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THE "GLANMORE SONNETS": A READING AND ANALYSIS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Alix J. Samuels, B. A.

Denton, Texas

December, 1984

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Seamus Heaney's 1979 volume of poems, Field Work, contains ten sonnets written while the Northern Irish author lived for four years in a nineteenth-century cottage near Dublin. These sonnets, dealing with art, language, nature, and politics, reflect Heaney's major themes and are typical of his poetic techniques.

This study analyzes the content of the ten sonnets as well as their technical aspects.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of his first book, Death of a Naturalist (1966), the Irish poet Seamus Heaney has commanded the respect of both the public and the academic world. His most recent book, Field Work (1979), has been hailed as one of his best, balancing previous themes of art, nature, politics, and language. The "Glanmore Sonnets," a ten-sonnet sequence that lies at the heart of Field Work, touches upon all of those themes, and a careful study of them will reveal much about the direction Heaney hopes to take as an artist.¹

The sonnet sequence was written at Glanmore Cottage, County Wicklow, where Heaney had moved in 1972, leaving the political violence of Belfast behind him. At that time he was plagued with questions about the moral responsibility of the artist in a political world, questions that seemed to haunt him throughout his four-year stay at Glanmore. In the "Glanmore Sonnets," slowly and cautiously, he works his way toward answers.

Clearly, any understanding of the sonnets depends first upon an understanding of Heaney's poetic development as a whole. Although regarded as a late starter (he did

not express an interest in contemporary poetry until after his graduation from Queen's University, Belfast, at the age of twenty-two), Heaney dates his familiarity with verse to his early childhood in County Derry, Northern Ireland. Bawdy schoolboy chants, as well as the poetry of Keats and Byron memorized for recitation in the classroom, formed part of his early repertoire. At home, the young Heaney entertained family and friends with renditions of Irish ballads and an occasional recitation of "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" by Robert Service. Heaney recognized the importance of such verse at the conclusion of an essay entitled "Mossbawn":

While this kind of stuff did not possess the lure of forbidden words like "piss" and "hell to your soul," it was not encumbered by the solemn incomprehensibility of Byron and Keats. It gave verse, however humble, a place in the life of the home, made it one of the ordinary rituals of life.²

Heaney, then, felt an easy familiarity with poetry from an early age. It was just one of many childhood rituals practiced in what seems to have been a relatively happy family life, filled with siblings, aunts and uncles, and days spent roaming the countryside around his family's farm.

Although the Heaneys were Catholic, they lived in a predominantly Protestant area of Northern Ireland, and sectarian divisions formed another of the rituals of Heaney's childhood. Schoolyards were filled with taunts of "prod" and "pape"; one could be stopped and searched

by the Royal Ulster Constabulary at any time; being Catholic meant being suspected of providing shelter for the IRA. Yet there were moments during his childhood when religious differences lost some of their grim seriousness. For example, during World War II, a Protestant neighbor presented some rosary beads from Rome to Heaney's father with a joking comment: "I stole them for you, Paddy, off the pope's dresser when his back was turned."³

Aside from coloring the social milieu in which Heaney grew up, Catholicism was important to his poetical development for two other reasons. First, it left him with a deep reverence for words. Countless recitations of rosaries and catechism lessons provided the young poet with a sense of the "gorgeousness of the polysyllable";⁴ he began to be aware of "words as bearers of history and mystery."⁵ This awareness of language as a powerful artifact is present throughout his work and has become one of his trademarks. The second reason Catholicism was important to Heaney was that it established in him an awareness of man's need for ritual and order. It was the "burden of Catholicism" that made it possible for Heaney to acknowledge the need for myth--in the present as much as in the past.⁶

In 1951, the eleven-year-old Heaney left his home for St. Columb's College, Derry, a Catholic boarding school.

According to Robert Buttel in his book Seamus Heaney, while Heaney was at St. Columb's, his poetry was limited mostly to the "adolescent, roguish Latin verses" common to schoolboys--the stuff that gets passed under desks and snickered at.⁷

By the time he left St. Columb's, however, Heaney was fairly familiar with the English tradition. He was fortunate to have had an exceptionally fine English teacher, who, says Buttel, "had his students reading deeply and thoroughly in Shakespeare, Chaucer, Wordsworth, and Keats."⁸ One of the poets Heaney read during this time--Gerard Manly Hopkins--was to have a profound effect on him. In an essay called "Feeling into Words," Heaney describes his early encounters with Hopkins:

The result of reading Hopkins at school was the desire to write, and when I first put pen to paper at university, what flowed out was what had flowed in, the bumpy alliterating music, the reporting sounds and ricochetting consonants typical of Hopkins' verse. I remember lines from a piece of mine called "October Thought" in which some frail bucolic images floundered under the chain-mail of the pastiche:

Starling thatch-watches, and sudden swallow
 Straight breaks to mud-nest, home-rest rafter
 Up past dry dust-drunk cobwebs, like laughter
 Ghosting the roof of bog-oak, turf-sod and rods
 of willow. . . .⁹

Heaney's own judgment of these lines is accurate enough. What is significant about Heaney's early encounters with Hopkins is that in the rich, complicated verse of Hopkins,

Heaney heard something that made him want to write. In Hopkins, Heaney found a poetic voice that he recognized, one that carried with it tones of Northern Ireland.

"Looking back on it," he says, "I believe there was a connection . . . between the heavily accented consonantal noise of Hopkins' poetic voice, and the peculiar regional characteristics of a Northern Ireland accent."¹⁰ By imitating the Jesuit poet, Heaney was working his way slowly towards his own poetic style.

In 1957, Heaney started reading towards a degree in English language and literature at Queen's University, Belfast. While there, he studied the standard syllabus and became intrigued with the "rich stratifications of the English language itself."¹¹ Not confining himself to books, Heaney joined the University Gaelic Society and was master of ceremonies for a neighborhood Irish dancing organization. He still had little grasp of modern poetry-- "Dylan Thomas' records were as near as we seemed to get to the living thing," Heaney writes of his days at Queen's.¹² His own poetic voice eluded him. "At the university," he says, "I kept the whole thing at arm's length, read poetry for the noise and wrote about half a dozen pieces for the literary magazine. But nothing happened inside me."¹³

After graduation from Queen's in 1961 with a first-class honors degree, Heaney attended a college of education

for a year and then embarked on a teaching career. It was at this time that he discovered modern poetry. First, while at St. Joseph's College of Education, he began to read contemporary Irish poets--W. R. Rodgers, John Hewitt, Austin Clarke, Richard Murphy. Here were poets, according to Robert Buttel, "who had created a poetry out of their local and native background."¹⁴ In 1962, Heaney read Patrick Kavanagh and Ted Hughes. In an interview with James Randall, Heaney describes his introduction to these two poets:

When I started to teach . . . I remember getting Kavanagh's work for the first time. I was now twenty-three years of age. And I read "The Great Hunger," that was a thrill to me. Suddenly my own background was appearing in a book I was reading. And then I remember the day I opened Ted Hughes's Lupercal in the Belfast Public Library. And that was again in a poem called "View of a Pig" and in my childhood we'd killed pigs on the farm, and I'd seen pigs shaved, hung up and so on. So again, suddenly, the matter of contemporary poetry was the material of my own life. I had had some notion that modern poetry was far beyond the likes of me--there was Eliot and so on--so I got this thrill out of trusting my own background, and started about a year later, I think.¹⁵

At this time, Heaney joined a group of local Belfast poets, loosely led by Philip Hobsbaum, an English poet who was then lecturing at Queen's. This group, which included Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, met on an informal basis in Longley's apartment. Heaney's work seems to have been particularly favored by Hobsbaum, who, according

to Heaney, was a "strong believer in the bleeding hunk of experience."¹⁶ It was Hobsbaum, he said, who "was really the one who gave me the trust in what I was doing and he urged me to send poems out--and it's easy to forget how callow and unknowing you are about these things in the beginning."¹⁷

"Turkeys Observed" was the first of Heaney's poems to be published. It appeared in The Belfast Telegraph in 1962 and was quickly followed by other poems in such publications as Kilkenny Magazine, Irish Times, and New Statesman. He began to publish reviews during this period as well. Heaney continued to teach--at St. Joseph's College, and later at Queen's. He married Marie Devlin in 1965, the same year his pamphlet 11 Poems was published by Festival Publications.

Faber & Faber put out his much acclaimed first book, Death of a Naturalist, in 1966. The book was concerned mostly with Heaney's rural background--the local workers and characters around County Derry, the pleasures and hardships of growing up on a farm. It is dedicated to his wife and contains, like all his books, a number of poems about his marriage and family life. His second book, Door into the Dark, followed in 1969; it contains much of the same rural matter: salmon, thatchers, local folklore and legend, always the wet, mossy Irish soil

underfoot. It is perhaps significant that 1969 was also the year that "The Troubles" in Ireland emerged full blown, for a good deal of Heaney's work after 1969 deals, in some form or another, with that violence.

Heaney's next two books, Wintering Out (1972) and North (1975), are more serious than the early works; both make an effort to come to terms with the political situation in Ireland. By 1972, in fact, Heaney found himself in the rather uncomfortable position of being thought of as a spokesman for the North, a kind of Catholic tribune. Earlier in his life, Heaney had dabbled in local politics, marching in civil rights parades and writing a satiric anti-Loyalist ballad. At this point, however, Heaney had doubts about the efficacy of poetry as a political vehicle: "Poetry is out of the quarrel with ourselves," he wrote in 1972, "and the quarrel with others is rhetoric. It would wrench the rhythms of my writing to start squaring up to contemporary events with more will than ways to deal with them."¹⁸ It was to avoid the image of a political spokesman, as well as to devote himself to full-time writing, that Heaney and his family moved south to Glanmore, County Wicklow, in the summer of 1972, as Heaney relates in a 1978 interview:

I left . . . not really out of any rejection of Belfast but because . . . Well, I had written three books, had published two, and one was due to come out. I had the name for being a poet but

I was also discovering myself being interviewed as, more or less, a spokesman for the Catholic minority during this early stage of the troubles. I found the whole question of what was the status of art within my own life and the question of what is an artist to do in a political situation very urgent matters. I found that my life, most of my time, was being spent in classrooms, with friends, at various social events, and I didn't feel that my work was sufficiently the center of my life, so I decided I would resign; and I now realize that my age was the age that is probably crucial in everybody's life--around thirty-three. I was going through a sort of rite of passage, I suppose. I wanted to resign, I wanted to leave Belfast because I wanted to step out of the rhythms I had established; I wanted to be alone with myself.¹⁹

We have, then, two forces driving Heaney to an examination of his role as artist: on the one hand, the determination to become a full-time writer, and, on the other, the belief that his responsibility as an artist lies outside the realm of politics.

It is no surprise, therefore, that half of the "Glanmore Sonnets" have as their theme the responsibility or role of the artist. In Sonnet I, Heaney renounces strictly political verse that attempts to build a "paradigm of earth new" in favor of poetry that springs naturally from the subconscious. In the second sonnet, he describes the poetic voice he hopes to find at Glanmore: one that will "continue, hold, dispel, and appease." The romantic origin of that voice is the theme of Sonnet IV. In Sonnet VI he discusses his commitment to reach that moment of transcendence when a poet is able to "break through" and

speak of things that hitherto were "glazed over." Finally, in Sonnet IX, Heaney speaks of the responsibility of the artist to be moved by beauty above all else.

The background of the "Glanmore Sonnets" is everyday life at the gate lodge of Glanmore Castle, which was leased to Heaney by his friend Anne Saddlemyer, to whom the sonnets are dedicated. Weather reports, elderberry trees, the farm land around the lodge, daydreams--these are the raw material of the sonnets. Out of this material, Heaney shapes a somber reply to the questions bothering him in Belfast. His time at Glanmore was no idyllic retreat, though he is tempted at times to portray it that way. In fact several of the sonnets are concerned with the theme of Wicklow as a haven. In Sonnet III, Heaney attempts to draw a comparison between himself and his wife Marie at Glanmore and William and Dorothy Wordsworth at Dove Cottage. Sonnet VII reinforces the image of Glanmore as a harbor of refuge quite literally: bad weather forces trawlers to the "lee of Wicklow" where they "nursed their bright names" and give Heaney reason to marvel over the haven he has found. In Sonnet V, an elderberry tree on the grounds prompts Heaney to recall a similar tree from his childhood that provided green shelter and to which he would now "fall back" and "crouch." Again, the idea of a refuge or sanctuary is suggested.

