

BETWEEN THE 'PLANTER & THE GAEL:'
A CROSS-COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN POETRY

A Dissertation
by
ADRIAN RICE

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Abstract

BETWEEN THE 'PLANTER & THE GAEL:' A CROSS-COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN POETRY

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This 4-article dissertation mines the sources and outworking's of my position as a scholar-poet, one who has attempted to steer a dissenting course between the twin pillars of Ulster Protestant Unionism and Irish Catholic Nationalism - between 'The Planter & The Gael' - the Scylla and Charybdis of the Troubled sectarian divide in my native Northern Ireland. In so doing, this dissertation focuses on the work of some of the key cross-community poet-mentors whose personal lives and written works, especially their poems, have been a (quite literal) education for me, both inside and outside the classroom, thereby influencing my own professional and published work.

From a structural standpoint, although there are indeed five chapters, this dissertation does not feature a traditional five-chapter format. There are four *main* "chapters" included in this document, each one housing a manuscript/article intended for publication. Furthermore, the organization of this dissertation is also unconventional in that it mirrors the action/reflection cycle commonly featured in action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Kindon et al., 2007). Therefore, each chapter serves as its own form of

“action,” and is then followed by a short reflective section before the action begins anew with another chapter. These brief “reflective bridges” operate as the “glue” of the dissertation, as they provide linkages between main chapters, helping to avoid fragmentation and instead foster a unified, cohesive document.

The four article manuscripts featured in this dissertation are all aimed at academic/literary audiences: three are intended for publication in peer-reviewed journals of note, and one is for book publication. The first manuscript, Chapter Two, ‘William Drennan and the Poetry of Presbytery,’ has just been published in *Christianity & Literature* (Volume 72, Number 2, June 2023, Johns Hopkins University Press), a special Irish Literature edition (guest edited by Dr. Richard Rankin Russell, Baylor University). Chapter Three, ‘Casting the Stones of Silence: Seamus Heaney’s “Punishment”,’ is intended for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, the *New Hibernia Review* (University of St. Thomas). Chapter Four, ‘Postcolonialism, New Historicism, and the Northern Irish Poet,’ is aimed at a peer-reviewed journal, *The Irish University Review* (Edinburgh University Press), a leading global journal of Irish literary studies affiliated to the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL). And Chapter Five, a full-length poetry sequence entitled ‘Eleventh Night,’ is in preparation for book publication in Fall 2026 (Press 53, Winston-Salem).

Discussion of the lives and works of poet-mentors William Drennan (Protestant ‘Planter’) and Seamus Heaney (Catholic ‘Gael’) constitute the second and third chapters of this dissertation, examining their work in relation to the tumultuous times they lived in: in Drennan’s case, the decade of the 1790s which led to the United Irish Rebellion of 1798; in Heaney’s case, the thirty-year bloody conflict of the Ulster Troubles (1968-

1998). Coming, as they do, from both sides of the Ulster conflict, and despite being separated by centuries, Drennan and Heaney's essentially moral, cross-community stances in their lives and work have been guiding lights for my own efforts within both the educational classroom and publishing arenas.

Chapter Four employs the twin theoretical lenses of Postcolonialism and New Historicism to help facilitate ways of thinking about poems from three major Northern Irish 'Troubles' poets - 'Catholic' poet Seamus Heaney, again, but this time set alongside 'Protestant' poets from Northern Ireland, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley. Both theoretical lenses, I argue, are crucial to understanding how literature (specifically poetry) and culture have been effective, non-didactic tools for cultural communication in Northern Ireland.

And finally, Chapter Five is my own new poetry sequence entitled 'Eleventh Night,' a sequence which has grown alongside my dissertation work. It is based on insights and experiences from my formative years growing up in the notorious Protestant 'hood' of Rathcoole Housing Estate, north of Belfast, during the Ulster Troubles, and it encapsulates how influences from all poet-mentors discussed here, particularly Drennan and Heaney, have not only helped to shape my philosophy of teaching within the educational environment, but are continuing to inform and color my present creative work.

Acknowledgments

To say that coming to the end of this doctoral dissertation journey is both a great joy and an immense relief would be a genuine understatement. It is forty years since my first document-boxed, working-copy, doctoral dissertation work was ‘lifted’ from the trunk (‘boot’) of my car outside my house in the notorious Rathcoole Housing Estate where I grew up. It is a long, painful story from a pre-internet, pre-saved-to-disc-or-Cloud time. For brevity purposes, suffice to say here, any rescuable remains of the sadly graffitied, soiled, soggy, ripped-up DPhil work were salvaged, and through several additional part-time years of study they were eventually turned into an MPhil awarded by the University of Ulster. Not surprisingly perhaps, I never thought I would ever revisit the idea of doctoral work again.

However, and many years later, I hadn’t planned on Poetry taking me to Hickory, NC. I hadn’t planned on meeting and marrying the love of my life, Molly. I hadn’t planned on us turning a (return) six month writer’s residency in Hickory into an ongoing nineteen year stay. Moreover, I certainly hadn’t planned on going to teach at Appalachian State University (ASU), and ending up in our doctoral program. But here I am! And the main person that I gladly, gratefully acknowledge for bringing me to Appalachian State is my great friend and peerless Doctoral Committee Chair, Dr. Woodrow ‘Woody’ Trathen.

I got to know Woody through his Irish wife, my Dublin mate, Dorothy Maguire, who keeps good tabs on anyone from ‘Home’ who is making Irish Arts noises around Charlotte and beyond. She told me that Woody and I would ‘click,’ and click, we did. Woody saw me struggling on adjunct pay in Hickory colleges, and convinced me to come

teach adjunct at ASU on the MA, through the Reading Program; and then he convinced me that I needed to apply to the Doctoral Program to make a full-time teaching position possible (with the aid of a gifted Nissan Pathfinder, to “find my path to ASU”). Again, I took the advice, and here we are - set to graduate; and in a full-time position in my beloved First Year Seminar Program (FYS) at ASU. Some people you just can’t thank enough.

Now, I don’t want to go on interminably, but there is something about marking the completion of a terminal degree - being the end of our ‘official’ educational voyage, as it were, the highest level of education available in our chosen field - which not only calls forth thanks to the living, but also summons up the need for thanks to welcome, vital ghosts from one’s past (both living and dead) without whom we wouldn’t have fallen in love with education, nor stuck at it for so long.

It takes a village. And it all begins at home, with my mother and father, who somehow made it possible for me to go to Ballyclare High School, a good ‘grammar’ school in the country, a biggish bus journey away from the increasingly volatile atmosphere of Rathcoole, our just about to be ‘Troubled’ housing estate whose secondary schools were excellent feeder grounds for footballers snaffled by the likes of Manchester United, or for budding paramilitaries, but which struggled to foster educational success stories.

And then, ‘There was a teacher ...’, or should I say, teachers. If you read this dissertation, you will know how important my high school English teacher, Samuel ‘Sammy T’ Thompson was to me; his classes, particularly his knowledgeable passion for poetry were truly life-changing, rest-of-life-enhancing for a Rathcoole teenager, at that

stage more ‘jock’ than ‘poet,’ more brawn than brains. But Dr. Robson ‘Robbo’ Davison, my History teacher (and rugby coach), was almost equally important to me. One of the smartest people I have ever met, he made History truly our story.

At university level, there were several good professors, but two stand out: a real live writer, the Belfast novelist David Martin, a classic bad boy prof who could often be a pretentious pain in the arse to both staff and students, but whose commitment to reading and writing was inspirational to those of us who turned up for his unpredictable classes, or drank and debated with him (legally!) in the student bars afterwards. And there was Dr. Colin Meir, a published Yeats scholar, who was a real poetry enthusiast, and superb close reader of poems. (He was also supervisor of the doomed DPhil project which he helped me salvage as an MPhil.)

Then there are close family and friends to thank: my big Irish kids, of course, Matthew, Charis and Charlotte - especially helpful having one who has made it through the doctoral process, and another in the middle of it right now. And other family and friends also who, whether they realize[d] it or not, have been important influences on my love of learning and education, because they were up for long daylight conversations, or significant bouts of late night musings - those nebula-natterings out of which real thinking is born. These include folk from all stages of the journey: among others, the list includes my uncles, John Marks and Samuel Hay; and Martin Beattie, Ian Rea, Kevin Todd, Michael Smith, Mervyn Perry, Martin Quinn, Pdraig McGuinness, Steven McFarland, Tim Gracey, Anthony Bergin, Eddy Durkin, Glenn Simpson, Paddy Howard, Keith Rogers, Tyrone Herd, Raymond Armstrong, Ross Wilson, Damian Smyth, Philip Orr, Ian Duhig, Mark Roper, Mel McMahan, Betty Orr, Sacha Abercorn, Richard Rankin

Russell, Michael Dugan, Rand Brandes, Anne Rawson, Jimmy Brown, Mike Dowdy, Paul Custer, Scott McKendry; and last but not least, my Hickory-based, Belfast Boys best buddy, Alan Mearns, whose presence in Hickory is surely evidence of Providence, and whose intelligence, friendship and always timely encouragement have been priceless.

At App State I have been blessed with wonderful colleagues in the FYS program, and two superb and supportive Chairs: Dr. Martha McCaughey, and presently, Dr. Rick Klima. I have also had consistent, selfless support from the best school secretary one could ever have, Sheryl Mohn. (Her imminent retirement feels like a personal loss.) And I have benefited greatly from working with Dr. Trathen and Dr. Elizabeth Frye in the Reading Program, especially co-creating joint conference paper presentations and publications centered on using poetry in the classroom.

The Doctoral Program adventure then gave me cool Educational Leadership Doctoral Cohort 23 colleagues, especially (now) Dr. Ashley Pennell (who helped - suffered?! - to get me through the statistics component). I also thoroughly enjoyed and benefited from the Wednesday night class sessions, well led by talented ASU professors.

Two of those professors were Dr. Greg McClure and Dr. Peter 'PJ' Nelsen, and their classes were particularly inspiring for me, so I was honored when they agreed to serve alongside Dr. Trathen on my doctoral committee. Work which began in their classes has found its way into the finished dissertation. But the final Committee member came from outside ASU, in the form of professor, poet, writer and critic, Dr. Patrick Bizzaro. Pat had perceptively reviewed several of my poetry books in the *Asheville Poetry Review*, so he knew my work, and his own work in the fields of literary theory and creative writing was well suited to help. And so, HUGE thanks to Woody, Greg, PJ and

Pat, the ‘Fellowship of the Dissertation.’

Grateful thanks also go out to Dr. Vachel Miller, and to the rest of his excellent Doctoral Program Office team, especially to Dr. Star Brown (‘Queen of Pagination’!) and Elizabeth Hayes. They have been so helpful and encouraging at every stage of the process. (Vachel was the boss when I was accepted onto the program. When Vachel left the Directorship a few years back, I was gutted. When he resumed the position in recent years, I was rightly happy again. He has smoothed the way.)

Finally, I must return to give my deepest thanks to two special people. Without Woody Trathen, this journey would not have begun, and certainly would not have successfully finished. I will forever treasure our dissertating times in the likes of Foggy Rock! Woody is a consummate educator, a real leader, a carer, giver, and encourager; and he has a mind like a laser. I am so proud to call him my friend. I always told him I was doing it not just for me and my family, but for him, too, to honor his belief in me and my work, and he would smile. But I meant it. I trust he knows that now.

Well, no surprise, I have left the most important person to thank to the very end: the *sine qua non*, the without which nothing - my beautiful wife, Molly. From the moment we first met at the door of Lenoir-Rhyne College’s guest house in fall 1999, when she came to pick the wee visiting Irish poet up to go talk to her improv students, I fell in love with her. It’s true. She is not only beautiful, smart, funny, caring, nurturing, creative, a poet, and on and on and on ... but she is also the best teacher I have ever known. Don’t believe me, just ask any of her students. Without Molly, and our son, Micah, (and Zed the dog!) nothing would be worth celebrating.

Molly - we did it. (‘717’) Forever Eighty-Eights xo

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my wife, Molly, and to my son, Micah - the bright stars in my Hickory firmament - who have been with me every single line of the way.

And to Dr. Woodrow Trathen, mentor and friend, who more than helped to make it possible.

It is also dedicated to my mum, and to the loving memory of several other significant people in my life, from family, and friends, to poet-mentors: to my dad, Kenneth Robert Rice (1938-2014), who I know is more than proud of me; to Martin Andrew Beattie (1958-2016) and Pádraig Dennis McGuinness (1958-2020) - my two much missed best friends, my planter and gael brothers; and to poets John Hewitt (1907-1987) and Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), the 'Planter and the Gael' of this dissertation, whose lives and works are evergreen, sustaining presences.

Foreword

From a structural standpoint, as previously outlined in the Abstract, this dissertation does not feature a traditional five-chapter format. Rather, there are four *main* “chapters” included in this document, each one housing a manuscript/article intended for publication.

Given the fact that each manuscript/article has been prepared with a different publication/journal in mind, each of them has been formatted to conform to the requirements for each publication source. The four article manuscripts featured in this dissertation are all aimed at academic/literary audiences: three are intended for publication in peer-reviewed journals of note, and one is for book publication.

The first manuscript, Chapter Two, ‘William Drennan and the Poetry of Presbytery,’ has just been published in *Christianity & Literature* (Volume 72, Number 2, June 2023, Johns Hopkins University Press), a special Irish Literature edition (guest edited by Dr. Richard Rankin Russell, Baylor University). In accordance with the Journal Guidelines, Chapter Two conforms to the Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition, Notes and Bibliography Style.

The second manuscript, Chapter Three, ‘Casting the Stones of Silence: Seamus Heaney’s “Punishment”,’ is intended for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, the *New Hibernia Review* (University of St. Thomas). In accordance with the Journal Guidelines, Chapter Three conforms to American Psychological Association (APA) Style.

Chapter Four, ‘Postcolonialism, New Historicism, and the Northern Irish Poet,’ is aimed at a peer-reviewed journal, *The Irish University Review* (Edinburgh University Press), a leading global journal of Irish literary studies affiliated to the International

Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL). In accordance with the Journal Guidelines, Chapter Four conforms to APA Style.

Chapter Five, a full-length poetry sequence entitled ‘Eleventh Night,’ is in preparation for book publication in Fall 2026 (Press 53, Winston-Salem). Normally, Press 53 suggests that work *for submission* should be double-spaced and set in a standard 12-point font. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, to (i) keep the length of the whole manuscript to more manageable binding proportions; and (ii) to keep poem lines more ‘connected,’ I have used a spacing of 1.5 instead of double spacing. (Such spacing actually conforms more truly to the *final* stylistic formatting of Press 53’s published books.)

Similarly, when it comes to the style and formatting of the various appendices, I have chosen to faithfully mirror the formatting of the original sources for each appendix. Therefore, Appendix A is in an MLA style formatting; Appendix B is in APA style; Appendix C holds poems in 12 pt, Times New Roman font, 1.15 spacing, in accordance with the style of the book publications the various poems originally appeared in; and Appendix D simply reproduces the formatting of the email sent to myself from Mark Eaton, Publisher, giving permission to include ‘Chapter Two: William Drennan and the Poetry of Presbytery’ in this dissertation.

Finally, since I hail from Belfast, Northern Ireland, I have sought permission - for (only) certain sections of this dissertation - to honor the rules of United Kingdom grammar and punctuation to preserve my voice and the spirit of my creative work. In such sections, no words have been Americanized by removing a “u” or changing an “s” to a “z”; likewise, commas and periods have been left outside the quotation marks. This

policy pertains to Chapter Five, my full-length poetry sequence entitled ‘Eleventh Night’; to Appendix A, and to Appendix C; and also, of course, to direct quotations from UK/Irish authors and critics contained within this dissertation.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Setting the Scene

Poetry is the reason I am here. By that I mean, here at Appalachian State University, in this doctoral program, writing a dissertation (largely) about poetry. Indeed, I am tempted to go much further than this; I am tempted to say that poetry is the reason I am *here*, in a much more existential way, given the fact that from the age of fifteen, poetry has been the prime shaper and sustainer of my life - my personal, educational, professorial and publishing lives.

My relationship with poetry began in a classroom back home in Northern Ireland, under an English teacher, the late (great) Samuel Thompson of Ballyclare High School, County Antrim. Though generally regarded as being a bit ‘eccentric,’ he was known affectionately by his pupils as ‘Sammy T,’ and he was literally steeped, as I would find out, in poetry. He had hundreds of poems committed to memory and had the gift of making a difficult poem easy to understand. Quite simply, his passion for poetry changed my life. He knew how to step outside the syllabus, even for a moment, in order to make poets and poetry seem relevant. For example, he informed our class that John Keats, the great Romantic poet, despite his relatively small physical stature, was also nifty with his fists on occasion. Such knowledge instantaneously turned ‘Keats the Romantic’ into ‘Keats the Real Man’ for ‘Ulster Troubles’ teenagers like myself. Suddenly, Keats and poetry were pretty cool. And it was the poetry of Keats that got me hooked for life, just one poem, that is all it took, one of his famous odes, “Ode to a Nightingale,” shared in a classroom moment that I have tried to capture in one of my own poems, from a

sequence-in-progress entitled ‘Eleventh Night.’ The sequence has been gathered together in preparation for publication, and constitutes Chapter Five of this dissertation:

HEART ACHE

Uniformed us, sweating in a mobile hut
Waiting for our English teacher to show up,
Dying to begin to torture the old fool:
Lucky ‘Troubles’ children, country grammar school
Kids who escaped from the massacre on a
Daily basis; bright teenagers who’d passed the
Eleven Plus test or, like moi, had fluffed it
But benefited from parents who’d paid out
Money they couldn’t afford to try and make
Sure that we wouldn’t copy their mistake
Of neglecting our precious education
For some quick nine-to-five remuneration:
Though few of them had been given any real
Choice—straight out to work was the working class deal.

Just as our undisciplined waiting almost
Reached its silly farm antics limit, he burst
In through the door like a man on a mission,
With mortarboard in hand and black gown swishing.
Immediately labeled a total twat,
He resembled a bald, bespectacled bat,

But swiftly secured a ripple of applause
By matching his bake to back end of a bus,
While claiming he knew not what he was doing.
Despite the fact that most of us were pissing
Ourselves at the disheveled get-up of him,
He got himself together, quietened the din,
Commanded the front, closed his eyes and opened
His mouth, and booklessly waved a verbal wand.

He spoke of heartache, and numbness, and of pain;
Of what sounded like cold beer, good drugs, and wine;
Said stuff about dissolving, and forgetting,
In a place where there was no place for fretting ...
The very classroom walls seemed to draw their breath
When he talked of almost being in love with death.

When teacher finished, he had no need to blush.
Coming round, out of the unreal teenage hush,
I turned and whispered to my mate beside me—
His mouth hanging open, his chin on his knee—
Wow ... what does he call that thing when it's at home?
Not sure ... but I think he said it was a ... 'poem'?
From that moment onward, there would be no doubt—
Liking poetry would be my 'coming out.' (Rice, 2013, p. 90-91)

The fact that I found poetry in this way, in a classroom setting, through a passionate teacher who so clearly loved poetry, and who could only be described as superior, has no doubt colored my relationship to poetry, and to the discipline of teaching poetry as an educator myself. Indeed, I believe that Mr Thompson not only taught us about poetry, but taught us *with* poetry, in the broadest, fullest sense - a holistic theme that runs throughout this dissertation.

It was lessons learned not only from a wonderful English teacher, but from the poetry of the twin pillars of this dissertation - William Drennan (a northern Irish Protestant) and Seamus Heaney (a northern Irish Catholic), and from supporting featured poets like Derek Mahon and Michael Longley - that not only engendered a life-long love of literature and learning in me, but also, essentially, helped me 'to stay out of trouble' during the violent sectarian of the Ulster Troubles (1968-1998). Moreover, their poems have been, to this day, the foundation of my classroom teaching, whether back home in Northern Ireland, or in various other countries; and I now have the privilege of teaching classes at App State in First Year Seminar (FYS) for both the College of General Education and the Honors College, designing my own courses - 'Education in Poetry' and 'Soul-Sustaining Arts' - which are heavily poetry-based.

Indeed, our FYS course aims and requirements are uniquely suited for me as an educator, as I get to focus the required (to me, *vital*) Global Learning Opportunity (GLO) component into a student research paper based upon the history, culture and literature of my native Northern Ireland, and specifically centered on 'The Poetry of the Northern Irish Troubles (1968-1998).' Many students come to see, as I have long since believed,

that in contrast to much that appears as news in media posts and online memes, *good* poems can hold open a brief but transformative ‘listening’ door to enable fresh understanding and a possible change of perspective in respect to (often controversial) current events: they can bring us into a more neutral headspace just long enough to encourage us to think, for a crucial minute, that our ingrained ‘tribal’ certainties might, just might, be ‘wrong.’ We will discuss such pivotal, mind-opening poems written during the NI Troubles in this dissertation - Michael Longley’s “Ceasefire” being a key example of such wily, peace-promoting persuasion - but for an example closer to home here, from one of my American mentor-poets, William Stafford, “Learning” will work to show how good poetry can open a sneaky educational window for us, *if* we’re exposed to it:

LEARNING

A piccolo played, then a drum.
Feet began to come—a part
of the music. Here came a horse,
clippety clop, away.

My mother said, “Don’t run—
the army is after someone
other than us. If you stay
you’ll learn our enemy.”

Then he came, the speaker. He stood
in the square. He told us who
to hate. I watched my mother's face,
it's quiet. "That's him," she said. (Stafford, 2014, p. 25)

Such a clever, subtle poem using a short, dramatic scene involving a mother and young son who are obviously within the 'tribe' that's seemingly under the 'protection' of the army leader. However, in my (transatlantic) classroom experience, and no matter which 'side' of which modern political divide students might lean towards, most if not all students are persuaded - by a *poem* no less, this one poem - that we should probably learn the lesson being passed from mother to son in the poem, which is to reconsider anyone as a leader/protector who publicly tells us "who to hate."

This 4-article dissertation begins by thus acknowledging my coming to Poetry in my teenage years at high school, an educational establishment, through the inspired teaching of a passionate English teacher, and moves forward to consider some of the work of particular poet-mentors from Northern Ireland - writing well before, and during the notorious Ulster Troubles, and since - who have most helped to steer me on a cross-community, anti-sectarian path inspired by the example of their lives and the contents of their poetry and prose.

The most prominent poet-mentors featured are the (Protestant) Belfast Presbyterian radical and poet, William Drennan (1754-1820), and the (Catholic) Nobel Laureate, poet Seamus Heaney (1939-2013). Spanning centuries of Irish history and literature, from the United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798 to the notorious Northern Irish

Troubles, and exhibiting admirable private and public personas, Drennan and Heaney - representative of 'The Planter and the Gael' of our dissertation title, the Protestant Scots-Irish 'planters' from the Ulster Plantation of the 1600s, and the native Catholic Irish 'gaels' - strove through their work to challenge sectarian norms and foster peace and reconciliation within a deeply divided society. Given my own mixed heritage - brought up Presbyterian in predominantly Protestant County Antrim, only to discover when I was eighteen and my father (who had been fostered by Presbyterians as a young boy) was forty, that he was actually from Roman Catholic parents in Republican South Armagh - I have always found myself in that halfway house between the two extremes in Northern Ireland, between 'The Planter and the Gael:' a position that was made less groundless primarily by the examples of Drennan and Heaney, alongside similar poets whose work will be examined in Chapter Three - including Derek Mahon (Protestant), and Michael Longley (Protestant), but also Paul Durcan (Catholic), and John Hewitt (Protestant), whose work will be touched on in our linking 'Reflective Bridge' sections, and Final Reflection.

The resulting *in*-fluence from such poet-mentors can also be seen in the final article manuscript of Chapter Five, 'Eleventh Night,' which I am terming an autobiographical and *ethnographic* poetry sequence. A single sentence from ethnographer Casey Golomski was the first ethnography-based thunderbolt to hit me during my research:

Ethnographers are storytellers engaged in the project of conveying other peoples' experiences, re-presenting content of others' and our own lives in ways that we hope changes consciousness for those

who bear witness to it (Golomski, 2019).

It was not just a perfect description of ethnographers, but of so many *poets*, including Drennan and Heaney et al; and it was a revelatory insight for me in terms of describing much of my own poetry, especially early longer sequences I have published like *Muck Island* (1990), or *Hickory Haiku* (2010), and (most pertinently) the new manuscript featured here in Chapter Five, ‘Eleventh Night.’ Hitherto, although I knew that I was using these longer sequences to engage with my communities through poetry, I would not have attached the label ‘ethnographic’ to them. But soon after Golomski’s comment, I came across the work of James Clifford who defines ethnography as, “a state of being in culture while looking at culture, a form of personal and collective self-fashioning” (Heuston, 2011, p. 1), and I realized that ethnography is undoubtedly a big part of what I have been engaged in while writing these three poetry sequences, especially ‘Eleventh Night;’ ethnography, or as Renato Rosaldo (2014) has further elaborated, ‘anthropoetry:’

... anthropoesia or anthropoetry ... poetry that situates itself in a social and cultural world; poetry that is centrally about the human condition ... verse with an ethnographic sensibility ... poetry where description is central. (p. 101-106)

Since encountering such scholars, I have delved deeper into the ethnography discipline, discovering the recent work of Sean Heuston (2011). In a novel approach to the works of W.B. Yeats, Robert Frost, Robert Penn Warren, and (our own) Seamus Heaney, Heuston combines interdisciplinary analysis, specifically ethnography and close reading, to argue for the intersection of modern poetry studies and contemporary

ethnographic theory. His insightful work on Heaney's "ethnographic impulse" (Heuston, 2011, p. 153) was a real find and will be used as a brief but provocative compare and contrast with my own work (in the *Reflective Bridge: Looking Back* on Chapter Four and Forward to Chapter Five). Heuston correctly suggests that "Heaney's poetry ... self-consciously dramatizes and enacts the problems of perspective, voice, and interpretation that surround ethnographic texts" (p. 153). And his discussion of how a poet like Heaney establishes "authority" within his poems about his community/ies is most pertinent to my own case, with Heaney believing that it is achieved through the "specificity and accurate representation of local details" in the poetry (p. 153). Additionally, I am also intrigued by Heuston's distinction between 'Insider ethnography' and 'Halfie ethnography,' terms that distinguish between those writing as native to a culture, and those whose identity is typically divided between the culture under study and another culture (p. 141). Given my own fluidities - positioned back Home as Protestant, but also having Catholic heritage, caught between 'The Planter & The Gael,' and even now positioned in Hickory as a long-term permanent resident/alien, with an American wife, American son, but also having my Ulster family circle, including three adult children, back Home - the debate between 'insider' and 'halfie' is a very real one for me.

Chapter Two houses the first of our four article manuscripts, 'William Drennan and the Poetry of Presbytery.' Belfast poet and Presbyterian radical dissenter, Dr William Drennan (1754-1820) was brought to my attention primarily through the efforts of another Belfast poet and radical dissenter, John Hewitt (1907-1987), once described by Heaney as being "the doyen of the Ulster poets (Heaney, 1987)." Coming from the

Protestant ('Planter') side of the Irish conflict, and although from different centuries, Drennan and Hewitt were exemplary 'dissenters,' occupying the radical middle ground between the more traditional Catholic and Protestant parties in Ireland, north and south, of their day. Both men have been lodestones for me, necessary angels, keepers of the flame, their poetry teaching lessons about the importance of remaining true to one's conscience. I had the joy of spending a full day with Hewitt in his Belfast home, just ten months before his death at 79 yrs of age. It was an unforgettable experience. So you can imagine my surprise when reading the following comments from noted Irish literary critic Patricia Craig in her review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of my book, *The Clock Flower*, forever linking my own work with that of Hewitt and Drennan, two cherished poet-mentors:

... along with the poetry comes a growing awareness of the "independent airs" of radical Belfast, of the great dissenting tradition of the past, of an integrationist stance. Birds flying in and out of *The Clock Flower* poems - blackbirds, sparrows, hawks, jays - put us in mind of John Hewitt's lines about staking his future on "birds flying in and out of the schoolroom window". Hewitt, and beyond him the nineteenth-century Dr William Drennan, are exemplars for this poet. But Rice's voice is distinctively his own: forthright, colloquial, wry and persuasive. (Craig, 2013, p. 23)

If these, perchance, turn out to be my lineage laurels, I will gladly rest on them.

In a moving newspaper obituary, written upon Drennan's death in 1820, one commentator wrote, "Will nothing be done by Belfast to preserve the memory of such a man?" (*The Irishman*, Feb. 11th, 1820). And in 1847, the heterodox liberal divine Henry Montgomery saluted Drennan as "a philosopher, a statesman, an orator, a poet, and in all that gives dignity to the name, a MAN!" (*The Unitarian Magazine and Bible Christian*, 1827, p. 328). These are but two examples of the many tributes which have descended upon Drennan since his death. In typical fashion, as we will witness in Chapter Two, Drennan's own self-judgments were always more sober. Writing in 1806, in his poetic self-portrait, "W.D.", Drennan described himself thus:

Man of taste, more than talent; not learn'd tho' of letters;

His creed without claws, and his faith without fetters. (Drennan, 1815, p. 123)

Considering the poet's life and work, this admirably self-effacing couplet could stand as the most fitting of epitaphs. This was certainly the opinion of John Hewitt who, as we know, was a political dissenter of high moral fiber, and whom several critics have classed as being Drennan's natural heir. Indeed, Hewitt delighted in citing Drennan's couplet as the words of a truly honest Ulsterman; reveling, in particular, in the essentially libertarian and non-sectarian ideals enshrined in the line, "creed without claws, and faith without fetters" (Drennan, 1815, p. 123). Moreover, it was Hewitt who, while championing Drennan's undoubted commitment to the democratization of his native island, could, (in a suitably tongue-in-cheek style), hint at the less glamorous things which Drennan said about his fellow countrymen in his political poetry:

It is, of course, not to be expected that those who approved his patriotic ardor should also care to be reminded that the same poet had referred

to his fellow Irishmen and his native land in such terms as:

A nation of abortive men,

That dart - the tongue; and point - the pen.

And, at the back of Europe, hurl'd -

A base Posterior of the world. (Hewitt, 1950, p. 43)

In addition, by highlighting the above verse, Hewitt perhaps pinpoints Drennan's most authentic Irish voice - that Swift-like iconoclasm, so prevalent in Drennan's epistolary compositions - which John Montague might have called "the rage of the unwilling patriot;" (Montague, 1978, p. 28) or what Conor Cruise O'Brien once referred to as evidence of being "mauled by the Irish situation" (Montague, 1978, p. 28).

Without a doubt, Drennan's life and work do reflect much of the ebb and flow of Presbyterian radicalism during the momentous pre and post-Union era in Ireland. However, as evidenced in Chapter Two, with the discernment of his moral and religious milieu, his 'love of the fatherland' principles, and his Swiftian exasperation, it becomes clear that tribal generalizations (whether they be of the Catholic Irish Republican Nationalist slant, or of the Ulster Presbyterian and Unionist type) do not satisfy in every individual case, especially with an individual as interesting and complex as Drennan.

Though Drennan's dissenting voice may have been drowned over the centuries by the growing tide of the Orange and Green, 'the Planter & the Gael,' it was, nevertheless, raised out of his genuine desire to unite the hearts and minds of all Irishmen, regardless of creed or 'color'. Rather than securing a more traditional form of Irish patriotic notoriety, the kind of memorial which Drennan himself would have liked is implied in a letter to his sister in 1807:

... on [day] my petition in favour of the Catholics will be discussed at a Catholic meeting of Lords and Commons ... my hymn will be sung much about the same hour in the Presbyterian meeting house at Strand Street charity sermon ... (Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, 1931, Letter 1307)

Furthermore, he left specific instructions that a minister and priest should jointly preside at his funeral and that he be carried to his grave by six Protestants and six Catholics. The old Fenian, John O'Leary, often said that there were things a man must not do to save a nation (Yeats & Johnston, 1970, p. 2). The true legacy of William Drennan is that the unconscionable slaughter of one's fellow countrymen can never hope to establish one nation, *united* and free.

Chapter Two, which now follows, is my dissertation article attempt to honor the memory of William Drennan; to raise his poetic voice above the (still) simmering sectarian tides; to acknowledge him across the centuries for providing an enduring cross-community *education* - not least of all, in poetry. It has just been published in *Christianity & Literature* (Volume 72, Number 2, June 2023, Johns Hopkins University Press), a special Irish Literature edition (guest edited by Dr. Richard Rankin Russell, Baylor University).

Chapter Two

William Drennan and the Poetry of Presbytery

Mentor Markers from the 'Protestant Dissenting Tradition' in Ireland

Poetic imagination is determined finally by the state of negotiation - in a person or in a people - between man and his idea of the Creator. This is natural enough, and everything else is naturally enough subordinate to it. How things are between man and his idea of the Divinity determines everything in his life, the quality and connectedness of every feeling and thought, and the meaning of every action.

-Ted Hughes

For over two centuries, the Belfast Presbyterian radical Dr. William Drennan (1754-1820) has been widely regarded as the poet (certainly the 'best' poet) of the United Irishmen, due mainly to his famous ballads, "Erin" (1795) and "The Wake of William Orr" (1797). Although Drennan's significance as a key player in the political drama of eighteenth century Ireland has been well documented in the history books (a welcome recent addition being Fergus Whelan's *May Tyrant's Tremble: The Life of William Drennan, 1754-1820* from Irish Academic Press) the enigmatic personality of the man behind the historical mask has never been fully explored. Indeed, it is only through his poetry (in conjunction with his private correspondence) that we can begin to plumb the depths of Drennan's complex psyche. Very few of Drennan's poems, however, have received critical attention. Moreover, even those which have attracted the interest of the critics, have succeeded in doing so only because of their political content, rather than any intrinsic literary merit.

It is true, as Patrick Curley maintains, that Drennan's poetry both represents a "rational, radical, realistic and Protestant"¹ effort within a difficult political and cultural period situated between the eras of tradition and revolution, Augustanism and Romanticism, and merits consideration as "the crowning example" of an "eighteenth century Protestant libertarian protest."² Also, Drennan's lifework does indeed symbolize the "radicalism and reaction that lies at the heart of Ulster Presbyterianism."³ Such conclusions may be reached by any serious reader of Drennan's poetry. However, Curley does well to further ascertain the hitherto unexplored importance of the religious undercurrent to Drennan's political poetry, a discovery which leads Curley to claim that, "There can be little question that Drennan's active Presbyterianism finally fashioned his aspirations and gained a precedence over all his ambitions."⁴ I would basically concur, though not without certain crucial qualifications. For example, Curley's phrase "active Presbyterianism" presumes that a united Presbyterian polity existed in eighteenth century Ireland, which is not the case. The Irish Presbyterians of the period being divided into the two main rival camps of Old Light and New Light - reformed orthodoxy versus the liberalism and individualism of the Age of Reason - meant membership of either wing could dictate one's support for or against a political event as relevant to the poetry of Drennan as the 1798 Rebellion. Accepting that such important differences existed within the Irish Presbyterianism of Drennan's era, proper stress needs to be given to an accurate assessment of the religious principles which permeate Drennan's poetical responses to political events.

The literary critic and poet, Ted Hughes, has said:

Poetic imagination is determined finally by the state of negotiation - in a person or in a people - between man and his idea of the Creator. This is natural enough, and everything else is naturally enough subordinate to it. How things are between man and his idea of the Divinity determines everything in his life, the quality and connectedness of every feeling and thought, and the meaning of every action.⁵

Drennan's "idea of the Creator" cannot simply be brought under a theological umbrella term like "Presbyterianism." Rather, it must be recognised that his "idea of the Creator" is expressed from within a dissenting, non-subscribing Unitarian Presbyterian framework. His muse is predominantly moral, and specifically New Light, constituting the final ground plan for his chief poetical statements.

The religious undercurrent to Drennan's patriotic verse is significantly different to that contained in the bulk of Irish nationalist poetry, written mainly by patriots of a Catholic persuasion. The religious symbolism which pervades much Catholic Irish patriot verse (from Drennan's era to the present-day) is the blood sacrifice motif. By this I refer to the tendency of many Catholic Irish patriot-poets to elevate those who suffer and die for the 'cause' to the station of Christ-like martyrdom. This equation - patriot hero = Christ the Redeemer - is seen in its most extreme in the messianic swansongs of Patrick Pearse. Add to this religious invocation of blood sacrifice a popular conviction that God will help the 'Gael' in the battle against the oppressor, and we have the two basic tenets

of the religious bedrock to Catholic Irish patriotic verse. By contrast, the New Light Presbyterian liberalism of Drennan's religious concerns lend a more egalitarian complexion to his patriotic poetry. Although in "The Wake of William Orr" (1797),⁶ Drennan draws a certain parallel between the "murdered brother" and Christ - "'Countrymen, UNITE', he cried, / And died for what his Saviour died" - he (paradoxically) goes on to lament the often tragic results of the volatile mixture of such religious symbolism and nationalistic fervor:

Monstrous and unhappy sight!
Brothers' blood will not unite;
Holy oil and holy water
Mix, and fill the world with slaughter.

The truly distinctive religious slant which he then incorporates into the same poem is drawn from two New Testament exhortations not commonly heard in Irish patriotic poetry - the commands to love one's neighbor, and forgive one's enemies. Drennan suggests that the only thing worse than the "foreign weight" of Britain, is the "domestic hate" separating Irishman from Irishman. In this way the poem becomes an urgent, and refreshing, call for dialogue as opposed to violence:

God of mercy! God of peace!
Make this mad confusion cease
O'er the mental chaos move,

Through it SPEAK the light of love.

A similar plea for reconciliation forms the core of Drennan's equally famous ballad, "Erin" (1795).⁷ Here again, the triumph over internal Irish divisions is seen as important, perhaps more so, than the expulsion of the colonial power:

Drive the demon of bigotry home to his den,
And where Britain made brutes now let Erin make men.
Let my sons like the leaves of the shamrock unite,
A partition of sects from one footstalk of right,
Give each his full share of the earth and the sky,
Nor fatten the slave where the serpent would die.

Alas! for poor Erin that some are still seen,
Who would dye the grass red from their hatred to green;
Yet, oh! when you're up and they're down, let them live,
Then yield them that mercy which they would not give.
Arm of Erin be strong! but be gentle as brave!
And uplifted to strike, be still ready to save!
Let no feeling of vengeance presume to defile
The cause of, or men of, the Emerald Isle.

Drennan's deeply held religious principles must not be underestimated in the debate regarding his patriotism. I would contend, for instance, that the underlying religious restraint in his political verse goes a long way to explaining his absence from the fighting in 1798. However, the strength of Drennan's religious opinions was certainly underestimated by a Mr. Archdale, who published an article⁸ in *Faulkner's Journal*, dated 27 June 1793, in which he accused the members of the Society of United Irishmen of being "despisers of all religion." Drennan was sufficiently incensed to reply personally,⁹ in the following manner:

Sir,

Having seen an unqualify'd and indiscriminate censure of yours in *Faulkner's Journal*, on the whole Society of United Irishmen as despisers of all Religion, and finding myself necessarily included as being a member of that Society, I am convinced that you will do me the justice to except me from those on whom you meant to bestow such an appellation.

I am, Sir, ...

W. D. (1 July 1793)

Though Drennan's sensitivity is somewhat amusing, it is also very revealing, insofar as he is at pains to defend himself from the irreligious charge, but not the rest of the Society.

Given the extent to which Drennan's religious convictions permeate his political poems, it is only appropriate that his "Hymn VII" (originally included as a footnote to a Monthly Retrospect of Politics, in the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* of August 1813¹⁰) should present a summation of his views of the political events of his era. In the opening verses of the hymn Drennan portrays Nature's joyful acclamation of the primacy of man. Later, however, he indicates that something had happened to spoil man's noble position:

So Nature spoke, with voice benign,
When, from her blackest cave,
Bigotry yell'd, "A share be mine,
From cradle to the grave!"

The Sun of Reason then began
To set, eclips'd in blood;
And He, alone, can rescue man,
Who first pronounced him GOOD.

As with many others in the Enlightenment age, Drennan believed that Man had great potential for universal improvement. However, such meliorism was deflated when bigotry, the opposite of charity and brotherliness, queered the pitch. The high hopes propagated by the Age of Reason came crashing to the ground. This fall was symbolized for Drennan, internationally, in the bloody development of the French Revolution, and locally, in the circumstances surrounding the United Irish Rebellion of 1798. The last two

lines of the hymn point Drennan's final recourse to his religious beliefs to sustain him with hope for the future in the midst of social and political uncertainty.

Although much can thus be drawn about the moral measure of the man from the New Light nature of his political poetry, perhaps the most revealing insights into Drennan's character are to be found, not in his political verse, but in the previously uncharted regions of his poetic oeuvre. This body of work, which represents the bulk of Drennan's poetry, falls conveniently into three quite separate categories - personal, sociological and religious - each of which illuminates the different aspects of the author's private and public personae.

Drennan's personal poems are few in number, perhaps no more than a dozen in total. By and large they seem to have flourished only in the latter years of the poet's life, i.e. the period after 1800. In these songs of experience and maturity, we find Drennan at his most introspective and sentimental; on the one hand, taking stock of his own life, his achievements and disappointments; and on the other, deeply absorbed with memories and thoughts about members of his family circle. "Veneration of one's parents" is celebrated in "My Father,"¹¹ one of the most important of Drennan's personal poems; not least because it captures the major influence that the father's example had on him throughout his life. (His father was the Reverend Thomas Drennan, the minister of a Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church in Rosemary Street, Belfast.) Drennan evidently wrote this poem sometime between late 1805 and early 1806. In a letter written during that period, his sister Matty tells him that she had placed his filial tribute in the Belfast Newsletter.¹² The poem concentrates on four main areas of the father's influence. First,

the poet acknowledges his debt to his father for introducing him to the splendors of a God-centered creation:

Who made me feel, and understand,
The wonders of the sea and land,
And mark, through all, the Maker's hand?

MY FATHER!

Second, he recounts how he was instructed by observing the outworking of his father's gentle and highly compassionate character:

Not on an insect would he tread,
Nor strike the stinging nettle dead,
Who taught, at once, my heart and head -

Third, the central verses of the poem allude to the classical training that he received from his father, and which would later inspire the son's love of his country:

Who fir'd my breast with Homer's fame,
And taught the high, heroic theme,
That nightly flashed upon my dream?
Who, with Ulysses, saw me roam,
High on the raft, amidst the foam,

His head uprais'd to look for home?

Here, the young William questions the father as to why Ulysses should have such a fervent desire “for home”:

“What made a barren rock so dear?”

“My boy, he had a country there!”

And who, then, dropt a prescient tear?

