting that their violence is more primitive than Christian.

Hufstader returns to a Jungian framework to describe the poet's journey into himself and into the deep, dark unconscious of his people. The poet faces a risk, writes Hufstader:

> By risking descent into this pagan bog and submitting to a primitive process, one which is both sacred and violent, the poet does not seek any kind of redemption, in either a pagan sense (free from compulsion) or a Christian one (free from guilt). Instead, he attempts to see for himself, to encounter the original ritual of violence, to experience it *without succumbing to it*, and thus to emerge with a new understanding of himself both as a part and as no longer a part of that process. (67)

Hufstader traces this journey and descent beginning with the poem "The Tollund Man" and proceeding through the various bog poems in *North*. As the poet experiments with a variety of approaches and attitudes to the victims of ritual violence, he faces the limits of these approaches and attitudes. Hufstader observes, "…each one leaves the observer suspended between distance

from the ritual and participation in cruelty, between identification with the victim and solidarity with the oppressors" (71). Every poem, notes Hufstader, "disclosed fresh uncertainties and new ways of lapsing into old rituals" (71). Hufstader posits that it is the poem "Strange Fruit" that ultimately frustrates the poet's ambitions to perceive and understand. The female victim's gaze, staring back at the poet in silence, "renders full awareness of a horror that cannot be rationalized and abruptly ends the experiment of the bog poems" (71). The bog people have resisted the appropriation and the political posturing being attempted by the poet and the poet retreats.

Hufstader concludes his article by suggesting Heaney's success in the poems from *North* from a Jungian perspective. He argues:

> Heaney avoids the clichés and the half-truths encased in statement by enacting a ritual of exploration into the poet's psyche – ritual participation in a collective, violent unconscious. Why a ritual? Although the poet cannot have unmediated encounters with what he cannot know consciously, he can create procedures for descending into a symbolically represented unknown. (73)

Hufstader elaborates by stating, "The rituals of *North* lead the poet through a series of unconscious, irrational positions until, at last, he can see himself realistically in relation to the rest of his contemporary world" (74). Hufstader argues that this journey has freed the poet from "tribal violence sacramentalized by the rite" (74). Hufstader suggests that in *North*, "Heaney creates a new form of social lyric, as well as pointing the way, a way still patently untraveled, towards shared political consciousness" (74). Hufstader sees a hopeful future in a secular space mapped by conscious rationality and aware of the past temptations to violence and disorder. Hufstader, as noted earlier, avoids serious focus on the victims of violence. It is the poet's journey that matters most, and the ultimate goal is the rejection of old, violent mythologies for a

new rational, secular space. As Cavanaugh noted in *The Myth of Religious Violence*, this new "rational, secular" space that Hufstader alludes to has proven to be equally dangerous to victims of secular violence.

VI. The Victim in Girard and Heaney

At this point, I'd like to return briefly to my argument presented at the beginning of the chapter. I argue that both Girard and Heaney display a "sympathy for the victim" in their work. To what extent does Girard, in his book *Violence and the Sacred*, and Heaney, in his book *North*, provide evidence of a sympathy for the victim? In the case of Girard, I argue that he does exhibit sympathy for the victim. In Girard's analysis of the surrogate victim, he suggests that primitive cultures selected victims of ritualized religious violence not based on guilt and blame, but on the victim's lack of access to protection in the form of vengeance. The ideal surrogate victim is one whose death cannot inspire vengeance. This victim is selected and sacrificed to bring peace to the community. The victim serves a real purpose in the maintenance of the larger social order. While Girard never condones the sacrifice of the surrogate victim, he provides a compelling theory for both the mechanism and purposes behind the ritual of sacrifice in primitive societies. As Girard noted clearly in his book *Violence and the Sacred*, his analysis is limited to what he terms primitive societies. He promises that further work on Jewish and Christian societies and cultures will be a part of future research. With this in mind, it is important to limit the application of Girard's insights in *Violence and the Sacred*.

Girard, in his proximity to victims of religious violence, differs from Heaney. Girard writes capably of the victims of primitive religious rituals in primitive societies and ancient cultures. Heaney, in contrast, is very close to the victims of religious violence in Northern

Ireland. His neighbours, friends, and even distant family members are dying in the conflict. Real blood is being shed, real human lives are being taken, and Heaney witnesses the impact of the violence on the families left behind. Heaney struggles to be a dispassionate and detached observer, with the demands of kin, country, and religion pressuring him. It is important to note this as one compares Girard's sympathy for the victim with Heaney's sympathy for the victim.

Seamus Heaney's sympathy for the victim, as evidenced in his poem "Tollund Man" and the poems from *North*, suggests a more complicated and nuanced answer to the question of his "sympathy for the victim". Heaney is unafraid to identify directly with the victims of primitive religious violence. His sympathy and compassion for the Tollund man, the Grauballe man, and the Windeby girl are notable. Along with this sympathy and compassion, though, Heaney also very self-consciously registers the tendency to objectify these victims and utilize them in what can be termed "self-serving" ways in his work. This is particularly troubling in his poems that deal with female victims of primitive religious violence. While the term "artful voyeur" can be viewed as a clever turn-of-phrase, it also suggests the viewing without permission of the exposed female form. Heaney imagines, in the poem "Punishment", that being stripped naked was part of the punishment imposed on the girl by her community. The waters used to drown her do not cover her nudity and she is exposed again after being discovered in the bog. Heaney acknowledges this without resolving it in his work.

Heaney's relationship to the victims of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland that are depicted in his poems is equally vexed. For the most part, it would appear that Heaney bears great sympathy and compassion for both Protestant and Roman Catholic victims of violence in the conflict in Northern Ireland. There are times, however, when Heaney is more likely to focus on Roman Catholic victims of violence in his depictions of victims. He appears to serve, in part,

as a witness and scribe of violence against his fellow Irish Roman Catholics. At the same time, he can be harsh with those Irish Roman Catholics who have dared to consort with Irish Protestants or the British. Returning to the poem "Punishment", Heaney decries the shaving, tarring, and public shaming of Irish Roman Catholic young women who had consorted with British soldiers. At the same time, Heaney refers to these young women as "betraying" (38) and he admits to standing silently at times and observing their punishment without protest. In part, Heaney admits, this is due to his understanding of "…the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge" (43 - 44). While this may be understandable on a certain level, it does suggest a limit to Heaney's sympathy and compassion for certain victims that he will need to continue to test and explore as he continues to think about and write about the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland in the years after the publication of *North*.

VII. Summary

In summary, Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* and Heaney's *North* represent important ideas and theories about religion, violence, religious violence, and the possibility of peace. Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* opens with a focus on sacrifice and expands to a focus on the role of the surrogate victim in helping communities in crisis to manage violence. In Girard's view, primitive religions are inextricably linked to violence. Girard connects his work in *Violence and the Sacred* to his earlier work in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* by returning to an understanding of mimetic desire and applying mimetic desire to violence. Girard's focus on primitive societies suggests that the surrogate victim provides a mechanism that modern society has replaced with the rule of law. Girard suggests that primitive religion evolved to manage and contain mimetic violence with mimetic ritual. Heaney's *North* employs a focus on Iron Age

societies and religious sacrifice in a search for a motif capable of addressing the violent crisis of Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. P. V. Glob's book *The Bog People* served as an important inspiration for Heaney as he sought new ways to depict the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. Heaney's use of primitive figures, cultures, and violent religious rituals suggests a possible connection to the work of René Girard. Charles O'Neill's article from 1996 represents an important early exploration of this connection but it fails in certain ways to represent Girard's and Heaney's work accurately. Jonathan Hufstader's article from 1996 extends the analysis of Girard and Heaney by referring to the work of Carl Jung. Girard and Heaney both display sympathy and compassion for the victim of religious violence in their work. In the next chapter, I'll be comparing Girard's book *Battling to the End* with Heaney's poetry and plays that followed the events of 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror. I will focus on the question of the apocalyptic and the ultimate need to renounce violence depicted in the work of both Girard and Heaney.

Chapter 3

Renouncing Violence: René Girard's *Battling to the End* , Seamus Heaney's Poetry, and Seamus Heaney's *Burial at Thebes* after 9/11 and the War on Terror

I. Renouncing Violence after 9/11 and the War on Terror

Questions about religion, religious violence, and victims of violence took on a new urgency in the days, weeks, months, and years after the events of September 11, 2001. Heaney and Girard, like many others, struggled to comprehend and respond to the events. Shortly after 9/11, American leaders initiated what would come be called the War on Terror. The countries of Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded by Western forces pursuing supposed terrorist targets. As events unfolded, the sympathy extended to the United States of America as a result of 9/11 shifted to concern and criticism of its military misadventures in the War on Terror. Terrorist attacks in Europe, including attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005, further threatened the sense of personal security for many in the West. Heaney's poetry and his translation of the Greek play *The Burial at Thebes* during this period reflect Heaney's responses to this new reality. Girard's book *Battling to the End* also served as a response to this new reality. Girard invoked the term "apocalypse" in his text, seeking to rescue the term from popular distortions of its origins and purpose.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will briefly review the events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing War on Terror. I will refer to Heaney's poem "Anything Can Happen" and Girard's early responses to 9/11. I will examine Heaney's translation of the play *The Burial at Thebes* and his poems published after the London bombings of 2005. I will briefly sketch the history of the emergence of secular modernity in the West and Girard's sense of this shift. I will

review the terms “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” followed by an analysis of Girard’s book *Battling to the End*. For Heaney and for Girard, the only viable option for the future is the complete and total renunciation of violence. Revenge must be abandoned and apocalyptic cycles of violence must be interrupted. Both men struggled to find hope in the current moment and both feared the results of humanity’s unwillingness to reject violence and embrace peace.

II. September 11, 2001

The terrorist attacks against the United States of America on September 11, 2001 represent one of the “most consequential events of modern American history” (Pritchard). Four passenger planes (two departing from Logan Airport in Boston, one from Dulles International Airport in Virginia, and one from Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey) were hijacked in flight and the hijackers rerouted the flights with plans to crash the planes into important targets. Two of the planes hit the North and South towers of the World Trade Center in New York. One of the planes hit the Pentagon. The fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The intended target for the fourth plane was never identified and it is believed that the passengers on the plane may have attacked the hijackers and forced the plane down before further harm could be done. There were no survivors from the four flights and there were also numerous casualties (2,996 killed, over 6,000 injured) at the Pentagon and at the World Trade Center. The two towers of World Trade Center collapsed after fires from the plane crashes weakened the structures. Images and videos of the planes crashing into the towers and the towers collapsing would be broadcast by news outlets repeatedly over the next months. The initial shock and grief led to public anger and a desire for revenge (Pritchard).

III. Heaney and September 11, 2001

Seamus Heaney responded to the attacks on September 11 by publishing his translation of Horace's *Ode* 1.34, titled "Horace and the Thunder (after Horace, *Odes*, 1, 34)". The poem reads:

Anything can happen. You know how Jupiter
Will mostly wait for clouds to gather head
Before he hurls the lightning? Well, just now
He galloped his thunder-cart and his horses

Across a clear blue sky. It shook the earth
And the clogged underearth, the River Styx,
The winding streams, the Atlantic shore itself.
Anything can happen, the tallest things

Be overturned, those in high places daunted,
Those overlooked regarded. Stropped-beak Fortune
Swoops, making the air gasp, tearing the crest off one,
Setting it down bleeding on the next.

Ground gives. The heaven's weight
Lifts up off Atlas like a kettle lid.
Capstones shift, nothing resettles right.
Smoke-furl and boiling ashes darken day. (1 – 16)

Heaney published this poem in *The Irish Times*, in *Translation Ireland*, in a booklet for Amnesty International and later, with slight edits and a title change, in his 2005 poetry collection *District*

and Circle. I will briefly focus on the poet Horace and his context before returning to Heaney's comments about the poem.

Horace was a Roman poet who was born in December, 65 BCE and who died in November, 8 BCE. The son of a freed slave, Horace served as a soldier with distinction in the civil wars following the assassination of Julius Caesar, throwing his support behind Brutus and Cassius. After their defeat, Horace returned to Rome, was pardoned, and began work as a civil servant. He was introduced to important literary figures in Rome and began writing. His early work in satire shifted to a focus on lyric poetry. Horace was fascinated by and deeply influenced by the Archaic Greek lyric poets and his work bears their influence. He embraced the Greek lyric poets' role as "bard of the community" with the understanding that his "verse could be expected to have a political effect" (Grant). His favourite themes were love, friendship, philosophy, and the art of poetry.

