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'THE PLOUGH TURNED ROUND': EARTH IMAGERY IN THE POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY

by

LUBA SLABYJ

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled 'THE PLOUGH TURNED ROUND': EARTH IMAGERY IN THE POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY submitted by LUBA SLABYJ in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

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Abstract

Place and particularly the element of earth are of fundamental importance to Seamus Heaney and have in fact shaped his earliest and on-going views of himself, his art, his community and the natural world, all of which constitute the chief themes of his poetry. For this reason, earth and earth-related imagery plays a central role in both literally and symbolically expressing Heaney's essential poetic vision, which sees not only the individual artist, his community and his environment, but past, present and future as closely, even organically, related. Most broadly, it serves as an icon of origin, development and continuity, as these reveal themselves in the three basic thematic dimensions of Heaney's work. Furthermore, in association with circular and linear imagery, earth imagery expresses Heaney's perception of a broad, earth-based and -centred pattern that is simultaneously cyclical and developmental in its nature. While often celebratory, this imagery also frequently reflects the various ambivalences in Heaney's treatment of the relationships between artist and community and continuity and progress or, more generally, between territorial rootedness and transcendence. At times of greatest ambivalence, caused primarily by the pressures of the Northern Irish Troubles, Heaney attempts to abandon his use of earth imagery and his cyclical/developmental vision altogether. However, having made such an attempt, he eventually returns to an altered but still essentially organic and pattern-oriented form of his earliest poetic vision.

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I. Introduction

Since his first published collection, Death of a Naturalist (1966), Seamus Heaney's poetry has revealed a fascination with the Irish landscape and the element of earth so prevalent as to make it, along with his distinctive use of language, a trademark for the poet and his work. In a 1980 anthology of Irish writing, for instance, the accompanying photograph to a selection of Heaney's poems presents the poet standing in the foreground of a vast stretch of level land while in the background an older man, bent over and looking down, digs a furrow in the soil, this furrow serving as the only visual link between the two figures (Carpenter and Fallon 50).

The scene is at once vividly emblematic not only of Heaney's preoccupation with the earth--and especially with the activity of digging--but of his direct inheritance of this preoccupation from his rural Irish ancestors. As such, it might in retrospect reinforce a view of the poet and his work that was in fact held by many of his critics in the early stages of his career: that is, a view of Heaney as a limited and even provincial 'poet of the soil', albeit a talented one, and of his work as the largely anecdotal evocations of an upbringing in rural Northern Ireland. In 1969, for instance, Clive James commented, "The subject is loud with the slap of the spade and sour with the stink of turned earth. Close to the vest, close to the bone, close to the soil. We have learnt already not to look to him for the expansive gesture." And even the more favourably disposed Christopher Ricks in the same year wrote, "It is the man's second volume which fixes him. . . . So three years after his Death of a Naturalist, Seamus Heaney is going to have to reconcile himself to the fact that Door into the Dark will consolidate

him as the poet of muddy-booted blackberry-picking" (900). Two years previously, Jon Silkin had offered a more insightful interpretation of this early work in arguing the presence of an overt concern on Heaney's part with his departure from the traditional, rural ways of his ancestors and his assumption of a new role as poet in such poems as "Digging" and "Follower" (69-70); but even this broader perspective falls short of a full and proper understanding of Heaney's poetry in general and of his use of earth imagery in particular, as many later critics have realized.[1]

This enlarged critical perspective on the significance of Heaney's poetry, however, has arisen more out of a general perception of a growth in his thematic concerns and technique than out of any recognition or admission of there having already been more to the 'earthiness' of his earlier poetry than was initially credited. Furthermore, this critical tendency to measure the significance of Heaney's poetry and his use of earth imagery strictly by their development in his later collections has been somewhat undercut by the fact that critics have had difficulty agreeing upon the precise nature and implications of this development. Tony Curtis, for example, argues that the basic trend in Heaney's poetry consists of his progressive movement away from the purely personal concerns of his two early collections (which Curtis rather limitedly perceives as dealing "with the poet's childhood in rural Ireland and his growing sense of detachment from his heritage" [80]) toward a greater concern with the community surrounding him, and particularly with Irish history--a movement in which the "landscape" of his poetry comes more

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[1] These include Anthony Bradley, Robert Buttel, Mark Patrick Hederman and many others who have noted the wide-ranging significance of Heaney's earth imagery.

and more to be "viewed in strictly political terms" (83) and in which Heaney himself comes to project "a more social voice" (a phrase which Curtis quotes from Heaney's 1979 interview with James Randall [88]). Andrew Waterman, on the other hand, perceives Heaney's artistic growth as exhibiting a pattern converse to that outlined by Curtis: in his view, Heaney gradually moves away from a rootedness in the soil of his rural community (characterized, he argues, by a limited seeking out of "traditional" "sanctions" [42] for his poetry) toward a "growing understanding of what full engagement with the 'earth' of language and the experience it stores and mediates entails" (42). This movement, as the poet's understanding develops, becomes a "spiritual voyage into solitude" (46), stemming from his gradual recognition "that a poet's vision if it is to achieve fully authentic realisation must challenge the confines of that which nourishes it" (42). According to this interpretation, then, Heaney's exploration of the communal or social dimensions of the landscape fostering his poetry brings him to a recognition of their restrictive influence on his work and finally results in his breaking free of them "in order to assert a powerful individual vision" (46) through, among other things, a more purely personal and poetic use of earth imagery. Neither critic pays much attention to the two early collections, preferring, in Waterman's case, to see them as a "limited achievement" (42), and in Curtis' case, as simple preparation for Heaney's later work; and perhaps it is their failure to do so, along with their failure to look at the later collections up to and including Field Work more closely and objectively,[2] that leads them to misconstrue the actual development of

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[2] Both critics seem intent, for their own reasons, on holding Heaney up as an exemplar to other Irish or British poets: Curtis' belief that

Heaney's poetry, which in fact takes the form of an increasingly conscious dialogue between the personal and social content of his poetry, rather than a growth of one element at the expense of the other.

This interplay of the personal and social is particularly noticeable in Heaney's metaphorical use of earth and earth-related imagery. The latter includes the earth's various living and non-living subterranean contents--for example, soil-dwelling animals, corpses and artefacts--as well as its outward manifestation in the form of landscape, both local and more broadly geographic. It also includes earth-related forces and processes such as gravity and eruption, and the human activities of digging and drilling, planting and harvesting, as well as the various implements with which these are carried out. By far the most important earth-related imagery is that of subterranean water, especially in the form of wells, springs and bogs. (While water is obviously a separate element and can thus possibly be seen as the basis for a completely different form of imagery in Heaney's poetry, it is often presented by him as being contained within and interacting with the earth and therefore must be examined in any discussion of his use of earth imagery.) The earth, and all that Heaney associates it with, in fact stands throughout his work as a primary symbol of his own self, his poetry, and the human environment that has shaped and continues to

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[2](cont'd) "writers in the British Isles have to meet the challenge of a social and political climate that has been breaking down, through the last decade" (79) leads him to argue, in a somewhat overstated fashion, that Heaney's poetic growth takes the form of a "slow process of politicisation" (84) or "com[ing] out" (88) of the Republican closet; and the general, underlying assumption of Waterman's article that "Irish writers on the whole, whatever they sometimes like to pretend about a tradition of alienation . . . have been too apt in fact cosily to affirm solidarities" (46) leads him consciously to seek, in Heaney's work, an example of the artist's escape "from the complacency and parochial myopia of most other 'Ulster poetry'" (47).

influence both. In its broadest and most basic function, it serves as an icon of origin and development, with its numerous sub-symbols ranging (sometimes simultaneously) in application from the individual and personal to the social and historical. In his first two volumes, for instance, Heaney not only uses earth and earth-related imagery as a metaphor for self, growth of self, self-exploration and poetic self-expression, but also associates the earth, both literally and figuratively, with social aspects and concepts of origin and development--history and myth, nationality, culture, language, tradition and continuity--which, while he recognizes their direct bearing on himself and his poetry, he also explores in a less strictly personal way. Heaney also uses the earth as a means of figuratively representing the various human impulses--mnemonic, religious, emotional and sexual, for example--that shape and direct both the individual self and the larger community. There is, moreover, a third and more broadly universal symbolic dimension to Heaney's use of earth imagery in these two early collections that can be seen as encompassing both the personal and social ones: namely, his association of the soil with natural, and even supernatural, life forces, and with extra-human reality in general.

Unifying these various dimensions and their associated ideas is Heaney's perception of a broader pattern, which in fact forms the most basic foundation of his poetic vision. According to this pattern, which Heaney clearly derives from the natural, personal and social patterns of continuity and development he perceives, past, present and future are bound to one another--as are the individual, the community and the extra-human realm--through forward- or outward-moving but essentially unchanging cycles. Grounding these cycles is the Irish territory itself,

which in natural, personal and cultural terms serves both as an individual part of the pattern and as its physical or sacred centre. The most common expressions of this overall pattern are either combined images of earth-related circularity and linearity or the more unified image of the expanding circle. So pervasive are this broad idea of pattern and its associated imagery in Heaney's work that they in fact justify a general description of his poetic vision as earth-based and cyclical/developmental (an admittedly cumbersome phrase, but the only one adequate to this discussion).

Having been established in the early poetry, the different dimensions of Heaney's earth imagery and the basic pattern unifying them continue to operate and develop through Heaney's later poetry. And while the individual components of Heaney's earth-based vision often work together harmoniously in both the early and later poetry, they also frequently exert their own individual and exclusive forces on Heaney's imagination, so that his poetic vision is at different times (and sometimes within a single poem) pulled in different directions: for example, toward self, toward community, or toward that which lies beyond, even while encompassing, both. The resulting tensions are further intensified by an occasional ambivalence in Heaney's attitude toward himself, his work and the natural and cultural environment surrounding him--an ambivalence which he also figuratively expresses by means of earth imagery. For instance, as early as Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark, Heaney presents the earth as both malevolent and benevolent, 'other' and intimate, destroyer and preserver, infector and healer, divider and reconciler, prison and release. Some of the parallels between these dualities in Heaney's earth imagery and his

ambivalent perception of himself and his natural and social environment are clear enough. Heaney, for instance, recognizes and often explores the existence, beneath his generally reverential and celebratory view of life, of a dark and potentially destructive aspect to his psyche. Similarly, he recognizes the obvious fact that the natural world, either in his rural childhood community or elsewhere, is not a purely benevolent or nurturing one. And in his representation of his community,[1] he reveals not only the stable, fostering qualities that have inspired much of his poetry, but the darker psychological undercurrents responsible for its long-standing factionalism and more recent embroilment in sectarian violence--which currents have also had a decided, but less benevolent, influence on his poetry by generating and imposing upon him a degree of political and other pressure that has caused him to seek (although not to the extent argued by Waterman) an escape from it. Similar parallels are evident in Heaney's presentation of a larger, earth-based pattern, which at its best offers the possiblity of simultaneous continuity and progress but at its most ambivalent questions, among other things, this very possibility itself and even sees the overall pattern as more restrictive than unifying.

Also important are the parallels between the dualities in Heaney's earth imagery and his own complex and ambivalent understanding of his functions as an artist. According to this understanding, the poet is both a solitary figure--one whose sometimes painful search for self-knowledge and individual authority and whose dedication to his art often exclude and perhaps therefore threaten others--and a servant of

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[1] This community can be thought to include all of Ulster, and even all of Ireland, although the smaller community of Mossbawn, Co. Derry, in which he spent his early childhood, features most prominently in his early work.

his community, a gifted 'maker'[4] who not only offers to the members of his society, in the form of his poetry, "beautiful things that are comforting" (qtd. in Clines 104) and actively seeks to explore, preserve or heal, and express, his community's consciousness, but who on occasion also feels the urge to speak unwelcome truths to his community and thereby "wreck that comfort" (Clines 104) which he has created. Furthermore, Heaney's interest in a broader, not strictly human reality can be seen as giving rise to his belief that the poet, "Like all true artists . . . perceives [himself] as a servant of reality, an instrument of processes that are universal" ("The Nerves in Leaf" 19).[5] Heaney's self-perceived role as the servant of this complex reality is inevitably marked by ambivalence.

While Heaney strives to synthesize these frequently conflicting aspects of his poetic vision, the inevitable tensions between them at times--particularly in North (1975)--develop into a noticeable strain, especially between the competing claims of his perceived personal and social responsibilities within the context of the Northern Irish Troubles. At these points, the ambivalence that has already marked Heaney's attitude toward himself and his community escalates into an emotional complex of guilt and resentment accompanied by self-criticism, even self-condemnation, and satiric attacks on the Ulster mentality. This strain, however, never causes an actual unravelling because, despite his recognition of the contradictory pulls exerted on his poetic

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[4] Heaney offers this Greek root-meaning of 'poet' on a number of occasions, including his essay "The Poetry of John Hewitt" (Pre 207) and his interviews with Patrick Garland and Robert Druce (24).

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[5] This statement is taken somewhat out of context, since Heaney is discussing the work of another artist; however, its general nature permits it to be applied to his understanding of his own function as poet.

vision by his personal and social concerns, Heaney clearly believes in their fundamental interrelatedness and mutual dependence, as well as in their interplay with a larger, patterned reality. In accordance with this belief, a poet, in Heaney's view, must seek to validate himself by gaining self understanding and authority before he can validate (by witnessing and revealing) reality and the community's experience of it; however, it is only in performing these functions--in acting as the servant of reality and his community--that he can hope for the full validation of himself and his art. This much is evident in a remark he makes to Catherine McKeen:

> ... I do believe that poetry is witness to a reality that is mysteriously lodged with us. On the other hand, I believe that in order to reveal that common, shared reality, the poet has to trust himself a lot. And there's a danger in that because one can be tempted toward indulgence, or egotism, or irrelevance. Poetry always has to keep one eye open toward the world and the people beyond the poem, saying, 'It's got nothing to do with me. It's this.' On the other hand, the poet has an equal compulsion to say 'But, it only springs out of me.' So you're moving in two directions at once with that center being pulled. A writer's not worth his salt unless it's springing from some internal conviction, some internal pursuit, some arrogant centering within himself. But the arrogance is worthless unless it's in the service of something beyond the self. (504)

This comment, made in 1981, perhaps reveals a more conscious understanding of the complexities of his poetic role than Heaney would have been able to articulate at the beginning of his career. However, the basic understanding itself can be seen to be operating, at least at an intuitive level (and often at a more fully conscious one), in many of his earliest poems. And for this reason in particular, an examination of Heaney's use of earth and earth-related imagery proves an effective means of uncovering his most fundamental views of himself, his environment and his poetry, since it is primarily through this imagery that Heaney works out and expresses these views.

The probable reasons for this primacy of earth imagery (rather than a more discursive technique) as a means of formulating and expressing Heaney's early understanding of his art are numerous and some of them obvious. His close proximity to the soil throughout his childhood years, for instance, has had the understandable effect of permeating his entire personal and poetic sensibility[6], as is evident in the unusually high incidence of earth references and analogies in his discussions of his own and other writers' work.[7] Furthermore, the largely inarticulate[8] and even deliberately tight-lipped atmosphere of his childhood--attributable both to Heaney's paternal side of the family's "belief in the authenticity of the unspoken" (qtd. in Clines 104) and to tensions within his mixed, Catholic and Protestant community[9]--seems to have encouraged his decidedly and self-acknowledged[10] intuitive mode of understanding. And this mode of understanding, particularly when coupled with Heaney's sign-oriented and

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[6] Heaney's essay "Mossbawn" (Pre 17-27) reveals, in remarkably evocative language, the extent to which his sensibility was shaped by the landscape of his childhood community.

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[7] These references and analogies are too numerous to catalogue with any completeness, but they appear as early as 1968, with Heaney's description of Theodore Roethke's best poems as "canticles to the earth" (Pre 193) and as recently as 1987, with his essay on Auden, in which he remarks that the Anglo-Saxon metre and diction of the poet's early work "were pulled like a harrow against the natural slope of social speech and iambic lyric" ("Sounding Auden" 17).

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[8] For an interesting and useful discussion of the theme of inarticulacy in Heaney's early collections, see Chapter 2 of Blake Morrison's full-length study of the poet.

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[9] In his interview with Monie Begley, Heaney remarks, ". . . you grew up in an atmosphere that was full of the silent awarenesses of the division" (161).

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[10] "I always go by the sixth sense, by intuition . . ." (Walsh).

essentially religious way of interpreting his childhood environment,[11] might be seen as logically giving rise to his later, marked preference for the image as a means of poetic expression.

Whatever the reasons for this preference (and these will be discussed futher), Heaney's earth imagery plays a central role in explaining his earliest and on-going views of himself, his environment and his art. Therefore, rather than being used as the basis for a criticism or even outright dismissal of Heaney's early poetry as insufficiently intellectual and limited to mere anecdote and evocation--an unhelpful exercise that a number of his earlier critics have engaged in[12]--it should be taken up as a means of exploring the basis of his poetic vision--particularly since the image, and especially earth imagery, never ceases to be an integral symbolic element in his poetry.[13]

The following chapters will attempt to outline and explain, through an examination of Heaney's first four collections, the range of

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[11] Along with "Mossbawn", Heaney's essay "The Poet as a Christian" reveals the importance of natural and ritual signs in his upbringing; particularly noteworthy is his remark that "The landscape was sacramental, a system of signs that called automatically upon systems of thinking and feeling" (604).

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[12] These include Gerald Burns, Peter Dale, David Galler, and Robin Skelton.

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[13] In his 1979 interview with Robert Druce, Heaney remarks,

> As Yeats said, I seek an image, not an idea. I think I have to, in some ways, be rolling an image under my feet. There has to be an original growth point, a nub of some kind which has a field of force around it that draws all our thinking into it. And the poems proceed not so much by force of argument and intellection and intention, as by some sort of intuitive gathering up or spreading out.

His most recent volume, The Haw Lantern (1987), amply demonstrates the continuing importance of earth imagery as "an original growth point" for thought in his poetry.

symbolic significance inherent in Heaney's use of earth imagery, and particularly the ways in which the development of this imagery reflects not only Heaney's growing awareness of the interrelated personal, social, and extra-human thematic dimensions of his art but his increasing consciousness of their often conflicting demands on his poetic vision. Chapter II, which deals with Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark, will discuss the individual symbolic functions of Heaney's earth imagery as they are established in his early work, and point out the ways in which these combine to form both an overall pattern and an overall expression of Heaney's earliest understanding of his role as poet. For this reason, the chapter is largely inductive in structure, reserving its most comprehensive statements about Heaney's earth-based poetic vision for last. The third chapter, which deals with Wintering Out (1972) and North, will, by focusing on the religious and political aspects of Heaney's work, discuss more directly and exclusively the ways in which earth imagery increasingly reflects the paradoxical division-within-unity of the personal and communal dimensions of Heaney's work. Heaney's most recent collections are beyond the scope of this discussion; however, the conclusion will, by providing a very brief and general summary of the developments in Heaney's earth imagery to date, attempt to point the way toward a continuing examination of his poetry along the lines established here.

II. Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark

By virtue of its subject matter and placement at the beginning of Death of a Naturalist, the poem "Digging" (13-14) holds the status of a 'poet's manifesto', in which Heaney's final resolution to "dig" (31) with his pen constitutes a declaration of his future intention and, to a large extent, of his future method as well. The poem is also the launching point for Heaney's prose version of a poet's manifesto, his essay "Feeling into Words," written ten years later[1] (1974), in which he states that "'Digging' . . . was . . . the first poem I wrote where I thought my feelings had got into words, or to put it more accurately, where I thought my feel had got into words" (Pre 41). So, it is only appropriate that "Digging", along with a number of closely related poems in the first two collections, should also serve as a starting point for a discussion of Heaney's poetry and his use of earth imagery.