The “prescient tear” in the old man’s eye suggests that he had glimpsed something of the trials through which his own son would have to pass because of his love of country and the “high heroic theme”.) Lastly, the admiring son nostalgically affirms the father’s concern that the Christian faith should be expressed in both word and deed:

O! teach me still thy Christian plan,

For practice with thy precept ran,

Nor yet desert me, now a man -

Overall, the poem is a testimony to the fact that, for Drennan, the father’s character was the measure of all things. As well as seeking to emulate the paternal character himself, the son saw it as the standard against which all others either stood or fell. The father’s moralistic practice, gentlemanly attributes and biblical convictions became William’s

“pillar by night, and cloud by day.”¹³ Even as a mature man, the poet was calling on his father to “still prompt the motive and the choice.”¹⁴

Nevertheless, if the father’s ‘ghost’ could be called upon to “prompt” him, the motives and choices in life, like the burden of self-assessment, still had to be carried by Drennan himself. In other words, the theory had to quicken into practice. Three poems, written at different stages of his life, highlight some of the problems which Drennan encountered in trying to work out the principles so esteemed by his father. In each of these works - “To a Friend”, “Fragment”, and “W.D.” - the author can be seen struggling between action and inaction within a less than moral society.

No date is available for “To a Friend”,¹⁵ but at one point Drennan addresses himself with the words “Rise, foolish youth!”, which would seem to date the poem as an early composition. Here we find the poet in a contemplative, even confessional mood, acutely aware of his own inertia:

In careless thought, in fruitless ease,
Thy Drennan wastes his useless days; ...
... I melt away the time,
In careless thought, and playful rhyme;

The poem is especially noteworthy for a dialogue between self and soul, which is reminiscent of the psalmist’s¹⁶ complaint at the seeming triumph of the unjust over the righteous:

Yet why, just Heav'n, am I unblest?
I melt not on soft pleasure's breast;
With sober temp'rance, I restrain
The dropsied thirst of sordid gain.
I dive not in ambition's flood,
Nor creep thro' ministerial mud.

And although Drennan had earlier expressed the frustration of "The heart that pants for honest fame," the soul manages to rescue the self from its disillusionment with the vagaries of human society by pointing to the eternal rather than the temporal plane, and to the spiritual rewards of the righteous:

Are not the pearls of morning mine!
Mine, the rich lawns where em'rals lie,
And mine, the sapphires of the sky.

And even a jaundiced aside

Ah! see! the locusts spawn'd by spleen,
Brood o'er the soul's enliv'ning green.

cannot prevent the poet from reasserting his Augustan sense of equanimity:

Set free the Heav'n-directed mind;

Submit to reason's calm control

Each vagrant passion of the soul;

Ironically, though, the poem concludes with a romantic idyll, with Drennan having retreated into a kind of philosopher's garden, where "The moon-beams trickle thro' the trees ..." to soothe "the calm halcyon of the breast." Thus "wrapt in a web of well-spun thought," the poet seems to have been (unwittingly) seduced into a more subtle form of stagnation, where fame is no longer the spur.

Drennan's debate between self and society is continued in "Fragment",¹⁷ published in *Fugitive Pieces* (like "W.D." and "To a Friend"), but first seen in the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* of 1808, under the apposite Latin pseudonym "Morosos."¹⁸ Whereas "To a Friend" showed Drennan in a lethargic, though finally optimistic frame of mind, "Fragment" portrays him in an ill-tempered, gloomy, and generally pessimistic mood vis-a-vis society. There is no definite date for the writing of the poem: however, the fact that Drennan speaks of himself therein as a bachelor indicates that it was written before his marriage in 1800. The poem's theme, moreover, is one which had preoccupied him during 1796. In one long letter to his sister Matty, for example, he describes himself first as "a Crusoe in this City (Dublin), without having even a Friday for a Servant or a Parrot to prate to ...:" and then as "a sullen Solitaire, a moping misanthrope in a crowded City ...," who is "an authorling burning his shins, at a solitary fireside."¹⁹ (The poem's treatment of this theme is also, and even more strongly redolent of a handwritten document by Drennan entitled "Walks by my Fireside - Walk the First,"²⁰ in which he

yearns: “Let me retire at times from this bustling life, and commune with myself as if in the closet of my heart.” A wish fulfillment exposed as bogus in the latter half of “Fragment.”)

The first half of the poem pictures Drennan eating out alone, lamenting the absence of a female companion in a tone typical of eighteenth century sentimentality:

No human face divine, sheds on my face

A pure and lambent light - No spirit of love

Draws from its depth the meeting tide of soul...

...

No feast, where sense adds zest to sentiment:

Such feasts as Booth shar'd with Amelia

...

He, her “near Booth”, and she, his “Darling Girl!”

His idealized representation of this romantic couple accentuates the loveless and godless social setting in which he finds himself:

How dull, compar'd with this, the lonely crowd,

Where idiot ceremony sickens us

...

Meals that begin without one thought of God,

And end - by loudly calling for the Dev'!

There then follows a short, and rather macabre scene, which begins with the entrance of the Devil, and ends with a diabolical curate, who “gives thanks, /And whispers ... some paltry pun” in a woman’s ear. Drennan’s response to this *Grand Guignol* is to withdraw from society - as he had done at the end of “To a Friend” - into his own private world of “insulated independence” and thought. There he fancies himself stamping proudly

... upon the servitudes of life,
As on a carpet woven with chequer’d colours;
Or, with legs rais’d, at horizontal height,
Widely encircling one warm friend - the fire;

before which he desires to sit and meditate, “... blest as Atlas, lighten’d of his load.” At this juncture Drennan insinuates a more metaphysical theme, considering both the interdependence of body and soul (a topic which he also discusses in great detail in “Walks by my Fireside - Walks the First”), and the influence of “his hand who bade us run...:”

Did not some Heav’nly impulse drive us on,
This weight of world would sink us to the centre:
As body gravitates, the soul would grovel,
And its sole pow’r would be the pow’r of falling
Thro’ vast vacuity.

This is a vivid philosophical exposition of the destructive pressure that everyday life can exert on people. However, the soul, driven on by the Heavenly impulse, regenerates the body which is sick of society and the scheme of things, enabling Drennan to stir himself from his solipsistic reverie:

Yet, strange, how soon I long for company!

It gently agitates the stagnant mind;

And we are drawn by many petty habits,

As Gulliver by Lilliputian cords.

...

We know not why, or wherefore; - but we feel

The hungry vacuum of an idle heart.

In the document “Walks by my Fireside” Drennan similarly admits that he is equipped for only a temporary retirement from society:

I am ill-calculated for general society, but I should be a worse hermit ...²¹

Indeed he is aware of the dangers of subjective idealism:

I ought to consider that such seclusion may degenerate into

a sullen and selfish estrangement ... Certain it is, that terrestrial

enjoyment can never result from a cynical isolation. Short retirements ought rather to urge a sweet return.²²

In “Fragment”, however, the poet renounces his moment of solitude, only to be denied a “sweet return.” He resumes his former station with the “sad composure” of one who remains at odds with society in general.

The dual themes of self-assessment and the poet’s relationship with society culminate in the autobiographical “W.D.”²³ - perhaps the most accomplished of his personal poems - written in 1806, when Drennan was a mature man of 52 years of age. In a letter to his sister, he says:

I compared however myself at present (even at 52) with what I have been, and for the many comforts I possess, in wife, children, sisters and kind relations, I gratefully thanked God, and if not happy, I am at least content.²⁴

“W.D.” is a hammering into unity of the different facets of Drennan’s life, moving from a dissection of his own personality to a commentary on his political, professional and domestic fortunes, past and present. It offers a balanced account of his successes and disappointments, throughout which honesty is tempered with irony:

And now, with a pencil impartial, though kind,
Let me picture myself, from the mirror of mind.
What a deep tint of gravity saddens that face!

A smile evanescent, a light'ning grace,
Endeavours by fits, but in vain, to illume,
And more clearly reveals constitutional gloom.

(These lines echo Drennan's opinion of his own portrait, painted in the 1780's by Robert Home.²⁵ Matty had praised the painting in 1786, saying that "... it bespeaks great thought, and a degree of anxiety, that interests the beholder, it is grimmer than you but I like it the better".²⁶ Ten years later, Drennan chided his sister, "... I wonder that you would keep that picture of me, so dismal in look, and ominous of face, at least in its present situation. It seems to have been smoked in Erebus...".²⁷ Through a striking use of antithesis, Drennan acknowledges that he is habitually ill-at-ease in society:

Most social, alone; but alone in the crowd,
With candour, reserved, and with diffidence, proud;

And commenting on his reputation for a certain hardness,²⁸ he suggests that this is a very one-sided view of his character:

His manners so cold, so repulsive, so shy,
One might think that the fountain of feeling was dry;
Yet his nature was soft-situation alone
Can make petrified water seem absolute stone;
But no sooner is felt the elective attraction,

Than it quick re-dissolves into tears of affection.

Unable to suffer fools gladly, he disliked the superficiality of much social intercourse; nonetheless, he gave himself whole-heartedly to genuine friendship.

In the next section of this poetic memoir, Drennan reviews his heyday as a political activist:

Still shrinking from praise, tho' in search of a name,
He trod on the brink of precipitate fame;
And stretch'd forth his arm to the beckoning form,
A vision of glory, which flash'd thro' the storm;
INDEPENDENCE shot past him in letters of light,
Then the scroll seem'd to shrivel, and vanish in night;
And all the illumin'd horizon became,
In the shift of the moment, a darkness - a dream.

Not only does this stanza refer to the author's involvement in the political realm, but it also hints at his withdrawal therefrom, and his detachment from the vicious spiral of sectarian rancor and revolutionary action. While keeping faith in his radical liberalism, Drennan obviously had no desire for the "precipitous fame" of being hung alongside his contemporaries in the gallery of martyred Irish patriots. In its representation of Drennan's political ambivalence, the poem evokes the dilemma of Hamlet - perhaps the classic exemplar of the struggle between action and inaction. Like the Danish prince, the poet stretches "forth his arm to the beckoning form:" yet for Drennan, the solicitous shadow

was not a manifestation of his beloved father, but the early spirit of the Volunteer Movement.

Having dispensed with the vexed question of his politics, Drennan then turns his attention to his career as a doctor of medicine. He claims to have dissociated himself from the underhand money-making practices which so discredited the Hippocratic oath. (He also denounces the “craft of a calling, and tricks of a trade” in “An Original Letter.”²⁹) Certainly he was

No lithe interloper, no courteous encroacher,

No practice detailer, no puffer, no poacher,

and his dislike of such degenerate practitioners contributed to his disaffection with the profession as a whole. A symptom of this disaffection was that the poet would often dwell wistfully upon his failure to ‘seize the day’. For example, in a letter to Dr. William Bruce, he wrote, “I am past my 31st year and all my life has been spent preparing to live... .”³⁰ Drennan’s sense of frustrated ambition largely resulted from his conviction that time spent on an unrewarding career was time stolen from those areas in which he sometimes dared to believe that he could have excelled, if he had dedicated himself to their pursuit: namely, the areas of politics, literature and religion. Indeed, in the year that “W.D.” was written, he complained to Matty: “Perhaps I have too long halted between two professions, a poor author and a poor physician”³¹ Such frustration was considerably eased, though, with the solace of his wife and children in his latter years, and his move to Cabin Hill, to which the scene of the poem now shifts. This rural Belfast

home symbolized in its appearance his relative contentment, and it was a place where “a certain morality (breathed) all around:”

As to picture its owner the spot were design'd,
Not his hand, not his purse - but his feelings, his mind;
The order, the neatness, the quiet, impress'd
On the scen'ry around, which now reign in his breast.
...
While his trees seem to triumph in sentiment too,
And wave to the town an indignant adieu!

These two lines, in fact, introduce a theme that Drennan alluded to when sending the unpublished poem to his sister:

... some lines I lately wrote on myself, which will at least
serve to show a city love for the country ...³²

Metaphorically speaking, the trees around Cabin Hill were still close enough to the city to be able to wave to it, and Drennan enjoyed the countryside as long as the city was not too far away.

Drennan moves on to express his love for his wife, his sisters, and his children, lavishing praise on each of them. Talking of his sons' education and upbringing, he

affirms his love of both learning and feeling, instructing them to combine erudition with affection. He also stresses that love of one's country should begin at home, where

The home-bred attachment most deeply impress'd,
Will make country's bare name beat a drum in the breast;

The boys will not be forced to their stations by cold parental discipline, but they will be led by example, encouraged to "speak all the truth, and to act all the right," by "the kisses of love."

The last stanza of the poem finds Drennan "at least content," if not overwhelmingly happy. The poet has put his life into humble perspective. After all, his achievements, if not exactly dazzling, were still bright:

Thus, enough in the world to know well for whom made,
And enough in the sun, for to shine in the shade;
Enough, too of life, when in children renew'd,
Its estimate made, and its end understood.

So far we have seen how the essentially moral example of his father was the driving force behind both Drennan's respect for honesty and moral rectitude in society, and his concern to apply such principles to an analysis of the motives and choices of his own life. It is not surprising that Drennan endeavored to pass on this philosophy to his own children, especially his first-born son, Thomas, named after the beloved grandfather.

Thomas was born on 24 March 1801, “promising by his first cry of Liberty to be the heir of his father’s favorite virtue.”³³ And in his touching poem³⁴ about the boy, Drennan records how he delighted to see the graces of the grandfather being reproduced in Thomas:

I saw my father pictur’d in my son;
His life, I hop’d, would glide as smooth away;
And when the calm, sequester’d course was run,
The morn and eve, might make one sabbath day.

Placid, benign, contemplative, and pure,
Such was my father, such wert thou, my child!
Thy flow’r, I hop’d, would bear his fruit mature,
Thy happy morn attain his ev’ning mild.

This poem is, however, an elegy, since the hopes that Drennan had cherished were tragically dashed with the untimely death of little Tom in 1812.³⁵

Drennan’s moralistic concerns are continued in the final area of his personal poetry, in which he dons the mantle of love poet. Female virtue and propriety are central to Drennan’s attitude towards women. A poem entitled “Verses for a Young Lady”³⁶ illustrates this fact, and is characteristically Augustan in its treatment of *affaires de coeur*. In the poem any suggestion that purely physical love could serve as the basis of the male/female relationship is redressed by Drennan’s polite insistence that “marriage of the

mind” is of more importance. The brazen homage paid by many poets in the seventeenth century to sensual union contrasts sharply with Drennan’s singing of a more moral theme:

Though Fate for some more happy swain

That faultless form design’d,

You still may grant, and I may gain,

Sweet wedlock with thy mind.

...

Fleeting the beauty, which ensnares

The love to sense confin’d:

Eternal, as itself, endures

The marriage of the mind.

This is not to suggest that Drennan despised the joys of sexual love, but certainly such joys would only be entertained by Drennan within marriage - a marriage in which the couple were both emotionally and intellectually compatible. This theme is neatly summarized in “Song,”³⁷ a short poem he had published in Joshua Edkins’ collection *Poems by Many Hands* (1801):

... her I seek who can dispense

An uniform control;

By night, supply the feast of sense,

By day, the flow of soul.

An examination of three poems Drennan wrote for his wife - namely, "To S.S. with Kotzebue's Plays,"³⁸ "To S.D. with a Ring"³⁹ and "To S.D. with a branch of sweet-briar"⁴⁰ - would suggest that she, Sarah, epitomized what he was looking for in a woman. Indeed, judging from Sarah's character as portrayed by Drennan, there seems no doubt that even the poet's paternal mentor would have approved of his son's choice of wife. Certainly the father would have agreed with the moral content of the poetry. Unlike the love poets of the previous century who tended to be fairly lewd and lascivious, Drennan's major themes in these poems are the sanctity of marriage and the praise of the homely wife.

The first of the poems was written to his (then) fiancée in 1799, the year before their marriage, and originally included in a letter to Martha, where Drennan comments: "Perhaps you need not read the lines as written for the secret ear, and written with facility."⁴¹ The poem opens with Drennan as a love-sick suitor, yearning for the company of his beloved:

No voice to praise, no darling SARAH near,
No lip of love to catch the falling tear;
No neck inclining to the soft caress,
No eye to glisten, and no hand to press;

This theme of unfulfilled desire is common to love poetry of any age, but Drennan, in accordance with eighteenth century Augustan decorum as opposed to Restoration eroticism, lays down his anticipation of union with his fiancée in respectable terms:

No mouth to meditate the matron kiss,
While the heart palpitates for nameless bliss;

The Restoration view of such decorum might be summarized in the following extract from an anonymous poem entitled “No true love between Man and Woman.”⁴²

When a Man to a Woman comes creeping and cringing
And spends his high Raptures on her Nose and her Eyes;
'Tis Priapus inspires the Talkative Engine,
And all for the sake of her lilly white Thighs.

Whether or not this expresses a cynical truth, Drennan’s poem does not admit such base confessions. What the heart palpitates for is acknowledged as blissful, but not a bliss to be described, to be put on public display - it is deliberately left nameless, emphasizing its proper private place.

Drennan’s desire for his wife is that of the legitimate husband; and the words “duty” and “law” in the following passage stress the obligations of the marriage contract, as opposed to a Mills and Boon-style romanticism:

Oh! come to him, who, in the husband’s name,
Has father’s, mother’s, sister’s, brother’s claim!
And if ’tis duty that alone can move,
The first of duties is the law of love.

These lines, which encapsulate Drennan's concept of marriage, echo the biblical charge to nubile couples to leave their respective families and cleave to their new partners; a cleaving which is to be for life:

And if attachment e'er should lose its force,
Then, Nature, break they ring, and keep the long divorce!

Drennan's exposition and celebration of the traditional view of marriage is further developed in the poem "To S.D. with a Ring," where the emphasis is placed specifically upon praise of the homespun wife. The poet uses the simple gold wedding ring, the "holy amulet," to symbolize the ideal wife, in opposition to the showy diamond as a symbol of the worldly wife:

Emblem of happiness, not bought, nor sold,
Accept this modest RING of virgin gold.
Love, in the small but perfect circle, trace,
And duty in its soft, tho' strict embrace.
Plain, precious, pure, as best becomes the wife;
Yet firm to bear the frequent rubs of life.

The wife who is perhaps outwardly attractive but inwardly shallow is exposed in the lines:

The dazzling diamond's meretricious blaze,
That hides, with glare, the anguish of a heart
By nature hard, tho' polished bright - by art.

The warm, sincere and domesticated woman is more to Drennan's liking:

More to my taste, the ornament that shows
Domestic bliss, and, without glaring glows.

Sarah seems to have measured up to Drennan's domestic standard, and we find him commenting to his sister that, "Sarah is a very neat housekeeper - cleanliness is the virtue of the body, and virtue is the cleanliness of the mind."⁴³ She certainly had to "bear the frequent rubs of life," with the loss of three of her children - the loss of her first child being particularly poignant.⁴⁴ And when Mary McNeill says that "she was an excellent wife to her introspective, over-sensitive husband,"⁴⁵ she hints at Sarah's able handling of her husband's gloomy sojourns from society. Drennan does seem to have truly loved her, and he often extols her virtues in his letters, referring not just to her practical qualities, but also, in a tone of tender love and affection, to the all-round womanly talents that she possessed. This is the theme of "To S.D. with branch of sweet-briar," a short poem written after thirteen years of married life:

How sweet, how short is beauty's power!
A passing, partial grace,

In bird, in blossom, and in flow'r,
In female form or face!

But when the flow'r pervades the tree,
The likeness is complete,
Between this fragrant shrub and thee -
For every leaf is sweet.

Despite the strict formalism of this poem, the words “fragrant” and “sweet” are just sufficient to convey an affectionate tone to the reader. Drennan’s heart and emotions are involved in all three of the poems for his wife, even if the moralistic tone and technique of the poetry tend to strangle (albeit not completely) the sentiments of authentic romance.

Given the predominant sober moralism of the poems to his wife, Drennan’s use of metaphysical imagery in “To S.S. with Kotzebue's Plays” is particularly arresting. He says:

If Earth meets Heav'n but by partaken bliss,
And Heav'n grow brighter Heav'n, when Angels kiss:

Drennan probably borrowed this idea from Emanuel Swedenberg (1688-1772), who suggested that the sexual intercourse of angels produces an incandescence (a theme also explored by W.B. Yeats in his poem “A Last Confession”⁴⁶). Holy Scripture, however,

would not admit such a speculation; and considering his biblical beliefs, Drennan's public use of such an implicitly sacrilegious image is both daring and uncharacteristic.

The above use of the word "public" is deliberate, because in contrast to the prevalent moralism of his personal poetry, Drennan's private notebooks of the 1780's contain some verses which are rather less than chaste. The following selection of limerick-like snippets serves to illustrate this point. Each of these verses (which require no introduction, insofar as the identities of the persons addressed are of no importance) is distinguished by a scatological tone and vocabulary alien to Drennan's personal poetry:

Montgomery - Montgomery

Thou dish of stale flummery

Thou lousy half-pay lieutenant

To make you a lord

'Tis but gilding a t--d

Or to make of a goose a pheasant.⁴⁷

When the Corporation came

When its mouth was dumb thro' shame

But to lengthen out the farce

Spoke to Rutland with its a-se ...⁴⁸

And then and once in the eating fit

The Duke sat down to dine,

Sat till, some say, he threw up wit,

More likely, 'twas the wine.⁴⁹

The above verses are accompanied by another which houses a note of rebuke:

Ah Drennan O Drennan

When you draw your pen on

A subject so worthless and mean

By way of excuse

For your dirty abuse

Write something that's fit to be seen.⁵⁰

One cannot be sure, however, that these private verses were in fact penned by Drennan himself. They are discussed briefly in Patrick Curley's thesis,⁵¹ where they are accepted unequivocally as Drennan's. (Curley's judgment in this area though, is decidedly suspect, not least because of his astonishingly inaccurate, and wholly unsubstantiated, assertion that Drennan wrote two versions of his famous ballad, "The Wake of William Orr." While Curley makes much of the comparison, he himself is forced to admit that the alleged prototype - published anonymously - bears no resemblance whatsoever to Drennan's finished work.) But such a degree of certainty is impossible, as the verses are unsigned, and recorded mainly in a style of handwriting very unlike that of the poet. Nevertheless, in view of their indelicate nature, the real importance of the verses surely lies in the fact that they are preserved by Drennan at all. As Curley rightly comments:

Considering the manners of the time (one thinks of Keats' use of bawdy in his slightly later letters) these verses are not unduly vulgar. What makes them noteworthy in Drennan's case is the otherwise perfect decorum of the rest of his work ...⁵²

Following the lofty moral tone of his personal poetry, these apocryphal verses demonstrate that Drennan did not always conform to the puritan in his soul.

The rigid moralism which characterizes Drennan's personal poetry is also evident to some extent in his sociological verse - i.e. those poems in which he turns the spotlight on the vanities and vices of contemporary life. In the sociological verse, however, the moral seriousness is tempered by the fact that Drennan evinces a satirical touch worthy of Swift. Here, Drennan relaxes into a lighter groove, becoming less self-conscious and more objective; less po-faced, and often quite humorous. For instance, "A Walk on the Bason at Newry,"⁵³ written in 1787 when the poet was resident in that town, is a jocular poem in the Augustan mode, deriding the foibles of middle to upper class life, the fashions and follies of the belles and the beaux. The rows of ladies parading on the Bason at Newry are:

... tied at each end with a well-puft-out beau;
Not a bow made of ribbon and lace, and all that,
But a chitterlin beau, with a head and a hat -
A hat cock'd with air, and a head cock'd with claret,

Like a well-furnish'd house, with a great empty garret.

The ladies themselves receive no mercy from Drennan, who first contrasts the natural color and beauty of a sunset with their painted countenances, and then lampoons their audaciously upholstered figures:

... nothing pointed in females is found,
But all is protuberant, swelling, and round,
Nothing turns from the touch, nothing shrinks from the sight,
But all bounces forward, and bumps into light;
Ev'n the bosom disdains to retreat from the view,
But heaves up the window, and asks, "who are you?"
O! why take such pains to be timid and tall,
When the Venus that models all beauty, is small;
And in well-guarded nakedness, strives to seem less,
It were easy to make her indecent - by dress;
But the Statue would blush to be trick'd in the ton,
With a round-about rump, and a swelling bouffon.

Drennan would seem to have modeled this poem on "Song for Ranelagh," written by the English Poet Laureate William Whitehead (1715-1785),⁵⁴ which is strikingly similar in its chiding of the ladies who promenaded around the famous Rotunda of the Earl of Ranelagh's Gardens, Chelsea.

The remarkable economy of Drennan's satire is captured in a poem entitled "To the Author of a Libel, On a Respectable Family"⁵⁵ (quoted here in full):

Such was the pow'r of hidden worth,
Within a stranger land,
A viper, which the heat brought forth,
Dropt, harmless, from the hand!

Such is the pow'r of secret spite,
That had there been apply'd
To thee the same envenom'd bite,
The serpent must have died!

The contrast in this poem between the personality involved in stanza one and that of stanza two throws into sharp relief the theme of "hidden worth" (moral fiber) versus "secret spite" (lack of moral fiber). The reference in stanza one must be to the viper which failed to harm the Apostle Paul.⁵⁶ The personage of stanza two, then, is measured against the Christian standard, and fares miserably by the comparison. Throughout his sociological poetry, Drennan holds up this standard of biblical morality, which in turn provides him with the license to castigate the social evils of his day. The disgruntled but basically passive poet of the personal verse becomes an energetic satirist of the contemporary scene. But the satire was not to become an excuse for mere spite. For

instance, in a poem entitled “Lines, Addressed To the Author of a Libel on the Players,”⁵⁷ Drennan rebukes the author for his vicious attack on “the Players:”

Without one manly, gen’rous aim,
Thine, is an effervescent fame:
Pungent, and volatile, and smart,
Distill’d from vitriol of the heart
...
Such venom in the early page,
What will the virus be in age?

Drennan’s solution to the poet’s “illness” is that he should turn from his poisonous satire, “cast off (his) wreath of Aconite,” and cultivate “the verse of taste and truth.” It was important to Drennan that satire should be balanced with a delicate sense of didacticism. He would have viewed his own satirical themes not as examples of tasteless, negative, or purely spiteful bombast, but as a form of moral corrective. This theme of moral judgment and correction, as applied by Drennan to different subjects, permeates the bulk of his sociological poetry.

In the poems entitled “To J.C., who said, “I care not what the crowd may think,”⁵⁸ and “The Worm of the Still,”⁵⁹ Drennan comments upon two problems which affected the lower orders of his day: poverty and drink. The first poem was written in response to another published in the *Belfast Newsletter* of September 1788, entitled “Mr Gratitude to Poverty,”⁶⁰ the theme being based upon the scripture: “It is easier for a camel to go

through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”⁶¹ The writer states his intentions to:

... write of POVERTY and Want
And scorn what gold and wealth can grant,
Nor seek their arts to please.

But the writer proceeds to sing rather naively and unfeelingly of poverty being “Sweet,” and loses track of his more realistic theme which is stated in the following lines:

Hate not what wealth you cannot gain;
Admit CONTENT to form thy train;
This makes true happiness ...

The lesson of the scripture verse is not that one should covet “Sweet Poverty,” but that one should avoid the worship of Mammon. Accordingly, Drennan rounded on the writer in a poem laced with satire, humor, and one of the greatest of eighteenth century attributes, common sense:

The crowd, my friend, have common sense,
They feel the pow’r of pounds and pence;
And as they feel, they prize:
For wealth, when rightly understood,

Is the best blessing of the good,
The wisdom of the wise.

He points out the harsh realities of poverty, which make it far from “sweet:”

... (the) cradl'd child unconscious sleeps,
But woe for her who wakes and weeps,
The mother and the wife.

And Drennan further demonstrates a more faithful exegesis of the scriptural text:

Whate'er the cynic may pretend,
Money, a means, but not an end,
 Is Happiness below
Oh! for a mine of gold to give,
To live, and to make others live,
 And clear the world of woe.

Drennan actually omitted a verse from the poem when publishing it years later in *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose*. The verse in question strongly suggests that he knew the author of “To Poverty,” even though the poem was submitted under the pseudonym “Cincinnatus”:

'Tis not to act the volunteer,
When one is frighten'd out of fear,
An Irish Cincinnatus;
And then in ragged pride, retire
To meet his heart's supreme desire;
His pig, and his potatoes.

Thus Drennan lambasts the writer, not simply for his (im)moral attitude to poverty, but also for the apparent inconsistency of his politics after the momentous events of 1782.⁶² Drennan's poem "The Worm of the Still" tackles an evil which has often made the rich poor, and the poor yet the poorer - drunkenness:

I have found what the learn'd seem'd so puzzled to tell
The true shape of the Devil, and where is his Hell;
Into serpents, of old, crept the Author of Ill,
But Satan works now as a Worm of the Still.
...
Mark that mother, that monster, that shame, and that curse!
See the child hang dead drunk at the breast of its nurse!
As it drops from her arm, mark her stupify'd stare!
Then she wakes with a yell, and a shriek of despair.

Drennan was not a total abstainer himself, but he shunned excess in drinking habits. The genesis of this poem can be traced to the poet's comments on drunkenness in a letter to Martha in the year of 1796, where he records his belief "that Sunday in the Catholic part of this country is much the most sinful day of the week,"⁶³ adding that the lower orders of society were being kept in a state of perpetual intoxication. The poem appeared first in the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* in 1809, and in a subsequent issue of that same magazine (March 1810), Drennan elaborated upon the theme of intemperance:

...(drunkenness) is not exclusively the vice of the poor, many of the higher and middle ranks show them a bad example, and in such a case have no right to complain of the brawls of the poor in the street and in the whiskey shops, while they themselves are guilty of intemperance though in a more private manner.⁶⁴

He also went on to lament the intemperate nature of the work of one of the eighteenth century's most celebrated literary sons:

Hector MacNeill (a Scottish bard), ... reproves a brother poet who,
with all his genius corrupted himself, and debauched his countrymen
by his licentious songs,

"Robin Burns in many a ditty,
Loudly sings in whiskey's praise,
Sweet his song! the mair's the pity

E'er yet pree'd or e'er will taste,
Brewed in hell's black Pandemonia;
Whiskey's ills will scaith her maist!"

These lines applied to Ireland are no less forcibly expressive.⁶⁵

This is a perfect example of Drennan's moral philosophy: no amount of poetic genius could excuse the public use of immoral themes.

Having brought his searching social commentary to bear upon the vices of the lower orders, Drennan turned his attention to members of the professional classes. And the one profession about which he could speak with authority would have been that of his own particular calling, the medical profession. He wrote a poem while practicing in Newry entitled "An Original Letter"⁶⁶ with the sub-title "From Mr --- Organist at Armagh, to Mr ---, At Newry, Relative to the Sieur Palme." The poem was eventually printed in *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose*, but it was included initially in a letter to Martha, dated the 8th of September, 1783. The inspiration for the poem was explained to Martha in the following terms:

I would be very glad if you, or any person to whom you would apply,
could get the enclosed printed off and sent under cover to me in Newry ...
I and Kennedy have been threatened by the Sieur Palme in the newspaper
here, for injurious slanders on his character, and I have reason to believe
that Langdon an organist at Armagh was a talebearer between us -
I wish to create a laugh against this foolish fellow, but I do not care to risque

sending such a thing to the Printer here who is a disciple and patient of Palme's -...⁶⁷

Other sections of Drennan's correspondence from Newry would seem to suggest that the "Sieur Palme" was the poet's name for a reasonably successful Catholic doctor, who was practicing in the vicinity of that town at the same time as Drennan himself. "Kennedy" is certainly a reference to a certain Dr. Kennedy, who would also seem to have been something of a rival to Drennan in Newry early in 1783, but they appear to have joined forces at the end of that year after both were attacked by the Sieur Palme. In the poem, Drennan turns the tables on the tale bearer, putting into his mouth all of the "injurious slanders" against the Sieur Palme and his practices that presumably had been attributed to Drennan and Kennedy by the said Mr. Langdon. It is safe to assume that by denouncing the Sieur Palme, Drennan was hitting out against certain new medical practices and machinery (which he believed to be dubious), and against the dishonest behavior of many doctors who prolonged, as it were, the people's illnesses so as to increase their own fees for providing treatment. Electric shocks seem to have formed part of the new medical techniques:

At last, from much thinking on what I had read,
A deluge of dropsy came into my head;
And then it became my desire and ambition,
To receive a few strokes from this SHOCKING physician.
...
Then he pour'd out some liquid upon my bare scull,

While I roar'd all the time, like the Phalaris Bull:
Next, towards his electric machine was I led,
And large drops of fire fell, like rain, on my head;
Which made me re-bellow, with exquisite pain,
And the water to bubble and boil in my brain:

The Sieur's attack on the patient's pocket is no less aggressive. The unflattering reference to "Jesuit" in the following lines reflects Drennan's disappointment that relatively few Catholics consulted him during his medical career, preferring to stick to their co-religionists, whom he felt were neither always the most honest or the most qualified:⁶⁸

With a wink at his wife and a Jesuit grin,
He caught hold of my hand, and he welcom'd me in;
My hand its contraction no longer could hold,
But relax'd at his touch, and, in dropt the gold.

The Sieur's concentration on financial remuneration is further exposed, and resoundingly resisted, at the end of the poem:

"And now, Sir," said he, "I will cure your disease,
In but twenty more visits - and twenty more fees."
"Sir", said I, "my disease is a most cursed evil,
But to die of the Doctor, is worse than the Devil;"

...

Then I caught up my hat, and my wig, in a fury,

And cursing all quacks, I departed from Newry.

Drennan's poem entitled "A Trio"⁶⁹ is a platform for his poetical opinions upon another profession, the clergy. The poem contains character sketches of three men, Joseph Pollock, William Campbell, and Bishop Percy of Dromore. The first person fares quite well under Drennan's critical gaze; the second suffers to some extent; but it is the third who bears the brunt of Drennan's satirical invective. The second and third characters were both episcopal clergymen. As a Dissenter, Drennan had deeply held beliefs regarding the independence of Church and State. And, because of his own father's example, he also demanded high standards of personal character in a Christian minister. In this poem, Drennan demonstrates, amongst other things, his scant regard for several aspects of episcopacy, insinuating that an upstanding minister should be:

No prancing, curvetting, episcopal pony,

No desk petit-maitre, no church macaroni,

With his curl carv'd as stiff as the top of the crozier,

And manners more pliant and loose than an osier;

The main charge brought against William Campbell, the Curate of Newry at the time, centers on his stout defense of the marriage of Church and State:

But Will would uphold both the Church and the State!
On all who dare shake that convenient alliance,
He bends his black brows, and he scowls a defiance;
Yet forgets, while he thunders against reformation,
That what is establishment, WAS innovation.

While the (seemingly) anonymous personage of the third character stands accused (along with his “good fellows”) of being rather less than sincere in his displays of courtly manners and polite graces:

And for taste let me call on our courtly Collector,
Not the King of his company - but the protector;
Who, with easy hilarity, knows how to sit
In a family compact with wisdom and wit.
...
No collector of medals or fossils so fine;
He gathers good fellows around his good wine
No collector of shells, or of stuff'd alligators,
But of two-legg'd, unfeather'd, erect, mutton-eaters;
That join, heart in hand, to drive round the decanter,
While the Bishop hob-nobs with the lowly Dissenter.

Furthermore, his political character is rather too flexible to earn either respect or trust from Drennan:

Here, the puddle of party ne'er rises in riot,
But the oil of urbanity keeps the waves of quiet;
Neither faction nor feud his good-humour espouses,
He's the happy Mercutio, who "curses both houses!"

The third character is only anonymous insofar as his initials, unlike those of the other two figures, are not given in the poem. However, the clear reference to "Bishop" and his "family compact with wisdom and wit" makes it clear that Drennan is indeed satirizing the pretensions of the conservative and literary coterie of Bishop Percy of Dromore.⁷⁰

The following quatrain from "A Trio" is a powerful summary of Drennan's poetical indictment of corruption in the professions:

True politeness, like sense, is begotten, not made,
But all our professions smell strong of a trade,
All vocation is craft, both the black and the scarlet,
The doctor, the pleader, the judge, and the harlot.

One is hardly meant to suppose that the dubious "profession" of the harlot is being exalted to the standard of the other three: rather, they are scathingly reduced to her ignominious level.

Drennan raises his sights from the lower orders and the professions to take aim at the upper echelons of society: among his targets are prominent members of the aristocracy and the political establishment. Drennan strikes at the complacent self-regard of this realm of society in a bold poem entitled “Juvenal, Eighth Satire, An Imitation:”⁷¹

Say, ye who perch on lofty pedigree,
What fruit is gather'd from the parchment tree?
Broad as it spreads, and tow'ring to the skies,
From root plebian its first glories rise;
What then avails, when rightly understood,
The boast of ancestry, the pride of blood?

Clearly, the poet does not believe that an inherited title in itself makes anyone worthy of honor or respect. Indeed, the ancestry attached to the title is often less than noble:

Thus far for him, the proud inflated lord,
With father concubin'd, and mother whor'd!
In all so high in rank, or man, or woman;
No sense so rare, as what they call the common.
Scorning that level, they ascend the skies,
Like the puff'd bag, whose lightness makes it rise;
Titles and arms the varnish'd silk may bear,
Within - 'tis nought but pestilential air.

Drennan urges the nobility to turn from their attachment to the posthumous fame of their ancestors, towards the establishment of their own reputations:

Turn from the past, and bring thy honours home -

Thyself the ancestor, for times to come.

Using a horrifyingly vivid image of parasitism, he repudiates the claim of one who:

From some dried mummy draws his noble claim,

Snuffs up the foetor, and believes it fame.

Having witnessed Drennan's constant insistence on moral fiber throughout both his personal and sociological poetry, it is not surprising that he should contrast such a fetid conception of fame with his own peculiar brand of "honest fame" - which he does in the most uncompromising of terms:

Base born such men, though fill'd with regal blood,

The truly noble are the truly good;

And he whose morals through his manners shine,

May boast himself of the Milesian line

...

Office and rank are duties of the mind ...

Drennan's sardonic judgements, however, ought not to give us the impression that he was some kind of self-righteous and arrogant prig. For, as we have seen in the personal poetry, he himself takes a very realistic view of his own character, his pride and prejudices, his vanity and ambitions, and his search and liking for fame, albeit "honest fame." He also enjoyed receiving the plaudits of his peers. While studying at Edinburgh in 1778, he admitted to his sister:

Do you know that I do not feel the same sick'ning longings to return home that I used to do - what can be the reason? I fear it is somewhat owing to Pride - I feel myself happy here because I am received in the companies I go into with pleasure ...⁷²

And ten years later, he confessed, in an epistle to Dr. William Bruce, that he himself was apt to indulge in a kind of back-slapping coterie:

I write now most frequently to King who is an agreeable man -
I am garrulous to him - I have the pleasure of retailing my witticisms, my rhymes, my fondnesses, and he in his way, flatters me in return ...
we go drink tea and play whist with some of the ladies and thus I
scate (sic) along this life smoothly, too smoothly for a man -
I am a mighty Mite in Newry - ...⁷³

His attendance at the theatre was part of Drennan's skating along life. Both he and Matty were keen theatre-goers, considerable reference to this habit being recorded in their letters to one another. Martha not only went out to the theater, but, as was the custom of the day, also enjoyed staging private theatrical performances, either in her own house, or in that of one of her social circle. Drennan was called upon to provide poetical prologues to some of their performances, one such piece, entitled "Prologue to Douglas, Performed by a Private Company," appeared in *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose*.⁷⁴ The opening lines are worthy of a better poem:

Chill'd to the heart, expires the wasted year -
I hope December has no influence here;

Drennan proceeds to nominate simplicity, honesty and enthusiasm as essential elements of good theatre:

We boast our ignorance of scenic art,
To con - a feeling, or rehearse - a start;
To roll from pit to box the clock-work eye,
And lift both arms to storm the canvas sky;
...
This is to hold the mirror up - to art;
To get by rote, is not to get - by heart;
"To get by heart" - an honest phrase, though plain,

For what you do not feel, O! never hope to feign!

Later he penned a *hommage* entitled “Addressed to Mrs. Siddons”⁷⁵ - the lady in question being a famous actress, whose performances were much admired by the poet and his sister. (Indeed Martha seems to have met her socially on several occasions.) Theatre provided both catharsis and escapism for Drennan. Through his identification with the actress and her art, he could be soothed and enchanted:

In Thee, the broken heart finds sweet relief,
And wills its suffering with ideal grief;
Lost to the ills of life, it leaves behind
Corroding care, and quarrel of the mind;

Drennan’s love of the theatre draws attention to just one of the differences of attitude between New Light Presbyterianism and Orthodox Presbyterianism. John Hewitt notes that “the Presbyterian code had little place for plays or playactors,”⁷⁶ but this prejudice existed much more amongst the Orthodox adherents than the free-thinking aesthetes of the New Light persuasion.

Drennan’s religious poems, that is to say, his hymns, are typical of the school of Unitarian hymnology which blossomed during the mid-eighteenth century with the rise of Arianism amongst previously Trinitarian congregations. Given the theological divergence between the New Light and Old Light denominations (especially regarding the doctrine of the

Trinity), there was a need within the Unitarian congregations for new hymns. The subjects and themes of traditional hymns used in Orthodox Presbyterian denominations, both in Ireland and elsewhere, were steeped in the Reformed doctrine of the triune God, often allied to a robust Evangelical proclamation of the gospel. Clearly a liberal and Unitarian congregation needed hymns that would express its own heterodox beliefs.

Julian's Dictionary of Hymnology⁷⁷ records how Unitarian congregations initially circumvented this problem by simply taking Orthodox hymns and editing the theological content to suit their own purposes. This was reasonably satisfactory, except for the authors of the hymns and paraphrasers of psalms, who often had to stomach their work being changed almost out of all recognition, and by a hand with no regard for the maintenance of literary merit. (This re-arrangement of hymns, though, was not solely a Unitarian practice, since the Orthodox / Evangelical camp also altered hymns to suit their Arminian or Calvinistic tenets.) However, in his discussion of Irish hymnology, Julian mentions one book which was specially produced for the Unitarian Presbyterians:

The Presbyterians throughout Ireland have usually adhered to the use of the Scottish Psalter. Individual efforts have, however, been made from time to time to supply separate congregations with hymn books, as in the case of *A Selection of Psalms and Hymns for the Use of the Presbytery of Antrim and the Congregation of Strand Street, Dublin, Belfast, 1818.*⁷⁸

This volume was a much better attempt to meet the needs of the Unitarian congregations and contained many original compositions from their own members. At least one of

Drennan's father's hymns⁷⁹ is published in the book, alongside three (in abridged form) by Drennan himself, and five by William Hamilton Drummond. Julian suggests that the latter had edited this selection,⁸⁰ and this seems likely considering the fact that Drummond was ministering to the Strand Street congregation in 1818.