Rather than being an idyllic holiday, Heaney's stay at Glanmore was a time of probing the relationships between art, nature, and politics. It was a time of examining the darker side of his own personality. For Heaney may, indeed, be a rural poet, a poet of the land, but his is a land of severity and murder. He may be a transcriber of quaint folk customs, but he is also, as he shows in North, a transcriber of brutalities. And this element of darkness is evident in the "Glanmore Sonnets," as Blake Morrison explains at the end of his book Seamus Heaney, which studies all the poems written before 1980:

Knottily textured, difficult, lush with omen, it does not merely happen on its pleasures and harmonies but has to wrest them from fragmentation and disorder. Beyond the images of delicate beauty--small ripples across water and heart, a "rustling and twig-combing breeze," "fuschia in a drizzling noon"--lies the constant risk of intrusion and disillusion: "distant gargling tractors," clanking trains, a rat that "sways on the briar like infected fruit." Ringed round by dangers, the poet and his wife succeed in making small epiphanic clearings.²⁰

In these clearings, Heaney manages to celebrate the powers of language and human love. His relationship with his wife, and the respite it affords, is the theme of Sonnets VIII and X. It is her presence he seeks to console him when he is haunted by memories of political killings and the injustices of nature, as he describes them in Sonnet VIII. Again, in Sonnet X, Heaney describes a dream within a dream, in which the strength and sensuality

of his relationship with Marie offer him a moment of comfort in an otherwise gloomy setting.

The retreat at Glanmore lasted four years, until 1976, when the Heaneys moved to Dublin and Heaney accepted a position as head of the English Department at Carysfort College, a parochial training school for teachers. He has since been named poet-in-residence at Harvard University, assuming the position after the death of his friend and mentor Robert Lowell. In addition to teaching and lecturing, Heaney is currently at work on a long poem entitled "Station Island."

The years spent at Glanmore served their purpose: they allowed Heaney the time to dedicate himself to his poetry. The results of that dedication are best seen in his "Glanmore Sonnets," and his readers would do well to search for him there.

The body of this study is divided into two sections. The first section, Chapter II, covers Sonnets I, II, IV, VI, and IX--the sonnets in which Heaney grapples with his ideas of the artist's responsibility and the nature of his own art. These poems, with their emphasis on the subconscious origin of poetry, illustrate his attempts to veer away from prescriptive partisan poetry; at the same time, with their veiled political references and imagery, they illustrate Heaney's reliance on the "Northern Situation" for metaphors.

The second section, Chapter III, deals with the five remaining sonnets: III, V, VII, VIII, and X. These sonnets concentrate on issues closer to home: the sustenance he derives from his marriage and the sanctuary which Glanmore in part represents. The Troubles are never far away, but at least in these poems Heaney is able to bring the reader closer to the minor, everyday occurrences that everyone shares. At times in these domestic sonnets, Heaney achieves a voice that reassures us of our similarities, a healing voice that deals with "politics" in the largest sense of the word: "as the problem of how and to what extent humans relate to each other."²¹

The conclusion discusses the problem of whether Heaney was able to determine his own moral responsibility as an artist while he was at Glanmore.

NOTES

¹Since the main focus of this study is on the "Glanmore Sonnets," which appear in Field Work (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), pp. 33-42, the sonnets will subsequently be referred to in the text as Sonnet I, Sonnet II, etc.

²Seamus Heaney, "Mossbawn," in Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968-1978 (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), p. 27.

³Seamus Heaney, Stations (Belfast: Ulsterman Publications, 1975), p. 18.

⁴Heaney, "Mossbawn," in Preoccupations, p. 26.

⁵Heaney, "Feeling into Words," in Preoccupations, p. 45.

⁶Robert Druce, "A Raindrop on a Thorn: An Interview with Seamus Heaney," Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters, 9 (1978), 30.

⁷Robert Buttel, Seamus Heaney (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 25.

⁸Buttel, p. 25.

⁹Heaney, "Feeling into Words," in Preoccupations, p. 44.

¹⁰Heaney, "Feeling into Words," p. 44.

¹¹Heaney, "Feeling into Words," p. 46.

¹²Heaney, "Belfast," in Preoccupations, p. 28.

¹³Heaney, "Feeling into Words," in Preoccupations, p. 46.

¹⁴Buttel, p. 26.

¹⁵James Randall, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney," Ploughshares, 5 (1978), 14.

¹⁶Randall, p. 15.

¹⁷Randall, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸Heaney, "Belfast," in Preoccupations, p. 34.

¹⁹Randall, p. 7.

²⁰Blake Morrison, Seamus Heaney (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 85.

²¹David Lloyd, "Seamus Heaney's Field Work," Ariel E, 12 (1981), 91.

CHAPTER II

SONNETS I, II, IV, VI, AND IX

The group of "Glanmore Sonnets" that deals with art and the artist's responsibility sprang from Heaney's uncertainties about his own role as an artist. They reflect the ambivalence he felt towards taking an active role in politics--writing political commentaries and occasional poetry, for example, or making speeches. At the same time, these sonnets reveal the underlying political currents that run through much of his poetry, currents that indicate Heaney is unlikely to dismiss the political situation altogether. When he arrived at Glanmore Cottage in 1972, this dilemma over his moral responsibility had disheartened him. He felt confused, disappointed, and guilty. A year after his arrival, he recorded those emotions in a poem entitled "Exposure":

It is December in Wicklow:
Alders dripping, birches
Inheriting the last light,
The ash tree cold to look at.

A comet that was lost
Should be visible at sunset,
Those million tons of light
Like a glimmer of haws and rose-hips,

And I sometimes see a falling star.
If I could come on meteorite!
Instead I walk through damp leaves,
Husks, the spent flukes of autumn,

Imagining a hero
 On some muddy compound,
 His gift like a slingstone
 Whirled for the desperate.

How did I end up like this?
 I often think of my friends'
 Beautiful prismatic counselling
 And the anvil brains of some who hate me

As I sit weighing and weighing
 My responsible tristia.
 For what? For the ear? For the people?
 For what is said behind-backs?

Rain comes down through the alders,
 Its low conducive voices
 Mutter about let-downs and erosions
 And yet each drop recalls

The diamond absolutes.
 I am neither internee nor informer;
 An inner emigre, grown long-haired
 And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,
 Taking protective colouring
 From bole and bark, feeling
 Every wind that blows;

Who, blowing up these sparks
 For their meagre heat, have missed
 The once-in-a-lifetime portent,
 The comet's pulsing rose.¹

The poem effectively captures Heaney's early mood: his disappointment, guilt, and confusion over the very nature and purpose of his art. Darcy O'Brien, a close friend of Heaney's, explains the sadness and disillusionment which appear in "Exposure" in a 1981 article:

But here one senses that he feels that he has come to the end of some personal and poetic rope and that like a condemned prisoner he must make a last statement, summing up. . . . He had written the bog poems as a means of coming to terms with the

sectarian violence in his native Northern Ireland. He knew the poems were good, but they had led him to the dead end of hopelessness. No end to the killings was in view, and he had concluded that the murderous impulse had some primordial root that defied rational analysis and, if it could be dug up at all, could not itself be killed and would continue to flourish, feeding on blood. Personally he felt guilty at having abandoned the North for the peaceful glades of Wicklow, even though the move had been a sensible and responsible one for his family. The move had made him, as he says, an exile, a wood kerne, that is a vagabond soldier hiding in a forest. Neither an internee nor informer: neither a prisoner of the British nor a traitor to the Nationalist cause, yet feeling vacuous and ineffectual from being neither this nor that, neither here nor there. "How did I end up like this?"²

The "Glanmore Sonnets" are evidence of the constant struggle going on within Heaney. He hopes to find a voice that heals even though it grows out of a violent land; he hopes to write poetry that transcends the war even though he is a vagabond soldier. He is torn between a commitment to art and a commitment to society, between images of despair and images of beauty. Blake Morrison argues that, in the end, art wins out:

There are no easy answers, but there is a drift towards placing art above all else--the "diamond absolutes" are decisively preferred to the "slingstone / Whirled for the desperate." Heaney's reviews from the mid-1970s bear this development out, suggesting a reaction against the kind of political pressure he had been under in Belfast and to which North had been a response. In a review of 1975 he can be found complaining that "internment and the North have become a spectator sport" (P[reoccupations], p. 214), and a 1974 account of Mandelstam's relationship with the Russian government claims: "We live here in critical times ourselves when the idea of poetry as an art is in

danger of being overshadowed by a quest for poetry as a diagram of political attitudes. Some commentators have all the fussy literalism of an official from the ministry of truth."³

Yet there is no denying the fact that, even though Heaney may wish to place "art above all else," the Ulster problem still hovers dangerously close to much of his poetry. Field Work: (published in 1979, well after Heaney's comments about the North's having become a "spectator sport") begins and ends with an eye to the North. The first half of the book consists mainly of elegies to friends and relatives killed in the political violence; the second half ends with a seemingly innocent translation from Dante's Inferno. Heaney's comment on the translation, however, places it in a different light:

I sensed there was something intimate, almost carnal, about these feuds and sorrows of mediaeval Pisa, something that could perhaps mesh with and house the equivalent and destructive energies at work in, say, contemporary Belfast.⁴

This observation shows that, if there is a "drift towards placing art above all else," it is a very slow drift indeed.

The problem of the artist's role--his proper function, voice, and material--has been a theme which recurs throughout Heaney's work. In his earlier books, particularly in Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark, the artist is seen as a kind of folk character: a thatcher, a diviner, a smithy, a farmer. Heaney's own ancestors were farmers,

and he sees himself following in their footsteps in his early poem "Digging." Heaney admits that it is a "coarse-grained navvy of a poem," but he also says that it is the first poem in which he found his own poetic voice:⁵

This was the first place where I felt I had done more than make an arrangement of words: I felt I had let down a shaft into real life. The facts and surfaces of the thing were true, but more important, the excitement that came from naming them gave me a kind of insouciance and a kind of confidence. I didn't care who thought what about it: somehow, it had surprised me by coming out with a stance and an idea that I would stand over:

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

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.⁶

It is with this idea of "poet-as-ploughman" that Heaney begins his series of ten "Glanmore Sonnets" in his volume Field Work.⁷ The first sonnet finds Heaney standing in a newly ploughed field and speculating upon the responsibility of the artist:

Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground.
The mildest February for twenty years
Is mist bands over furrows, a deep no sound
Vulnerable to distant gargling tractors.
Our road is steaming, the turned-up acres breathe.
Now the good life could be to cross a field
And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe
Of ploughs. My lea is deeply tilled.
Old ploughsocks gorge the subsoil of each sense
And I am quickened with a redolence
Of the fundamental dark unblown rose.
Wait then . . . Breasting the mist, in sowers' aprons,
My ghosts come striding into their spring stations.
The dream grain whirls like freakish Easter snows.

The sight of newly ploughed fields causes Heaney to wonder just exactly what the most worthwhile "crop" might be. He could easily plant political seeds and "art a paradigm of earth new." He realizes, however, that his "lea is deeply tilled"--that is, much has been said already of Ireland and politics. He is inspired by his vision of the "fundamental dark unblown rose"--in other words, the Ireland that few writers have captured, the Ireland that transcends politics. The last three lines indicate that he hopes his themes spring from his subconscious rather than from the latest sectarian vendetta.

The opening line--"Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground" introduces the agrarian imagery which permeates the first sonnet: the poem is filled with soil, lathes, ploughsocks, and tractors. It is interesting that Heaney chose to plough "vowels" into the ground rather than consonants or syllables or any other of a number of things he might have chosen. The word "vowels" has a special significance for Heaney. They are associated in his mind with "image and emotion" rather than "will and intelligence," with the Motherland Ireland rather than the Fatherland England.⁸ The fact that he begins his sonnet sequence by ploughing vowels into the ground indicates an inclination towards verse controlled by emotion rather than reason, a romantic poetry more in tune with Wordsworth than with Yeats or Hopkins.

Lines 2-5 suggest the first stirrings of spring. The damp, mild weather, the steaming road, the noisy tractor--Heaney's imagery here calls to mind rebirth and fertility. He is preoccupied with new artistic beginnings.