The poem appears simple enough--"a big, coarse-grained navvy of a poem," Heaney has called it (Pre 43)--and what is most obvious about it is that it exhibits Heaney's earliest poetic preoccupation with the earth as both literal subject matter and symbolic emblem. The soil, of course, is not itself the central focus of the poem, which is largely Heaney's attempt to express symbolically a cyclical but developmental continuity between the agricultural labours of his father and grandfather and his own newly-taken-up poet's trade. It is however, the medium in which Heaney represents his forefathers toiling, and, moreover, it is the symbolic medium in which Heaney represents himself as working. Not only does he take up the earth as the literal subject matter of his poetry, but as his spade/pen analogy clearly suggests, he

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[1] According to Heaney, "Digging" was written in the summer of 1964 (Pre 41).

already views his poetry as the process and product of his labours in another kind of soil. This is the soil of experience, thoughts, emotions and words, which, within the field of the page, he attempts to work through as systematically and skilfully in his search for poetic fuel and produce as his father and grandfather once cut turf and dug potatoes.[2]

Heaney's figurative and fundamentally organic view of his poetry is strikingly reinforced by his versification, particularly in the last three stanzas of the poem, where many of his line endings and turns mime the digging actions he represents and hence give his poetry a digging action of its own. For instance, in the lines "Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods / Over his shoulder, going down and down / For the good turf. Digging" (22-24), the line break between "heaving sods" and "Over his shoulder" suggests the action itself, as does the break between "going down and down" and "For the good turf." Even Heaney's placement of the sentence consisting of the one word "Digging" at the very bottom and end of this stanza suggests that the essence of his grandfather's actions, as encapsulated in this one word, has been arrived at through the downward movement of the previous lines. The same effect has also been achieved, although less emphatically, at the bottoms of the second and third stanzas, describing Heaney's father's digging, which end or nearly end with the phrases "My father, digging" (5) and "Where he was digging" (9). Likewise, in the lines "The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap / Of soggy peat, the curt

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[2] Heaney later more fully articulates this view of his poetry as a kind of digging in a number of different essays and interviews, but most noteworthily in "Feeling into Words", where his description of poetry as "a dig for finds that end up being plants" (41) carries an archaeological sense as well as this original, agricultural one.

cuts of an edge / Through living roots awaken in my head" (25-27), the break between "edge" and "through" mimics the cutting action of the spade. And finally, the last lines of the poem, "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it" (29-31), which form a significant variation on the first two lines, "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests; snug as a gun," are broken down from two lines into three, progressively narrowing and downward-moving ones, with the final and narrowest line of the poem declaring the essence of Heaney's future writing, which will be a sort of 'digging.' This arrival at the essence of his own work through the gradual narrowing of the previous lines of course echoes the effects he has previously created in lines 5, 9 and 24, and thereby both strengthens the symbolic connection between his father's and grandfather's work and his own, and adds resonance to the poem's final line.

Heaney's mimetic linking of his poetry to the soil-based activities of his father and grandfather is, moreover, heightened by the alliterative onomatopoeia of such phrases as "the squelch and slap / Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge," the latter which phrase also demonstrates the way in which his rhythms are in this poem more keyed to imitation of the digging process than to any set metrical scheme, of which there is none. Other examples of such mimetic rhythm include the line "Stooping in rhythm through potato drills" (8) and the last four and a half lines of the sixth stanza, "He straightened up / To drink it, then fell to right away / Nicking and slicing neatly" and so on (20-24), whose respectively laboured and bobbing rhythms effectively imitate their content.

This technique of using prosodic and other stylistic devices to mime earth-related processes, specific earth images, or the general 'digging' essence of Heaney's own poetry recurs frequently in his work. For instance, in "Follower" (DN 24-25), Heaney again uses the line turn mimetically, but this time to imitate the ploughing process: "the sweating team turned round / And back into the land" (9-10). The gesture is, of course, a skilful playing upon the double notion of 'verse' as both a line of poetry and the turn made by a ploughman at the end of a furrow (both senses stemming from the Latin word 'verto', meaning 'to turn').[3] And in "Bann Clay" (DD 53-54) and "Bogland" (DD 55-56), Heaney uses his versification in a broader imitation of his poetry's 'digging' action by forming his stanzas into thinner quatrains or sestets--what he later describes, when discussing the poems of Wintering Out and North, as "drills or augers for turning in . . . narrow and long and deep" (Randall 16).

However, more important than such devices is the actual subject matter of "Digging". This is at once rural, traditional, personal, familial, artistic and, of course, strongly earth-related; and in its formulation of some of Heaney's earliest and most basic thematic concerns, it serves as prototypical material for a number of similar poems in the first two collections--particularly "Personal Helicon" (DN 57), "Follower," "The Diviner" (DN 36) and "Thatcher" (DD 20)--and for much of Heaney's later poetry as well. Furthermore, an examination of this subject matter reveals some of the bases of Heaney's earliest and primarily organic understanding of the processes and functions of his poetry.

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[3] Heaney later dwells on this double meaning of 'verse' in his discussion of Wordsworth, "The Makings of a Music" (Pre 65).

The most important idea presented through this subject matter, and through the controlling image of digging, is that of cyclical but developmental continuity between past, present and future. In "Digging," and in many other poems that follow it, this continuity emerges in a basic two-step process. First, a literal pattern of recurring action, usually rooted in some earth-related activity, is perceived by Heaney through the processes of memory, intuition or intellection. Then, usually at a point where literal continuity becomes difficult or impossible to perceive, the essence of this literal pattern is re-perceived and re-expressed as part of a greater symbolic pattern of continuity. This process is not, of course, restricted to the confines of the poem, which is the finished product of the process, but takes place prior to its writing. For instance, in "Digging" Heaney has already perceived a symbolic connection between his forefathers' work and his own, and thus the poem stylistically demonstrates the metaphorical digging action of his poetry before he actually 'forms' his resolution to "dig" with his pen. However, even as a finished product, the poem parallels the two-step process described. At the outset of the poem, Heaney begins to perceive, through the processes of memory, a literal pattern of recurring action in his past, a familial tradition whereby Heaney's father has inherited from his father the agricultural activity of digging. This much seems to be triggered naturally in lines five and six by his gazing at his father working in the flowerbeds outside his window, and continues through to the seventh stanza. Then, at approximately the point where Heaney admits that he has "no spade to follow" (28) his father and grandfather, he perceives another and higher symbolic level at which the pattern persists, and expresses this new

symbolic continuity by metaphorically transferring the digging action of his forefathers' spades to his pen: "I'll dig with it" (31). The same process occurs in "Personal Helicon" (also something of a poet's manifesto), where Heaney again, through the processes of memory, perceives a literal pattern of recurring and earth-related action in his past--this time, his childhood gazing into wells--and then, at the point at which literal continuity seemingly breaks down, re-perceives it as part of a broader symbolic continuity between his childhood pursuits and his more mature activity of writing poetry:

> Now to pry into roots, to finger slime,
> To stare big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
> Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
> To see myself, to set the darkness echoing. (17-20)

In both cases, the symbolic connections between past and present, because of Heaney's self-conscious assertion of them and because of his simultaneous acknowledgement of a literal discontinuity between his rural origins and his work as a poet, might very well seem forced or contrived--attempts to make connections where none exist. This allegation has in fact been made against "Digging" by more than one critic for reasons that will, along with Heaney's acknowledgement of a literal discontinuity between his past and present, be discussed later. However, the essential validity of the connections Heaney seeks to express is more than apparent in a number of related ways. First, the dominance of past earth-related experience in these poems--its role as their primary source of inspiration, as the title "Personal Helicon" suggests--in itself points to the existence of a psychological and imaginative continuity between Heaney's origins and his poetry. Secondly, and as Catherine McKeen in part suggests, the metaphors of digging and well-gazing are appropriate figurative expressions of the

exploratory and contemplative aspects of Heaney's poetry and of poetry in general (504). And thirdly, these metaphors effectively capture the essence of the relationship between the exploratory and contemplative actions of Heaney's poetry and the subject matter upon which they work: "Digging" is in fact "the curt cuts" of Heaney's poetry "through [the] living roots" of the past experience informing this poetry, just as "Personal Helicon" constitutes his gazing down or, more precisely, backward into the earliest experiential sources of his poetic inspiration.

This essential symbolic and developmental continuity of experience and action is in both poems underlined by a similar continuity of attitude. In "Personal Helicon," it is the same basic impulse to explore the unknown, the mysterious, the submerged, either within or beyond oneself, in some attempt to gain understanding or at least affirm one's identity, that lies behind both Heaney's childhood well-gazing and his adult writing of poetry. In "Digging" the continuity of attitude between Heaney's forefathers and himself is less conspicuous because Heaney presents these men as 'strong, silent types.' However, implicit in their concentration on their digging is a regard for their work as a craft or skill and a sense of purpose that might be described as a finely developed work ethic,[4] and which has the effect of investing both the men and their work with an authority that reinforces their obvious physical power and sets them apart from others: "My grandfather cut more turf in a day / Than any other man on Toner's bog" (18-19). This earth-based ethic and an accompanying sense of the authority derived

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[4] George Brinton uses this familiar phrase (33) in his discussion of such poems as "The Forge" and "Thatcher," but it is also clearly applicable in the case of this earlier poem.

from it are in turn implicitly demonstrated by Heaney in his resolution to "dig" with his pen. Furthermore, they continue to be demonstrated by him with regard not only to his own poetry but to the poetic art in general. For instance, in the final stanza of "Follower," Heaney implicitly presents himself as a newer, poetic equivalent of his father the ploughman, who now ironically follows in his footsteps as Heaney once followed in his--the change symbolizing, among other things, a shift in authority between the two. In "Bann Clay," he compares himself to another set of diggers in his "labour[ing] / Towards" the title subject matter of the poem (23-24). And in his 1969 essay "The Poetry of John Hewitt," he writes appreciatively of Hewitt's "emphasis on the poet as maker, [his] concern for professional standards in the handling of form, [his] distrust of freedom and extravagance that has not been earned by toil within the traditional modes" (Pre 207). Heaney's association of digging with the idea of authority is in fact so strong that it continues to inform his understanding of the poetic process and gives rise to his even more organic figurative view of the earth itself as a source of authority, into which the poet, via his poems, sends down roots or feelers. In discussing the creative process with Seamus Deane in 1977, for instance, Heaney remarks, "The all-important thing here is the emerging authority which one senses in the poem being written, when you recognize that there are elements in the poem which are . . . capillaries sucking the whole of the earth" ("Unhappy and at Home" 67).

There seems, moreover, to be a subtler carry-over of attitude, perhaps not so much from Heaney's forefathers themselves (although this is a possibility) as from Heaney's own celebration of their digging as a special, inherited talent--"By God, the old man could handle a spade. /

"Just like his old man" (15-16) to his view of his own poetic 'digging' as such a talent or gift. This view is not overt in "Digging," but it becomes more apparent in such poems as "The Diviner" and "Thatcher," where the implicit comparisons between the special gifts of these rural tradesmen and the poet's gift are relatively obvious and once more expressed through earth-related imagery. In "Thatcher," for instance, Heaney's descriptions of the thatcher testing his hazel and willow rods for strength (6-7), "warming up" all morning (8), and then "pinning down his world, handfull by handful" (12), to leave the "sods above the rafters" (13) upon which he has lain for days "gaping at his Midas touch" (16) apply equally well to his own careful, time-consuming and Midas like flexing and stitching together of words, his 'pinning down of his world' in the writing of his poetry--especially since he also, in a symbolic sense, works with the 'sod' of his earth-based origins beneath him.[5] And more importantly, in "The Diviner," the central figure, whose talent for locating the "secret stations" (8) of springs is earth-directed and earth-dependent, at once symbolizes both the poet as "Vates" or diviner[5] and his bestowed or innate technique for sensing the material of his poetry and its hidden meaning, as opposed to his learned and 'earned' acquisition of poetic craft.[•] In all of these poems, the special, earth-affiliated talent or gift, like the work ethic, endows its possessor with a degree of authority that sets him apart from others. This idea is most explicitly presented in "The Diviner," where, in the third stanza, the diviner's hazel wand does not perform its

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[5] "As Sir Philip Sidney notes in his Apologie for Poetry: 'Among the Romans a Poet was called Vates, which is as much as a Diviner . . .'" (Pre 48).

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[•] See Heaney's discussion of "The Diviner" and technique versus craft in "Feeling into Words" (Pre 47-48).

function in the hands of the bystanders until he himself grips their wrists.

Heaney's view of his poetry not only as a form of labour but as a gift, and particularly a familial, soil-derived and authority investing one, stems in part from a long standing family superstition, according to which members of the Heaney clan are supposedly able to endow the sand of a particular area in northern County Derry with magical qualities simply by lifting it (Pre 21). More than a quaint folkloric coincidence, this belief in an earth-related supernatural force investing his talent continues to inform Heaney's view of his poetry, and even forms part of the basis of a semi-pagan, semi-Christian attitude toward it that ties into his inherited work ethic. This seems to be the case, at any rate, when in his 1973 interview with Harriet Cooke he remarks that he often fears his poetic abilities "could be taken away, I can't will them," and when in his 1979 interview with John Haffenden he expresses his belief that "you can sin against your own gift by not remembering always to keep it handy" or by not regarding it as the basis of a full-time "vocation" (9). This pagan/Christian attitude, not only toward his poetry but toward the earth that inspires it, emerges in other poems in Heaney's first two collections and becomes even more prominent in his later ones. "Personal Helicon," in fact, falls within this category of poems since, as John Wilson Foster points out, Heaney's childhood well-gazing bears strong affinities with the ancient Gaelic practice of spring and well worship ("The Poetry of Seamus Heaney" 40)--a connection that Heaney was most likely aware of when writing the poem.[7]

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[7] For more information on Gaelic well worship, see David Annwn (101).

Finally, there is yet another kind of earth-based continuity informing "Digging" which is imperceptible in the poem itself but which Heaney later, in "Feeling into Words", reveals as its core. This is a continuity between the figurative modes of perception and expression encountered by Heaney in his childhood and those employed by him in this and other poems. As Heaney explains it,

> The pen/spade analogy was the simple heart of the matter and that was simply a matter of almost proverbial common sense. As a child on the road to and from school, people used to ask you what class you were in and how many slaps you'd got that day and invariably they ended up with an exhortation to keep studying because 'learning's easy carried' and 'the pen's lighter than the spade'. And the poem does no more than allow that bud of wisdom to exfoliate, although the significant point . . . is that at the time of writing I was not aware of the proverbial structure at the back of my mind. Nor was I aware that the poem was an enactment of yet another digging metaphor that came back to me years later. This was the rhyme we used to chant on the road to school, though, as I have said before, we were not fully aware of what we were dealing with:
>
> 'Are your praties dry
> And are they fit for digging?'
> 'Put in your spade and try,'
> Says Dirty-Faced McGuigan.
>
> There digging becomes a sexual metaphor, an emblem of initiation, like putting your hand into the bush or robbing the nest, one of the various natural analogies for uncovering and touching the hidden thing. (Pre 42)

Here it becomes apparent that the chief means by which Heaney symbolically expresses developmental continuity between his soil-based origins and his poetry--the pen/spade analogy--is itself dictated to him by a common, synecdochic proverb from his past which, while it stresses the differences between spade and pen, labour and learning, brings them into a direct and developmental symbolic relationship within an earth-oriented mode of perception: that is, the pen is different from the spade but is also in a sense a new and better kind of spade. In this respect, the proverbial structure is paradoxically at one and the same time dichotomy and analogy, symbol of discontinuity and symbol of

continuity, both in its original context and in the context of Heaney's poem. A similar point, incidentally, can be made about the well poetry structure in "Personal Helicon" in that poetry, while something different from well-gazing, is also a newer and better form of it.

Equally interesting is the metaphor connecting the digging of "praties" with sexual initiation, and specifically masturbation, which Heaney in turn connects with the initiation of his poetic career as represented in "Digging," since he continues to describe the process of poetic creation by means of earth/sex metaphors. One of the most explicit and even risque instances of this association occurs, not in his poetry (although a number of examples will later be pointed out), but in his 1973 interview with Patrick Garland, where, after quoting a favourite passage of his from Timon of Athens, I,i,* he comments that it contains "almost a sexual metaphor of self-provocation" and goes on to say,

> That is something that I think all poets experience, now and again, and want more and more: the sense of supply, the sense of a hinterland of energies, or a depth of energies, opening and giving you something, and you discover it coming in your hands.

Most interesting of all, however, is Heaney's revelation that he was unaware of the influences of these metaphors, these earth-based modes of perception and expression, on "Digging" at the time he was writing it. This revelation not only reflects the unconscious or unselfconscious aspect of his poetry, the importance of which he continues to maintain,* but once more points up the fundamentality of

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* Our poesy is as a gum which oozes
From whence'tis nourished. The fire i' th' flint
Shows not till it be struck; our gentle flame
Provokes itself and like the current flies
Each bound it chafes. (21-25)

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* In his interview with John Haffenden, he states, ". . . I only write

his early experience both to his frequent choice of earth imagery as a means of expression within his poetry, and to his use of this imagery in describing his view of the poetic process. A number of examples of the latter have already arisen, but of additional interest might be another one of his remarks about "Digging" in "Feeling into Words": "I wrote it down years ago; yet perhaps I should say that I dug it up, because I have come to realize that it was laid down in me years before that even" (Pre 42). In these respects, Heaney's comment points out the beginnings of his tapping into an earth-based past for common resources of perception and verbal expression, which in turn quickly give rise to his distinctive figurative association of the earth with the psychological and historical aspects of language. Incidentally, Heaney's remark also suggests the possibility that he was not, at the time of writing "Digging" and these other poems, entirely conscious of many of the other types of developmental continuity they reflect. However, his sense of them, whether fully conscious or not, is fully evident in these poems and is more consciously articulated by him later in his career, as both "Feeling into Words" and his later poetry demonstrate.

The central concept of cyclical but developmental continuity arising out of the subject matter of "Digging" and its related poems, then, clearly comprehends a wide array of individual but related continuities--those of experience and action, belief, attitude, impulse, perception and expression--which ground Heaney's poetry firmly in his soil-based origins and yet at the same time place it within a higher and

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*(cont'd) when I'm in the trance. That is my superstition, it is a mystery of sorts, if you are possessed by a subject, if you have a subject in you . . ." (15). This remark, of course, ties the unconscious aspect of Heaney's poetic creativity to the religious and superstitious view of it that has already been briefly outlined and explained.

more maturely perceived and expressed symbolic pattern. These individual continuities provide a large part of the basis for a developmental continuity within the actual body of Heaney's poetry, within his general view of it, and, of course, within his use of figurative language. That is, not only do the same themes relating to continuity persist and develop in Heaney's poetry henceforward, but they continue to reflect his essentially unchanging, although increasingly conscious, understanding of the processes involved in his writing of this poetry, and continue to be expressed in a broadening range of earth and earth-related metaphors as well.

Furthermore, while these poems appear to be largely personal and anecdotal and are in fact Heaney's attempts to explore his rural childhood, define its original influence on both himself and his poetry, and derive his own authoritative voice from the many continuities it generates, they also possess broader communal and even extra-communal dimensions that reflect Heaney's more than strictly personal concerns. Such dimensions are obvious in "The Diviner" and "Thatcher," whose central symbolic figures, while gifted men apart, are primarily the servants of their community, men whose value is defined chiefly by the usefulness of their gifts to those around them. Moreover, the diviner, as Heaney describes him, is a 'mediator' "between the latent resource and the community that wants it current and released" (Pre 47-48), and as such, his role also involves the 'tuning into' and uncovering of a hidden, non-human force--the spring water's 'frequency'--that lies beyond the community's full understanding or reach. These same dimensions are also present in the seemingly more personal "Digging" and "Personal Helicon". In "Digging" community is defined primarily in terms

of Heaney's family, with the succession of generations outlined in the poem creating a clearly extra-personal human context within which Heaney's forefathers are partly servants. An extra-personal dimension is also revealed in Heaney's use of the words "our" and "we" in the lines "To scatter new potatoes that we picked / Loving their cool hardness in our hands" (13-14). Furthermore, the poem's declaratory nature implies Heaney's sense of an audience, a recipient of his resolution to "dig" with his pen. "Personal Helicon," while containing no explicit references to any community, and while appearing to be, as its final stanza suggests, a narcissistic exercise, does in fact allude to persons other than the poet who are most likely, again, members of his family: "As a child, they could not keep me from wells" (1). And, as Anne Cluysenaar points out, it also, like "Digging," exhibits Heaney's distinct awareness of an audience, particularly through its dedication to Heaney's fellow-poet Michael Longley, its narrative form, and its use of the words "you" and "your" in lines 8, 11 and 13, which, although they clearly refer back to the poet in the same way that the poem's first person pronouns do, also implicitly invite the reader to participate in the poem's remembered action by identifying with the poet (315). Furthermore, the wells described in stanzas 3 and 4 are obviously representative of the various submerged levels of Heaney's own personality and psyche, the first and most accessible of which, symbolically speaking, lies just beneath a tangle of "roots" (11) and constitutes a core of identity; the second of which seems to be a deeper fund of creative revitalization that yields up "clean new music" (14) through its inner resounding of the poet's conscious utterances; and the third and seemingly most submerged of which obviously consists of the

darker, fear-inspiring aspects of the unconscious, as symbolized by the rat 'slapping' across the poet's reflection (16). But the first specific well remembered by Heaney is, in fact, "So deep you saw no reflection in it" (8) and thus clearly suggests the key place that the extra-personal and extra-human realms, along with Heaney's personal, artistic concerns, hold in his poetry.