Drennan was clearly performing a much needed service for his chosen denomination by employing his poetical skills in the field of Unitarian hymnology. It was not an uncommon practice in the eighteenth century for poets to include hymns among their work. Moreover, the genre was a logical medium for an outworking of Drennan's faith and his biblically based moral code. Drennan's hymns, however, seem to have resulted from other areas of inspiration. A letter, written to Matty on 24 August 1804, reveals the tripartite invocation to Drennan's religious muse:

I recommend you to read Mr Cowper's Life by Hayley in three volumes, the last lately published, as his letters and small poetry are excellent - ... They are excellent Sunday reading - I try'd my hand last Sunday upon two hymns, one of which I shall fill up the paper with, and the other I shall keep for Tom - This would serve for a charity sermon, if wanted -⁸¹

First, Drennan was a great admirer of William Cowper, whose Olney Hymns, co-written with the reformed slave-trader John Newton, are well known. Drennan's immersion in the Cowper biography seems to be one reason for his own hymn-writing. Second, he alludes to the fact that he is keeping back one of his hymns for Thomas, his son. Torn was

staying with Matty in Belfast at this time, and Drennan sent Matty a hymn with nine verses, of which the following is representative:

And softer than the softest strain
Of music to the ear,
The placid joy we give and gain,
By gratitude sincere.⁸²

Despite the boy's tender age, the hymn was accompanied by the instruction: "Make Tom (if he has any memory) to try to get the following hymn by heart." No wonder that the very next letter from Matty finished laconically with the postscript: "Your verses are good - so is Tom's memory, surely these will not impress a three year old."⁸³ Drennan had also previously commented to Matty: "I find Thomas is like to acquire a taste for Watt's hymns and he could not learn better -"⁸⁴ Accordingly, Drennan was keen to put into his son's mind an appreciation of poetry, and of poetry of moral content, and this desire prompted him to produce his own hymns. Third, and finally, Drennan was also aware of the popularity of the charity sermon in his own denomination, and he knew that the subjects and themes of his hymns could complement such a discourse, if required.⁸⁵

While some of Drennan's hymns are contained in his letters to Matty, a full quota of them, in Drennan's own handwriting (and showing very minor changes from the published versions), can be found in his manuscript material in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland. The hymns were first published in the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, 1808. Two years later, they appeared in the Reverend Robert Aspland of Hackney's

collection entitled, *A Selection of Psalms and Hymns for Unitarian Worship*, which, according to Julian's Dictionary of Hymnology, was the first instance of the term "Unitarian" being seen on the front page of a hymn book - and this at a time when the belief in such a doctrine was still a penal offence.⁸⁶ Drennan's hymns then appeared in *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose*, 1815, and in *Glendalloch and Other Poems*, in 1859. The verses which follow are taken from the seven hymns published in *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose*, 1815, where they are simply numbered from I to VII.

John Hewitt has correctly noted that Drennan's hymns "strike a resonant note, in which their tolerant clarity utterly transcends the customary jiggling of tread-bare texts."⁸⁷ This tone of "tolerant clarity" is due mainly to the benevolent themes that distinguish all the hymns. Drennan himself reveled in the idea of brotherly love, and enthusiastically embraced the Yuletide spirit of generosity:

And no time of the year appears better suited for the commemoration of Christ,
than that which most urgently calls for the practical display of his
characteristic excellence, CHARITY. Christ is love.⁸⁸

Throughout the hymns there is a conspicuous absence of "the customary jiggling of thread-bare texts." Indeed the only piece that actually expounds upon a direct scriptural text is Hymn V, the opening words of which are those uttered by Solomon after the building of the Temple.⁸⁹ Despite its brevity, a mere three verses, this is perhaps the best of Drennan's songs of worship, and neatly incorporates the biblical teaching that the

Almighty cannot be bound by anything or anyone, yet voluntarily chooses to dwell in His humble people:

The Heav'n of Heav'ns cannot contain

The Universal Lord;

Yet He, in humble hearts, will deign

To dwell, and be ador'd.

Although Drennan's hymns do not simply re-jig "thread-bare texts," they do, nevertheless, draw their main themes from a number of scriptural tenets, notably, I Corinthians 13 v 3:

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three;

but the greatest of these is charity.

and Mark 12vs 29-31:

Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

and James 2 v 20:

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

The poet opens Hymn III by declaring the greatness of charity:

O sweeter than the fragrant flow'r,
At ev'ning's dewy close,
The will, united with the pow'r,
To succour human woes!

The same hymn concludes with an exhortation to "love thy neighbour:"

...

First daughter to the love of God,
Is Charity to Man.

'Tis he, who scatters blessings round,
Adores his Maker best;
His walk through life is mercy-crown'd,
His bed of death is blest.

And, in Hymn VI Drennan again accentuates the Christian principle of charity to one's fellow-man, be he near or far:

More perfect bond, the Christian plan
Attaches soul to soul;
Our neighbour is the suffering man,
Though at the farthest pole.

Finally, at the close of Hymn II, the poet paraphrases the warning from James' epistle:

But Charity itself may fail,
Which does not active prove;
Nor will the prayer of Faith avail,
Without the works of Love.

Drennan weaves this insistence on the Christian duties throughout his hymns. He stresses the need for practical Christianity, viewing a person's charitable works as a measure of their love of both God and man.

The predominant themes of practical Christianity would not, in and of themselves, distinguish Drennan's hymns as New Light rather than Old Light. (In any event, it could be said that there is little to separate their Christianity from basic humanitarianism.) Rather, it is the absence of an Evangelical proclamation of the Word which points up a major difference between his hymns and those of the Old Light creed. Martin Luther once

described the Epistle of James as “a right strawy epistle ... no evangelical manner about it;”⁹⁰ and indeed Old Light adherents might well have made the same criticism of Drennan’s hymns. The emphasis on practical Christianity found in the Epistle of James is there to encourage Christians to live out their Christianity - to be doers, and not just hearers, of the Word. This explains the comparative absence of the *Kerygma*, the proclamation of the gospel message. Correspondingly, it could be argued that Drennan’s hymns were themselves written expressly with an eye to the charity sermon, as opposed to the Evangelistic meeting. In truth, however, the lack of gospel content in his religious verse stemmed not so much from any intention on the part of the poet to stress the practical above the spiritual, but rather from his New Light distrust of Evangelicalism in general. The Evangelical faith, especially that of the Methodists, was too exclusive and intolerant for Drennan; and he questioned the authenticity of the conversion experience which Old Light/Evangelical hymnology proclaimed, as in John Newton’s famous opening verse:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found:
Was blind, but now I see.⁹¹

The rationale behind Drennan’s non-acceptance of the Evangelical theory of conversion is perhaps best, and most subtly, shown in a pamphlet he wrote in defense of the Dissenters:

And Paul who formerly was a violent stickler for the established church and persecuted the dissenters, yet when he was convinced of the super-excellence of their principles, he resolutely defended them against the united attacks of church and state ...⁹²

However, this ultra-rationalistic portrayal of the Apostle's change of heart seems much less faithful to the biblical account of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, than the Evangelical version of that same event. For his part, Drennan attributed the dramatic conversion experience that accompanied much of the Evangelical preaching of his own day to the techniques of the preachers. Two lines from Hymn II hint at this opinion:

And he who speaks in Mercy's name,
No fiction needs, nor art;

It was, according to Drennan, the Methodists who dealt most in such make-believe:

... these various missions, of a nature often captivating by their eccentricity, tickling the imagination, rather than teaching the heart ...⁹³

In the Preface to *A Selection of Psalms and Hymns for the Use of the Presbytery of Antrim and the Congregation of Strand Street, Dublin*, the following commentary is given:

Some doctrines are so offensive to the societies, for whose use

this compilation is principally intended, that they are carefully avoided ... This selection may, therefore, be thought defective, but it will not disgust by a pertinacious obtrusion of doctrine.⁹⁴

Certainly the hymns contained in the book are not saturated in “a pertinacious obtrusion of doctrine.” However, there are identifiable doctrines in these hymns, including those of Drennan: and the doctrines in question are no less unyielding for being Unitarian and liberal, rather than Trinitarian and Reformed.

Drennan’s Unitarian/liberal doctrines highlight further differences between the New Light and the Old Light Presbyterian hymnody. As with his rejection of Evangelicalism, it is not what is said in the hymns, but rather what is left unsaid, that points to a Unitarian subtext. There is, for example, no reference in any of Drennan’s hymns to the Deity of Christ - a mainstay of Orthodox hymnology. In fact, his only mention of Christ at all comes in the first verse of Hymn I:

O Thou, who, from thy Heav’n of Love,
To man in mercy came,
And took, descending from above,
His nature and his name;

Here the poet emphasizes the human rather than the divine character of Jesus. The Trinitarian riposte could be summarized in the following lines taken from Cecil F. Alexander’s famous hymn, beginning “Once in royal David's city ...”:

He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,⁹⁵

Drennan was content to exalt a Christ who was a paragon of morality and human virtue, as opposed to the God-Man of Orthodox belief:

I like the morality of the gospel so well, that I have not the least occasion for the supplementary proof of miracle - perhaps the ignorant and stupid may by this means be alarmed into belief and chilled into conviction and for this purpose perhaps they were from time to time invented, after the first set had been palmed upon the pure moralist long after his Death; that such a system of Morals should be promulgated by such a man is not to me at all miraculous but only shows what the simple sweetness of human nature can attain to when not agitated with the pride of the Schools or the turbulence of ambition and self-interest and I should more readily hope for such morality from a carpenter's son than from Plato in the Portico, or Aristotle in the Court of Alexander.⁹⁶

This extract shows the full extent of Drennan's New Light liberalism. Not only does Drennan cast doubt on both the authenticity of the miracles and Divinity of Christ Himself, but his optimistic faith in "the simple sweetness of human nature" also

contradicts the Orthodox teaching about the total depravity of mankind after the Fall. The doctrine of original sin was clearly not one which he could readily endorse, and this is further apparent in the opening verses of Hymn II:

Why does the will of Heav'n ordain

A world so mix'd with woe?

Why pour down want, disease, and pain,

On wretched men below?

It was the will of God to leave

These ills for man to mend,

Nor let affliction pass the grave,

Before it found a friend.

Here Drennan promotes the rather woolly idea that God left affliction in the world to inspire man to charity and works of love: Orthodoxy would reply that man's sin is responsible for his woes - woes which, in turn, prove that he is under the judgment of God, because of sin.

Thus, in Pelagian fashion, Drennan tended to credit man with a character more noble than that accepted by Presbyterian Orthodoxy. Moreover, in true liberal and Enlightenment tradition, he stressed not only the primacy of man, but also that of Nature.

In Hymn VII he declares:

“Let all the creatures of this earth
Or hail thy smile, or dread thy frown!”
Nature exclaim’d, when man had birth,
And on his cradle plac’d her crown.

“This globe be subject to thy tread,
Yon stars to thy command;
Be thine the all-contriving head,
And all-performing hand!” -

So Nature spoke ...

Poetic license notwithstanding, Orthodox opinion would regard this personification of Nature as a heretical deification: according to Scripture, it was God who made both Nature and man, and it was He who spoke to man, giving him dominion over natural things.⁹⁷

Evidence of Drennan’s non-Evangelicalism and Unitarian liberalism, can also be seen in three poems, which, if outside the strict bounds of his overtly religious verse, are nevertheless heavily influenced by his religious principles.

Firstly, in four lines taken from an epitaph entitled “In Memory of John Campbell”⁹⁸ (written in 1804 - the same year that he began writing hymns), Drennan manages to summarize the basic themes of practical Christianity that run throughout his

Hymns, while also hinting at his dislike of fervent Evangelicalism. Talking of John Campbell, a Belfast merchant, he says:

Sparing in words, and speaking in the deed,
No narrow sect pal'd in his Christian creed.
Deed without show, his evangelic plan,
He worship'd God, by doing good to man.

Secondly, in a translation entitled "Fragment of Sophocles,"⁹⁹ the opening couplet authoritatively states that:

There is One God, and there is only One;
The world he made must worship Him alone, ...

Given Drennan's Unitarian beliefs, it is safe to assume that he would have interpreted such sentiments from a Unitarian perspective, thereby denying the Deity of Christ. Finally, Drennan's theological liberalism manifests itself once again in a short poem about William Cowper, entitled "On the Posthumous Volume of Cowper's Works,"¹⁰⁰ in which he also displays a fraternal affection for his more celebrated fellow-poet:

Cowper! were Palestine thy place of birth,
When Christ arose on a benighted earth,
The loved disciple, chosen from the rest,

Thou would'st have leaned upon the Saviour's breast;
And the same word which bade the tempest cease,
To thee, poor sinless sufferer, whispered peace!

Cowper was an Evangelical of Calvinist stamp, who, by dwelling morbidly on the Orthodox teaching of the total depravity of the human heart, came to see himself as selected by God for a special and irrevocable damnation. With respect to Cowper's predicament, the theology implied in the phrase "poor sinless sufferer" signals the difference between Drennan's doctrinal liberalism and the Orthodox/Evangelical position. Whereas Drennan, in desiring to soothe the poet's mind, would have turned Cowper's attention away from the concept of man's inherent sinfulness, the Orthodox adherent, while recognising Cowper's conviction of the sinfulness of his heart, would have sought to give a balanced view of this problem by stressing the assurance of salvation from the penalty of sin through faith in the redemption accomplished by Christ.

Overall, Drennan's religious verse provides us with a valuable poetic insight into the particular theological bedrock of his New Light Presbyterian denomination. More importantly though, the recurrent themes of the hymns, with their insistence on practical Christianity, perfectly exemplify Drennan's penchant for using poetry as a vehicle for moral instruction. Such didacticism fits naturally within the medium of religious poetry, but, as we have seen, Drennan's passion for moral rectitude also permeates his political, personal, and sociological verse. Ultimately, however, it is the Christian principles enshrined in the religious poetry which represent the *sine qua non* of all Drennan's moral judgements. And it was indeed these judgements that were most sorely tested when the

poet of Presbytery, attempting to maintain an ethical stance, found himself alone in the political arena.

Notes

1. Patrick Curley, "William Drennan and the young Samuel Ferguson: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Union in Ulster Poetry between 1778 and 1848", Ph.D. diss., (Queen's University, Belfast, 1987), 3.
2. Curley, "William Drennan and the young Samuel Ferguson", 6.
3. Curley, "William Drennan and the young Samuel Ferguson", 4.
4. Curley, "William Drennan and the young Samuel Ferguson", 68.
5. Ted Hughes in his 'Afterword' to *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*; taken from Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations, Selected Prose 1968-1978* (Faber and Faber, 1980), 91.
6. William Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose* (Belfast, 1815), 79f.
7. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 1f.
8. Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast (hereafter PRONI), D531/6, 440.
9. PRONI, D531/6, 440.
10. "Let all the creatures of this earth," *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Vol. XI (August, 1813), 166; also, Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 140.
11. William Drennan, *Glendalloch and Other Poems* (Belfast, 1859), 63-64.
12. PRONI, T 765/2/9, Letter 1216, M. McTier to Drennan, 2 February, 1806.
13. Exodus 13:21.
14. Drennan, *Glendalloch*, 64.
15. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 25-29.
16. Psalm 10.
17. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 20-22.

18. *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Vol. I (1808), 43-44.
19. PRONI, T 765/2/4, Letter 601, Drennan to M. McTier, 14 March, 1796.
20. PRONI, D 531/7 (2/16), 521.
21. PRONI, D 531/7 (2/16), 522.
22. PRONI, D 531/7 (2/16), 521.
23. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 123-127.
24. PRONI, T 765/2/9, Letter 1234, Drennan to M. McTier, 24 March, 1806.
25. See PRONI, T 765/2/5, Letter 638, Drennan to M. McTier, 5 November, 1796.
26. PRONI, T 765/2/2, Letter 222, M. McTier to Drennan, 1786.
27. PRONI, T 765/2/5, Letter 638, Drennan to M. McTier, 5 November, 1796.
28. For example, in Lady Sydney Morgan's, *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys: A National Tale*, (Paris, 1828), Vol. III, p. 75, she reports that Drennan might have passed, in appearance, "for the demure minister of some remote village-congregation of the Scotch kirk"
29. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 51-54.
30. D 553/46, Drennan to Reverend William Bruce, August, 1785.
31. PRONI, T 765/2/9, Letter 1232, Drennan to M. McTier, 21 March, 1806.
32. PRONI, Letter 1268, Drennan to M. McTier, 1 August, 1806.
33. PRONI, T 765/2/7, Letter 907, Drennan to M. McTier, March, 1806.
34. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 150-151.
35. See Mary McNeill, *Little Tom Drennan* (Dublin, 1962), for a more detailed account of Drennan's relationship with his son.
36. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 23-24.
37. Joshua Edkins, *A Collection of Poems, by Many Hands* (Dublin, 1801), 110.
38. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 117-118.
39. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 119.
40. Drennan, *Glendaloch*, 57.

41. PRONI, T 765/2/6, Letter 792, Drennan to M. McTier, 14 October, 1799.
42. Harold Love, ed., *The Penguin Book of Restoration Verse* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 164-166.
43. PRONI, T 765/2/6, Letter 872, Drennan to M. McTier, 17 September, 1800.
44. For a full account of this tragedy, see Mary McNeill, *Little Tom Drennan* (Dublin, 1962).
45. McNeill, *Little Tom Drennan*, 65.
46. See Colin Meir, *The Ballads and Songs of W. B. Yeats* (London and New York, 1974), 112.
47. PRONI, D 531/8/35, 1082.
48. PRONI, D 531/8/22, 1051.
49. PRONI, D 531/8/35, 1082.
50. PRONI, D 531/8/35, 1082.
51. Curley, "William Drennan and the young Samuel Ferguson", 34f.
52. Curley, "William Drennan and the young Samuel Ferguson", 36.
53. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 55-59.
54. Denis Davison, ed., *The Penguin Book of Eighteenth-Century English Verse* (Harmondsworth, 1975), 21-22.
55. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 128.
56. Acts 28:3-5.
57. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 82-83.
58. First published in *Belfast News Letter*, 19 September, 1788; Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 45-47.
59. *Belfast News Letter*, 19 September, 1788, 10-11.
60. *Belfast News Letter*, 9 September, 1788.
61. Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25.
62. Cincinnatus may well have been Thomas Stott (1755-1829), one of Bishop Percy of Dromore's literary coterie. A poem, signed "S of Dromore," and entitled "An Ode to Wealth," follows "To J.C." in the *BNL* of the following week. This is most probably Stott's reply to

- Drennan. Also, John Hewitt points out that Drennan's *BMM* attacked Stott “variously for his bad poetry, his plagiarism, his alleged sycophancy and his apostasy to the cause of Irish freedom” (John Hewitt, “Ulster Poets 1800-1870,” 32.). Further, Hewitt quotes the *BMM* of 1812 as saying, “This poet (Stott) formerly ranked in the numerous lists of the friends of liberty - he once more contently wears his chains.”
63. PRONI, T 765/2/4, Letter 624, Drennan to M. McTier, 12 August, 1796.
 64. *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Vol. IV (March, 1810), 227.
 65. *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Vol. IV (March, 1810), 227.
 66. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 51-54.
 67. PRONI, T 765/2/1, Letter 108, Drennan to M. McTier, 8 September, 1783,
 68. See, e.g., PRONI, T 765/2/3, Letter 439, Drennan to S. McTier, 1 September 1793. In this letter, Drennan complains that though he has “suffered very considerably” for their cause, they (the Catholics), “have never shown the least disposition to befriend me in my profession; I never received more than a single guinea from a Catholic in my life -”
 69. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 74-78.
 70. William Hamilton Drummond was a member of Percy's group. Indeed, Percy used his influence to secure for Drummond an honorary doctorate in divinity from Marischal College, Aberdeen. Drennan, however, could be ruthless with Dromore pretensions, especially in the columns of the *BMM*. Although, as John Hewitt has pointed out, Drennan did not oppose Percy's nomination “as one of the Honorary Life-Visitors to the Academical Institution to which Percy had presented a hundred guineas, for the Institution was one of Drennan's major causes” (John Hewitt, “Ulster Poets 1800-1870,” 42).
 71. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 87-94.
 72. PRONI, T 765/2/1, Letter 28, Drennan to M. McTier, 6 April, 1778.
 73. PRONI, D 553/61, Drennan to Reverend William Bruce, November, 1787.
 74. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 69-70; see also, PRONI, T 765/2/2, Drennan to S. McTier, 7

- December, 1791.
75. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 63-68.
 76. John Hewitt, *The Rhyming Weavers* (Belfast, 1974), 31.
 77. John Julian, ed., *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (London, 1892), 1194-1195.
 78. Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, 570.
 79. *A Selection of Psalms and Hymns for the Use of the Presbytery of Antrim and the Congregation of Strand Street, Dublin* (Belfast, 1818), number 276; see also, PRONI, D 531/8/19.
 80. Julian, op.cit., 313.
 81. PRONI, T 765/2/8, Letter 1124, Drennan to M. McTier, 24 August, 1804.
 82. PRONI, T 765/2/8, Letter 1126, Drennan to M. McTier, 1 September, 1804.
 83. PRONI, T 765/2/8, Letter 1127, M. McTier to Drennan, September, 1804.
 84. PRONI, T 765/2/8, Letter 1104, Drennan to M. McTier, 30 May, 1804.
 85. PRONI, T 765/2/8, Letter 1124, Drennan to M. McTier, 24 August, 1804.
 86. Julian, op.cit., 1193.
 87. John Hewitt, "Ulster Poets 1800-1870", 44.
 88. *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Vol. VII (December 1811), 473.
 89. 1 Kings 8:27.
 90. D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs and D. J. Wiseman, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (IVP, London, 1970), 1222.
 91. *Grace Hymns* (Grace Publications Trust, London), number 378.
 92. Taken from pamphlet headed "To the PUBLIC", in PRONI, T 965/3.
 93. *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Vol. III (August 1811), 153.
 94. *A Selection of Psalms and Hymns for the Use of the Presbytery of Antrim and the Congregation of Strand Street, Dublin* (Belfast, 1818), V.
 95. *Grace Hymns*, op.cit., number 193.

96. PRONI, T 765/2/4, Letter 600, Drennan to M. McTier, March, 1796.
97. Genesis 1:26-29.
98. Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, 148.
99. Drennan, *Glendalloch*, 14.
100. Drennan, *Glendalloch*, 72.

Reflective Bridge

Looking Back on Chapter Two and Forward to Chapter Three

As Patricia Craig pointed out in her *Times Literary Supplement* review of *The Clock Flower*, critical responses to my own scholarly work and published poetry have categorized it as being, among other things, of the ‘dissenting’ tradition in Ireland: more specifically (given my perceived religious background) of the ‘Protestant dissenting tradition,’ a lineage including William Drennan, linked to the radical Presbyterians from the north of Ireland from the late 1700s-early 1800s: those educated radicals, who, fired by Enlightenment ideals and democratic Classical Republicanism, sought and fought for a union of Irishmen of *all* religious persuasions within a unified, independent Ireland. Like Drennan, they championed a cross-community vision of Ireland, an Ireland which would celebrate “The Sovereignty of the People not of any party, / the Ascendancy of Christianity - not of any church ...” (PRONI, Drennan to S. McTier, 3 February 1791). In his poem “Erin” (1795), Drennan also famously coined the now popular appellation for Ireland of the “Emerald Isle.” But, as we heard John Hewitt point out, he was no starry-eyed Irish romantic, calling upon his fellow Irishmen in the very same poem to “drive the demon of bigotry home to his den.”

From early in my educational/scholarly life, Drennan’s principled cross-community combination of Presbyterian radicalism and championship of Catholic Emancipation set a salutary example for me of what I have termed “radical neutrality” - a true mentor-poet’s positional star to steer by amidst the deadly tribal certainties which have dominated the cultural and political arenas of my native Northern Ireland/Ireland.

Imagine, indeed, my astonishment, as a Protestant growing up in the Troubles, to discover that it was a Protestant poet who actually gave Ireland the now famous name of the “Emerald Isle.” Not named by a Catholic poet or cultural figure, but by a - Protestant from Belfast?! A Protestant happily (and forever, as it turned out) celebrating the ‘Green-ness’ of Ireland - and an Ireland as a whole island entity - in the very face of fellow Protestants who by that stage had formed The Orange Order to triumphantly commemorate each July 12th the victory of King William of Orange, the Dutch King, over James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, a battle which basically secured the continued existence of Protestantism in the north of Ireland (much more of this yearly event will be captured in our concluding article-chapter, my ‘Eleventh Night’ poetry sequence). Now, as a kid from the Protestant ‘hood’ who had somehow managed to get to a ‘good’ school, and who had not only an life-changing English teacher, but also an equally inspirational History teacher, Dr. Robson Davidson, who taught us all about Drennan and the radical Presbyterians of the 1790’s - well, Drennan was a very fortunate find; my kind of true *protestant*.

If William Drennan is one of my main pillars of Protestant dissent, steering a principle course through the tumultuous times of the 1790s in Ireland, then Seamus Heaney is chief among the Catholic poets from the North; a poet-mentor who has also set a significant example of “radical neutrality,” this time manifested in his life and work through the bitter sectarian cauldron of the more recent Ulster ‘Troubles’ (1968-1998).

Drennan’s tightrope to walk would have been to reach out to the Catholics in Ireland without alienating his fellow Protestants. Heaney’s situation was as tricky, though reversed. Moreover, Heaney’s predicament was possibly more delicate as he

belonged to the ‘side’ in the Irish conflict that has been historically considered to be on the side of ‘freedom’ - an Irish Catholic tradition fighting for liberation from a domineering colonial ruler. And given Heaney’s more challenging circle to square, it is perhaps not surprising that one of his most (in)famous poems, “Punishment” (*North*, 1975), got him into all kinds of trouble, not only with northern Protestants but also with eminent members of the Catholic community, including significant Catholic poets like Ciaran Carson. Heaney’s seeming ‘understanding’ of a particularly degrading Catholic paramilitary ‘punishment’ sparked serious controversy: casting an early shadow over his rising star as the best Irish poet since W. B. Yeats; questioning his integrity; and threatening to permanently undermine his position as an honest poetry broker during the bitterly divisive ‘Troubles.’

Article-Chapter Three then provides relevant biographical information for Heaney, and a brief background to the ‘Troubles’ that produced “Punishment.” It presents the full text of the poem and provides some important background information regarding its genesis. In addition, it provides a thorough literature review of the critical response to “Punishment,” and a review of key concepts of integrity drawn from several notable scholars in the field, highlighting those insights most pertinent to Heaney’s integrity dilemma in ‘Punishment.’ The poem itself is then analyzed, especially in relation to the material laid out in the review sections; and the article-chapter will conclude by arguing that in “Punishment” Heaney chose to honor his own sense of personal and poetic integrity over and above any instinctive allegiance to, or natural moral responsibility towards, his fellow Catholics or the wider Northern Irish community.

Chapter Three, ‘Casting the Stones of Silence: Seamus Heaney’s “Punishment,” is intended for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, the *New Hibernia Review* (University of St. Thomas).

Chapter Three

Casting the Stones of Silence: Seamus Heaney's "Punishment" Integrity Challenges for 'Catholic Dissent' in Northern Ireland's Troubled Times

When awarding the 1995 Nobel Prize for Literature to Irish poet Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), the Swedish Academy praised him both “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past,” and also applauded him, as a Roman Catholic, for analyzing the violence in Northern Ireland (during the infamous Northern Irish ‘Troubles,’ 1968-1998) in a non-sectarian way (Nobelprize.org, 1995, p. 1). Many other commentators, both local and international, also viewed the award of the Nobel Prize to Heaney as being crucially connected to his cultured contribution to the ‘peace process’ that resulted in the historic Good Friday Agreement of 1998, and which set up a (miraculous) power-sharing Parliament between Catholics and Protestants to govern a ‘new’ Northern Ireland.

However, Heaney’s acceptance as a cross-community poet-peacemaker in his native province has not always been so apparently secure. Indeed, in the early 1970s, following the release of his volume entitled *North* (Faber & Faber, 1975), Heaney was described by Ciaran Carson (himself a notable Catholic poet, and one who would eventually earn Heaney’s recommendation as the first Director of the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at their joint alma mater), as having “moved - unwillingly, perhaps - from being a writer with the gift of precision, to become the laureate of violence” (Andrews, 1998, p. 84). Carson was not alone in such a reaction to *North*, with major critics like Prof Edna Longley, and Conor Cruise O’Brien, also expressing consternation at Heaney’s allegedly dangerous mythologizing of Northern Ireland’s (almost) civil war,

known as the Ulster Troubles.

One poem from *North* attracted the most critical attention: “Punishment,” the poem at the center of this study. “Punishment” was not necessarily the best poem in *North*, but it was easily the most controversial. It quickly became a forum for heated debate concerning Heaney’s *personal* and *poetic integrity*, and the nature of his relationship to his fellow citizens. Given the seriousness of the charge, we will address whether, indeed, Heaney is deserving of Carson’s appellation of being “the laureate of violence;” and ask why Heaney risked writing and publishing this particularly contentious poem, a poem he must have known to be so, dealing as it does with one of Northern Ireland’s most personal tribal ‘punishments.’

The poem was originally uncollected, but always included in later collected volumes of verse. Moreover, it is interesting to see it included in the most recent collection of Heaney’s poetry, *Seamus Heaney: 100 Poems* (Faber and Faber, 2018). It is interesting, I would suggest, because the selection was made by the Heaney family themselves, not some literary editor. In the short Introduction, written by Heaney’s daughter, Catherine, she states how obviously hard it was for the family to limit themselves to just 100 favorite poems. Therefore, it would have been easy for the family to leave “Punishment” out. They would not be unwise as to the poem’s reputation back then, and its lingering stigma for some, even today. Perhaps its inclusion is not only a serious signal as to their admiration of the poem, but also to their personal knowledge of Heaney’s own, presumably, unshakeable faith in the stance of the poem. But Heaney knew it was an extremely risky topic for an Ulster poet to take on, especially during one of the worst years of bloodletting in the early Troubles. What then does the poem do to

Heaney's (now widely accepted) reputation as a peacemaker, and person/poet of high personal and artistic *integrity*?

In this essay, I will begin by providing relevant biographical information for Heaney, and a brief background to the 'Troubles' that produced "Punishment." Then I will present the full text of the poem, and provide some important background information regarding its genesis. In addition, I will provide a thorough literature review of the critical response to "Punishment," and a review of key concepts of integrity drawn from several notable scholars in the field, highlighting those insights most pertinent to Heaney's integrity dilemma in "Punishment." I will then analyze the poem itself, especially in relation to material laid out in the review sections; and will conclude by arguing that in "Punishment" Heaney chose to honor his *own* sense of personal and poetic integrity *over and above* any instinctive allegiance to, or natural moral responsibility towards the wider Northern Irish community.

Born in 1939 (the year W. B. Yeats died, Ireland's previous poet recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature), Seamus Heaney was a Catholic country boy from Castledawson, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland (though it would always have been 'Derry' to Heaney – but that's another story that we will touch on later). His family soon moved from Castledawson to a nearby farm in Bellaghy. Heaney, the oldest of nine children, began his own journey away from the beloved Bellaghy farmyard when he won a scholarship to board at St. Columb's College, Derry. He followed a distinguished high school career with similar academic success at Queen's University, Belfast. Following graduation, he trained as a teacher, married his wife Marie, started a family, and worked

as a Belfast school teacher, and then as a lecturer at Queen’s University, Belfast (QUB), before taking the risky plunge of moving his family to Wicklow, Ireland, to try his hand as a full-time poet and writer. To supplement initial earnings from his pen, Heaney took a position as head of English at a local school until, with the success of his startling early books, he was able to settle in Sandymount, Dublin, (the Heaney family home right up until his untimely death in 2013). Harvard University came calling in 1981, and from there on, as they say, the rest is history, with Heaney’s poetry and prose earning him honor upon honor, culminating in the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

For over eight hundred years, Britain was the dominating, colonial force in Ireland. Though a colonial case of ‘white on white,’ the English worked hard to always blacken the Irish ‘natives’ as tribally-based inferiors to their more ‘civilized’ race. (We don’t have the still surviving image of the stupid, drunken “Paddy” for nothing.) Ireland as a whole has thirty-two counties. After years of failed rebellions, the majority of Ireland, twenty-six counties, and almost totally Roman Catholic by religion, gained independence from Britain in 1922. However, the other six counties in the north of Ireland, with a majority Ulster-Scots Protestant community which had been there from at least 1600 (which some historians, like Dr. Ian Adamson in his book, *The Cruthin: A History of the Ulster Lands and People*, would say were actually the original inhabitants of Ireland, who were merely returning to the north from Scotland in the Ulster Plantation of the 1600s – the old Gaelic name for Scotland, for example, “Scotia”, which means “Ireland”), were allowed to remain British, and so the new country of Northern Ireland was born. To this day (despite the uncertainty of all things ‘Brexit’), England, Scotland,

Wales, and Northern Ireland constitute what we still know as the United Kingdom.

Obviously, the remaining Catholics of the new six county country were not happy, and did suffer from various forms of discrimination under the pro-British, Protestant controlled government departments of Northern Ireland. Sporadic opposition to this situation culminated in the 1960s with the Catholic Civil Rights protest marches, mirroring those in other parts of the world, especially those in America. One particular flashpoint march in the majority Catholic city of Londonderry (strictly ‘Derry’ – no “London” prefix – to Catholics like Heaney, who went to school in the city) in the late 1960s sparked what has come to be known as the ‘Troubles,’ the thirty year conflict between the Catholic Nationalist I.R.A, and the British government and Protestant paramilitaries. The IRA/Sinn Fein, led by Gerry Adams, waged their guerrilla war in support of an All-Ireland state, completely separate from the UK; and the Protestant community, led by the Rev. Ian Paisley/DUP, and Protestant paramilitaries like the UDA and UVF, opposed any union with independent Ireland. (This is the conflict that I grew up in from the age of ten, almost getting seriously involved myself along the way, and certainly losing many friends from both sides in the hostilities.) The IRA called their historic ceasefire in 1994, and since then there has, thankfully, been a sustained measure of peace, with both main sides agreeing (from 1998) to serve together in a new Northern Ireland Assembly (though Brexit, and the shadow of a ‘hard border,’ has recently refueled old tribal tensions.)

Predictably enough, true poets are always going to be affected by the politics of their times, and poets from Northern Ireland were no exception. Trying as hard as they could to receive and deliver ‘ordinary’ poems – of love, nature, etc. – they inevitably

found themselves having to respond at times to the issues arising from their deeply divided community. The Northern Irish Catholic poet, like Heaney, would be expected to be at least sympathetically Irish Nationalist, inheriting an anti-colonial-power stance against the British. On the other hand, the Northern Irish Protestant poet was expected to be at least partial to the old colonial power, and partial to supporting the remaining link to Britain. But things are never that simple, nor straightforward. The Troubles created veritable moral minefields for Ulster poets (and the wider, divided community) to traverse in their attempts to write (and behave) critically, and fairly. And no Ulster poet had to walk a more public tightrope in his work than “Famous Seamus” – an appellation apparently coined by the great Welsh poet, R. S. Thomas (Rogers, 2007, p. 30); and it was a tightrope from which, in “Punishment,” at least, some senior critics judged him to have clearly fallen off.

Here is the full text of Heaney’s “Punishment,” the focal point of this essay:

PUNISHMENT

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,

it shakes the frail rigging

of her ribs.

I can see her drowned

body in the bog,

the weighing stone,

the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first

she was a barked sapling

that is dug up

oak-bone, brain-firkin:

her shaved head

like a stubble of black corn,

her blindfold a soiled bandage,

her noose a ring

to store

the memories of love.

Little adulteress,
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.

I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,

cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

(from *North*, Faber & Faber, 1975)

Like several other key poems in Heaney's controversial *North* collection, "Punishment" was spawned by the poet's reading of *The Bog People* by Danish archaeologist P. V. Glob. "Bog" is a word that Americans may need translation for, but coming from Ireland, Heaney knew well what bogs were: wet, marshy, peaty fields with miraculous powers of preservation. The English translation of the book was published in 1969, right at the start of the Troubles. As Heaney himself points out, Glob's book "was chiefly concerned with preserved bodies of men and women found in the bogs of Jutland, naked, strangled or with their throats cut, disposed under the peat since early Iron Age times" (Heaney, 1980, p. 57). The photograph which inspired "Punishment" was that of "the Windeby Girl," whom Heaney (and everyone else) believed to be a young girl punished by her tribe for adultery. Ironically, as Richard Rankin Russell records, recent evidence has proved that the body belongs not to a young girl killed for adultery, but to a young boy who was a victim of starvation (Russell, 2010, p. 219). Despite the interesting

re-focus of “Punishment” that this provokes, I do not believe it to be significant in the long run: Heaney believed it was a girl punished for adultery, and that is paramount to the poem.

Responding as a poet to the outbreak of the Troubles in the late 60s, Heaney said that, “From that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament ...” (Heaney, 1980, p. 56). In short, Glob’s book supplied Heaney with images and symbols equal to some of the horrors of the Troubles – troubles that Heaney knew were nothing new, given the long history of warfare between Britain and Ireland, and of sectarian infighting among the Catholics and Protestants of Ulster.

By believing the Windeby Girl to be just that, a girl, punished for going beyond the rules of the tribe, Heaney makes the transition in the poem from Iron Age victim to Troubles victim with consummate ease. The Troubles victim who ends the poem, one of the “betraying sisters” (line 38), is a Catholic girl or woman ‘punished’ by the IRA for relations with a British soldier, and so linked in Heaney’s mind to the bog girl by virtue of being ‘punished’ for breaking tribal mores. The punishment, in this case, stopped short of death, but involved painful, public humiliation on her native streets – tied to a lamppost, head shaved, then tarred-and-feathered to finish the punishment ritual. Having made the startling sleight-of-hand transition from Iron Age justice to contemporary Ulster ‘punishment,’ Heaney concludes the poem by admitting that he would (has?) “cast ... the stones of silence” (lls. 31/32), and that he would “connive / in civilized outrage / yet understand the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge” (lls. 41-44). And with these final lines, he unleashed a critical backlash: What was he saying, exactly? How could he keep

his personal and poetic integrity intact by admitting to standing dumb in the face of such cruel tribal retribution, or by confessing to faking outrage, and to understanding the punishment meted out? What floodgates of justification for violence was he opening up within his Troubles-torn country? For if he understood this revenge, what revenge would he not “understand”? As we turn to the critical responses to “Punishment”, it is perhaps easy to see why fellow northern Catholic poet Ciaran Carson dared to consider Heaney as “the laureate of violence” (Andrews, 1998, p.84).

There is always an intimidating literature review involved when one tackles almost anything to do with a Nobel Prize-winning poet like Heaney, and the critical reaction to “Punishment” is no exception. Essentially, we are dealing with everything from published essays and articles related in a very broad sense to Irish ‘poetry and politics,’ down to specific critiques focused on the poem. I will begin by paying due attention to the wider context, but will quickly shift my focus to reactions to the poem itself.

Major Irish literary and social critics, from cultural commentators like Conor Cruise O’Brien, to Lit-Crit. touchstones like Prof Edna Longley, and fellow poets like Ciaran Carson, have commentated on “Punishment;” and a selection of such commentary will be briefly recorded and assessed. We begin, however, with a neglected quotation from an essay by Heaney’s contemporary, (Northern Protestant) poet James Simmons.

Simmons’s essay appeared in *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Andrews, ed., 1992) intended, really, as a tribute to Heaney, and so, given the title of the essay, it is easy to see why it raised more than a few eyebrows before anyone even read a

word of it: the essay title being – ‘The Trouble with Seamus.’ (Heaney attracted all kinds of - arguable - jealousy!) Nevertheless, if certainly cheeky, the essay is still keenly argued, and Simmons’s closing comments in regard to “Punishment” are right on point:

[Heaney] leaves us with the statement that he understands “the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge.” He does not seem to be confessing or apologizing. That’s where he stands. This is very exciting and interesting. You wish he would say more. A good essay could be written on the politics of Seamus Heaney that would tease out the implications of this and other enigmatic statements ... (Andrews, 1992, p. 56).

While not assuming our essay is “good,” or even strictly centered on Heaney’s “politics,” although his politics will be a prominent feature, we will, nevertheless, attempt to tease out the implications of the phrase Simmons pinpoints from the last two stanzas of “Punishment,” from the stanzas that caused, and continue to cause so much fuss:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact

and tribal, intimate revenge.

Once again, does this, at best, honestly ambivalent attitude towards such ‘punishments’ by the IRA deserve to earn Heaney Carson’s appellation of being “the laureate of violence”? And what does the poem do to Heaney’s (widely accepted) reputation as a peacemaker, and person/poet of high personal and artistic integrity? Does Heaney’s honest ambivalence help maintain his personal integrity at the cost of encouraging those who continued to endanger lives in the wider community? Can a major poet living in a bitterly divided community, especially a poet who could use a cherished piece of Ulster tongue-in-cheek, but often life-saving wisdom, as a title for another poem in *North* - “Whatever You Say, Say Nothing” (Heaney, 1975, pp. 57-60) - ever dare to say that he could, in any public way at all, ‘understand’ tribal violence, and not, point-blank, denounce it?

Beginning with the ‘attackers’ of “Punishment” first, and in chronological order, consider Irish cultural heavyweight Conor Cruise O’Brien who (in *The Listener*, 1975, on *North*) opens up by throwing cold water on the whole relationship between literature and politics. Then, moving to the poem, he gets to the nitty-gritty of the closing verses, taking Heaney to task over his seeming acceptance of the self-appointed, judgmental role of the IRA in such tribal punishments:

“Betraying” ... “exact” ... “revenge”... The poet here appears as part of his people’s assumption that, since the girl has been punished by the IRA, she must indeed be guilty: a double assumption – that she did in fact, inform on the IRA and that

informing on the IRA is a crime. The IRA – nowhere directly referred to – are Furies with an ‘understood’ role and place in the tribe ...” (Andrews, 1998, p. 82)

But O’Brien’s misgivings were relatively mild in comparison to those outlined by Ciaran Carson (in the *Honest Ulsterman*, 1975). Coming from a younger Catholic poet of significance, Belfast-based, these were perhaps the most damning and influential comments. First, Carson summarizes the whole volume, *North*:

Heaney seems to have moved – unwillingly, perhaps – from being a writer with the gift of precision, to become the laureate of violence – a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, and apologist for ‘the situation’, in the last resort, a mystifier ... (Andrews, 1998, p. 84)

He then turns to “Punishment” directly, opposing Heaney’s attempt to link – essentially merge – past and present punishments, and hones in on Heaney’s use of that most problematic word, “understand:”

... the real differences between our society and that of Jutland in some vague past are glossed over for the sake of the parallels of ritual. Being killed for adultery (for example) is one thing; being tarred and feathered is another ... In “Punishment” [Heaney] seems to be offering his ‘understanding’ of the situation almost as consolation ... It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened. They happened then, they happen now, and that is sufficient ground for understanding and absolution. (Andrews, 1998, p. 85)

And it is this crucial problem of Heaney’s ‘understanding’ of tarring and feathering that is taken up by Blake Morrison (1982) in his book, *Seamus Heaney* where he accuses

Heaney of lending “sectarian killing in Ulster a historical respectability which it is not usually given in day-to-day journalism” (Morrison, 1982, p. 67); and he claims that Heaney displays “the tribal prejudices of an Irish Catholic” (Morrison, 1982, p. 67). He also claims that in “Punishment” itself, Heaney “ends up speaking the language of the tribe, brutal though that language may be” (Morrison, 1982, p. 68). Moreover, he further feels that in the whole volume of *North*, Heaney “is not writing his poems but having them written for him, his frieze composed almost in spite of him by the ‘anonymities’ of race and religion” (Morrison, 1982, p. 68). These latter points will be teased out when we closely examine the poem, as it is crucial to decide how far Heaney went to placate his ‘tribe’ *versus* how much he decided to please himself and his own sense of rightness and integrity.