Yet rather than carry the rebirth imagery any further, Heaney introduces one of the problems plaguing him in Belfast: the role of the artist in a violent, political world. In lines 6-8 he writes: "Now the good life could be to cross a field / And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe / Of ploughs." Obviously Heaney is aware that at this point in his life he could use art to try to restructure the world, to shape ideas, to incite action. He could try to be the war poet that some of his contemporaries were calling for. Yet even the wording of these lines suggests that he had doubts about this role. The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that "art" used as a verb is an archaic form with at least two distinct meanings. The first is "to confine, cramp, restrict, limit, in local position or in action"; the second, "to make artificial." Clearly, Heaney felt ambivalent about writing purely political verse--"crisis poetry," he calls it: "once its occasion is over, the energy of the poetry is over."⁹

Lines 8-11 illustrate this ambivalence. He could write political poetry, but, as he says, his "lea is

deeply tilled" or worked. Instead, Heaney looks to the "fundamental dark unblown rose," the essential nature of his country that lies embedded in his own subconscious. This return to himself, to his own "rag-and-bone shop," emerges as the basic theme of the sonnet in the last three lines:¹⁰

Wait then . . . Breasting the mist, in sowers' aprons
My ghosts come striding into their spring stations.
The dream grain whirls like freakish Easter snows.

Heaney's ghosts are the shades of his subconscious mind. They are strangely militaristic, in apron uniforms, striding rather than gliding or simply materializing. They assume their positions almost as if preparing for a battle. These positions, or "stations," can best be understood in light of one of Heaney's lesser-known works. At approximately the same time that he was writing the Glanmore sonnet sequence, Heaney was also completing a group of prose-poems that he had started in 1970 in California. They were published collectively in 1975 under the title "Stations." In the introduction to that work, Heaney discusses the delay in their completion, as well as the meaning he assigns to the word "stations" itself:

A second, less precisely definable block was in the air when I came back to Belfast: those first pieces had been attempts to touch what Wordsworth called "spots of time," moments at the very edge of consciousness which had lain for years in the unconscious as active lodes of nodes, yet on my return a month after the introduction of internment my introspection was not confident enough

to pursue its direction. The sirens in the air, perhaps quite rightly, jammed those other tentative if insistent signals. So it was again at a remove, in the "hedge-school" of Glanmore, in Wicklow, that the sequence was returned to, and then the sectarian dimension of that pre-reflective experience presented itself as something asking to be uttered also.

I think of the pieces now as points on a psychic turas, stations that I have often made unthinkingly in my head. I wrote each of them down with the excitement of coming for the first time to a place I had always known completely.¹¹

"Stations," then, are "moments at the very edge of consciousness," and indeed, a careful examination of the "Glanmore Sonnets" shows that memories and dreams play an important part in all but two of the sonnets. The "edge of consciousness," Heaney seems to be saying, is where the poet is obligated to search for material.

The sonnet form in which this material is presented is not uncommon in Heaney's work. All of his slim books of poetry contain at least one sonnet: Door into the Dark and North have three, while Field Work includes two sonnets in addition to the ten-sonnet sequence. Very few of Heaney's previous sonnets, however, are strictly traditional, and the "Glanmore Sonnets" are no exception. The meter of the sequence is basically iambic pentameter; few of the lines are acatalectic. The sequence's rhyme scheme, however, is somewhat erratic; while almost all of the sonnets close with a rhymed couplet, only four are true English (III, IV, V, X). Five are modified English (I, II, VI, VIII, IX) and one (VII) contains no discernible rhyme scheme.

Sonnet I, then, with its modified English rhyme scheme and its rough iambic pentameter, is fairly representative of the majority of Heaney's sonnets. Up until the eighth line, the rhyme scheme is English: ababcdcd. Beginning with the ninth line, however, an irregular pattern is established: eefggf. Though most of the lines are decasyllabic, only the last line is written in true iambic pentameter. Consequently, this line conveys a sense of finality that befits its meaning: "The dream grain whirls like freakish Easter snows," the poet says, as he wipes his hands of dirt. Heaney makes no attempt to establish distinct quatrains and a closing couplet in this sonnet; instead, the sonnet is divided into three sections of unequal length. In the first five lines, the poet stands in the freshly ploughed field, observing his surroundings. In the next six lines, he speculates on the proper crop to plant, and in the last three, his decision is made: he will plant personal "dream grain" rather than public didactic seed. His voice will find inspiration in the depths of his subconscious rather than in the morning paper.

In many ways, the second sonnet begins where the first left off. It opens with an image of "words" "ferreting themselves out" of the subconscious and ends with a couplet that repeats the opening line of the first sonnet:

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

The origins and functions of the artist's voice are the themes of the second sonnet. In the first sonnet, Heaney wrestles primarily with questions of the artist's responsibility, and he concludes that the artist's material should spring from his own subconscious mind rather than from outside sources. In other words, he should wait for poetry rather than search for it. In the second sonnet, Heaney narrows in on the actual act of writing: the mysterious escape of words from the subconscious.

Heaney has always maintained a romantic view of this escape, seeing "poetry as divination."¹² He sees the poet as "making contact with what lies hidden," as if poetry itself existed somewhere as an entity, and the poet's job was to act as a sort of conductor, a receptor of poetic waves.¹³ He discusses this idea at the beginning of an essay entitled "The Makings of a Music," in which he compares the poetry of Wordsworth to that of Yeats:

The given line, the phrase or cadence which haunts the ear and the eager parts of the mind, this is the tuning fork to which the whole music of the poem is orchestrated, that out of which the overall melodies are worked for or calculated. It is my impression that this haunting or *donné* occurs to all poets in much the same way, arbitrarily, with a sense of promise, as an alertness, a hankering, a readiness. It is also my impression that the quality of the music in the finished poem has to do with the way the poet proceeds to respond to his *donné*. If he surrenders to it, allows himself to be carried by its initial rhythmic suggestiveness, to become somnambulist after its invitations, then we will have a music not unlike Wordsworth's, hypnotic, swimming with the current of its form rather than against it. If, on the other hand, instead of surrendering to the drift of the original generating rhythm, the poet seeks to discipline it, to harness its energies in order to drive other parts of his mind into motion, then we will have a music not unlike Yeats's, affirmative, seeking to master rather than to mesmerize the ear, swimming strongly against the current of its form.¹⁴

Heaney's own poetic voice, he seems to be saying in the second sonnet, is Wordsworthian rather than Yeatsian. It is a voice that acquiesces to the "drift of the original generating rhythm," a voice that seems to have appeared out of nowhere and, as in the fourth Glanmore sonnet, "vanished into where [it] seemed to start," a mysterious voice through which words are able to escape the "dark hutch" of the subconscious as if they are indeed living creatures. The phrase "mountings from the hiding places" in fact comes from Wordsworth's Prelude: "Trances of thought and mountings of the mind / Come fast upon me. . . ." ¹⁵

The mysterious nature of the poetic voice is emphasized in lines 4-8 by Oisín Kelly, an old stonecutter from

Belfast who shares Heaney's romantic ideas about art: "These things are not secrets but mysteries," he states unpragmatically. Kelly longed to lay his hands upon stone "That connived with the chisel, as if the grain / Remembered what the mallet tapped to know." ("Grain" here echoes the "dream grain" scattered in Sonnet I, further connecting the two poems.) Through Kelly, Heaney develops the idea of the artist as receptor, tapping out an image that already lay embedded in the stone's memory.

Sonnet II moves quite suddenly from the past Belfast to the present Glanmore. "Then I landed in the hedge-school of Glanmore," he says, comparing Glanmore to the so-called "schools" for poor Catholics which flourished prior to 1831.¹⁶ At this hedge-school of Glanmore, Heaney hopes to find a "voice caught back off slug-horn and slow chanter." This voice contains an element of music in it: "slug-horn" is an outdated term for "trumpet," and "chanter" is both "one who sings" and the "pipe of a bagpipe" (OED). On one level, these images suggest that Heaney's ideal voice harks back to the Irish bards who travelled the countryside reciting verses to the accompaniment of a musical instrument--a bit of Celtic-twilight imagery. Both "chanter" and "slug-horn," however, have other definitions that also apply in this case. "Chanter" can mean either a "magician" or a "priest"; the fact that Heaney's ideal

voice is taken from a slow chanter implies that Heaney senses an enormous power in the poetic voice, an ancient power skin to magic and religion.

Similarly, Heaney's use of the word "slug-horn" is probably an acknowledgment that the poetic voice carries with it another kind of power as well. The OED indicates that the hyphenated "slug-horn" is an "erroneous use of 'slughorn,' the earlier form of 'slogan.'" The primary definition of "slogan" is a "war-cry or battle-cry . . . specifically one of those formerly employed by the native Irish." The reader is forced to wonder whether Heaney made intentional use of this erroneous form; as a "connoisseur of language," and having a fondness for native Irish, he was no doubt aware of its double meaning.¹⁷

The poetic voice Heaney is hoping to find at Glanmore, then, is "caught back off" an ancient war-cry; it is necessarily a Northern Irish, Catholic voice, stained with undertones of war, violence, and politics. Heaney can never separate himself completely from the tragedy of his homeland; the fact, however, that Heaney used the hyphenated form of "slug-horn" points out that he hopes his poetic voice will spring from deeper and older wells of inspiration. His poetry, he seems to be saying, is primarily a form of art, like music, and only secondarily, if at all, a form of political comment.

The functions of a poetic voice, as Heaney envisions them here, are to "continue, hold, dispel, appease"--again, all functions which imply a great deal of power wielded over an audience. A voice "that might continue" and "hold" connotes, among other things, tradition, and presumably Heaney here refers not only to the Irish tradition, but also to his place in the English tradition as well. Heaney's voice has always been that of a hybrid, although in the "Glanmore Sonnets", as Blake Morrison points out, Heaney adheres in some ways more to the English tradition than to the Irish:

The sequence marks Heaney's return not just to the countryside but to the mainstream of English poetry: having begun in imitation of Ted Hughes and then looked more to his own countrymen, he now takes his place in an English lyric tradition that includes Wyatt at one end and Wordsworth at the other.¹⁸

Part of the beauty of the sonnets is the way Heaney manages to draw from both traditions: he plants Irish vowels in Wordsworthian rows.

Heaney's hybrid voice is one which "dispels" and "appeases," interesting word choices for someone attempting to stay out of the political arena. These verbs, however, also suggest that the poetic voice, with small offerings of truth or beauty, may bring a form of temporary peace. As Blake Morrison writes: "Peace of one sort or another (his own, his readers', his nation's; psychological, civil, and aesthetic) is what all his poetry works towards."¹⁹ This idea will be discussed further in the section on

Sonnet IX; suffice it to say here that while Heaney does not see the poetic voice as an instrument of politics, he nevertheless sees it as a small instrument of peace.

The penultimate line of the second sonnet--"Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground"--repeats the opening line of the first, thus drawing the two sonnets together to a mutual conclusion. In the second sonnet, however, the colon after "other" has been replaced with a comma, which speeds the line up considerably while still emphasizing the fact that Heaney is at a turning point in his life: at Glanmore he is exploring new poetic ground.

The final line of the second sonnet--"Each verse returning like the plough turned round"--is an indication of just how Wordsworthian Heaney had become at Glanmore. He was in fact studying Wordsworth, and particularly The Prelude, while he was living at Glanmore, and he found himself interested in Wordsworth's habit of composing poetry aloud. In Heaney's essay "The Makings of a Music," he mentions the section in The Prelude that deals with this habit: "In The Prelude [Wordsworth] tells us how he paced the woods with his dog running a bit ahead of him, so that the dog's barking would warn him of strangers and he could then quieten his iambic drone and not be taken for an idiot."²⁰ Later in the same essay, Heaney comments further:

Wordsworth's chaunt acted as a spell upon the hearer, whether that hearer were Hazlitt or Wordsworth himself. It enchanted. It was "equable, sustained, internal," three adjectives which we might apply to the motion of Wordsworth's blank verse also. The continuity of the thing was what was important, the onward inward pouring out, up and down the gravel path, the crunch and scuffle of the gravel working like a metre or a metronome under the rhythms of the ongoing chaunt, those "trances of thought and mountings of the mind" somehow aided by the automatic, monotonous turns and returns of the walk, the length of the path acting like the length of the line. And I imagine that the swing of the poet's body contributed as well to the sway of the voice, for Hazlitt tells us that "there was something of a roll, a lounge in his gait, not unlike his own Peter Bell." The poet as ploughman, if you like, and the suggestive etymology of the word "verse" itself is pertinent in this context. "Verse" comes from the Latin versus which could mean a line of poetry but could also mean the turn that a ploughman made at the head of the field as he finished one furrow and faced back into another. Wordsworth on the gravel path, to-ing and fro-ing like a ploughman up and down a field, his voice rising and falling between the measure of his pentameters, unites the old walking meaning of versus with the newer, talking sense of verse.²¹

Heaney has incorporated several of the images in this passage into Sonnet II. The idea of the poet as a "slow chanter" can be seen clearly in this prose piece written just before the sonnets were published. The last line of Sonnet II--"Each verse returning like the plough turned round"--is obviously a reworking of the thoughts expressed in the above passage. Wordsworth's influence on Heaney at Glanmore is seen first in Sonnet II, but it also appears--as a direct reference--in Sonnet III. And, indeed, one critic has gone so far as to call the entire sonnet sequence "distinctly Wordsworthian."²² While that may be

overstating the case, it is certainly true that Wordsworth plays an important part in at least two of the Glanmore Sonnets.