Michael Grant notes that Horace was an innovator, combining older forms with newer topics. He writes:

> The unique charm of Horace's lyric poetry arises from his combination of the metre and style of the distant past – the world of the Archaic Greek lyric poets – with descriptions of his personal experience and the important moments of Roman life. He creates an intermediate space between the real world and the world of his imagination…

Horace won the respect and admiration of the Emperor Augustus and Horace supported, in his writing, many of Augustus' political, religious, and social reforms in Rome. Horace could be criticized for serving as "poet of the State" but he did act to maintain his independence from Augustus and the Roman government in certain ways. His relationship to Roman religion was complicated. As Grant indicates, "The gods are often on his lips, but, in defiance of much

contemporary feeling, he absolutely denied an afterlife". Horace's later work focused on the art of literature. His *Ars Poetica* served as an important document for Romantic poets in England in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Horace's fascination with past Greek poetic tradition, his embrace of the role of poet as "bard" and "political commentator", his linking of the poetic and the personal, and his reflections on the art of poetry complement Heaney's engagement with tradition, politics, and art.

In an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, Heaney recounts having read Horace's *Odes* in a translation by David Ferry. He had referenced the thirty fourth poem in *Ode 1* in a lecture at Harvard in 2000. As Heaney writes, "When the World Trade Centre attacks happened, I suddenly found that the shock-and-awe factor in the Horace poem matched what I and everybody else was feeling. The Latin words that mean something like 'for sure the god has power' I translated – fairly enough, I thought – as 'anything can happen'" (O'Driscoll 423 – 424). In "Reality and Justice: On Translating Horace *Odes*, 1, 34", Heaney makes reference to a quote from William Butler Yeats, where Yeats highlighted the challenge for the poet "to hold in a single thought reality and justice" (Yeats qtd. in Heaney, "Reality" 51). Heaney's concern for justice extends to the translating of a classic text and its application to a contemporary crisis. As he notes, "In the circumstances, any translation from the classics was going to be read as a response to the contemporary situation, an attempt to 'restore the earth beneath our feet', so what the translator had to do was to hold in a single expression truth to reality in the present while doing justice to the original poem" ("Reality" 51). In the article, Heaney presents the Latin original, and a translation into English from a Victorian edition published in 1887 (51 – 52). Heaney makes further connections between the events of 9/11 and Horace's *Ode*:

Obviously, there was an eerie correspondence between words '*valet ima summis*

> *mutare…deus*' (the god has power to change the highest things to/for the lowest) and the dreamy, deadly images of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre being struck and then crumbling out of sight; and there was an equally unnerving fit between the conventional wisdom of the Latin '*obscura promens*' (bringing the disregarded to notice) and the *realpolitik* of the terrorist assault, in that the irruption of death into the Manhattan morning produced not only world-darkening grief for the multitudes of victims' families and friends, but it also had the effect of bringing to new prominence the plight of the Palestinians and much else in and about the Arab world. (52 – 53)

While Heaney signals to the political in his commentary, he seeks to situate the poem in primarily a religious and personal context. As he notes, "…the original is a poem of religious awe rather than any kind of political comment or coded response to events. It is the voice of an individual in shock at what can happen in the world…" (53). Heaney's choice to remove a possible reference to "god" in the title of the poem and to reference Jupiter in the body of the work avoids attributing the events of 9/11 to either the capability and will of the god of the Christians or of the god of the Muslims.

Seamus Heaney's response to 9/11 included both grief and concern. In an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, Heaney is questioned about his use of Horace. O'Driscoll asks, "What were you hoping to say to the post-9/11 reader through Horace?" (424) Heaney responds, "It was more a case of trying to register the impact of the attack than of commenting on its significance" (O'Driscoll 424). O'Driscoll asks, "Did you feel compelled to make some kind of response to the attacks?" (424) Heaney responds:

> For better or worse, you can't be liberated from consciousness. What happened on September 11 meant that the whole condition of the world was altered henceforth, the

> spirit of the age had darkened. I didn't feel compelled to respond; but as somebody who'd worked regularly in the States for years and had benefited from the connection, I couldn't ignore what had happened – and was going to happen. I knew a crackdown was bound to come; but I also foreknew it would exhibit a moral arrogance and military mercilessness that would be scaresome. In fact, the poem is born as much out of dismay at what lies ahead as out of distress at what has occurred. (O'Driscoll 424)

Heaney's concerns about American retaliation for 9/11 proved to be justified as the American government and its people moved into what can now be termed the "War on Terror".

IV. Girard and September 11, 2001

Robert Doran, in his 2007 interview "Apocalyptic Thinking after 9/11: An Interview with René Girard", reviewed Girard's initial and early responses to the events of September 11. In an earlier interview with the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* soon after the events of 9/11, Girard said that "what is occurring today is a mimetic rivalry on a planetary scale" (Girard qtd. in Doran, "Apocalyptic" 20). Doran suggests in his interview that subsequent events have confirmed this thesis. Doran writes, "All evidence points to a continuation and intensification of mimetic conflict: wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; transit bombings in Madrid and London; even the car burnings in the Paris suburbs are not unrelated" ("Apocalyptic" 20). Girard agrees with Doran and adds this comment: "It seemed impossible at the time, but I think that many people have forgotten 9/11 – not completely forgotten, but they have reduced it to some kind of unspoken norm. When I did that interview with *Le Monde*, everyone agreed that it was a most unusual, new, and incomparable event" (20). For Girard, the important question that must not be dismissed or forgotten is, "What is 9/11?" (20). Doran suggests that Girard views 9/11 as a

"…kind of rupture, a seminal event…" (21). Girard responds:

> Yes, I see it as a seminal event, and it is fundamentally wrong to minimize it today. The normal desire to be optimistic, to not see the uniqueness of our time from the point of view of violence, is the desire to grab any straw to make our time appear as the mere continuation of the violence of the twentieth century. I personally think that it represents a new dimension, a new world dimension….a truly global war…To minimize 9/11 is to try to avoid thinking the way I do about the importance of this new dimension. ("Apocalytic" 21)

Robert Doran alludes to the media coverage and the depictions of 9/11. While the plane hitting the first tower was unexpected, cameras were filming as the second plane hit the second tower. He suggests, "Certainly the spectacular aspect of 9/11 suggests an analogous relation to theater. But with 9/11 we could all be witnesses to a *real* event as it happened" (24). Girard responds, "Yes, with 9/11 there was television. Television makes you present at the scene, and thus it intensifies the experience…It was like a tragic spectacle, but real at the same time" (25). Girard suggests that a newer version of his text *Violence and the Sacred* would require references to 9/11. He sees in this event a return of archaic violence. He states, "…9/11 represents a strange return of the archaic with the secularism of our time. Not too long ago people would have had a Christian reaction to 9/11. Now they have an archaic reaction, which does not bode well for the future" (25). Like Heaney, Girard bears a concern for the violence expressed in 9/11 and the violence that might result from Western responses to this crucial and critical event.

V. The War on Terror

In the weeks following the events of 9/11, the American Federal Bureau of Investigation

linked the attacks to al-Qaeda, a "fringe anti-Western terrorist organization composed of several factions throughout the Middle East" (Pritchard). Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks in October 2001. Because al-Qaeda had connections and some support from the Taliban in Afghanistan, President Bush led the United States and a NATO coalition into military action against targets in Afghanistan. In addition to military action, the United States of America also made many changes to its own security measures and systems. The American government acquired unprecedented access to the private lives and the private information of its citizens and it authorized expanded powers in the investigating, detaining, and deporting of immigrants suspected of criminal or terrorist activity.

The War on Terror, which grew out of American and NATO responses to 9/11, came to be understood as "a multifaceted effort to prevent the spread of terrorist ideologies and activities" (Rich, Moreno-Riano). President George W. Bush and his administration widened the focus of the War on Terror beyond a specific targeting of al-Qaeda to other national and international terrorist groups including Hamas and Hezbollah. The War on Terror has "mostly taken the form of extended military operations, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan" but also includes "…intelligence operations throughout the world, as well as domestic intelligence gathering" (Rich, Moreno-Riano). While support for retaliation was strong in the days after 9/11, public support for certain elements of the War on Terror has faltered in the United States and criticism has grown as the outcomes of military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan have done much to destabilize the region.

Specific data exists on the attitudes and opinions of American citizens about the invasion of Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq, and the overall threat of international terrorism to the United States. For example, a poll by Gallup asked American citizens if the United States made

a "mistake in sending military forces to Afghanistan or not?" In November, 2001, the responses were: Yes (9%) No (89%) No opinion (2%). In February, 2014, responses to the same question were: Yes (49%) No (48%) No opinion (3%) (Newport). A poll by Pew Research asked American citizens about whether the decision the United States made to use military force in Iraq was the "right decision". In March 2003, 73% of respondents felt this was the right decision. In 2011, 48% of respondents felt it was the "right decision" while 46% felt it was the "wrong decision" ("Views of the Iraq War"). In 2003 and 2015, Gallup asked American respondents, "In view of developments since we first sent our troops to Iraq, do you think the United States made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq or not?" In 2003, 23% felt the United States made a mistake, 75% felt that they did not, and 2% had no opinion. In 2015, 51% felt the United States made a mistake (down from a high of 63% in April 2008), 46% felt the United States had not made a mistake (up from a low of 36% in July 2007), and 3% had no opinion ("Iraq"). A Gallup poll in 2015 asked about threats to the "vital interests of the United States in the next ten years". Respondents rated "international terrorism" as a critical (84%) or an important (13%) threat to the vital interests of the United States. In the same survey, respondents rated 'Islamic militants, commonly known as ISIS, operating in Iraq and Syria' as a critical (84%) or important (12%) threat (Swift and Dugan). While public opinion has shifted on the specifics of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, it is clear that international terrorism remains a major concern for the American people. The "success" of the War on Terror is definitely open to question.

VI. Protesting the War in Iraq

As the United States prepared to invade Iraq in early 2003, protests erupted globally. On February 15, 2003, peace marches were held around the world, representing the biggest peace

protest in history. An anthology titled *Irish Writers Against the War* appeared at this time, echoing the concerns of the Irish literary community about American military action. Noted Irish playwright Brian Friel, in the preface, wrote, "I will not be enlisted into the strident ranks of anti-America. My affectionate relationship with the USA began with emigrant ancestors and for over fifty years my own experience of the United States has been animating and enriching" (7). Friel critiques the language of both the "America-bashers" and America itself, seeking public support for its proposed war in Iraq. Friel continues:

> So I will say only this: that I oppose this war with a mute passion, a pain of deep anxiety that cannot find coherent articulation. And I oppose this war because I just know – every instinct insists – that there is something not-thought-through about it; something wildly disproportionate about it; something inimical to reason and reasonableness; something, indeed, that offends the notion of what it is to be fully human.
>
> If this stance classifies me as an opponent of the US and her allies and the whole axis of terrible vengeance, then regretfully – while this distemper rages abroad – so be it. (7).

Seamus Heaney joined Friel and over fifty other Irish literary figures (writers, poets, playwrights, and literary critics) as a contributor to the anthology. Heaney's contribution, titled "News of the Raven", was a selected portion of his translation of *Beowulf*. In this text, a rider announces that the great king Beowulf is dying after battling a fierce dragon. The rider predicts, upon the news of Beowulf's death, that their enemies will arise and "…war will overwhelm our nation" ("News" 53). The glory and wealth of the kingdom will be consumed as the raven shares the news and the eagle and the wolf make "…short work of the dead" (54). Beowulf's death will signal the end of an era as a great king is laid to rest and threats surround his kingdom.

Beowulf is an Old English poem believed to be composed between the seventh and the eleventh century CE. Originally preserved in oral tradition, the poem was written down at a certain point by a Christian poet. The poem survives in one manuscript and is one of the longest of its kind with 3182 lines of poetry. The poem is focused on the main character Beowulf, a Scandinavian prince whose deeds win him fame, honour, and acclaim as a young man and, later, as an aged king. The poem has been studied as an example of Anglo Saxon poetry, as an historical document, and as a cultural document. J. R. R. Tolkien, in an important paper titled "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" published in 1936, argued that the poem is also a great work of literary art. In the mid 1980s, Seamus Heaney was approached by the editors of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* to produce a new translation of *Beowulf*. Heaney's version was published in 2001 and, as an illustrated version, in 2007. Heaney's comments about translating *Beowulf* were included in an introduction to the poem in 2001 and Heaney also discussed his work on *Beowulf* in an essay titled "Fretwork: On Translating *Beowulf*". Alison Finlay has also written about Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. For my purposes, I focus on Heaney's comments on language, politics, translation, and violence.