Professor Edna Longley’s (now famous) essay on Heaney and all things *North*, ‘Inner Émigré’ or ‘Artful Voyeur’? appeared in *The Art of Seamus Heaney* (ed. Tony Curtis, Poetry Wales, 1982.) This is the fullest essay critique, probably to this very day, of *North*. She believes that Heaney fails “to distinguish between involuntary and voluntary martyrdom” in his use of mythic archetypes, and that he is flirting too closely with dangerous versions of Nationalist Ideology. In a later essay, Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland (*Poetry in the Wars*, 1986), she also holds, like O’Brien before her, that “Poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated” (Longley, 1986, p. 185), as politics usually, in her opinion, leads to bad poetry. (This is slightly problematic for her, I would contend, as her husband, a major living Ulster poet, Michael Longley, has often proved useful at blending the two areas; furthermore, one of independent Ireland’s greatest living poets, Paul Durcan, is also well known for producing very effective poems

on political subjects, including seriously brave poems on the Troubles – and Edna Longley greatly admires Durcan.) Like Carson before her, Longley zeroes in on the final two controversial stanzas of “Punishment,” saying:

This is all right if Heaney is merely being ‘outrageously’ honest about his own reactions, if the paradoxical ‘connive ... civilised’ is designed to corner people who think they have risen above the primitive, if the poem exposes a representative Irish conflict between ‘humane reason’ and subconscious allegiances. But can the poet run with the hare (I can feel the tug / of the halter’) and hunt with the hounds? (Longley, 1986, p. 77)

It becomes clear that she does not seem to think so.

Longley then references an early interview between Heaney and his friend, poet/critic Seamus Deane, in which Deane encourages Heaney to “commit” himself more, politically, and presumably to the Nationalist side of things. Heaney backs off from such commitment to tribe, and Longley rightly says that “The Deane interview epitomizes the intensive pressure on Heaney, including his own sense of duty: to be more Irish, to be more political, to ‘try to touch the people’, to do Yeats’s job again instead of his own” (Longley, 1986, p. 78). Indeed, Longley believes that Southern Irish intellectuals like Deane, philosopher Richard Kearney, and Mark Patrick Hederman had hijacked Heaney for the sophisticated Catholic Nationalist side of things. Hederman responded by claiming that poetry and politics had to be mixed, fearing that Longley was wanting to “cordon poetry off into an anodyne, detached and insulated cocoon where it loses all its essential meaning and power” (Andrews, 1998, p. 103). Hederman also suggested that Longley failed to understand the Catholic Irish psyche, part of “the

assumptive world of the ‘colonized’ person” (Andrews, 1998, p. 107). And he maintained that he thought Heaney was not being urged by him to prop up the intellectual version of Catholic Nationalist ideology, but that Heaney was viewed as one of the only poets capable of leading folk out of that particular paradigm (something that I would argue is close to the truth, but only via Heaney’s later poetry and prose, and his blossoming public persona).

The ‘defenders’ of Heaney’s *North*, and of “Punishment,” included his friend (ex-high school buddy), the poet/critic Seamus Deane. Deane did not shy away from the controversial last two stanzas of “Punishment,” and attempted to explain them thus:

Heaney is asking himself the hard question here – to which is his loyalty given: the outrage or the revenge? The answer would seem to be that imaginatively, he is with the revenge, morally, with the outrage. It is a grievous tension for him since his instinctive understanding of the roots of violence is incompatible with any profound repudiation of it (especially when ‘the men of violence’ had become a propaganda phrase) and equally incompatible with the shallow, politically expedient denunciations of it from quarters not reluctant to use it themselves. (Andrews, 1998, p. 111)

Deane was highlighting Heaney’s ambivalence – his moral, integrity-based urge to condemn the ‘punishment’ being at war with his almost genetic understanding of the aptness of the tribal retribution – and seemed to be granting his friend the proverbial running with the hare and hunting with the hounds denied to him by Edna Longley.

Critic Denis Donoghue (in *We Irish*, 1986) also argued in Heaney's defense, saying that his mythic approach in *North* allowed him to place the Troubles in a larger perspective, allowing him to express more than just anger and outrage (Donoghue, 1986, p.189). A decade later, however, Eoghan Harris, in *The Sunday Times*, in 1997– after Heaney's Nobel – scoffed at the value of this mythic approach: “I am not sure that his poetry has much to say to modern Ireland ... It deals with pre-Christian people who put bodies in Danish bogs, not post-Christian people who put them in bin liners. It is literally bogged down in the past” (Andrews, 1998, p. 80).

To conclude the *North*/"Punishment" literature review, it must be said that Heaney himself has always been well able, in both poetry and prose, to defend his own work. In one of his classic early ruminations about poetry and politics, in conversation with Seamus Deane, he explains:

Poetry is born out of the watermarks and colourings of the self. But that self in some ways takes its spiritual pulse from the inward spiritual structuring of the community to which it belongs: and the community to which I belong is Catholic and Nationalist. I believe that the poet's force now, and hopefully in the future, is to maintain the efficacy of his “mythos”, his own cultural and political colourings, rather than to serve any particular momentary strategy and his political leaders, his paramilitary organisation or his own liberal self might want him to serve. I think that poetry and politics are, in different ways, an articulation, an ordering, a giving of form to inchoate pieties, prejudices, world-views, or whatever. And I think that my own poetry is a kind of slow, obstinate, papish burn, emanating from the ground I was

brought up on. (Interview with Seamus Deane, “Unhappy and at Home”, in *The Crane Bag*, No. 1, 1977.

This is a telling, verily prophetic piece of self-scrutiny. While acknowledging his communal sympathy towards tribal Catholicism, Heaney hints – only three years after publishing “Punishment” – at his growing sense of loyalty to his own private “mythos.”

The window of post-tribal light is opened wider, I believe, in one of my favorite Heaney statements relating to the (often) oil and water nature of poetry and politics. In a 1984 lecture, entitled *Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland*, Heaney says:

“The poet is stretched between politics and transcendence, and is often displaced from a confidence in a single position by his disposition to be affected by all positions” (Heaney, 1984, p. 8)

Heaney’s desire to break the ties of tribal political loyalties for the kite-like freedom of poetic transcendence is well and truly begun here, signaling the less “papish,” more cross-community aspect of the later Heaney – the mature, national poet ready to don the Nobel mantle.

“Integrity is a lid that covers many bins.”

W. R. Rodgers, poet

“Some kinds of integrity are excuses for irresponsibility.”

William Stafford, poet

Scholars working on concepts of ‘integrity’ provide much food for thought regarding Heaney’s dilemma in “Punishment,” especially when we consider them in regard to his attempts to balance the call of community against the claims of personal and poetic freedom.

In *Integrity and Self-Protection*, Carolyn McLeod suggests that “a certain amount of self-protection is consistent with integrity and is even required by it in many circumstances” (McLeod, 2004, p.216); and that “People with integrity resist pressure to go against their values, but not in a way that is dogmatic or rash given the need they have to value their deliberative role in an evaluative community” (McLeod, 2004, p.230).

Heaney certainly valued his relationship to his Catholic community, and his role within the wider Northern Irish community. However, he also, gently but firmly, resisted pressure to go against his personal gut values and principles.

In *Standing for Something*, Cheshire Calhoun tells us that “Three pictures of integrity have gained philosophical currency ... the integrated-self, identity, and clean-hands pictures of integrity” (Calhoun, 1995, p. 235). Concerning the first, the integrated-self, Calhoun suggests that “This picture of integrity has intuitive appeal. It captures our sense that people with integrity decide what they stand for and have their own settled reasons for taking the stands they do.” (Calhoun, 1995, p.237). However, she frets, crucially, about the idea of wholeheartedness, of the clarity of decision and position that goes with this view, the idea that the subject might have less than concrete convictions, and may entertain ambivalence as a plus, rather than a negative factor: “But being of two minds might not make what we do any less ours ... integrity may sometimes in fact require resisting the impulse to resolve inconsistencies and ambivalence”

(Calhoun, 1995, p.238). Now this seems very relevant to Heaney in “Punishment,” and echoes his quotation from earlier concerning the many-sidedness of the poet’s outlook: “The poet is stretched between politics and transcendence, and is often displaced from a confidence in a single position by his disposition to be affected by all positions” (Heaney, 1984, p. 8). (Indeed, I have personally coined a phrase for such in-between-ness: “radical neutrality” – not a fence straddle, but an active, honest middle ground position between competing extremes.)

For her own part, Calhoun considers the view of the Latina lesbian, Maria Lugones, who “...argued for the value of conceptualizing oneself as a duplicitous or multiplicitous being” (Calhoun, 1995, p.238). She maintains that “What Lugone’s case illustrates is that lack of wholeheartedness does not necessarily signal some personal failure on the part of the agent ... [and in her case] taking a stand against oppressions – something a person with integrity might well do – involves endorsing and struggling to preserve meaning and value systems that conflict with each other” (Calhoun, 1995, p.239). Furthermore, she positively celebrates “ambivalence:”

When one’s own and others’ judgments come into serious conflict, ambivalence may be a way of acknowledging that equality. Ambivalence does not necessarily signal a failure on the agent’s part to make up his mind about what he really believes and wants. Agents can have reason to resist resolving ambivalence. In particular, they may think it important to acknowledge a basic assumption underlying practical deliberation, namely, the equality of deliberators. (Calhoun, 1995, p.241)

In “Punishment,” Heaney’s ambivalence may well be of this very brand, caught between

“the equality of deliberators;” between the yin and yang of the rights and wrongs of the punished and the punishers; between the “I almost love you” / “but would have cast” of the poem itself (ll. 29-30).

Regarding “identity,” the second picture of integrity, Calhoun says simply that it is a matter “... of having character and being true to it” (Calhoun, 1995, p.241). She uses the Gauguin case as an example, and says “... when moral obligation conflicts with his deep identity as a painter, preserving his integrity requires that he betray his moral commitments” (Calhoun, 1995, p.243). Here, Calhoun’s person of integrity portrait truly starts to resemble Heaney, the poet-artist who has to consider putting his own artistic identity ahead of communal moral imperatives.

Reaching the third, and final, picture of integrity outlined by Calhoun, the “clean-hands” model, we find that here:

... integrity is a matter of endorsing and, should the occasion arise, standing on some bottom-line principles that define what the agent is willing to have done through her agency and thus beyond which she will not cooperate with evil. A person has integrity when there are some things she will not do regardless of the consequences of this refusal. In bottom-line situations, she places the importance of principle and the purity of her own agency above consequential concerns. (Calhoun, 1995, p.246).

Again, this is pertinent to Heaney’s stance in “Punishment:” his preparedness to accept criticism for his ‘understanding’ of the punishment no matter what public backlash would come as a consequence of his stance.

Calhoun reels off several other relevant gems, such as: “persons with integrity will

sometimes refuse to maximize good consequences when this means doing something morally disagreeable” (Calhoun, 1995, p.247) – in Heaney’s case, disagreeable to *him*; or “The only necessary condition of moral integrity is that one do what one takes oneself to have most moral reason to do” (Calhoun, 1995, p.249); and finally, “Integrity becomes an issue – something that one risks losing and must act to preserve – particularly in contexts where there is some incentive to act on someone else’s best judgment” (Calhoun, 1995, p.250). This is especially applicable to Heaney, being that most of his critics’ best judgments were (and he could have guessed they would be) in opposition to his in “Punishment.”

In *Integrity and Radical Change*, Victoria M. Davion claims that integrity is changeable depending on one’s ‘new’ knowledge, and consequently, one must be open to such change. It is about “*being true to oneself*,” and in order to be true to oneself, one must be willing to explore commitments and change them when necessary” (Davion, 1991, p.183). I would contend that Heaney’s poetry career, certainly from the contentious *North* volume onwards, was founded on such a principle, on the notion of self-examination and justification.

Davion then mentions Sarah Hoagland, who said that “moral agency requires autokoenoeny,” which she defines as a sense of self in community: “It involves each of us having a self-conscious sense of ourselves as moral agents in a community of other self-conscious moral agents” (Davion, 1991, p.189). Heaney was all too aware of his position as poet-spokesperson in a divided community, and of the duality of his position – native Catholic poet steeped in Catholic culture, but also duty bound to be an ‘objective’ poet-spokesperson for the whole community, Catholic and Protestant, where possible. A

condition Lugones hints at when she says: “Each of these two selves understands the other. This is not a given. This requires significant work in the ‘borderlands’” (Davion, 1991, p.190). This idea of the ‘dual’ self having to do serious work “in the borderlands” captures the conscientious integrity work facing a poet like Heaney who operated in a country whose very border constituted a life-and-death dispute.

In *Personal Integrity, Politics, and Moral Imagination*, Babbit supplies us with two related observations that can be fruitfully applied to Heaney’s “Punishment” position.

First:

Now, how do we explain the apparent personally liberating consequences of an act that is clearly immoral? In particular, how do we explain the fact that an act that is immoral, according to society’s standards, may be significant as regards the individuals’ moral responsibilities to maintain their own sense of self-respect and dignity? (Babbit, 1997, p.112)

And, second:

... maintaining one’s personal honor is occasionally something one does at great risk of being sanctioned, even severely. People sometimes go against social norms, at great material and personal risk, just to maintain or to gain a sense of personal honor. (Babbit, 1997, p.127)

It can be argued, again, that Heaney risked censor from some members of his own ‘side,’ as well as from the other, for publicly seeming to almost justify violence; for looking like he was going against the civilized social norm, all in order to stay true to his own sense of honest honor.

Lynne McFall's article, *Integrity*, also rings some Heaney bells, beginning with this passage:

A person of integrity is willing to bear the consequences of her convictions, even when this is difficult, that is, when the consequences are unpleasant ... Where there is no possibility of loss, integrity cannot exist ... Similarly in the case of the approval seeker. The single-minded pursuit of approval is inconsistent with integrity ...

(McFall, 1987, p.9.)

For Heaney must surely have realized that he risked losing face with friend and foe alike by his stance of staying true to his personal views and his poetry rather than to the feelings of the wider community. Moreover, I believe he felt that: "An attitude essential to the notion of integrity is that there are some things that one is not prepared to do, or some things one *must* do." (McFall, 1987, p. 11). He also would have known that: "A social morality is the set of principles that we adhere to that we expect everyone to adhere to and that are characterized by impartiality" (McFall, 1987, p. 17). However, despite knowing he was crossing the line that critics like Carson and Longley would undoubtedly draw, the line of received social morality, I believe he had, nevertheless, to be honest in his poem about his 'understanding' of the tribal punishment, in order to save his personal integrity.

Finally, we conclude this 'integrity' literature review with reference to Gabrielle Taylor and Raimond Gaita's argumentative article, simply titled *Integrity*. This article begins with Taylor, and revolves around Taylor's notion of the person of integrity being someone who keeps themselves "intact,"

... the person who 'keeps his inmost self intact,' whose life is 'of a piece,' whose self

is whole and integrated. My claim is that it is this view of integrity which is the fundamental one. The person of integrity keeps his self intact ... (Taylor G & Gaita, Raimond, 1981, p. 144)

I would suggest that Heaney is the epitome of such an “intact” person. In his own poetry, on more than one occasion, he has even described himself as being ‘lucky.’ He came from a solid rural background, from a large, loving family, and managed to marry talent, hard work, and opportunity throughout his favored life. Unlike some others, he fretted continually in his poetry and prose about the claims and counterclaims of poetry schools and political camps, and, as far as possible, managed to walk the Yeatsian tightrope of keeping in balance ‘reality and justice.’

(For the closing record, Gaita counters Taylor by discussing the case of mental illness, with the dividedness and conflict, lack of integration, that that can bring, but which Gaita still believes can hold a person of integrity. Talking of such, he says: “... he is the child of two cultures and in him the two are sometimes in creative, sometimes in debilitating conflict ... The conflict is the root of his strengths and weaknesses” (Taylor G & Gaita, Raimond, 1981, p. 162). Though Heaney was certainly not mentally ill, this idea of the creative tension produced by engagement with conflicting cultures, is still somewhat apt.)

Having already touched on some of the most important issues surrounding Heaney’s publishing of “Punishment,” we will conclude by turning more directly to the poem itself.

At least three things are crucial to an understanding of the heated critical reaction

to “Punishment.” First, it is significant that Heaney is a pro-Nationalist member of the Northern Irish Catholic community, writing about ‘punishments’ handed out by extremists from that ‘tribe.’ Second, one must remember that he was writing from relative exile, having moved to the South of Ireland a couple years before. The move did not go unnoticed by Protestants, especially the firebrand Protestant leader, Rev. Ian Paisley. Paisley’s Protestant Telegraph labeled Heaney a “papist propagandist” (Murphy, 1996, p. 51), and accused him of fleeing south. And third, we have to take seriously the pressure put upon him to tow certain lines – as a major poet – from both friends and enemies living within the sectarian nightmare that was the Troubles. Heaney’s pen was highly desirable, and his own ‘tribe’ coveted his support. Aside from interviews with the likes of Seamus Deane, other Catholics also challenged him continually to write for them. (He often told the story about being cornered by a Catholic man on the Belfast-Dublin train, and his reply was basically – if he was going to write for *anybody*, it would be for *himself*.)

As we know, Heaney published “Punishment” in *North*, during one of the worst years of violence in the Troubles. Given the Troubles, the title would have immediately attracted attention. Local readers would have settled down to read a Troubles poem. However, Heaney cleverly introduced one of Glob’s bog people, the Windeby Girl, which would have thrown some readers, including myself, by taking them off guard, defusing the Troubles connection, and, crucially, sucking them into reading the poem, not knowing what was to confront them at the poem’s end. (Poet Michael Longley also used this approach in his famous Troubles poem, “Ceasefire,” published in the very week of the IRA ceasefire of 1994. The title made us all think that he was tackling the big burning

issue, but when we started reading we realized it was about Achilles, and Priam, and Hector, and all things Greek myth. However, having caught our disinterested attention, Longley cleverly ended the poem, a paean to peace-making, with the couplet that challenged us all in Northern Ireland to do the real, hard work, to make peace, to humble ourselves to deal with sworn enemies: “I get down on my knees and do what must be done / And kiss Achilles hand, the killer of my son” (Longley, 1997, p. 39).

If the title of “Punishment” was designed to catch the eye, the quick realization that we were dealing with a young woman who had been hung, and drowned, would have thrown the Ulster reader off the scent of any idea of a tarring and feathering ‘punishment.’ (At that stage of the Troubles, and largely throughout, with sad, notable exceptions, women were not as brutally, fatally dealt with as men were by tribal ‘hoods.’) However, locally charged words like “bog,” and “shaved-head,” and “Little adulteress” would have signaled something for the reader. Still, generally speaking, readers would have thought that Heaney was, indeed, talking about some tribal punishment from abroad, not from Ireland. So when he suddenly shifted from the ancient victim to the “betraying sisters,” the shift was seismic. And then, what we would have expected, even Catholic extremists, would have been Heaney unequivocally condemning such ‘punishments’ as being uncivilized and barbaric. However, as we have seen, he is at best honestly ambivalent; at worst, in silent support of such tribal “revenge:”

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.

I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed

and darkened combs,

your muscles' webbing

and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb

when your betraying sisters,

cauled in tar,

wept by the railings,

who would connive

in civilized outrage

yet understand the exact

and tribal, intimate revenge.

Admitting to casting the (biblical) stones of silence was one thing – how many Ulster people did the same throughout the thirty year conflict? But daring to say that his “civilized outrage” was false, a pretense, and that he understood the “revenge” – that shocked almost everyone, including, I am sure, the perpetrators.

In the last verse, I would contend that it is the use of the word “who” instead of “I” that is so important – “who would connive;” if he had said “I would connive,” then no problem. Still shocking, but personal. However, the “who” instead of “I” leaves the door open to a ghost “we;” and the actual “who” rhymes with a ghost “you”, as in *us*, the readers. It is as if Heaney is saying, *without saying*, that we all have connived in “civilized outrage” – this is a *big* inference; “connive” being nearly always pointing to a collective action, of being in league with others, thus implicating not just himself but all of us in Northern Ireland.

It has to be acknowledged that so many of us during the Troubles thought one-sided, tribal private thoughts while engaging in public denouncements, but to actually say such out loud, and in public print? No. We all knew that loose talk costs lives. And, to quote the title of that Heaney poem, we also knew well: whatever you say, say nothing. Many, not just literary critics, believed that any public admission of ‘understanding’ of such violence by Heaney was tantamount to excusing the act, and opening the door to all other violent acts by his ‘own tribe,’ and surely by all sides of the conflict: thus Carson’s appellation, “laureate of violence” seemed appropriate to many. Much rather, perhaps, as no one could have been certain that the women so treated were in fact ‘guilty:’ why not speak out in their defense? Why not just say how terrible the whole thing was? Or, at the very least, again, say nothing

So, once again - why did Heaney risk writing and publishing this contentious poem, a poem he must have known to be so? Of course he knew well that it was an explosive topic for an Ulster poet to touch on, especially during one of the Troubles’

worst years. He knew that for a Catholic poet, it was a no-win situation. Though coming out in favor of such rough ‘justice’ would (unintentionally, for his part, it must be said) endear him to many nationalists, certainly violent ones, it would undoubtedly alienate many moderate Catholics, and Catholic poets like Carson.

Although “Punishment” was a no-win situation for Heaney, as was proved by most of the reaction, even from Catholic poet/critics, and certainly from Protestant sources, I would argue that it was Heaney’s way of honestly attempting to get to grips with the situation as a poet, and make sense of the Troubles within the (Glob) mythic context of the ancient, recurring tribal killing grounds. Moreover, and crucially, the complications of “Punishment,” I believe, were only entertained by Heaney because of his own sense of personal integrity. He had a need to tell the truth, even if it was self-demeaning, even if possibly career-derailing; the need to stop “weighing and weighing [his] responsible *trista*” (Heaney, 1975, p. 73) and say something as openly, and as honestly as possible in the complicated Troubles arena.

In the end, Heaney chose, on this occasion, (at risk to his personal life, perhaps, and certainly to his career and reputation) personal and poetic integrity *over and above* communal integrity and loyalty. He knew his words could have encouraged some who might use them to continue to justify violence within the wider Northern Irish community, but his sense of self/poetic integrity meant that he had to publicly admit to his (at least) dangerous ambivalence in the face of such tribal betrayal and subsequent revenge.

As a form of small appendix, I am humbly inserting two of my own Troubles poems here by way of comparison and contrast with Heaney's more 'Troublesome' work. The first, "Bullets or Bats," is my 'Protestant' version of a certain "punishment" – known as 'knee-capping' – also handed out by Protestant paramilitaries (mirror images of the IRA) from the 'hood' that I grew up in. The second, "Stone Head, Stone Heart, Stone Hope," is my little nod to Heaney's "bog" poems, but set in Islandmagee, a rural and predominantly Protestant part of Northern Ireland. Very simply, I would suggest that I decided to be honest about these terrible events, but in a way that more clearly condemned them. By doing so, I would argue that I chose, on these occasions, to marry my sense of personal and poetic integrity with the interests of the wider community. In other words, these particular poems cannot be taken as saying anything other than - to the men of violence, from both sides - *STOP!*

(from the 'Eleventh Night' sequence)

BULLETS OR BATS

Big Bobby Cain strolled down to The Diamond to

Seek some advice from one of the chosen few –

A Catholic solicitor that was allowed

To peddle his wares with the Protestant crowd

('Cause even the dogs knew that Taigs knew their rights).

Ushered in by a cute wee thing in black tights,

And greeted by a smile and a handshake, he

Joked that the lawyer'd forgotten Masonry.

Grinning, the lawyer asked Bobby what he could
Do him for. Bobby then cleared his throat and said
That the lawyer might want to consider it
As being ‘off the record’, if he knew what
He meant. The lawyer then mimicked turning off
His recorder, and prepared to hear something rough.

The form was that Bobby had made a mistake
That meant that both of his knees would have to break
Before his wrong could be put right. He had been
Out on the razzle one night at the Ardeen
Hall, and had drunkenly fell in with a doll
Who had never slept with her arse to the wall –
Problem being, she was married to his best Mate,
who was spending his time down in the Kesh
For giving his all for the Loyalist cause.
(It’s easy to imagine the pregnant pause.)
His mate didn’t give two shites for his hoor at home,
But such behaviour ‘the boys’ couldn’t condone.
The lawyer leant forward and nervously asked
What exactly Bobby thought was his task.

In a nutshell – in terms of the compensation,
Should he choose bullets or bats? So you can
Picture the look on the solicitor's face –
A classic case of an owl Del Boy double-take –
As he slumped back bewildered into his chair.
Bobby understood that it was hardly fair –
The proverbial darkie's arse in moonlight –
To ask him the question, but in the light
Of the fact that a big payout was comin',
He thought the lawyer might fancy some action.
The lawyer 'hadn't heard the conversation',
But agreed to take a piece of the action.

Bats over bullets was apparently best
To maximize coffers from the compo chest.
Though bullets were obviously dangerous,
The bats produced unpredictable messes,
And there'd be brownie points from the assessors
For extra trauma from hands-on aggressors.
So Bobby accepted the lawman's advice
And cast in his lot with bats' roll of the dice.

He phoned 'the boys' to pass on his decision,

And then went to bed with the television.

Next day he was woken by his old mother

Who sensed that he was in some kind of bother

Because of the awkwardness of the nervous

Crew that had just interrupted her breakfast.

Bobby reassured her not to be worried,

And got into his daily duds and hurried

Downstairs to see who'd been sent to do the job –

He was relieved to see mates filling their gobs.

There sat Mr. Red, Mr. White and Mr. Blue,

Three of the local smalltime hoods, sent round to

Administer Bobby's punishment beating.

The fact that the same doll had been giving

All three of them the same kind of attention

Was neither here nor there, not worth a mention –

The big lad's mistake was to go and get caught.

Feeling sorry for their oul mucker, they brought

Him some 'anesthesia' – gold whiskey, wine

And beer, and made him to promise, by the time

They'd return later that day, that he'd have them

Beaten down his fat neck to help numb the pain.

His ma was like a second mum to them all,

So he should pack her off to the bingo hall.

He thanked them, though he worried that the booze would

Make him bleed a bit more, but they swore blind they'd

Get an ambulance the minute they were done –

There'd be no body when his mother got home.

They'd also take care not to leave a real mess,

To spare his mother any needless distress.

With all that being said, they showed themselves out,

And left their oul mucker to his drinking bout.

To cut a long story short, they shattered his knees –

Three men who couldn't punch through wet paper bags ...

But they kept to their word, for what it was worth –

He got help and survived by the skin of his teeth.

Once able, he hobbled out to cash his 'winnin's',

And was greeted by a gang of wee hallions

Who ran shouting round the shops, in Rathcoole rain:

Look at big Bobby, and his best mate – Cane!

STONE HEAD, STONE HEART, STONE HOPE

I. *Hillsport, 1907*

At the east side Of the Chapel Field

The wind stripped

The soil away,

And a skull,

Sockets fraught with earth,

Gazed across the sea.

II. *Brown's Bay, 1956*

When the last layers were lifted,

A skeleton lay in its narrow house -

An axehead lodged between the ribs.

Wasted heart, holding such weight

Of stone, how often were you bruised

By the thud of the tongue's hammer

Long before the axehead's Final sickening wound?

III. *The Gobbins, 1975*

No primordial plot,

Just shot and driven

To the Gobbins' cliffs.

Void of the heat

Of their loosened

Ghosts, both bodies,

Tepid to the touch,

Are left to stiffen.

Two more - long since - too much.

(from *The Mason's Tongue*, Abbey Press, 1999)

Reflective Bridge

Looking Back on Chapter Three and Forward to Chapter Four

Seamus Heaney, as we know, came from the Catholic community in Ireland, a country dominated for centuries by Great Britain, the colonial empire, who took political possession of Ireland, mainly ruling through a system of landlord absenteeism. Heaney was specifically from the north of Ireland, the part of the island that the British took much deeper possession of in the 1690s by ‘planting’ a sizeable Scots population there, a population whose descendants were happy to manipulate and maintain the political privileges that came with being part of an inbuilt ‘democratically elected’ majority in the new Northern Ireland state formed in 1922. Prior to partition, those Ulster-Scots stood determined to remain British, and their heirs still are determined to remain separate from the Republic of Ireland to this very day.

Despite the undeniable atrocities committed in Ireland by the colonial power over the course of several centuries, it could be argued that political limitations placed upon the Catholic population of Northern Ireland in the 20th century under the Protestant majority were a far cry from earlier forms of oppression - Cromwellian butchery, for example. This point was actually made during the Troubles in a poem by another poet also hailing from Heaney’s Co. Derry, James (Jimmy) Simmons. Simmons was an often deliberately, some might say mischievously controversial Ulster poet from a Protestant background, and also a member of the same famous literary coterie, labeled The Belfast Group, that included, amongst others, Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon (the main poets of our next article-chapter, Chapter Four).

When reflecting on the previous chapter, it struck me that if Heaney had (uncharacteristically) dared to voice the normally unsaid - namely, that he himself, and by implication in "Punishment," as we have seen, the wider Catholic population, might secretly "understand" certain tribal/sectarian violence from within their own community - so Simmons dared to voice the normally unsaid among the Protestant community in a poem entitled "Ulster Says Yes" (a cheeky reversal of the late 20th century Ulster Protestant slogan of "Ulster Says No"):

ULSTER SAYS YES

One Protestant Irishman

wants to confess this:

we frightened you Catholics, we gerrymandered,
we applied injustice.

However, we weren't Nazis or Yanks,
so measure your fuss
who never suffered like Jews or Blacks,
not here, with us;

but, since we didn't reform ourselves,
since we had to be caught
red-handed, justice is something
we have to be taught. (Simmons, 1986)

So just what is Simmons saying here? That Protestants abused their power in Northern Ireland, withholding full civil rights from their Catholic neighbors, gerrymandering voting districts, et al, and that the IRA guerilla warfare of the Troubles was the violent wake-up call that the Protestants and the British needed to teach them to correct their ways? That whatever they did to Catholics was gently categorized as being simply a bit frightening, or lacking in pure justice? And that the way Catholics were treated in Northern Ireland was hardly comparable to a Nazi Holocaust or African American hardships, and therefore, presumably, not worth Catholics being too upset about? Certainly not worth the bombings and murders of Protestants, RUC policemen, and British Army soldiers during the Troubles? Indeed, given Simmons' equivalency, were Northern Irish Catholics not just meant to be relatively grateful for the lack of horror dished out to them in Northern Ireland under the Protestant-controlled Stormont government from 1922, in comparison to the horrors suffered by Jews during WWII, and the racial apartheid African Americans had to put up with under 'Jim Crow' laws in the 20th century? In the poem's own words, in short - did Ulster Catholics maybe just need to stop insisting on making such a "fuss"?

Although Simmons's own Presbyterian, Protestant roots could never be classified as being anything other than grounded in the dissenting side of that tradition, he did, indeed, appear to be saying some version of all of the above in his provocative poem: a poem not hidden, neither, but published in his selected *Poems 1956-1986* (Simmons, 1986), and collected in notable anthologies like Blackstaff Press's landmark titles, *The Ulster Anthology* (edited by Patricia Craig, 2006), and *A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (edited by Frank Ormsby, 1992). For when some folk,

including me, first read "Ulster Says Yes" there was a sharp intake of breath similar to that which followed a first reading of Heaney's "Punishment;" a sense of shock at the published, said 'thing,' quickly followed by a worry that it had been said publicly by a poet of reputable standing in a tight-knit, dangerously divided Northern Ireland. As with the Heaney poem, so too with Simmons's poem, the thought was - why risk seeming to excuse obviously bad behavior of any kind by your perceived 'tribe'? For while presumably choosing to be 'honest' in verse, *a la* Heaney in "Punishment," was Simmons not simply joining Heaney in running the risk of giving succor to sectarian extremists on either side of the conflict? Despite his reputation as being more of a poetry provocateur in comparison to Heaney's natural diplomacy, some of us felt that this kind of poem, while harboring honest, undeniable grains of truth - Catholics in Northern Ireland weren't being treated like Jews under Hitler or black slaves in America - the poem's sentiments still risked giving encouragement to Protestants in power to maintain their particular (almost acceptable) measures of dominance; just as Heaney's "Punishment" might have given some Catholic paramilitary types license to keep terrorizing their own community.

Whether or which, both Heaney's "Punishment" and Simmons's "Ulster Says Yes" are perfect foils to set against not only the vast majority of their own Troubles' poetry oeuvre, but against other crucial poems from major Northern Irish poets of the Troubles era, including significant poems from their friends and celebrated contemporaries, small 'p' Protestant poets Derek Mahon and Michael Longley. Longley's now famous poem, "Ceasefire," will be given particular attention in the following chapter, standing as a contrast to the Heaney and Simmons poems, by being a classic example of how to

employ poetry to *unequivocally* help steer a fractured community towards reconciliation and the seemingly impossible possibility of peace.

Despite the old colonial overlord still holding sway in the six counties that make up Northern Ireland, Britain has long since ceased to be a significant colonial power in the world. Although it could be argued that by gaining independence in 1922, the Republic of Ireland moved into a clear postcolonial situation, whereas the North technically remained under colonialism, literary and cultural critics agree that the ‘postcolonial’ appellation pertains to both; and it is the continuing complications of the postcolonial situation that colors much of the creative work produced in Ireland, particularly in the North, since partition.

In the article-chapter that now follows, Chapter Four, Postcolonialism and New Historicism are the twin theoretical lenses employed to help facilitate ways of thinking about poems from three major Northern Irish ‘Troubles’ poets - Seamus Heaney (again), alongside Derek Mahon and Michael Longley - and to frame a critical response to such poetry by myself, aided, specifically in Longley’s case, by leading Irish literary scholar, Richard Rankin Russell. Postcolonialism, because it is the soil out of which Ulster poets farm their verses; and New Historicism, because of its holistic approach to literary criticism, combining close-reading attention to both the formal qualities of poems (in our case), *and* their important historical and cultural milieu. Both tools are crucial to understanding how literature and culture have been effective, non-didactic tools for cultural communication in Northern Ireland.

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Chapter Four

Postcolonialism, New Historicism, and the Northern Irish Poet Heaney, Longley & Mahon: poems as non-didactic tools for cross-cultural communication

In regard to the (often impenetrable) world of theory and theorizing, it may be fairly assumed that many poets - certainly from my own personal experience in moving amongst them - do not find it easy to “thole” the theorizing. (“Thole” is an old Scottish word we use back in Ireland which essentially means: to endure something without complaint or resistance; to tolerate. Premier Irish poet, Paul Muldoon, has used it to heartbreaking effect in his elegy for his friend and mentor, Seamus Heaney, in a line he employs a couple of times in the poem: “I cannot thole the thought of Seamus Heaney dead:” Muldoon, 2015, p.4). Indeed, I have come to believe that, in a very real way, ‘Poets’ are almost genetically primed to be intensely suspicious of ‘Theory;’ at least in the sense of not attaching themselves too religiously to any one set theoretical position; of dissenting from, or resisting theoretical labeling. Obviously, given the (often almost invisible) environmental colorings and prejudices that we all inherit to some extent, this is an impossible position to purely maintain, but the struggle, for the Poet, must be embraced – it must be tholed.

Another great Irish literary figure, James Joyce, made one of his (largely autobiographical) characters, Stephen Dedalus, famously say:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. (Joyce, 1960, p. 203)

Here, I believe, (the notoriously cunning) Joyce is hinting at a duality of meanings in his phrase “fly by,” because he would know that he never could, fully, escape (or ignore) those “nets” of “nationality, language, religion,” certainly not the middle one – he was a great novelist, after all. Therefore, I read his personal manifesto, through the mouth of his ‘fictional’ character, as being the equivalent of saying, “I will also *use* those nets to my advantage.”

For our purposes here, I would suggest that one could profitably borrow from Joyce and argue that it is possible to both “*fly by* those nets” (of theory, in our case), *and* to *fly by the use of* those nets (of theory) as they ring true and usable to help facilitate ways of thinking about poems from three major Northern Irish poets - Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley - and to frame a critical response to such poetry, aided, specifically in Longley’s case, by leading Irish literary scholar, Richard Rankin Russell.

Postcolonialism and New Historicism are the twin theoretical lenses we will employ. Firstly, ‘postcolonialism,’ because of its evergreen pertinence to poetry coming from Northern Ireland, a country which is still regarded by the bulk of Irish people from the whole island - despite the North having a (slender) pro-British, pro-Union majority - as being under illegitimate ‘post-colonial’ rule by the British Parliament in London. We will provide a brief background to postcolonialism, and its relevance to Northern Irish poetry (including my own), before highlighting its influence on two poets from across the religious divide - Catholic poet, Seamus Heaney, and Protestant poet, Derek Mahon.

And secondly, ‘new historicism,’ because of its holistic approach to literary criticism, combining close-reading attention to both the formal qualities of poems (in our case), *and* their historical and cultural milieu. This new historicist approach facilitates my own way of reading, and is also conducive to Baylor’s Richard Rankin Russell, a celebrated contemporary critic, who passionately believes that the major poems of the Northern Irish Troubles, particularly Michael Longley’s (now famous) “Ceasefire,” are crucial to understanding how literature and culture have been effective, non-didactic tools for cultural communication in the province (Russell, 2010, p. 124).

Not surprisingly, perhaps, coming as I do from Northern Ireland, one of the theories that most attracts me is Postcolonialism. Not necessarily because of its great originators and advocates - including Gayatri Spivak, a distinguished theorist recently hosted by our own Appalachian State University - but because so much of the reason for its existence, and its tenets, aims and objectives, make concrete sense to me; postcolonial theorizing and debates feel authentic, not distant and abstract, due to my Northern Irish ‘Troubles’ background. I even find the theorizing relatively – relatively – easy to follow, despite also nodding along with the mischievous Terry Eagleton when he cheekily gibes:

Post-colonial theorists are often to be found agonizing about the gap between their own intellectual discourse and the natives of whom they speak; but the gap might look rather less awesome if they did not speak a discourse which most intellectuals, too, find unintelligible ... Post-colonial theory makes heavy weather of a respect for the Other, but its most immediate Other, the reader, is apparently dispensed from this sensitivity. (Eagleton, 2005, p.159)

While acknowledging Eagleton's concern for accessibility, I think the reason I find postcolonial theorizing slightly easier to follow is, simply, because it does make so much lived sense to me, though I cannot pretend not to be still nonplussed at times when knee-deep in some of the (necessarily) complicated discourses that Eagleton is referencing.

In the short 'Posts' chapter of *The Theory Toolbox*, Nealon and Giroux (2011) provide relatively easy access to postcolonialism. They begin by simply tackling the root word "colonialism," harkening back to the heyday of European imperialism when countries like England, France and Spain pursued a colonizing project of extending their allegedly superior civilization over the so-called inferior peoples of the non-Western world. It was essentially "a race for territory and wealth," justified under the obnoxious guise of (almost) philanthropically civilizing the less civilized 'Other' (p. 154). The extent of this patronizing policy of Western supremacy is well caught by Nealon and Giroux in a quotation they cite from an article by Guari Viswanathan concerning Britain's educational and cultural program in pre-independent India. Witness these remarks from a senior British official:

The Natives must either be kept down by a sense of our power, or they must willingly submit from a conviction that we are more wise, more just, more humane, and more anxious to improve their condition than any other rulers they could possibly have. (Nealon & Giroux, 2011, p. 158)

This is both breathtakingly chilling, and, once read, surely makes it a noble moral stance to cheer on those who free themselves from the burden of such arrogant overseers.

Including the successful revolt of the American colonies against English rule in 1776, decolonization has been a force for centuries, and it reached its zenith in the twentieth century, some would say, when Britain handed control of Hong Kong back to the Chinese in 1999. Such cumulative decolonization has spawned “postcolonialism,” the period following the peak of colonization (Nealon & Giroux, 2011, p. 158).

Umbrella-like theoretical terms are seldom without dispute, and postcolonialism is not immune. Indeed, Nealon and Giroux (2011) explain that many theorists prefer to use the term “*neocolonial*” as being more appropriate since it better describes those recently independent nations who are struggling to develop economically in the “New World Order.” And the authors also soberly note that America, who should know better as a former colony of Britain, has become, perhaps, *the* modern-day model of imperialism (Nealon & Giroux, 2011, p. 158).

I should say that (apparently) contrary to Eagleton, for example, I am choosing to use ‘postcolonialism’ throughout this essay in its de-hyphenated form. With the most recent reminder coming from critic Brenda Murray, I am aware of the debate among scholars as to the status of the prefix. The hyphenated version has been assumed to suggest a linear temporality denoting a/the period after colonialism, whereas the unhyphenated version that I prefer suggests a paradigm in which the colonizer is intricately tied up with the colonized in an ongoing, active, more messy relationship (Murray, 2005, p.15). Such as, indeed, is the situation we will briefly dwell on here – the relationship between Irish poets and British ex-colonial power, or more specifically, the case of Northern Irish Catholic poet, Seamus Heaney, and the Northern Irish Protestant poet, Derek Mahon, and the same.

Up until Irish independence in 1922, and the formation of the twenty-six county Republic of Ireland, Britain had been the dominating, colonial force in Ireland for over eight hundred years. Although the vast majority of Ireland was suddenly finally free of colonial rule, the six counties in the north of Ireland, with a majority Ulster-Scots Protestant community which had been there from at least 1600, were allowed to remain British, and so the new country of Northern Ireland was born. To this day, England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland constitute what we know as the United Kingdom.

Obviously, the remaining Catholics of the new six county country felt aggrieved, and did suffer from various forms of discrimination under the pro-British, Protestant controlled government departments of Northern Ireland. Sporadic opposition to this situation culminated in the 1960s with the Catholic Civil Rights protest marches, mirroring those in other parts of the world, especially those in America. One particular flashpoint march in the majority Catholic city of Londonderry in the late 1960s sparked what has come to be known as The Troubles, the thirty-year conflict between the Catholic Nationalist I.R.A., and the British government and Protestant paramilitaries. The I.R.A./Sinn Fein, figure-headed by Gerry Adams, waging their guerrilla war in support of an All-Ireland state, completely separate from the UK; and the Protestant community, led by the D.U.P's Rev. Ian Paisley and Protestant paramilitaries like the U.D.A and U.V.F, opposing any union with independent Ireland. Despite recent challenges to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, when both main sides agreed to share power in a new Northern Ireland Assembly, there has been a measure of real peace since that time.