Implicit in the extra-personal dimensions of these poems is Heaney's acknowledgement of the important role played by his human and natural environments in providing the early experience that informs his poetry. This acknowledgement, furthermore, takes the form of an actual gratitude and desire to 'return the favour', to make his gift useful, particularly to his community, by exploring, revealing and preserving these influences through his art. This much is evident in Heaney's clear sense of audience and in the reverential tone of all of these, and other,[10] reminiscent poems. Again, in the case of "Personal Helicon," as Cluysenaar notes, the title and final line, "I rhyme to see myself, to set the darkness echoing," along with Heaney's use of such words as "wells" and "spring", which have both "downward and upward connotations," strongly imply an element of "reciprocity . . . and of gratitude towards the sources of inspiration" (311). And this element of reciprocity, particularly in the form of a communally educative function in Heaney's poetry, becomes more explicit in other poems in both these and the later collections.

In those poems in Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark where Heaney's communal and extra-human sources of inspiration come more explicitly to the fore as subject matter in their own right, his

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[10] The more noteworthy of these include "Churning Day" (DN 21) and "The Forge" (DD 19), which will not be examined here.

exploration and preservation of them takes much the same shape as his exploration of the origins and processes of his own poetry. That is, earth-related and cyclical/developmental continuities between past and present are again perceived and expressed by Heaney through earth and earth-related metaphors as a means of placing community and natural environment within a greater and more clearly understandable symbolic pattern. However, the scope of this subject matter being larger than that of his more personal (or, in the case of "The Diviner" and "Thatcher," personally symbolic) poems, the temporal and spatial range of his explorations widens to include more broadly historical, geographic and even cosmic dimensions that are only hinted at in the previous poems. At the same time, though, these broader dimensions reflect on a greater scale the mnemonic, religious and sexual aspects of the more personal poems and can in fact be understood as feeding back into them via Heaney's rural and communal connection and, more importantly, via the medium of the soil that shapes both his environment and his poetry.

In "At a Potato Digging" (DN 31-33), for instance, Heaney again, but on a communal scale, outlines a soil-rooted continuity of experience, action and impulse, based on the obvious historical pattern of Irish potato cultivation. This time the pattern comprises not just a few generations in a small locality, as in "Digging," but centuries of social history throughout Ireland. However, the same conscious and unconscious sense of affiliation with the past through soil-related activity that Heaney has revealed on his own part in "Digging" is demonstrated in this poem by the contemporary potato harvesters. The same givenness to toil and the same pagan view of the earth as a

fostering force that characterize Heaney's hereditary and psychological ties with his forefathers seem to have been inherited even more directly--almost genetically--by these workers, who are, within the pattern of the poem, the modern-day equivalents of their labouring and soil-worshipping ancestors:

> Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black
> Mother. Processional stooping through the turf
>
> Recurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries
> Of fear and homage to the famine god
> Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,
> Make a seasonal altar of the sod. (11-16)

The poem acknowledges the presence, within its symbolic pattern of earth-based continuity, of certain literal discontinuities whose operation loosely parallels that of the literal discontinuities in "Digging" and "Personal Helicon." The more important of these, the Great Potato Famine of the 1840s, has at one point threatened the permanent loss of an earth-based continuity by disrupting the cyclical potato harvest and killing millions of members of a whole generation of potato diggers, just as Heaney's taking up of poetry has seemingly but less seriously threatened the permanent loss of the earth-based continuities maintained by his forefathers' and his own childhood way of life. However, the famine has now paradoxically become a very element of cyclical continuity in the larger and ancestrally-generated symbolic pattern of "fear and homage to the famine god," just as poetry is a very element of continuity in the larger symbolic pattern of 'digging' and 'gazing and echoing' that Heaney perceives himself as fulfilling. In the light of such a paradox, the lesser-seeming discontinuity of mechanization in the potato harvest does not make a great deal of difference to the overall pattern, just as Heaney's substitution of the

pen for spade and well does not make a great deal of difference to the symbolic pattern he broadly outlines in the previous two poems, except that in all three poems the seeming discontinuities reflect a slightly newer and more conscious dimension of continuity. Just as the writing of poetry in "Digging" and "Personal Helicon" constitutes a higher and more articulate version of the ventures carried out by Heaney's forefathers and his childhood self, so the famine and mechanization respectively give rise to and reflect a marginal development in the continuity of the potato harvest in the forms of increased historical consciousness and increased control of the natural environment on the part of the potato diggers. Admittedly, this improvement is not affirmed as it has been in the previous poems; in fact, it is presented in neutral and even negative terms:

> A mechanical digger wrecks the drill,
> Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould.
> Labourers swarm in behind, stoop to fill
> Wicker creels. Fingers go dead in the cold. (1-5)
>
> Stinking potatoes fouled the land,
> pits turned pus into filthy mounds:
> and where potato diggers are
> you still smell the running sore. (46-49)

In lines 1 to 5 the machine does not appear to have diminished significantly the discomfort of the potato diggers, who still stumble behind it in the cold collecting the potatoes in traditional wicker creels; furthermore, it seems to carry a destructive capacity in its 'wrecking' of the drill. Nevertheless, it clearly represents some degree of modernization and humanization of the ritual pagan character and "rhythm" (51) of the harvest. Similarly, the potato diggers' collective memory of the harvest may indeed be compared to an unconscious, festering sore, but the sore is clearly meant to be taken

as a spiritual and emotional one--arising, it would seem, from an awareness of the social and historical injustices partially responsible for the starvation--that to some extent mitigates pagan acceptance of the famine. (It may appear that the semi-sinister mood of this poem is being deliberately overlooked in the interest of asserting a positive cyclical/developmental continuity between past and present-day Ireland, but this issue will be taken up again toward the end of the chapter.)

A slightly more positive tone emerges in a similar historical poem, "Requiem for the Croppies" (DD 24), in which the slaughter of the so-called "croppies" of the 1798 Rebellion--another clear instance of disruption of continuity in the life of the Irish community--again becomes a very element of continuity, both in the nation's on-going historical memory and in the larger cyclical and progressive pattern of rebellion in Irish history. But this time the continuity is symbolized not by an image of disease but by one of growth that is seemingly brought about by the bloodshed and death:

> The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave.
> They buried us without shroud or coffin
> And in August the barley grew up out of the grave. (12-14)

Since "At a Potato Digging" and "Requiem for the Croppies" were both published in 1966,[11] a year in which, as Heaney has noted, "poets in Ireland were straining to celebrate the anniversary of the 1916 Rising" (Pre 56), Heaney's aim in writing them would seem to be to promote a recognition of an historical pattern that extends beyond this event to include its roots in the earlier events of the 1798 Rebellion and the Great Famine. As Heaney himself explains the connection between 1916 and

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[11] The former was of course published in Death of a Naturalist in May, 1966 but was also published separately in New Ireland, 1966; the latter was first published in Dublin Magazine, Summer, 1966.

1798 in particular,

> That rising was the harvest of seeds sown in 1798, when revolutionary republican ideals and national feeling coalesced in the doctrines of Irish republicanism and in the rebellion of 1798 itself--unsuccessful and savagely put down. The poem was born of and ended with an image of resurrection based on the fact that some time after the rebels were buried in common graves, these graves began to sprout with young barley, growing up from barley corn which the 'croppies' had carried in their pockets to eat while on the march. The oblique implication was that the seeds of violent resistance sowed in the Year of Liberty had flowered in what Yeats called 'the right rose tree' of 1916. (Pre 56)

The choice of earlier historical subject matter of course reflects Heaney's "Papish . . . nationalistic," or small 'r' republican, as opposed to "Sinn Fein . . . Republican," political sensibility (Begley 161), which also informs some of the later and more overtly nationalistic poems of Wintering Out and North. More importantly, however, it demonstrates the earth-based, pattern-oriented perception that has already characterized Heaney's understanding of his own life and art and that also, as will be seen, characterizes his understanding of the extra-human realm. Furthermore, lest Heaney's historical understanding at this point be thought to include only the 'native' Catholic Irishry, it would be well to note two other poems, "Shoreline" (DD 51-52) and the uncollected "Medallion," in which the seeming disruptions caused by the invasions of Ireland by non-Irish, including the Norse, Normans, Protestant English and Scottish and even the Neolithic and Celtic tribes that first populated the country, are all presented as a part of a larger and continuous developmental pattern of invasion turned resistance against invasion, which has been absorbed by the Irish landscape and made wholly Irish. In "Shoreline," for instance, remnants of these invasions, such as the Neolithic burial mound at Belmullet, the Danish-named Strangford and Arklow and the Norman castle

at Carrickfergus "Stay, forgotten like sentries" (28), along Ireland's coastline. And in "Medallion," the Ulster Protestants' successful resistance to the 1689 Catholic siege of Derry is not only presented, through the appropriate circular emblem of a commemorative medallion, as the event that "started it all" (6)--that is, the Ulster Protestants' on-going siege mentality--but is, through the description of the image of the Rev. George Walker's head as "Bogged deep in the silver" (2) and the comparison of the medallion and of Derry itself to an ancient Gaelic "ring-fort thrown up / On the baize" (11-12), assimilated into the broader and essentially unchanging pattern.

If one temporarily leaves politics and history aside, however, one notes, in "At a Potato Digging," "Requiem for the Croppies" and "Shoreline," an increased conspicuousness in the figurative role played by earth imagery. Thus far in Heaney's poetry, the earth has been a relatively passive medium, revealing symbolic cyclical/developmental continuities more through the shared activities carried out in, upon or through it (digging, ploughing, gazing, divining, thatching and of course their symbolic poetic equivalents) than through itself. In these poems, however, the earth takes on a more active role as a semi-animate being with the physical characteristics of a human and, more often than not, of a woman in particular. In "Shoreline," for instance, the coastal landscape is personified as a series of soldiers: "tidal craters march / The corn and grazing" (7-8), "All around Antrim and westward / . . . / Basalt stands to" (9-11). In "Requiem," the hillside is personified as a woman in its 'blushing' with the bloodshed of the croppies. And in "At a Potato Digging," the soil takes on the archetypal and even more directly active role of Earth Mother, whose beneficent and procreative functions

Heaney equates with human ones:

> Good smells exude from the crumbled earth.
> The rough bark of humus erupts
> knots of potatoes (a clean birth)
> whose solid feel, whose wet inside
> promises taste of ground and root: (24-28)

This figurative linking of the earth with human anatomy, sexuality and fertility recurs frequently in Heaney's poetry and with an increasing boldness, intricacy and symbolic resonance. For example, in "Undine" (DD 26),[12] the interactions between the personified stream and the farmer's ditches and fields are not only described in the highly suggestive terms of sexual intercourse, but, in accordance with the myth from which the poem derives, actually culminate in a human sexual relationship between man and transformed water nymph:

> . . . he dug a spade deep in my flank
> And took me to him. I swallowed his trench
>
> Gratefully, dispersing myself for love
> Down in his roots, climbing his brassy grain--
> But once he knew my welcome, I alone
>
> Could give him subtle increase and reflection.
> He explored me so completely, each limb
> Lost its cold freedom. Human, warmed to him. (8-15)

And in "Rite of Spring" (DD 25),[13] the water pump, a more mechanical version of a spring or well but holding equally mystical significance in Heaney's iconography,[14] becomes an extraordinary combination of penis and vagina--described, however, only as female--that upon being de-iced

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[12] For a helpful and interesting discussion of this poem that once more points out the sources of Heaney's poetry in his rural childhood experience, see "Feeling into Words" (Pre 52-54).

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[13] The poem was originally published separately as "Persephone," a title that even more clearly underlines the pump's ritual role as an earth/fertility figure.

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[14] See the opening paragraph of "Mossbawn," in which Heaney describes the pump on his childhood farm as the "omphalos" of his world (Pre 17).

releases water from the earth in a metaphorical orgasm: ". . . we lifted her latch, / Her entrance was wet, and she came" (11-12).

In certain of Heaney's poems, the sequence of this figurative link is reversed, so that the human body takes on the qualities of the earth rather than vice versa. In the uncollected "Aubade," for instance, the pregnant speaker becomes a mine worked by her unborn child: "He works relentlessly day and dark / Prospecting light, making me his tunnel" (11-12). And on a more sombre note, the bereaved mother in "Elegy for a Still-Born Child" (DD 31-32) is likened to a grave when her dead child's birth is described as "Birth of death, exhumation for burial" (14). It is the former sequence, though, that dominates, thus suggesting that the earth and its related processes of growth and release of water are given human form in these poems primarily as a reflection of the human community engaged with them--a standard anthropomorphic device that seems to have its origins in Heaney's inherited resources of earth-based perception and expression and in his pagan heritage. The fact that the sequence can be reversed, however, suggests that there is also a basic circularity to Heaney's figurative use of earth imagery, according to which the earth feeds human self-perception as much as human self-perception feeds its perception of the earth. This circularity, as the previously discussed 'praties metaphor' would indicate, also seems to originate in Heaney's inherited perceptual and expressive resources.

A similar point can be made about the early landscape poems "Lovers on Aran" (DN 47) and "Night Drive" (DD 34), in which broader geographic land masses take on human qualities and sexuality not only as a reflection of the personal relationships presented in the poems, but as a reflection of the nations they contain and symbolize--again a

standard enough figurative mode of perceiving land masses, particularly for an Irish poet raised on the Kathleen Ni Houlihan and Mother Ireland myths.[15] In "Lovers on Aran," for example, the collision between waves and land serves primarily as an analogue for the sexual and emotional interactions of the two lovers, who are not directly presented in the poem. However, the poem also seems to contain a submerged allusion to the relationship between Ireland and America established through the large scale emigrations of Irish peasants from the west coast in the nineteenth century (an allusion that would be especially apparent to any of Heaney's Irish readers). And in the context of this allusion, the sexual metaphors, and the questions that arise along with them, carry a veiled cultural import:

> The timeless waves. . .
> Came glinting, sifting from the Americas
>
> To possess Aran. Or did Aran rush
> To throw wide arms of rock around a tide
> That yielded with an ebb, with a soft crash?
>
> Did sea define the land or land the sea?
> Each drew new meaning from the waves' collision.
> Sea broke on land to full identity.

The resolution of the question of dominance in the poem's final two lines thus acquires a whole other significance in that the reciprocity between American waves and Irish coastline now also mildly suggests the cultural ties between Ireland and America. In "Night Drive" the comparison of Italy and France to two lovers--"Italy / Laid its loin to France on the darkened sphere" (14-15)--again underscores the personal relationship referred to in the poem in much the same way that the word choices "warm" (4), "granting", "fulfilment" (8), "groaning" (9) and

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[15] See "Feeling into Words" (57) for Heaney's own comments on the pervasiveness of this traditional figurative perception of Ireland.

"smouldered" (11) do. However, as with the metaphors in "Lovers on Aran," it also reveals the emerging figurative view of international relationships as dynamic and sometimes violent sexual encounters that characterizes a number of the poems of Wintering Out and North. More specifically, they point to Heaney's later and more explicit figurative view of Irish culture, and its linguistic aspects in particular, as being substantially, even radically, altered by the sexual-like invasions of other nations, especially England. And, along with the other poems, they also indirectly reflect Heaney's more general historical and earth-related sense of language through their employment of archetypal earth/human and human/earth metaphors.

In addition to their communal significance, all of these poems carry in their metaphors a personal and artistic significance for Heaney himself. For instance, "Lovers on Aran" and "Night Drive" would both seem to be about his relationship with his wife, just as "Aubade" appears to be about his wife's first pregnancy (their son Michael having been born three months prior to the poem's publication) and "Elegy" is clearly written for close friends of his. Moreover, the images of sexual and other release in "Undine" and "Rite of Spring," as Blake Morrison has noted, symbolize the release of the poet's own voice and authority through the writing of his poetry as readily as they symbolize natural and agricultural processes (32). This is clearly an association that connects back with the 'praties' metaphor informing "Digging." Also, both poems offer an abundant sense of that eruptive poetic "hinterland of energies" which Heaney describes in his interview with Garland.[16]

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[16] All of these poems also, to some extent or other, exemplify the so-called 'feminine principle' that characterizes so much of Heaney's personal and artistic, as well as cultural, philosophy and that, unfortunately, cannot be discussed in any detail here. For a discussion

As well as possessing physical human traits, the earth, as a number of these poems demonstrate, also possesses a varying degree of human like consciousness. This consciousness is characterized not only by emotion, thought and sense of identity, as in "Undine" and "Lovers on Aran," but by active memory, as in "At a Potato Digging," "Requiem for the Croppies" and "Shoreline," where the earth issues forth its own reminders of historical events in the form of living crops or displays them in its landscape and thus in itself parallels the communally educative function of Heaney's poetry by promoting recognition of broader patterns of continuity. In this figurative role as living storehouse of past communal experience, the earth reflects the human community engaged with it, just as its physically human characteristics have done. Furthermore, this communal mnemonic function also ties into the more purely personal and artistic facets of Heaney's poetry since the earth, as has already been seen, also serves, although less directly and actively, as a living storehouse of his own personal past experience, his digging into of which provides him not only with "the first quickening" of his poetry (Pre 54), but also with his first means of perceiving symbolic patterns of developmental continuity in the subject matter of his poetry. These human characteristics possessed by the earth, however, clearly not only reflect the personal and communal subject matter of Heaney's poetry, but figuratively express certain non- or extra-human forces that it itself contains. The Earth Mother of "At a Potato Digging," for example, is as much a figurative representation of an extra-human life force generated within the soil, which is a constituent of a broader, extra-human reality, as she is an

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16(cont'd) of this feature of Heaney's poetry, see Carlanda Green's "The Feminine Principle in Seamus Heaney's Poetry."

anthropomorphized nurturer of the community. Similarly, Heaney's sexualizing of the earth, or its related processes and geographic characteristics, in such poems as "Undine," "Rite of Spring," "Lovers on Aran" and "Night Drive" is clearly his means of conveying its literal containment and symbolic representation of a vast network of physical and other forces, as well its literal containment and symbolic representation of humanity, community and nation.

The sense of such a network emerges more clearly in the poems "In Gallarus Oratory" (DD 22), "Bann Clay," "Bogland" and "A Lough Neagh Sequence" (DD 38-45), where the earth, along with its related life forms and processes, is still tied to the human community but nevertheless underlies it as an independent entity, displaying its own forces, its own patterns of continuity and its own seeming consciousness as well. In "In Gallarus Oratory," for example, the earth within the oratory--which is itself compared to a "turfstack" (2)--apparently stores the "feel" (1) of the original community that once worshipped in it, as well as the essential nature of its religious experience, both of which are sensed and articulated by the poet as modern tourist. The earth, however, also possesses and exerts a pull of its own--almost a swallowing and drawing of humanity into its figurative body--that radically affects the nature of the religious experience and is only diminished when it is withdrawn from:

> . . . When you're in it alone
> You might have dropped, a reduced creature
> To the heart of the globe. No worshipper
> Would leap up to his God off this floor.
>
> Founded there like heroes in a barrow
> They sought themselves in the eye of their King
> Under the black weight of their own breathing.
> And how he smiled on them as out they came,
> The sea a censer, and the grass a flame. (4-12)

In "Bann Clay" and "Bogland," the earth again serves as living storehouse of past communal experience, the bog in the latter poem preserving and issuing artefacts, and each of its strata revealing a preceding era of human history: "Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before" (25-26). But at the same time, it holds its own prehistoric identity, characterized by developmental but essentially unchanging continuities:

> For centuries under the grass
> It baked white in the sun,
> Relieved its hoarded waters
> And began to ripen.
>
> It underruns the valley,
> The first slow residue
> Of a river finding its way.
> Above it, the webbed marsh is new,
>
> Even the clutch of Mesolithic
> Flints. . . . ("Bann Clay" 9-18)

> The ground itself is kind, black butter
>
> Melting and opening underfoot,
> Missing its last definition
> By millions of years. ("Bogland" 16-19)

As the clay's 'relieving' of its waters and the 'kindness' of the buttery ground might suggest, the earth also possesses a human-like being and force capable of pulling or absorbing things into itself. "The wet centre" in "Bogland," for instance, is "bottomless" (28) but in some way gravitational, the sense of which quality is reinforced, as effectively as finite verse permits, by the placement of this word at the very end or 'bottom' of the poem. And the clay in "Bann Clay" "holds and gluts" (24), the sense of this action again being reinforced by the poem's closure with these words.