Heaney begins his essay "Fretwork" by comparing his experiences of Latin and English in his time as a Roman Catholic schoolboy. The Latin of St. Jerome's Bible and the Mass seemed to the young Heaney to be a truer, more powerful, and more foundational language than the English employed in modern Bibles and liturgies. Heaney wonders if he had "…some older need for a magic language that would altogether open and close the world…" ("Fretwork"). Heaney connects this notion to comments from the poet Octavio Paz, as Paz writes that "…poetry is born of the age-old magic belief in the identity of the word and what it names" (Paz translated by Helen Lane and quoted in Heaney, "Fretwork"). Paz acknowledges the arbitrary

relationship between sound and meaning posited by semioticians even as he is tempted by this deeper magic. Heaney, in a reference to the biblical myth of the Tower of Babel, references the unity and power of "pre-Babel speech". Heaney writes of the "post-Babel" moment:

> The diversity of tongues, however, broke this link. Contact with other tribes, trade with other nations, invasion by bigger empires, conversion to other faiths, education in other cultures – progressively and capably, from the cave to the computer age, human beings kept evolving as creatures of language, meeting the new and integrating it, but never without experiencing every time a vestigial tremor, a repetition of that first shock of hearing the other. Hence the writer's longing can be understood as a nostalgia for the original undifferentiated linguistic home. ("Fretwork")

For Heaney, the experience of translating *Beowulf* was an opportunity to work closer to the mythic roots of that "original undifferentiated linguistic home". This yearning for a common language and a common understanding and this sense of diaspora reflects a reality of our situation today. We struggle to communicate with both our closest neighbours and those separated from us by geography, language, culture, ethnicity, and religion.

Heaney's work on *Beowulf* helped him to understand his own situation in different ways. Heaney states that, in his translation work, "…I wanted my anchor to be lodged on the Anglo-Saxon sea-floor, down in the consonantal rock" ("Fretwork"). Understanding and respecting the *Beowulf* poet's use of language and form was crucial to Heaney's work. He admits, as the project continued, to securing a "…second mooring down in the old soft vowel-bog of the local speech" ("Fretwork"). Heaney's discovery of Anglo-Saxon root words that are common to both later English and later Irish words shifted his sense of language. He writes:

> I tended to conceive of English and Irish as adversarial tongues, as either/or conditions

> rather that both/and, and this was an attitude that for a long time hampered the development of a more confident and creative way of dealing with the whole vexed question – the question…of the relationship between nationality, language, history and literary tradition in Ireland. ("Introduction" xxiv)

Heaney admits to yearning for "…some unpartitioned linguistic country, a region where one's language would not be simply a badge of ethnicity or a matter of cultural preference or an official imposition, but an entry into further language" ("Introduction" xxv). This "further language" that Heaney refers to suggests the possibility of more universal mode of communication that undermines the tensions and problems exacerbated by today's deep divisions in language, culture, and religion.

Heaney addresses politics in his translation work and his comments on *Beowulf*. In translating certain Anglo-Saxon terms, Heaney allows himself the freedom to employ older English and Irish terms. In one instance, this freedom alludes to Ireland's colonial history. Heaney translates the term for the character Hrothgar's hall as "bawn". The English term "bawn" is drawn from the Irish term "*bó-dhún*" which refers to a "fort for cattle". In Elizabethan times, "bawn" "…referred specifically to the fortified dwellings that the English planters built in Ireland to keep the dispossessed natives at bay" ("Introduction" xxx). Hrothgar's "embattled keep" where he "waits and watches" for an imminent attack in *Beowulf* reminds Heaney of Kilcolman Castle in Ireland, where the Irish burned the castle and drove Edmund Spenser and Sir Walter Raleigh back to the court of Queen Elizabeth I. Heaney writes about his word choice, suggesting, "Putting a bawn into *Beowulf* seems one way for an Irish poet to come to terms with that complex history of conquest and colony, absorption and resistance, integrity and antagonism, a history that has to be clearly acknowledged by all concerned in order to render it

ever more 'willable forward / again and again and again'[2] ("Introduction", xxx). Heaney was also willing to extend the comparisons of *Beowulf* to more modern political contexts, suggesting that the violence in *Beowulf* was not so different from the violence in Rwanda, Ireland, and Kosovo in the 1990s ("Introduction" xxi). Arguably, one could also apply this to the violence in New York, Afghanistan, and Iraq in the new Millennium.

Heaney comments on the work and goal of translation in his work on *Beowulf*. The commission from the editors of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* to translate *Beowulf* gave the project a certain pedagogical emphasis. In addition to this emphasis, Tolkien's essay on *Beowulf* highlighted the literary merits of the poem and included several suggestions for anyone hoping to translate the poem. For students of literature and for the general reading public, Heaney wanted to communicate something of the power and relevance of the poem in both its initial hearing and in its modern context. Heaney states, "The individual translator of *Beowulf* shoulders the burden of the past and tries to launch it into the swim of the present" ("Fretwork"). In doing a literary translation, Heaney faced further challenges. He writes, "…I am trying to find a way of talking about the liminal situation of the literary translator, the one standing at the frontier of a resonant original, in awe of its primacy, utterly persuaded, and yet called upon to utter a different yet equally persuasive version of it in his or her own words" ("Fretwork"). Heaney describes one of the motives for translating as the opportunity to "write vicariously" while working in the "tension between the impulse to use the work in its first language as a stimulus and obligation to give it a fair hearing in the second" ("Fretwork"). Heaney admits to bringing his own reactions and prejudices to his work on the poem. He states, "I came to the task of translating *Beowulf* with a prejudice in favour of forthright delivery. I remembered the

[2] Heaney quotes his poem "The Settle Bed" from his 1991 book *Seeing Things*. The poem describes a family heirloom, passed from generation to generation.

voice of the poem as being attractively direct, even though the diction was ornate and the narrative method at times oblique" ("Introduction" xxvii). Heaney is reminded of his Irish uncles and their somber, slow speech as he works to set the phrases of the Germanic warriors into English.

Heaney sets the violence depicted in *Beowulf* in the cultural context of Germanic warrior culture. Violence in battle serves as a means attaining fame, as a means for expressing dedication to one's lord, and as a means for building community among the warriors. Heaney writes:

> The prospect of gaining a glorious name in the *wæl-ræs* (the rush of battle slaughter), the pride of defending one's lord and bearing heroic witness to the integrity of the bond between him and his hall companions – a bond sealed in the *glēo* and *gidd* of peace-time feasting and ring-giving – this is what gave drive and sanction to the Germanic warrior-culture enshrined in *Beowulf*. ("Introduction" xv – xvi)

Heaney highlights a portion of the poem where a minstrel sings in celebration of Beowulf's victories. The minstrel's song serves to further immerse the reader

> …in a society that is at once honour-bound and blood-stained, presided over by the laws of the blood-feud, where the kin of a person slain are bound to set an exact price for the death, wither by slaying the killer or by receiving satisfaction in the form of *wergild* (the 'man-price'), a legally fixed compensation. The claustrophobic and doomladen atmosphere of this interlude gives the reader an intense intimation of what *wyrd*, or fate, meant not only to the character in the Finn story but to those participating in the main action of *Beowulf* itself. All conceive of themselves as hooped within the great wheel of necessity, in thrall to a code of loyalty and bravery, bound to seek glory in the eye of the

> warrior world. The little nations are grouped around their lord; the greater nations spoil for war and menace the little ones… ("Introduction" xiii – xiv)

Beowulf presents a Germanic warrior culture that illustrates, in many ways, the primitive cultures described by Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*. The dangers of blood-feud and revenge are as real for these Germanic tribes as they are for so many of the primitive peoples Girard surveys.

The violence depicted in *Beowulf* is situated in a pagan context and understanding. The poet of *Beowulf*, whomever he or she might be, clearly writes as an Old English poet with a Christian understanding and worldview "looking back at places and legends that his ancestors knew before they made their migration from continental Europe to their new home on the island of the Britons" ("Introduction" xvi). The poet's language helps to situate both the poet's understanding and his or her view of the Germanic peoples depicted in the poem. For example, in Heaney's translation the *Beowulf* poet describes the Germanic peoples at worship, writing:

> Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed
> Offerings to idols, swore oaths
> That the killer of souls might come to their aid
> And save the people. That was their way,
> Their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts
> They remembered hell. (175 – 80)

The terms "pagan", "idols", and "heathenish" help to situate the poet as a Christian who views this older religion as primitive and pre-Christian. The term "killer of souls" suggests that this older religion was a worship of the devil. Their worship was also suggested to be, in a certain sense, a remembrance of hell. The reference to offerings also reminds me of Girard's work in *Violence and the Sacred* on human and animal sacrifice. While the Beowulf poet is clearly

making some judgments in this section of the poem, the poet is also capable of presenting the values of the Germanic warrior culture. Returning to the theme of vengeance in the culture, the poet in Heaney's translation writes:

> It is always better
> To avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.
> ……
> Let whoever can
> Win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,
> That will be his best and only bulwark. (1384 – 1389)

The ancient Germanic warrior culture can be compared to the modern American warrior culture. Vengeance remains a high value, particularly in relation to 9/11 and the War on Terror. The need to win glory and renown before death also remains a high value in American warrior culture.

Alison Finlay, in her chapter "Putting a *Bawn* in *Beowulf*", discusses Heaney's presentation of the various themes in the poem. In particular, Finlay notes that Heaney

> stresses the universality of the poem's analysis of the inevitability of human violence, noting that what at first appears tribal and antiquated in a world of increasingly impersonal global powers – the identity of national boundaries with those of kin, the origin of national conflicts in personal or family vengeance, pursued over generations – reflects the contemporary reality not only of his own Northern Irish milieu, but of countless petty wars in the Balkans and elsewhere that were prominent in the news when the translation was published in 1999. (147)

Finlay quotes Heaney from an interview on *Beowulf* where Heaney states

> At the end of the second millennium I would say [*Beowulf*] is especially relevant because it takes nothing for granted. It understands that small wars will constantly break out, that borders are going to be invaded….So, if one wanted to give a second millennium 'spin' to the thing, you could say that it is about facing up to the reality of human aggression, to the political problems of living with strong neighbours… (Heaney qtd in Finlay 147)

Heaney claims that he detects in *Beowulf* a "structured, adequate way of facing the atrocious" which may serve the modern reader and citizen well (Heaney qtd. in Finlay 147). Heaney's efforts to contemporize the themes of *Beowulf*, however, run the risk of shaping the poem to fit current events as well as Heaney's own personal history. Finlay writes, "Heaney's reduction of the particularities of Germanic heroic culture shows his determination to find in this alien and forgotten world the universal elements that will resonate in a modern, mechanized, literate culture as well as reflecting the specifics of his individual background" (152). This risk of including the current and the personal can serve to isolate the poem from its original setting even as it helps to give it an uncommon power to speak to our modern situation. As noted earlier, Heaney is aware of these risks in the act of translation.

As I conclude this section on *Beowulf*, I want to return to the scenes depicting the death of Beowulf. Heaney had included the portion "News of the Raven" in the collection *Irish Writers Against the War*. As the previous paragraphs have indicated, Heaney's selection was a timely and judicious one. I want to end with a depiction of grief at Beowulf's funeral and Heaney's comments on it. In Heaney's translation, the funeral pyre has been lit and the poem includes this depiction:

> A Geat woman too sang out in grief;
> With hair bound up, she unburdened herself

> Of her worst fears, a wild litany
> Of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,
> Enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,
> Slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke. (3150 – 3155)

The woman's grief encompasses both her current and imagined future losses. Heaney reads in this section of the poem both the past and the present. He writes,

> Here the inexorable and the elegiac combine in a description of the funeral pyre being got ready, the body being burnt, and the barrow being constructed – a scene at once immemorial and oddly contemporary. The Geat woman who cries out in dread as the flames consume the body of her dear lord could come straight from a late-twentieth century news report, from Rwanda or Kosovo; her keen is a nightmare glimpse into the minds of people who have survived traumatic, even monstrous events and who are now being exposed to the comfortless future. ("Introduction" xxi)

When Heaney wrote this, the events of 9/11 and the War on Terror were still in the future. As he clearly indicates in his selection for the collection *Irish Writers Against the War*, the timeless themes and concerns in Beowulf continue to be relevant, particularly in a context where vengeance is being pursued and the perpetrators of 9/11 are being sought to be punished. Heaney clearly intends to send a warning about the dangers of the blood-feud, the dangers of honour killing, and the need to resist the sense that ongoing war and violence is the fate of the world today and on into the future.

VII. Heaney, Sophocles, and *Burial at Thebes*

As he does with Horace and with the text of *Beowulf*, Heaney also translates the plays of

the Greek playwright Sophocles. Sophocles lived from 497 – 406 BCE and is regarded as the "greatest of the Athenian playwrights" (Love, 227). Sophocles was born in the district of Colonus near Athens and it is believed that he was active in political life in his community. He served as a treasurer of the Delian Confederacy, as a military general, and as a member of the Council of Ten (Love, 227). Sophocles was also active in the religious life of his community. In addition to his public service, Sophocles was a prolific writer, authoring 123 plays. His plays won awards at drama competitions at the festival of Dionysius. Influenced by the dramatist Aeschylus, Sophocles' style evolved from a more archaic style in keeping with Aeschylus to a "more natural, less archaic style" (Love, 227). Sophocles was also an innovator, introducing a third actor in his plays and increasing the size of the chorus from 12 to 15. Seven of his plays have survived until today. Heaney first translated Sophocles' play *Philoctetes* in 1991. Titled *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes*, Heaney's version updated the play's focus on the Trojan War and made reference to Northern Ireland's Troubles. Sophocles' play *Antigone,* which had brought Sophocles fame and power, was the play Heaney turned his attention to in 2003.