(Regarding such challenges, none is more real than the recent and ongoing turmoil created by Brexit raising the ghost of ‘the border’ debate.)

Predictably enough, real poets are always going to be affected by the politics of their times, and senior poets-in-the-spotlight from Northern Ireland like Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon, perhaps particularly so. Trying as hard as they could to receive and deliver ‘ordinary’ poems – of love, nature, etc. – they inevitably found themselves having to respond to political issues arising from their deeply divided community. A Northern Irish Catholic poet, like Heaney, would be expected to be at least sympathetically Irish Nationalist, inheriting an anti-colonial-power stance against the British. On the other hand, a Northern Irish Protestant poet, like Mahon, was expected to be at least partial to the old colonial power, and partial to supporting the remaining link to Britain.

For my own part, I am perceived as a Northern Irish Protestant poet because of my background and schooling. I was raised in a notorious north Belfast ‘hood’ by working class, nominally Presbyterian parents, and sent to local Protestant schools. However, when I was eighteen and my late father was forty, he found out that his birth parents (he had been fostered from a young age) were actually Catholics from the I.R.A stronghold of the border county of South Armagh. So, on the Protestant side of my family I have a brother who was a policeman during the Troubles and moved three times under direct I.R.A. death threats; and on the Catholic side, I have some relatives who ‘sympathized,’ shall we say, with the I.R.A.’s ‘Troubles’ campaign. Therefore, I see my role, gratefully, as being in the radical middle ground, a dissenting middle ground of “radical neutrality,” using my poetry and my voice as a unifying voice; ‘shouting’ at both extremes to

encourage those trapped in-between, who constitute the silent, peace-loving majority of both communities in Northern Ireland.

To further demonstrate the complications of what I am trying to describe, let me share a poem from *The Clock Flower* (Rice, 2013) entitled “Flags.” It is based on a real happening, when I was asked to go into my local elementary school in Hickory during their Cultural Week to represent where I come from, Northern Ireland. This is what transpired:

(from the ‘Eleventh Night’ sequence)

FLAGS

Flags, fucking flags ...

What real use have they ever been to anyone?

Oh yeah, we’ve marched behind them

Plenty of times, but save to wrap our proud

Big-bellied patriotic selves up in, what else?

Waste of fucking time, waste of fucking cloth,

If you ask me ...

Raised with the results of patriot bragging,

I have always been wary of flag-waving.

Going into an American classroom

To talk to some children about where I'm from,
I notice the Irish tricolour hanging
Print-new and proudly from the classroom ceiling.
It's natural to assume I'm from Ireland.
How do I explain about Northern Ireland?
As a holder of both passports from back home
(Dissenting attempt to annoy everyone)
I am determined to keep my big mouth stum.
Why bother splitting history hairs with children?
But soon as the beaming teacher stretches out
Her hand in confident welcome, I blurt out
That the flag isn't the flag of my country.
At first she thinks that I'm just being funny,
But I gently insist that the flag is wrong.
Befuddled embarrassment, agitation,
Summarises the look on the teacher's face,
But I tactfully stress that if I'm to teach
The children, accurately, about where I'm from,
She'll have to accept that the flag is ... well ... wrong.

To put things, technically, on the right track

I say that the flag should be the Union Jack.
Seeing another huge question mark take her face,
I speak of the red, white and blue, the British

Flag of T-shirt fame, of Buckingham Palace,
And suddenly she's back in her happy place,
Promising me that the Union Jack will soon
Be flying in full glory in the classroom.
I feel guilty, worried about the hassle,
The expense, but she sees it's a teachable
Moment and reassures me that it's okay.

I return to the school the very next day
To find the mischief-makers hung side by side.
It then becomes clear I've still got to decide
How to fairly present wee Northern Ireland
Without draping another flag beside them –
The red-handed standard of the Ulstermen.
Feels ridiculous making the suggestion,
But poor teacher runs with it, claiming it shall
Be no problem swinging a third flag at all.
On my last visit, just a few days later,
There hangs the full blood-handed flag of Ulster,
Centre stage in the troublesome trinity:
Perfectly appropriate, it seems to me,
Given Ulster's piggy-in-the-middleness
From one British-Irish conflict to the next.
The flags are my visual three point sermon

As I attempt to educate the children.

Who's to know if anything makes sense to them?

If not, it isn't for the want of trying.

I joke on the phone with a friend back home

That the flags are eenie meenie miney, min-

Us moe. He laughs, but tells me I'm getting slow

If I think I can get away without moe.

There's a fourth flag needed for the equation

To list all the flags of the Ulster Question.

I have forgotten the nine county, not six,

Version of Ulster's banner – red hand, red cross

Set against a bright yellow, not white, background –

A flag fit for flying in Donegal Town.

Tempted to further enlighten the teacher,

I've a hunch my messages mightn't reach her.

Our mutual sectarian alchemies,

Which changed green, white and orange

Into green, white and gold,

Made real political progress seem

As elusive as the old philosopher's stone.

Sure it would've been easier to find a fart

In a field of flags, fart-flapping

On a blustery Ulster morning, than to imagine

Us ending up with 'The Chuckle Brothers.' (Rice, 2013, p. 112)

Yes, Northern Ireland was the only classroom that had three flags draped in it, with a fourth being justifiable! My previous point of favoring the non-hyphenated 'postcolonialism' because of its accurate messiness, now, I trust, makes more sense. The results of colonialism in Ireland, and the attempt to move to a fully *postcolonial* status, particularly in Northern Ireland, are not easy to negotiate, if taken in all of their complexity. ("The Chuckle Brothers," by the way, are Protestant firebrand, Rev. Ian Paisley, and Gerry Adams' right hand I.R.A. man, Martin McGuinness, who - beyond amazingly - shared power as First and Deputy First Minister, and got on so well, they earned that apt nickname. Once the bitterest of arch-enemies, they miraculously became friends. Both men are now gone; Paisley, first, after whose death McGuinness shed true public tears on BBC Northern Ireland television when speaking of Paisley's death.)

But let us return to the perceived Catholic and Protestant poets previously mentioned for examination here – Seamus Heaney, and Derek Mahon. To begin with, let us consider the late, greatly lamented, Nobel Prize winning Northern Irish Catholic poet Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), and his testy, but also richly beneficial relationship with the British ex-colonial power; home, after all, of his prestigious London publisher, Faber & Faber. Heaney was always (thankfully) aware of the power and responsibility of his own position as arguably the premier Northern Irish poet (though back home, in an embarrassingly rich poetic culture, Nobel Prizes do not necessarily denote rank). So much so, and I know this from personal experience as much as from published empirical

evidence, that he refused to become an easy spokesperson for the Northern Irish Catholic Nationalist cause. A lot of this had to do with his natural abhorrence of violence, particularly the sectarian violence of the anti-Brit I.R.A, the infamous paramilitary grouping spawned by Heaney's native Northern Irish Catholic community. Heaney always understood the inherent urge to hit back against the imperial power, but he also balanced such potential response against the need to be a decent human being; a human being that tried to understand the "other" – in his case, the British 'other,' and specifically the fellow Northern Irish citizen 'other,' who happened to be Protestant, not Catholic, and whose compass point was thus more naturally turned towards London, not Dublin.

Heaney's ambivalent relationship with the ex-colonial power came to clear public notice when he chose to publish his poem entitled "An Open Letter" in the postcolonial-inspired literary and cultural publication that was *Ireland's Field Day*. This publication was the child of the Field Day Theatre Company, a gathering of friends and like-minded Irish intellectuals and literary figures including Heaney's friends like poet Tom Paulin, David Hammond, actor Stephen Rea, poet and critic Seamus Deane, and playwright Brian Friel. Their 'mission' was to intellectually challenge the residual power of Britain in Ireland, particularly, of course, within Northern Ireland, a 'state-let' still technically under British rule.

In his epigraph to "An Open Letter," (1985) Heaney cites philosopher Gaston Bachelard: "What is the source of our first suffering? It lies in the fact that we hesitated to speak ... It was born in the moments when we accumulated silent things within us (p. 21)." And the silent thing within Seamus was his (apologetically put) aversion to being

included in the *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Verse*. The most frequently quoted verses from the poem are:

Yet doubts, admittedly arise,

When somebody who publishes

In *LRB* and *TLS*,

The Listener –

In other words, whose audience is,

Via Faber,

A British one, is characterized

As British. But don't be surprised,

If I demur, for, to be advised

My passport's green.

No glass of ours was ever raised

To toast *The Queen*. (p. 25)

One can imagine what feathers were ruffled and eyebrows raised back home when this appeared in print. Although, by this stage, Heaney was living in Dublin, as an Irish passport holder, he was originally from Northern Ireland, a country still politically part of the ex-colonial power, Britain, and so many in the North, even some Catholics, cringed at

the sentiment of the poem. Many saw Heaney as a Northern Irish Catholic poet, with a London publisher, having his proverbial (colonial?) cake, and eating it too. (The poem's sentiments did come back to haunt Heaney in 2011, not long before his own premature passing, when he was photographed at a banquet table in his role as one of the honored guests chosen to toast the Queen herself on the momentous occasion of the first official visit of a British Monarch to the Republic in over one hundred years. However, by that stage, Heaney was well aware of the need to go the extra mile to encourage anything that would help bolster the peace building between Ireland and Britain, particularly that secured by the Good Friday Agreement in his native Northern Ireland.)

Now, let us turn our gaze to living Northern Irish Protestant poet (with a small 'p', admittedly), Derek Mahon, who is an exact contemporary of Heaney, and for many, actually, a 'better' poet, whose more urbane, intellectual poems may, it is often argued, stand a better chance of living long. Be that as it may, Mahon is perceived as coming from the 'other side' of the fence to Heaney. Rather than being a rural Catholic poet, Mahon is seen as a working class Protestant poet from north Belfast. Whereas Heaney is perceived as being at least partial to Catholic Nationalism, Mahon would be expected to be, at least secretly, more in favor of the Protestant Britishness of the majority of his fellow 'tribe.' But Mahon is the classic case of the historically aware, educated member of the Northern Protestant community (dare I say it, like myself). Those who do not want to take up arms to fight the ex-colonial power, Britain, and do not support the violent tactics of the I.R.A, but who nevertheless find themselves in a situation of feeling more "Irish" than "British," and more sympathetic to their Irish Catholic neighbors, than they

do towards the once-colonial cricket-loving Tory toff from South London (although Mahon himself, it must be said, has had a dandyish love-affair with English London, as witnessed by some of his more popular poems, like “A Kensington Notebook”). A longtime resident of independent Ireland, Mahon even went so far as to refuse a high honor from the Queen of England (an OBE – Officer of the Order of the British Empire), something that other prominent “Protestant” poets like Michael Longley, and notable Protestant cultural icons like Van Morrison, have had no problem in accepting.

It is also worth considering Mahon and Heaney’s dilemmas in the light of an exciting, pertinent article by Belfast academic, Stephanie Bachorz: ‘Revising Postcolonialism: Irish Literary Criticism, Irish national Identity and the Protestant Poet.’ Beginning with past Irish literary figures like W. B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde, and coming up to our own times with the work of Declan Kiberd, Seamus Deane, and even Terry Eagleton, Bachorz examines how a notion of Irish Literature has emerged that presents everything Irish as binary opposites to everything British, with ‘British’ being viewed as everything rationalist, capitalist, and colonial/Empire-ial (Bachorz, 2003, p. 1). Bachorz neatly summarizes these simplistic binary oppositions that so plague us in Northern Ireland: Catholic = Nationalist = Good; Protestant = Unionist/Pro-British = Bad. She points out that this might work in a Northern Ireland that only consisted of Catholic Nationalists. But then she gets to the real crunch for me, especially in regard to Mahon’s position:

In short, those who are not Catholic and nationalist but still consider themselves Irish rather than British, are victims of ‘mistaken identity’. In this context, a

twentieth century Protestant Northern Irish poet like Derek Mahon can be used as an example not only of the struggle of writers of that background to find for themselves a niche, a tradition and role-models to follow. More importantly, especially as regards the question of postcolonial Ireland, Mahon can be used to illustrate how such a narrow approach tends to play down or ignore the role and the importance of such writers for any concept of Irish literature. (Bachorz, 2003, pp. 5-6)

And so – what is the simple, verifiable result of such narrow-minded postcolonial conception of what constitutes “Irish literature”? Well, Mahon was left out of the Field Day Theatre Company’s (attempted) 1991 monumental publication entitled, *Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature* because his ‘face’ didn’t fit properly enough; or as we would say back home in the rugby circles I come from – he wore the wrong color of socks. Hardly needs to be said, but Mahon’s exclusion is a perfect example of how Irish postcolonial practice can too easily fall into the trap of merely reversing the hierarchy, rather than profitably questioning the complications of the binary oppositions that exist.

Let me finish our postcolonial section with a poem from Derek Mahon, one of his most famous, “Glengormley,” the name of a small, more middle-class town just a stroll up the road from the ‘hood’ that I came from, Rathcoole, north of Belfast. This much-anthologized poem perfectly captures his (and my own) struggles between a sense of sticking to one’s roots, and also desiring to (almost) abandon them; of being both attached to, and repelled by one’s own dear ‘place:’ in effect, the plight of the postcolonial, Northern Irish Protestant poet.

GLENGORMLEY

“Wonders are many and none is more wonderful than man”

Who has tamed the terrier, trimmed the hedge
And grasped the principle of the watering can.
Clothes pegs litter the window ledge
And the long ships lie in clover. Washing lines
Shake out white linen over the chalk thanes.

Now we are safe from monsters, and the giants
Who tore up sods twelve miles by six
And hurled them out to sea to become islands
Can worry us no more. The sticks
And stones that once broke bones will not now harm
A generation of such sense and charm.

Only words hurt us now. No saint or hero,
Landing at night from the conspiring seas,
Brings dangerous tokens to the new era –
Their sad names linger in the histories.
The unreconciled, in their metaphysical pain,
Dangle from lampposts in the dawn rain;

And much dies with them. I should rather praise
A worldly time under this worldly sky –
The terrier-taming, garden-watering days
Those heroes pictured as they struggled through
The quick noose of their finite being. By
Necessity, if not choice, I live here too. (Mahon, 2021, p. 20)

From the outset we determined to use the twin lenses of Postcolonialism and New Historicism to help facilitate ways of thinking about poems from three major Northern Irish poets - Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley - and to frame the critical response to such poetry by myself, and by prominent Irish literary scholar, Richard Rankin Russell. Having used postcolonialism in regard to Heaney and Mahon, we now turn, with Russell's help, to a close reading response to our third chosen poet, Michael Longley, specifically in relation to Longley's (now famous) Troubles poem, "Ceasefire."

For purposes of clarity, it should be said that Russell would recoil slightly at being considered anything approaching 'theorist,' preferring – like many scholars – the simple label of literary scholar/critic. However, and not to sound too contradictory, I prefer to use the term 'New Historicism' for both Russell's and my own approaches here; although, he might disagree with the term. In an email to myself, he has said:

I am honestly not sure my literary criticism makes me what you might term a "theorist". I'm suspicious of that word to be honest. If anything, I see my work as perhaps part of what has been called "The New Formalism," a loosely defined school that features critics who pay attention to the formal properties of literary

works while not neglecting their historical and cultural contexts. (R.R. Russell, January, 2020)

So, while the simple terms of literary critic is probably more accurate for scholars like Russell, such scholars might also, perhaps, be rounded up collectively under the (possibly leaky) umbrella of ‘The New Formalism’ school of literary criticism; or, dare I suggest, ‘New Historicism’ which can surely also hold critics like himself, committed to a more holistic approach to tackling a poem than that often employed by many contemporary critical, cultural, and literary theorists within the academy.

There has, indeed, been much recent debate around the term ‘The New Formalism,’ taking its origin from Marjorie Levinson’s seminal essay ‘What is New Formalism,’ published in *Modern Language Quarterly*, in spring 2000 (The British Modernities Group, 2010, p. 1). There, Levinson explains how ‘New Formalism’ has its roots in the almost century-old approach of adherents to ‘Russian Formalism,’ and Anglo-American ‘New Criticism’ that is, in the idea that a work of art (including a poem) should be studied on the basis of its formal qualities alone. However, in the 1980s, what was termed “New Historicism,” challenged this methodology by placing proper interpretation of an artwork firmly within the context of its historical and cultural context (The British Modernities Group, 2010, p. 2). Essentially, whether you call it one thing or the other, our approach here, via Russell, pays serious attention to both the formal qualities of an artwork (poem, in our case), *and* its historical and cultural milieu.

Having, I hope, made the apologetic case for using a literary critic rather than a strictly defined ‘theorist’ in this paper, and having then conceded to some theoretical

labeling for them along the ‘new historicism’ line, I will now provide a brief background to my chief chosen critic, Richard Rankin Russell, and to his main ‘theory’ that I will focus on: namely, his contention that the major poems of the Northern Irish Troubles, particularly those of poet Michael Longley – especially his celebrated poem “Ceasefire,” published in 1994 in the same week as the IRA’s historic cessation of violence – are crucial to understanding how literature and culture have been effective, non-didactic tools for cultural communication in Northern Ireland due to their being essentially non-sectarian and reconciliatory in nature (Russell, 2010, p. 124).

Dr. Richard Rankin Russell is Professor of English at Baylor University, Texas, where he is also Graduate Program Director of the prestigious Beall Poetry Festival. (He is also the Cornelia Marschall Smith Professor of the Year for 2023.) His academic/research interests center on British & Irish, Modern & Contemporary, and Southern Literature. Although he has published widely on the latter two areas, he has established a reputation as being one of the primary Irish Literary critics of the present generation of notables in the international field by publishing critically acclaimed books on three well-known Irish literary figures: the playwright, Brian Friel, and novelists, Bernard MacLaverty and James Joyce. (His new book is *James Joyce and Samaritan Hospitality: Postcritical and Postsecular Readings in Dubliners and Ulysses*, from Edinburgh University Press, 2023.) However, it is his work on Irish poetry, particularly Northern Irish poetry, and specifically the poetry of Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, which is most pertinent here. His ground-breaking book (referenced in this essay) *Poetry and Peace: Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, and Northern Ireland* (University of Notre

Dame Press, 2010) was quickly followed by another study based solely on Heaney, *Seamus Heaney's Regions* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), and he has also released *Seamus Heaney: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2016) which cemented his position of preeminence among working Heaney scholars.

In *Poetry and Peace: Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, and Northern Ireland*, Russell focuses on the way in which Longley and Heaney's work has helped to nurture the process of peace and reconciliation within their native country, a process made necessary by the bitter sectarian conflict known as the Troubles (1968-1998), which we have summarized earlier; a conflict almost waiting to happen given Northern Ireland's postcolonial frictions. He tackles Longley's more specifically political poetry in the chapter entitled, 'Longley's Poetry of War and Peace.' The centerpiece of this chapter is Russell's discussion of Longley's most famous Northern Irish Troubles poem, "Ceasefire," taken from his book *The Ghost Orchid* (Jonathan Cape, 1995). The Troubles created veritable moral minefields for Ulster poets (and the wider, divided community) to traverse in their attempts to write (and behave) critically, and fairly. And, as Russell well knows, no Ulster poets had to walk more public tightropes in their work than (Northern 'Catholic') Seamus Heaney and (Northern 'Protestant') Michael Longley.

Longley's poem "Ceasefire," as previously noted, is perhaps his most famous poem, certainly his most famous political poem. When Russell claims that "Longley's poems dealing with the Troubles ... are crucial to understanding how literature and culture have been effective, non-didactic tools for cultural communication in Northern

Ireland” (Russell, 2010, p. 124), he has “Ceasefire” uppermost in mind, a poem that is perhaps best, and poignantly, introduced by Longley himself, who has said:

... at that time [in 1994] we were praying for an IRA ceasefire, I called the poem “Ceasefire” and, hoping to make my own minute contribution, sent it to the *Irish Times*. It was the poem's good luck to be published two days after the IRA's declaration. Almost always a poem makes its own occasion in private. This was an exception, and I still find warming the response of several readers, some of them damaged or bereaved in the Troubles ... (Spence, 2005, p. 1)

Indeed, Longley even received a letter from the father of sixteen-year-old Paul Maxwell, who had been blown up with Lord Mountbatten in an IRA attack, a letter which he has always maintained means more to him than any literary awards or any amount of professional acknowledgement. Therefore, the question now is: how did “Ceasefire” touch such deep chords within so many Troubles-hardened, Troubles-weary hearts?

“Ceasefire” is written in sonnet form, not surprisingly, given Longley’s training in the Classics, and his preference for a signature formal style in much of his verse, even when not using strict rhyme. Published in *The Irish Times* a few days after the historic IRA ceasefire in 1994, it would have drawn the attention of most readers, poetry-lovers or not, because of its very title: “Ceasefire.” Longley knew this, for sure. He would have known, like we all did, that such a title given to a poem by a prominent ‘Protestant’ poet from the troubled North, signaled a significant engagement with the IRA ceasefire, with all the deeply divided, impassioned politics, for and against, that surrounded it. Such a clever way to make sure his poem was going to be read, even by non-poetry people.

So, readers would have been expecting some contemporary, Troubles-based poetical commentary. However, the poem opens with reference to the two main protagonists of the Trojan War, Achilles and King Priam, sworn enemies. Achilles had killed Hector, Priam's son, in battle, and had agreed to a ceasefire to allow the old King to come begging for the return of Hector's body for proper burial. Longley's opening verse introduces us to the necessary beginnings of a peace process – two enemies brought face-to-face, unexpectedly humbled and humanized in each other's eyes through the contact:

I

Put in mind of his own father and moved to tears

Achilles took him by the hand and pushed the old king

Gently away, but Priam curled up at his feet and

Wept with him until their sadness filled the building. (Longley, 1995, ll. 1-4)

Moreover, this miraculous moment of de-demonizing of 'the other' through simple human contact leads quickly to the second stage of any true peace process – someone compromises, holds the hand out to 'the other,' and does something to prove it is a real gesture, not just mere words or shared tears:

II

Taking Hector's corpse into his own hands Achilles

Made sure it was washed and, for the old king's sake,

Laid out in uniform, ready for Priam to carry

Wrapped like a present home to Troy at daybreak. (Longley, 1995, ll. 5-8)

The sense of (at least temporary) mutual respect and reconciliation so engendered here then leads to the vital third stage of this peace process – the combatants actually sitting down with each other to eat and talk like normal human beings. Indeed, both adversaries now obviously admire one another, and more than just secretly it would appear:

III

When they had eaten together, it pleased them both

To stare at each other's beauty as lovers might,

Achilles built like a god, Priam good-looking still

And full of conversation, who earlier had sighed. (Longley, 1995, ll. 9-12)

Up until this point, and with only a couplet left of the sonnet, I would argue that Longley had been able to lead most *Irish Times* readers through this peace process in such a way as to challenge their sectarian/tribal prejudices. In other words, I believe that most readers would have been persuasively lulled into thinking: yes, it is possible, and a good thing, for sworn enemies to come together, despite their grievances and their mutual bloodletting, and do the decent human thing for the greater good of both of their peoples ... I was certainly one of those readers. However, it is now that Longley introduces the final couplet, a couplet that should have started the poem in order to be faithful to the meetings chronological order, but which he has deliberately withheld until now, until some of us would be willing to accept its accumulative peace-is-possible-no-matter-how-difficult logic:

IV

“I get down on my knees and do what must be done

And kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son.” (Longley, 1995, ll. 13-14)

To fully put across the sudden impact of these powerful lines would require Belfast profanity, but an honest-to-God WOW will have to do. The readers, many of which had been, as I said, lured into at least a tacit collusion with this glorious window of hope for peace between two sworn enemies, were now confronted with the action which made it possible at all – the humbling of one leader of the conflict in relation to the other; an action dangerously close to the ballpark of one of Northern Ireland’s most controversial words (which Protestants always prefix with a loud NO): Surrender.

Although Longley would have lost a lot of readers with the challenging revelation of his closing couplet, especially those who were more die hard in their Troubles’ entrenchment, he would have kept some readers with him, perhaps even helping, ever so slightly, to change their mind about the need for making a hard peace. Indeed, Russell records how Longley confessed to such hopes, and higher hopes, in an interview with Sarah Bloom, in which he admitted to daring to believe that the poem might reach the eyes and ears of IRA leaders (and of others in chief positions within the conflict):

... I sent it to *The Irish Times* and hoped that they would print it, in the hope that if they did print it somebody might read it and it might change the mind of one ditherer on the IRA [‘war’] Council. (Russell, 2010, p. 118)

Being published just after the IRA ceasefire, the poem presumably was not the feather in the balance that Longley dared to dream of, but since the ceasefire the poem has taken on an influential life of its own, something Longley also alluded to in his Bloom interview: “... the poem had some kind of public life in as much as priests and politicians picked it up.” (Russell, 2010, p. 118). Its message of forgiveness even reached the American senator Edward Kennedy, who cited the closing couplet in 1998 in a lecture in Northern

Ireland, using it to suggest that: “The two communities in Northern Ireland must reach out and do what must be done – and join hands across centuries and chasms of killing and pain” (Russell, 2010, p. 121).

Many other such instances of the public, reconciliatory power of the poem could also be cited here; sufficient to say that the poem does satisfy Russell’s own assertion that the major poems of the Northern Irish Troubles, particularly those of Longley, are in fact central to understanding how literature and culture have been effective, *non-didactic* tools for cultural communication in Northern Ireland. Doubtless, if Longley had laid out some one-sided Protestant, propagandistic program in a poem whose content was clearly Troubles-contemporary, it would probably have been totally ignored by at least one section of the Northern Irish community, the Catholics. However, by cleverly using a mythic context involving two Mediterranean combatants, he opened possible lines of communication between sympathetic and war-weary listeners from both of the NI communities who first read the poem in Ireland’s national newspaper, and for those who have heard it aired many times since.

During his consideration of Longley’s “Ceasefire,” Russell alludes to part of a video presentation given by Longley to a conference in Belfast in 2007. In that video, Longley claims that Northern Ireland’s best poetry was “essentially two-minded,” and concerned “about not ignoring the dark presence and at the same time imagining different futures.” He also maintains that such poetry had been true to NI’s “multifarious literary traditions,” and could profoundly help its people to understand the complicated historical, religious and cultural realities of the province (Russell, 2010, p. 122). Longley’s (and

Russell's) belief in this role of the Northern Irish poet, and NI poetry, is also shared by his fellow Ulster great; one, as we already know, from the Catholic side of the fence – Seamus Heaney.

In a lecture Heaney delivered to the Trustees of (Wordsworth's) Dove Cottage in 1984, ten years before the IRA ceasefire entitled, 'Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland,' Heaney argues for the possibility of poetry being "a symbolic resolution of opposing truths" (Heaney, 2002, p. 118). To be able to square such a circle within a postcolonial, deeply divided community, is no mean feat, and is the equivalent of poet-as-tightrope-walker extraordinaire:

The poet is stretched between politics and transcendence, and is often displaced from a confidence in a single position by his [or her] disposition to be affected by all positions ... (Heaney, 2002, p. 119)

Although it might sound a tad wishy-washy, a sitting-on-the-fence-ness, this high-wire attempt on the part of Northern Irish poets to stay as unbiased as humanly possible is well worth the effort. It has been achieved, not only by Longley and Heaney (and Mahon), but by significant others, and it has helped to provide a cultural corridor for thoughtful communication within Northern Irish society. Contrary to any possible claims of evasiveness, or middle-ground ineffectiveness, I believe that the Northern Irish poets' position is best described as being one of radical neutrality; an interrogative, stubborn, but ultimately open-handed refusal to give in to tribal loyalties and propaganda, and a determination to strive to see the many-sidedness of the cultural and political situation, one long embroiled in postcolonial angst.

Heaney himself, although not always totally successful, fought such a long-running war within his own poetry to stay as unbiased as possible, resulting in his words being used by the likes of President Clinton (and now President Biden) to promote the idea of peace and reconciliation within Ireland, and further afield. This inspirational extract from *The Cure at Troy*, his translation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, is now one of his poetical touchstones, and was aimed first and foremost (in 1991, three years before the IRA ceasefire) at all the people of Ireland, North and South:

History says, *Don't hope*

on this side of the grave.

But then, once in a lifetime

the longed for tidal wave

of justice can rise up,

and hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change

on the far side of revenge.

Believe that a further shore

is reachable from here ... (Heaney, 1990, p. 77)

As with Longley in "Ceasefire," and as Russell has asserted, so too with Heaney here – a fervent belief, as framed *in verse* by a Northern Irish poet, in the power of forgiveness and reconciliation to overcome revenge.

Furthermore, it speaks to what another literary critic, Eugene O'Brien, says about the healthy relationships that Heaney has tried to foster, especially in his poetry, between

conflicting identities and ideologies within postcolonial Northern Ireland. In *Seamus Heaney as Aesthetic Thinker* (Syracuse University Press, 2016), O'Brien sees Heaney's view of the relationship between poetry and politics as being essentially ethical:

... in that poetry allows for an alternative government, a government of language, a government of the tongue, that exists alongside actuality and holds up a possible alternative to that actuality and attempts to speak the truth to power. (O'Brien, 2016, p. 35)

In other words, poems can, and do, as with Longley's "Ceasefire," or Heaney's "hope and history" extract, exist alongside the megaphoned tribal certainties from a troubled, postcolonial province like Northern Ireland, and can provide an imaginative, liberating alternative to such seemingly irreconcilable political and cultural positions. Heaney believed, as O'Brien points out, in what the Greek poet George Seferis said of the uses of poetry in times of political crisis, that "poetry was strong enough to help;" and also in the late Ulster poet John Hewitt's view of poetry as an "imagining faculty" available to the domain of politics (even messier postcolonial politics) if political leaders might only pay heed (O'Brien, 2016, p. 172).

To conclude, it does seem that not just literary critics and poets like Russell, Heaney, Mahon, Longley, and O'Brien have believed in the healing efforts of Northern Ireland's poets and their poems, but certain key politicians within Northern Ireland have done so, too. To imagine that sworn enemies like the Protestant Rev. Ian Paisley, and the Sinn Fein/IRA Catholic leader, Martin McGuinness could ever share the highest political office together, never mind be genuine friends in the end, would have seemed plain silly

during the Troubles. However, “hope and history” did eventually rhyme for postcolonial Northern Ireland and its heroic people, and McGuinness, for one, knew an important part of the reason why: in closing, consider this, from McGuinness, following Michael Longley’s investiture as Ireland’s Professor of Poetry in 2007:

I believe that Michael, like previous holders of the chair, recognizes the responsibility that comes with having such a gift. The impact that poetry and literature have on people and society should never be underestimated. We have recently embarked on a new era of power-sharing here and the First Minister [Ian Paisley] and I are firmly committed to building structures and institutions which will underpin a peaceful and prosperous future for all of us. Literature and the other arts have a crucial role to play in what we are trying to achieve.

Participation and enjoyment of arts and culture promote imagination and can change our perceptions of events and each other. I believe that arts and culture will continue to play a crucial role in knitting together the fabric of our society.

(Russell, 2010, p. 2)

- Martin McGuinness, Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland (2007-2017).

Reflective Bridge

Looking Back on Chapter Four and Forward to Chapter Five

In previous article-Chapters we have considered William Drennan, premier poet of the political turbulence of the 1790s in Ireland, and major poets of the more contemporary Ulster Troubles including Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, and most specifically, Nobel laureate, Seamus Heaney. The work of these poets embodies the different ways in which they have consistently raised their collective poetic voices in what amounts to a creative, cross-community challenge to sectarian violence and an attempt, thereby, to foster peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. The ‘Eleventh Night’ (‘EN’) poetry sequence which follows - as Chapter Five - is part of my own creative attempt to do the very same: a present-day dissenter’s autobiography-in-verse, *in*-fluenced and inspired by such poet-mentor voices.

Poetry as a means of self-expression has intrigued writers throughout the ages and cultures. Ancient authors such as Catullus and Ovid penned Latin poems, *Carmina* and *Tristia*, treating questions of lives faced with controversy and exile. And since the Renaissance, major writers have chosen to lay down some of their most important works in the form of autobiographical poems. Dante’s *Vita Nuova*, Petrarch’s *Canzonere*, Shakespeare’s Sonnets, Goethe’s *Sesenheimer Lieder*, and Wordsworth’s *Prelude* are but a few, crucial milestones of the genre. Using autobiography to consider the self is at the center of all forms of lyrical expression. Whether it be in the form of love poems, religious poetry, historiographic or epic poems, et al, the poet is often mingled with the

text in an approach to telling selfhood. In recent centuries, autobiographical poetry has also been widely practiced throughout the literatures, with Modernists and Postmodernists such as Arthur Rimbaud and Gottfried Benn pushing the boundaries of life-writing in verse (Paul, 2017, p. 1). However, scholarly approaches to the art of autobiographical writing are typically focused on prose narrative forms rather than, like here, on poetry.

Unusually, unlike so many other poets, I myself did not start out as a poet by penning autobiographical poems. When they begin, poets and writers are most often told to write what they know best, which is usually taken as being themselves and their own life events. Instead, my early poems were almost totally based on what might be termed ‘pure imagination,’ using characters and scenes that I had ‘made up.’ For instance, I am assuming that no one has ever dug up a human tongue on a beach which then started talking to them. Of course, ‘pure imagination’ is arguably impossible, given our humanness; how our life experiences color how our brains work. Nevertheless, pure out-of-body make-believe seemed to be the source of several of my early poems, like “The Mason’s Tongue:”

THE MASON’S TONGUE

Although a likeable, charitable soul,
He had a less than secret tongue;
So it was removed, and entombed
A ritual distance from the shore -
Sealed dumb in the packed sand.

When a young man dug it up
(Out toiling for some bait)
It dropped from the wet spade
On to the cool slab of strand,
And lay like an odd curl of meat.

The young man cupped it in his hands
To get a closer look,
When, stirring on his palms
And with a strangely mournful note,
It suddenly began to speak:

*Go tell all the brethren
There is no rest where I have gone,
No answer comes from Jah-Bul-On.*

Bewildered, and seized with sudden dread,
He let the tongue flop to the sand,
Then scooped it back up with his spade
And flung it out across the waves.
Yet, though hushed upon the ocean bed,
The tongue's words lapped about his head:

Go tell all the brethren

There is no rest where I have gone,

No answer comes from Jah-Bul-On. (Rice, 1999, p. 16)

This strange, surreal poem was first published in *Muck Island* (1990), my first sequence of poems, being a box-set of my poems alongside charcoal drawings by Ulster artist Ross Wilson. The box-set contains twelve poems, with only three of them having what one might call a firm basis in reality.

I should note here, however, that though “The Mason’s Tongue” details an event that to my knowledge had never happened, the subject and theme of this early poem showed signs of the real political/cultural engagement contained in my later work, especially in ‘Eleventh Night:’ the same attitude we have seen our poets display in earlier chapters, of daring to seem as if they are betraying their tribe in order to reach a hand out to the ‘other.’ In this case, I was daring - just in a poem - to challenge the foundational myths of a distinctly (some might say sectarian) Protestant institution in Northern Ireland, the Masonic Order. (The poem was published in a major Northern Ireland journal and led to my brother, a policeman during the Troubles, being asked, by two plain clothes officers in his Belfast station, if his brother had “ever had his house burned down.” My brother’s reply was: “No, but if it ever happens, I’ll know who to look for.” They all smiled.)

My move to penning more conventionally autobiographical poems really took root after moving from Belfast to Hickory in 2005, a full fifteen years after the publication of *Muck Island*. Such poems have filled the pages of four beefy books of poetry so far, including a hefty New & Selected Poems. A fifth collection is due in fall 2024, *The Chances of Harm*, to be followed by the publication of the manuscript that makes up our

Chapter Five, 'Eleventh Night.' (All titles have/will come from Press 53, Winston-Salem.)

The poems for these collections have been largely received and written on my '717', 4th Ave NW, Hickory porch - what my family, friends and neighbors have dubbed 'the poetry porch.' There I spell-sit and sieve the daily dust of my life and thoughts, recording "the music of what happens" (Heaney, 1979, p. 56), in poems that bring the autobiographical 'I' into play much more than in my earlier work; so much so, that a little (as yet unpublished) one of them is even entitled, simply, "I:"

I

I figure the I:

it's divinely

human nature;

it's top to tail

uprightness;

pure spinefulness;

it's servant-to-none

but selfness.

Go figure the I.

Some of the thoughts and feelings that turned into individual poems on the Hickory porch stayed just that - individual lyrics. Others, however, coalesced into groups of poems. I completed 'The Moongate Sonnets,' for example, a sequence based on my relationship with an old mentor-friend from back Home, Billy Montgomery. In my

fiftieth year, a sequence of short poems surfaced which grew into a chapbook of fifty haiku entitled *Hickory Haiku* (2010). I also produced a suite of poems under the title ‘The Kingdom of Porch,’ for a book I entitled *Hickory Station* (2015), a title that signaled a growing awareness on my part of being in ‘exile,’ being ‘stationed’ in Hickory (a title that I now realize nods to a Heaney sequence called “Stations,” and his full length collection, *Station Island*).

As previously discussed in Chapter One, I realized that in the longer sequences I was definitely moving my poems from personal musings to social commentary - it wasn’t ‘Rice Haiku’, it was ‘*Hickory Haiku*’ - and my mind went back to where my poetry journey started, to the *Muck Island* poems ... and then it struck me - such poems were not so much autobiographical, but were maybe more ethnographical, though I would not have used the term back then. This single sentence, previously quoted from ethnographer Casey Golomski was, indeed, an ethnography-based wake-up call:

Ethnographers are storytellers engaged in the project of conveying other peoples’ experiences, re-presenting content of others’ and our own lives in ways that we hope changes consciousness for those who bear witness to it. (Golomski, 2019)

It was, again, not just a perfect description of ethnographers, but of so many *poets*, including Drennan and Heaney et al. And it was clear to me that in *Muck Island* I had captured (researched), interrogated, and essentially celebrated (albeit mainly in a highly imaginative way) the history of a whole community, the community of Islandmagee, County Antrim where I was living; and in *Hickory Haiku* I was doing the same for my adopted home in Catawba County, NC.

And then, I went back in my mind to one evening porch-sit, during which I had what I can only describe as being some form of poetic epiphany, involving a strange visitation from behind the veil of Poetry, an experience I immediately captured in this poem, “Neighbourhood” (Rice, 2013, p. 59), a poem which is now an opening epigraph to ‘Eleventh Night:’

NEIGHBOURHOOD

I dwell in a neighbourhood where most driveways
are laid with white marble stones of a kind which
are normally raked over posh people’s graves

and where the house opposite is a dead ringer for
the only home I could ever draw easily at school –
roofed square, four windows, winding pathway to door –

and where the green grassy garden is treated to a trim
never having been left long enough to merit a cut
and where I can sit on my porch and read and dream

and sip chilled wine for hours on end while tree frogs
and cicadas blend their comforting evening fugue
and the only thing to fear is the mighty mosquito ...

what a change from the streets of my Rathcoole childhood

when if I stood at our door and simply gazed out

I'd be greeted with, *who the fuck are you lookin' at?*

I can well remember looking up from whatever book I was reading and 'seeing' this character on the footpath, for just a few seconds, and if he wasn't 'real,' he was real to me. I knew, too, what it was he was sent to do: to challenge me to turn aside from the local view from my Southern porch, and turn my memory-gaze (my memorializing-gaze) back towards Home, to write about the community I came from, the (largely) Scots-Irish Protestant community of Rathcoole Housing Estate, and through that process to reach out to the other half of my genetic make-up, the Catholic side of my DNA, and the Troubles Republican housing estates neighboring Rathcoole.

Although nervous to start out, not wanting to be the cliché of a poet who has to leave home to be able to write about it in depth, I knew, nevertheless, that I was being compelled to confront those formative years in Rathcoole, and had to be obedient to what felt like a genuine impulse. Moreover, the deal was sealed, as it were, with my friend's reaction to the opening lines of the first main poem of 'EN,' a poem entitled "Bones and Blood:"

My bones are pavement, and my blood cement,

I'm the Protestant half of an Irish lament.

From the Rathcoole Housing Estate, I'm torn,

By way of Dromara and the Mountains of Mourne.

My friend simply said: "Well, you're definitely onto something, because that's as far away from Heaney as you can get!" Heaney, the Catholic, would have had to substitute

peat bog for pavement, and maybe rivers for blood, and certainly Co. Derry for counties Antrim and Down. In that sense, he couldn't write 'Eleventh Night' even if he wished to - only a Rathcoole urbanite like me could, one well-armed with the cross-community education in poetry that I had received from him and the other influential poet-mentors of this dissertation.

It is that manuscript, 'Eleventh Night,' which now constitutes our fifth and final article-chapter - Chapter Five: 'Eleventh Night:' An Ethnographic Poetry Sequence: A Present-Day Dissenter's 'Troubles' Autobiography-in-Verse. 'Eleventh Night' is being prepared for submission to Press 53, Winston-Salem, for publication.

I should say that the sequence is a departure for me in terms of style. The first lines, the first poems, arrived in eleven-syllable-long rhyming couplets, albeit couplets with as much variation in rhyme - between strict and loose - as possible; and as each poem appeared, they all demanded to be in the same format. It also struck me, quite naturally, to set them out like verse epistles, with each new stanza break looking more like a paragraph indentation. Moreover, given the form of the eleven-syllable-long line length, allied to the nature of the material, involving as it does a poem like "Tour of Fire" (longest of the sequence) which describes Rathcoole bonfire-lighting festivities similar to those which flare up across the whole of Northern Ireland on the 'eleventh night,' the eve of the Twelfth of July, the Protestant community's contentious annual 'cultural' celebration of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 - well, 'Eleventh Night' seemed 'given.'

In order to preserve the voice and the spirit of my poems, I am keeping the United Kingdom grammar and punctuation for the poems in 'Eleventh Night,' so the likes of "u"

will not be removed from words like “Neighbourhood;” likewise, commas and periods in my poems have been left outside the quotation marks.

I have also included (as Appendix A to this dissertation) an unusual interview exercise related to Chapter Five, entitled, ‘TOWS - The One Who Stayed,’ in which I am essentially interviewing myself, or my ‘muse.’ The purpose of this exercise is to have a conversation with one of the main ‘voices’ behind ‘Eleventh Night.’ There are many different ‘voices’ coming through in ‘EN,’ but the one selected as the subject for this interview is perhaps the most central - the Rathcoole man, the friend, the one, unlike me, who ‘stayed:’ the very same shade who ‘appeared’ to me on the Hickory porch, issuing the streetwise confrontational challenge that closed “Neighbourhood” and opened the door to the entire ‘Eleventh Night’ sequence.