"A Lough Neagh Sequence," Heaney's most sustained piece in these first two collections, is also the most interesting of this group of 'earth-active' poems because here the earth displays virtually no human characteristics, and yet the poem offers the clearest sense so far of its vast and continuous network of physical and life forces. The effect is achieved by the poem's centering primarily not on a human community but on the expansive life cycle of the eel, which each year travels inland from the Atlantic, "A gland agitating / mud" ("Beyond Sargasso" 1-2), to mature in the mud and water of Lough Neagh and its surrounding fields and streams before returning once more to the ocean to spawn and complete its life-span. The eel is only one of a number of earth- and water-dwelling animals that represent the earth's life forces in the early collections: these include the frogs in "Death of a Naturalist" (DN 15-16), the rats in "An Advancement of Learning" (DN 18-19), the turkey in "Turkeys Observed" (DN 37), the trout in the poem of the same name (DN 39), the salmon in "The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon" (DD 18) and, to a lesser extent, the cow in "Cow in Calf" (DN 38) and the bull in "The Outlaw" (DD 16-17), which might not normally be thought of as soil-dwelling but which are described as a "great bag of seed" (5) and a "load of sand" (19) respectively. The eel, however, is to Heaney a particularly exemplary embodiment of earth-based life forces because of its resemblance to the snake, which he has described as a symbol of "certain life forces" that were "paralysed" within the context of the Irish-Catholic religion by St. Patrick's legendary expulsion of the snake from Ireland ("King of the Dark" 182). Why Heaney sees snakes and eels in particular as symbols of earth-based life forces, he does not explain; however, it would appear that the snake in particular being

commonly associated with the ideas of fertility and eternity, and that both creatures' body shapes being linear and, when placed head to tail, circular, they symbolically and physically constitute appropriate emblems of the cyclical and developmental continuities that Heaney perceives in the natural world. Moreover, Heaney's equation of snakes and eels, as John Wilson Foster points out, is no doubt derived from the Irish folkloric belief that eels are the descendants of Ireland's banished snakes ("Seamus Heaney's 'A Lough Neagh Sequence': Sources and Motifs 141). Heaney, incidentally, represents this belief in his uncollected poem "Icon," which depicts the banished snakes' transmutation into eels:

> Their sphincters quietly
> Rippling, snakes point
> And pass to the sea.
> Crusty with sand
>
> They dirty and fatten
> The lip of the wave.
> The whole island
> Writhes at the edges. (13-20)

Clearly, Heaney sees the snake and eel as pagan icons of life forces which have, along with these life forces, passed into the Irish-Catholic religion, even though they have been changed by this religion into symbols of evil.[17] Perhaps he even sees the folkloric belief as symbolic of the way in which the pagan understanding, while appearing to have been superseded by the Christian one, has in fact fed into and lives on in it, albeit in a rather dormant or, as Heaney puts it, "paralysed" manner.

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[17] The power of the eel and snake as such symbols in the Irish-Catholic religion is made clear when, in commenting on the many statues in Ireland depicting St. Patrick's expulsion of the snakes, Heaney remarks, "I know several people who will never eat eels because of the profound implications of this statue" ("King of the Dark" 182).

As an extension of the earth's continuous and cyclical life forces, the eel's life cycle forms the basis and determines the nature of a yet larger cycle that comprehends the annual eel harvest by the lough fishermen, as well as their nightly gathering of worms for bait during this harvest. The whole of this vast cycle, however, is clearly governed not by the eels but by the earth itself, whose gravitational forces directly and indirectly influence its nature by generating and promoting fixed patterns of linearity and circularity.[18] In "Beyond Sargasso," for instance, the region around the lough exerts a physiologically gravitational pull on the eel while it is still in the second stage of its development in the Sargasso Sea. The eel must follow this pull in order to complete the next stage of its growth. Then, as in "The Return," it must respond to the pull of its spawning ground back in the Sargasso and 'lay down in its origins' (20-22) in order to complete its life and spawn a new generation of eels. Thus the eel's life, like its body shape, is simultaneously linear or sequential and, in its following of a fixed "orbit" ("Beyond Sargasso" 11), circular. Furthermore, the life cycle that it follows and maintains is obviously of a circular nature but might also be thought of as linearly developmental since it is, in its essential nature, the same from year to year but is also each year new. It would also be well to note that, as in the other cyclical/developmental patterns of earth-based continuity already discussed, the seeming discontinuity or disruption posed by some of the eels' capture by the fishermen or by their otherwise 'abortion' of their mission ("Beyond Sargasso" 22) does not in

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[18] See John Wilson Foster's article "Seamus Heaney's 'A Lough Neagh Sequence': Sources and Motifs," to which the following argument is largely indebted.

fact change the essential nature of the overall life cycle but actually promotes the larger cycle of which it forms the base. Similar points can be made about the fishermen's annual eel harvest, in that this harvest has also been repeated for generations and yet is each year a new occurrence, so that the cycle it constitutes disorients the poem's speaker and eludes his attempts to pinpoint its temporal origins: "And when did this begin? / This morning, last year, when the lough first spawned?" ("Lifting" 22-23). The harvest, moreover, is also shaped by the earth's gravitational forces, not only indirectly, through its dependence on the eel's life cycle, but also directly, by the physically gravitational pull of the lough's floor, which regularly draws down both the fishermen's lines and the fishermen themselves. Again, these drownings do not disrupt the cycle but in fact contribute another form of circularity to it: "The lough will claim a victim every year" ("Up the Shore" 1). Similarly, the modernization of the eel harvest in some areas of the lough, while it offers the fishermen the possibility of a new level of control over the cycle, does not interfere with its overall linear/circular nature. Patterns of linearity and circularity in fact seem to characterize every aspect of the harvest, from the fishermen's gathering of the worms--who not only resemble the eel and snake in their body shape, but who are also described as "Making the globe a perfect fit" ("Bait" 19), "whorling their mud coronas" (13) and serving as "garland for the bay" (22)--to their actual fishing in the lough, which is not only itself described through a number of linear and circular images, but whose surrounding natural environment is also so characterized:

> A line goes out of sight and out of mind
> Down to the soft bottom of silt and sand

Past the indifferent skill of the hunting hand.

A bouquet of small hooks coiled in the stern
Is being paid out, back to its true form,
Until the bouquet's hidden in the worm.

The boat rides forward where the line slants back.
The oars in their locks go round and round.
The eel describes his arcs without a sound.

The gulls fly and umbrella overhead,
Treading air as soon as the line runs out. . . .
("Setting" 1-11)

These images culminate in the sequence's final and most powerful section, "Vision," in which the field, seemingly come to life with the movement of the eels, becomes in the mind of the adult male in the poem (likely Heaney himself) a "jellied road" (15) and the "world's live girdle" (17), equivalent to the rope of lice whose downward-pulling force he was threatened with as a child.

This 'confirming' (20) vision of the earth's forces is of course a symbolic perception of what is essentially a physical pattern of cyclical/developmental continuities. However, the vision's mystical and pagan nature not only underlines the earth's physical power as a generator and promoter of a cosmic order, but demonstrates its power over the human imagination as a generator and promoter of ordering myths and religious beliefs and attitudes. These are evident elsewhere in the sequence as well. For instance, the opening stanza of the first section, "Up the Shore," reads as a litany of semi-fact, semi-myth that has seemingly been recited and believed in by generations of fishermen:

The Lough will claim a victim every year.
It has virtue that hardens wood to stone.
There is a town sunk beneath its water.
It is the scar left by the Isle of Man.

The litany is at once a form of homage to the lough and its governing forces, a reflection of the order they generate and, in itself, an

ordering of the fishermen's experience of them. Moreover, its tone of inevitability reflects the fatalism inherent in the fishermen's sense of themselves as a comparatively small and powerless part of a greater destiny--a view of which they are not entirely conscious but which they nevertheless hold to in their refusal either to introduce any technical innovations to their eel-fishing or to learn how to swim:

> There is a sense of fair play in the game.
> The fishermen confront them one by one
> And sail miles out, and never learn to swim.
>
> 'We'll be the quicker going down', they say--
> And when you argue that there are no storms here,
> That one hour floating's sure to land them safely--
> 'The lough will claim a victim every year.' (10-16)

The same unconsciously religious attitude on the part of the fishermen is evident in "Setting":

> Not sensible of any kyrie,
> The fishers, who don't know and never try,
> Pursue the work in hand as destiny. (13-15)

More important, however, is the effect that this earth-based network of continuous forces has on the poet's own imagination and understanding, since this effect influences the more strictly personal and communal dimensions of his poetry. First, it is obvious that Heaney perceives more clearly than the fishermen both the vastness and intricacy of this network and the extent of its influence on human belief and attitude. In this respect, Heaney as artist stands removed from the community of fishermen, outlining and articulating their environment and experience more consciously than they themselves can. However, even while he does so, and even while he clearly disagrees with their fatalistic attitude toward drowning, he also clearly shares their sense of a greater "destiny" generated by extra-human forces contained within and represented by the earth, and approves of their "sense of

fair play in the game." Heaney in fact goes farther than the fishermen in perceiving a cosmic, religious aspect (both Christian and pagan) to this cycle. It is after all he, not the fishermen, who, obviously with the Christian symbolic connotations of the whole fishing scene in mind, sees the seagulls as "responsive acolytes" (12) in the singing of a "kyrie" in "Setting." Furthermore, the vision at the end of the sequence, which seems to be both his own and the product of family folklore (and from which he also distances himself in order to articulate it), not only acknowledges, with pagan awe, the cyclical/developmental continuities apparent in his natural environment, but demonstrates, in its view of the rope of lice and the field of eels as successive manifestations of the "world's live girdle," the cyclical/developmental continuities apparent in his own inherited mythic view of the earth and its life forces (as does, coincidentally, his vision of the snakes transmuting into eels in "Icon"). Finally, Heaney seems to demonstrate a fatalistic faith of his own in the overall cycle when he says of the worms in "Bait," "A few are bound to be rustled in these night raids" (16), "A few are bound to be cheated of" (20) the globe--the word "bound" tying into the notion of the earth's girdle and otherwise carrying a clear significance in the context of the general pattern Heaney outlines throughout the sequence.

The affinities between the patterns Heaney presents in these latter poems and those he presents in his more strictly personal and communal poems are of course obvious and suggest that Heaney's earth-based understanding of the extra-human realm shapes his similar understanding of his community, himself and his poetry. One could perhaps see the perceptive process by which Heaney develops his

essential poetic vision as working in reverse: Heaney extending the patterns he perceives in his own life and art to his community and natural environment. This view might be supported by the (very) roughly personal to communal to extra communal progression of his thematic concerns in these first two collections. And depending on whether or not one sees the initial, more personal continuities presented in "Digging" and "Personal Helicon" as valid, the entire extra-human dimension of similar continuities that Heaney has outlined by the end of these collections might very well appear imposed, an offshoot of some psychological need on his part to connect past and present through the medium of the earth in a way that naturally resolves or dissolves any seeming discontinuities between his origins and his poetry. This could perhaps be the argument of critics like Jon Silkin and Mary Brown, who respectively attribute Heaney's association of his poetry with the earth and with digging to "nostalgia" (70) and "residual guilt" (289) over his abandonment of his forefathers' way of life. And it is even more directly the argument of John Wilson Foster, who, in his article on "A Lough Neagh Sequence," sees the patterns outlined by Heaney as "Perhaps too neatly" conceived (142) and as comprising a basic "motif of homing" (142) and "Dark descent to origins" (140) in his poetry--comments that echo his earlier description of Death of a Naturalist as the "incantation and commemoration" of the rural origins that "Heaney is no longer at one with" ("The Poetry of Seamus Heaney" 36).

There is of course an element of truth to such arguments. Heaney himself has remarked that he grew up "at the end of a world" that was rapidly changed by mechanization in the 1950s (Begley 160-61) and that his studies, and later his teaching, took him away from. Thus, in a way,

his poetry constitutes an imaginative return to and recreation of a world that he has left and that has, by virtue of its own changes, moved beyond itself. A line like "But I've no spade to follow men like them," moreover, reveals not only Heaney's feelings of nostalgia and loss over leaving his original community but his sense of inadequacy in not being able to inherit his father's and grandfather's agricultural line of work. Furthermore, there is some sense of guilt underlying the frustration and even resentment that Heaney expresses in "Follower" in desiring to escape his origins, as they are embodied by his father, and yet finding himself unable to: "But today / It is my father who keeps stumbling / Behind me and will not go away" (22-24). Such ambivalences might compel Heaney to manufacture an elaborate schema in which earth-based cyclical patterns at once exist and remain essentially the same and yet inevitably either generate or absorb development or change. However, many of the continuities from which Heaney draws his general pattern have a literal basis: the individual patterns directly outlined or implied in such poems as "Digging," "Personal Helicon," "At a Potato Digging," "Requiem for the Croppies," "Bann Clay," "Bogland" and "A Lough Neagh Sequence," for instance, are hardly mere aesthetic constructs but are based on existing historical and physical continuities perceptible to anyone familiar with Heaney's background, Irish history and certain natural processes. Furthermore, if one considers the fact that Heaney, while he is clearly to some extent conscious of the patterns he presents, may not be entirely so--as he has not been, for instance, of some of the continuities evident in "Digging"--then one might more accurately perceive the general pattern as giving rise to itself in Heaney's imagination and as containing his

personal ambivalences, rather than the other way around. And, more accurately still, one might perceive Heaney's apprehension of this pattern as being promoted by his personal anxieties but as reinforming and reinforcing them as well. For when one examines this supposed schema more closely, one can see that it is in fact fraught with ambivalences and tensions that not only belie any seeming contrivance on Heaney's part but relate as generally to Heaney's view of the earth and the communal and extra-human realms, and the idea of earth-based cyclical/developmental continuity itself, as they do to Heaney's personal and artistic concerns.

Heaney, for instance, while he views the earth as a beneyolent, life-fostering element, a preserver of communal history and memory and even as something of a healer, or at least an absorber and transmuter, of communal disruptions (as in "Requiem," "Medallion," and "Shoreline"), also sees it and the life forces it generates and contains as alien, malevolent, potentially violent and destructive, and even infecting. For example, in "Death of a Naturalist," a poem which in fact takes as its central theme the displacement of Heaney's innocent and cozy childhood familiarity with nature by a nauseating awareness of its menacing and alienating forces, the frogs inhabiting the flax-dam that "festered in the heart/ Of the townland" (1-2) are described as "mud grenades" (30) threatening to explode in the young Heaney's face. More seriously, the earth in "At a Potato Digging," while it takes the form of Earth Mother, is also "the bitch earth" (43) and "the faithless ground" (56), whose hosting of the blight was largely responsible for the Great Famine and who is still associated with putrefaction and the "running sore" of the potato diggers' memory of the famine. This acknowledgement of the earth

and its life forces as potentially brutal also influences the frequently brutal tone of Heaney's poetry in these first two collections and explains his earlier-cited reference to his periodic desire to "wreck that comfort" which he attempts to offer himself and his community in his poems.

In a similar vein, Heaney's relationship with the earth, while it is close and even, as his frequent sexualizing of it might suggest, physically and emotionally intimate, and while it provides him with identity, religious experience, poetic inspiration, authority and release, is also seen by him as a potentially retarding and smothering one, threatening absorption and obliteration of his individual consciousness and poetic creativity. This much is suggested by the closing image of "Bann Clay," the notion of the earth's reductive influence on the spirit in "In Gallarus Oratory" and particularly the idea of the "world's live girdle" in "A Lough Neagh Sequence." The same can be said of the community's relationship with the earth as Heaney represents it, since it offers the community identity, stability, continuity and even growth but also seemingly threatens to retard its historical progress. Furthermore, if one understands the earth not only as a seemingly conscious or in some way living force and storehouse of human consciousness and memory, but as both a shaper of and analogue for the human unconscious--roles that it clearly plays in "At a Potato Digging," "A Lough Neagh Sequence," "In Gallarus Oratory," "Personal Helicon" and "Bogland," for instance--then it would seem that Heaney is for similar reasons ambivalent about his exploration of the darker underside of both his personality and his community, particularly as this is exemplified by the pagan impulse.

These ambivalences are partially resolved by the idea of cyclical/developmental continuity: for instance, the unconscious, within this framework, can be seen as feeding into and shaping a higher consciousness, as a pagan belief structure can be seen as feeding into and shaping a Christian one, both of which then channel back into an understanding of the unconscious and the pagan and so on. Nevertheless, they seem implicitly to raise questions in Heaney's mind about the complete desirability of the overall pattern he perceives. For instance, is growth within the community and the individual implicit to and inevitable within this pattern, or do cyclical connections with the past and the earth form a constricting rather than unifying circle which potentially inhibits development unless it is broken or escaped? The effect of the earth's force in "In Gallarus Oratory," which seems to be more of an impediment to spiritual growth--"No worshipper / Would leap up to his God off this floor"--than a promoter of it, would perhaps suggest the latter, even while it serves to heighten, by contrast, the religious experience achieved outside the oratory. And the vision at the end of "A Lough Neagh Sequence" would seem unequivocally to confirm the latter. Similarly, the sense of a greater destiny that prevents the fishermen from learning to swim in "A Lough Neagh Sequence" seems pointlessly and inhibitively, even primitively, fatalistic. The same question also applies to the influence of Heaney's rural origins and familial ties on his poetry, as the ambivalence of "Follower" clearly demonstrates. This general problem, moreover, is exacerbated by another and converse question arising as to whether development within this pattern, inevitable or not, is actually progress or loss. The introduction of technological innovations to the potato and eel harvests

in "At a Potato Digging" and "A Lough Neagh Sequence," and the socio-economic effects of the Great Famine's disruption of the potato-harvesting cycle, for instance, are either potentially or actually destructive, particularly of a "sense of fair play" in man's interactions with the earth and, in the case of the famine, of man himself. Again, this converse question applies to the matter of Heaney's own poetry, as his partial anxiety in "Digging" fully suggests.

These ambivalences inform Heaney's representation of his community as simultaneously admirable and suspect in both its traditionalism and its growth. And this dual representation sometimes threatens to become a cancelling out, as in "At a Potato Digging," where one is puzzled as to whether Heaney admires the diggers' 'mindlessness' or their sense of injustice, the modern improvements in the conditions of the harvest or the diggers' unconsciously ritualistic propitiation of the earth with "Libations of cold tea" and food (57)--or whether in fact he prefers any of these. The same, moreover, can be said of Heaney's representation of himself, according to which he is at once a fully grown man and poet, symbolically following in his forefathers' steps through the digging and ploughing of his poetry but striking out, somewhat guiltily, in a new and higher direction, and yet, as in "Poem" (DN 48), a mental "child / Who diligently potters . . . / Digging with a heavy spade" (2-3), "Whose small imperfect [i.e. earthbound] limits would keep breaking" (14) and who seeks perfection "Within new limits" (15)--in this instance, the new and more eternal limits of a different sort of circle symbolized by the "golden ring" (16) of his marriage.