Heaney's translation of Sophocles' play *Antigone* represents a further commentary on the War on Terror and American domestic and foreign misadventures. Antigone, a character from Greek mythology, is the daughter of King Oedipus. In Sophocles' version of Antigone's story, Antigone's brother Eteocles has broken his agreement with his brother Polyneices to share the throne of Thebes and they have gone to war against each other. Both brothers die in the battle and Creon assumes the throne. He grants Eteocles a proper burial but promises punishment to any who wish to honour Polyneices with a proper burial. Creon considers Polyneices to be a traitor to Thebes. Antigone disobeys Creon's orders, burying her brother Polyneices as a sign of

respect and care as well as a sign of concern for his passage into the afterlife. She invites her sister Ismene to help her with the burial but Ismene is reluctant to offend the new king. Antigone is discovered, arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. The blind prophet Tiresias urges King Creon to reconsider but King Creon refuses, losing his son Haemon and his wife Eurydice to suicide after Antigone takes her own life. King Creon is a tragic figure grieving these losses as the play ends. Heaney's version of *Antigone*, retitled *The Burial at Thebes: Sophocles' Antigone*, was commissioned by the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and presented in 2004 and 2008.

Hugh Harkin traces the tradition of Irish playwrights translating and presenting Sophocles' *Antigone* in Irish theatre. William Butler Yeats had translated the plays *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* for the Abbey Theatre in the 1930s but had only managed to complete fifteen lines of *Antigone*. In 1984 alone, Harkin noted that four versions of the Antigone myth were produced in Ireland: Carl Matthew's *Antigone*, Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act*, Brendan Kennelly's *Antigone* and what he describes as a "loosely adapted film version in Pat Murphy's *Anne Devlin*" (294). Harkin notes, with surprise, that "…Paulin's is the only Irish version - even today - which clearly has Northern politics as a backdrop" (295). Harkin observes a focus on feminist issues for Kennelly's *Antigone* and *Anne Devlin*. Matthew's *Antigone* was a critique of the "Criminal Justice Bill then making its way through the *Oireachtas* [the legistlature of Ireland], which was seen to be curtailing civil liberties" (295). Harkin contrasts these Irish Antigones with the more recently produced plays by Conall Morrison (*Antigone*, 2003) and Seamus Heaney (*The Burial at Thebes*, 2004, 2008). Harkin suggests that peace in Ireland has dulled the focus on Irish politics and he traces in Morrison's and Heaney's work a broader, international focus. He writes:

Reflecting this domestic stagnancy, then, is the fact that the most recent Irish versions of

> Greek tragedy have resonated with international rather than national politics. Coming from Irish playwrights Seamus Heaney and Conall Morrison, this is a new and unprecedented development that begs many questions. Why now? Why only now? Why Greek tragedy? Why *Antigone*? Is this simply a phase that Irish theatre is going through, or have we in fact reached a point - as I contend - where such internationalism is likely to become an enduring feature of Irish theatre? (292)

Harkin provides some important background material to help situate Antigone in Ireland and in the international context.

Harkin suggests that earlier readings of *Antigone*, inspired by thinkers like Friedrich Hegel, were not suited for depicting Ireland's struggle against British rule. In Hegel's reading, a moral balance exists between the ruler and the ruled. Harkin notes:

> …the notion of Antigone as some kind of 'anti-imperialist' would not have registered then in the way that it has come to register for audiences today. Friedrich Hegel's interpretation of a collision of equally justified moral powers - the state against the individual, right versus right - was and to a large extent remains the dominant reading. (293)

Harkin traces the beginning of a shift in Irish thinking about *Antigone* with a lecture by Conor Cruise O'Brien at Queen's University in Belfast in 1968. O'Brien referenced the character of Antigone, comparing her "defiant stance" with both the growing Northern civil rights movement arising in Northern Ireland among Irish Roman Catholics at the time and the civil rights movement in the United States. O'Brien suggested that the Northern Irish protestors would be wise to stay home from the public protests and avoid the violence they experienced at the hands of Royal Ulster Constabulary (the police force in Northern Ireland from 1922 – 2001). Tom

Paulin rebuts O'Brien's position with his play *The Riot Act*. In a position that might be compared with Antigone's sister Ismene, O'Brien refused to recommend either non-violent or violent protest. Tom Paulin reads the act of doing nothing as complicity with the oppressor (Harkin 300).

The Burial at Thebes: Sophocles' Antigone, translated by Seamus Heaney, includes the following characters: Antigone, Antigone's sister Ismene, the Chorus of Theban elders, Creon King of Thebes, a guard, Haemon son of Creon, Tiresias the blind prophet, a messenger, and Eurydice wife of Creon. As the play opens, Antigone's brothers Eteocles and Polyneices are dead and an edict from the newly crowned King Creon forbids the burial of Polyneices. Antigone and her sister enter hastily as dawn is breaking. After discussing their parents, Antigone summarizes the crisis:

> There's a general order issued
> And again it hits us hardest.
> The ones we love, it says,
> Are enemies of the state.
> To be considered traitors – (*Burial* 1)

Antigone reflects the paranoia of those whose privacy has been compromised. She speaks to her sister outside because the "…walls in there have ears. / This is for your ears only" (*Burial* 2). Antigone notes that Eteocles has been buried "…As a soldier, with full honours, / So he's gone home to the dead" (*Burial* 2). Polyneices has been denied burial and, by extension, the journey home to the dead. Antigone suggests burying Polyneices properly on their own but Ismene responds, "…You'll have committed a crime" (*Burial* 3). While Ismene feels grief at the loss of her brother Polyneices, she is reluctant to challenge or disobey the new king.

In a speech that echoes the words of President George W. Bush as he responded to 9/11, Antigone speaks:

This is law and order
In the land of good King Creon.
This is his edict for you
And for me, Ismene, for me.
And he's coming to announce it.
'I'll flush 'em out,' he says.
'Whoever isn't for us
Is against us in this case.
Whoever breaks this law,
I'll have them stoned to death'. (Heaney, *Burial* 3)

Bush's speech to the Joint Session of Congress and the American people on September 20, 2001, included the claim, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists". Bush's statement echoes the words of Jesus in Matt 12.30: "He who is not with me is against me". (A different rendering of this text in Luke 9.50 reads, "…whoever is not against you is for you") Bush's false binary is reflected in Creon's proclamation. These words represent a challenge to Antigone and Ismene as they test their loyalties to kin and to king. Ismene, after rehearsing their very shaky status in the community, replies,

In the land of the living, sister,
The laws of the land obtain –
And the dead know that as well.

The dead will have to forgive me.

I'll be ruled by Creon's word.

Anything else is madness. (Heaney, *Burial* 5)

Antigone parts from Ismene, bent on pursuing her plan to bury Polyneices, while Ismene promises her love to her sister. Ismene departs the scene.

The Chorus of Theban elders and King Creon enter. The Chorus attributes the success in the recent battle to divine intervention; they assert, "A god of war stiffened our will / And locked our arms, so the line held" (*Burial* 8). Religious rhetoric marks the speeches of both the Chorus and Creon, echoing President Bush's evocations of God, the Bible, and the Christian faith as America's faith in the early days after 9/11. Creon affirms his position on enemies and patriots as he speaks:

…Nor would I,

Ever, have anything to do

With my country's enemy. For the patriot,

Personal loyalty always must give way

To patriotic duty.

Solidarity, friends,

Is what we need. The whole crew must close ranks.

The safety of our state depends upon it.

Our trust. Our friendships. Our security.

Good order in the city. And our greatness. (*Burial* 10)

Creon calls Polyneices an "…anti-Theban Theban prepared to kill / His countrymen in war, and desecrate / The shrines of his country's gods…" (*Burial* 10 – 11). Creon reiterates his position

on Thebes and its friends and foes. He states,

> This is where I stand when it comes to Thebes:
>
> Never to grant traitors and subversives
>
> Equal footing with loyal citizens,
>
> But to honour patriots in life and death. (*Burial* 11)

The erosion and withdrawal of human rights for those considered to be traitors and subversives in the War on Terror is echoed in these lines.

Creon is confused by a report that Polyneices has been properly buried and he wonders if the gods may have played a role in the burial. He asks,

> Did they hide him under clay for his religion?
>
> For coming to burn their colonnaded temples?
>
> For attacking a city under their protection?
>
> The gods, you think, will side with the likes of him? (*Burial* 14)

Ruling out the possibility that the gods would have any concern for Polyneices, Creon then wonders if a "…certain poisonous minority…" might be responsible for the burial (*Burial* 14). The guard suggests that Creon's conscience might be bothering him and he's warned by Creon to be careful (*Burial* 15). Antigone is discovered to be the culprit and she is questioned by Creon on her disobedience to the law. Antigone chooses to appeal to Zeus and Justice. She responds:

> I disobeyed because the law was not
>
> The law of Zeus nor the law ordained
>
> By Justice, Justice dwelling deep
>
> Among the gods of the dead. What they decree
>
> Is immemorial and binding for us all.

The proclamation had your force behind it

But it was a mortal force, and I, also a mortal,

I chose to disregard it. (*Burial* 21)

The very foundations of law and order are shaken by Antigone's challenge to Creon. Is there a difference between mortal and divine law? When the mortal law contravenes divine law, what is the citizen to do?

Creon speaks of Polyneices and Eteocles. Creon introduces the notion of terrorism, arguing that Polyneices "terrorized us" (*Burial* 24). In contrast, says Creon, "Eteocles stood by us" (*Burial* 24). The power to assign the designation of "terrorist" is assumed by Creon and not questioned by those close to him. This becomes a crucial aspect of the War on Terror. When hijackers fly planes into the World Trade Center, they are considered and classified as "terrorists". When American pilots bomb Baghdad, they are considered and classified as American patriots and legitimate combatants in a legal and justifiable, by American standards, war. Antigone shifts the terms of the debate to a question of religious practice. She states, "Religion dictates the burial of the dead" (*Burial* 24). Creon questions her, saying, "Dictates the same for loyal and disloyal?" (*Burial* 24) Antigone responds, saying "Who knows what loyalty is in the underworld?" (*Burial* 24) Creon is not convinced and he sentences Antigone to death for disobeying the king and burying her brother.

Creon's son Haemon is Antigone's fiancé and he pleads with Creon to change his verdict. The father-son dynamic represented in the play can serve as a foil for the relationship of President George W. Bush, his father President George H. W. Bush, and their shared enemy Saddam Hussein. The Gulf War in 1991 initiated by George H. W. Bush repelled Iraqi troops from Kuwait but did not result in a regime change in Baghdad. Was it possible that the 2003

invasion of Iraq was in part an effort by a son to complete the work of his father? Creon implores Haemon, asking for his support and saying,

It's what all men pray for,

Children who will show a due respect,

Who will make their father's enemies

Their enemies, and his friends their friends. (*Burial* 30)

Haemon refuses to comply, scolding his father with the words,

…There's no shame

In taking good advice.

It's a sign of wisdom.

……..

…Swallow pride and anger.

Allow yourself

to change. (*Burial* 32)

Creon refuses to bend and he stands by his decision.

As a clear example of Girard's figure of the "surrogate victim", Antigone is sealed up in a cave and left to die. Creon puts the blame for her death clearly on her, refusing to bear any responsibility. He speaks,

She'll be put in there and some food put in with her –

To ward off any blood-guilt from the city.

And once she's in, she can pray to her heart's content

To her god of death. After all her Hades talk,

It'll be her chance to see if he can save her. (*Burial* 36)

Creon's concern about blood-guilt on the city is telling, and his comments about Hades remind me of the crowd's comments at the death of Jesus in the Gospels (Matt 27.39 – 44). The Chorus of Theban elders seeks to assign blame, suggesting to Antigone that she is "…Paying, perhaps, in your life / For the past life of your father" (*Burial* 38). The need to assign guilt, even inherited guilt, to the scapegoat is evident. Creon, for his part, reminds me of Pontius Pilate at the trial of Jesus (Matt 27.24), stating, "There's no blood on my hands here. It was she / Who put herself beyond the pale. She is to blame / For every blackout stone they pile up round her" (*Burial* 40). Antigone is sent to her death. The Chorus ominously intones,

> Fate finds strange ways to fulfil its ends.
>
> Not military power nor the power of money,
>
> Not battlements of stone nor black-hulled fleets
>
> Can fend off fate or keep its force at bay. (Heaney, *Burial* 42)

Antigone and Creon's decisive acts are obscured in this reference to fate, suggesting Girard's notion that violence against the "surrogate victim" or scapegoat is overlooked.