Chapter Five

‘Eleventh Night:’ An Ethnographic Poetry Sequence A Present-Day Dissenter’s ‘Troubles’ Autobiography-in-Verse

(Epigraph I to ‘EN’)

LIGHTS OUT

Outside our house, across the road,
there is a game of stalk and stalked.

One, two, three red light!

We shuffle up the gentle, grassy slope
and freeze, smiling, some stock still,
some tipling, off balance, but safe,

lean lions creeping up on a gazelle
who hasn’t caught us out, just yet.

One, two ... three red light!

The pack is that bit closer to the kill.

One ... two ... three red light!

Now one or two have been found out.

One, two.....three red light!

The focused few still stand their ground.

Behind our backs air didgeridoos

as double-decker buses roar to a stop.

One two three red

Lights out!

(Epigraph II to 'EN')

NEIGHBOURHOOD

I dwell in a neighbourhood where most driveways
are laid with white marble stones of a kind which
are normally raked over posh people's graves

and where the house opposite is a dead ringer for
the only home I could ever draw easily at school –
roofed square, four windows, winding pathway to door –

and where the green grassy garden is treated to a trim
never having been left long enough to merit a cut
and where I can sit on my porch and read and dream

and sip chilled wine for hours on end while tree frogs
and cicadas blend their comforting evening fugue
and the only thing to fear is the mighty mosquito ...

what a change from the streets of my Rathcoole childhood
when if I stood at our door and simply gazed out
I'd be greeted with, *who the fuck are you lookin' at?*

Eleventh Night

NHOJ

I'm big McClatchy and I don't give a fuck,
Except for your bird if she's fit for a buck.
I tattooed my own name on my forehead once
- Just actin' the lig, like, playin' the dunce –
It was a wee homemade job, done at the house,
And I managed to screw up my own name – twice.
When I finally nailed it, it looked fuckin' well,
Except for the fact it was so hard to tell
(‘Cause it looked more like some stupid fenian scrawl)
If it was written in proper English at all.
So I asked my mates for their opinion
And was pissed off to see them all fall about laughin'.
But they did let me know that I'd got it wrong –
Instead of 'JOHN', it really read 'NHOJ'.
You can imagine my fuckin' horror ...
Though it taught me NEVER to trust in the mirror.

BONES AND BLOOD

My bones are pavement, and my blood cement,
I'm the Protestant half of an Irish lament.
From the Rathcoole housing estate, I'm torn,
By way of Dromara and the Mountains of Mourne.

 Within one-nine-six, on Derrycoole Way,
I made my memories, and remember the day
That a workman left footprints forevermore
Upon the unset pathway to our front door;
Footprints I knew would be someone's undoing
If they were not watching where they were going:
Sunk down in cement by some Immanent Will
For my brother, Annesley, who was nearly killed
When he went for a trip, and had a great fall,
Headfirst through the glass door and into our hall,
Because he was basically being a get
To beat me to money to buy a Seajet.
Being hard on his heels, I witnessed it all –
Saw him bloodied, lifeless, and flat on the floor,
Face-shrouded in the lace curtain that adorned
Our front door. But you could never keep him down
And out; he was soon up and washed and away –
Good prep for a boy who would face the IRA.

 Much stranger than fiction, the funniest thing
Was that our family had been preparing
For days for something similar to happen
To me, set down in stone by a prediction
Made by my Presbyterian grandmother,
Who would work herself up into a lather
Because of her unfortunate psychic powers

That would often keep her awake for long hours
Worrying about the poor apparitions
From her vivid, dream-given revelations.

Although she couldn't say when or where or why,
My granny foresaw airplanes fall from the sky,
And prophesied the time when a spoil-tip slipped down
To stop up young mouths in a coal mining town.
She said she had dreamt that an ominous cloud
Grew bigger and darker and covered a crowd
Of innocent children sat in a room
And brought them black rain from the kingdom of doom ...
She swore they were singing a beautiful hymn
With voices like birds warbling sweetly in whin.
The Aberfan disaster would strike home each year
When Welsh male voice choirs would bring down a tear.

But as sure as such dreams, every prediction
Would be fulfilled with a different victim
Suffering the bad (never good) of any
Dream scenario phoned through by my granny
To a daughter, son or other relation –
I had been earmarked for Annesley's misfortune.

THE DEEP FIELD

Blurry Christmas tree lights in the corner gloom
Become the Hubble deep field, making this room
A portal through which I travel back in time
To seek out the company of my own kind.

Early Christmas Eve; my young brother and I
Are already in bed, the only night my
Parents knew we'd volunteer to climb the stairs
Without the need for either of their orders.
I'm the oldest by three whole years, coming ten,
Old enough to know the saddest truth by then:
That Santa Claus is just a storybook sham,
Another figment of human invention.
But I was predestined to be a friend of
The imagination; found myself in love
With things invisible to sense and to plain
Sight – had reinvented him; believed again.

I haven't yet moved into the box room. I'm
Still sharing a bedroom, glad that at bedtime
I can safely ask that the landing light be
Left on and blame it on my brother, as he
Still has an excuse for not liking the dark.
Asking is no problem when dad is at work.
But tonight, I know that my dad's Santa Claus,
And my about-to-burst heart's primed with applause.

Lying beside my brother in semi-gloom,
I can hear sounds rising from the living room:
Comforting parental happy talk and low
Canned laughter from a comedy Christmas show
Everyone liked – the great Morecambe and Wise ...

Though my brother gets beaten by sleep, my eyes
Are set firmly on the prize of Christmas morn.
I know we can't get up until after dawn,
But the very second that daylight comes round,
We both race downstairs without touching the ground.

 Though working class kids, not mammon anointed,
I can honestly say we aren't disappointed:
We get toy soldiers, and football boots, and kits,
Cool games, and annuals, and even two bikes.
Our mum and dad rise to look at our faces,
Then head back to bed to resume their places
In a dream world that we wouldn't begrudge them,
Since they've left us in our version of heaven.

 Before the long day's out, before bed seems good,
We turn our attention to kids' Christmas food:
Not turkey and stuffing with gravy and peas,
But from padding presents left under the tree –
Selection boxes created perfectly,
Full of Mars Bars, Milky Ways and Galaxys.

THE GREY VAN

It always appears in Innis Avenue,
So, from Derrycoole Way, it's hidden from view,
But the long, community-friendly, horn-toot
Sounds its arrival, and we're begging for loot
To saunter round the corner to join children
Already in a line for the ice-cream man.
No need for a Mr. Softy or Whippy
Breakneck sprint, fearful that he'll have gone away
Before we'll reach him, because he's patient, seems
A genuine gentleman, not an ice-cream
Cowboy, arriving to the redneck 'Dixie',
Anywhere, and at anytime of the day
Or night, blasting out the Southern anthem from
A multi-coloured, plastic-cone-topped wagon.
Don't get me wrong, it's part of our pantheon;
Just looks like a tasteless giant's novelty crown,
While the ice-cream man's van is synonymous
With a kind of understated ice-cream class.
His small, smoke-grey Morris Minor Mini-Van,
Immaculately kept, showroom condition,
Rolls to kerbside standstill like a welcome hearse
Or a taxi on time for a tipper's purse.
No need for lettering; a marketer's dream:
Miniature, working-class Roll's Royce of ice-cream.
Although he's no undertaker – more like The
Slider Provider, The Ice-Cream Supremo, The
Neapolitan Magician, The King of
The Poke – he has a quiet, certain something of
The undertaker's reserved, stoic manner,

And a gentle grandfatherly demeanour.
And there's always something about his clean-cut
Image, his light jacket over proper shirt
And tie, that lends him a double-life aura –
Like he's a doctor by day, chemist or a
Surgeon or a dentist or big shot lawyer ...
But by night – Master-Butcher of Vanilla!
He turns towards us from the driver's side and takes
Our window orders for sliders, crisps, cones, flakes,
For our fathers' cigarettes, whose cellophane-
Slickness somehow seems risqué coming from him.
And what's between is his work board and money
Tray, where coins are sifted and sorted, money
Stamped with kings and queens, and the Poet's horses
And hens, hounds, salmon, pigs, bulls and hares ...
By his leg, low down's another money bag,
Which holds the lighter currency of our swag.
But it's when he reaches back for a new block
Of cartoned delight that a Bowie's knife-knack
Deftly kicks in, as he open-ends' the cartons,
Slicing ice-cream into perfect portions,
Presenting them, wafered, with the grace of old-
Fashioned, unfussed, professional quid pro quo.

Before I let it go, what I remember
Most fondly is the drizzly Ulster weather
Late Sunday afternoons and evenings when I
Am the solitary client at kerbside.
I have the grey van and the ice-cream man all
To myself. He often rewards his loyal
Customers with something a bit cheaper, or
Free, waiving the search for the extra copper.

What passes wordless between us, now, is lovely,
Worth more than money. And lives, in memory.

SPOT THE BALL

At last, after the headlines have been scoured,
After the death notices have been devoured,
With ah, that's terrible or such a young age,
The 'Tele' reaches me, folded at the page
I've been waiting on, with blue ballpoint in hand,
Ready to lend my young football brain to land
A welcome windfall by winning 'Spot The Ball':
It's a photograph from a local football
Match, players bucklepping all over the place,
Epitome of focus on ev'ry face,
Just enough to persuade that they know the way
To the ball that has been airbrushed from the fray,
The ghost ball that if you pinpoint with an 'X'
Will let your family sit back and relax.
I don't know that a biroed cross will never
Be fairly acknowledged by money-makers,
And so all my attempts to target the ball,
With hindsight, are much less than no chance at all.
That doesn't stop me, now, from doing my best
To conjure the impossible jackpot 'X'.
Then an uncle leans over and interjects,
Sure, never mind the ball – get on with the match!
Another joins in with more uncle banter,
An Irish League game? Ball could be anywhere!
All less than nothing to my concentration,
Aided by mother's motherly protection,
Give over you pair, our Adrian's inspired,
And you'll not be laughing when we've all retired!
I'm in the zone, in my grandparents' living

Room and, despite the odds, I'm more than hoping
That a solitary 'X' will hit the spot.
Secretly, even I know that it will not.
But why not? Why not? Why shouldn't it be so?
Answer's from them that signed 'X', not long ago.

LISSUE

I stand in tears in the alien playground,
Watching my mother sailing away around
The bend in the front seat of an ambulance.
I'm left at Lissue House for convalescence.
Post-op children are sent here to get well
From the Royal Victoria Hospital.
Although shell-shocked, forsaken, I understand
My mother's reason for fibbing, to pretend
She was only going to talk to someone
For a minute – her way of getting back home
With her worry-weary heart almost intact.
It'll be days before she'll be allowed back
For a first visit. Such knowledge is feeding fears
When a voice from behind me says, "Dry your tears
Mate, it's OK, you'll live to fight another
Day. Welcome to 'The Zoo'! It's flippin' cracker!"
Still gripping the wire fencing that keeps us in,
I swivel round to study the form of him
Who speaks. He has the wild look of someone who's
A bit cream-crackers, not all here, few loose screws,
But I'm glad of some comfort in this new place,
Even from a stranger with a strange face.
He's Ivor, 'Big Ivor', with a weight issue,
And he takes me on my first tour round Lissue.

 To a wee boy that's used to terraced Rathcoole,
Lissue is a haunted house from Scooby Doo,
With a hint of St. Trinian's thrown into
The mix – not only boys dorms, but girls dorms, too.
The dorms are really just big communal halls

Lined with hospital beds down their long side walls.
Big Ivor's delighted that the new boy – me –
Will bed down beside him, providentially.
There's just enough room between beds for lockers
With cupboards friendly to Lucozade bottles.
Dorm side we're facing has towering high windows,
Shuttered, come night, to slay countryside shadows.
At one end of the hall, high up on the wall,
Is a TV set mounted to serve us all.

But before I get to properly settle,
I'm summoned to test my masculine mettle
By two young nurses who are doing their best
To lighten the trauma which I have to face.
Since my kidney treatment back at the Royal,
I've endured a urination ritual
Involving many small humiliations
Necessary to ease my urinary pains.
When I pee, it's bloody, and it feels, at best,
Like I'm peeing hot liquefied broken glass.
So pre-pee, from the waist on down, I'm clabbered
In Vaseline, then taken to a prepared
Bath of scalding water, which I will sit in
While going, the shock of the heat confusing
The brain into thinking there's no pain peeing.
The trick, the medicinal mixture of pain
And pleasure, worked every time at the Royal,
But now I've landed in a new hospital,
And it's hard to unveil your bits and pieces
To even the nicest of these new nurses.
Still a boy, I know some things have to be done,
And at least it turns out that I'm not alone,

For there's two big baths that the nurses have run,
And another boy wondering what he's done
Wrong to suffer this daily dose of torture.
I joke that we're blood-in-the-water brothers
As we're coaxed into the bubbling cauldrons.
Then, just as I start to wee-wee, it happens –
Rather than soaking in a bathtub turned red,
I'm astonished to see clear water instead!
I leap out of the tub like a scalded cat,
And grab a towel to cover my bare butt.
The nurses are clapping and laughing with joy,
But I'm feeling sorry for the other boy,
Who's sitting dumbstruck in a crimson hell-broth.
I will not blame him if he blackens my path.
I'm a lucky boy, and a happy one, too,
Now looking forward to my time at Lissue.
Another eight weeks, another eight weeks off
School! Compared to schoolwork, this should be a laugh.

It takes just a wee while to settle well in,
To suss out the do's and the don'ts of the scene.
Like TV prison, there's a swapping system
That I quickly take a real interest in –
Smuggling stuff into the bogs and under
The walls that divide one bog from the other.
My most profitable client is Ivor,
Who, in a fit of sugar craze fever,
Lets me have the Ark Royal, ship of my dreams,
For two packets of Orange Chocolate Creams.

Aptly enough, given his greeting jingle,
Ivor's one of only two guys who single
Me out for a late night dormitory fight.

The other's Damian, a cheeky wee shite
From the Shore Road, who bails out before the off.
But big Ivor's a game bird, though he's not tough,
And I reluctantly have it out with him,
In our pajamas, both in bare feet, 'fighting'
Over something that's forgettably silly.
I end up faking punches to his belly,
Unable to beat a friend about the head –
I might as well be wrestling a waterbed.
We end up covered in sweaty tears, not blood,
With our tested friendship better than good.

Highlights of each week include Top of the Pops,
When us boys slither our way in for some bops
In the girls' dorm. Most nurses turn a blind eye,
As it's against the rules, knowing it's only
Flirty fun for pre-teens who couldn't dance to
Save themselves, and who wouldn't know what to 'do',
To be honest, if whatever 'the birds and
The bees' is really about was to up and
Land in our laps. Though some of us know, sadly,
More than we should of 'love' when it goes badly.

Then there's the weekend weaving of the wicker
Baskets, a session with limited numbers,
Which, somehow or other, I get roped into
Being part of. What starts as dejected boo
Hoos, turns into hat-high-in-the-air hoorays –
I'm a complete basket case come Saturdays.

But it's not just a holiday camp. All play
And no work is not the order of the day.
We have bouts of school, too, in a room on site,
Though more often than not, we're out and about

On nature rambles in the countryside, where
We covet chestnuts and acorns, bird feathers,
Pale-blue speckled eggs, within earshot of trains
And in sight of the crowns of the Mourne Mountains.

The chief routine glory of Lissue for me
Is the Santa's grotto of the toy room we
Get to play in regularly, set in a
Kind of miniature village, outside of the
Main house, spellbindingly full of every
Game and toy that we have ever dreamt to see.
With Monopoly and Subbuteo,
Working train sets, Johnny Seven Guns and Cluedo,
Plus some fancy games we had never heard of,
We vanish the days doing things that kids love.

Convalescence complete, my Mum and Dad come
To bring me back to my box-room bed at home.
I came from a thin-walled, matchbox council house
With postage-stamp garden, with its humble fence
And latched gate put up to give our family
Some semblance of ownership and privacy,
To the gentrified House of Lissue, with its
Old world character and the voluptuousness
Of high-ceilinged places. All too soon, it's time
To say goodbye to Ivor for one last time.
Our friendship helped conquer my initial fears,
And leaves us standing in the playground in tears.

LOOKIN' OUT

We'd gather round the TV in those days of
Black-and-white to watch the tea-time news. We'd have
To catch up on the latest that the 'Troubles'
Had to offer – see who was flexing muscles
In the paramilitary arena.
Still early doors, but both the sides had seen a
Fair amount of bloodletting in their patches.

I watch my dad sitting there as he watches
One of those round table discussions that were
Deemed discussions in name only, as they were
Favourite forums for war-jawing for all
Our politicians with backs against the wall.
There was no such thing as 'talks about talks' back
Then – just bake-to-bake bare knuckles; mighty craic
For people, in a black humoured kind of way.
It was Currie and Hume v Craig and Paisley –
Tag-team style – and when Cowan or Dunseith would
Ring the bell, pent-up viewers called out for blood.

This night, amongst uncles, aunts and grandparents,
I see my dad get agitated. It is apparent
That his heckles have risen against 'Fenian
Lies and Popish propaganda' coming from
The tongues of Mr. Currie and Mr. Hume.

I'm studying other faces round the room,
Seeing how they're soon in solid sympathy
With my proudly Protestant father's angry
Response to the Catholic politicians' rant –
All save my canny grandmother, who just can't
Stop smiling at my dad, the angrier he

Gets, which, when he catches on, is guarantee
That all hell will break out again between them.
What are you starin' at? And what's with the grin?
Oh, I'm just wond'ring why you're so red with rage.
We aren't smiling, but her smile would fill a page.
And then: *Just as sure as God is on His Throne,*
Just as sure as you were fostered from a Home,
Just as sure as your surname, it's in the eye
That they're your born friends – it's lookin' outta ye!

DUNCHER

My granda was a quiet man from the Collin,
Between Ballyclare and Slemish Mountain.
He'd smile, and say nothing, as he sipped his tea,
Sitting by the clinkered fire, cap over knee.
His 'duncher' I remember, with affection,
Being centre of my childish attention
On stay over evenings when granda and me
Played cat-and-mouse cap-tag before the TV.
He'd pretend not to watch my every move
As I inched my way forward, trying to prove
That I wasn't heart-set on swiping his cap,
But merely attempting to sit on his lap.
Of course, in the end, he'd surrender the prize,
With mock-shock on his face, and love in his eyes.

THE SILVER SPOON

My father wasn't born with a silver spoon
In his mouth. Rather, he was transported soon
After his birth to a Home up in Belfast,
And there he stayed for seven more years. His last
Day couldn't have come sooner – he was fostered
By Jimmy and Minnie Martin, who chauffeured
Him to Cambria Park, Whiteabbey, beside
Railway tracks that run from Belfast to seaside
Larne. He was foster-brother to two brothers:
Not mistreated, but nothing like those others,
As they were the apples of their parent's eyes.
In any day and age, sure that's no surprise.

He grew up tough and he grew up mean, the boy
Named Sue had nothing on him: a nobody's
Fool, even if he was nobody's child. They
Sometimes had to send him home from school early
To protect kids from his fists. One Punch Ken was
His young nickname, and it stuck, simply because
When he hit you, he hit you hard, and that meant
Lights out. For some, Ken sent home was Heaven sent.

But even now we've gone too far. We need to
Go back a bit, back before primary school,
Go back to the Home, back to his memory
Of a time when he was out on a sunny
Day in the grounds of the Home, when he was asked
To pay respects to a stranger who was whisked
Into his play. He always remembers her
As a lady, well dressed and well spoken, her
Demeanour immaculate, with a softish,

Kindly manner, with a man with an English
Accent. In dreams, he knows that she's his mother.
But what he remembers distinctly is more
Of the fear that she had come to confiscate
His spoon, his silver spoon, the spoon he would hate
To part with, the spoon which he played with in that
Playground dirt, the spoon he'd stolen off the bat.
But she was there, he'd felt her in ev'ry way.
Though she still remains a phantom to this day.

THE ALPHA

It always has the promise of beginning,
Going down to the Alpha of an evening,
Rushing into the plush-pile, hoovered splendour
Of that well-carpeted cinema foyer,
An entrance large-postered with Hollywood greats
And lined with glassed counters for tickets and treats.

Pop-corned and fizzy-drinked, we welcome the dark.
A torchy shines us to our seats. We shuffle-walk
Past half-risen fellow torn ticket holders
Who just conceal the narkiness that smoulders
Beneath their tight-lipped smiles. We can't care less.
We're focused on our mission to see the best
That Hollywood has prepared for us tonight.
Subtly choosing seats, with 'best' mates left and right,
We elbow in to thole the advertisements,
Which merely serve to stoke our core excitement.
Anytime now, the magic curtains will close,
And though we are sitting, we'll be on our toes
For the lights to dim and the curtains to open.
And here it comes! The regal, roaring lion!
Calling us into the land of make-believe,
Which is somehow always better than where we live.

Tonight, we're in the balcony, not the stalls,
So we get to pause and muster up the balls
To send our sticky lollies sky-rocketing
In the dark, raining down on the plebs below.
We snigger at the shouts and simply lie low,
Poker-faced in the torchlight that scans our row.
Then it's back to business and on with the show.

This night, per usual, we're put through the mill,
Torn between laughter and tears, good and the ill,
But left believing that good guys always win.
There *will* be last minute punishment for sin.
The movie finishes, the titles descend,
And it draws to a close with two words: THE END.

But then that's just the start of the beginning,
For when we are young we are always winning.
The curtains close, and the Anthem begins, but
We're nowhere to be seen, being up and out
To round up the dregs of our pocket money
To bag us some chips from the Alpha café.
Then we run like the wind straight out the front doors
With our top-buttoned, hooded duffle-coat cloaks
Flowing behind us as we act out our scenes –
Full of Cowboys and Indians, Kings and Queens,
Goodies and Baddies – in our innocent minds,
Realer than real But we can't foresee the times
When the Alpha is a drinking den, drunken
Hoods being all the show, while true working
Men stay home to shelter their wives and children:
Not matinee men; but heroes, in the end.

TOUR OF FIRE

Eleventh Night peaks. The Twelfth has come. Torches
Are lit and thrust into the driest branches
Of the pagan pyre. Time for the tour of fire.
Inferno in every window; wood and tyres
Sending smoke signals up into the night sky.
Proud Papal effigies preparing to die.
Bewildered Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses,
Looking down from their balcony maisonettes.
Loyal players in these fiery mirror-halls,
The usual suspects are fanning the flames:
The accordionist, the preacher, the drunk,
The skinhead, the hood, and the grammar school punk;
The flirt, the millie, and the token taig
(Suffered, good-humouredly, when things aren't too bad);
The dole-soul, the work-shy, and the work-is-done,
The mason, the slapper, and off-duty policeman;
All swaying and singing to Loyalist songs
Blaring from bass-booming home radiograms –
Some placed on the paths like musical coffins,
Tight owners sat on them, holding their half ins.

There are the beer-bellied boys, low-chested athletes,
Tenants tins stamped with girls in scant panties,
And their wives swigging their wee Smirnoff's and cokes,
Relaxing for the moment, sharing some jokes,
But secretly tuned to their man's rising laugh,
Some fearing the cost of this night's aftermath.
To drown such fears, there's Pernod and blackcurrant,
Leg-openers to maybe spare the children ...
But all that's in the future, the night's still young,

Time for girlie banter about the 'well-hung' ...
Coffin-nail of choice is Embassy Regal –
Or Embassy Red if the wallet's able –
No. 6 or Players or Rothman's King Size
For highfalutin types with gold in their eyes,
Voluptuous women with bare bosom soufflés
Who know that their jiggle is mankind's heart-prize.
People suck on cancer sticks, long, hard and strong,
To raise themselves out of a houseful of wrong.
But let's give a nick to the Gallagher's weed
And return to the main act played on the green.

To 'King' Billy and Bobby, and big Davy
Who'd savour the chance to mangle a Mickey.
They're seated around the 'top table', flanking
The main paramilitary man, who's yanking
Their chains with sinister banter to keep them
In check, making sure they're reminded it's him
That they owe loyalty to – lest they forget.
Not easy to do, considering the state
Of their mucker's face who had made the mistake
Of hitting the wrong guy a dig in the bake.
And there are plenty of youthful replacements,
Now sniffing round wee girls like dogs with two dicks:
Schoolgirls stretching their long chewing gum high wires
From hands to mouths, with confident, cheeky smiles,
Teen titties on show ... but they don't realize
That their precious hymens are playing with fire.
Though some have clearly gone off to the races,
Those marks might be passion-poppies ... or bruises ...
Ack, you can't talk to them at this age! I hear
Big Sadie say, sidling up to bend my ear,

Reminding me to remember my teenage
Years, when such schoolgirls starred in my own wet dreams.
Then she smiles and suggests that we let them run on,
And pray that it amounts to no more than fun.
*It's better than being alone like Ms. Ward –
Soaks her dildos in vinegar to keep them hard!*

But to get the whole truth, come a bit closer,
And witness the things surrounding love's bonfire.
See the innocent caught in the web of life,
Not one thing or other, not suited for strife,
Yet playing their part in the Protestant scene,
Being born in Rathcoole, and not Skibbereen.
Doubtless they're characters that carry some hope,
Who can look at their mates and dare to say, nope
That's not what I'm into, I mean no offense,
But hating a Catholic just makes no sense.
(But then that's easy when Republican guns
Are not pointed at your own flesh-and-blood ones.)
It's not all about Billy-boys, birds and booze.
There are ordinary heroes here because
It's their community, for good or for ill,
And they won't surrender their traditional
Celebrations totally to the dark side –
Would be easier to sit at home and hide.
See doting grandkids on grandparent's knees.
Hear the old ones swapping childhood memories.
Watch playground sweethearts holding hands in public,
Willingly running the wolf-whistle gauntlet.
See the 'deeps' in their duffle-coats sneaking
A joint, who can't for the life of them quite see
The point, but they've left their hippy incense-dark,

Unable to resist the communal lark,
For despite education's enlightenment,
They're still drawn to the Eleventh excitement.

Whiff the irresistible aromas from
The welcome wagon-train of lay-by chip-vans,
Serving gravy chips, curry chips, fish suppers,
Pasties, sausages, bacon sodas, burgers,
Fanta, Coke, Iron Brew, Lilt, and Seven Up,
Ulster cheddar and cold cuts in big Belfast baps.
See kids queuing for cones from Mr. Whippy,
'99' pokes with flakes and chocolatey
Sprinkles, or flake-less but with tarn in top
Of strawberry or of raspberry syrup,
Or feasting on lollies like Seajet, Quencher,
Cornetto, Fab, Rocket, Magnum and Joker,
Choc Ice, Ice Pop, the ice-cream harmonica –
Wafered slabs of mouth-watering vanilla.
And Candy Floss! E number-less nebulas!
Pink pillars of creation where sugar's
Born! Formed by hands circling in widening gyres,
Kids crave second helpings of this edible air.

(Love the banter between old primary school mates,
Now separated by 11-Plus Tests,
Swappin' slaggin's alongside the ice-cream van:
It's Strider the Slider & Vanilla the Man!
Without missing a beat, the ball's back with grins:
It's The Wallypops & The Skinhead Supremes!)

The mobile shop that's a permanent fixture,
Is also getting well in on the picture,
Supplying the adults with mixers and cigs,
Mining the pocket money gold rush of kids

Who've struck it rich from half-blocked uncles and aunts.
With such dosh now burning a hole in their pants,
The shop is thankfully well-stocked and ready –
A cornucopia of confectionary!
There are Lucky Bags, Wine Gums, Chelsea Whoppers,
Sports Mixture, Black Jacks, Fruit Salad and Gob Stoppers,
Sherbet Fountains, Dib Dabs, Lucky Mines, Cola
Bottles, Flumps, Fruit Gums, Munchies and Mintola,
Fruit Pastilles, Fruitella and 10p mixes,
Bounty Bar, Golden Cup, Crunchie and Twix,
Galaxy, Picnic, Opal Fruits and Mars Bars,
Aero, Love Hearts, Caramel, Chocolate Éclairs,
Curly Wurly, Fry's Cream, Flake and Marathon,
Milky Bar, Milky Way, and the Toblerone!
As many sweeties as wild flowers of the Burren –
Don't have all night to stand here and name them ...
(Keep those health-wise *tut, tuts* in suburbia –
Sometimes these kids' only comfort is sugar.)

My granny and granda have just dandered up –
It's strictly Tetley tea in their drinking cups.
Salt-of-the-earth Ulster-Scots, country people,
Who carry the weather of their own locale
Like a breath of fresh air into this scene
And lend it some semblance of real dignity.
Granda's the quiet one, but granny's a talker
And though a churchgoer, nothing can shock her,
No, not even big Sadie and her harem
Of housewives come over to see how she's been.

The fire's really raging by now, it's burning
Its way through the telegraph wires, and singeing
The eyebrows on reddening faces of folk

Too tipsy to care; and of proud kids who've built
The bonie and are innocently basking
In the glow of watching their parents' good time.
It's blistering paintwork on bonie-side homes
And fracturing windows in their living rooms.
But, like Christmas, Eleventh Night comes round just
Once a year: as then, so now, in God they trust
To foot the bill for any bonie damage,
Which won't be much as long as there's no rampage
Of eejit teenagers who can't hold their drink.
And to speak of some damage, I hate to think
Of blood spilled on the green before the night's out
But it happens, and's nearly always about
Someone caught putting their hands were they shouldn't.
It's always a clash with randy Protestant
Celebrity brethren blown in from Scotland
To add some Bannockburn to the Twelfth Day bands.
Their kilts and their sporrans can turn women's heads
And make them unmindful of their marriage beds.
It never ends well, but's mostly forgotten –
There's serious marching to do come morning.

Let's leave the tour here at the height of the night;
Hope that the just will be allowed to sleep tight.
While, for some, it's all downhill from here to dawn,
For the young fire-builders, it's ladders to heaven –
It's hard to fathom, but part of the picture:
Kids are Cowboys and Indians, not just your
Prods versus Taigs of the grown-up condition.
The night truly begins for bonfire children
When the adults head off to parties or bed –
Time for baking big spuds in the dying red

Embers, and then feeding the flames to make
Sure that their bonfire survives until daybreak.
They've given their all for the Loyalist cause
Not with any prejudicial malice, as
Many of their parents and siblings have done,
But because they have been given permission
To be hunters and gatherers, selected,
Yes, by tribal grown-ups to help them erect
Monuments of Protestant magnificence,
But outside of flirting with fire, there's no sense
Of real premeditated, knowledgeable
Hatred directed through flames to those unable
To get housed by the Housing Executive –
At this stage, they're happy to live and let live.

BULLETS OR BATS

Big Bobby Cain strolled down to The Diamond to
Seek some advice from one of the chosen few –
A Catholic solicitor that was allowed
To peddle his wares with the Protestant crowd
(’Cause even the dogs knew that Taigs knew their rights).

Ushered in by a cute wee thing in black tights,
And greeted by a smile and a handshake, he
Joked that the lawyer’d forgotten Masonry.
Grinning, the lawyer asked Bobby what he could
Do him for. Bobby then cleared his throat and said
That the lawyer might want to consider it
As being ‘off the record’, if he knew what
He meant. The lawyer then mimicked turning off
His recorder, and prepared to hear something rough.

The form was that Bobby had made a mistake
That meant that both of his knees would have to break
Before his wrong could be put right. He had been
Out on the razzle one night at the Ardeen
Hall, and had drunkenly fell in with a doll
Who had never slept with her arse to the wall –
Problem being, she was married to his best
Mate, who was spending his time down in the Kesh
For giving his all for the Loyalist cause.
(It’s easy to imagine the pregnant pause.)
His mate didn’t give two shites for his hoor at home,
But such behaviour ‘the boys’ couldn’t condone.
The lawyer leant forward and nervously asked
What exactly Bobby thought was his task.

In a nutshell – in terms of the compensation,

Should he choose bullets or bats? So you can
Picture the look on the solicitor's face –
A classic case of an owl Del Boy double-take –
As he slumped back bewildered into his chair.
Bobby understood that it was hardly fair –
The proverbial darkie's arse in moonlight –
To ask him the question, but in the light
Of the fact that a big payout was comin',
He thought the lawyer might fancy some action.
The lawyer 'hadn't heard the conversation',
But agreed to take a piece of the action.

Bats over bullets was apparently best
To maximize coffers from the compo chest.
Though bullets were obviously dangerous,
The bats produced unpredictable messes,
And there'd be brownie points from the assessors
For extra trauma from hands-on aggressors.
So Bobby accepted the lawman's advice
And cast in his lot with bats' roll of the dice.
He phoned 'the boys' to pass on his decision,
And then went to bed with the television.

Next day he was woken by his old mother
Who sensed that he was in some kind of bother
Because of the awkwardness of the nervous
Crew that had just interrupted her breakfast.
Bobby reassured her not to be worried,
And got into his daily duds and hurried
Downstairs to see who'd been sent to do the job –
He was relieved to see mates filling their gobs.

There sat Mr. Red, Mr. White and Mr. Blue,
Three of the local smalltime hoods, sent round to

Administer Bobby's punishment beating.
The fact that the same doll had been giving
All three of them the same kind of attention
Was neither here nor there, not worth a mention –
The big lad's mistake was to go and get caught.
Feeling sorry for their oul mucker, they brought
Him some 'anesthesia' – gold whiskey, wine
And beer, and made him to promise, by the time
They'd return later that day, that he'd have them
Beaten down his fat neck to help numb the pain.
His ma was like a second mum to them all,
So he should pack her off to the bingo hall.

He thanked them, though he worried that the booze would
Make him bleed a bit more, but they swore blind they'd
Get an ambulance the minute they were done –
There'd be no body when his mother got home.
They'd also take care not to leave a real mess,
To spare his mother any needless distress.
With all that being said, they showed themselves out,
And left their oul mucker to his drinking bout.

To cut a long story short, they shattered his knees –
Three men who couldn't punch through wet paper bags ...
But they kept to their word, for what it was worth –
He got help and survived by the skin of his teeth.
Once able, he hobbled out to cash his 'winnin's',
And was greeted by a gang of wee hallions
Who ran shouting round the shops, in Rathcoole rain:
Look at big Bobby, and his best mate – Cane!

McNABNEY'S

Flushed with some pocket money, we would dander
The Old Irish Highway to Cloughfern Corners
And along the Doagh Road to McNabney's shop.
You could buy almost anything there: top up
On basics like bread, and milk, and cigarettes,
Clear bags of sticks, firelighters, and peat briquettes.
But we coveted sweeties in big plastic
Jars: towering, lid-topped sentinels, standing like
Dolmens on some sugary Easter Island,
Shoulder-to-shoulder in ranked rows, and opened
At our command. Cola Cubes, Chocolate Éclairs,
Brandy Balls, Bon Bons, Cinnamon Lozenges,
Sherbet Strawberries, Apple Tarts, Murray Maids, all
Weighed on the scales and bagged at our beck-and-call.
We loved McNabney's on warm summer nights or
On cold winter ones with Christmas in the air.
But the main thing that stays in the memory
Is the image of the owner's daughter. She
Was always on duty, be it day or night.
Plainest Jane, certain spinster, nothing to write
Home about. She would ask, serve, take money, give
Change, all the while acting like we weren't alive.
She was the snigger-stock, the weirdo, the creep,
Who we'd only laugh at when back on the street.
But I was taken by her concentration,
Loved the way she ignored the situation
Caused by her staring out and above our heads.
I sensed she could see into all our lived lives.
If I could see her now, I would tell her that

She was right to so ignore us, right to strike
Out on her inward own, and fair play to her.
If I only knew her name, I would name her.

CIVILITY

Off-school summer days at Hazelbank Park,
Sun burnt sweaty from our frolics by the Lough,
Heading back, heads down, hungry enough for home ...
Then – cool civility on the polished lawn
Of the manicured bowling green from Heaven!
Daz-washed teams of working class men and women
In whiter-than-white duds and matronly frocks –
Most men sporting their pre-Fall, Sunday-best caps,
Most women topped with stylishly floppy hats –
Are rolling their perfectly weighted bowls that
Ride on Jesus-fish curves, each bowl traveling
On invisible beams round intervening
Planets to barely kiss the jack, or fired plum
Down the slick surface like a shot from a gun
To smack jack's pale face into the drop-off ditch.
Partitioned behind gated railings, we watch
And listen to banter as inherently
Necessary as the push to every
Bowl, bowls shaped like inflated vinyl singles,
With those many-coloured side-centered labels,
Lovingly buffed with magical cloths before
The taking of the mat, the balanced posture,
Arcing underhand swing (nothing down and low
About it despite the bias in the bowl),
And then the final flourish of the release
That leaves each hand open and at low-five peace.

BURNING LOVE

At school, big boys ink-in the soft flesh between
Their forefinger and middle finger to make it seem
Like they are sporting 'fanny', the term they use
When they boast about the place that we still view
With a kind of Halloween fascination:
Though we will feign familiarisation,
Of course, faking manly knowledge of the great
Girlish unknown. We can recognise the get-
Up of the strut: leggy model, knuckle-kneed,
Fingernails as toenails painted to succeed
In attracting the big boys, who're now walking
Fingers on desktops, scissoring them with glee.

Or back in the 'Coole, they press palms together
Either side of some open-faced fence chicken wire
And tell us that it feels just like fanny lips
Or the firm, forgiving flesh of budding breasts.
And then, if you slip a hand under a skirt
And run it up above the smooth stocking top
To the softest skin-silk of opening thighs,
You are in to see the whites of willing eyes.

Sometimes we catch them in action behind the
Maisonettes, involved in sex scenes fit for "Huh?"
Two on one, a young thing stretched across their knees
On the late night, bulb-fused, Baltic, cement steps,
Being played like a four-handed piano –
Two on the white bits; two on the dark below.
Or in a disused coal shed behind bricked houses
Where Wranglers are unzipped to undone blouses,
There are big boys, bone-hard, and wet at the tip,

With big girls in need of salve for swollen lips,
Proving the best and worst that love can offer.
We spy through rusty keyholes (What the Butler
Saw!) or listen long outside closed doors to moans
Which clearly come from a good place; and to groans
Which sound closer to a bad horror movie,
The kind that one just can't bring oneself to see,
Which make it hard to tell if it is really
Wanted or not – being stolen; not for free.

 In these concrete cities, jungles of hormones,
Every type of situation happens,
Same as in the privileged suburban scene,
But often rawer, more brutal, more obscene,
More often on the wrong side of right and wrong.
Like when young babysitters play horsey on
The man of the house's lap before the wife
Comes home; or find themselves fighting for their life
In the backs of parked cars before being dropped
Off outside their mummy's door with their pocket
Money wet with tears, silence-sworn forever
For fear of the fallout if Da were aware.
Or when older women get backed against side walls,
Being had by drunken men with bully balls.
But justice can come by the old dog eat dog,
When such meet their maker in a cold bar bog.

 Despite the risky outweighing the risqué,
And lust shading love on a given day,
'Coole girls and boys still curl up their lips and move
To The King's own *hunk-a-hunk of burning love*.

HEART ACHE

Uniformed us, sweating in a mobile hut
Waiting for our English teacher to show up,
Dying to begin to torture the old fool:
Lucky 'Troubles' children, country grammar school
Kids who escaped from the massacre on a
Daily basis; bright teenagers who'd passed the
Eleven Plus test or, like moi, had fluffed it
But benefited from parents who'd paid out
Money they couldn't afford to try and make
Sure that we wouldn't copy their mistake
Of neglecting our precious education
For some quick nine-to-five remuneration:
Though few of them had been given any real
Choice—straight out to work was the working class deal.

Just as our undisciplined waiting almost
Reached its silly farm antics limit, he burst
In through the door like a man on a mission,
With mortarboard in hand and black gown swishing.
Immediately labeled a total twat,
He resembled a bald, bespectacled bat,
But swiftly secured a ripple of applause
By matching his bake to back end of a bus,
While claiming he knew not what he was doing.
Despite the fact that most of us were pissing
Ourselves at the disheveled get-up of him,
He got himself together, quietened the din,
Commanded the front, closed his eyes and opened
His mouth, and booklessly waved a verbal wand.

He spoke of heartache, and numbness, and of pain;

Of what sounded like cold beer, good drugs, and wine;
Said stuff about dissolving, and forgetting,
In a place where there was no place for fretting ...
The very classroom walls seemed to draw their breath
When he talked of almost being in love with death.

When teacher finished, he had no need to blush.

Coming round, out of the unreal teenage hush,
I turned and whispered to my mate beside me—
His mouth hanging open, his chin on his knee—
Wow ... what does he call that thing when it's at home?
Not sure ... but I think he said it was a ... 'poem'?
From that moment onward, there would be no doubt—
Liking poetry would be my 'coming out'.

THE WIDE WORLD

Not sure if I'm up with the lark, but I'm up
With my dad, who's swilling a final tea-sup
Before driving to his work in Swift's Kilroot,
A seven-to-three shift at the polymer plant.
It's going to be a sunny one, and I'm
Trying to be breakfasted and dressed in time
For a 'literary' morning with my mate
Marty from next door. We mustn't be late
For our rendezvous with our third wheel, mountain
Man Ian Rea, who might send us to detention
If we don't make religious Thoreau-time. Ian
Is two years older than us, and he's the brain
Behind our scake-of-dawn adventure. Penguin
Paperbacks in hand, plan's to spend the morning
Down at Hazelbank, shore of Belfast Lough -
Among other things, famous for Paddy's Rock,
A giant boulder embedded on the beach.
Except at low tide, it is well out of reach,
But when the water retreats, it's a favoured
Spot for a photo opp. of children shouldered
Up on top by dads or big bruvv, all saying
Cheeeese for smiling Kodak mums, who're capturing
An untroubled moment for the family
Album, such as it'll be. But this morning, we
Are on our ownios, three amigos who
Have waltzed down from the 'Coole, only stopping to
Lose our bridged faces in the cumulous smoke
Piped up by the old steam train taking a toke
For the ages on its way from Belfast to

Carrick to Larne, conjuring up Cat Ballou,
And Billy The Kid, The James Gang, and The Duke,
Silver screens idols straight from the only books
That my father ever leaves lying around
The house - those or the odd dirty secondhand
Magazines brought home from the late shift and 'left'
Lying bog-side as a wee fatherly 'gift'.

The tide's well out, sun's up, and Paddy's Rock sits
Like a broken filling on the beach tongue. It's
A mind-boggler how it hasn't been renamed
'Billy's Rock' ... The two shoreside turrets remain
Rooted like twin chessboard rooks, commanding the
Promenade. After a stroll up and down the
Shelly strand, we park ourselves on a bench seat
Initialed by paramilitary deadbeats
And their wenchens, co-starring with ev'ry Ulster
Protestant acronym under the sun - four
'FTP' are only outdone by five 'KAI',
Rathcoole acronym for 'Kill All Irish'. I
Can never quite square that one with our Irish
Island locale ... But it's a clear piece of pish
To some whom we've grown up with, those Billy Boys
Who pack the weekend stands for the Crues and Blues,
Who wouldn't know bold Jemmy Hope from Bob Hope,
Though they would find both men just as funny, no doubt,
If they did. The PIRA would make sure of that
By killing floating votes with gun, bomb and bat.
(The very name, 'KAI', was allegedly born
On the terraces at Ibrox Park, when some
Bright spark took a Danish striker's name and thought -
'I can make a cool gang name out of that!')