What lies at the heart of these ambivalences and contradictions is not simply Heaney's difficulty in reconciling his soil-based origins

with his poetry and the seeming losses and gains involved in his movement from one to the other but his difficulty in reconciling the general concepts of repetition and progress or rootedness and transcendence. These difficulties notwithstanding, Heaney clearly believes in their interrelatedness and expresses this belief in two especially emblematic poems, "Gravities" (DN 43) and "The Plantation" (DD 49-50). In the former, the interrelatedness of rootedness and transcendence is symbolized by the force of gravity, physical, physiological or emotional, which defines patterns of flight or outward movement by connecting them either to the earth or to some other base in a form of orbit. Three of the illustrations Heaney presents are especially interesting and even prophetic: the "reined" kites (1-2) and the "instinctively" returning bird (3-4), which serve as emblems of the earth's or origins' binding influence on the soul and heart, particularly the artist's soul and heart, and which figure again in Heaney's most recent collections, and the image of Joyce "on Iona Colmcille . . . / . . . wearing Irish mould next to his feet" (11-12). The latter is not only a precursor to later images of artistic exile in Heaney's poetry but an illustration of the artist's intellectual and spiritual rootedness in his origins and community. Furthermore, it is an example that Heaney places in its own cyclical/developmental pattern by associating Joyce with the sixth-century monastery of Iona Colmcille, whose inhabitants, while living in spiritual retreat from Ireland, nevertheless served as some of the chief promoters and guardians of its art and culture. This interrelationship is even more complexly presented in "The Plantation," where, in the symbolic landscape of a forest, linear progression and circularity, past and present, individual and

communal experience become one and the same:

> Though you walked a straight line
> It might be a circle that you travelled
> With toadstools and stumps
>
> Always repeating themselves.
> Or did you re-pass them?
> Here were bleyberries quilting the floor,
> The black char of a fire
>
> And having found them once
> You were sure to find them again.
> Someone had always been there
> Though always you were alone. (6-16)

In this process, a return to one's historical, experiential roots in landscape leads to a type of transcendence characterized by simultaneous control and lack of control, awareness and loss of oneself:

> You had to come back
> To learn how to lose yourself,
> To be pilot and stray--witch,
> Hansel and Gretel in one. (33-36)

In noting such patterns of circularity, John Wilson Foster has argued that the collective "conceit" they form, "that of the circle or orbit . . . threatens to make his [Heaney's] poetic philosophy a closed system . . ." ("The Poetry of Seamus Heaney" 41). There is of course some truth in this statement. Heaney does, for instance, see the circularity of the forest as a "whispering treadmill" (24), an image that would suggest a narrow round of repetition; and his image of the orbit, both in "Gravities" and "A Lough Neagh Sequence," could be seen as implying, in Foster's words, a "tendency . . . to circumscribe" (41). However, the "treadmill," while its limits seem "defined / . . . from outside" (25-26), is paradoxically limitless on the inside; and the image of the orbit is more reflective of the tension in Heaney's poetry that has already been described than it is of any wholly circumscribed outlook on his part. If one judges by these symbolic images alone,

Heaney's "system" does not appear to be a closed one. Furthermore, if one adds to them the generally developmental nature of the cyclical patterns outlined or implied in his other poems, then one can in fact see his "system" as being more open than closed. Heaney's "poetic philosophy," however, is not really a "system" at all but a way of seeing that stems from the many existing continuities he perceives in his environment, community and personal life and art, and that attains to a greater and more coherent understanding of these continuities. It might even be said, to use a phrase with which Heaney himself describes a similar phenomenon in Hardy's poetry, that his perceived world of cyclical/developmental continuity is "simply the natural climate of [his] imagination" ("Place, Pastness, Poems" 43). Furthermore, while this way of seeing continues to characterize Heaney's later collections, it by no means remains static but, because of its unresolved ambivalences and tensions and especially because of the pressures placed upon it by political events in Northern Ireland, in itself continues to develop.

III. Wintering Out and North

Heaney has said of his first four volumes that they constitute "one book" that "grows together and goes together" (Haffenden 15-16). And certainly Wintering Out and North are in many ways natural extensions of Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark, once more taking up much of the subject matter and developing many of the themes of these first two collections. Most notably, these later volumes reveal the same fascination with the earth and the same earth-based, pattern-oriented perception of organic relationships between past and present, and environment, community, self and art. There is, however, a noticeable increase in the intensity of the fascination, with these two works being much more earth-centred in their content. In particular, Heaney's early interest in and perception of the earth, and especially the bog, as a living repository of and influence on Irish and Northern Irish experience here develops, in the form of numerous earth and landscape poems--among the better known, the so-called 'Bog Poems'--into a controlling idea of increasingly symbolic scope that binds these two collections into a cohesive unit. And this unit, while it does in fact, as Heaney suggests, point back to his earlier volumes, also remains distinct from them, serving as a pivotal point between them and his more recent work.

Accompanying this development is a development of purpose and focus in Heaney's exploration and delineation of a general earth-based, cyclical pattern. While Heaney has up to this point outlined the pattern and noted, even implicitly questioned, some of its extra-human, communal and personal manifestations in an attempt to enlarge both his own and his community's understanding of it, he has remained largely passive in

his view of it. In fact, he has looked to it primarily as an explanation, and even justification, for his own and his community's experience and only secondarily as something in itself requiring closer examination and justification. In other words, he has seen the general cyclical/developmental pattern as more or less a given, a universal and unifying principle of order, that acts upon more than it is itself acted upon. In Wintering Out and North, Heaney continues to regard the pattern as a given to be discovered and understood but begins also to see the possibility of its being influenced by the artist and his community. Furthermore, in his more sceptical moments, which will be discussed toward the end of this chapter, Heaney ceases to take this pattern as a given at all, instead temporarily seeing its cyclical aspects as man-created, man-perpetuated and confining, and interpreting the constant imbalances between its cyclical and developmental aspects as unresolvable contradictions to be thrown over in favour of a more strictly developmental and wholly earth-detached vision.

It is largely for these reasons (under which lie the effects on Heaney of the Northern Irish Troubles, to be discussed shortly) that Heaney, while retaining an interest in and largely religious view of the earth as a symbolic embodiment of the extra-human realm, displays a stronger interest in the nature of its relationship to the communal and personal and artistic realms. Heaney presents the interrelationship of these two realms themselves so much more directly and intensely that his communal and his own personal/artistic experiences and concerns occasionally, as in "Traditions" (WO 31-32) and Part II of "Funeral Rites" (N 16-17), become indistinguishable from one another:

> 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. ("Traditions" 1-12)

Now as news comes in
of each neighbourly murder
we pine for ceremony,
customary rhythms:

the temperate footsteps
of a cortege, winding past
each blinded home. ("Funeral Rites" 33-39)

In these passages, what most obviously marks the conflation of the artist and his previously implied audience (the 'you,' for instance, of "Personal Helicon") into one prominent body with common experiences and needs is Heaney's shift from the more personally familial use of the first person pronouns 'we,' 'us' and 'our' in the earlier collections to a more broadly communal one. (It might be argued here that the first person plural pronouns in "Traditions" are meant to refer strictly to the speaker and the writer Tom Flanagan, to whom Heaney dedicates the poem; however, even more clearly than in the also dedicated "Personal Helicon," the extra-personal dimension of the poem can be felt to include Heaney's entire Irish community--and not only his contemporary one but his historical and even fictional ones as well.) Even more important, though, is Heaney's tying of himself and his art to his community through his use of such phrases and words as "guttural muse" and "rhythms," which not only suggest the importance of literature,

especially poetry, as a linguistic expression of the common nation containing and uniting the individual Irish artist and his community, but with the accompanying words "custom," "customary," "cortege" and "winding" also point up the importance of pattern to this sense of unity.

That the pattern is moreover earth-based and circular or cyclical/developmental is evident in the larger context of the entire poems. In "Traditions," the "guttural muse" of the Irish language, which in such poems as "Anahorish" (WO 16), "Toome" (WO 26) and "Broagh" (WO 27) is implicitly identified as the Irish landscape itself, has been "bulled long ago" by the English "alliterative tradition"--the highly expressive word "bulled" having among the many meanings suggested by the OED the particularly relevant ones of 'bred with a bull' or, more colloquially, 'bred with a man' (in both cases John Bull comes to mind), 'deceived, cheated or mocked' and most significantly 'ploughed up by the bull teeth of a harrow.' The muse having been made "vestigial," the recipients of her inspiration have been culturally uprooted and simultaneously invaded by and connected to the British Isles. (Again, the phrase 'beds down' carries the double sex and earth denotations that are clearly in Heaney's poetry symbolically interrelated and mutually sustaining.) There they have been degraded and ridiculed in the body of the defiant but nevertheless subservient Shakespearean character MacMorris "gallivanting / round the Globe" (25-26) and asking the question "What ish my nation?" (32) This latter image is ideal, capturing, among other things, the sense of the uprooted Irish tradition being set down on the new artistic soil of the Globe Theatre, microcosmic representation of the English world, which it now falsely

gravitates around and moreover, as the word "gallivanting" suggests, prostitutes itself in doing so. However, despite its serious waning in the Elizabethan era, the Irish muse's power has eventually reasserted itself in the figure of Joyce's Bloom, whose "wandering" (34) in the streets of Dublin and response to MacMorris' question with the serene, unpretentious statement "Ireland . . . / I was born here. Ireland" (35-36) successfully counteract the rootless Irish stereotype by stressing the re-rooted and re-strengthened Irish tradition and the physical land that inspires and sustains it. The pattern, of course, is not one of full circle but of developmental circle: the Irish language, that key component of the old tradition, remains largely vestigial, but in compensation the Irish muse now channels her inspiration through the English language, which her recipients have by this time not only fully mastered (the contrast between the stage-Irish accent of MacMorris and the simple but clear and forceful diction of Bloom is noteworthy), but also enhanced with their own linguistic contributions. Furthermore, as Neil Corcoran points out, the Irish tradition, while remaining true to its original centre, has not only, as in "Gravities," held within its orbit the exiled artist Joyce but, through Joyce's novel and its "wandering," Jewish/Odyssean hero, extended itself so as to possess and influence the entire Western tradition, thus turning its previous and temporary defeat into an eventual victory (83).[1] Incidentally, this idea of a reversal of the process of cultural absorption in Ireland's favour also inspires "Bone Dreams" (N 27-30), a poem that Heaney has playfully

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[1] It is worth noting, as Corcoran in fact does, that in his discussion of Joyce's cultural legacy in "The Interesting Case of John Alphonsus Mulrennan," Heaney closes with the significant remark, "His achievement reminds me that English is by now not so much an imperial humiliation as a native weapon" (40).

called "a kind of linguistic invasion of England" (FPC); however, in this case, Heaney's raids on what might be termed the 'English alliterative muse' that is, the landscape of Maiden Castle and the Anglo Saxon language which it gave rise to are carried out with the intention, not of 'bulling,' but of revivifying, the English tradition.

The earth based circular pattern of "Funeral Rites" manifests itself somewhat differently but is even more complex in nature. Its representative image is that of the enormous imaginary funeral procession, compared in lines 55 and 56 to "a serpent / in its grassy boulevard" (a simile reminiscent of the eel and all of its cyclical/developmental associations in "A Lough Neagh Sequence"), travelling from Northern Ireland to the Neolithic burial grounds on the River Boyne and then back again. However, the purposes and the historically symbolic route of this imaginary procession themselves reveal underlying circular patterns. The procession's primary function is to reinstil death in Northern Ireland with the order, solemnity and dignity that it once possessed in the past, up to and including the speaker's own youth, but no longer possesses in the present sectarian violence. In Heaney's own words, then, its purpose is to "remind ourselves [the Northern Irish] of the enormity of what it is to kill one person" (FPC). Furthermore, in doing so, the procession is meant to appease, by means of ritual, the violent impulses responsible for the current deaths and offer "the possibility of forgiveness" (FPC) in much the same way as the vision of the dead Gunnar of Njal's Saga "chanting / verses about honour" (73-74).[2] Likewise, the actual route of the

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[2] There are two points worth noting about Heaney's use of this work: first, Gunnar's special appeal to Heaney undoubtedly lies in the fact that his death is due largely to his deep attachment to his farm and the Icelandic landscape in general, which leads him to defy his sentence of

procession offers the possibility of reconciliation through a circular journey in time and space that performs a number of functions. First, it symbolically bridges the divisions between Protestant Loyalists and Catholic Republicans, which Heaney clearly sees as responsible for the current bloodshed, by physically bridging the border that separates Northern from Republican Ireland:

> the procession drags its tail
> out of the Gap of the North
> as its head already enters
> the megalithic doorway. (57-60)

Furthermore, it does so by returning in space to that precise scene of previous bloodshed, the Boyne River, at which the "Gap" can be thought to have most significantly widened. However, in journeying back in time beyond the Battle of the Boyne, which is not mentioned in the poem, and making its more specific destination the Neolithic burial grounds that share the battle's location but predate it by thousands of years, the procession succeeds both in depriving the religio-political causes of the Northern killings of their urgency and in reasserting the significance that the deaths themselves share with past deaths in one of Ireland's earliest known cultures. A similar effect is created by the return journey in time and space "past Strang and Carling fjords" (64), whose function as reminders of Ireland's Viking legacy and accompanying allusion to Gunnar dissolve the seeming differences between the vengeful ethos of the Danes and that of the Northern Irish and cyclically extend

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[2](cont'd) exile, even at the risk of being killed with impunity by his enemies; secondly--and this is a point that Annwn also makes (139)--Heaney's reading of the particular episode to which he alludes is decidedly more optimistic than the text dictates since the honour about which Gunnar chants consists in dying bravely on the battlefield and is furthermore interpreted by his listeners as counsel to carry on the feud that has resulted in his death. (See Chapters 75 and 79 of Njal's Saga.)

the possibility of the end of the one to the other.[3]

The general circular pattern evident in "Funeral Rites" is clearly not as developmental as that of "Traditions," offering as it does a mere restoration of the past to the present, unaccompanied by any noticeable improvement of it in compensation for temporary or permanent losses suffered by the Irish community. Furthermore, while the ethos of revenge dealt with in the poem, like the changes undergone by the Irish tradition in "Traditions," would seem to demonstrate an actual, perceptible cyclicality, the circular procession created by Heaney is itself strictly imaginary and its effects desired rather than achieved. That is, Heaney "would," but does not actually, "restore / the great chambers of Boyne" (40-41) and have his community participate in the great procession he envisions. Despite these differences, the two poems display an obvious similarity in their vision of a cyclical relationship between past and present and in their identification of the Irish soil as both the primary base and the focal point of this relationship. And even more importantly, they share a paradoxical view of their cyclical and circular patterns as being both earth-governed and yet also man- and community-governed, particularly through the agency of the poet or writer, who records common language and experience. (It is worth noting that each poem ends with a direct quotation or paraphrase of a literary work that has come to stand as a symbol of the nation inspiring it.)

Such similarities and the developments they reflect are attributable to a crucial influence on Heaney's poetry at this time which the subject matter of "Funeral Rites," and even indirectly of

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[3] For a similar but more detailed and informative reading of this poem, see Corcoran, 109-11. Also, for a more in-depth commentary on the ritual significance of the funeral procession, see Annwn, 138-39.

"Traditions," reveals: namely, the escalation of political and religious hostility in Northern Ireland into the full-scale sectarian violence that began with the rioting of Mid-August 1969 and consequent introduction of British troops (two months after Door into the Dark's publication) and that rapidly intensified through the 1970s. Heaney has remarked of this period of his writing that while the general characteristics of his poetry "remained the same, they had to strain to face the reality of the happenings and the subterranean energies which produced these happenings" (Deane, "Unhappy" 67). This remark itself does much to suggest not only the basic ways in which Heaney himself understands the Troubles and asks his fellow Northern Irishmen to do so, but the basic tension inherent in this understanding.

First, as the phrase "subterranean energies" partly implies, Heaney sees the violence as having its roots not simply in the political-religious conflict between Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants (which is itself complex enough), but in two, more deeply earth-based religious phenomena that are closely related and pervasive in Irish and Northern Irish culture. The first of these is the cyclically on-going and primitively religious attachment--'paralyzed' though it has been by Catholicism--of the native Irish to their country's soil and landscape. "Territorial religion" (Walsh) and "territorial piety" (Pre 57) are two phrases that Heaney has used to describe this attachment as it is embodied by Catholic Irish Republicanism in particular. Accompanying this attachment in earlier times was not only the attractive feature of a devotion to a distinctive language that had been shaped, in Heaney's eyes, by the landscape as muse, but also the less attractive feature of a givenness to seasonal,

ritualistic and even violent human sacrifice in propitiation of the landscape as goddess. These are features that to Heaney's mind have survived in diminished and altered, but not greatly diminished and altered, form in present-day Irish culture. Heaney does not, of course, see these traits as exclusive to the Irish; his many allusions--more numerous in North than in Wintering Out--to the old Norse and Anglo-Saxon cultures often reveal his knowledge that they are common to the Northern European races in general,* even though they are perhaps not as readily apparent in these other races' modern members as they are in the Irish. This knowledge certainly underlies his use of Njal's Saga in "Funeral Rites," and even more so his repeated poetic treatment of the Danish 'Bog People,' victims of Iron-Age sacrifices to the earth goddess Nerthus. Most noteworthy of these 'Bog Poems' in this respect is "The Tollund Man," which ends with this imagined personal response on Heaney's part to the poem's sacrificial victim and Danish landscape:

> Something of his sad freedom
> As he rode the tumbril
> Will come to me, driving,
> Saying the names
>
> Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard....
>
> Out there in Jutland
> In the old man-killing parishes
> I will feel lost,
> Unhappy and at home. (33-40)

Here, Heaney's incantatory repetition of the Danish place-names "Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard" (similar, in its quality of reverence, to his poetic relishings of the Irish place-names Anahorish, Toome and

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* Heaney draws this knowledge from P.V. Glob's The Bog People (the well-known inspiration for his 'Bog Poems'), which, although it deals mostly with Germanic Iron Age tribes, identifies the practice of ritual human sacrifices to earth goddesses as a general Northern European phenomenon.

Broagh) and his description of them as "the old man-killing parishes" reveal the integral and on-going connection he sees between land, language and religious sacrifice. His final, disoriented and yet sadly familiar response to this pattern in turn stresses the connection he draws between Iron-Age Denmark and his own past and present-day Northern Ireland. However, keen as Heaney's interest in the similarities between the different Northern European 'territorial religions' might be, it restricts itself primarily to their usefulness in enlarging his own and his community's understanding of the specifically pagan-Catholic Northern Irish 'religion's' contribution to the Troubles.

The same point can be made about the other earth-based religious phenomenon that Heaney sees as contributing to Northern Irish sectarian violence, which is the historic disruption and attempted displacement of the Irish 'territorial religion' by its English counterpart. That is, rather than dwelling on the broader pattern of cultural invasion and counter-invasion characterizing the overall relationship of the Northern European races, Heaney focuses on this one general invasion and particularly that one phase of it which perhaps best accounts for the distinctness of Ireland's present political situation from those of its neighbouring countries. This is the Tudor plantation which, in its establishment of a large loyalist Protestant population in Ireland and especially Northern Ireland, radically upset the Irish territorial religion and hence began the intense religio-political hostilities that have continued intermittently and concentrated themselves in the one part of the country where modern Britain still maintains its presence. This, of course, is the specific invasion referred to in "Traditions" and even more forcefully presented in "Ocean's Love to Ireland" (N

46-47), where it takes on the qualities of a rape perpetrated by that chief devotee of "Cynthia" (10) and her policies, Walter Ralegh. Especially noteworthy are three features of this latter poem that illustrate the invasion's suppression and supplanting of the intimate, propitiatory relationship between the Irish (and their political allies), their language and their territorial deity. These are its references to Ralegh's "broad Devonshire" (1) accent and the "iambic drums / of English" (22-23) beating the Irish woods; its sexual and biblical presentation of the "ruined" Ireland (in the form of an Irish-speaking "maid") as being "failed" by both "The Spanish prince," who "has spilled his gold" (19-22), and her own poets, who "Sink like Onan" (19-24); and its closing description of the Irish soil as 'fading' from these poets' "somnolent clasp / Into ringlet-breath and dew, / The ground possessed and repossessed" (25-27).

The exact brand of territorial religion that grew out of the Plantation Heaney does not define in "Ocean's Love to Ireland," but elsewhere he sees it as essentially masculine and dominant rather than feminine and propitiatory, since the Planter stock was and still is "bound" to the soil, not through a goddess figure--and certainly not through her Catholic Marian equivalent as are in part the native Irish[5]--but "through the charter given by an historical king" (Pre 147) and through a biblical, male and of course Protestant God. Similarly, this Planter stock's ties to the Irish soil are expressed, not through the Irish language, over which the native territorial deity presides as

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[5] In "The Sense of Place," Heaney points explicitly to the merging of pagan and Catholic personifications of the soil when he remembers, from his own childhood, that "during the month of May the pagan goddess became the Virgin Mary and May flowers had to be gathered for her altar on the chest-of-drawers in the bedroom . . ."(Pre 134).

muse, but through a language largely alien to the landscape. These different channels of the loyalist religious attachment come together in "The Other Side" (WO 34-36), where the Protestant neighbour, as he appeared to the young Heaney, is clearly both a descendant of the English-speaking Planter stock and a biblical prophet figure asserting the righteousness of his people's (as opposed to the Irish Catholics') connection with the Ulster soil:

> Thigh-deep in sedge and marigolds
> a neighbour laid his shadow
> on the stream, vouching
>
> 'It's poor as Lazarus, that ground,'
> and brushed away
> among the shaken leafage:
>
> I lay where his lea sloped
> to meet our fallow,
> nested on moss and rushes,
>
> my ear swallowing
> his fabulous, biblical dismissal,
> that tongue of chosen people.
>
> When he would stand like that
> on the other side, white-haired,
> swinging his blackthorn
>
> at the marsh weeds,
> he prophesied above our scraggy acres,
> and then turned away
>
> towards his promised furrows
> on the hills.... (1-20)

The Old Testament association is of course the dominant one, but the references to "that tongue of chosen people" and "promised furrows" also unmistakably describe the sense of territorial religious privilege enjoyed by Northern Irish loyalists by virtue of their colonial status, their 'establishment' religion and their language.[6]

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[6] Again, for a differently focused but informative reading of this poem, see Corcoran, 91.