In form, Sonnet II (like Sonnet I) is modified Shakespearean. Unlike Sonnet I, the last six lines are regular: efefgg. Heaney employs much slant rhyme throughout the sonnet, depending heavily on the goodwill of the reader. Three out of the fourteen lines are written in iambic pentameter. The other lines contain a variety of meters: lines 7 and 9 are basically anapestic, and the rest seem to follow no set pattern. These irregular meters have the effect of slowing the reader down. The sonnet does not read smoothly; rather there are fits and starts, unexpected spondees, runs of unaccented syllables. Perhaps an attempt is being made here to imitate the erratic journey of "words . . . ferreting themselves out of their dark hutch." The poetic voice does not spring full-blown from the subconscious, but rather comes in uneven bits and pieces.

Heaney's preoccupation with the artist's voice is again evident in Sonnet IV, which is ostensibly a description of the poet as a child trying in vain to hear a train by putting his ear against a railroad track. The sonnet is actually a lengthy metaphor of the poetic voice:

I used to lie with an ear to the line
For that way, they said, there should come a sound
Escaping ahead, an iron tune

Of flange and piston pitched along the ground,
 But I never heard that. Always, instead,
 Struck couplings and shuntings two miles away
 Lifted over the woods. The head
 Of a horse swirled back from a gate, a grey
 Turnover of haunch and mane, and I'd look
 Up to the cutting where she'd soon appear.
 Two fields back in the house, small ripples shook
 Silently across our drinking water
 (As they are shaking now across my heart)
 And vanished into where they seemed to start.

Heaney's poetic voice is not an "iron tune" that one can hear if one is in the right place at the right time. Rather, it shows itself to those who wait, to those who leave themselves open to its effects. Heaney's work is filled with references to the differences between poets who wait and poets who seek, as Blake Morrison makes clear:

His essays, reviews, and interviews repeatedly advance the idea that there are two kinds of poetry and two kinds of poet: les vers donnés as against les vers calculés; the poetry of chance and trance as against the poetry of resistance and perseverance; the poetry of "sinking in" or the poetry of "coming up against"; the instinctual or the rational; the feminine or the masculine; the "artesian" or the "architectonic"; the epiphanic or the crafted; the "ooze" of poetry or its "spur of flame" the "lived, illiterate, and unconscious" or the "learned, literate, and conscious"; the takers (Wordsworth, D. H. Lawrence, Keats, Patrick Kavanagh) and the makers (Yeats, Hopkins, Jonson, Lowell, John Montague, John Hewitt); poets who sense, surrender, dive, divine, receive, and coax, or poets who command, plot, assert, strike, labour, and force.^{2 3}

At Glanmore, Heaney tries to come to terms with his own brand of poetry. Sonnet II clearly indicates that he is a poet who waits for words to come of their own accord, and Sonnet IV illustrates the futility of his searching

them out: he never hears what he is listening for, only "struck couplings and shuntings two miles away / Lifted over the woods." Anyone who has heard a train in the country knows what Heaney is writing of here: the fluctuating rhythm heard in the distance, the farm animals judging their dinner time by the milk train, the slight vibrations felt even though the train is miles away.

The image of the poet with his ear to the ground occurs several times throughout Heaney's work, usually with unpleasant associations. In the second section of a poem entitled "Triptych" (Field Work) a sibyl announces:

The ground we kept our ear to for so long
Is flayed or calloused, and its entrails
Tented by an impious augury.
Our island is full of comfortless noises.²⁴

In the case of "Land," Heaney finds that lying with one's ear on the ground can be dangerous:

if I lie with my ear
in this loop of silence

long enough, thigh-bone
and shoulders against the phantom ground,

I expect to pick up
a small drumming

and must not be surprised
in bursting air

to find myself snared, swinging
an ear-ring of sharp wire.²⁵

Heaney, then, has never been satisfied with this kind of listening. He associates it with bad tidings, danger, or, in the case of Sonnet II, simply ineffectiveness.

Heaney never makes it clear exactly who told him to put his ear to the railroad track, but presumably "they" are childhood friends, boys from surrounding farms, who, like many children, are fond of playing near railroad tracks. Indeed, playing or walking along these tracks near his home seems to have been a fairly regular occurrence in Heaney's childhood, if one can judge by his poetry. In "Dawn Shoot," an early poem, Heaney describes a fox-hunting expedition at the railroad tracks, in which the silence of the morning and the absence of the trains are emphasized, so much so that one can almost imagine the boys discussing various methods of hearing distant trains. The silence is broken by a horse who "whinnied and shivered her haunches / Up on a hill"--perhaps the same grey horse of Sonnet IV.²⁶ Again, in one of Heaney's better known poems, "The Harvest Bow," from Field Work (p. 58), Heaney and his father "walk between the railway slopes / Into an evening of long grass and midges / . . . Me with the fishing rod, already homesick / For the big lift of these evenings." The railroad tracks, then, hold fond memories for Heaney; they are one of the stations to which he returns at Glanmore.

This fondness for a childhood haunt is completely overlooked in Calvin Bedient's analysis of Sonnet IV. Bedient discerns an element of despair in the sonnet:

The poem is peculiarly and almost despairingly open. What is desired does not first hum an "iron tune" along the line but springs ominously above the scene. And desire thence vanished into where it seemed to start. Did the heart, then, want a wooing? Must reality be a pitched music or else refused? Instead, the heart gets nothing, except rumors. The act of memory, feeding the act of the poem, is similarly self-circumscribed. The poem itself, rejecting resolution, would vanish into where it seemed to start. Yet how finely complete it is, finished in both senses: Luckily discovering closure through an indirection that, as such, delicately affirms the heart's position--two fields away, always disappointed, bucketed in parentheses: and as done for as a penny on the rails.²⁷

Heaney's heart is certainly not "as done for as a penny on the rails," nor is he particularly disappointed that he cannot hear the train with his ear to the track; rather, he uses the occasion to describe what he finally does hear and see: the tangible effects of an invisible force.

With a reassuring regularity, the sound of a switch engine was always "lifted over the woods," and by this sound the grey mare judged her feeding time. In the farm house, "small ripples shook / Silently across our drinking water," and, as if to confirm that the poetic voice is actually the subject of the poem, Heaney says parenthetically that similar waves "are shaking now across my heart"-- "now" being the time he writes, as he hears the voice inside his head. The voice, like the ripples on the drinking water, "vanished into where [it] seemed to start,"

disappearing into the subconscious, where it always begins and always ends.

Heaney's conscious mind, on the other hand, chose to make Sonnet IV a true English sonnet, with most of the lines ending in exact rhyme. The only exceptions are the slant rhymes in lines 1 and 4 ("line," "tune") and lines 10 and 12 ("appear," "water"). Sonnet IV is the only Glanmore sonnet that attempts to maintain an exact rhyme pattern.

Metrically, Sonnet IV corresponds more closely with the other Glanmore sonnets: that is, it contains a few lines of strategically placed iambic pentameter, with the majority of lines being variations of that meter. One variation, the anapest, is used with great effectiveness in Sonnet IV. In the first line, for example, the sound of the train is metrically imitated with the anapest. The first two feet of iambs lull the reader; the next two anapestic feet speed up and rock along just as a train might: "I used to lie with an ear to the line." Similarly, in lines 7 and 8, Heaney combines anapests and iambs to match the swinging motion of the horse: "the head / Of a horse swirled back from a gate." The metrically complete iambic pentameter of the last part of line 3 and all of line 4 is trainlike enough to suggest that it is no accident: "an iron tune / Of flange and piston pitched along

the ground." Iambic pentameter is also used to end the sonnet. The last two lines, while not a couplet in the formal sense of the word, form a sort of "ghost couplet": the meter and rhyme scheme correspond to the English form, but there is no formal two-line concluding commentary or epigram. The last two lines of the sonnet are merely part of a concluding quatrain.

Throughout the sonnet, in fact, though Heaney follows the English rhyme scheme, he does not divide the movement of the poem into corresponding patterns. The reader is not faced in Sonnet IV with three quatrains and a couplet, but rather with a quatrain, a sestet, and another quatrain. None of the sonnets, for that matter, falls into the traditional English patterns of quatrains and couplet. It is as if Heaney is rebelling, as if the closed form of the sonnet is a bit stifling, as if "the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground" inhibits the growth of his dream grain.²⁸

Indeed, it seems somewhat paradoxical that Heaney should have chosen the sonnet form in the first place, since a great deal of his work indicates that his poetry springs from his unconscious and has a mind of its own. Unless his poetry comes to him complete in fourteen rhymed lines, he would have to "strike, labour, and force" over it to some degree. This paradox illustrates the ambivalence, indeed almost confusion, that Heaney felt toward

his role as a poet. He can no more "receive" complete Shakespearean sonnets from his subconscious than he can write completely apolitical verse. The vagaries of rhythm and meter throughout the sonnets, as well as the veiled political images, are proof that at some deeper level, Heaney understood this truth about himself.

Sonnet VI again takes the artist as its theme. The poem begins in the present in County Wicklow, ends in County Derry in the past, and in between develops a metaphor for the kind of poet Heaney hopes to become at Glanmore:

He lived there in the unsayable lights.
 He saw the fuchsia in a drizzling noon,
 The elderflower at dusk like a risen moon
 And green fields greying on the windswept heights.
 "I will break through," he said, "what I glazed over
 With perfect mist and peaceful absences. . . ."
 Sudden and sure as the man who dared the ice
 And raced his bike across the Moyola River.
 A man we never saw. But in that winter
 Of nineteen forty-seven, when the snow
 Kept the country bright as a studio,
 In a cold where things might crystallize or founder,
 His story quickened us, a wild white goose
 Heard after dark above the drifted house.

Entranced with the beauty of his natural surroundings, Heaney vows to "break through . . . what I glazed over / With perfect mist and peaceful absences." This vow is in keeping with his introspective mood while at Glanmore: he is re-examining his art with a critical eye, trying to push the boundaries of language further than he had up to this point. The new poet he hopes to become at Glanmore

is one who trusts his instincts as surely as if his life depended on it.

This dependence on instinct reflects Heaney's view of himself as an instinctual rather than as a rational poet. The "man who dared the ice" could just as easily be Oisín Kelly the stonecutter or the old water diviner or any other of a number of folk characters who appear in Heaney's poetry epitomizing the instinctual artist. This man in Sonnet VI is never seen, and it could be that the incident was reported over the radio. Heaney, who would have been eight years old in 1947, was "quickenened" by the story, thrilled enough by the man's courage to remember the incident--and his hearing of it--for many years.

The sonnet emphasizes the bitterness of the winter of 1947: "the snow / Kept the country bright as a studio"; it was "a cold where things might crystallize or founder"; and the house was "drifted" with snow. The image of the country "bright as a studio" is appropriately incongruous: the light is unnaturally bright, so bright that it seems to emanate from electric lights rather than from the sun. The cold is severe enough to harm people and animals. Into this winter, like the cry of a "wild white goose," the man's story brings life and animation. It is not hard to imagine Heaney and an assortment of his nine brothers and sisters, inspired by the story, trekking down to the River

Bann and pacing its banks, daring and boasting, judging distances and depths.

It is not hard to imagine also that Heaney sees this "quickenings" as a function of the artist. A moment of rejuvenation in the dead of winter brought about by the artist's capacity to heal, to revitalize: it is in this sense that Heaney's poetic voice may be considered public or committed to society.

In a similar vein, the image of the "wild goose" in the penultimate line of Sonnet VI tells much about the way in which Heaney saw himself as an artist at Glanmore. To understand the significance of the term, the reader must be aware that historically "wild geese" refers to the Irish Catholic soldiers defeated by William of Orange after the siege of Derry in 1689:

The raising of the siege then led to the eventual total defeat of James II in Ireland. William of Orange landed at Carrickfergus Castle the next year, 1690, and won great victories in battles at the Boyne and at Aughrim. In 1691 all Catholic armies in Ireland totally surrendered at Limerick, under their Old English-Gaelic Catholic commander Patrick Sarsfield. He and thousands of his troops were allowed to go into exile to serve in the armies of Louis XIV and became known as "Wild Geese." This was the foundation of that triumph of Protestant over Catholic, Orange over Green, still perpetuated in memory by Protestants in Northern Ireland today because it is a memory they think they need.²⁹

A wild goose, then, is an exiled soldier, an Irish Catholic soldier serving in another country's army. This

fact recalls Heaney's lines in his 1973 poem "Exposure"
(North, p. 73):

I am neither internee nor informer,
An inner emigre, grown long-haired
And thoughtful; a word kerne

Escaped from the massacre.