We've made our contribution to Protestant
Dissent by carving names alongside such rant,
Like Henry Joy McCracken and William Orr,
Presbyterians even we could die for,
And band names like Pink Floyd and The Grateful Dead,
The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin - wee Van! - instead.

Our morning's chosen texts include Walden Pond
And the collected Keats. If we had a pound
For every Thoreau quote that hits the mark,
We teenage three would've a fortune in the bank.
'To live deliberately' - imagine thon!
Not blown about by every easy doctrine.
To 'stand on the shore of the wide world ... and think ...':
To think for ourselves, or at all! We would drink
A draught of Keatsian vintage to that, a full
Keg each of 'the blushful Hippocrene' an' all!
But we're the lucky ones, who've entered the world
Of books, enabled to weigh what we've been told
To believe in the balance of history ...
Such are this morning's musings by the blue sea,
Under a blue sky, strong sea salt in the air.
We close our books, eye new ships steering for elsewhere.

SPREES

We used to go on stealing sprees in Belfast
Some Saturdays after sports. Sprees would last
Right up until the last door shut of the last
Shop. Truth be told, we tea-leafed for the blast
Alone, as most of what we knocked off wasn't
Worth its weight in gold, though gold watches wouldn't
Be sniffed at, even in the days before bling:
They could be sold or traded for the real thing –
LPs that your mates had half-inched before you
Had got the chance to nab. There were rogues' rules you
Had to follow or you'd find yourself looking
For another mob to cruise around with – like making
Sure cover was provided for your mates while
They parked in front of the LP racks to pile
Up their coveted 'collection' on the rack al-
Most deadeye-level with their wedding tackle.

Two of us would casually wander in
To flank the main man so he could position
His selected stash for stealing. He'd open
His coat and pull up the jumper he'd put on
Especially for the job, press the LPs
To his chest, tuck the jumper into his jeans
And close his coat. Then he'd put his hands inside
His pockets to help take the weight, and decide
When was best to back out and head for the door.
In those days, security was so piss-poor –
Vinyl in sleeves was an invitation to theft,
And nothing would go beep beep beep as you left.

I broke the record (predestined was the pun!)

For nicking most LPs on a solo run.
I smuggled nine LPs inside my duffle
Coat, and emerged to spark a major kerfuffle
On the bus back when my mates worked out that I'd
Swiped *Vince Hill Sings* by mistake. I nearly cried;
Those bastards just hee-hee-heed all the way home.
Not swopped or sold, we'd dump stuff that was stolen
So our parents couldn't question our 'purchase',
But that LP didn't have to go to waste.

It was my mother's birthday, and *Vince Hill Sings*
Was perfect – the only thing better was rings.
But when I lied and told my settee'd father
Of the 'gift', and he told me that my mother
Was upstairs sick in bed and would be chuffed to
Bits by my thoughtfulness, well what could I do?
I slowly climbed the stairs with a roast-red face,
And gave back her gentle smile, hid my disgrace,
And then retreated to my cell-like bedroom
To stare at the ceiling through the evening gloom.
Such evidence of 'sin' made it plain to me –
Even on stealing sprees, nothing comes for free.

THE SKINHEAD AND THE FAG

Journeying one day from Rathcoole to Belfast,
He takes the Ulsterbus like the rest of us.
It is the height of the Wee Six's Troubles,
And his head is as bare as kids' bubbles.
Built like a brick shithouse, denimed, with skimmers
And knee-length Doc Martens, he eyes us sinners
Like he is the Devil Himself. Myself and
The girl just absorb the intimidation,
And the older passengers never blink eyes.
He lights his Number 6 and turns to the skies.
By the time we reach the security gates
That ring the city centre he's almost ate
A whole packets of fags, and lights another
As the soldiers board the bus to search for bother.
You either get off now or stay in your seat
Until the bus goes out through the other gate.
We're on our way to the Ulster Museum,
So we sit tight, along with the skinhead and
Two elderly women. But as the bus edges
Up Royal Avenue, the skinhead chances
His arm and stands up to ring the mid-door bell
To get off city centre. But we can tell
That the hardened bus-driver isn't going to
Play ball. What happens next's straight from Belfast Zoo.
Mr. Skinhead, fag still in mouth, now decides
He'll open the door by himself, so he tries
To finger apart the black rubber middle.
At this stage, we are all starting to piddle
Ourselves at the impossibleness of his

No Surrender mentality, but he is
All the business, managing to get himself -
One shoulder, one arm, one leg - out from the shelf
Of the bottom step. Then, superhumanly,
He's been born again, as (just) his bald pate snap-shuts free
Into a trapped liberty. I think that it's
Pure Belfast. The bus driver drives on. We sit
And wet ourselves. Wee millies and Buck Alecs
On the street run alongside, taking the piss -
Did yer fuckin' mummy stap tryin' to push?
We few on the bus feel his mortified blush.
As we pass out through the security gate,
The driver releases his angry inmate.
He just stamps out his fag-butt, without a word.
Wonder what shot will be heard around our world?

THE HERMITAGE

Saturday afternoon, with the rugby done,
Our hearts turn southward to the Kingdom of Mourne.
Rucksacks packed with tents, sleeping bags, bivvy bags,
Primus stoves, mountain clothes, shorts for swimming togs,
And with a shitload of Kendal Mint Cake, too, we three teens
Board the Ulsterbus for Belfast bus station
Where we transfer for the trip through County Down,
A roller-coaster ride across drumlin land.
Disembarking seaside in Newcastle Town,
We scorn the easy bus ride to Bryansford
In favour of a machismo yomp instead.

Almost running, like members of the Fellowship
Of the Ring, we reach Tollymore Forest Park.
Our own Rivendell! Our hobbit-haunted Shire!
Entering the pillared side entrance, we're
As awed as golfers on Magnolia Lane.
We have to get our tents up in case of rain
So we stride straight past the log cabin cafe,
Resisting the lure of the treat of the day,
Determined to make Skillen's Gate our base camp
Before the dusk sets in. 'Reaso' is the champ
At all things outdoors, and he soon cracks the whip
On Marty and me. You can't act like a tit
When Ian's in mountain mode. Skillen's Gate is on
The edge of the forest, foot of Luke's Mountain,
Suitably remote for three Thoreauians.
The park campsites are where the social craic is,
But they cost money, and we're low on shekels,
Plus we're much more interested in meadows,

And fresh water streams, and the quietness of stars,
Than being cooped-up with caravan campers.

We pitch our tents on flat mattresses of ferns,
And while we cook up a storm, we take our turns
Foraging in the forest for wood to burn
On the campfire spot that we always return
To - the big bevelled bowl of a hollowed-out
Tree stump holds another image of the night
Fires that the Maker will relight in the sky.
With the blaze well built - and fed, like us - we're shy
Of making the backward trek to socialism,
And vote to stay on the slopes of Luke's Mountain.
The night stars catch fire as we gather round ours
To swap stories of past forest adventures.

The cloudless heaven-breast wears The Milky Way
Like a studded boxing belt taken from Day
As we wage memory-wars with each other.
We're high enough up to look down and over
The dark forest below us, spread out like a
Gigantic blanket between mountains and sea ...
With a swig from a final stream-chilled lager,
The last fireside recollection falls to me.

From this vantage point, I can siphon the past
And follow the Shimna down through the forest
To The Hermitage, on a wilder than wild
Night, where Marty and I decided to hide
From an oceanic storm that had made us
Move from the mountain side: raindrops fell in droves
And the wind was wailing, banshee loud, so much
So that we lay gripped in giddy convulsions,
Holding on to the tent's sides, as it was set

To kite away if we let go. We laid bets
As to where it might end up if we did so,
And our own sides nearly split at 'Idaho'.

But soon, we rung out the tent and sleeping bags,
Shouldered our rucksacks like sogging-wet teabags,
And beat a path to the home of the hermit:
A domed stone shelter beside the Shimna, that
Overlooks a deadly deep river-pause pool
(That has turned townie teenagers into fools.)
That night The Hermitage was especially
Spooky, and we could safely assume that we
Were the only human souls tentless enough
To be bedding down in such a place. Short of
Being sluiced off the mountain like drowned puppies,
It was the only option left us 'Coolies.

Night woods, when they're empty, are never as full,
And the sense of something is what we could feel
As we entered the dome and surveyed the scene.
Below us, the downpour made the black pool seem
A bubbling oil-broth stirred by someone unseen,
Its blistered face still mirroring the lightning
That threatened to frazzle the forest's long locks.
One pooled bolt seemed to rise out of the depths
Like the fantastic sword of a fabled king.

Feeling there was no choice, we unpacked some things,
Just our sleeping bags, and orange bivvy bags
Which we frenchied over our dry sleeping bags
To beat the damp and the testicular cold.
We settled and bantered and tried to stay bold.

But then came the sound of footsteps overhead
That sat us straight up in our bivvy bag beds.

We reached for our knives. Exhausted and baffled,
We stood up and listened hard for the muffled
Footsteps to sound again, cushioned by the earth
That topped the Shire-like dome. They came, back and forth
Across our roof, more human than animal,
Though the storm said we couldn't be sure at all.
The Hermitage having two ways in and out,
We split, and rushed up the steps with nervous shouts.
Then, for what seemed a long second, we saw him -
Shadow-clad, stock-still, bald head bowed, with his chin
On his chest, standing under an ancient oak -
Then he was gone. And with him went the storm that
Had brought us to that spot. We tried to rub him
From our eyes, but could not. So, with the wind
And rain stopped, we repacked our stuff and headed
Back up the path to Skillen's Gate and bedded
Down, again, on that edge between forest and
Hillside; that zone between deep leaf-dark and
The moonlit mountain, the road that we'd been on.
Rest of the night we slept with one eye open.

Story ended, we just sit still, not speaking.

Above our heads, asteroids are etch-a-sketching
Across the blue star dome like criss-cross lovers,
While hares shape-shift between their holts and hovers
Under a moon so bright we'll need shades to sleep.
Stirring slowly, without a word, not a peep,
We douse the bowl of ashes and make for bed,
(Secretly dousing the demons in our head).
Then an angry rumble draws our eyes over
The low tree-line, down towards the distant seashore
Where deep purple clouds sound out their thunder song.

Seems the sea swell will curse the sky all night long.
We man up, hit the tents, and lay down the heads,
Confident the storm will run the coast instead
Of troubling us on the dry mountain side.
If not, we all know there's no place left to hide.

VERRUCA

*Verruca ... Verruca ... sounds like a really
Fast car, doesn't it? Like Ferrari, I say,
That's what you're thinking of, isn't it, Ferrari?*

Lenny laughs, silently. Says that's the crazy
Stuff that zooms around his head every day.
I smile and tell him that he's far from crazy.
We're parked in an empty shop doorway beside
Blinker's Café, looking out at Rathcoole wide
Boys and their UDA 'sponsored' black taxis.
The smoking black taxi men have only eyes
For the smoking hot Poly students who are
Waiting patiently in line in Bridge Street for
A taxi to ferry them to Jordanstown.

The girls giggle, or bow their heads to the ground,
Knowing they're ritual objects of desire.

It's a game of which the men will never tire.
Lenny rocks from foot to foot and asks me what
Degree I'm doing at the Polytechnic.

I tell him that I've told him a thousand times
Before: Bachelor's, Combined Humanities,
English major/Politics minor. He grins,
And tells me, again, to stick with my learnin's.
I know he fears that road-sweeping is my day
Job, when it's just a student summery way
Of making a rake of part-time quid to spend.

As we're standing there, me with my brush in hand,
A flashy car pulls up next the taxi stand.
A strange man in a dapper suit gets out and
Makes his way towards Lenny and me, walking like

He owns the whole of Belfast. *It's only Mike,*
Lenny says, *don't let yourself be troubled. He*
Always comes around this time of year. Silly.
Coming from the 'Coole, I'm braced for anything,
But this man just saunters up to us, smiling,
And palms a small brown envelope to Lenny,
Who accepts it, humbly, without any eye
Contact, and slips it inside his overcoat.
The man thanks him, adjusts his tie at his throat,
Nods at me, and heads back to his limousine.
I look at Lenny like things aren't what they seem.
I know that he knows that I know it's money
That's in the brown bag that he thinks is funny,
So he mumbles that he's *keeping it for them,*
That they give it to me to mind it for them.
Turns out that Lenny is an authority
On the gee-gees, and rich guys regularly
Tap his tipster head for his horsey hunches.
Then, come race day, if his picks bring in bunches
Of green backs, the men in suits always drop off
A wee something in an envelope, and doff
Their caps to him for the knowledgeable nod.
But, strangest thing, Lenny couldn't give a sod
About his share of the winnings, and he laughs,
Again, says he's just keeping the money safe.
I'm tempted to laugh – Lenny's a tramp, a waif,
Homeless on the hard streets of Troubled Belfast.
If there's anyone who could do with some fast
Cash, it's him. He just looks at my question-mark
Face and grins, happy to keep me in the dark.

He's the dead-ringer of the archetypal

Tramp, the kind that you might see in the local
Cinema in a Hollywood tearjerker
About the once successful, normal geezer
Who suddenly falls from grace, hits hard times,
Loses everything, including his mind,
But somehow manages to come back again,
Usually through the love of a good woman.
In Lenny's case, it's rumoured that a woman
Is to blame, though I haven't heard that from him.
They say he's an educated man from a
Respectable family, engaged to a
Girl who left him for someone else. He never
Recovered. Gave up his home. Ran for cover
To the roofless roads of Waring Street, High Street,
Lower North Street, Donegall Street and Bridge Street.

Yes, he's the classic Beckettian cut of
A homeless man, an uncouth Jesus, in love
With uncleanliness – matted beard, matted hair,
Baggy coat, baggy shirt and baggy trousers,
And shoes that are boots but which sound like flip-flops
When he walks because their soles are hanging off.
And his skin is leather-like, and just as tough.
He's no beggar. Not that there's anything wrong
With that. He'll accept a sandwich or a warm
Styrofoam cup of tea or coffee from you,
But he won't proffer the empty cup for you
To drop your loose change into. That's not his thing.
He's not making a living doing nothing.
When he comes to die, he'll have more money than
You or I holed up in the Bank of Ireland,
Routinely salvaged from him by some honest

Local RUC men who knew about his
'Winnings'. Of course, he never uses a penny
Of it. Only penny he loves is Penny
Lane by The Beatles. He knows every Beatles
Song by heart. If he's not singing the praises
Of Tommy Stack and Lester Piggott, jockeys
Already legendary, or Nijinsky
And Arkle, equally legendary,
He croons the words of Lennon & McCartney
To himself, quietly, and word perfectly,
Songs like Hey Jude, Let It Be and Yesterday.
The irony of the lyrics aren't lost on
Him or me. We understand the life chosen.
And we know how it will likely end. It can't
End well. A homeless man has no retirement.

Meanwhile, each summer holiday working day
I do my bit to love him in my own way,
And then leave him when it's time to head back round
To clock out at the Yard and catch the bus home.
Home for me's a family house in New Mossley.
His is a cold drunk-bastard-free shop doorway –
If he's lucky. If he's not, he's penny-free
And bloody-bruised in the mornings when I see
Him early. He says it's nothing, and it's not
Their fault, it's his, or the drink, or some such rot,
And my blood boils and I go have a wee word
With security gate men and am assured
That they'll look out for him again, as best they
Can, that they'll see that our Lenny is ok.
Ah, Adrian, Patron Saint of Homeless Men!
Balls. Seen sweeping the streets is embarrassing,

So much so that at times I'm happy Lenny's
Beside me for carer credibility.
But my heart does go out to him, though it must
Be said that he's sorry for the likes of us,
Not condescendingly – flip sake, how could he? –
But, withdrawn from the merry-go-round, he sees
Us rushing around the streets in a frenzy
Of ... what? Why all the hurry from A to B?
I haven't the heart to remind him of when
He would race to be spot on time for something
As simple as a quiet night with the girlfriend ...
(He would cringe at our connection addiction ...
But all that belongs in the present future –
It's time we got back to Lenny's *Verruca*.)
Could be a good name for a fast car or a
Fast horse ... Lenny nods, and reminds me of the
Reason we started on our conversation.
Your da's 'low-chested athlete's a good'un,
But imagine them calling those owl things 'Athlete's
Foot'? I'm no sprinter, and sure they're on my feet
And hands and probably elsewhere! I point out
That athlete's foot and plantar warts are no joke,
And that left untreated are a mosaic
Of trouble and pain. He smiles. Calls me 'Wissac-
Issac'. But agrees to let me bring some cream
For his 'wee wart mosaic' in the morning.
He peers at passing people, swigs cold coffee,
Then gets lost in the singing ... *She loves you, yeah,*
Yeah, yeah, she loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah, she loves you,
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah ... and with a love like that, you ...

WALLS HAVE EARS

Walls have ears. So do the innocent neighbours,
Good neighbours, who have to live with the terrors
That dog their waking and their sleeping, that keep
Them huddled in their house and off their own street.
Evil has manifested itself beside them,
Next door, the kind that knows no sleep, no shame.

Walls have ears. List'ning to the tale that this wall
Tells from one side of our sectarian sprawl.
A tale told in blood, to the restless music
Of the ceaseless Rave which floods the double-deck
Of the next-door house, commandeered for evil.
The commander-in-chief is a muscle devil.
Here, each rented row is chimney-topped, each row
A funneled Titanic from the shipyard show
That is Harland & Wolff, not more than a stone
Throw away, down the Crum, and across the town.

Walls have ears. Even the walls would admit to
Fears for the random, chosen civilians who
Will pay the price for their whole population's
Flirtation with freedom. Spilt blood builds nations,
And so does the blood spilt in retribution.
Such tit-for-tat is no lasting solution,
But that's what's being planned in the back kitchen
While the Rave pulses on, lending protection.

Tonight, the guns will be moved in wheelie bins,
Those plastic Trojans that trundle down back entries
On rubbish removal day

SPEECH

For fuck's sake, has nobody got a pencil?
Are we gonna have to fuckin' cancel
The mural unveiling? Bastards. Someone run
Across the street and ask my oul doll for one.
(And I mean a pencil, ya dirty penis-
Heads. Your dick's off if you mess with my missus.
You'll be a fuckin' eunuch, worse than a fag.)
There's bound to be one in our wee lad's schoolbag.
If there isn't, I'll bloody cane'im maself.
But if there isn't one, check the phone shelf.

Now, while he's away, are we gettin' ahead
Of ourselves? Can anybody push the lead?
Can anybody fuckin' spell? Properly?
It's the Beeb we're dealing with, not UTV!
Fuck's sake Alfie, you couldn't spell if you were
A fuckin' wizard! Can anybody here
Put two words together for these cam'ra cunts?
The Provies'll say that we all have wee wants
If we don't get our bloody acts together
And write a proper speech. Go get your Heather,
Bobby, she passed the Qualie, didn't she? She's
The woman for the job. She'll be fine. You'll see.

We can't turn the fuckin' music down, ya dick,
The rave's our fuckin' cover. Are ya just thick?
Apply yourselves here, 'cuz this is important.
In case you've forgotten, I'm your commandant
And if you make me look like a fool, I will
Personally turn you all into pig's swill.
Now, fuck the Provies and their artsy bullshit,

All those fuckin' fairy murals about shit-
Heads from some culchie past. Fuck'em. Fenian cunts.
They will be the fuckin' ones with the wee wants
If I have my way. Anyway, is Heather
Here yet? If not, big Bobby's in some bother.
OK, here she is now. Good on ye wee girl.
That's a crackin' wee dress there - give us a twirl!
Now, let's get down to work, we've only an hour
To get this right. When we're done, we'll hit the bar
And watch it on the late night news with a pint
In hand. It'll turn those fenian faces white.
You're askin' me which words we're gonna choose?
I give no fuck. Just make it spell Up The Blues!

SNIPER

God love the family from the Culmore Road
who owned a huggable wee dog that they called
Sniper. *Sniper! Sniper!* They'd loudly sing-song.
At the time, Sniper could do no earthly wrong.
He was christened in the crisis produced by
trigger-happy Paras on Bloody Sunday.
Then, the family had no hesitation
in calling him in from their Republican
cul-de-sac of Derry's Catholic Culmore.
Indeed, they'd volunteer to stand at the door
in full public view to summon the Sniper.
They hollered his name with parade ground power
and Sniper would hear and scamper homewards
to be showered with head pats and big belly rubs.

Right up and through the years of the hunger deaths
they polished the medals on his doggy chest.
But even the Troubles couldn't hold its heat.
When sectarian tides began to retreat
certain things became decidedly dodgy
as the area became more upwardly
mobile. Mixed middle-class families began
to settle into Sniper's Culmore kingdom,
bringing pedigree hounds out onto the grounds
to help harry the postmen on postal rounds.
Gradually, his owners grew shy to call
Sniper in by name. Tactfully, it was all
about playing to their prosperous neighbours
and 'Sniper' sounded classless to monied ears.
Sniper? Sniper? What on earth had possessed them?

As good Catholics, could they live down the shame?
Every time they had to call the dog in,
they would cup their mouths, whisper his name like sin,
repeating *Sniper, Sniper, here boy, come here.*
And knowing no better, he'd always appear.
Caught in the cross-sights of respectable types,
target of stares across avenues and drives,
in danger of lowering the area's
tone, cutting the price tag on their new neighbour's
homes, they couldn't be guilty of such a thing
in a community where money was king.
Did Sniper feel rejected? Did he feel blue?
Think why weren't they hollering like they used to?
Maybe he mused as he came in off the streets
on why whispered calls came with more doggy treats.

But if this teaches anything of value –
naming in anger can come back to bite you –
today, it need hardly be said, that you need
a dog called Sniper like a hole in the head.

FLAGS

Flags, fucking flags ...

What real use have they ever been to anyone?

Oh yeah, we've marched behind them

Plenty of times, but save to wrap our proud

Big-bellied patriotic selves up in, what else?

Waste of fucking time, waste of fucking cloth,

If you ask me ...

Raised with the results of patriot bragging,

I have always been wary of flag-waving.

Going into an American classroom

To talk to some children about where I'm from,

I notice the Irish tricolour hanging

Print-new and proudly from the classroom ceiling.

It's natural to assume I'm from Ireland.

How do I explain about Northern Ireland?

As a holder of both passports from back home

(Dissenting attempt to annoy everyone)

I am determined to keep my big mouth stum.

Why bother splitting history hairs with children?

But soon as the beaming teacher stretches out

Her hand in confident welcome, I blurt out

That the flag isn't the flag of my country.

At first she thinks that I'm just being funny,

But I gently insist that the flag is wrong.

Befuddled embarrassment, agitation,

Summarises the look on the teacher's face,

But I tactfully stress that if I'm to teach

The children, accurately, about where I'm from,

She'll have to accept that the flag is ... well ... wrong.

To put things, technically, on the right track
I say that the flag should be the Union Jack.
Seeing another huge question mark take her face,
I speak of the red, white and blue, the British
Flag of T-shirt fame, of Buckingham Palace,
And suddenly she's back in her happy place,
Promising me that the Union Jack will soon
Be flying in full glory in the classroom.
I feel guilty, worried about the hassle,
The expense, but she sees it's a teachable
Moment and reassures me that it's okay.

I return to the school the very next day
To find the mischief-makers hung side by side.
It then becomes clear I've still got to decide
How to fairly present wee Northern Ireland
Without draping another flag beside them –
The red-handed standard of the Ulstermen.
Feels ridiculous making the suggestion,
But poor teacher runs with it, claiming it shall
Be no problem swinging a third flag at all.
On my last visit, just a few days later,
There hangs the full blood-handed flag of Ulster,
Centre stage in the troublesome trinity:
Perfectly appropriate, it seems to me,
Given Ulster's piggy-in-the-middleness
From one British-Irish conflict to the next.
The flags are my visual three point sermon
As I attempt to educate the children.
Who's to know if anything makes sense to them?
If not, it isn't for the want of trying.

I joke on the phone with a friend back home
That the flags are eenie meenie miney, min-
Us moe. He laughs, but tells me I'm getting slow
If I think I can get away without moe.
There's a fourth flag needed for the equation
To list all the flags of the Ulster Question.
I have forgotten the nine county, not six,
Version of Ulster's banner – red hand, red cross
Set against a bright yellow, not white, background –
A flag fit for flying in Donegal Town.
Tempted to further enlighten the teacher,
I've a hunch my messages mightn't reach her.

*Our mutual sectarian alchemies,
Which changed green, white and orange
Into green, white and gold,
Made real political progress seem
As elusive as the old philosopher's stone.
Sure it would've been easier to find a fart
In a field of flags, fart-flapping
On a blustery Ulster morning, than to imagine
Us ending up with 'The Chuckle Brothers'.*

BUDGIE

*Drive the Demon of Bigotry home to his den,
And where Britain made brutes, now let Erin make men!*
– from “Erin” (1795) by William Drennan

It seemed like every single house had one
Except us, though we had an aquarium,
The other housed comfort of the working class,
One behind the bars, the other behind glass.
I thought it odd that the underprivileged
Would happily keep something tanked or caged,
Considering our hard human condition.
I guessed it was our identification
With creatures as poorly predestined as we
Often believed our hand-to-mouth selves to be.
Keeping birds in seed is a real kind of love,
And sprinkling fish-flakes like manna from above.

Now by a strange quirk of imagination –
Some new light from within, something gene-given –
Every time I saw a map of Ireland
I rebelled against the usual notion,
The bird's-eye, map-driven visualization
Of Ireland backed to the masculine mainland,
Her leafy petticoats eyed-up for stripping,
Her feminine fields ripe for penile ploughing.
Even as a child, I refused to see it
As a victim, back-turned towards Brit-
Ain, inviting colonial rear-ending.
I saw it as a battling budgie, facing
The mainland, proudly, prepared for what might come
Winging over the waves from the gauntlet realm.

Though couched by Drennan to properly provoke
His fellow Irishmen to throw off the yoke,
It was no 'base posterior of the world',
Arsehole waiting to be slavishly buggered
By a foreign foe even our side flinched at.
No more servile hung'ring for the 'lazy root',
But male and broad-shouldered as The Hill of Caves –
Where the United Irishmen first swore slaves
Would be set free by jointly overturning
The home-based kingdom of the sectarian –
Our bold-hearted budgie had come of age,
Had climbed the ladders and looked in the mirrors,
Then ignored the dudgeon doors and bent the bars,
Self-paroled, assuming independent airs.

So turned towards the royal raven of England,
To my mind, our Irish budgie was crowned
With the head of Ulster: the tufty hair of
Wind-blown Donegal, the brawn and brains of
Radical Belfast, the 'Athens of the North',
With the clear blue eye of Neagh, and beak of Ards,
Heart, lungs and Dublin barrel-bulge of Leinster,
The fiery feet and claws of mighty Munster,
And thrown-back western wings of mystic Connaught.
Four provinces, four-square, forever landlocked,
Friend of brother Celts, but full of righteous rage
Against the keeper of the keys to the cage,
The Bard's 'blessed plot', his 'precious stone set in
The silver sea', his 'dear, dear land', his England.
Yes, no Catholic cage, nor Protestant pound,
Could hold my dissenting ideal of Ireland.
For in spite of spite, it was Drennan's Eden,

'In the ring of this world the most precious stone!'
His 'Emerald of Europe', his 'Emerald Isle'
Which no vengefulness would finally defile.

(Postscript to 'EN')

'KELIHOPTERS'

In terms of years, it is half a century,
And I find myself thinking about the trees
That stood at the side of Wilton's Funeral
Parlour, the Whitehouse mansion that my brother
Annesley was born in, bottom of Doagh Road,
My grandparent's perk for carrying the load
Of being part of the burying business.
Just a primary school pup, it was massive
To me, a house from Agatha Christie,
Full of oldness, high ceilings, some mystery.
But the memory now is of those old trees,
So grounded, lording it above the side sheds.
When the time would come, they would drop their seedy
Loot on the shed roofs, and my Dad would help me,
With my uncles – my masculine quiver – onto the
Roofs to send a shower of kid-pronounced 'Keli-
Hopters' whirling-gigging into the beyond.
They looked like fossilised tadpoles or veined wing-
Quills. But only Nature-halved, un-Siamesed,
Split down the middle to cut them down to size,
Could they make a mesmeric, whirling whole.
Then, I couldn't know such halving makes a soul.

Final Reflection

Lessons Learned from a Cross-Community Education in Poetry, and How to Pass Them On

As we are following directly on from the ‘Eleventh Night’ (‘EN’) sequence that constitutes Chapter Five, I will begin with some reflections on ‘EN,’ before moving to reflect on how my poetry-mentors and education in poetry saturate and sustain my work as an educator.

All fruitful reflections become more like future promptings, for future projects. ‘EN’ has certainly made me reflective of how it links with my past work, and by doing so, it is sowing seeds for further musings, lighting the path towards new poems.

Written at three different stages of my development as a poet, the *Muck Island*, *Hickory Haiku*, and the ‘EN’ sequence from the last chapter employ very different styles of poetry, and, on the surface, three very different subject areas/milieu. But I can now see more clearly that they would also form a solid basis for a post-dissertation tripartite ethnographic poetry study. They all share certain crucial, consistent threads running through them. Moreover, although they deal, on one level, with three very different ‘communities,’ perhaps the paramount connecting thread running through all of them is the presence, and peculiarities of the Protestant Scots-Irish community - at *Home* and *abroad*.

Such a tripartite ethnographic poetry study might tackle each sequence in chronological order: *Muck Island* (1990) Islandmagee, (rural) NI; *Hickory Haiku* (2010)

Hickory, (urban) NC; ‘Eleventh Night’ (2012 - present) Rathcoole, (urban) NI, looking at the rationale behind them, how it was implemented, the whys and wherefores, et al. Having now laid down ‘EN’ as Chapter Five in this dissertation, these three sequences strike me as being a wonder-full case of ‘there and back again,’ as Tolkien (and the opening haiku of *Hickory Haiku*) might have it:

I
Fiftieth birthday -
musings between here and there,
there and back again. (Rice, 2010, p. 3)

So, in prose: I start in an Irish cottage in rural Islandmagee (*Muck Island*), cross the Atlantic to a chair on a Hickory southern porch (*Hickory Haiku*), and from there are taken back (through *memory* and *imagination*) to where it all began, to Rathcoole Housing Estate, the ‘Hood,’ north Belfast, with the crucial Ulster ‘Troubles’ formative years being cataloged in ‘EN:’ those formative years in many ways so very different from William Wordsworth’s “Fair seed-time had my soul” (Wordsworth, 2010, p. 309) idyllic English lakeland youth, but in others ways, not so much so, given ‘EN’ poems (like “The Hermitage”) that clearly show how us ‘hood’ boys were actually surrounded by nature on all sides, having just a relatively short walk from the concrete to the hills or the lough, or a forty-five minute bus ride to the land that inspired C.S Lewis’s ‘Narnia’ - the Mourne Mountains.

Muck Island is/was poet-as-dissenter slant writing in a rural, Protestant, Scots-Irish community traditionally unsympathetic to Irish Catholics; *Hickory Haiku*, with its poet-in-exile, poet-as-critical-liberal-observer slant writing within a traditionally

conservative, southern city, also significantly low mountain country Scots-Irish. And then the sequence that is given priority here, and which is already the longest, by far, ‘EN.’ As we know, it embeds my own autobiographical story alongside portraits of those I grew up with - family, friends, and neighbors - and places it all within the history of the pro-British, Scots-Irish, Ulster Protestant community of Rathcoole Housing Estate (at one point during the 1970s, the biggest housing complex in Western Europe), and by extension within the wider society/history of the ‘Troubles.’

As previously noted, ‘EN’ is not only an autobiographical sequence, but also an ethnographic poetry venture, a communal accounting. Inside that deep look via poetry at my first (and no doubt most formative) community, I am commenting on what I know, but also seeking to understand what I may be missing, and in that it seems I am donning the mantle of ethnographic poet: “a poet may write more to what one does not yet know; an ethnographer writes more to what one already knows. The ethnographic poet ... must do both” (Maynard & Cahnmann, 2010, p. 12).

Moreover, and this is one of the main personal revelations gained upon reflection, I have also realized that one of the humble aims of each sequence is *education*. I am trying to educate the reader about each community, by trying to be true to each community, and to myself, touching on all kinds of social, historical, and personal areas, and doing so by trying to be honest about what I see and hear, which sometimes means criticism, sometimes praise. Importantly, too, such criticism or praise in the sequence is ultimately directed *at* my community, so I am not just trying to speak to the reader from outside of these communities, to ‘educate’ the outsiders, the ‘others,’ but I am also

speaking to those who, like me, come from within. Indeed, one radio host, Irish actor Sean Rocks (in an off-air, intermission moment during RTE's premier Arts programme *Arena*) said of the 'EN' poems I was reading live: "This is great. You're really explaining your tradition, really revealing your 'side' ('Protestants') to our 'side' ('Catholics')." He instinctively knew that what I was "explaining" or "revealing" was not just an individual 'me,' but a whole community, a whole communal way of life. In a similar vein, while I was Home launching and promoting *The Clock Flower* in 2012, which includes a few of the earliest of the 'EN' poems, Jonathan Bell (2012) from the biggest local newspaper, *The Newtownabbey Times*, ran the interview/article headline: 'Rathcoole poet puts the estate in verse.' As I look back now, both Rocks and Bell were virtually screaming 'EN' as being an ethnographic poetry venture.

I also want to revisit another of the ethnography thunderbolts to strike me, from an article in the journal of the Society for Humanistic Anthropology, by Leah Zani, poetry editor at *Anthropology and Humanism*:

At its best, ethnographic poetry brings us closer to what it feels like to live life in a particular place and time. Written as an element of fieldwork, each poem is a keyhole through which the reader can see a larger world. The difference between a poem and an ethnographic poem is fieldwork. (Zani, 2019, p. 1)

Now this set a fire under me, almost literally, making me think immediately about the centerpiece of 'EN,' the longest poem of the sequence, entitled "Tour of Fire," a poem that describes the gallery of Rathcoole characters who would surround the communal bonfires on every street corner of the estate on July 11th, characters from every walk of

life brought together by their annual shared celebration of their Protestant culture on the eve of July 12th - Ulster's July 4th, if you like - the day in history when King William III's armies secured victory over James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, which, as we know, basically secured the existence of Protestantism in the north of Ireland to this day. The opening twenty lines (from a total of 200) of "Tour of Fire" captures the basic scene around the bonfire, situated literally just yards away from my Rathcoole childhood home:

Eleventh Night peaks. The Twelfth has come. Torches
Are lit and thrust into the driest branches
Of the pagan pyre. Time for the tour of fire.
Inferno in every window; wood and tyres
Sending smoke signals up into the night sky.
Proud Papal effigies preparing to die.
Bewildered Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses,
Looking down from their balcony maisonettes.
Loyal players in these fiery mirror-halls,
The usual suspects are fanning the flames:
The accordionist, the preacher, the drunk,
The skinhead, the hood, and the grammar school punk;
The flirt, the millie, and the token taig
(Suffered, good-humouredly, when things aren't too bad);
The dole-soul, the work-shy, and the work-is-done,
The mason, the slapper, and off-duty policeman;

All swaying and singing to Loyalist songs
Blaring from bass-booming home radiograms –
Some placed on the paths like musical coffins,
Tight owners sat on them, holding their half’ins. (Rice, 2013, p. 80)

If ‘EN’ was just that one poem, it would surely be enough to satisfy Zani’s opening sentence, for hopefully, as we have seen, “Tour of Fire” and the many other poems around it are truly Rathcoole-culture keyholes indeed.

And then, Zani’s last sentence about the difference between a poem and an ethnographic poem being “fieldwork” set me further aflame. My three longer sequences, especially the one trying to capture my most formative years, ‘EN,’ are not so much ‘research-based poetry,’ or anthropological verse, or purely phenomenological, but do contain important traces of all those lenses too, of course, and do require deep “fieldwork” (more so, *Muck Island* and ‘Eleventh Night’). However, and this is a crucial point, I believe, the “fieldwork,” especially with ‘EN,’ is less hands-on, but more head-work, memory-work. The necessary “fieldwork” is my attempts to *refresh memory*, not supply much ‘extra’ feet-on-the-ground knowledge - *because most of the necessary “fieldwork” has been done through* (a) my actual living and growing up in Rathcoole, and (b) my memory, that has recorded that growing up. Therefore, I am engaging, employing, mining the poets’ great ethnographic ‘fieldworker’ - *memory*. In ‘EN’ I am tapping into that existing ‘fieldwork’ of memories from my Rathcoole/Troubles past, now turning it into poetry to enable me to book-record a ‘history of me’ *and* my community.

Of course, regular visits Home to refresh memory helps and must qualify as ‘fieldwork’ trips; and talking with old friends and family by phone and email/social media regularly helps, too, and their ‘checking’ (and initiating some) of my poems as I go along is a great ‘fieldwork’ resource (which is the reason why my best and longest ‘Protestant’ friend and next-door neighbor from Rathcoole, Martin Beattie’s death is so extra-sad for me; and my other best friend from college years, ‘Catholic’ Padraig McGuinness, has also recently passed, disabling another invaluable memory-checking support).

So *memory*, and particularly now my *own* memory, is THE fieldworker at my disposal, the Queen of the Muses. This reflective realization regarding the primacy of memory draws me to other poems I have written in this area, like this one, “While I Slept,” based on an actual dream I had, and published in a recent American/Irish poetry anthology (Anderson, 2019, p. 294):

WHILE I SLEPT

I was the wick
Unlit at first
As all around me
My birth house
Reassembled itself
From the ground up
Like wax un-melting

Ten or so
The memorable age
Each room reappeared
Each stick of furniture
Showing me what
Had been forgotten
Each family member
Was there

Those now gone
Those still here
And I moved among them
Solid but unseen
I was the wick
Unlit at first
But when everything

Was fully formed
Memory peaked
And I became flame
The house and they
Began to melt away
All that memory

Had rebuilt

While I slept

Reinforcing and developing a point made earlier, I have also realized that those longer sequences provide an opportunity for me to *learn through my own* poems, which are trying to: educate outsiders about my communities; educate the communities about themselves and about those whom they see as ‘others;’ and also, in that strangely wonder-full way that true creative writing operates, educate me about myself and my relationship to the communities and places that I call Home/home, Belfast/Hickory.

I have always known this process of self-learning through one’s poems, of course, and traced it in the poetry and the prose of good poets who have gone before me. But there is something about the deep dive of these three longer sequences, particularly in ‘EN,’ that is most self-educating. Recently, in response to an interviewer questioning her about why she wrote poems, and about poetry’s role in her inner life, poet A. E. Stallings (just elected as Oxford Professor of Poetry) replied:

... when you write a really good poem and you are discovering something as you write there is no other feeling in the world like it—it is addictive. I think what poetry can do in a way is give life more abundantly ... there is a feeling of being fully alive and alert to the various-ness of the world. In a great poem, I feel fully conscious. (Matis, 2021, p. 1)

It is that exciting - even when painful - self-discovery that comes through writing poetry, especially with a sequence as soul-searching as ‘Eleventh Night.’

And that brings me, finally, in this first part of our Final Reflection, based on Chapter Five, to what I have called the ‘TOWS’ interview project, a lens I have invented to deep-dive into the ‘EN’ sequence, and which is included as Appendix A to this dissertation.

The purpose of the project is to have a conversation with one of the main ‘voices’ behind the ‘EN’ sequence. There are many different ‘voices’ coming through in the sequence, but the one selected as the subject for this interview is the man from Rathcoole conjured up earlier - in the Reflective Bridge: Looking Back on Chapter Four and Forward to Chapter Five - through my poem “Neighbourhood.” He was the vision, the porch-side epiphany, pointedly different to the deliberately chosen prompters (‘ghosts’ of Yeats and Joyce) of a text like Seamus Heaney’s *Station Island*, because he was *involuntarily* ‘conjured’ on the porch. I simply looked up, and ‘saw’ him. He was the epiphanic instigator, and has become the central commentating character of ‘EN,’ showing up with timely interjections throughout the sequence. For me, he is ‘T.O.W.S’ - ‘The One Who Stayed;’ unlike me, the person who not only left Rathcoole, but eventually, Northern Ireland.

Leaving our reflection on Chapter Five’s ‘Eleventh Night’ (‘EN’) sequence, I must return to my high school English teacher, Mr Thompson, the prime mover of my interest in poetry, in education in general, and therefore, in his own way, the prime mover of this dissertation. He not only hooked me with poetry on that first day in his classroom, but he went on to teach me that if poetry is going to be taught at all, it has to be taught well, with knowledge and enthusiasm; otherwise the results can be lifelong student alienation. Now

I know that can be said of any subject: we all have memories of tackling subjects at school for which we had a delicate early interest, only to see that tender interest crushed by a teacher who had long since given up the teaching ghost. Nevertheless, I do think the subject of poetry suffers most easily at the hands of the apathetic teacher. This is always confirmed for me when I talk to fellow writers and poets and ask them how their interest in poetry began. From major prizewinners to promising beginners, they will all reply, “There was a teacher” Well and good. However, if I ask the same question to students and adults of any generation who obviously dislike (even hate) poetry, they will also say, “There was a teacher” So, in the end, if we’re going to teach it, we had better be prepared to do it to the best of our ability.

Therefore, I have always been aware of the crucial role of the teacher in presenting poetry in the classroom, and have enjoyed working with Appalachian State colleagues Dr. Woodrow Trathen and Dr. Elizabeth Frye to help equip both student teachers and experienced teachers to best bring their students to poetry. Indeed, I was honored to be the first poet-in-residence at The Academy at Middle Fork, App State’s lab school in Winston-Salem, working alongside Dr. Frye. During that residency we put into practice many of the strategies we had marshaled along with Dr. Trathen for joint conference presentations; approaches to using poetry in classrooms (of all age groups) that were gathered together and published as ‘The poem, the teacher, and the assisted invitation’ (in B. Culligan & G. Mehigan (Eds.), *Exploring the literacy landscape: Celebrating 40 years of research and practice* (pp. 40-48). In that article, among other things, we considered the crucial role of the teacher in:

- considering the poem selection process
- determining what makes a good poem
- choosing which poems are age-appropriate, knowledge-appropriate
- knowing how to choose poems to fit not only the grade level or the class
- academic variables, but also the ethnic, cultural makeup of the classroom
- deciding how to present poems, whether orally, written format, screen-form
- in short - knowing what a good poem *is*, and how to *engage* students with it

And it is that very last bullet point that is perhaps most crucial. A plain-talking, often controversial, poet-critic William Logan (2021) has recently noted:

Poetry was long ago shoved aside in schools. In colleges it's easier to find courses on gender, or race, or class than on the Augustans or Romantics. In high schools and grade schools, when poetry is taught at all, too often it's as a shudder of self-expression, without any attempt to look at the difficulties and majesties of verse and the subtleties of meaning that make poetry poetry. No wonder kids don't like it - it becomes another way to bully them into feeling "compassion" or "tolerance", part of a curriculum that makes them good citizens but bad readers of poetry. (Logan, 2021, p. 346)

With the help of an enthusiastic, well-read, well-prepared teacher, I do not see why we cannot achieve both - good citizens *and* good readers of poetry.