Tiresias, the blind prophet, arrives and speaks. Illustrating Girard's concern about the contagion of violence, Tiresias speaks of the body of Polyneices. He prophesies:

> That body lying out there decomposing
>
> Is where the contagion starts. The dogs and birds
>
> Are at it day and night, spreading reek and rot
>
> On every altar stone and temple step, and the gods
>
> Are revolted. That's why we have this plague,
>
> This vile pollution. That's why my birds in flight
>
> Aren't making sense. They're feeding on his flesh.

Consider well, my son. All men make mistakes.

But mistakes don't have to be forever,

They can be admitted and atoned for.

It's the overbearing man who is to blame.

Pull back. Yield to the dead. Don't stab a ghost.

What can you win when you only wound a corpse?

I have your good at heart, and have good advice.

The easiest thing for you would be to take it. (*Burial* 44)

Creon, despite his earlier deeply religious rhetoric, is not interested in Tiresias's words. The king and prophet trade insults, culminating in Creon's assertion "…witlessness has to be the greatest threat" (*Burial* 45). Tiresias responds, "As you should know. It is your problem, Creon" (*Burial* 45) The play concludes with the suicides of Antigone, Creon's son Haemon, and Creon's wife Eurydice. As Creon struggles to respond to the news, he is told that his wife, before her suicidal death by his sword, "called you death-dealer and cursed your name" (*Burial* 54). Creon admits his recklessness and pride as the play draws to a close, admitting, "…Everything I've touched / I have destroyed" (*Burial* 56). Creon serves as a stark contrast to President George W. Bush and the American nation's refusal to admit fault or blame in the mistakes made and the possible crimes committed in the War on Terror.

Heaney, in his Jayne Lecture entitled "Title Deeds: Translating a Classic", discusses his work on the play *The Burial at Thebes*. He begins by describing the conflict associated with the death and release of the body of Francis Hughes. Hughes was a Volunteer of the Irish Republican Army who is described as "determined, committed, and totally fearless" ("Francis Hughes"). Hughes "organized a spectacularly successful series of military operations before his

capture and was once described by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (Northern Ireland's police force from 1922 – 2001) as their 'most wanted man' in the North" ("Francis Hughes"). Hughes was wounded, captured, and brought to trial in early 1980. He was charged with killing a British Special Air Services soldier (a member of the British Army's most renowned Special Forces unit), attempting to kill another Special Air Services soldier, and numerous other charges related to his service with the IRA. Hughes was found "guilty" on all charges. He received a life sentence for murder, fourteen years for attempted murder, and fifty-five years for other charges. Hughes was sent to the notorious H-Block prison, a prison operated by the British government.

Hughes joined with other IRA prisoners at the H-Block in demanding "special category status" as "political prisoners" instead of being considered as common criminals. As early as May 1972, IRA prisoners in the Belfast prison had employed the tactic of hunger strike to work toward their goals. Their early success faded as the British government worked to "…project the resistance as a criminal conspiracy" ("History"). In 1975, the H-Block prisons were created and "political prisoner" status was withdrawn from IRA prisoners. The prisoners responded with a blanket protest, refusing to wear prison clothes and wearing only blankets. Conditions in the H-Block deteriorated and hunger strikes were reinstated by some of the prisoners in October 27, 1980. Public sympathy and pressure applied to the British government appeared to be helping and the hunger strikers ceased their efforts. In the new year, prisoners were frustrated with the stalling by the British government and they reinstated the hunger strikes. Bobby Sands, an IRA prisoner, began his hunger strike on March 1, 1981. Francis Hughes followed suit two weeks later.

The IRA prisoners released a statement as Bobby Sands began his hunger strike. The statement included the following:

> We, the republican POWs [prisoners of war] in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh and our comrades in Armagh Prison, are entitled to and hereby demand political status, and we reject today as we have consistently rejected every day since September 14th, 1976, when the blanket protest began, the British government's attempted criminalization of our ourselves and our struggle…As further demonstration of our selflessness and the justness of our cause, a number of comrades, beginning today with Bobby Sands, will hunger strike to the death unless the British government abandons its criminalization policy and meets our demands for political status. ("History")

In a surprising turn, Bobby Sands was nominated on March 30, 1981, as Member of Parliament candidate for the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election, which became necessary following the sudden death of Frank Maguire, an independent MP who had been supporting the prisoners' cause. Sands was elected to serve as Member of Parliament but passed away on May 5, 1981. On May 12, 1981, after fifty-nine days on hunger strike, Francis Hughes also died.

After his death in prison, Hughes' family and friends awaited the release of his body in the village of Toome so they could bury the body properly. The anger and frustration of the crowd comes close to boiling over as the body is handed to the family. Heaney writes:

> The surge of rage in the crowd as they faced the police that evening was more than ideological. It did of course spring from political disaffection, but it sprang also from a sense that something inviolate had been assailed by the state. The nationalist collective felt that the police action was a deliberate assault on what the Irish language would call their *duchas*, something that is still vestigially present even in English-speaking Ulster in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. ("Title" 413)

Heaney cites the work of Irish critic Brendan Devlin, who has remarked that *duchas* is difficult

to translate but might be understood as "…inheritance, patrimony; native place or land; connection, affinity or attachment due to descent or long-standing; inherited instinct or natural tendency" (Devlin qtd. in Heaney, "Title" 413). Heaney suggests that a similar feeling motivates Antigone, "in thrall to patrimony, connection, affinity and attachment due to descent, to longstanding, to inherited instinct and natural tendency, and for her all these things have been elevated to a kind of ideal of the spirit, an enduring value" ("Title" 413). Heaney also suggests that Antigone's confrontation with King Creon resembles in many ways the near-conflict in the village of Toome ("Title" 413).

Heaney comments on his decision to change the name of the play to focus less on the character of Antigone and more on the central issue at hand: burial. It is, first, a "matter of burial refused" ("Title" 414). Polyneices is declared by Creon to be "anathema" as Polyneices had attacked his native city with an army from Argos. Heaney adds, "As a ruler responsible for security and good order in the polis, Creon's concern is the overall thing and he can tolerate no exceptions" ("Title" 414). Heaney continues, stating, "…this unbending attitude brings out the resister in Antigone, whom the Chorus calls *autonomos*, a law unto herself. She defies the order and gives ritual burial to her brother. The laws of the land, she avers, cannot overrule the laws of the gods" ("Title" 414). The conflict between Creon and Antigone will not be resolved until great destruction has been unleashed.

Heaney describes being asked by the Abbey Theatre in Dublin to translate a version of *Antigone* for the centenary of the theatre. Heaney felt "honoured and attracted, but unsure" if he would be able to do it ("Title" 414). He adds, "…the play had been translated and adapted so often, and had been co-opted into so many cultural and political arguments, it had begun to feel less like a text from the theatrical repertoire and more like a pretext for debate" ("Title"

414). Like Hugh Harkin, Heaney describes discovering Antigone in a new way through an article written by Conor Cruise O'Brien in 1968. In Heaney's recollection, O'Brien ends by "positing that both Creon and Antigone are dangerous in their commitments and situating Ismene as the moderator" (O'Brien qtd. in Heaney, "Title" 420). O'Brien expresses admiration for Antigone in his 1968 article but by 1972 is encouraging people to follow Ismene's example instead. Heaney acknowledges that the "local row" in Northern Ireland has calmed but he sees greater problems around the globe. He writes:

> Nevertheless, if the local row has abated, the global situation has worsened. Things that were once the preoccupation of an embattled and apparently historically retarded population in Northern Ireland have now come inescapably to a head for everybody. People in liberal democracies now find themselves forced to take a position on conflicts where God is invoked by both sides and where the great challenge that W. B. Yeats once posed for himself, namely, 'to hold in a single thought reality and justice,' is the challenge faced by us all. The question of *duchas* and dignity, the scandal of 'the supremacy of the supreme' exercised without check or embarrassment, the fact that one man's criminal or murderer or terrorist is another man's freedom fighter or martyr, none of these complicating and distressful realities has gone away. On the contrary, the fundamental crisis has deepened and the voltage generated even in the mere discussion of these matters has increased to a degree that is explosive and often destructive of all civil exchange. ("Title" 420)

Heaney refers to the nightly news on television as new images of death and mourning fill the screens. He writes:

> Night after night we watch on TV the crowds surging around biers borne shoulder high,

> carrying the dead through the streets of Fallujah or Ramallah, and watch the military with their cordons and snatch squads and armoured vehicles as they wait tensely in position or go fiercely into action, and as we watch it is impossible not to think that passions of a sort which were barely contained when the hunger striker's body changed hands at Toome have now been let loose to apocalyptic effect in the world at large. ("Title" 421)

Heaney's use of the term "apocalyptic" suggests a worsening violence culminating in a potentially world-ending conflict. Girard, in contrast, will use the term in both a negative and a positive way, reflecting a more traditionally Christian interpretation of the term and concept.

Heaney imagines the artist Goya, struggling to witness, understand, and depict the Napoleonic liberation of Spain. He adds:

> In our time, acts of terrorism committed against those who wield the equivalent of Napoleonic power have driven them to a point where the impulse to retaliate is in danger of overwhelming all need to understand what lies behind the terrorism. It was possible to feel, for example, that there was something not so much Napoleonic as Roman about the images of the prisoners in irons being marched in front of the world to their cages in Guantanamo Bay. It was as if we were witnessing a triumph on the *Via Appia*. Respect for the *duchas* and dignity of the defeated had been set at nought. ("Title" 421)

Heaney describes the dilemma of the world community as he pondered the request to translate *Antigone*.

> When the Abbey asked me to do the Antigone, President Bush and his secretary of defence were forcing not only their own electorate but the nations of the world into an either/or situation with regard to the tyrant of Baghdad. If you were not for state security

> to the point that you were ready to bomb Iraq, you could be represented as being in favour of terrorism. If you demurred at the linking of Al Qaeda to the despotism of Saddam Hussein, you were revealing yourself as unsound on important issues, soft on terrorism. If you demurred at the suspension of certain freedoms, you were unpatriotic. And all this circumstance would have made it easy to proceed with a treatment of Sophocles' play where Creon would have been a cipher for President Bush and the relationship between audience and action would have been knowing predicated on the assumption of political agreement. But to have gone in this direction would have been reductive and demeaning, both of Sophocles' art and of the huge responsibility the White House must bear for national security. ("Title" 421 – 422)

Heaney admits to struggling with a way into the work. His past and present concerns were helpful in sorting this out. He writes,

> Basically Creon turns Polyneices into a non-person, in much the same way as the first internees in Northern Ireland and the recent prisoners in Guantanamo Bay were turned into non-persons. By refusing Polyneices burial, Creon claims ownership of the body and in effect takes control of his spirit, because the spirit will not go to its right home with the dead until the body is buried with due ceremony. When Antigone refuses Creon's ruling and performs the traditional rites, her protest is therefore a gesture that is as anthropological as it is political, and it was only when I saw it in this light that I found a way out of the cat's cradle of political arguments and analogies the play has become and could re-approach it as a work atremble with passion, with the human pity and terror it possessed in its original cultural setting. ("Title" 422)

Heaney's decision to focus on the human over the political becomes an important part of his

overall response to 9/11 and the War on Terror. The humanity of the Americans and their enemies must be preserved despite conflicts and political differences.