Heaney emigrated safely from Belfast, but a small part of him still views himself as a Catholic soldier--"grown long-haired and thoughtful"--but a soldier nonetheless. Seuman MacManus, in his Story of the Irish Race, devotes an entire chapter to "The Wild Geese" and quotes from a poem whose main sentiment is that the one thing the wild geese gave to Ireland was the hope that they would someday return:

The Wild Geese shall return, and we'll welcome them home,
So active, so armed, so flighty,
A flock was ne'er known to this island to come
Since the days of Prince Fionn the mighty.
They will waste and destroy,
Overturn and o'erthrow,
They'll accomplish whate'er may in man be!
Just heaven they will bring Devastation and woe
On the hosts of the tyrannous Seaghan Buidhe.³⁰

It is doubtful that Heaney intended to return to Northern Ireland to bring "devastation and woe"; in fact, after four years at Glanmore he did not return to the North at all but instead settled in Dublin to teach. Nevertheless, his use of the term "wild goose" in Sonnet VI should be taken seriously, as it proves that at some level his political loyalties remain active and creep into his poetry.

In form, Sonnet VI is fairly typical of the other Glanmore Sonnets; that is, it has a modified English rhyme scheme and an abundance of slant rhymes. Heaney seems to use the balanced rhythm of metrically complete iambic pentameter to indicate a completion or beginning of a thought, as when he concludes his survey of the countryside: "and green fields greying on the windswept heights." Similarly, his explanation regarding the "man who dared the ice" begins with several lines of almost complete iambic pentameter: "A man we never saw. But in that winter / Of nineteen forty-seven, when the snow"

Sonnet IV falls into two sections--lines 1-6 and lines 7-14. In the first section, Heaney discusses his current situation in three sentences, all generally following a basic subject-verb-completer pattern: he lived, he saw, he said. In the case of the third sentence, Heaney projects himself into the future momentarily ("I will break through . . . what I glazed over"). As the second section begins, he plunges first into his past, and then, with the symbol of the wild goose, even further into Ireland's past, using his pen to dig through layers of time and uncover images of the artist.

Of all the "Glanmore Sonnets" that have the role or responsibility of the artist as their theme, Sonnet IX perhaps comes closest to expressing what Heaney hoped to

become at Glanmore: "someone whose pursuit of art places him above and beyond the demands of the tribe."³¹ It is here in Sonnet IX that Heaney's "drift toward placing art above all else" finds its full expression. His defense of poetry centers on nothing more ideological than an image of beauty:

Outside the kitchen window a black rat
 Sways on the briar like infected fruit:
 "It looked me through, it stared me out, I'm not
 Imagining things. Go you out to it."
 Did we come to the wilderness for this?
 We have our burnished bay tree at the gate,
 Classical, hung with the reek of silage
 From the next farm, tart-leafed as inwit.
 Blood on a pitch-fork, blood on chaff and hay,
 Rats speared in the sweat and dust of threshing--
 What is my apology for poetry?
 The empty briar is swishing
 When I come down, and beyond, your face
 Haunts like a new moon glimpsed through tangled glass.

As Marie Heaney directs her husband to chase away the rat on the briar, Heaney complains. "Did we come here to knock rats out of shrubbery?" he asks grudgingly. He reminds himself that his purpose in coming to Glanmore was to devote himself to his art and that the conditions should be ideal for writing. Yet something is wrong; small images of horror creep into his retreat. Heaney's conscience will not leave him in peace. How can he devote his life to art when his countrymen lie bloodied in their own fields? Heaney does not present a clear-cut answer; rather, he leaves the reader with an image which to him at that moment must have seemed the epitome of beauty. This image--

one of beauty and peace--is all that he can offer, both to his own conscience and to those who would have him write politically expedient verse.

The first quatrain of Sonnet IX introduces the image of the rat, climbing the shrubbery or tree that grows close to the kitchen window of the gate lodge. It seems to be a particularly menacing rat, black and heavy like "infected fruit," and it peers into the kitchen at Marie. Rats appear fairly frequently in Heaney's poetry and are usually associated with feelings of horror and disgust. In several of his early poems, Heaney displays what almost seems like a phobia of the creatures. "The Barn" (Death of a Naturalist, p. 17) is a description of the barn on Heaney's boyhood farm, a musty dark place where his childish imagination turned sacks of corn into huge and hungry rats:

The dark gulfed like a roof-space. I was chaff
To be pecked up when birds shot through the air-slits.
I lay face-down to shun the fear above.
The two-lugged sacks moved in like great blind rats.

In "Personal Helicon" (Death of a Naturalist, p. 57), Heaney describes his childhood fascination with wells and catalogues particular ones which made an impression on him: "And one / Was scaresome for there, out of ferns and tall / Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection." As Heaney grew older, he eventually confronted his fear of rats, and his subsequent victory over that fear is recorded in "An Advancement of Learning" (Death of a Naturalist, p. 18):

I took the embankment path
 (As always, deferring
 The bridge). The river nosed past,
 Pliable, oil-skinned, wearing

A transfer of gables and sky.
 Hunched over the railing,
 Well away from the road now, I
 Considered the dirty-keeled swans.

Something slobbered curtly, close,
 Smudging the silence: a rat
 Slimed out of the water and
 My throat sickened so quickly

I turned down the path in cold sweat
 But God, another was nimbling
 Up the far bank, tracing its wet
 Arcs on the stones. Incredibly then

I established a dreaded
 Bridgehead. I turned to stare
 With deliberate, thrilled care
 At my hitherto snubbed rodent.

He clockworked aimlessly a while,
 Stopped, back bunched and glistening,
 Ears plastered down on his knobbed skull,
 Insidiously listening.

The tapered tail that followed him,
 The raindrop eye, the old snout:
 One by one I took all in.
 He trained on me. I stared him out

Forgetting how I used to panic
 When his grey brothers scraped and fed
 Behind the hen-coop in our yard,
 On ceiling boards above my bed.

This terror, cold, wet-furred, small-clawed,
 Retreated up a pipe for sewage.
 I stared a minute after him.
 Then I walked on and crossed the bridge.

By the time Heaney reaches Glanmore, rats are no longer
 quite as disgusting to him as they once were. Though they
 are still seen as unpleasant and evocative of danger in

Sonnet IX, they are also seen as creatures "speared in the sweat and dust of threshing"--innocent bystanders like the majority of the population of Northern Ireland.

After using the rat in the first quatrain to introduce a sense of unease, Heaney continues to develop that sense in the second quatrain. Things are not quite right at Glanmore. Certainly Heaney has managed to bring his family from war-torn Belfast to an idyllic cottage in the "wilderness"; fate has even condescended and placed a "bay tree at the gate" from which Heaney can clip his laurels. Yet though the tree is "classical" and "burnished" with age, an appropriate symbol for the solitary poet, still there is something about it which calls Heaney back to the community. It is "hung with the reek of silage / From the next farm." Glanmore is not such a wilderness that one can escape one's neighbors easily. The pronounced odor hanging in the trees is "tart-leafed as inwit"; among the several definitions for "inwit" in the OED are "conscience" and an "inward sense of right and wrong." The tree, then, acts upon Heaney as sharply as his conscience.

Under the pressure of conscience, Heaney asks himself how he can justify a life devoted to art. "What is my apology for poetry?" he cries, using "apology" in the sense of a "formal defense." His defense of poetry rests on a single image. In the final epiphanic tercet, the rat has

disappeared and Heaney glimpses his wife's face in the kitchen window through a tangle of branches. Her face is not clearly seen, being partially obscured by branches and probably somewhat distorted by irregularities in the old glass panes. Heaney appropriately compares it to a "new" or waxing moon, the phase in which only a glimmer of a crescent can be observed. Most of the moon's face during this phase is obscured.

This image of beauty (and those like it, Heaney seems to be saying) is reason enough for poetry to exist. The poet's responsibility is to set the imagination working, and that in itself is more effective than countless pleas for peace. Heaney's defense of poetry in this sense is similar to Shelley's:

The great instrument of moral good is the imagination. . . . Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb. A Poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither.³²

By working the imagination, the poet can work towards peace.

In form, Sonnet IX follows an English rhyme scheme, although in some cases the end rhymes are nearly nonexistent. For example, "hay" and "poetry" depend on slant rhyme only. Heaney employs assonance more consistently than true end rhyme in this sonnet. He does not seem to relate the assonance to the meaning of the poem; it is used

simply for aesthetic reasons--for polyphony, emphasis, and unity.

In the first line, the phrase "black rat" is emphasized both by its assonance and by the fact that metrically it forms a spondee. The second quatrain has a predominance of long "e's," the last three of which appear at approximately the same place in each line:

We have our burnished bay trēē at the gate,
Classical, hung with the rēēk of silage
From the next farm, tart-lēāfed as inwit.

Similarly, the last quatrain exhibits assonance towards the beginning of each line:

What is m̄y apology for poetry?
The empty briar is swishing
When I come down, and beyond, your face
Haunts like a newmoon glimpsed through tangled glass.

Note in the final line the long "u's": "new," "moon," and "through." Heaney uses assonance to bring Sonnet IX to a close, balancing the vowel sound of "black rat" in the first line with "tangled glass" in the last.

The "apology for poetry" in Sonnet IX makes it clear that poetry in Heaney's mind needs nothing more than an image of beauty to justify its existence. This poem, along with the other sonnets discussed in this section which stress the subconscious origin of poetry, makes Heaney's stance perfectly clear: he is opposed to prescriptive poetry. The fact, however, that these sonnets contain political flotsam indicates that Heaney is keenly

aware of the influence the Troubles have had on him and his poetry; though he may abdicate the role of political spokesman, he cannot abdicate his Northern Irish heritage.

NOTES

¹Seamus Heaney, North (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 72-73. All subsequent references appear in the text.

²Darcy O'Brien, "Seamus Heaney and Wordsworth: A Correspondent Breeze," in The Nature of Identity, ed. Winston Weathers (Tulsa: Univ. of Tulsa Press, 1981), p. 40.

³Morrison, pp. 72-73.

⁴Shaun O'Connell, "Seamus Heaney: Poetry and Power," New Boston Review, 5 (1980), 5.

⁵Heaney, "Feeling into Words," in Preoccupations, p. 43.

⁶Heaney, "Feeling into Words," p. 42.

⁷Heaney, "The Makings of a Music: Reflections on Wordsworth and Yeats," in Preoccupations, p. 65.

⁸Heaney, "Belfast," in Preoccupations, p. 34.

⁹Druce, p. 27.

¹⁰W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 336.

¹¹Heaney, Stations, p. 3.

¹²Heaney, "Feeling into Words," in Preoccupations, p. 41.

¹³Heaney, "Feeling into Words," p. 48.

¹⁴Heaney, "The Makings of a Music," in Preoccupations, pp. 61-62.

¹⁵William Wordsworth, The Prelude, in The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Paul Sheats (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), p. 125. All subsequent references appear in the text.

- ¹⁶Morrison, p. 74.
- ¹⁷A. Alvarez, "A Fine Way with Language," New York Review of Books, 6 March 1980, p. 16.
- ¹⁸Morrison, p. 83.
- ¹⁹Morrison, p. 86.
- ²⁰Heaney, "The Makings of a Music," in Preoccupations, p. 63.
- ²¹Heaney, "The Makings of a Music," p. 65.
- ²²O'Brien, p. 39.
- ²³Morrison, p. 53.
- ²⁴Seamus Heaney, Field Work (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), p. 13. All subsequent references appear in the text.
- ²⁵Seamus Heaney, Wintering Out (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 22. All subsequent references appear in the text.
- ²⁶Seamus Heaney, Death of a Naturalist (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 30. All subsequent references appear in the text.
- ²⁷Calvin Bedient, "The Music of What Happens," Parnassus, 8 (1979), 120.
- ²⁸William Wordsworth, "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room," in The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, p. 331.
- ²⁹Robert Kee, Ireland: A History (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1982), p. 51.
- ³⁰Seuman MacManus, The Story of the Irish Race (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1944), p. 471.
- ³¹Morrison, p. 79.
- ³²Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in Vol. VII of The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), p. 118.