The danger of such suppression and supplanting of a territorial religion--namely, that they make conflict, even violent conflict, between the old and newer religions likely--is evident enough in Irish history and is directly treated by Heaney in "Act of Union" (N 49-50). In this poem, another sexually described invasion of Ireland by England, this time the 1800 Act of Union subsuming the Irish parliament into the English one, leaves a "legacy" (13), the "parasitical" Northern Irish population--divided within itself and with each part hostile to one of its two parent nations--that "culminates inexorably" (14) within "half-independent" (12) Ireland. Here Heaney places less explicit emphasis on the suppression of the Irish population's religious/linguistic relationship with the soil; in fact, Ireland and her people seem to be one body. Nevertheless, his references in an earlier version of the poem[7] to England's linguistic "occupation" (19), which has left Ireland's "mouth . . . fluent with" (33) the English tongue, would indicate that Heaney has this suppression strongly in mind as one of the chief factors responsible for the violent Northern Irish "legacy" he is here portraying.

Recognizing as he does the continuing power of the Irish territorial religious impulse in both its older and more recent forms, Heaney also recognizes, as his use of the phrase "subterranean energies" suggests, that this impulse is largely unconscious and volatile, and therefore inclined to result in regular, even cyclical "eruption[s] of archaic religious passions" (FPC) of which the Troubles are only the most recent form. Thus, one of the chief undertakings of his poetry becomes the direct exploration or 'facing' of the conflicting

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[7] Originally published separately as "A New Life."

"subterranean" religious "energies" feeding the Troubles--especially through the archaeological 'excavations' and associated mythopoeic visions of many of the poems in Wintering Out and North--in an attempt to air and explain them in terms of cyclically recurring territorial religious impulses. This would certainly seem to be the purpose of his three best known bog poems, "The Grauballe Man" (N 35-36), "Punishment" and "The Tollund Man," all of which draw unmistakable, cyclical lines of connection from the Danish Iron-Age sacrifices to similar sacrifices in Northern Ireland, whether they consist of recent occurrences, such as the 'slashing and dumping' of 'hooded victims' and the tarring of female Catholic 'collaborators,' or less recent incidents like the 1920s mutilation of four Catholic brothers by Protestants, which Heaney has described as "part of the folklore where I grew up" (FPC).

Explaining the Troubles through cyclical patterns, however, is not Heaney's only purpose in writing many of the poems in these collections. As recently as 1983, Heaney has explained an even more important intention, or desire, underlying them:

> I just tried to link ritual killing and fertility rites of the Iron Age ... to ritual killings and violence in contemporary Ireland in the hope that they might become fertility rites of some kind and that some kind of growth and renewal might occur at the end of it all. (FPC)

In this respect, then, Heaney is clearly attempting not only to explain Northern Irish violence in a mythopoeic mode, but also to turn the destructive aspects of this violence toward some peaceful and productive end. Furthermore, he is attempting both to promote the more valuable impulses of territorial religion such as devotion to land and language, and the need for communal rituals, and to appease and reconcile the differences in these impulses that occur from one Northern European

culture to another.

In particular, Heaney seeks to replace, if only imaginatively, the deep divisions within Northern Ireland, between Northern and Republican Ireland, and even between Ireland and Britain, with the "kind of rhythm" and "completeness" (Haffenden 18) that characterized life in Northern Europe under early territorial religion. He seeks to do so by uncovering and recapturing in his poetry an original, even primitive, cycle-oriented territorial religion that lies beneath, still influences, and can comprehend and explain its later offshoots and even, in some instances, appease their conflicting impulses. Once more, however, Heaney tailors this basic religion to the needs of his own community by, in most instances, making the soil of Ireland its sacred and unifying centre. Hence, his particular use of the ritualistic funeral cortege in "Funeral Rites" and also his treatment of cultural traditions in "Traditions," which, while strongly favouring Ireland in its cyclical and orbital view of cultural absorption and counter-absorption, nevertheless creates something of a whole and rhythmic picture of Western cultural tradition (as do, in sum, his prolific allusions to Irish and European literature throughout these two collections[*]). Hence also, in part, his frequent and conscious use of language and artefacts that are directly connected with the earth and a sacred, cycle-oriented view of it. In "Belderg" (N 13-14), for instance, Heaney, in describing a conversation with a collector of quernstones that have been retrieved from a bog, muses not only on the way in which the "stone-wall patternings" of the "fossilized landscape" preserved by the bog are

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[*] These allusions, some of which have arisen in this discussion but are too numerous to examine in any detail, are to date most thoroughly catalogued and discussed by Neil Corcoran (see chapters III and IV).

"Repeated before our eyes / In the stone walls of [present-day] Mayo" (16-19), but on the way in which the Irish, Anglo-Saxon and Norse etymologies of his own sacred homeground's name "Mossbawn," along with the collector's quernstones, constitute "growth rings," like those of a tree, that together point to "persistence, / A congruence of lives" (21-23). All of these ideas and circular images culminate in the poem's final vision of the "ancient mill" (41) and the Yggdrasil, or Scandinavian mythological world-tree that (according to Brewer's), "with its roots and branches, binds together heaven, earth and hell" and also represents the union of life and knowledge, and time and space. In Heaney's vision of it, the tree is composed not of plant tissue, but of "Querns piled like vertebrae, / The marrow crushed to grounds" (44-45). This terrifying but awe-inspiring image is wholly appropriate to Heaney's vision of a basic and culturally harmonizing territorial religion since, in its synthesis of the mechanical and the organic (mill and tree, and quernstones, spine and tree), it presents a cohesive view, both brutal and sublime, of the universe as one giant creation fueled by earth-based cycles and growths (including seemingly divergent languages), and by circular objects and mechanisms reflecting these cycles and growths.

In "Kinship," the sense of a universe fed and controlled by earth-based cycles is also prevalent and will be discussed later; but just as noteworthy is the way in which Heaney's characteristic and deliberate combination of Irish, Anglo-Saxon (or mock-Anglo-Saxon), Scandinavian and sometimes Latinate and other European words (a strategy that is also at work in "Belderg") in the poem's second part creates a unique, cross-cultural litany specifically inspired by the Irish bog:

But bog
meaning soft,
the fall of windless rain,
pupil of amber.

Ruminant ground,
digestion of mollusc
and seed-pod,
deep pollen bin.

Earth-pantry, bone-vault,
sun-bank, enbalmer
of votive goods
and sabred fugitives.

Insatiable bride.
Sword-swallower,
casket, midden,
floe of history. (29-44)

For the obvious reason that Heaney writes in English, most of the words comprising these stanzas are, according to the OED, of specifically Anglo-Saxon or more broadly Teutonic (that is, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and Old Norse) origin (for example, "meaning," "soft," "fall," "windless," "rain," "ground," "deep," "bin," "goods," and "bride) and are in current use. However, two of them, "midden" and "floe," are rarely or differently used today. Furthermore, a number of them are linked together to form the mock-Anglo-Saxon kennings "seed-pod," "sun-bank" and "sword-swallower", while others yet are linked with Old French or medieval Latin words to produce the hybrid mock-kennings "earth-pantry" and "bone-vault." All of these, along with the deliberately outdated form of "embalmer," numerous Latinates (for example, "pupil," "ruminant," "digestion," "votive," "fugitives," "insatiable" and "history") and a few words of uncertain or Oriental origin ("casket," "amber" and "sabred"), give the passage a deliberately archaic, pan-European quality that is also semi-pagan, semi-early-Christian, but clearly not of any more modern orthodox religion. Most important, of

course, is the italicized, Old Irish word "bog," which Heaney has contrasted with and chosen over its other Northern European equivalents "quagmire," "swampland" and "morass" (25), and which serves as the litany's central, triggering 'logos' whose meaning the ensuing words strive to echo and more fully describe. The Irish bog is, in fact, later in the poem described as "the vowel of earth" (86) itself, which can in a religious sense be seen as the key part of the territorial deity's physical and verbal revelation of herself to her people--that part, that is, which gives the earth full vocabular and religious meaning. And in this important respect, the Irish bog and the Irish word "bog" serve as centralizers and harmonizers of the litany's disparate linguistic and religious elements and hence have a similar, symbolic effect on the various Northern European forms of territorial worship.

Lest this discussion should seem to lock Heaney into the exclusive (and, in both its nature and exclusiveness, somewhat ludicrous) role of bog-priest or shaman attempting to lead the warring factions of his community into a uniform, neo-pagan and broadly Northern European but Irish-centred brand of earth-worship, it is crucial to repeat that "Belderg" and the bog litany of "Kinship" (along with "Funeral Rites," the bog poems and many other comparable poems in WO and N) are primarily imaginative and symbolic in gesture. Furthermore, Heaney's concerns and intentions in writing them are not strictly communally religious, although they are largely shaped by the territorial religion that he clearly shares with his community. Heaney's interest in the earth and its related cycles, artefacts and languages, for instance, is determined as much by their personal emotional and religious value to him and by their intrinsic aesthetic value as components of his own poetry as it is

by their broader, communally religious one. This last general feature is evident in different ways throughout Wintering Out and North. It is present, for instance, in the bog litany, which ends with the purely personal terms of praise "nesting ground, / outback of my mind" (47-48). Furthermore, with the possible exception of the vision of Gunnar in "Funeral Rites," the mythopoeic visions and imaginings of these two collections as, for example, in "Roots" (WO 39), "Tinder"(WO 43-44), "Belderg" and "Punishment" are experienced personally and exclusively by Heaney, even while they are transmitted to his audience and even while their import is broadly communal. And finally, Heaney's linguistic and earth explorations, manipulations and musings often become not only personal relishings of the qualities of individual words, place-names or landscape features (as in the place-name poems and "Bone Dreams," among others), but also conscious commentary on the poetic process of translating place into words and images, as in "Land" (WO 21-22):

> This is in place of what I would leave
> plaited and branchy
> on a long slope of stubble:
>
> a woman of old wet leaves,
> rush-bands and thatcher's scollops,
> stooked loosely, her breasts an open-work
>
> of new straw and harvest bows.
> Gazing out past
> the shifting hares. (14-22)

Incidentally, this passage, besides reflecting Heaney's prevailing and archetypally sexual view of the Irish soil and landscape, is very much in keeping with his contemplations in "Digging" and "Personal Helicon" on the symbolic, cyclical transference of his rural and soil-based childhood experience to his poetry.

Heaney's exploration of territorial religion and its various aspects, furthermore, is not always wholly religious in its focus. In fact, the rational and even scientific light which he occasionally seeks to shed on this religion and the earth that inspires it is often at odds with his own and his community's religious impulses. The archaic, mystical quality of the bog litany, for instance, is mitigated by the more modern Latinates "mollusc" and "pollen," which present the bog as an object of as much paleontological and botanical as religious interest. In the same vein, Heaney's frequent references--in this passage, in "Belderg" and in other poems--to the actual artefacts (both material and human) preserved by the bog reveal an archaeological interest as modern and objective as the visions these artefacts inspire are primitive and mythopoeic. As Corcoran, quoting Heaney, points out, this interest was partially fueled by a surge of archaeological activity in Republican Ireland during the late 1960s and the 1970s and by Heaney's friendship with the late archaeologist Tom Delaney, but the poet's visits to both Irish and Danish museums to view material and human artefacts were made largely on his own initiative (33-34).

These additional interests and concerns in Heaney's poetry point to fundamental divisions in his attitude toward his community and its conflicting territorial religions, and to similar divisions in his view of his own poetic enterprise, all of which account for the acute "strain" that Heaney alludes to in discussing his attempt "to face the reality of the happenings and the subterranean energies" of the Northern Irish Troubles. First, it is clear from such poems as "Bone Dreams," "The Other Side," "Kinship" and the 'rape of Ireland' poems that even while Heaney favours a unification and harmonizing of the conflicting

native and colonial territorially religious impulses, he is by virtue of his own childhood experience still very much loyal to the pagan/Catholic, feminine territorial deity*--often at the expense of the more masculine, Protestant one with which he is trying to merge her, as the general nature of his original, bog-centred religion and also his mild caricaturizing of the neighbour in "The Other Side" in particular suggest. Hence, the earth-based mythopoeic content of his poetry is to some extent motivated by his own personally biased desire to restrengthen and reassert over the more recent colonial culture the native Irish one that grew out of the worship of this deity. Nowhere is this sentiment more apparent than in "Antaeus" (N 12), where Heaney implicitly views himself as an Irish Antaeus figure championing the homeground and culture from which he draws his poetic strength:

> . . . Girdered with root and rock
> I am cradled in the dark that wombed me
> And nurtured in every artery
> Like a small hillock.
>
> Let each new hero come
> Seeking the golden apples and Atlas.
> He must wrestle with me before he pass
> Into that realm of fame
>
> Among sky-born and royal. . . . (9-17)

Heaney has in fact openly equated himself with Antaeus, whom he describes as "a native, earth-grubber, in touch with the ground" (Haffenden 22); and although this identification with a Greek mythological figure might seem to jar with his own territorial and cultural loyalties, it is nevertheless wholly appropriate, not only

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* This loyalty is also apparent in a number of Heaney's articles and interviews (among them, "The Sense of Place," "Unhappy" and the interviews with Robert Druce and Caroline Walsh), but especially so in his interview with Haffenden and "The Poet as a Christian" (much of the content of which is repeated in "The Sense of Place").

because of Antaeus' status as pagan figure and son of the earth goddess Gaea, but also because of his association with a native and nationalistic Irish culture of the soil in Yeats' "Municipal Gallery Revisited"--an association that Heaney is of course aware of (Haffenden 22). (It is also interesting to note that the "golden apples" guarded by Antaeus are perhaps not now so strongly associated with this figure as they are with Yeats and his "Song of the Wandering Aengus.")

Heaney's personal and poetic attachment to the Irish territorial deity, however, is often so strong that it has the paradoxical effect of separating him from the native, as well as the loyalist, Northern Irish community, even while it feeds his self-perceived role as unifier of these communities. This separateness is evident not only in his frequent, aestheticizing appreciations of Irish land and language, as in "Anahorish"--a poem that Heaney rarely reads in public "because there's no place for an audience to get in" (Haffenden 26)--but in a number of his bog poems, where his personal fascination with the territorial deity and her representative sacrificial victims reaches a disturbing and even alienating intensity. In "Come to the Bower" (N 31), for instance, Heaney's imagined discovery and undressing of "the dark-bowered queen" (5) takes on an unmistakably voyeuristic and even necrophiliac quality, particularly in the poem's final stanza:

> I reach past
> The riverbed's washed
> Dream of gold to the bullion
> Of her Venus bone. (17-20)

And in "Bog Queen" (N 32-34), Heaney's use of a distinct dramatic voice, although not by any means an innovation (dramatic voices having also been used in earlier poems like "Requiem for the Croppies," "Undine," "Aubade" and even "Antaeus," to list only some of the poems already

discussed), is nevertheless more disturbing than any previous such use. Perhaps this is so because, in following immediately after "Come to the Bower," it suggests that Heaney has somehow moved beyond the otherness implicit in his previous sexual contact with this dead but supernaturally living figure to a complete psychological fusion with her. The weirdness of this fusion is only further intensified by Heaney's deliberate combination throughout the poem of images of vital sexuality and physical decomposition, of beauty and ugliness, which build to the final and grotesque image of the dead queen's 'birth'/'resurrection':

> The plait of my hair,
> a slimy birth-cord
> of bog, had been cut
>
> and I rose from the dark,
> hacked bone, skull-ware,
> frayed stitches, tufts,
> small gleams on the bank. (50-56)[10]

These more purely artistic and personal aspects of Heaney's territorial attachment are continuous with two of his earliest and most important poetic mandates: first, (as he lays it down in "Personal Helicon") to explore the darker and more mysterious "subterranean" aspects of his own psyche, including his sexuality; and second, (as he implies it in "The Diviner") to stand religiously devoted to his own art and apart from his community, even while he performs for it much the same function as he performs for himself by exploring and uncovering the "subterranean energies" that it "wants ... current and released." Heaney

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[10] Neil Corcoran also stresses the symbolic, republican aspect of Heaney's relationship with this queen figure when he points out that "Come to the Bower" is the title of a popular Republican song and justifiably argues that the bog Queen (a Northern Irish, rather than Danish, find) serves as "a kind of Mother Ireland." (For further details of his political/allegorical reading of these poems, see 113-14 of his study.)

has in fact even directly associated an increased sense of these mandates with the increased sense of territorial religion gained through his exposure to the bog people and especially the Tollund Man:

> . . . when I wrote that poem ["The Tollund Man"] I had a sense of crossing a line really, that my whole being was involved in the sense--the root sense--of religion, being bonded to something, being bound to do something. I felt it a vow; I felt my whole being caught in this. And this was a moment of commitment not in the political sense but in the deeper sense of your life, committing yourself to something. I think that brought me a new possibility of seriousness in the poetic enterprise. . . . I'm very angry with a couple of snotty remarks by people who don't know what they are talking about and speak as if the bog images were picked up for convenience instead of being, as I'm trying to take this opportunity to say, a deeply felt part of my own life, a revelation to me. (Randall 18-19)

However, neither understanding the dual nature of his poetic role and the paradoxical way in which his territorial attachment both unites and divides his stances on self and poetry and community, nor implicitly reasserting the personal and artistic mandates of his poetry lessens the strain Heaney experiences as their direct result. In fact, this strain has increased considerably over the more comfortably handled tension of the earlier collections, no doubt because Heaney's obvious desire to serve as a unifier of his divided community is now far greater and more urgent than it ever could have been before the outbreak of the Troubles.

That Heaney alternately sees the public role of his poetry as compromising its more purely personal and artistic aspects and vice versa is evident in the differing lay-outs of Wintering Out and North and, periodically, within their individual poems.[11] Both are divided

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[11] It is necessary to note here that these lay-outs in no way reflect the chronological order in which Heaney wrote the poems of these collections, as the following discussion might imply. For instance, two of the poems in Part II of North, "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" (first published in October 1971) and "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966" (first published in September 1966), of which more will be said later, were written before the publication of either collection. However, Heaney's decision not to include them in his collections before this point, and

into two parts--a structure unique to these collections and appropriate to the strain with which Heaney is attempting to come to terms--with the first part of each being a fairly balanced combination of public and personal poetry--often, as in the case of "A Northern Hoard" (WO 39-44) and many of the poems from North already discussed, within individual poems or poem sequences themselves. Part II of Wintering Out, however, shifts noticeably to a poetry that, if not always wholly personal, is not wholly pertinent to the Northern Irish situation either--as if to say that Heaney is here asserting his status as an individual artist aware of but not entirely subject to public and political circumstance. This note is partially reinforced by the fact that most of the non-Heaney figures at the centre of Part II--the mad girl of "A Winter's Tale" (64-65), the woman and the mermaid of "Shore Woman" (66-67) and "Maighdean Mara" (68-69), and the woman and children (one dead, one living) of "Limbo" (70) and "Bye-Child" (71-72)--are all in one way or another solitary fringe members of the Irish community and are, moreover, presented by Heaney as other-worldly. One thinks in particular of Heaney's sustained association of the 'bye-child' with the moon:

> Little henhouse boy,
> Sharp-faced as new moons
> Remembered . . .
>
> Little moon man . . .
> Your frail shape, luminous,
> Weightless, is stirring the dust. . . . (5-12)

In contrast, Part II of North deliberately shifts to an emphasis on what Heaney himself has described as the "more public" (Haffenden 23) and "explicit" (Deane, "Unhappy" 71) voice of his poetry. Interestingly

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[11](cont'd) his ordering of the poems in both collections in general, clearly and intentionally reflect the larger direction of his shifting views on the Troubles and his own poetry.

enough, Heaney has also described the contents of this section as "poems which in a sense anybody could write . . ." (Druce 24). While such a statement is surely exaggerated, these poems do constitute Heaney's most contemporary and direct poetic confrontation of the Troubles and are no doubt his response to the criticisms he has just finished directing at himself in Part I for his self-absorption and absorption, both personal and aesthetic, with language and the Irish territorial deity. He has, for example, satirically identified himself, in "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" (N 21-24), with that epitome of self-alienation and political inefficacy, Hamlet, "coming to consciousness / by jumping in graves, / dithering, blathering" (62-64). Furthermore, through his description of himself as "the artful voyeur" (32) in "Punishment," he has simultaneously criticized his tendencies both to aestheticize and to sexualize the bog and its human contents from a safe distance. And, in a similar vein, he has, in "Ocean's Love to Ireland," implicitly represented himself as a wilfully ineffective Onan figure. (This last criticism can be read in either of two ways, depending upon how one interprets 'the sin of Onan.' If one understands it as Mary Brown, for instance, does, then one might see Heaney as implying that "Irish poets as a whole are useless [and, one might add, solely self-indulgent] masturbators" [295]. Such a reading could, if correct, throw a whole new and critical light on Heaney's playful use of the earth-related masturbation metaphor in his interview with Garland. If, however, one understands Onanism more technically as coitus interruptus,[12] one might, perhaps more accurately, see Heaney as implying that Irish poets, past and present, have derived their poetry from their sexual-like

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[12] My thanks to Professor R. F. Ayling for pointing out this more correct definition in our discussion of the poem.

interactions with the Irish territory but have, as it were, at critical moments in Ireland's history "failed" her by being too non-committal. In either case, Heaney's metaphor is perhaps unfortunate and even self-subverting since Onanism is, in keeping with the biblical passage from which the term derives, invariably associated with the phrase "spilling one's seed on the ground"--an association which in this case might imply a fulfilment of the Irish poet's responsibility to his country rather than a shirking of it.)