Heaney makes another connection with Ireland's historical context as he searched for the "right register" for Antigone. He remembered the poem of lament titled "Caoineadh Airt Ui Laoghaire" which, in English, means "The Lament for Art O'Leary". Heaney indicates, "…it is a poem uttered by O'Leary's widow, Eibhlin Dhubh Ni Chonaill, over the dead body of her husband. And this body, like the body of Polyneices, had been left exposed, unattended to, cut down by enemies and abandoned" ("Title" 423). This lament for this Irish victim of British violence in the past provided the model for Antigone's early lines about her brother Polyneices. Like the Irish lament, Heaney employed a "three-stress line" for the sisters as they discuss their brother at the beginning of the play. Heaney decided to employ "different metrical provisions for different characters and different phases of the action" ("Title" 422). In addition to the "three-stress line" for the sisters, Heaney included a "surge into more or less Anglo-Saxon metre with the choruses, then on again into blank verse, but blank verse that was dramatic and suited to the character of Creon rather than simply a metronome" ("Title" 422). In the lecture, Heaney returns to the topic of the new title for the play. He writes:

> Putting 'burial' in the title signals to a new audience what the central concern of the play is going to be. But because it is a word that has not yet been entirely divorced from primal reality, because it recalls to us our final destiny as members of the species, it also reminds us, however subliminally, of the solemnity of death, the sacredness of life and the need to allow in every case the essential dignity of the human creature. Wherever you come from, whatever flag is draped on the coffins of your dead, the word 'burial' carries with it something of your *duchas*. It emphasizes, in other words, those 'Instinctive

> Powers of Feeling, Love and Kinship' which authority must respect if it is not to turn callous, powers which will nevertheless also continue to inspire the one whom Cruise O'Brien called 'the trouble-maker from Thebes'. ("Title" 426)

In an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, Heaney describes his state of mind as he translated the play. He writes:

> George Bush's 'war on terror' was on my mind when I started. And the Guantanamo Bay prisoners, a couple of whom were Americans and whom Bush would have regarded much as Creon regarded Polyneices, 'an anti-Theban Theban' etc. Creon's lines got inflected with at least one Bushism, where he says of subversive elements, 'I'll flush 'em out.' And here and there the word 'patriot' is employed with a definite neo-conservative righteousness. (O'Driscoll 422- 423)

O'Driscoll asks about the play's contemporary significance. Heaney responds:

> There's always a balance to be struck. The question is, just how much contemporary allusion should be allowed into a text? In *The Burial*, I felt that on the whole I was keeping to the 'less is more' rule. The problem is that you end up serving not only the text but the publicity machine which the theatre requires. You respond to questions about the play's contemporary relevance, you do programme notes and interviews and the like, so you end up mediating between the otherness of the thing itself and the mood of the moment. (O'Driscoll 423)

Hugh Harkin, in discussing Heaney's *Burial at Thebes*, describes it as the first Irish "anti-war *Antigone*" (303). Harkin quotes Heaney, who describes his reasons for translating the play. Heaney comments, "There was the general worldwide problem where considerations of state security posed serious threats to individual freedom and human rights. Then there was the

obvious parallel between George W. Bush and Creon" (Heaney qtd. in Harkin 303). Harkin also quotes Heaney's programme notes for *The Burial at Thebes*, where Heaney writes about Antigone's "instinctive affirmation of what we might now call a human right" (Heaney qtd. in Harkin 303). Harkin sees Heaney's Creon as more "likeable" and "engaging" than some earlier Irish versions (304). This is necessary, according to Harkin, because Heaney's Antigone is "an angelic creature" and a "rebranded, less volatile, appealing Antigone" (304). Harkin postulates, "It may be that Heaney is endeavouring to change the perception that there is an inherent danger in Antigone's relentless pursuit of justice, that in an already war-torn twenty-first century we should not be discouraging prospective Antigones – for we need more people like her" (304). Harkin fails to suggest a viable alternative for Antigone as she juggles personal safety and a passion for justice for her family.

Harkin comments on Heaney's description in the play of Polyneices as one who "terrorized" Thebes. He writes:

> Heaney's new formulation is interesting, as in the Irish context the competing epithets of 'no common criminal' versus 'terrorist' evoke the campaign for 'prisoner of war' status waged by IRA inmates in British prisons over twenty-five years ago, that led to the hunger strikes and the deaths of ten men. It is possible that Heaney is nudging us towards an identification, certainly psychological rather than political, of Antigone with Bobby Sands, the first hunger striker to die. Equally, of course, the play's immediate political context points to the 'unlawful combatant' prisoners held by the United States at Guantanamo Bay. (Harkin 305)

Harkin ultimately reads Heaney's Antigone as a failure. He posits, "The conditions of our world today appear to have compelled Heaney…to launch this figure in desperate opposition to an

unhappy world order. Yet Heaney's 'heroic' Antigone ultimately is not a credible one" (305). In a certain sense, Heaney is writing beyond the borders of Ireland and seeking to work in a context of globalization. Harkin sees this as a "more tentative" foray "into unmapped territory", resulting in a "one-dimensional Antigone" (306). While it may have been safer for Heaney to keep his Antigone in an Irish context, I admire his efforts to wrestle with the depiction of a passionate protestor in our new globalized context.

VIII. Heaney's *District and Circle*

Heaney's poetry collection *District and Circle* was published in 2006. Michael Parker, in his article "Fallout from the Thunder: Poetry and Politics in Seamus Heaney's *District and Circle*", notes:

> …Heaney's preoccupation in *District and Circle* (2006) with international political events during this 'new age of anxiety', and how he initially approaches these circuitously through a return to originary, boyhood experiences. Such momentous acts as the attacks of 9/ll, the 'War on Terror' and the London bombings are filtered through, juxtaposed with and illuminated by episodes both from the ancient past and Heaney's family history. (369)

Parker notes Heaney's work on "Horace and the Thunder", his contribution to *Irish Writers Against the War*, and his work on *The Burial at Thebes* in the years prior to the publication of *District and Circle*. Parker situates this newer work by arguing, "This preoccupation with a wider politics should not be seen as a fresh departure but rather as the latest phase in a long engagement with issues of artistic responsibility in time of war" ("Fallout" 369). For the purposes of this project, the poems "Horace and the Thunder" (renamed "Anything Can

Happen"), "Out of Shot", and "District and Circle" from *District and Circle* will be analyzed more closely.

The poem "Anything Can Happen" appears in the collection after six poems that reflect Heaney's childhood (13). With "Anything Can Happen", Heaney both appeals to the ancient past and the more recent events of September 11. Heaney makes some edits of the original poem "Horace and the Thunder" in this presentation. Heaney changes the word "things" to "towers", suggesting more directly the towers of the World Trade Center. He also replaces the line "Smoke-furl and boiling ashes darken day" with "Telluric ash and fire-spores boil away". As Parker notes:

> By employing this extremely rare adjective in the last line – 'from the Latin '*tellur*-, *tellus* . . . Of or belonging to the earth' – Heaney acknowledges the language of the original, and so reminds contemporary readers of their simultaneous separation from and closeness to Rome, its culture and worldview. ("Fallout" 374)

Parker also admits that Heaney's reference to Jupiter or "Stropped-beak Fortune" suggests a diversion from focusing on human agency. The attacks of 9/11 are, after all, engineered and executed by "human agents, men convinced that in committing mass murder they were fulfilling their God's will" ("Fallout" 374). Despite this critique, Parker argues that "…what Heaney successfully captures in the poem – one of the two 'tuning forks' of the first part of the collection – is the earth-shattering momentousness of 9/11, and how since 'nothing resettles right'" ("Fallout" 374). The world has changed since 9/11 and Heaney's poetry reflects this.

The next poem in the collection that includes more direct references to the War on Terror is the poem "Out of Shot" (15). Parker notes that the "…continuing reverberations from 9/11 and the subsequent 'war on terror' are caught in the sonnet…, whose half-rhymes underline its

sense of missed harmony" ("Fallout" 374). In the poem, Heaney begins by depicting the speaker in the poem on a warm November Sunday morning inspecting livestock. Heaney's early years on the farm are evoked, along with allusions to his father's work with animals. In a shift that evokes Heaney's work in *North*, the speaker in the poem imagines seeing Vikings on the bay, followed by a meditation on the word *scriptorium* and the safety from attack by sea that storms on the Irish Sea would provide. Parker observes that exposure to a "…24/7 news culture means, however, that the twenty-first-century writer and his readers are constantly subjected to and disorientated by images of violence, emerging 'Out of the blue' like the planes on the morning of 11 September" ("Fallout" 374). The poem shifts again to a memory of the previous night's TV news and the image of a donkey's "staggering walk" wandering "out of shot" (15). The donkey is depicted as having been "loosed from a cart" that had "loosed five mortar shells" in the "bazaar district" (15). Parker suggests that the repetition of "loosed" directs the reader towards Yeats' "The Second Coming", where "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world / The blood-dimmed tide is loosed" (4 – 5). Parker contrasts Heaney's approach with that of Yeats, suggesting that "…Heaney eschews the over-charged, apocalyptic rhetoric of the Yeats piece, choosing to close his sonnet on a subdued, elegiac note" ("Fallout" 374 – 375). The donkey wanders "out of shot", without weaponry (15). In another sense, the donkey is wandering out of the "shot" of the TV news camera, risking the loss of the attention of the media and the world. In a world of 24/7 news coverage, that loss of attention is assured, even for the most harrowing stories of harm. Heaney closes with the "loss" motif, suggesting the donkey is also "Lost to its owner, lost for its sunlit hills" (14). Heaney's focus on the human cost of war is broadened by this reference to the suffering of animals.

Heaney's title poem "District and Circle" is inspired by London's "famous tube train

system" (Parker, "Fallout" 375). Heaney had worked in London's Passport Office during the summer of 1962 after graduating from Queen's and he had travelled regularly on the District Line at that time. Heaney had completed two of the five sections of the poem when the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks in London occurred. The attacks left 52 people dead and more than 700 injured. The poem makes no direct allusion to the attacks, serving instead to depict Heaney's thoughts and experiences as he rode the underground trains.

Dennis O'Driscoll, discussing the poem *District and Circle* with Seamus Heaney, asks "Was any thematic link intended between the title poem of *District and Circle*, the 'separate unit' to which you refer, and the London Underground bombings of 7 July 2005?" (410) Heaney responds:

> The figure who speaks in the five sonnets that make up 'District and Circle' is at a remove from the people among whom he finds himself. This is partly because I'm remembering the other, younger person I was when I first journeyed on a London tube train; somebody who was much less at home, more anxious and 'out of it' than I would come to be later on. (410)

This sense of homelessness and anxiousness is common in the young and is often outgrown by the more mature and confident. In the post 9/11 world, Heaney gestures to a newer problem as public transportation in the United States and England becomes the target of terrorist attacks. The very real physical risk and danger associated with public travel in a time of terror is the new reality of life in the West. Heaney registers another level of awareness as he writes "…of the mythical dimensions of all such journeys underground, into the earth, into the dark…" (O'Driscoll 410). Heaney suggests that the poem is both "direct reportage" and also a space where "the classical echoes were going to be heard, and the underground/underworld/otherworld

parallels come into play" (O'Driscoll 410). Heaney admits to being inspired by the work of Carl Jung as he explores this aspect of the underground journey by train.

The first section of "District and Circle" depicts the music from a "tin whistle" drifting up from underground as the speaker in the poem descends down the stairs to the trains (17). For the young Irish man in London, the tin whistle can represent the sounds of the music of home. As he descends, the speaker is confident that he will once again "find / My watcher on the tiles" (3 – 4), suggesting both the assurance of being truly seen by another and also the modern reality of constant surveillance. The speaker in the poem considers giving a coin to the musician, employing a gun metaphor as he describes how he would "…trigger and untrigger a hot coin" (10). He decides that his coin is not required for "passage", alluding to the Greek myth of the boatman Charon ferrying the dead across the rivers Styx and Acheron. In another gesture to Ireland and some of Heaney's earlier poems, the speaker and the musician communicate with only a nod.

The second section of "District and Circle" employs several biblical allusions. As the speaker describes the escalators "ascending and descending" (16), I am reminded of the story of Jacob from Gen 28.10 – 22. Jacob is on the run from his brother Esau and he camps in the wilderness. He dreams of stairways going from earth to and from heaven, with angels ascending and descending. The speaker describes "passages that flowed / With draughts from cooler tunnels" that make him miss the "light", suggesting a grave or tomb (21 - 22). The speaker struggles to remember the recently observed heat and light of the surface parks, where the "sunners" lay, suggesting a "resurrection scene minutes before / The resurrection" (26 - 27). The speaker also calls the "sunners" (24) the "habitués / Of their garden of delights" (27 – 28). With these images, Heaney is suggesting both the tomb of Jesus in the garden and the Garden of Eden

in Genesis 2.

In section three of "District and Circle", the speaker has travelled "Another level down" (28). His solitary journey down the escalators is over as he alights on the platform and re-enters "the safety of numbers, / A crowd half straggle-ravelled and half strung / Like a human chain" (30 – 32). The commuters are compared to runners getting ready to race as they line up to be "…first through the doors" (34). Heaney employs a powerful image of the crowd who begin by being "Street-loud, then succumbing to herd-quiet…" (35). The speaker pauses a moment to consider the musician with the tin whistle, wondering if he should have given money to the busker. Does this constitute a betrayal of self or of the other? The speaker slips into a religious register, describing his waffling between "unrepentant" and "repentant" as "Always new to me, always familiar" (37 - 38). The speaker is glad to be distracted by the "first tremor" of an arriving train, bracing himself for the "now-or-never whelm" of the crowd rushing to board the train (39 – 40). The tremor can also suggest the tremor of an explosion underground.