CHAPTER III

SONNETS III, V, VII, VIII, AND X

So far this study has treated the five sonnets which discuss the role of the artist. The five remaining sonnets, though still concerned in some respects with the artist, deal principally with domestic issues. In these poems, Heaney narrows his focus to hearth and family; his home at Glanmore is seen as a retreat in Sonnets III, VII, and V, and the comfort and strength he finds in his relationship with Marie is the theme of Sonnets VIII and X. These domestic sonnets may represent one way in which Heaney attempted to deal with his problem of moral responsibility: he finds a healing voice that speaks of similarities rather than differences.

The three sonnets with the theme of Glanmore as a haven generally have a light tone; Heaney seems to be able to lay aside his guilt, relax, and take pleasure in the idyllic setting of Glanmore Cottage. It has been pointed out by Morrison that in the "Glanmore Sonnets," Heaney is aware of certain parallels between his position at Glanmore Cottage and certain circumstances of other, more famous writers:

The subtext [of the sonnets] is Heaney's sense of himself as resembling other famous figures who

retreated into the sanctuary of rural life: Horace, in his "leafy privacy" far from Rome (Ann Saddle-meyer's loan of the Wicklow gate-lodge is like Maecenas' gift of the Sabine farm); Virgil, whose Georgics gave instructions in agriculture; Sweeney, of the Irish epic poem, who after the noise of battle was turned into a bird and roamed the countryside.¹

Perhaps the most important parallel is pointed out by Heaney himself in Sonnet III, where he compares himself and Marie to William and Dorothy Wordsworth at Dove Cottage:

This evening the cuckoo and the corncrake
 (So much, too much) consorted at twilight.
 It was all crepuscular and iambic.
 Out on the field a baby rabbit
 Took his bearings, and I knew the deer
 (I've seen them too from the window of the house,
 Like connoisseurs, inquisitive of air)
 Were careful under larch and May-green spruce.
 I had said earlier, "I won't relapse
 From this strange loneliness I've brought us to.
 Dorothy and William--" She interrupts:
 "You're not going to compare us two . . . ?"
 Outside a rustling and twig-coming breeze
 Refreshes and relents. Is cadences.

As Heaney observes the regular evening activities of the animals (perhaps their most constant companions at Glanmore), he is reminded of a comment he made earlier in the day. His suggestion that the Wordsworths' situation at Dove Cottage in some way resembled his and Marie's exile at Glanmore is abruptly but good-humoredly cut off by Marie. Heaney says no more, yet ample evidence exists to suggest that his comparison was not simply a passing fancy.

Previously, in Sonnet II, Heaney had acknowledged the similarities between his own poetic voice and that

of Wordsworth. Here in Sonnet III, he implies more profound similarities: just as Wordsworth found poetic inspiration and companionship at Dove Cottage, so Heaney would find a similar rejuvenation at Glanmore Cottage.

In a recent article by Darcy O'Brien, a friend of Heaney's, the Wordsworthian elements at Glanmore Cottage are pointed out:

Heaney was living at the time in a country cottage that could be called Wordsworthian: not a lake in sight but rustic and bucolic the dwelling was, about the same size as Dove Cottage and well-filled by the poet, his wife, two young boys, and an infant girl. It nestled, that is the word, in a green hilly spot in County Wicklow called Glanmore, was called Glanmore Cottage, and had once been part of the grand estate of the family of the playwright Synge. Wildflowers flourished there, and oaks, alders, birches. The Dublin road was close by and Dublin City only an hour's drive north, but gazing out through the wavy panes of the Cottage's windows, one could easily imagine oneself a hundred miles from anything and a hundred years ago, when the Cottage had been built. As if to assist the journey backward the Heaney's had furnished the place with nineteenth-century pieces, and at night turf-fire and candlelight warmed the room. At a certain point in the evening, the poet put nocturnes on the phonograph.²

The main idea behind O'Brien's article is simply that while Heaney was living in Glanmore he was influenced by Wordsworth in general and The Prelude in particular. O'Brien mentions that an autobiographical sequence called "Singing School," the last poems in North, could stand as Heaney's attempt at his own Prelude, and indeed is even prefaced (along with a quotation from Yeats) with these famous lines from Wordsworth's poem:

Fair seedtime had my soul, and I grew up
 Fostered alike by beauty and by fear;
 Much favoured in my birthplace, and no less
 In that beloved Vale to which, ere long,
 I was transplanted. . . . (ll. 301-305)

"Singing School" attempts to capture significant moments of his life (going off to boarding school, to Belfast, and to Berkeley; the civil disruptions of the late sixties; conflicting advice he receives about his artistic career), just as The Prelude records important moments of Wordsworth's life.

O'Brien refers also to the last poem in the "Singing School" sequence, the previously quoted "Exposure" that is so important in determining Heaney's early mood at Glanmore. In that poem, Heaney was exposed to "every wind that blows," and, as O'Brien says, "here one remembers that exposure is something you die of."³ In Sonnet III, however, that harsh wind has turned into a refreshing evening breeze that calls to mind the opening of The Prelude:

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze,
 A visitant that while it fans my cheek
 Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings
 From the green fields, and from yon azure sky.
 Whate'er its mission, the soft breeze can come
 To none more grateful than to me; escaped
 From the vast city. . . . (ll. 1-7)

The emphasis in Sonnet III is on freedom, the relief from pressure, the sheer luxury of free time. Though he may be somewhat lonely, Heaney now has the time to observe his natural surroundings and mark the animals' habits.

Heaney first mentions the cuckoo and the corncrake, both migratory birds that frequent the British Isles in the warmer months. These birds, along with the "baby rabbit," are creatures of spring and summer, the seasons of rebirth, and their presence reflects Heaney's preoccupation with new artistic beginnings. The parenthetical beginning of the second line--"(So much, too much)"--is probably an attempt to capture the sound of the birds' songs, as well as an indication of surfeit, as if the peace of Glanmore is almost too perfect to be real. The parenthetical phrase also echoes an Irish poem by James Cousins entitled "The Corncrake" (ca. 1900) that Heaney may or may not have been familiar with. Cousins also chose to imitate the bird's call in parenthesis, as the first two stanzas of the poem show:

I heard him faintly, far away
 (Break! Break!--Break! Break!)
 Calling to the dawn of day,
 "Break! Break!"⁴

Cousin's bird, however, takes on a somewhat gloomy duty at the end of the poem: "All night he shouts among the graves, / Wake! Wake--Wake! Wake!" As mentioned before, it is possible that Heaney was aware of the poem, for it appears in anthologies of Irish verse. If Heaney did indeed intend the second line as a distant allusion to Cousins' poem, it would certainly support Morrison's comment that "beyond the images of delicate beauty [in the Sonnets] lies the

constant risk of intrusion and disillusion,"⁵ This threat manifests itself particularly in the actions of the other animals in Sonnet III. The baby rabbit is not gamboling about in the twilight; rather he is taking his bearings, as if he might be lost. The deer are "careful," sniffing the air for predators. The birds and Heaney are the only creatures who seem to be relaxing. Nevertheless, the main tone of the poem, despite the threats that lurk in the background, is one of peace and tranquility.

The relaxed tone is reflected in the sonnet's third line: "It was all crepuscular and iambic." The word "crepuscular" means "of or pertaining to twilight," but it also has a zoological sense, referring to animals that "appear or are active in the twilight" (OED). Hence the word is perfectly suited to Heaney's meaning in this case: twilight was settling and the crepuscular animals were coming out. His use of the word "iambic" suggests an interesting conjunction of nature and language. The balanced, predictable iambic meter reflects the regularity of nature: the sun sets and the animals come out every evening, like clockwork.

Into this peaceful evening Heaney introduces his comment about Wordsworth made earlier in the day, a "dreamy" comment teasingly cut short by Marie. Her appearance in Sonnet III is the first time she is mentioned in the sonnet

sequence and is fairly representative of the way she appears throughout; Heaney depends on Marie for love, comfort, security, companionship, and, as here in Sonnet III, he depends on her to bring him back to earth. Her comment effectively silences his fantasy, but Heaney continues the allusion to Wordsworth in the final couplet: "Outside a rustling and twig-combing breeze / Refreshes and relents. Is cadences." Here is the same rejuvenating breeze that blows through the opening passages of The Prelude. The disheartened poet of "Exposure" finds a new beginning at Glanmore.

Sonnet III follows a Shakespearean rhyme scheme, although almost all of the rhymes are slant (i.e., "corn-crake," "iambic"; "twilight," "rabbit"). Like the other Glanmore Sonnets, its division is erratic, falling into a tercet, a quintet, a quatrain, and a closing couplet. Sonnet III is one of two Glanmore poems that contain parenthetical elements; their effect here is to establish a sense of intimacy between the writer and the reader, a sense that fits in well with the generally relaxed tone of the poem. The reader is left with the impression that he has sat with Heaney in his study, listening to him discuss the pleasures of life in the country.

The haven Heaney found at Glanmore is further emphasized in Sonnet VII, in which Heaney is delighted to find that he is not the only one finding refuge at Wicklow:

Dogger, Rockall, Malin, Irish Sea:
 Green swift upsurges, North Atlantic flux
 Conjured by that strong gale-warning voice
 Collapse into a sibilant penumbra.
 Midnight and closedown. Sirens of the tundra,
 Of eel-road, seal-road, keel-road, whale-road, raise
 Their wind-compounded keel behind the baize
 And drive the trawlers to the lee of Wicklow.
L'Etoile, Le Guillemot, La Belle Hélène
 Nursed their bright names this morning in the bay
 That toiled like mortar. It was marvelous
 And actual, I said out loud, "A haven,"
 The word deepening, clearing, like the sky
 Elsewhere on Minches, Cromarty, The Faroes.

The sonnet opens with echoes of a weather report.

Bad weather is forecast all the way from the tiny western Scottish island of Rockall, past Malin Head, the opening of the North Channel, down into the Irish Sea. The "strong gale-warning voice" of the radio announcer conjures up a tempest as surely as if he had been Prospero. After "midnight and closedown," the announcer's voice gives way to an eerie wind that "drives the trawlers to the lee of Wicklow." When Heaney sees them the next morning, the word "haven" takes on new meaning for him.

The radio forecast that begins the sonnet is similar to forecasts he heard as a young boy, forecasts that tuned his poetic ear. As he writes in a 1974 article: "[my ear] was stirred by the beautiful sprung rhythms of the old BBC weather forecast: Dogger, Rockall, Malin, Shetland, Faroes, Finistere."⁶ Just as he was stirred in the past, so he is stirred by this forecast heard at Glanmore. The announcer's voice conjures up images of the North Atlantic tide

collapsing in "green, swift upsurges" upon the shore, the waves hissing and leaving shadows on the sand.

As the radio station signs off at midnight, the sound of the wind becomes evident outside his baize curtains. It is not a comforting sound. The next few lines present a disturbing image: "Sirens of the tundra, / Of eel-road, seal-road, keel-road, whale-road, raise / Their wind-compounded keen" Traditionally, of course, sirens are the classical nymphs who, by their singing, lure sailors to their deaths along the rocky coasts. Heaney's sirens are Arctic, not Mediterranean; their ocean is described in the kennings of Old Norse poetry. Their song is an Irish dirge, or "keen," traditionally a particularly bitter lament. This imagery is consistent with that used in North, which draws parallels between the violence of Viking Dublin two thousand years ago and the violence of modern Ireland. No doubt the dirge of these sirens is an ancient one, a wailing for two millennia of troubles. Even in his country retreat, Heaney is haunted by memories of violence.

Just as Heaney sought refuge from the bloodshed of Belfast, the trawlers seek refuge from the storm in the "lee" or shelter of the bay of Wicklow. The names they "nursed" in the bay are poetic: L'Etoile, Le Guillemot, and La Belle Hélène mean respectively The Star, The Bird,

and The Beautiful Helen. Heaney finds both their names and their presence in the bay a wonderful thing. "It was marvelous and actual," he writes, echoing a line in Sonnet III: "It was crepuscular and iambic." Both lines describe his moments of contentment in the refuge of Glanmore.

Heaney is moved to speak aloud the word that epitomizes his experience, "a haven," and as he does, the word itself is clarified and intensified in his imagination. He compares it to the skies that must be clearing in northwestern Scotland as the front begins to move out of the area. The poem ends in the same way it begins, with an echo of a weather report.

Sonnet VII follows the rough iambic pentameter of the other "Glanmore Sonnets." Lines 6, 7, and 8 are true iambic pentameter; most of the rest miss iambic meter by a few odd stresses. An exception is the trochaic meter of line 1, a meter which effectively conveys the rhythm of waves crashing against the shores of Dogger, Rockall, and Malin Head. This rhythm is further emphasized in the next line by the heavily accented "gréén, swíft upsúrǵes."