These self-criticisms and the differences in the lay-outs of these two collections reflect more than just a tension between Heaney's personal and public voices, since what they also point to is an anxiety on Heaney's part about the extent to which his territorial attachment influences both these voices. This additional strain is not as evident in Wintering Out, although it is important to note that both Heaney's use of earth imagery and his anthropomorphizing of the Irish soil decrease significantly in the collection's second part--with the exception of his reference to walking "Over the soft fontanel / Of Ireland" (9-10) in "May" (75)--and are replaced by a more general use of landscape and place. But it is wholly apparent by the end of the first part of North, when, in "Hercules and Antaeus" (52-53), Heaney symbolically enacts a psychological rupture of his territorial attachment that he has already twice physically enacted through his year-long residence at Berkeley in 1970-71[13] and his permanent move to Republican Ireland in 1972, and that he at this point believes necessary for his writing of a more purely public poetry.

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[13] Of this first significant departure from Northern Ireland, Heaney has said, interestingly enough, that it "loosened the soil round the Ulster tap root" (Walsh).

Why Heaney thinks this sort of rupture necessary points to an ambivalence on his part which is so deeply rooted that it can be seen as underlying all of the other divisions in his poetry: his ambivalent view of the Irish territorial attachment and of the various earth-based cycles he has presented and seemingly believed in throughout his poetry. As he has explained to Haffenden, Heaney at this point in his writing sees Hercules' victory over Antaeus (with whom he has of course identified himself) as "represent[ing] the possibility of the play of intelligence" (22) in his poetry. Furthermore, Hercules, who is also largely an analogue for the British colonization of Ireland, represents a masculine will capable of culturally 'weaning' (9) both the poet and his nation from "the pieties of illiterate fidelity" (Deane, "Unhappy" 68) to the Irish soil and replacing them with a greater rationality. All this of course implies that Heaney now sees the Irish cycle-oriented religious attachment to a native territorial deity, and his own personal and poetic expression of this attachment, as being unintelligent and irrational, because not based on any verifiable reality, and therefore needlessly mystifying or aestheticizing, fatalistic and ultimately conducive to the current violence.

This attitude is not entirely new to Heaney's poetry. In fact, the sceptical side of Heaney's understanding of earth-based cycles and the Northern Irish affinity for them is only an intensification of two of his earliest and unresolved anxieties evident in Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark. The first is his fear that, despite its beneficent aspects, an on-going, religious and cycle-oriented attachment to the soil may have a retarding and even smothering effect on himself, his art and his community. The second is his related uncertainty as to

whether certain, more primitive features of soil-rootedness, despite their partial attractiveness, are not better left behind in a search for personal, artistic and communal development. Indeed, his 1972 description of the Troubles as part of "the old vortex of racial and religious instinct" ("The Trade of an Irish Poet" 32), aside from its more human and religio-political focus, seems little different from his earlier vision of the downward-pulling "world's live girdle" at the end of "A Lough Neagh Sequence." In the same vein, the obstinate and cyclically fatalistic strain that Heaney now perceives in the Northern Irish attitude toward the Troubles is strongly reminiscent of the Lough Neagh fishermen's similar assertion that "The lough will claim a victim every year."

Heaney's scepticism, moreover, has already openly shown itself in a number of the poems of Wintering Out and North. For instance, "Tinder," the final poem of the sequence "A Northern Hoard," presents an extremely desolate view of the way in which native memories of past cyclical patterns of violence in Irish history have largely contributed to a complacent acceptance of, and even desire for, the Troubles. As Corcoran has noted, the poem begins with Heaney's memory of his childhood attempts to start fires with flints, but Heaney's deliberate, implied comparison of the fingering of these "Pale and dirt-veined" (2), "Cold beads of history and home" (5) with the fingering of a rosary quickly takes it to a higher, religiously and politically symbolic level (73). It is, however, essential to add to Corcoran's comments that this basic and, here, earth-associated cyclical image symbolically summarizes the Northern Catholic, territorially religious belief that the current Northern Irish situation is only one small part of a larger cycle of

native uprisings against the British that will inevitably, at some critical moment, 'turn round' to result in the restoration of a United Ireland. On at least two occasions, Heaney has either neutrally or favourably described this belief as a general "blueprint" that he was himself culturally conditioned to accept (Begley 166; Deane, "Talk With Seamus Heaney" 48). In this poem, however, he clearly chooses to criticize it. His questions

> What did we know then
> Of tinder, charred linen and iron,
>
> Huddled at dusk in a ring,
> Our fists shut, our hopes shrunken?
>
> What could strike a blaze
> From our dead igneous days? (13-18)

and his probable allusion to Plato's Myth of the Cave in his reference to "a cave-mouth of flame / Of leaf and stick / Trembling at the mind's wick" (6-8) together strongly imply that a Catholic longing for a renewal of past resistance to British colonialism is informed by no-longer-real historical shadows and an inadequate and unrealistic understanding of the "subterranean" violent impulses underlying the "dead igneous days" of Irish history. Furthermore, as the poem's last three stanzas point out, this belief, far from finding cyclical fulfilment in a United Ireland, may in fact bring merely another round of very real and unprepared-for violence and destruction:

> 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. (19-24)

The poem's criticisms are equally applicable to the Protestant attitude

toward the Troubles since Heaney sees beneath this attitude a "blueprint" that is also cyclical but opposite to the Catholics', dictating that "the challenge" posed "to the established order" by current Catholic unrest will eventually be forcibly quelled, as other such challenges have been in the past (Deane, "Talk" 47-48). In fact, according to Robert Buttel, Heaney has said at a reading that, among other things, "he thinks he had Paisley in mind" (71) in writing the poem.

If this vision of violence perpetuated by Northerners' contradictory and questionable cyclical thinking is bleak, even bleaker is the possiblity Heaney, at times, entertains of its inescapability. In having drawn cyclical connections between Iron Age and current Northern Catholic revenge on 'traitorous' women, for instance, Heaney finds himself wanting, but unable, to break free of the violent cycle in which he feels himself emotionally and culturally bound:

> My poor scapegoat,
>
> I almost love you
> but would have cast, I know,
> the stones of silence. . . .
>
> I who have stood dumb
> when your betraying sisters,
> cauled in tar,
> wept by the railings,
>
> who would connive
> in civilized outrage
> yet understand the exact
> and tribal, intimate revenge. (28-44)[14]

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[14] These problematic stanzas have elicited more than one critical attack. James Liddy, for instance, uses them to argue the "aesthetic neo-sadism" (135) of Heaney's vision, and Edna Longley, while acknowledging Heaney's honesty, questions his indecisive sympathizing with both victims and avengers: "can the poet run with the hare . . . and hunt with the hounds?" (78). That they are the chief source of the poem's power, however, cannot be denied--a fact that is brought home when one finds the last two of them conspicuously absent from an early

An even more despairing tone is evident in the final part of "Kinship," where Heaney, with the cyclical nature of Northern Irish violence in mind, sarcastically bids the long-dead Roman historian Tacitus to return and update his reports of Northern European sacrifices to the territorial deity:

> 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. (133-44)

Again, Heaney uses the image of indiscriminate and obliterating absorption by the earth that has come to represent his fear of personal, artistic and communal stagnation.

As sceptical as these visions are, however, they have, "Hercules and Antaeus," been countered by Heaney's also long-standing, and opposing, anxiety about territorial attachment and earth-based cycles. This is his fear that objective, 'progressive' detachment from the soil, with which, understandably enough, he associates intuition, religion, creativity and continuance, will result in greater losses for himself and his poetry, greater cultural losses for the native Catholic part of his community, and a greater loss for his community as a whole of a pagan sense of extra-human and cyclically rhythmic completeness, than have already resulted from change in his own life and from

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[14](cont'd) publication of the poem in James Joyce Quarterly (Spring 1974).

in the necessity of the latter sense as a means of dealing with the Troubles has of course already been positively expressed through his symbolic use of a unifying pagan earth religion and ceremonial rituals in such poems as "Kinship" and "Funeral Rites." In fact, the title Wintering Out itself reflects this belief, since it fully suggests the patient and hopeful endurance of this particularly bad phase of a cyclical and earth-based Northern Irish violence in the anticipation of a 'spring' to come. However, Heaney's alternate and more general anxieties about the loss of this sense and of other beneficial aspects of earth attachment are just as forcefully expressed in such poems as "Fodder" (WO 13), "The Last Mummer" (WO 18-20), "The Wool Trade" (WO 37) and the already discussed "Ocean's Love to Ireland"--all of which record either personal or cultural losses brought about by the departure from rural or religious tradition and by British colonialism. Particularly interesting in this respect is "Midnight" (WO 45-46), where Heaney sees the extinction of the Irish wolf and the destruction of its habitat as symbolic of a brake upon the earth-associated life force of his own poetic voice: "The tongue's / Leashed in my throat" (23-24).

Heaney's conflicting anxieties, moreover, while clearly alternating with one another, have also from time to time been reconciled and appeased by his maintenance, within individual poems, of a simultaneously progressive view of Irish history and a religious belief in the power and value both of the Irish territorial deity and of his community's attachment to this deity. That is, while the archaeological and otherwise more scientific side of his investigations of the earth has been prompted by a desire both to objectify the

promote a clearer understanding and humane resolution of the conflict, the mythopoeic side of these same investigations has been prompted by a desire to retain and promote a religious sense of personal and communal destiny.[18] Furthermore, Heaney has seen this sense of destiny, in part generated by the Irish soil itself and therefore not strictly humanly controlled, as potentially complementing a keener secular understanding of the Northern Irish situation by setting it within a broader, even cosmic, perspective. Something of Heaney's desire to balance these humanistic/progressive and religious/cyclical impulses within the communal realm is evident in "Navvy" (WO 51), where Heaney, through a representative depiction of his "brother and keeper" (16), the navvy, presents a picture of progressive human activity that is kept in check by the earth's forces, as other such activity has been in the past, yet is also linked to--or 'grafted' (2), as Heaney would have it--and maintained by these same forces, and even, in its own small way, in control of them:

> The morass
> the macadam snakes over
>
> swallowed his yellow bulldozer
> four years ago, laying it down
> with lake-dwellings and dug-outs,
> pike-shafts, axe-heads, bone pins,
>
> all he is indifferent to.
> He has not relented . . .

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[18] Catherine McKeen stresses the importance of this broadly religious sense of destiny in a rough paraphrase of Heaney's beliefs, derived from her interview with the poet:

> To Heaney, poetry is a fundamentally religious activity, religion understood in its widest sense of people bound together in a common destiny. When society has strong unifying myths which have something of the transcendant about them, poetry is strongest. (504)

the welted, stretchmarked
curve of the world. (7-20)

Also noteworthy, of course, is Heaney's by now familiar use of the snake image, which in this instance, along with his use of the word "grafting" and the image of the navvy "picking along" the earth's maternal curve, blends the organic and the cyclical with the mechanical in much the same way as the quernstone vision of "Belderg." A similar but more strictly organic and personally symbolic expression of this balance is also evident in the progressive but circular image that Heaney, in "Kinship," presents of himself as a tree growing out of and away from the bog but always gravitating back toward the soil it is rooted in and nourished by:

I grew out of all this
like a weeping willow
inclined to
the appetites of gravity. (93-96)[16]

Even more importantly and more specifically directed toward the Northern Irish situation and the problems of Heaney's own poetry together, however, this desire for equilibrium exemplifies itself in "Traditions," the first poem discussed in this chapter. Here Heaney balances a religious view of Irish culture as cyclical and soil-governed with a progressive one that sees this culture as man-influenced and forward-moving. Also, he reconciles the old and not wholly dead Irish tradition with the more recently and forcibly imposed British and generally Western tradition through an expanding and gravitational embrace that is gently triumphant but, as the tone of Bloom's final statement suggests, not smug or necessarily exclusive of Northern

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[16] Corcoran says much the same about this image but points also to its verbal ambiguities (see 104).

communal 'we,' 'us' and 'our,' Heaney blends his personal and public voices so successfully that Bloom's statement becomes a representative celebration of both Heaney's and his community's territorial attachment. Similarly, Bloom's symbolic status and the simultaneous sense of attachment and past-tense distance evident in his statement also finally serve to link Heaney and Joyce himself together as detached artists who nevertheless remain tied to their nation and serve as individual agents promoting its encircling and absorption of the whole Western tradition: "Ireland . . . / I was born here. Ireland."

These various successes of "Traditions" are no doubt due to the fact that, of all the poems in Wintering Out and North, it best illustrates the basic vision that has characterized Heaney's earlier poetry and that has provided him with the best and most personally satisfying means of reconciling his childhood with his adulthood, his private self and poetry with his community and an extra-human realm, and also the more general concepts of repetition and progress, loss and gain, and rootedness and transcendence. As some of the poems of the earlier collections have already suggested, and many of the poems of these collections made clear, this sort of complex balance is a delicate and difficult one to maintain, tending at different times to tip more toward the past than the present or future, the religious or fatalistic than the progressive or open-ended, the personal and artistic than the communal. Nevertheless, Heaney has for the most part struggled to contain these fluctuations both through and within his use of earth and earth-related imagery. This has been so not only because of Heaney's own preference for such imagery but because the earth, serving as both

has provided him with a basis both for a mythologizing, aestheticizing and self-surrendering approach to his most important thematic concerns, including the Troubles, and for an objectifying, analytical and mastering one. Now, in "Hercules and Antaeus," Heaney, having made something of a last, large and failed attempt at maintaining this complex balance in "Kinship," seems to have wearied temporarily of it and given up almost entirely his use of earth imagery. And in doing so, he abandons not only its religious/cyclical significance, which he has lost faith in and nostalgically but skeptically terms "pap for the dispossessed" (32), but its potential for promoting progress and rationality, except in so much as he now defines this potential against, and not through, territorial attachment.

In light of the demands and pressures of the Northern Irish situation, this crucial gesture appears understandable, since the cyclical/developmental vision of progress as inevitable, even while it retains the past, would seem likely to encourage, at best, a simultaneously religious and humanist complacency about a resolution to the Troubles. And, at worst, it would encourage fatalism and frustration over any delay in this resolution. For instance, "Traditions"' exemplification of Heaney's cyclical/developmental vision no doubt appears to him, when viewed in the direct light of the Troubles, too facile and its stance neither relevant enough nor tenable, and is therefore, with all its apparent success, disappointedly abandoned by him.

Having made his gesture, however, Heaney seems almost immediately to regret it. He has in fact remarked to Deane that he believes it was

dangerous," asserting that instead there must be a "dialogue" between the "obstinate voice of rationalist humanism [as represented by Hercules]" and what Deane has implicitly termed the "atavisms" previously present in Heaney's poetry (68). This regret is already partially apparent as early as "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" (56), which begins the second and "more public" part of North and in which Heaney, playing upon Shelley's epithet, satirically undercuts his role as would-be political spokesman for Northern Catholics by presenting himself as more of a caged and helpless political prisoner on display before his readers: "Were those your eyes just now at the hatch?" (16). Most significant in this poem are Heaney's comic comparisons of himself with both Tarzan and Archimedes, who "thought he could move the world if he could / find the right place to position his lever" (1-2), since these clearly mock the heroically earth-detached and earth-dominant rationality he has just finished espousing in "Hercules and Antaeus." In particular, the seeming transformation of Heaney's "creeper of secrets" (5) into "a strappado" (10), from which he feels himself swinging, caricatures the previous poem's image of Hercules lifting Antaeus/Heaney.

Heaney's uneasiness with his new poetic voice, however, is only a symptom of the deeper tensions evident in Part II of North. A part of these, as "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream" initially suggests and "Freedman" (61) and three of the poems of the sequence "Singing School," "The Ministry of Fear" (63-65), "A Constable Calls" (66-67) and "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966" (68), make clear, is Heaney's assumption of the most sustained and overtly partisan political stance of his career.

unflattering portrait of the Unionist mentality. But even more notable, because different in its political stance, is "Freedman," which is headed by a quotation from Barrow's The Romans justifying imperial Roman enslavement of "backward" races, and in which Heaney, making skilful and cutting use of the Catholic Ash Wednesday ritual of having ashes impressed on one's forehead by a priest, presents himself and his fellow Northern Irish Catholics as having been doubly enslaved by the Roman church and the Roman-like British/Protestant occupation (the latter being a comparison he has made before in "Kinship"): I was under that thumb too like all my caste" (8). Also significant is Heaney's presentation of the ashes upon his own and other Northern Catholics' foreheads--in this poem constituted of dust rather than proper ashes--as a symbol of their enslavement by that particular part of the Irish Catholic religion, subsumed from the earlier pagan one, which perpetuates unquestioning fidelity to the native territorial deity. As this two-pronged attack suggests, Heaney's turning away from one part of his divided community is in actuality only the first step in his turning away from his entire community, along with its territorial rootedness, in the interests of his own self and poetry. "Freedman" is, after all, a poem more about poetry's redemption--and alienation--of Heaney from the bonds of both sides of his community than about these bonds themselves: "And poetry wiped my brow and sped me. / Now they will say I bite the hand that fed me" (15-16).

On the surface, then, these poems would seem to reflect something of the more strictly detached and progressive vision that Heaney is now

in the way one might expect them to be. For instance, as supposedly "public" poems, they seem to have little to offer Heaney's community. The view they present of the Northern Irish situation is neither 'rational humanist' nor progressive; it tends rather, as "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" (57-60) reveals, toward a stance that oscillates between rage and despair. Indeed "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966"--actually written in 1966--reflects what Heaney has described as "the aggravated young Catholic male part" of himself, which for the most part "went underground" and was replaced by "the private county Derry childhood part" (Deane, "Unhappy" 66) after having only fleetingly revealed itself in "Docker" (DN 41) and a few other unpublished or uncollected poems he describes to Deane. If one considers these facts, then one might reasonably see the second part of North as a partial downturn from Heaney's more recent attempts at maintaining a unified and unifying view of his community.

Furthermore, if one compares this "public" section of poems with its oppositely intentioned counterpart in Wintering Out, one finds that it is, ironically, even more personally and artistically oriented than this previous shift away from a personal/public balance. In other words, Heaney's public and sometimes politically partisan voice has resurfaced--if one can reverse and modify his previous metaphor. But in expressing it, Heaney has only directed his attention deeper "underground," to the private self and poetry that are now, in a sense, lying beneath it again. (This situation is not unlike the alienating earth-absorption that has also undercut Heaney's earlier and milder

attachment.) Yet this section does not appear as successful as the second part of Wintering Out, perhaps because having for the most part consciously dispensed not only with much of the symbolic earth imagery expressing Heaney's territorial attachment but with this attachment itself--and particularly its larger religious aspect--it has seemingly deprived his poetry of the imaginative framework that has given it its previous scope, tension and distinctness. It could very well be the apparent loss of this overall and intricate framework that Heaney has in mind when he claims "anybody could write" these poems.