The speaker in "District and Circle" boards the train in the fourth section of the poem, "Stepping on to it across the gap" (42). The speaker grabs the "…stubby black roof-wort" as he prepares to brace for departure (44). The speaker is both "…well girded, yet on edge...", suggesting both protection and danger (47). The speaker glimpses a moment between settling in on the train and the departure that he describes as a "…long between-times pause before the budge / And glaze-over" (52 – 53) where movement is restricted and personal distance between passengers must be restored and respected. In the fifth section of the poem, the speaker continues to ride in the train car, and catches a reflection of his "…father's glazed face in my own waning / And craning…" in the windows of the train (58 - 59). The train stops, releases passengers, loads passengers, and carries on with a "…long centrifugal / Haulage of speed

through every dragging socket" (61 - 62). The speaker imagines journeying "…by night and day…Through galleried earth with them" (64 - 65). The speaker differentiates himself from "them" by describing himself as the "only relict / Of all that I belonged to, hurtled forward…" (65 – 66). Parker provides some background on the word "relict", describing it as an "archaism" and explains that

> the noun embodies and voices difference, separation, value. In the fields of biology and geology it refers to a species or structure left over 'from a previous age . . . after the disappearance of related species'; in linguistics it can refer to a verbal 'survival'; amongst its earliest usages, in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Scots, was to denote a reliquary. ("Fallout" 376)

The speaker in the poem returns to the reflections on the windows, describing them as "…mirror-backed / By blasted weeping rock-walls. / Flicker-lit" (67 – 69). Heaney gestures both toward the explosions required to build the tunnels and those explosions that killed and injured the passengers in July of 2005. The term "weeping" suggests the water dripping down the tunnel walls and the tears of grief and mourning shed after the attacks. The term "Flicker-lit" can refer both the flickering lights of the train on the tunnel walls and the flickering of flames lit for vigils for the victims in the aftermath of the attacks. Heaney's poem "District and Circle" speaks on many levels to the possibilities and the dangers of public travel in a post 9/11 world.

Heaney's poems from *District and Circle* and his play *The Burial at Thebes* depict a new moment in the history of the West following the events of 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror. Is the West, with its deep commitment to secular modernity, able to respond appropriately to the growing power of the Muslim world and other non-Western entities? I will briefly trace the

emergence of secular modernity and situate Girard's work within it. I will follow this with a brief consideration of the "apocalyptic". I will then transition into a consideration of Girard's book *Battling to the End* before summarizing what I believe to be Heaney's and Girard's readings of our current crisis.

IX. Girard and Secular Modernity

Australian Anglican priest, professor, and writer Scott Cowdell, in his book *René Girard and Secular Modernity: Christ, Culture, and Crisis*, provides a helpful summary of the emergence of secular modernity in Western culture. Cowdell suggests that until the late Middle Ages in Europe, religion and society were woven together into a theopolitical whole. The subsequent separation of religion and society in Europe was driven by various causes. Cowdell cites the work of late medieval nominalist philosophers like Duns Scotus and William of Ockham whose work emphasized God's sovereignty over and separation from the created world. This understanding allowed for the notion of what Cowdell terms the *saeculum* – a natural order separate from God that could be studied by science. Cowdell also credits changes in education (the rediscovery of Greek thought and the emergence of the universities) and politics (from feudal to monarchy) as early contributors to secularization in Europe. The emergence of the modern notion of the individual along with the emergence of a middle class also aided secularization. The Reformation fractured the unity and power of the Western Christian church and was followed by a growing emphasis on markets and commerce. Cowdell writes, "A public world increasingly understood as the work of voluntary human association, preserved by human know-how, for the pursuit of human well-being, left less room for God and less need for religion" (8). As religion became a private and personal matter in the West, nation-states and

markets grew more powerful and influential.

Cowdell includes Western advances in science, manufacturing, medicine, politics, and the project of European colonialism as elements that contributed to a growing secularism in the West. The work of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud provided additional justification for a modern secular mindset. Personal religious faith in this context became "increasingly fragile as an essentially isolated matter of personal preference with a larger worldview that was secular" (Cowdell 8). Cowdell raises a question about secular modernity as he writes, "what binds together the life of secular modern communities now that the old premodern synthesis is gone and 'formal' religions are increasingly sidelined?" (9) Cowdell writes that an "adequate answer must include nation-states and global markets, programmatic national enmities and grand ideologies, all seen to fulfill formerly religious functions" (9). While this narrative of the emergence of secular modernity in the West is compelling, this narrative is made more tentative by the "resurgence of religion in step with feral manifestations of modernity" (Cowdell 9). Applying this narrative of secular modernity is especially difficult in non-Western countries and cultures where these cultural changes were only partially or never introduced.

Scott Cowdell situates Girard's thought and his work in relation to secular modernity. Girard is not as focused on the personal "loss of faith" (Cowdell 10) in secular modernity as he is on religion's diminishing public role in protecting the community from violence. Girard differentiates between religion as an evolved element of culture and religion as a "countercultural witness" (Cowdell 10). Girard argues that God's separation from the social and the human, a hallmark of secular modernity for some, actually occurred in biblical times. As noted before, Girard rejects secular modernity's "illusion" of the "modern romantic individual", suggesting that modern people are as equally influenced by the power of the mimetic as the people of the

past (Cowdell 11). Girard detects what he believes to be a "resacralizing" occurring in secular modernity, where the West again becomes "functionally religious" (Cowdell 12). This return of the archaic religious in the West, however, lacks the power to manage violence because of Christ. Cowdell refers to Girard's account of history as "essentially apocalyptic" with "greater risks" and "less protection" in secular modernity (12).

Cowdell situates Girard with thinkers like Hans Blumenberg, Max Weber, and Marcel Gauchet who argue that the "ultimate source" of secular modernity is Christianity (12). Girard differs from Blumenberg, Weber and Gauchet in situating the early emergence of the first vestiges of secular modernity in the destruction of the "surrogate victim" mechanism by the gospel of Christ. Girard is not threatened by the "spiritual homelessness" of secular modernity, arguing that "disenchantment is…the price of Christian maturity and closeness to God" (Cowdell 13). Girard notes that enchantment returns in secular modernity as "historical enmities, nation-states, political ideologies, and market forces are invested with transcendent meaning" (Cowdell 13). Girard's political responses to the challenges of secular modernity are conservative or progressive depending on the issue. Girard is particularly concerned about the best way to respond to the rise of terrorist violence among some in the Islamic community. Girard has been willing to link the current crisis of violence with his sense of the apocalyptic.

X. The Apocalypse and the Apocalyptic

The Apocalypse is a Christian idea that has been adopted in the larger Western culture and also imported into Islam. A brief focus on the terms of apocalyptic discourse is in order. The word "apocalypse" is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as: "1. The 'revelation' of the future granted to St. John on the isle of Patmos. The book of the New Testament in which

this is recorded. 2. By extension: Any revelation or disclosure" (*OED Online*). The word "apocalyptic" refers to: "1. a. The Second Coming of Christ and ultimate destruction of the world. 1. b. Of, relating to, or characteristic of a disaster, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, especially on a global scale, cataclysmic" (*OED Online*). In the traditional Christian understanding, the apocalypse represents a hopeful future promised after a time of trials and suffering. In popular culture, the term "apocalypse" has come to be associated with the end of the world through war or other means. There is no sense of hope in this popular understanding of the apocalypse.

The apocalyptic can also represent a literary genre in early Jewish and early Christian writings. This genre is replete with bizarre and troubling imagery, an obsession with numbers, and a need for careful interpretation. The original authors employed the elements of the apocalyptic genre to present historical figures and events in an imaginative context. The apocalyptic is intimately bound, in many cases, with the eschatological. Eschatology is defined as:

> 1: a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind. 2: a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind; specifically : any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment. (*Merriam-Webster*)

The eschatological focus on last things and the end of the world imply a revealing of the hidden forces of history that is referenced in the term "apocalypse". Jean-Pierre Filiu writes, "Apocalypse is, historically, a Christian concept whose etymology refers to the disclosing or revelation of hidden realities from an eschatological perspective" (3). While the understanding of "apocalypse" can vary based on different traditions, the term suggests for many a time of great

distress, disorder, and destruction as the present order is swept away and a new order is revealed. The apocalypse can also represent a hopeful future beyond the crisis of the end.

Examples of apocalyptic texts include portions of the Old Testament books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. The Book of Revelation in the Christian New Testament is for many the ultimate apocalyptic text. A brief sample of Rev 13.1–10 includes this passage:

> The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. Whoever has ears, let them hear. "If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed." This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

Many of the typical elements of the apocalyptic are included in this portion from Revelation: bizarre creatures, numbers of special importance, violence, bloodshed, and references to God and God's people. The purpose of the apocalyptic is clearly spelled out in verse 10; the people of God are encouraged to see beyond the machinations of history, patiently enduring and faithfully waiting for God's ultimate purpose and reality to be revealed. Other popular figures in Revelation include the Woman (Rev 12), Michael the Archangel and his angel armies (Rev 12), Babylon the Great (Rev 18), and the Rider on the White Horse (Rev 19), believed by some interpreters to be Jesus Christ depicted as a powerful, blood-spattered, and victorious warrior. In addition to the numbers 7, 10, and 42, Revelation focuses on the numbers 12, 666, 777, 1000, and 144,000.

These numbers, symbols, and images from the Book of Revelation require a close and careful reading of both the Jewish Scriptures and the historical context of first century Christianity. Important stories and themes from the Jewish Scriptures are evoked by the Book of Revelation and help the text to function as a hypertext. The personal and political struggles and fortunes of the early Christians should also be considered as one reads the Book of Revelation. The text is written in a code that would communicate with those early readers in a special sense. Since that time, the Book of Revelation has been interpreted and applied in a number of historical contexts throughout the history of the church. Misinterpretations have proliferated and continue to abound. This is particularly true today as the numbers, symbols, and images of Revelation continue to play a role in the popular imagination in both Western and Muslim communities.

XI. Girard's *Battling to the End*

René Girard's book *Battling to the End*, published in French in 2007 and in English in 2010, focuses on the nineteenth century text *On War*, written by Prussian military officer and strategist Carl von Clausewitz. Girard's text, presented as a conversation with Benoît Chantre, explores Clausewitz's theories on modern warfare. Girard asserts, "Without realizing it, Clausewitz discovered not only the apocalyptic formula but also the fact that it is bound up with mimetic rivalry" (*Battling* xiii). Clausewitz sensed that emerging modern military conflicts were shifting into a potential "escalation to extremes" that had devastating implications for all involved. This increased danger also applied to civilians in more and more situations. Girard argues that Clausewitz, after glimpsing the apocalyptic potential of his model, retreated to a safer and less extreme presentation of modern war.

Girard, in his introduction to *Battling to the End*, makes numerous references to European history as well as the apocalyptic and apocalyptic texts. *Battling to the End* is presented by Girard as a "study of Germany and French-German relations" over the last two hundred years (ix). Girard examines the impact of mimetic desire between these two great nations of Europe. The mimetic violence that overtakes Germany and France at different points in this relationship serves to ultimately exhaust and nearly destroy these countries. The book serves a second purpose for Girard, gesturing to the possibility of the end to "Europe, the Western world, and the world as a whole" (*Battling* ix). With this second purpose, Girard claims that *Battling to the End* is an "apocalyptic" book. The mimetic violence which overtook and exhausted Germany and France is breaking out on a large scale in many settings all over the world. Girard's largest concern is with the conflict between Islam and the West. He writes, "The West is going to exhaust itself in its fight against Islamic terrorism, which Western arrogance has undeniably kindled" (*Battling* 210). In a world where access to nuclear weapons is growing, this fight to end

between the West and Islam can be truly apocalyptic in the most negative sense of the term.

In *Battling to the End*, Girard pays special attention to the Revelation from the New Testament and its place in Western discourse. With the disempowering of sacrifice in religion, Girard argues that Revelation assumes a certain power. Some will react to the Revelation by "escalating violence" because they will find no "outlet for their mimetic struggles" (Girard, *Battling* 118). Girard asserts that others will face a choice: acknowledge the truth of Christianity, or contribute to violence by rejecting Revelation (*Battling* 103). Girard's suggested solution to this crisis is to focus on Christ and his behavior. Girard writes, "To make the Revelation wholly good, and not threatening at all, humans have only to adopt the behavior recommended by Christ: abstain completely from retaliation, and renounce the escalation to extremes" (*Battling* xix). Girard shares a personal word about his own continual return to the text of Revelation. Girard is strangely comforted by the text's message that "reconciliation is not immanent in the course of history" (*Battling* 49). This may mean that Girard has settled into the idea that reconciliation will not occur. It may also mean that reconciliation will occur, in Girard's thinking, beyond history.

Girard employs references to the Kingdom of God in his discussion of the apocalyptic in *Battling to the End*. Echoing the words of Jesus in the gospels, Girard claims that the "…Kingdom is already here, but human violence will increasingly mask it" (*Battling* 46). The Kingdom of God is "absolute peace" while "relative peace" is less and less possible owing to the "growing empire of violence" (*Battling* 199). Scott Cowdell connects Girard's thoughts about the Kingdom of God to conversion. Cowdell writes, "Girard's consistent theme is that conversion to Christ means the renunciation of our own violent posture toward others. This is the Kingdom of God, Girard says: to give up disputes when mimetic rivalry is beginning to take

over, to help victims, and to refuse all violence" (177). Girard sees the possibility of hope for humanity but only in "relation to an alternative that leaves only the choice between total destruction and realization of the Kingdom" (*Battling* 119). Violence cannot be contained and will not serve to keep the peace. Only a complete renunciation of violence can ensure a peaceful future.