Though metrically similar to the rest of the sonnets, Sonnet VII is the only sonnet with no discernible rhyme scheme. This fact may reflect the subject matter of the poem: Glanmore is not only a refuge from violence, but also

a temporary refuge from the conventions of art. The sonnet is not, however, entirely lacking in rhyme. An assonant long "e" pervades the poem, a sound which in line 6 comes to a head: "ēēl-road, sēāl-road, kēēl - road. . . ." The use of this sound may be an attempt to capture the screech of the storm. Heaney uses the same assonance at the beginning and the end of the sonnet, and in both cases the storm is being referred to: "sēā," "grēēn," "dēēpening," "clēāring."

Though lacking a formal rhyme scheme, Sonnet VII does have four end-rhymed lines (4-7), lines that overlap three lines of complete iambic pentameter (6-8), so that, in effect, Heaney has created a small quintet of tradition in an otherwise untraditional sonnet. These lines deal with the mythical "sirens of the tundra," and perhaps Heaney felt that their antiquity and the bitterness of their dirge were more appropriately conveyed with traditional meter and rhyme.

Some of the words appearing in Sonnet VII are uncommon and illustrate Heaney's fascination with language. "Keen," "flux," and "lee," for example, could just as easily have been "dirge," "tide," and "shelter"; Heaney, however, prefers the archaic and the native Irish. At times this tendency has been criticized; A. Alvarez has called Heaney "an ornamentalist, a word collector, a connoisseur of fine

language for its own sake."⁷ Heaney takes an almost physical pleasure in words, and nowhere is it better seen than in his discussions of nature and growing things. In an early essay, Heaney describes the bogs around his home and the "mosscheeper" that grew there:

We'd heard about a mystery man who haunted the fringes of the bog here, we talked about man-keepers and mosscheepers, creatures uncatalogued by any naturalist, but none the less real for that. What was a mosscheeper, anyway, if not the soft, malicious sound the word itself made, a siren of collapsing sibilants coaxing you out towards bog pools lidded with innocent grass, quicksands and quagmires?⁸

This tendency to get his "imagination . . . entangled in the vegetation" can be found in Sonnet V. The poem centers on the word "elderberry," a kind of tree which provided a haven for Heaney as a child and to which he would return in the present for similar shelter:

Soft corrugations in the boortree's trunk,
 Its green young shoots, its rods like freckled solder:
 It was our bower as children, a greenish, dank
 And snapping memory as I get older.
 And elderberry I have learned to call it.
 I love its blooms like saucers brimmed with meal,
 Its berries a swart caviar of shot,
 A buoyant spawn, a light bruised out of purple.
 Elderberry? It is shires dreaming wine.
 Boortree is bower tree, where I played "touching tongues"
 And felt another's texture quick on mine.
 So, etymologist of roots and graftings,
 I fall back to my tree-house and would crouch
 Where small buds shoot and flourish in the hush.

Like an etymologist, Heaney records the history of the word "elderberry" in his own life. As a child he called the tree a "boortree," which, as he explains in his notes

at the end of Field Work, is "Ulster dialect for the elder tree, and probably derives from the Scots pronunciation of 'bower tree.'" During his childhood, he saw the tree as a cool, shady haven in which to play. Eventually he learned its common name, elderberry, which he associates with its derivative wine. The earlier name "boortree" conjures up images of the elder bower in which he experienced his first tentative kiss. Declaring himself an "etymologist of roots and graftings," he returns to the haven of the tree as an adult, feeling drawn to the peace of quiet growing things.

As in many of the Glanmore Sonnets, Heaney has returned in Sonnet V to a particular memory. In Preoccupations, Heaney recalls a certain willow tree in which he spent much of his free time as a child. Though Sonnet V deals with a different species of tree, it can be seen that the sentiment is the same:

It was a hollow tree, with gnarled, spreading roots, a soft, perishing bark and a pithy inside. Its mouth was like the fat and solid opening in a horse's collar, and, once you squeezed in through it, you were at the heart of a different life, looking out on the familiar yard as if it were suddenly behind a pane of strangeness. Above your head, the living tree flourished and breathed, you shouldered the slightly vibrant bole, and if you put your forehead to the rough pith, you felt the whole lithe and whispering crown of willow moving in the sky above you.⁹

This childhood haven is what Heaney finds again at Glanmore among the elder trees. The phrasing of the final

couplet indicates the great need Heaney felt for a regression, even momentarily, into the hopeful world of childhood; the realities of adulthood make him want to "fall back" and "crouch" in his "tree-house," a gardener of words hiding where a summer quiet prevails.

In his enthusiasm for the tree, Heaney has subjected it to some rather unusual analogies. The phrase "rods like freckled solder," for example, conjures up images of metal, as if the tree were absurdly shaped monkey bars upon which children climbed. Further on in the poem, the flowers and berries of the elder tree receive similar eclectic treatment. The flowers are "like saucers" domestically "brimmed with meal." The berries are likened to a "swart caviar of shot," a strangely mixed image of fish eggs and ammunition. This allusion to shot may be another instance of Heaney's military imagery, or it may simply refer to the fact that the berries of the elder tree might have served as a sort of ammunition in a child's "bourtree-gun, a popgun made of the wood of the elder after the pith has been removed" (OED).

Sonnet V begins in much the same way as many of the "Glanmore Sonnets": with an opening phrase or clause that establishes a mood or sets a scene. The critic David Lloyd in his review of Field Work indicates that this poem "begins by presenting the texture of the tree through sight

and touch. The poem then progresses by accumulating sensory images. . . .¹⁰ He explains how Heaney's ability to bring the reader into contact with the natural world is in itself a political act:

Heaney's use of densely textured language is a method of embodying the dense texture of the natural world to make the reader come into more complete contact with it. It is not until the end of the sonnet that Heaney shifts his focus to bring in, briefly and playfully, the idea of human contact and interaction when he remembers a game he once played in the very bower the poem celebrates: "Boortree is bower tree, where I played 'touching tongues' / And felt another's texture quick on mine." The poem moves easily from the poet's memory of intense contact with the natural world as a child to his memory of intimate contact with a girl while surrounded by elements of the natural world. This progression reflects an assertion which is important in the corpus of Heaney's work: that as we heighten the quality of our interaction with and awareness of the natural world, we also heighten the quality of our human relationships. Since the problem of how and to what extent humans relate to each other is a political problem, Sonnet V and other poems of Field Work which deal with the contact theme must be seen in a political context.¹¹

This growing ability to enhance the appreciation of nature and "human relationships" may be one way Heaney has found to deal with the Northern Ireland issue. In Sonnet V, the reader sees the healing voice at work.

Sonnet V follows an English rhyme scheme, using slant rhyme almost exclusively. The use of a traditional rhyme scheme with untraditional rhymes reinforces the meaning of the poem: Heaney at Glanmore is returning to a childhood where form might indeed be recognized, but must not always be adhered to.

Though country life must have often seemed idyllic after living in Belfast, Heaney could not completely escape the North, nor could he escape the darker side of his own nature. At times when he was particularly disturbed, the presence of his wife Marie seemed to sustain him. She plays an important role in the "Glanmore Sonnets," appearing towards the beginning of the sequence in Sonnet III and also in the last three sonnets. Marie has always had a place in Heaney's poetry; Heaney's first book is dedicated to her, and all of his books contain poems about and for her. Death of a Naturalist and Wintering Out each has five poems concerning Marie; the former concentrates on their meeting and honeymoon, while the latter deals with settling into a marriage: the adjustments, fights, and young children. Heaney's continuing verse portrayal of his family is surprisingly honest. He shows both good and bad, taking an unsentimental view of this most important relationship. In "Act of Union," a double sonnet from North (pp. 49-50), Heaney displays a remarkable combination of guilt and tenderness concerning Marie's pregnancy:

I

Tonight, a first movement, a pulse,
 As if the rain in bogland gathered head
 To slip and flood: a bog-burst,
 A gash breaking open the ferny bed.
 Your back is a firm line of eastern coast
 And arms and legs are thrown
 Beyond your gradual hills. I caress
 The heaving province where our past has grown.
 I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder

That you would neither cajole nor ignore.
 Conquest is a lie. I grow older
 Conceding your half-independent shore
 Within whose borders now my legacy
 Culminates inexorably.

II

And I am still imperially
 Male, leaving you with the pain,
 The rending process in the colony,
 The battering ram, the boom burst from within.
 The act sprouted an obstinate fifth column
 Whose stance is growing unilateral.
 His heart beneath your heart is a wardrum
 Mustering force. His parasitical
 And ignorant little fists already
 Beat at your borders and I know they're cocked
 At me across the water. No treaty
 I foresee will salve completely your tracked
 And stretchmarked body, and big pain
 That leaves you raw, like opened ground, again.

Heaney seems unable to elude the imagery of war, no matter what the subject.

In "Summer Home" (Wintering Out, p. 59), Heaney writes of more difficult times:

My children weep out the hot foreign night.
 We walk the floor, my foul mouth takes it out
 On you and we lie stiff till dawn
 Attends the pillow, and the maize, and vine

That holds its filling burden to the light.
 Yesterday rocks rang when we tapped
 Stalactites in the cave's old, dripping dark--
 Our love calls tiny as a tuning fork.

Their relationship survives. In Field Work, the subject of jealousy is introduced in two poems. "A Dream of Jealousy" deals with Heaney's apparent lust for another woman. "An Afterwards" (Field Work, p. 44) portrays Heaney in the ninth circle of Dante's hell, the circle for poets. Marie,

accompanied by Virgil's wife, visits but refuses to give him news of poets "in the green land above":

I have closed my widowed ears
To the sulphurous news of poets and poetry.
Why could you not have, oftener, in our years

Unclenched, and come down laughing from your room
And walked the twilight with me and your children--
Like that one evening of elder bloom
And hay, when the wild roses were fading?

In the "Glanmore Sonnets," however, Heaney seems to have risen above small jealousies and arguments. His marriage is portrayed as enduring and sustaining, as can be seen from Sonnet VIII, where his relationship with Marie is seen as a source of comfort in an uncertain world:

Thunderlight on the split logs: big raindrops
At body heat and lush with omen
Spattering dark on the hatchet iron.
This morning when a magpie with jerky steps
Inspected a horse asleep beside the wood
I thought of dew on armour and carrion.
What would I meet, blood-boltered, on the road?
How deep into the woodpile sat the toad?
What welters through this dark hush on the crops?
Do you remember that pension in Les Landes
Where the old one rocked and rocked and rocked
A mongol in her lap, to little songs?
Come to me quick, I am upstairs shaking.
My all of you birchwood in lightning.

Heaney interprets rain falling on a hatchet as a sort of ill omen; it reminds him of his somber reflections earlier in the day, when the sight of a bird examining a sleeping horse brought to mind images of war--"dew on armour and carrion"-- as well as a host of other unpleasant thoughts. In the final couplet he calls upon the fair-haired Marie, his "all of you birchwood in lightning," for comfort.

The first three lines of the sonnet present a vivid image that draws the reader into the poem. As a storm brews, firewood is illuminated by lightning ("thunderlight," as Heaney calls it), and a hatchet is darkened by the first raindrops, falling at body temperature in large drops: an innocent scene, but this play of light, dark, heat, and water seems somehow ominous. The rain is as warm as blood, and it "spatters" on a tool that could as easily be used for murder as for farmwork.

The next three lines again construct a seemingly pleasant scene: a bird inspecting a sleeping horse by the woods. This bird, however, is a magpie, a species known for its "pilfering" and one that is "popularly regarded as a bird of ill omen," according to the OED. The sleeping horse obviously looks dead, and the image of the vulturous magpie lurking around its body made Heaney think of the aftermath of a battle--"dew on armour and carrion." This image of metal, moisture, and blood echoes the previous image of warm rain on the hatchet iron, dramatically tying the first six lines together.