Following out of this broad difference, moreover, is a clear difference in these sections' stances toward community. Part II of Wintering Out largely reveals, as has already been said, an aloofness and neutral peripherality in Heaney's poetic relationship to the public world of Northern Ireland, but it has not, as such personal poems as "Wedding Day" (57), "Mother of the Groom" (58) and "Summer Home" (59-61) demonstrate, entirely lost a favourable view of community or, more particularly, family, even though it deals with difficult personal and familial changes and with marital and other familial or communal problems. Furthermore, the position of the previously discussed non-Heaney figures of this section, while communally peripheral and even other-worldly, is nevertheless defined both through and against some of the more basic and positive ideas associated with community. For instance, the "Little moon man" of "Bye-Child," even while a victim of child abuse, is described as "faithful / At the foot of the yard" (10-11) and his inarticulate speech as

. . . gaping wordless proof
Of lunar distances
Travelled beyond love. (22-24)

In fact, this boy and the mad daughter of "A Winter's Tale" are paradoxical figures in their existence both within and outside their communities and in their orbital encircling and unification of the community or communal values that they yet, in some sense, surpass. This is particularly the case with the mad girl, who is presented, first as a fugitive, escaping her community's search parties until being encircled and welcomed back to "family hearth and floor"(14), and then as herself a wandering encircler and unifier of her community:

Still, like good luck, she returned.
Some nights, crossing the thresholds
Of empty homes, she warmed
Her dewy roundings and folds
To sleep in the chimney nook.
After all, they were neighbours.
As neighbours, when they came back
Surprised but unmalicious
Greetings passed
Between them. She was there first
And so appeared no haunter
But, making all comers guests,
She stirred as from a winter
Sleep. Smiled. Uncradled her breasts. (17-30)

In contrast, the stance toward community revealed in Part II of North is more strictly one of the artist reacting against and desiring to escape from its confining influences. However, this basic stance, in keeping with its largely negative underlying impulse, ironically defines itself through and against some of the more basic and negative characteristics associated with community--narrowness, rivalry, hostility and violence--and therefore takes the shape of inner, artistic retreat within the community, with attack upon it being the chief means of

is only encircled and trapped. For instance, the Homeric allusion he uses to describe the Northern Catholic population in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing,"

> . . . half of us, as in a wooden horse
> Were cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,
> Besieged within the siege, whispering morse (74-76),

in itself presents an additional and deliberately Infernoesque image of concentric and confining communal circles (amplified by the images of "coiled tongue" and "flames" directly preceding it).[17] Furthermore, in being even more strictly applicable to the position of the "wee six" (62) Belfast Group of which Heaney is a member, it suggests an additional and debilitating inner circle into which he sees these poets as having been forced to retreat and "Where to be saved you only must save face / And whatever you say, you say nothing" (63-64). Heaney's fused allusions to Homer and Dante are not coincidental but in fact reflect his belief in the existence of similar tensions between the public and private poetic voices throughout the Western literary tradition. This idea has already partially surfaced through "Traditions"' simultaneous resolution of this tension and embrace of the Western tradition from Homer through Joyce. It is, moreover, re-echoed many years later in an interview with Christopher Lydon and Derek Walcott on the poetry of Robert Penn Warren, when Heaney points out the same tension in Warren's "Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce" and says, implicitly commenting on "Whatever You Say" in the process,

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[17] My thanks to Professors J. F. Forrest and S. Rees for pointing out yet another allusion in this passage--this one to Shakespeare's Macbeth: "But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in / To saucy fears and doubts" (III.iv.24-25).

> authenticity would somehow be compromised by taking on public matters. But poetry always, from Homer through Dante, has that challenge. And Warren did not refuse the challenge and rose to the occasion in many places. It's the largeness of the voice and the enterprise that I salute. . . . (607)

The voice of "Whatever You Say" is, of course, hoarsely angry rather than 'large,' even though the enterprise underlying it is clearly weighty. In fact one notes how different both the "morse" whispered by the "wily" Northern Catholics and implicitly by the additionally confined and equally wily Belfast poets, and "The famous / Northern reticence, the tight gag of place / And times" (60-62) silencing all parts of the community are from the released and almost supernaturally expressive "remote mime" of "Bye-Child"'s inarticulate "Little moon man." However, the similarity between the increasing sense here of solitude within community and the strange but communally unifying solitude of the 'bye-child' and the mad daughter also hints at the eventual success of Heaney's enterprise, which subsumes the Western poetic tradition of private/public tension by modeling itself after Dante's success and does so more satisfactorily to Heaney, because more strenuously, than "Traditions."

Heaney's representation of the ever-dwindling and more purely artistic community to which he feels he can safely belong and which is encircled by other hostile communities, silently or secretly waiting for an opportunity to triumph over its opposition, is only further reinforced by "The Ministry of Fear" (63-65) and "Summer 1969" (69-70). In the former, this community--if one discounts the fleeting, past-tense reference to Kavanagh--has been reduced to just two poets, Heaney and

out of a culturally imprisoning circle:

> Ulster was British, but with no rights on
> The English lyric: all around us, though
> We hadn't named it, the ministry of fear. (55-57)

By "Summer 1969," this narrowing 'community,' is no longer a community at all but Heaney himself, who, vacationing in Spain and reading "The life of Joyce" (6), is both physically and intellectually displaced from the outbreak of the Troubles. However, having "retreated to the cool of the Prado" (20), Heaney finds himself confronted with Goya's "nightmares" (26), which have an obvious relevance to the territorially inspired and cyclical violence now occurring in his own country:

> Dark cyclones, hosting, breaking; Saturn
> Jewelled in the blood of his own children,
> Gigantic Chaos turning his brute hips
> Over the world. Also, that holmgang
> Where two berserks club each other to death
> For honour's sake, greaved in a bog, and sinking. (27-32)

Also relevant is the poem's final image of the solitary Goya confined by a metaphorical bull-ring and engaged in a fight to the death with destructive historical forces, which stands as a bleak sort of ideal for Heaney in his own position as solitary artist confronted by the Troubles: "He painted with his fists and elbows, flourished / The stained cape of his heart as history charged" (33-34).

These poems are crucial to an understanding of the acute but ultimately productive tensions in Heaney's cyclical/developmental vision at this point. As their series of ever-narrowing concentric circles--the last one continuing to enclose the artist and the to- and fro-charging bull of history--suggests, Heaney, while attempting both to escape the soil-rooted, cyclical vision previously characterizing his poetry and to

change the community and historical patterns circumscribed and dictated by this same vision, has as yet been unable to offer any genuinely progressive line of escape to his community in this "public" and "explicit" section of North. Rather, he has found only a seemingly regressive line of retreat for himself, into the world of self and poetry, where he continues to do battle with the still cyclically circumscribed historical forces confining him and 'bulling' his "guttural muse." Furthermore, his poetic voice, whereas before it has alternated between brutality and consolation, is now largely brutal, offering very little hope to his community and in fact "wreck[ing]" much of the "comfort" he has previously sought to offer through his cyclical/developmental vision. Paradoxically, however, it is Heaney's retreat from and reaction against the community he sees himself as serving that points the way to a slightly different and more effective voice for him as both a private and communal poet: a voice that is 'inarticulate,' brutal and largely secret in strictly public or communal terms and that deals largely with personal and artistic concerns but that is ultimately more capable of consoling, instructing and guiding the community toward change because, as Heaney, quoting Kavanagh, later puts it in his foreword to Preoccupations, "the self is interesting only as an example" (14). And more generally speaking, it is Heaney's ironic inner retreat within an increasingly narrow-seeming and confining cyclical vision, even while he is reacting against it, that finally offers him the possibility of transportation beyond it: a transportation that takes the form of an inward, communally and territorially attached, yet orbital and detached, poetic vision.

Such paradoxical resolutions of the various tensions and ambivalences in Heaney's poetic vision are not new. They have in fact suggested themselves as early as "Digging," "Gravities" and "The Plantation," as well as being evident, to varying degrees, in "Traditions," the previously discussed poems of Part II of Wintering Out, and the willow image of "Kinship"--in other words, in many of those poems that best illustrate Heaney's basic cyclical/developmental vision. They have even been present in "Antaeus," which predates all but the first two of these poems[18] and whose final lines, "But let him not plan, lifting me off the earth, / My elevation, my fall" (19-20), might initially look like clever closure but in retrospect seem, not even a reversal of the paradox, but a preliminary step towards its partial achievement in "Hercules and Antaeus" and the second part of North. Nor are these resolutions fully arrived at by the end of this volume. This is particularly evident if one shifts away from the Antaeus metaphor and instead very roughly compares Heaney to Dante--in particular the Dante of The Divine Comedy, whose influence on Heaney from the early 1970s onward has clearly begun to show itself in his poetry at this point.[19] In the context of such a comparison, which Heaney himself appears to be making, he can be seen as having made a Dante-like, solitary decision to break free of the seeming dead-end of territorial attachment and cyclical vision in the attempt to find a progressive 'right road' to personal/artistic and communal 'salvation' from the "barbarous cycle" ("The Interesting Case" 38) of Northern Irish violence. Thinking he has

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[18] The poem was first published in Hibernia October, 1966 (17).

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[19] For more detailed explanations of this influence, which will not be discussed here, see Heaney's "Envies and Identifications" and Kieran Quinlan's "Forsaking the Norse Mythologies."

found this road in "the obstinate voice of rational humanism," he has, however, been blocked by the violence itself, which makes progress beyond it extremely difficult if not impossible. Heaney has therefore been forced to retreat back into a series of ever-narrowing and increasingly anti-communal and brutally--or at best, melancholily--portrayed circles (carried part of the way by his Antaeus-like "illiterate fidelity" to native community and territory[20]), eventually finding himself at the very point he was initially trying to work toward: a more objective, detached and, in its own way, progressive and hopeful view of himself, the Northern Irish community and the cyclical myth. However, Heaney is not yet either fully comfortable with or fully confident in his new poetic voice. In fact, "Exposure" (72-73), the final poem of North, finds him--in partial contrast to Dante at the end of the first stage of his journey--in a southern as opposed to northern region, but one which is still, in the form of a Wicklow forest, a 'Dark Wood,' where he carries on uncertainly "weighing and weighing" his "responsible tristia" (21-22) and is therefore largely unable to see the night sky and its "once-in-a-lifetime portent, / The comet's pulsing rose" (39-40).

This last image itself suggests the nature of the dissatisfaction underlying Heaney's uncertainty, since, in symbolically placing him out of the range of a vision of a critical phase in the comet's orbit, it reveals his "vague feeling of missing a historical moment" (Cooke) in the cyclical fortunes of Northern Ireland--a moment which he has, as a Northern Catholic, long anticipated and which is now, despite its basis in territorial attachment, 'above,' not 'beneath' him. Something of this

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[20] See Inf. XXI.112-45.

sense of displacement has also been present in the final poem of Wintering Out, "Westering" (79-80), where Heaney sees the crucified Christ and the Irish culture with which he equates him as lunar and in a distinct cyclical orbit that he has, by virtue of his journey to Berkeley, been "unreeled, unreeled" (28) out of and that is at this point beyond his reach:

> Six thousand miles away,
> I imagine untroubled dust,
> A loosening gravity,
> Christ weighing by his hands. (33-36)

However, Heaney's choice here of the image of a comet with its "pulsing rose" over one of the moon (which would imply frequent recurrance) gives his feeling of displacement a greater sense of permanence and in fact heightens the disparity between himself and Dante, since the "pulsing rose" light of the comet he has missed seeing strongly brings to mind the vision of the rose that Dante eventually attains (Par. XXX-XXXIII). Clearly, in this respect, Heaney's 'break' with a territorially attached cyclical vision has nevertheless left him attached to it, if only in the form of 'missing' and desiring it. Furthermore, in his symbolic expression of this 'break,' he has obviously continued to use cyclical or circular images and, in the form of Dante's Divine Comedy, a whole narrative based on a Medieval conception of the universe as a system of downward- and upward-radiating circles and spheres. While he has divested all of these (and his increasingly brutal poetic voice) of any originally associated earth imagery, they still clearly appeal not only to his cyclical/developmental vision and religious sense of destiny but to the territorial attachment out of which they proceed.[11] This is true

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[11] It is also worth noting that Dante's status as exiled, White Guelf poet and his belief in a "Greyhound" figure (Inf. I.101) who would eventually redeem the Holy Roman Empire (which belief is clearly of a

not only of the poems just discussed but of the penultimate poem in the "Singing School" sequence, "Fosterage" (71). Here Heaney picks up "Freedman"'s final image of poetry's wiping his "earth-starred" (9) brow and redeeming him from 'Roman' bondage (replacing personified poetry, however, with his early mentor, Michael McLaverty). But, in his very use of linear and circular imagery, he reveals the persistence of his essential, earth-based vision:

> I have the Journals
> He gave me, underlined, his buckled self
> Obeisant to their pain. He discerned
> The lineaments of patience everywhere
> And fostered me and sent me out, with words
> Imposing on my tongue like obols. (13-16)

Indeed, one can even see Heaney's inward retreat and its beneficial results as having been promoted by his cyclical vision, although not in any purely positive way. For, in having made this retreat, Heaney has in fact chosen to follow the counsel of "The longship's swimming tongue" (20) in North's title poem (19-20), which, in keeping with Heaney's other bleak visions of cyclical and empty sameness, has told him,

> Lie down
> in the word-hoard, burrow
> the coil and gleam
> of your furrowed brain.
>
> Compose in darkness.
> Expect aurora borealis
> in the long foray
> but no cascade of light.
>
> Keep your eye clear
> as the bleb of the icicle,
> trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
> your hands have known. (29-40)

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[11](cont'd) cyclical bent and might also be termed "pap for the dispossessed") clearly appeal both to Heaney's sense of his own position as displaced poet and to his Northern Catholic sensibility.

Given the essential inescapability of an earth-based cyclical/developmental vision, then, Heaney's task in his next three volumes of poetry becomes, not an attempt to break free of this vision, but instead an attempt both to re-evaluate its meaning and to reincorporate it into his poetry in a way that reaffirms his original organic understanding of the relationship between poet, community and extra-human realm but also stresses more emphatically its progressive, dynamic and transcendent aspects. In other words, he attempts, from this point, to establish the dialogue between "rational humanism" and religious, territorial "atavisms" that he insists upon in his interview with Deane.

Conclusion

The most basic distinctions between Heaney's earlier and later poetry are made implicitly by Heaney himself, in a recent article on Patrick Kavanagh. Of Kavanagh's initial poetic treatment of his original county Monaghan world, he writes,

> it is supplied with a strong physical presence and is full of the recognitions which existed between the poet and his place; it is symbolic of affections rooted in a community life and has behind it an imagination which is not yet weaned from its origin, an attached rather than detached faculty. . . . Many of those poems do indeed celebrate the place as heavenly, many more are disappointed that it is not as heavenly as it could or should be, but all of the early Monaghan poetry gives the place credit for existing, assists at its real topographical presence, dwells upon it and accepts it as the definitive locus of the given world.
>
> The horizons of the little fields and hills, whether they are gloomy and constricting or radiant and enhancing, are sensed as the horizons of consciousness. He knows that the Monaghan world is not the whole world yet it is the only one for him, the one which he embosses solidly and intimately into the words of poems. We might say that Kavanagh is pervious to his world's spirit more than it is pervious to his. . . . the experienced physical reality of Monaghan life imposes itself on the poet's consciousness so that he necessarily composes himself, his poetic identity and his poems in relation to that encircling horizon of given experience. ("The Placeless Heaven" 372)

Using much the same terms, Heaney then goes on to describe the "definite change" in Kavanagh's later depiction of this world:

> We might say that now the world is more pervious to his vision than he is pervious to the world. When he writes about places now, they are luminous spaces within his mind. They have been evacuated of their status as background, as documentary geography, and exist instead as transfigured images, sites where the mind projects its own force. In this later poetry, place is included within the horizon of Kavanagh's mind rather than the other way around. The country he visits is inside himself. (372-73)

The correspondences between Kavanagh's early poetry, as Heaney understands it, and Heaney's own early work are numerous and obvious: the poets' views of their original worlds as sacred, centred and

encircling ground fostering their art; their ambivalent absorption with or 'perviousness' to them; and their largely religious rendering of them in symbolic terms that are yet largely literal in detail. More important, however, are the obvious and numerous correspondences between the developments in the two poets' work: their eventual internalization of their original worlds and placement of them within a greater perspective in their own personal consciousness; the resulting 'perviousness' of these worlds to their imagination; and their rendering of them in more purely symbolic terms (though still literal inasmuch as these terms frequently take the form of familiar physical images) as expansive ideas or potentially transcendent visions.

These developments are apparent in such recent poems of Heaney's as "The Toome Road" (FW 15), "The Birthplace" (SI 34-35), "The Mud Vision" (HL 48-49) and "The Disappearing Island" (HL 50). In these, Heaney transforms literal landscape or memory of it into more purely symbolic terms in order to make a larger statement about the equal inadequacy of utterly passive territorial rootedness and complete separation or remoteness from place, whether this place be one's childhood environment or one's nation. Thus he implicitly urges greater mental and spiritual engagement in reperceiving the deeper and larger meaning of the idea of 'sacred world' as the first but not the only realm of possibility or of potential transcendence and self-affirmation--a realm that, ideally, one carries within oneself and acts upon always. In these latter respects, then, the poems serve as important illustrations of the balance between religion and humanism, territorial rootedness and detachment, that Heaney has sought implicitly to achieve in his poetic treatment of place throughout his earlier

corrections and that he has already [illegible]

work--although, as the "Station Island" sequence (SI 61-94) most pointedly demonstrates, not without great struggle.

Accommodating and in fact making possible this new balance and the overall change in Heaney's representation of his original county Derry world and his later and broader ones are two fundamental and related changes in his understanding of an earth-based cyclical/developmental pattern. The first is a movement away from his earlier view of place as generating but absorbing and confining change within an overall cyclical pattern of which it forms the ever-present centre. Instead, Heaney sees his childhood landscape, and indeed any landscape or broader territory, as promoting growth but, in doing so, emptying out beyond itself into an expanding sphere of experience, leaving only its memory and essential enabling idea behind and thus becoming more of an imaginary, constantly re-approximated and departed-from place than an actual one--the "luminous," meditated-upon mental site Heaney refers to. This is the process and product symbolized by the idea of Heaney's original world 'breathing' upon him in "the spit blood of a last few haws and rose-hips" (17) in "The Loaning" (SI 51-52) and by the image of the "space utterly empty, utterly a source" which Heaney contemplates "walking round and round" in both "Station Island, III" (SI 67-68) and "Clearances, 8" (HL 32). The second of the two basic changes is Heaney's shift from his earlier organic understanding of place as binding and blurring all distinctions between its individual components, past and present, into eternal sameness to one that sees it more discriminatingly as a congregate of distinctive parts through which growth occurs separately, although interrelatedly, and upon which the nature of the

applies to the personal and communal realms, Heaney still believes in his organic relationship with community and place and in his role as the articulator of the ideas and possibilities generated by or associated with territory but stresses more emphatically the individual and concerted communal pursuit of any transcendent understanding of them. This much is evident in a recent interview, in which Heaney explains the artist's function of "produc[ing] forms which will renew the consciousness" and assist in redefining the expanding and changing Irish "sacred world view" but also points to the role of the artist's audience and of larger social institutions in this process, stating that "Society is an organism" and the artist is "only one little cell in the organism" (Linehan 1).

Such changes are so significant as to transform Heaney's earlier and more literal and passive presentation of an earth-based pattern. However, while Heaney's understanding of this pattern has changed, the essence of his vision, inasmuch as it still values the original influence of earth and place on poet and community, and inasmuch as it still conceives of the processes of this influence in cyclical/developmental terms, clearly remains unaltered. This combination of continuity and change is perhaps best captured by Heaney himself in the opening and closing of the first two "Glanmore Sonnets" (FW 33-34), which both in content and form connect Heaney's later poetry with the earlier but at the same time stress both its openness to the present and its forward movement:

> Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground,
> Each verse returning like the plough turned round.

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