Girard traces in conventional Western Christianity a lost sense of eschatology. This is particularly ironic as it happened while the world moved closer to apocalypse with the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. Girard notes that French Catholics in particular moved away from this awareness at this time. He writes, "Western Christians, French Catholics in particular, stopped talking about the apocalypse just when the abstract became real, when reality began to match the concept" (*Battling* 64). Western Christianity's willful ignorance of the apocalyptic texts from the Synoptic Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, and the Book of Revelation, argues Girard, cannot ultimately silence the voice of God rising through the apocalyptic writings (*Battling* x). The minority of Christians who do focus on these texts read them badly. Girard writes:

> The only Christians who still talk about the apocalypse are fundamentalists, but they have a completely mythological conception of it. They think that the violence at the end of time will come from God himself. They cannot do without a cruel God. Strangely, they do not see that the violence we ourselves are in the process of amassing and that is looming over our own heads is entirely sufficient to trigger the worst. They have no sense of humour. (*Battling* xvi)

Girard correctly surmises that one's sense of the apocalyptic is deeply embedded in one's sense of who God is and what God does. If one's God is an angry and vengeful deity impatiently waiting to punish and destroy the world, the apocalypse is to be feared. If one's God is instead

non-violent and wanting to move humanity past their violence to peace, the apocalypse is to be expected and the waiting for it endured with patience and hope. Girard argues that Christians who seek to hasten a violent apocalypse have failed to understand God in this more peaceful and hopeful way.

Girard, like many before him, sees in the troubling events of our world today, the very real "immanence of the Second Coming" of Christ (*Battling* xi). Girard conflates Christ's return with the apocalypse and argues for its essential originality. Girard writes:

> The absolute new is the Second Coming, in other words, the apocalypse. Christ's triumph will take place in a beyond of which we can describe neither the time nor place. However, the devastation will be all on our side: the apocalyptic texts speak of a war among people, not of a war of God against humans. The apocalypse has to be taken out of fundamentalist hands. (*Battling* 48)

Girard's careful reading of the apocalyptic texts affirms a need to clarify God's role in the apocalypse. In Girard's sense, fundamentalist Christians and other fundamentalist religious adherents who seek to "help" God by actively working to hasten the apocalypse are merely preparing themselves for a grand and disastrous human battle that God neither seeks nor desires. This is particularly relevant in the current War on Terror that the United States of America is struggling to manage.

Girard criticizes George W. Bush, seeing him as "the very caricature of what is lacking in politicians, who are incapable of thinking apocalyptically" (*Battling* 20). By misreading the apocalyptic texts, the attacks of 9/11, and the realities of the Islamic world, Bush and his advisors have foolishly destabilized the Middle East and moved humanity closer to a grand and disastrous final human battle. Bush succeeds, according to Girard, in only one way; he succeeds

in:

> demolishing a form of co-existence more or less maintained between brothers who have always been enemies. The worst is now likely in the Middle East, where Shiites and Sunnis are escalating to extremes. The escalation could just as well take place between Arab countries and the Western world. (*Battling* 20)

The conflict that has destabilized Islam for so long has erupted in new and powerful ways, particularly in the recent events of Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS/ISIL. The battle between the various Shiite, Sunni, and militant Muslim factions, in Girard's reading of the situation, is mimetic and amounts to a "a merciless battle between twins" (*Battling* 41). This mimetic violence acts as a contagion and is spilling over into larger conflicts with Muslims and the West. Girard asserts the Muslims and Westerners, in light of the events of September 11, can also be considered "twins", literally engaging in what could prove to be a battle to the end.

Girard readily admits that he needs to learn more about the history and diversity of Islam. This is particularly important as Muslims are being targeted as scapegoats in Western political discourse. He suggests that learning about the complexities and realities of Islam should be a high priority for politicians and scholars in the West. Girard struggles to situate Islam in his grander theory about mimesis, violence, and religion. Girard writes:

> The work to be done is immense. Personally, I have the impression that this religion has used the Bible as a support to rebuild an archaic religion that is more powerful than all the others. It threatens to become an apocalyptic tool, the new face of escalation to extremes…Archaic religion collapsed in the face of Judeo-Christian revelation, but Islam resists. While Christianity eliminates sacrifice wherever it gains a foothold, Islam seems in many respects to situate itself prior to that rejection. (*Battling* 214)

Islam's resistance to power of Judeo-Christian revelation raises important questions about the nature of Islam and the way violence is contained and managed in Islam. Responding to Islam without understanding these dynamics raises the risk of further jeopardizing the stability, peace and well-being of the whole world. The question of sacrifice in Islam is especially provocative given the central role it plays in Girard's work.

XII. Summary

Irish poet and playwright Seamus Heaney and theorist René Girard share a deep concern and respect for the uniqueness and importance of the events of September 11, 2001. In his interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, Heaney commented, "What happened on September 11 meant that the whole condition of the world was altered henceforth, the spirit of the age had darkened" (O'Driscoll 424). In his interview with Robert Doran, Girard describes 9/11 as "a most unusual, new, and incomparable event" ("Apocalyptic" 20) and as a "kind of rupture, a seminal event" ("Apocalyptic" 21). Girard suggests that 9/11 is a "…new dimension, a new world dimension…a truly global war" ("Apocalyptic" 21). Girard is concerned that the uniqueness of 9/11 has been forgotten and the conflicts that followed have too quickly become the new "normal" in our global context.

As the American government responded to 9/11 with the War on Terror, both Heaney and Girard criticized this response in their work. Heaney's translations of Horace and Sophocles and his own poetry addressed the new realities of the world post 9/11. While Heaney understood the desire for revenge that inspired American military action, he also feared the power and range of this pursuit of vengeance that suggested "apocalyptic" overtones. Heaney also depicted the fear and concern of the average citizen in this new "age of terror". Girard's work in *Battling to*

the End also critiqued American efforts to seek revenge for 9/11. Girard's efforts included a desire to rescue the term "apocalyptic" from Christian fundamentalists and from Muslim fundamentalists who would employ it to justify an "escalation to extremes" that could only end in a cataclysmic final battle. While Heaney and Girard remain skeptical about humanity's ability to resist ongoing cycles of violence and revenge, they do seek to remind their readers that this violence and revenge is a costly enterprise with potentially devastating consequences in a world with the capacity to wage nuclear war. The time to renounce violence has come.

Afterword

This project has been focused on the relationship between religion and violence. This relationship has been examined in the context of Religious Studies, with a focus on religion and literature. As noted in chapter one, the terms "religion", "violence", and "religious violence" can be contested. The term "myth" is also an important one in this study. Working definitions of these terms were provided and efforts were made to situate these terms in modern Western culture and in the current academic study of religion. The work of French historian, literary theorist, and scholar of religion René Girard and the work of Irish poet, professor, and literary translator Seamus Heaney were set side by side. While "religion", "violence", and "religious violence" are discussed and depicted in different ways in Girard and Heaney, each thinker clearly believes that religion, as they understand it, is of at least some historical, political, and even personal importance. Each thinker also believes that violence is, in at least certain expressions and times, deeply connected to religion.

Girard's early work in history and French literature culminated in the ideas he presented in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in the Literary Structure*. Drawing insights into human desire and behavior from the characters in the novels of the great European writers Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Proust, and Stendhal, Girard formulated his theory of mimetic desire. In Girard's understanding, human desires are not unique or autonomous; they are copied from a mediator or model. Where the mediator or model exists apart from the subject, there is little competition between them for the desired object. Where the mediator or model is directly able to block access to the desired object, frustration can build for the subject and conflict can arise between the subject and mediator. Applying these insights to the early work of Irish poet Seamus Heaney raises questions about his early mediators and models. Heaney lists his

important influences: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Patrick Kavanagh, Robert Frost, James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, William Carlos Williams, Ernest Hemingway, and Ted Hughes. Heaney is also influenced by important mentors like Michael McLaverty and Philip Hobsbaum and fellow poets like Michael Longley and Derek Mahon. These influences and mentors provide Heaney with models to emulate as a poet in addition to encouragement and a healthy dose of artistic competition and rivalry.

Girard also provides us, in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, with a theory about the great author and the need for humility in approaching his or her work. Great writing should not be a weapon used against others; great writing should present the death of pride and self as the great author serves the reader in humbleness and truth. While Heaney is tempted to use his poetry as a weapon (see the early poem ”Docker”), his friendships across sectarian religious and political lines helps him to respect the humanity of those who differ from him. Heaney's humble beginnings in rural Northern Ireland help him to resist pride as he develops his voice and craft as a poet.

Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* and Heaney's *North* represent important ideas and theories about “religion”, “violence”, “religious violence”, and the possibility of peace. Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* opens with a focus on human and animal sacrifice in primitive societies and in primitive religions. Girard expands his focus to include the role of the sacrificial or surrogate victim in helping communities in crisis to manage violence. In Girard's view, primitive religions are inextricably linked to the containment of violence. Ironically, primitive societies employ violence in rituals of sacrifice to limit violence from spreading into the larger community and endangering the members of that community. Heaney's *North* employs a focus on Iron Age societies and religious sacrifice in a search for a motif capable of addressing the

violent crisis of Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. P. V. Glob's book *The Bog People*, with its photos of corpses drawn from the bog and its stories of ritualized violence, served as an important inspiration for Heaney. Heaney's depiction of primitive figures, cultures, and violent religious rituals in his poetry provides an interesting comparison point with Girard's work. Girard and Heaney both display sympathy and compassion for the victim of religious ritual violence in their work. Girard works from a personal and critical distance as he studies ritual sacrifice in primitive and archaic societies; Heaney employs references to primitive ritual sacrifice as he and his community struggle with personal losses and griefs through the experiences of sectarian religious and political violence in Northern Ireland. Both men's work suggest that the surrogate victim mechanism, as described by Girard, is no longer functioning to contain violence in our modern world.

In the third chapter, I compared Girard's book *Battling to the End* with Heaney's poetry and translation work that followed the events of 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror. While they agree on the importance of the event that was 9/11, Heaney and Girard differ in their responses to 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror. In the weeks immediately following 9/11, Heaney's work on Horace's *Odes* enables his literary response. Heaney avoids any direct reference to the gods of Western Christianity or Islam, deftly shifting any responsibility and blame from human agents to what might be termed the vagaries of the weather and blind Fate. Girard's early reaction to 9/11 situates the conflict in his theory of mimetic desire. As the War on Terror developed, Heaney continued to work with the classical literature of the Western tradition. His focus on freedom, human rights, human dignity, and justice is admirable and represents a path forward that alludes to the highest ideals of secular modernity. Girard moved in a different direction, engaging with Clausewitz's classic text *On War* and seeking to set the current moment

in the larger history of the West. Girard's evocation of the apocalyptic is timely, and his efforts to remind Western Christianity of its foundations are compelling. Girard predicts that religion will continue to play a major role in the world in the future and its true nature and purpose needs to be reexamined in Western discourse. For both Heaney and Girard, the way forward includes a renunciation of violence and a deep embrace of peace. While both men struggle to resist a deep and abiding pessimism about the future, both men have contributed important work to the ongoing conversation about violence and religion in the twenty-first century.

In closing, Girard locates the resources needed to address the challenges of today in great literature, anthropology, and the person and message of Christ. Great literature can give us insights into our own desires and conflicts with others. Great literature can also provide us with a pathway out of pride into humility. Anthropology provides us with tools to examine human behavior in human communities in primitive, archaic, and modern societies. Girard's anthropology of religion suggests an important role for religion in the past and raises questions about religion's role in the present and the future. Girard sees in the person and message of Christ a compelling model and teaching about the renunciation of violence and the embrace of peace. Girard is particularly concerned that the post-Christian West return to these resources of its past. Heaney, in contrast, locates the resources needed to address the challenges of today in Western literature and the ideals of secular modernity. Heaney believes that a poetry adequate to meet our current dilemma is a possibility. Heaney's work within the tradition of Irish literature and his work within the larger tradition of British and Western literature is a compelling addition to this great "word-hoard". Heaney's work in translation, including works by Sophocles, Horace, the *Beowulf* poet, and modern Eastern European poets (not addressed in this project) highlight his belief in the power of great art to speak through the centuries and across different

cultures. Heaney's depictions of violence are balanced by depictions of those who strive for truth, justice, human rights, and human dignity. Cycles of revenge can be broken; tyranny can be resisted. The poet can stand alongside the human community in an effort to use the resources of language to point to a better, more peaceful, and more just world.

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