All of these images of metal and blood in his own backyard make Heaney wonder just what else is out there. He begins a series of questions addressed indirectly to Marie. "What would I meet, blood-boltered, on the road?" he wonders. The term "blood-boltered," according to The

Century Dictionary and Cyclopaedia (1911), means "clotted or clogged with blood" and is generally used to refer to the hair of farm animals. In this case, however, the reader gets the impression that animals are not what Heaney is afraid of meeting on the road, and another poem from Field Work entitled "The Strand at Lough Beg" (p. 17) confirms that impression. The poem is dedicated to his cousin, Colum McCartney, who was "the victim of a random sectarian killing in the late summer of 1975." It eloquently expresses what must be the fears of many in Northern Ireland:

Leaving the white glow of filling stations
 And a few lonely streetlamps among fields
 You climbed the hills towards Newtownhamilton
 Past the Few's Forest, out beneath the stars--
 Along that road, a high, bare pilgrim's track
 Where Sweeney fled before the bloodied heads,
 Goat-beards and dogs' eyes in a demon pack
 Blazing out of the ground, snapping and squealing.
 What blazed ahead of you? A faked road block?
 The red lamp swung, the sudden brakes and stalling
 Engine, voices, heads hooded and the cold-nosed gun?
 Or in your driving mirror, tailing headlights
 That pulled out suddenly and flagged you down
 Where you weren't known and far from what you knew. . . .

I turn because the sweeping of your feet
 Has stopped behind me, to find you on your knees
 With blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes,
 Then kneel in front of you in brimming grass
 And gather up cold handfuls of the dew
 To wash you, cousin.

It is not only innocent victims that are found on the country roads of Northern Ireland, and in yet another poem from Field Work, "The Toome Road" (p. 15), Heaney describes what he met one morning along his road:

One morning early I met armoured cars
 In convoy, warbling along on powerful tyres,
 All camouflaged with broken alder branches,
 And headphoned soldiers standing up in turrets.
 How long were they approaching down my roads
 As if they owned them? The whole country was sleeping,
 I had rights-of-ways, fields, cattle in my keeping,
 Tractors hitched to buckrakes in open sheds,
 Silos, shill gates, wet slates, the greens and reds
 Of outhouse roofs. Whom should I run to tell
 Among all of those with their back doors on the latch
 For the bringer of bad news, that small-hours visitant
 Who, by being expected, might be kept distant?

The question, then, that Heaney poses in line 7--"What would I meet, blood-boltered, on the road?"--has profound implications for Northern Irishmen.

His second and third questions seem to extend the realities of evil and despair past the realm of the political. It is not something that is simply met on the public road; it lurks in his own woodpile and crops. Neither is it something that is strictly born of politics; it is born of nature as well, as he suggests in his fourth question: "Do you remember that pension in Les Landes / Where the old one rocked and rocked and rocked / A mongol in her lap, to little songs?" Les Landes is a region of France where the Heaneys visited one summer. Its name means, appropriately enough, "wasteland." The repetition of the word "rocked" here suggests the monotony of despair: no matter how hard or long the old woman rocks, the little "mongol" will never be a normal child. Nature's tricks are usually irremediable.

Against this backdrop of despair and disorder, Heaney breaks down. The only bit of comfort he can find comes from the spiritual and physical presence of his wife, whom he addresses directly in the final couplet: "Come to me quick, I am upstairs shaking. / My all of you birchwood in lightning." A sexual connotation is obvious here, but Heaney seems to realize that even this sort of comfort is tenuous, as brief as illumination by lightning.

The rhyme scheme of Sonnet VIII emphasizes the disorder and anarchy of which Heaney writes. For the purposes of classification, the sonnet might be called a highly modified Shakespearean, although Heaney has taken so many liberties with the form that one hesitates to classify it. A careful look at the pattern will confirm this hesitation:

raindrops	a
omen	b
iron	b
steps	a
wood	c
carrion	b
road	c
toad	c
crops	d
Landes	e
rocked	d
songs	e
shaking	f
lightning	f

The first two quatrains have slipped the English mold, and the final gg rhyme is missing altogether. The strained

slant rhymes only add to the confusion. Is one expected to rhyme "wood" with "road" and "toad"? Is "carrion" intended to be an extension of the b rhyme of "omen" and "iron"? Heaney has effectively conveyed his own sense of unease through the erratic pattern of Sonnet VIII.

That same sense of unease is conveyed in the tenth and last sonnet through a dream in which the poet and his wife sleep outside in the rain:

I dreamt we slept in a moss in Donegal
 On turf banks under blankets, with our faces
 Exposed all night in a wetting drizzle,
 Pallid as the dripping sapling birches.
 Lorenzo and Jessica in a cold climate.
 Diarmuid and Grainne waiting to be found.
 Darkly asperged and censed, we were laid out
 Like breathing effigies on a raised ground,
 And in that dream I dreamt--how like you this?
 Our first night years ago in that hotel
 When you came with your deliberate kiss
 To raise us towards the lovely and painful
 Covenants of flesh; our separateness;
 The respite in our dewy dreaming faces.

The first half of Sonnet X, lines 1-8, emphasizes their exposure; they seem to be lost in a forest with few chances of being found. The second half, lines 9-14, concerns a dream within the dream and the respite Heaney finds there in his relationship with Marie.

Using the technique of a dream within a dream enables Heaney to strip off layers of consciousness one by one: as the first layer comes off in the original dream, Heaney and his wife lie in a "moss in Donegal." They are wet and pale, as pale as the "sapling birches" that surround them.

This forest is a metaphor for the real world, with all its dangers and uncertainties. Heaney and his wife have little with which to arm themselves against its onslaught. He compares them to Lorenzo and Jessica from the Merchant of Venice and Diarmuid and Grainne from Celtic myth--both couples, as Morrison points out, who were "living in constant danger of discovery and death."¹² Indeed Heaney compares their state to a sort of death-in-life: they are sprinkled with holy water, perfumed with incense, and "laid out like breathing effigies." A grimmer fate is hard to imagine. One gets the impression here that even without the Troubles to influence his poetry, Heaney would still have his moments of profound bleakness.

In his dream within a dream, he strips off yet another layer of consciousness. At this deeper, more vulnerable level lies the memory of his "first night" with Marie. As Blake Morrison points out, this section of Sonnet X owes much to the English tradition:

Thomas Wyatt's "They Flee From Me . . ." is explicitly drawn on in the dream . . . contributing to the poem's erotic memory of the "covenants of flesh":

And in that dream I dreamt--how like you this?--
Our first night years ago in that hotel
When you came with your deliberate kiss . . . (Heaney)

She caught me in her arms long and small
There with all sweetly did me kiss
And softly said dear heart, how like you this? (Wyatt)¹³

The memory of these "lovely and painful covenants of flesh" is held up against the grim imagery of the first part of the sonnet, as one might try to evade thoughts of death with thoughts of life, but it is only a temporary comfort. The last line--"the respite in our dewy dreaming faces"--indicates that Heaney realizes the transience of human relations, no matter how close.

The last sonnet follows a true English rhyme scheme, using mostly slant rhymes. It has surprisingly little internal alliteration, and comparatively little assonance, the effect being that the sonnet seems less like a poem and more like a simple recounting of a dream. The movement of the sonnet, too, contributes to this effect: rather than quatrains and couplets, the reader is faced with two sections, lines 1-8 and lines 9-14, each of which relates a separate dream. In this case, content takes precedence over form.

The domestic sonnets discussed in this section portray a literary man in love with his wife and immersed in the pleasures of country life, a man who remembers the violence but who chooses not to be ruled by it. The "Glanmore Sonnets" end, appropriately enough, with an emphasis on the value of human relationships, however transient they may be.

NOTES

¹Morrison, p. 73.

²O'Brien, p. 38.

³O'Brien, p. 41.

⁴Kathleen Hoagland, ed., 1000 Years of Irish Poetry (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1947), p. 340.

⁵Morrison, p. 85.

⁶Heaney, "Feeling into Words," in Preoccupations, p. 45.

⁷Alvarez, p. 16.

⁸Heaney, "Mossbawn," in Preoccupations, p. 18.

⁹Heaney, Mossbawn, p. 18.

¹⁰David Lloyd, "Seamus Heaney's Field Work," Ariel E, 12 (1981), 91.

¹¹Lloyd, p. 92.

¹²Morrison, p. 86.

¹³Morrison, pp. 83-84.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In 1976, after four years at Glanmore Cottage, Heaney and his family moved thirty miles north to the suburbs of Dublin, where Heaney resumed his teaching career. In 1979 he published the highly acclaimed Field Work; in 1982 he received the esteemed Bennett Award, a \$12,500 prize awarded by the Hudson Review, and the same year he was named poet-in-residence at Harvard University. The time at Glanmore certainly dispelled whatever doubts he might have had about poetry as his "full vocation"; he could indeed dedicate himself to his art successfully. The question remains whether he was able to resolve the moral questions that plagued him in Belfast. Did he determine his own responsibility as an artist in a political world?

In the first group of sonnets treated in this study, Heaney tries to indicate that the artist's primary responsibility is to be moved by beauty and by images that rise freely from the subconscious. He makes that proposition clear enough in Sonnet I, with his "ghosts" sowing "dream grain," and in Sonnet IX, when his "apology for poetry" is condensed into an image of beauty. Yet throughout the sonnets, political references are found--the "voice caught

back off slug-horn," the "wild white goose," the backyard vision of "armour and carrion." These references can be traced to the fact that while he avoids writing political "crisis poetry," he nevertheless acknowledges the influence that the Troubles have had, and will continue to have, on his poetry.¹ By this acknowledgment, he frees himself to continue using the Northern Situation as a "network of metaphors that lie behind and beyond" his poetry, and at the same time claim art as his sovereign.

In this attitude, Heaney is much like poets of an earlier era:

The thirties poets . . . concluded, most of them, for the supremacy of art and its indirections. Auden . . . was their spokesman. "You must never," he said, "tell people what to do--only tell them particular stories of particular people with whom they may voluntarily identify themselves, and from which they voluntarily draw conclusions." They saw art, indeed, as socially functional, but not in any way that the artist could specifically program.²

The idea of art's being "socially functional" appears in several of the sonnets but perhaps most clearly in Sonnet II. In that poem, while the poetic voice may rise spontaneously from the subconscious, it is still a voice that acknowledges social duties: to "continue, hold, dispel, appease." It is a voice conscious of tradition, conscious of an obligation to hold a community together in some small way and to work towards peace.

The fact that he has at times avoided this obligation still sits heavily with Heaney. In an interview, Heaney discussed the 1981 hunger strikes staged in prisons by some of his countrymen and the effect the strikes had on him:

I'm still haunted by them. . . . I find myself very, very deeply challenged. There is some kind of perhaps too scrupulous refusal to get involved with what was essentially a Provisional I.R.A. propaganda campaign. That was the deep text: When you move, you move in behalf of those guys--you're part of the war machine now, and in a way you have lost your mystery. . . . On the other hand, if you do shut up, you go through this awareness: You live out, or live in, this really useless tremor of liberal conscience. You're left with Margaret Thatcher. You're speaking not with forked tongue, but with forked silence.³

At Glanmore Heaney worked towards finding a non-partisan, healing voice, a voice that could not be used to counter "the bad against the worse."⁴ Rather, as he said in Sonnet VI, he hoped for a voice that would "quicken" and "break through" barriers, that would show the reader things he might not otherwise see. "I think a poet cannot influence events in the North," he said in a 1975 interview, "because it is men of action that are influencing everybody and everything, but I do believe that poetry is its own special action and that having its own mode of consciousness, its own mode of reality, has its own efficacy gradually."⁵

That "special action" of poetry is evident in the personal sonnets. In Sonnet V, for example, as Heaney

describes the elderberry tree of his childhood, his rich language brings the reader closer to the natural world, and this enriched cognizance of nature enhances the reader's ability to appreciate human relationships. The personal sonnets are filled with small but important moments and objects--the "crepuscular" antics of field animals, a "rustling and twig-combing breeze," a moment of domestic harmony, ships that "nursed their bright names in the bay," the realization of one's dependence on another human being--all designed to call forth from the reader recognition, and from that recognition, understanding of the human condition. David Lloyd writes: "Heaney's most important trait as a political poet is his ability to heal separation by placing us all back into contact with the meaningful parts of our lives and surroundings."⁶

Heaney spent much of his time at Glanmore trying to come to terms with his role as a "political poet," struggling to understand his moral responsibility and at the same time not be dominated by it. In the end, his responsibility as an artist took precedence over his responsibility as a citizen. As the "Glanmore Sonnets" show, art wins a small but impressive battle.

NOTES

¹Druce, p. 27.

²D. E. S. Maxwell, "Imagining the North: Violence and the Writers," Éire, 8 (1973), 103.

³Francis X. Clines, "Poet of the Bogs," The New York Times Magazine, 13 March 1983, p. 99.

⁴C. Day Lewis, "Where Are the War Poets?" Collected Poems of C. Day Lewis (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), p. 228.

⁵Heaney, Irish Times (1975), interview, p. 5, as quoted in Morrison, p. 69.

⁶Lloyd, p. 90.

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