While studying under Mr. Thompson, I came to realize that he was as much of a 'poet' as he was a great teacher of poetry, and I sensed that I had to be more 'like' him if I wanted to get deeper into whatever 'poetry' was. Not just read the same books, but to have a similar angle of thinking about, and looking at the world; the same experience of

seeing things afresh, of looking at the *extraordinary* of the world that the other-worldly man has in Seamus Heaney's poem "The annals say" (which is discussed in this Final Reflection within the 'poems and close-reading' section which follows):

"... the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back / Out of the marvellous as he had known it" (Heaney, 1991, p. 62).

Moreover, what I am trying to say here is perfectly summed up in a poem by my friend and music partner with The Belfast Boys, Alan Mearns, who has always joked with me about him getting, what he calls, a free mentorship in poetry just by being my friend and listening to my enthusiasms; my history of reading; enjoying our late night poetry discussions; and by observing (and helping) me edit my own poems:

TEACHER

Not

To know

What he knows

But

To go

Where he goes

In the first verse, Alan is not pooh-poohing the good poets and poetry that I have shared with him, as if such reading is not important. It is crucial. But he knows that whatever he has got from me is like an infection; indeed, he jokes that I have "infected him with full-blown Poetry." And the second verse cleverly reveals that he is now seeking for the

angle of ‘looking’ that good poets and successful poems encourage, that simple but profound way of “seeing things” of Heaney’s wide-eyed ship-seer.

Of course, “Poetry” definitions are somewhat legion, and not always helpful, and I am reminded of the late Irish poet, Dennis O’Driscoll’s comment about regretting saying anything definitive about poetry, because he felt it immediately limited it in some way. Moreover, A. E. Housman famously cautioned against making set-in-stone pronouncements about poetry, saying, “I can no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat; but he knows a rat when he comes across one...” However, though suitably warned, I would dare to concord with some of the Tweet-like insights provided by the likes of W. B. Yeats: “Poetry is truth seen with passion;” or from the living American poet, Dana Gioia: “Poetry is the art of using words charged with their utmost meaning;” or this, especially in relation to reaching our naturally inquisitive students, from another one of my (sadly recently deceased) go-to poets, Charles Simic: “Poetry is a place where all the fundamental questions are asked about the human condition” (Frye, et al, 2017, p. 42).

Without seeming too misty-eyed here, I believe there is a ‘zone’ we can try to take ourselves and our students to where, as Belfast’s Van Morrison might say, the poetic champions compose. Michael Longley has also famously said that if he knew where poems came from, he’d go there (Astley, 2003, p. 439); and using a country well motif, Seamus Heaney has famously written in his poem “Personal Helicon” that he rhymes to see himself, “to set the darkness echoing” (Heaney, 1966, p. 57). Despite any humble hint of doubt here, I believe that Longley and Heaney know, like Morrison, that they/we

can get in behind that veil, or down into that zone to bring a pail of light up out of the inner dark, otherwise they would not have any poems worth sharing.

I also believe that as teachers of poetry, we too can get ourselves into that zone through reading and thinking and learning through good poems, and thereby come back with something worthy of sharing with our students. As good *readers* of poems, good thinkers *about* poems, good learners *through* poems, we can become good teachers *with* poems. (And through such an enthusiastic, full-blown infectious process, some teachers and students might not just learn through good poems - which is more than enough - but might catch the Poetry bug and become good poets themselves.)

One of the poetry exercises I use in my classrooms centers on the practice of close reading - close reading that leads to what I would term deep reading, or ‘going deep.’

“Close reading” of texts used to be a prominent requirement of the Common Core in our schools, and many teachers were unhappy with the way the idea was presented. Many teachers saw close reading as having the sole purpose of reading literature to extract information, thus ignoring important recent work concerning reader-text interaction. Some feared that close reading to merely extract information would turn students away from having any pleasure in the text; moving students from a transformative engagement with literature, which can lead them to question their worlds, and even change their lives, to a tepid engagement with uninspiring texts.

Many educators especially feared the Common Core’s “close reading” discouragement of students’ prior knowledge; the idea that students must not violate the strict norms of text-based reading. I would echo their fears. (Nevertheless, it must also

be said that *too much* emphasis on “prior knowledge” can lead, in my experience, to a cardinal sin of poetry study: the *reading into* a text, and not *out of it*. Too many teachers, for years and years, have lazily told students that poems can mean whatever they want them to mean. Simply put – they cannot.)

For many teachers, close reading as an informational extraction tool meant that it was not being used to best effect. It actually led to texts being selected for study that were less literary and inspirational – dry prose as opposed to imaginative poetry. Poetry, indeed, seemed to be the first “text” to bite the dust when the selection for study process was underway.

Certainly, in part, as an ongoing reaction to all this, I use poems in my classrooms to contend that poetry should not only be used for close reading, but that it is tailor-made to be *the* close, or better still, *deep* reading tool; for *good* poetry is the best words in the best order; at its best, it says the profound thing in as short a space as possible; it reaches – as the late great Welsh poet. R. S. Thomas famously said – the intellect by way of the heart.

Of course, close reading using poetry is not a new thing under the sun. From a notable educator and literary critic, I. A. Richards, and his groundbreaking *Practical Criticism*, to a modern poet-critic like the late Joseph Brodsky, and his close/deep reading in books like *On Grief and Reason* of individual poems by giants like Robert Frost and W. H. Auden, it has been around for a long time.

Schon’s idea, in his *Educating the Reflective Learner*, of the “Practicum” is also useful here, as I would suggest that close reading, used correctly, with a rounded

approach to reader-text interaction, not excluding prior knowledge, or students' emotions and feelings, and led by a knowledgeable, committed teacher, using good poems, can constitute a *deep* reading process capable of producing inspired, lifelong readers.

To demonstrate here how I use poetry as a close and deep reading tool within my classrooms, I will share what I term my '4 Poem Exercise.' For the sake of brevity, I will tackle each of the four poems in point form only, moving from a concentration on *close* reading highlights to key *deep* reading opportunities.

The first poem is a twelve liner from Seamus Heaney. It comes from a sequence of forty-eight 12-liners included in his wonder-full collection, *Seeing Things*. Here is the first poem, in full:

POEM 1:

The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
Were all at prayers inside the oratory
A ship appeared above them in the air.

The anchor dragged along behind so deep
It hooked itself into the altar rails
And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,

A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
And struggled to release it. But in vain.
"This man can't bear our life here and will drown,"

The abbot said, "unless we help him." So
They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it.

Close Reading:

- This is a simply told, narrative story-poem retelling a fantastical/mythical happening.
- Poem doesn't need to rhyme to be rhythmical and memorable.
- Except for very young students, only words needing explanation are in opening line, which helps bring Irish history into play: "annals" (real, big history books), and "Clonmacnoise" (a real, old Irish monastery).
- Monks are at routine prayers, the humdrum of their existence, *despite* being spiritual exercises.
- Fantastical ship and strange man suddenly appear, as if from a different dimension, coinciding with monks' prayers.
- Strange man 'drowning' in our atmosphere. Monks do *real* Christian thing and help.
- Freed man sails off in ship, climbing back "Out of the marvelous as *he* had known it".

Deep Reading:

- *Crucial* last line to end poem: "Out of the marvelous as *he* had known it". Only by *going deep* will we reveal the clever turn around by the poet.
- Man did not climb back *into* marvelous, but *out of it*. *Our world* was marvelous to *him*.
- Poem is really about the angle of looking of good poets; about their way of seeing the world; of seeing the world with fresh eyes, as if for the first time.

POEM 2:

“A Call”, by Seamus Heaney (from *The Spirit Level*, Faber & Faber, 1996).

A CALL

“Hold on,” she said, “I’ll just run out and get him.
The weather here’s so good, he took the chance

To do a bit of weeding.”

So I saw him
Down on his hands and knees beside the leek rig,
Touching, inspecting, separating one
Stalk from the other, gently pulling up
Everything not tapered, frail and leafless,
Pleased to feel each little weed-root break,
But rueful also . . .

Then found myself listening to
The amplified grave ticking of hall clocks
Where the phone lay unattended in a calm
Of mirror glass and sunstruck pendulums . . .

And found myself then thinking: if it were nowadays,
This is how Death would summon Everyman.

Next thing he spoke and I nearly said I loved him.

Close Reading:

- Start by noting the importance of titles. Simple point, but helpful to notice.
- Again, no need to rhyme to make a good, memorable poem.
- Chance to explain unusual/archaic words, like “leek” and “rueful”.
- Opportunity to teach the origin of *Everyman*, the medieval mystery play.
- “Death” using phone, today, to summon “Everyman” – humorous, but sadly true (though text or snapchat message might be the way!).

Deep Reading:

- Importance of paying attention to where quotation marks *start and end*; realizing who is speaking in the poem, and when; who is doing the ‘seeing’ in the poem, and when.
- Opportunity to catch the age of man in the garden. And why is he “rueful also” about weed roots being removed? Wisdom of age. Respect for *all* living things.
- Go deep to talk about pace of poem, based on poet waiting on a *landline* phone: cue the talk of slower, but more thoughtful, contemplative world that we are fast losing, with distraction masquerading today as connection.
- Highlight of the last line. Dramatic. Heartbreaking. Go deep to get at the ‘why’ of regret.
- Love poem, but not conventional. Man to man. Father-son/younger man to mentor.

POEM 3:

“The Changeful Tap,” by Adrian Rice (from *The Mason’s Tongue*, Abbey Press, 1999)

THE CHANGEFUL TAP

The water would suddenly thin to a trickle,
Some summer evening while filling the kettle –
It took an eternity just to make tea.
And I’d know with an absolute certainty
He’d made his way back to the garden
To toddle around the immaculate rows,
To sprinkle the heads of infant flowers
From the font of his watering can.
It was such chores that kept him happy.

Still, I'd secretly curse our shared supply
And covet the moment when I'd have control.
But nowadays reaching to turn on the tap,
I sometimes fall for the futile hope
The running water might suddenly slow.

Close Reading:

- Title – pun on ‘full of change’; death, in this case. Also, echo of Irish “changeling.”
- More formal looking poem – actually a sonnet.
- Not fully conventional sonnet – discuss ‘free’ sonnet, full of half-rhymes.
- Only “font” and “futile” unusual words for some, especially younger students.
- Making (boiling) “tea” is a clue to it being a non-American poem.
- Phrase “secretly curse” is not serious: poem ends in grief and longing; love.

Deep Reading:

- Read deep to possibly challenge the stereotype of who is making “tea.”
- Age of man in the garden? Word “toddle” key here. Must be an old man.
- Deep reading needed around “shared supply” – *must* be a neighbor.
- Challenges stereotype of “love” poem – young man to old man, brotherly/mentor love.

POEM 4:

“A Removal from Terry Street”, by Douglas Dunn (from *Selected Poems*, F&F, 1986)

A REMOVAL FROM TERRY STREET

On a squeaking cart, they push the usual stuff,
A mattress, bed ends, cups, carpets, chairs,
Four paperback westerns. Two whistling youths
In surplus US Army battle-jackets
Remove their sister's goods. Her husband
Follows, carrying on his shoulders the son
Whose mischief we are glad to see removed,
And pushing, of all things, a lawnmower.
There is no grass in Terry Street. The worms
Come up cracks in concrete yards in moonlight.
That man, I wish him well. I wish him grass.

Close Reading:

- Title important, again: "Removal", harsh maybe, but not "eviction" – why?
- Again, not a formal, rhyming poem, but rhythmic and right.
- Classic working-class family scenario.
- Clearly a tough life, BUT still a family life, with support from teenage brothers, too.
- Poet glad to see their "mischief" go, but still empathetic to them.

Deep Reading:

- Short, but deceptively powerful poem: discuss the *loaded cargo* of every word.
- *Deep read* the list of "usual stuff". Says a LOT about family and their circumstances.
- *Lawnmower* absolutely crucial. Symbol of simple future hope.
- Only "poetic line", the penultimate line, done deliberately, to self-mock "poetry".
- Last line, an absolutely killer line. Poet's loving empathy for fellow (male)

human beings.

Such “close reading” of texts is certainly not a new concept, but it can be a worthy one, only if it is carried out in a “deep reading” fashion, under the guidance of a motivated, knowledgeable instructor, who encourages students’ prior knowledge, and their feelings and emotions, to be involved in the reader-text engagement process.

I have strongly suggested that good poetry is *the* perfect text for profitable close reading, because good poetry facilitates *deep* reading. Of course, the choice of poems is crucial to attract students. I chose four poems that may look relatively simple, but which richly reward deep reading. Such close reading, or deep reading, is a corrective to the skimming, surface nature of most students’ (largely online, screen-aged) reading lives. This real close reading, deep reading, is not only about extracting information – it also employs students’ prior knowledge, and their feelings and emotions. It encourages reading as a tool for engaging with inspiring, illuminating thoughts and truisms that can be positively transformative in our students’ lives.

Now, having said all this, I am aware, as Billy Collins laments in his popular poem, “Introduction to Poetry,” that some students and many teachers may assume that studying a poem, especially by using anything approaching the close-reading paradigm, amounts to them having a licence to “tie the poem to a chair with rope / and torture a confession out of it” (Collins, 1996, p. 58). And we can all smile at this, of course, knowing that all too often, this is the deathly truth, no matter how well prepared or well-intentioned the interrogation may be. However, and Collins would surely agree, we can strike a proper balance between, on one hand, treating the poem as a skimmable,

run-of-the-mill communication like a text message or tweet or some such fast-food, easily digestible wordbite; and, on the other hand, seeing the poem as a language object more worthy of a deep-read - the latter process being, I believe, like a full-course dinner, able to sustain us much longer than the snacktime speed-read.

For some, it is enough to simply view the finished splendor of a poem, or the shine and sleekness of an expensive car, or the wonders of Nature. For others, they prefer to immediately get in behind such things, to see how they work, to ascertain what laws or rules are in play that help make such beautiful things what they are, and therefore they get their fix in that creative engagement. Maybe one could see the former as representing the casual reader, and the latter representing the serious critic. If so, then the ideal might be a combination of these two ways of looking - someone capable of *both* admiring the (seemingly effortless) showroom perfection, *and* curious enough to acquire knowledge of the behind-the-scenes skillful machinations that helps create the polished product. Perhaps, indeed, such double-vision naturally belongs to the attentive reader, the serious critic, the good teacher, and the true poet.

Despite the increasing pressure today on students, in what I have called a screen-age of distraction, the poem as a concentrated nugget of truth, of real-time, experiential connection, of memorable speech in a world of throwaway language, is more essential than ever. Educators can find and utilize poems that will prove to our students that good poems (as S. T. Coleridge famously said) are really the *best* words in the best order. We can read widely to select poems that can reach our students, finding poems which can, as Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney might say, “catch the heart off guard and blow it open” (Heaney, 1996, p. 70); poems which will, indeed, “strike the reader as a

wording of his [their] own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance” (Keats, 2002, p. 97). For if, as poet Christopher Logue has said, that “Poetry cannot be defined, only experienced” (Astley, 2003, p. 18); and if the late, great Welsh poet, R.S. Thomas is indeed right when he says, “Poetry is that / which reaches the intellect / by way of the heart,” (Thomas, 2003, p. 69) then my/our mission is to assist teachers in selecting and reading poems that relate to our student’s experiences, poems which can reach and teach both head and heart (Frye, et al, 2017).

To conclude, this 4-article dissertation is essentially an assertion of the power of poetry, and an argument for the *use-full-ness* of poetry: (a) for us as individual human beings (often living within divided societies), and (b) for us as educators within each and every educational environment, particularly within the school/college classroom. It is built on two main foundations (a) the history of my own education in poetry, from my teacher-inspired introduction to poetry at high school, on through the particular cross-community education in poetry that I was lucky to receive from major poets from both sides of the across-centuries conflicts in Ireland/Northern Ireland, to my ongoing professional attachment to poetry as an established poet and professor; and (b) the way that I have utilized poetry as an educational tool within the publishing arena (culminating in the ‘Eleventh Night’ poetry sequence of Chapter Five) and in various educational settings, up to and including my present Appalachian State University classrooms.

Considering how to craft ending remarks for this doctoral journey without simply rehashing snippets from earlier chapters and bridges was relatively easy - once I realized that I needed, firstly, to include two more appendices: a short prose piece written in

memory of Seamus Heaney; and a small, but significant group of my own poems drawn from various books of mine, which I have (almost unconsciously) dedicated to my main mentor-poets from Home represented in this dissertation.

The short prose piece, Appendix B, entitled “Across a Crowded Room,” was published in The American Conference for Irish Studies' online journal, *Irish Studies South*, ‘Remembering Seamus Heaney’ (Rice, 2014). Responding to Heaney’s untimely passing, it is my heartfelt tribute to Seamus as a man and as a poet, of course, but it also manages to celebrate William Drennan and John Hewitt in the opening paragraph, yoking my dissertation’s poet-mentors, my ‘planters’ and ‘gaels’, together yet again. When rereading it recently, I was freshly surprised I had done that, as if I had almost forgotten the collective watermark-*influence* they have had on me - though, as this dissertation surely attests, that is a plainly silly thought.

The group of poems gathered together under Appendix C, entitled “Poems for the Dissertation Poets,” is an unexpected reflective bounty for me. Certainly, I knew that I had written poems down the years dedicated to poets I have admired and learned from, but it came as a genuine surprise - closer to shock - to realize that there were poems dedicated to every one of the main mentor-poets featured in this dissertation. I honestly found that to be so significant - knowing I had already paid tribute to them in poetry well before this attempt to acknowledge their influence in dissertation prose. And it was also revealing to see that some of the poets have been the dedicatees of multiple poems (the ‘planter’, Hewitt, and the ‘gael’, Heaney).

I use two poems discussed in depth in this dissertation, Heaney's "Punishment" and Longley's "Ceasefire," as part of the backbone of my classes' Research Papers each term. As mentioned previously, I choose to use such poems from Northern Ireland to teach them about the history and culture of N. Ireland/Republic of Ireland; to help my first year seminar students fulfill their (required) Global Learning Component (GLO); to educate them about somewhere else in the wide world through major poets and poems that I know well. But I cannot finish this dissertation without briefly discussing two other Irish poets' poems that work alongside the Heaney and Longley poems to form the basis of the compare and contrast nature of my students' Research Papers.

The first of these poems is by the wily old 'Protestant' dissenter, John Hewitt. (I use 'Protestant' here because that is his perceived religious background, though Hewitt himself was really of no religious creed, despite having Methodist parents. He was a confirmed atheist who left his body to medical science.) It was written in 1969, the year the Troubles broke out in N. Ireland, and he titled it, "The Coasters" (Hewitt, 2007, pp. 71-73). I will reproduce the poem here in full (and please note that the lines in bold font have been highlighted by me, not Hewitt):

THE COASTERS

by John Hewitt
(circa 1969)

You coasted along

to larger houses, gadgets, more machines
to golf and weekend bungalows,
caravans when the children were small,
the Mediterranean, later, with the wife.

You did not go to Church often,
weddings were special;
but you kept your name on the books
against eventualities;
and the parson called, or the curate.

You showed a sense of responsibility,
with subscriptions to worthwhile causes
and service in voluntary organisations;
and, anyhow, this did the business no harm,
no harm at all.

**Relations were improving. A good
useful life. You coasted along.**

**You even had a friend of two of the other sort,
coasting too: your ways ran parallel.**

Their children and yours seldom met, though,
being at different schools.

You visited each other, decent folk with a sense
of humour. Introduced, even, to
one of their clergy. And then you smiled
in the looking-glass, admiring, a
little moved by your broadmindedness.

Your father would never have known
one of them. Come to think of it,
when you were young, your own home was never
visited by one of the other sort.

Relations were improving. The annual processions
began to look rather like folk-festivals.

When that noisy preacher started,

he seemed old-fashioned, a survival.

Later you remarked on his vehemence,
a bit on the rough side.

**But you said, admit it, you said in the club, “You
know, there’s something in what he says”.**

And you who seldom had time to read a book,
what with reports and the colour-supplements,
denounced censorship.

And you who never had an adventurous thought
were positive that the church of the other sort
vetoes thought.

And you who simply put up with marriage
for the children’s sake, deplored
the attitude of the other sort
to divorce.

You coasted along.

**And all the time, though you never noticed,
the old lies festered;**

the ignorant became more thoroughly infected;
there were gains, of course;
you never saw any go barefoot.

The government permanent, sustained
by the regular plebiscites of loyalty.

You always voted but never
put a sticker on your car;
a card in the window
would not have been seen from the street.
Faces changed on posters, names too, often,

but the same families, the same class of people.
A Minister once called you by your first name.

**You coasted along
and the sores suppurated and spread.**

**Now the fever is high and raging;
who would have guessed it, coasting along?
The ignorant-sick thrash about in delirium
and tear at the scabs with dirty finger-nails.
The cloud of infection hangs over the city,
a quick change of wind and it
might spill over the leafy suburbs.
You coasted too long.**

This is a clear variation on the Heaney and Longley poems tackled earlier. There is no distancing tactic as employed by Heaney and Longley: no distant recourse to European bog bodies, or Classical allusions to Achilles and Priam. No, Hewitt is clearly talking pretty plainly to the people of Ulster, *especially* the majority Protestants, basically telling the silent majority on both sides that they bear a load of blame for the eruption of sectarian violence in 1969, which ran for a full thirty, bloody years. The silent majority who would never dream of signing up for either group of paramilitaries, but who still voted for ‘their’ extreme side in the privacy of the ballot box: Protestants voting for the likes of the ‘Protestant’ Democratic Unionist Party formed and headed by the “noisy preacher” of Hewitt’s poem, the Reverend Ian Paisley; and Catholics voting for the ‘ballot box in one hand, and the armalite in the other’ political strategists like Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Again, although both silent majorities, Protestant and Catholic, are caught in Hewitt's accusation, he is definitely, in my mind, mostly pointing the poets' pen at what would be perceived as his 'side,' the Unionist/Protestants. He is daring to look as if he is berating his own tribe, scolding them for allowing the long established sectarian sores and suppurations to turn so feverish among some that they believed their only way to fix the political imbalance in Ulster was a resort to an armed struggle, an armed struggle that was able to breach the walls of the middle class suburbs. Hewitt is accusing them, particularly the Protestants, of "coasting along," enjoying the benefits of political power since Northern Ireland's foundation in 1922, and closing their eyes and ears to those Catholics who wanted more representation and fuller civil rights. And he ends his poem with the pointed, I would say chilling reality - the silent majorities, certainly the Protestant one, "coasted too long."

I hope you can imagine the effect this poem has on my App State students each term, and on the innumerable students and community group members of all stripes that I have spoken to down the years, here and at Home. I don't even have to spell it out for them - they get it. Yes, they get it. And sadly, today, my students also get it in relation to the politically/culturally inspired 'hatreds' being stoked on a daily basis between fellow Americans.

During the Troubles, we used to say back in Belfast that we wished we could be more like America. Sadly, today, I hear the very same people suggesting that America needs to be more like N. Ireland, despite Ulster's often shaky peace. My big Irish kids used to want to come to live here in the States, but now it's the last place they would wish to live in. Goodness, my eldest (43 years old!) Matthew, who is a major new poet

himself back Home, even turned down an all-expense paid trip to Texas to deliver a paper at a big conference (he's finishing his PhD at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University, Belfast). He told me that America is too 'mental' (mad) at the minute, and too addicted to guns, and he just wouldn't have felt safe in Texas. Of course I told him not to be too worried and to come, but he politely said, no thanks, Da. He can see, even from across the sea, that too many silent majority Americans, particularly those who have wielded most power, have "coasted too long," resulting in the mayhem of January 6th, which may be just for starters if we are not very careful.

I will finish this Final Reflection, and this dissertation, with some comments on another poem I use for my classes' Research Paper. It is a poem by a major poet from the Republic of Ireland. Whereas Heaney, Hewitt and Longley, and Mahon are from different parts of Northern Ireland, Paul Durcan is from the city of Dublin. Now in his 80s, he is still going strong, still writing and publishing. He can make you laugh out loud; make you want to cry; prick your conscience with satirical takes on everyday politics; and in his wide-ranging poetry about the Troubles, he can cut through the posturing on both sides with a pen like a sharp sword.

Right from the title, "The Bloomsday Murders, 16 June 1997" (Durcan, 1999, p. 177-178), my students are awakened by the word "murders." They immediately sense that this poet is not going to tiptoe around people's feelings. He is going, in his own inimitable way, to call a spade a spade, not a shovel. Here is the poem in full (again, please note that the bold font is mine, not Durcan's - it is one of the ways in which I direct less attentive students to the meat of a poem):

THE BLOOMSDAY MURDERS, 16 JUNE 1997

*- A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the
same people living in the same place.*

from *Ulysses*, by James Joyce
(Bodley Head edition, 1960, pg. 489)

**Not even you, Gerry Adams, deserve to be murdered:
You whose friends at noon murdered my two young men,
David Johnston and John Graham;**

You who in the afternoon came on TV
In a bookshop on Bloomsday signing books,
Sporting a trendy union shirt.
(We vain authors do not wear collars and ties.)

**Instead of the bleeding corpses of David and John
We were treated to you gazing up into camera
In bewilderment fibbing like a spoilt child:
“Their deaths diminish us all”.**

You with your paterfamilias beard,
Your Fidel Castro street-cred,
Your Parnell martyr-gaze,
Your Lincoln gravitas,
O Gerry Adams, you're a wicked boy.

Only on Sunday evening in sunlight
I met David and John up the park
Patrolling the young mums with prams.
“Going to write a poem about us, Paul?”
How they laughed! How they saluted!
How they turned their backs! Their silver spines!

Had I known it, would I have told them?
That for next Sunday's newspaper I'd compose a poem
**How you, Gerry Adams, not caring to see,
Saw two angels in their silver spines shot.**

**I am a citizen of the nation of Ireland -
The same people living in the same place.
I hope the Protestants never leave our shores.
I am a Jew and my name is Bloom.
You, Gerry Adams, do not sign books in my name.
May God forgive me - lock, stock and barrel.**

We know from the word “murders” in the title, this Dublin poet is in no doubt as to what occurred on “June 16, 1997,” and on one of literary/cultural Ireland’s ‘holy’ days. On that day, jovial Dubliners, in particular, dress up as characters from James Joyce’s monumental novel, set in just one day in Dublin, June 16th, which since the novel’s rise to literary Parnassus, has been designated ‘Bloomsday,’ forever. It is a day to celebrate the journey of a simple protagonist, an Irish Jew, Leopold Bloom, as he weaves his way around the pubs and places of downtown Dublin.

Durcan’s epigraph quotes Bloom’s words to a bullish Irish Nationalist in Davy Byrne’s pub, who did not see an Irish Jew as maybe ‘Irish’ enough. Before Bloom escapes from the pub, he dares to shout the epigraph’s ecumenical defiance towards the angry racial certainties coming at him. And so we know, even before Durcan has truly begun his poem, that he probably accepts (as the last verse says) northern Protestants as Irish, as nationhood to the poet simply equates to “the same people living in the same place.”

Furthermore, this poem was published in the biggest newspaper on the whole island of Ireland, *The Irish Times*, and we all knew back Home what had prompted the poem: the cold-blooded murder of two Northern Irish policemen, RUC men, shot from behind, who, because of the ceasefire that had been in place from 1994, were not armed as they simply strolled through a park full of women and children in sunny Portadown. The shock was palpable across the country - was the IRA not only breaking their ceasefire temporarily, but perhaps breaking it for good?

Well, unlike Heaney's possible misstep in "Punishment," or Longley's clever encouragement towards peace in "Ceasefire," or Hewitt's relatively gentle admonishment of Ulster's middle ground "coasters," Durcan goes straight to a contemporary killing, actually happening right there and then, and pens what I consider to be the bravest poem of the entire Troubles, with the bravest (a lot may have thought foolish) first line of any Troubles-related poem: "Not even you, Gerry Adams, deserve to be murdered:"

By the time my students read that line, they know the position that Gerry Adams holds within the Nationalist community. He was *the* man during the Troubles' years (and beyond), sitting as President at the top of Republican Sinn Fein/IRA. A man who, we always assumed, could order 'harm' to anyone on the island, if he chose to do so. And here is a poet - a poet! - from Dublin, with impeccable Irish Nationalist family heritage, daring to challenge him, and to do it so publicly. Durcan's mother was the niece of Major John MacBride, one of the martyrs of the Irish revolution in 1916, a doomed effort that nevertheless lit the flame of independence for the 26 counties in 1922. MacBride married Maud Gonne, immortalized by the poet W. B. Yeats. So Durcan was born into the mythos of martyred Ireland. He had real rebel street cred, yet here he was daring to tell

us all that if *anyone* did actually deserve to be murdered, it *would be* Gerry Adams! I honestly cannot count the times that a student will say something like: “But Prof Rice, that is like calling out, on the front page of the *New York Times*, a major mafia leader, a guy like Tony Soprano! Wow!” And I always nod and say, yes, that’s exactly what it was like. We all feared for the safety of the poet Paul Durcan.

Durcan proceeds to drive his murderous accusation home: “You whose friends at noon murdered my two young men, / David Johnston and John Graham;” Durcan didn’t know these young policemen, but he was prepared to identify fully with them in the face of their murderers, no matter what Irish ‘cause’ they were using to justify the killings. Durcan also realized that this bloody breakdown of the ceasefire had been carried out on Bloomsday, a day set aside to champion the power and freedom of literature and the imagination; and on that very day Adams was launching one of his story books in a bookshop in Dublin, safely on the other side of the contentious border. This sickens the poet, who says that:

Instead of the bleeding corpses of David and John
We were treated to you gazing up into camera
In bewilderment fibbing like a spoilt child:
“Their deaths diminish us all”.

The last line’s perfectly phrased political response by Adams, caught by surprise in the glare of the Dublin media, especially sickened Durcan. He calls him “a wicked boy.”

Imagine our open-mouthed shock at the angry cheek of Durcan, the Dublin poet with Irish Nationalist bloodlines, accusing Adams of being a murderer and a spoilt child, just lying all the time. And he didn’t stop there. He employed his famous surreal style to imagine something that didn’t happen, that he had met the two policemen in the park one

week earlier, and joked with them, and he lets the reader know that they could have turned their backs on him alright, and been safe. And then, he dares to refer to them as “angels” with “silver spines,” presumably so different, by implication, to the cowardly yellow spines of Adams and his “friends.” Now these are RUC men, an almost predominantly Protestant police force, not exactly innocent during the history of Northern Ireland and its Troubles, and not always angelic towards many northern Catholics. But this killing had broken the all-important ceasefire, and Durcan was seething, like a lot of folk were, from both sides of the divide, that the whole peace process might have been suddenly jeopardized. He can’t help himself from leveling another devastating personal attack on Adams by suggesting that though he may have been the big man sanctioning the deaths, he had to send his henchmen to do the dirty deed.

Durcan’s anger against Adams and the IRA comes to a head in the final stanza:

I am a citizen of the nation of Ireland -
The same people living in the same place.
I hope the Protestants never leave our shores.
I am a Jew and my name is Bloom.

He pulled rank on the northern Adams, who at that point, pre-Good Friday Agreement of 1998, could not own an Irish passport, just a British one. But Durcan had one. And he hopes the Protestants never leave the island. And if identifying with Ulster Protestants in an attempt to stop the killings isn’t enough, he takes on the name of Bloom and calls himself by the name of historical persecution itself - Jew.

The story might be apocryphal, but I have heard it from more than one Irish poet, and could well believe it: Durcan apparently gets a bullet in the post every birthday, with his name, ‘PAUL’, inscribed on it. However, whether or which, he is still with us, the

poet who I believe not only wrote the bravest poem of the Troubles, but who remains the bravest poet in Ireland, period. And make no mistake, Durcan also made devastating exposures in verse of killers from the other side, the Protestant paramilitaries (in poems with titles such as, “In Memory: The Miami Showband – Massacred 31 July, 1975”), the British security forces, and even Margaret Thatcher herself. He has been a constant champion, a peculiar, one-of-a-kind, cross-community dissenter of the highest caliber, standing against everything that threatens basic human rights, freedom, equality - whether that be the abuses of the Catholic Church, or the treatment of women in society, or the sectarian violence of the Troubles, et al.

Along with the other mentor-poet dissenting voices featured in this dissertation, from both sides of the Ulster crisis - poets William Drennan, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, and John Hewitt - Paul Durcan has set an exemplary example for me to follow, in both the subjects and themes of my own poetry, and in how I use poetry to challenge my students to truly think for themselves.

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Appendix A

'TOWS - The One Who Stayed'

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to have a conversation with one of the main 'voices' behind the poetry sequence housed in Chapter Five, 'Eleventh Night,' ('EN') the autobiographical sequence of poems based on my formative years growing up in the notorious Rathcoole Housing Estate, just north of Belfast. There are many different 'voices' coming through in 'EN,' but the one selected as the subject for this interview is perhaps the most central - the man, the friend, the one, unlike me, who 'stayed.' I envisage myself perhaps even using it as a template for interrogating other 'voices' from the 'EN' sequence in the future.

This is a highly unusual project, to say the least, having to interview a voice from one's childhood milieu, conjured from one's own imagination, but Poetry is a mysteriously 'given' thing, and the poet has to employ as many ways of interrogating one's 'Muse' as possible. Essentially, I am trying to uncover insights into the psychology of this person, this voice, 'The One Who Stayed.' And this is something that is hard to see without this kind of 'going deep' reflection. I think it is a process. I have to give myself permission to get to the meat of the 'EN' poems, the 'EN' 'voices,' going down deep to the psychology coal-face of it all to explore what I don't know now; which might, hopefully, tell me what I still have to do - if anything - to make sure the sequence is, indeed, now complete and fully ready for publication.

Here is the preliminary list of questions drawn up for this (unusual) interview:

- Your voice is present in many of my poems, especially the ‘Eleventh Night’ section; what do you want the readers to know about you?
- Are you a typical Irishman? How would you want people to describe you?
- Describe Rathcoole. How do you think Rathcoole shaped you as a person? What makes you tick?
- Many of your mates have left Rathcoole, to attend University and ultimately leave Rathcoole behind. You did not. What thoughts do you have about staying and your mates leaving?
- I often consider myself lucky to have “escaped” the Hood relatively unscarred. What do you think of this view? Do you consider yourself to be unlucky for remaining?
- Do you know “Big McClatchy”? What do you make of him?
- What are your experiences/stories/memories about Eleventh Night and July 12 activities? How would you explain this to an “American,” who had no knowledge about Northern Ireland and its history, like the Battle of Boyne?
- What are some of your favorite poems of mine? Why those?
- How do you see your life unfolding? Where will you be in ten years? What will you be doing?

In the Transcript I, which follows, you will see that not all of these questions were asked, but those that were asked often produced answers suitable to some of the other questions on the list, all transpiring in a very natural, unplanned way. Transcript II then gave me a chance to pursue some of the questions ‘missed’ the first time around.

Interview Transcript I

ME: Your voice is present in many of my poems, especially the ‘Eleventh Night’ section; what do you want the readers to know about you?

TOWS: “Your voice is present in many of my poems ...” - for fuck’s sake, Ady, can ya hear yourself?! Lol (and that’s not ‘laugh out loud,’ big man, it’s ‘Loyal Orange Lodge’!) “Poems”? Have ya forgotten where ya come from, mate?

ME: Now that’s hardly fair ... (smiling).

TOWS: Aye, like a darkie’s arse in the moonlight ...

ME: And that’s racist! (smiling)

TOWS: That’s rich coming from you, as it’s in one of yer wee poems, no?

ME: True, true, but it’s there for a reason ... to be true to the sort of things we all said back in the day ...

TOWS: Poems, and being true ... feck sake, Ady, you’re a real mess, aren’t ye? Worse than I thought ... (smiling).

ME: Ok, stop the slabbering and answer the blooming question. (smiling)

TOWS: What question? (smiling)

ME: Ok, wise guy, here it is again - Your voice is present in many of my poems, especially the *Eleventh Night* section; what do you want the readers to know about you?

TOWS: If my voice is in your poems, what does that make me? A ventriloquist’s fuckin’ dummy? And if so, where’s your bloody hand?! (laughing) You’re not one ‘of those’, too, please tell me no ... (smiling)

ME: Very funny ... but if you think I’d put my hand anywhere near your arse, you must have come up the Lagan in a bubble! Just answer the bloody question! (smiling)

(And stop encouraging me to swear - it'll be double the work to clean this up for public consumption!)

TOWS: You need encouragement to swear? Feck sake, times have changed, Ady boy! (smiling) And Pubic what? (smiling) Ok, ok, don't get your fancy knickers in a twist ... if you want me to get serious for your wee interview, then I guess if the man in black can sing about 'The Boy Named Sue', you can call me 'The One Who Stayed' ...

ME: Now you're getting serious - what do you mean by that?

TOWS: Just what I say, I'm the one who stayed, the one who stayed in Rathcoole, in our patch, not run off to foreign fancy fields like you. We're the same age, aren't we? We didn't live in the same street in Rathcoole, but I was just up the road from you at Derry Hill (which should have been 'Londonderry Hill' - what feekin' closet Fenian named that?! lol). We hung around, at times, with the same crowds, even though you had your best friends down in Derrycoole Way (Londonderrycoole Way! lol), and I had mine up the Hill. Sure, we mingled down at the shops, at the Diamond, or at the Alpha for the films, or outside the Cloughfern Arms or The Fern Lodge, hassling oul boys to get us carryouts, or played football together as kids, in rival street teams, on those long summer nights on the Derry Hill all-weather pitches, or ran into each other when collecting wood and stuff for the bonfires on the Eleventh Night, and my ma knew yer ma from working together in the Mace shop (everyone knew your ma, good oul Jean), and if I'm not mistaken, we've not only manned a few wee barricades together in our day, but maybe even had a wee sly dig at each other too. (winking and laughing) And the point is, my oul son, my arse has stayed put in the 'Coole, while you've been out of the 'Coole from the age of eighteen - how long is that?

ME: Forty years.

TOWS: Forty fuckin' years? Wow. Forty years. We're gettin' old mate! (But we're only as old as the weemin we feel ... heheheh) Forty years.

ME: And I moved back into the 'Coole, in case you've forgotten, in my twenties, for another few years ...

TOWS: Aye, and with your wee Catholic wife, and wee son, if I'm not mistaken - you must have had some local contacts, Ady, to get away with that ... (smiling) (Hey, I'm happy to see you've a wee American wife now who kicks with the 'right' foot! lol)

ME: (smiling) Get back to your point ...

TOWS: The point's very simple, even a doctoral student (that's what ye call yersel now, yeah? lol) could understand it - you got to leave Rathcoole a long time ago, while me and lots of the other boyos stayed. That makes a world of difference.

ME: But as they say, you can take a man out of Rathcoole, but you can't ...

TOWS: ... take Rathcoole out of the feekin' wallypop poet (smiling). Listen big lad, to be serious now, whodoya think yer kiddin'? Do you expect me to believe that staying in Rathcoole all these years is somehow the same as escaping it and writing wee poems about the memories of it on your hoity-toity wine porch in sunny America? If you believe that, it's you that came up the fucking Lagan in a fucking big bubble! (smiling)

ME: Now hold your horses (smiling). I'm not saying they're anywhere near the same thing, but as the one who left - escaped, as you say - I can tell you (and you wouldn't know, as you haven't experienced it yourself) that in one way, one way, you never really leave. Most of the important things in life happen before the age of eighteen, and that's not just some psycho babble, it's definitely true in my own experience ... why else would I be writing so many poems about it all now at fifty-eight years of age?

TOWS: Ady, Ady, Ady ... (smiling) ... sure isn't it my job to cast aspersions on your wee poetry intentions? Someone has to try to keep you honest ... (smiling)

ME: How noble of you. (laughing)

TOWS: But to get back to your point - yes, ok, I can believe that in some real way that you're still a Rathcoole man, and always will be (unless ya want yer knees done! lol), but you've been a world away from Rathcoole for most of your life, unlike the likes of myself who stayed ...

ME: You used the word "escaped" to describe my leaving Rathcoole, not just "left". Would the reader be fair to think that in your own case, "stayed" might equal "trapped"?

TOWS: Now that's gettin' close to fightin' talk, big Ady ... (smiling)

ME: It's not meant to be insulting, mate ... and you don't have to answer it, no sweat ...

TOWS: Ack, just ribbin' ye (smiling). I don't mind answering your question. I guess, I think it's probably a mixture of the two words. I've stayed alright, sure that's obvious, that's simply the facts of the matter. But "trapped"? Yep, I think there's definitely a touch of that in it, too ...

ME: How much is a "touch"?

TOWS: What is this, an interrogation? (laughing loudly) Where's the lightbulb, and the dripping tap? (laughing) Or the hood and the ropes, more likely ... (smiling) Well, ok Sherlock, I'm gonna say that it's a case of 50/50 ...

ME: 50/50, really?

TOWS: Well, if you were to put a gun to my head (and please don't, as I don't enjoy flashbacks! lol), it's probably 60% trapped, and 40% content to be so ...

ME: And what would you say trapped you?

TOWS: Fuck's sake, this is getting deeper than the 'Ra's arms dumps ... (laughing)

ME: (LOL) Again, you don't have to answer ...

TOWS: Ok, Magnus, I know, but I'll not pass on the question ... (smiling)

ME: Very kind of you ...

TOWS: Sarcky cunt! (laughing) Ok, I'm assuming we don't have all day, so I'll make it brief: family, friends, and schooling. Simple equation, Einstein. (smiling slightly) Great 3-point sermon maybe for your Billy-boyo in the Mountains over there maybe? (smiling big)

ME: Can you elaborate?

TOWS: "Elaborate"? Slaborate, if ya like ... (smiling)

ME: (lol) You know what I mean ...

TOWS: My ma and da moved us into the estate in the early 60s ...

ME: We'd better explain "estate" for our American friends ...

TOWS: (laughing) Yeah, I guess they'd know it as 'The Hood'. I suppose when they hear "estate", they think we're living like the Royals! No such fuckin' luck. (smiling) So yeah, the 'Hood', though it wasn't the Hood back then, just a growing concrete jungle between the Cave Hill and Belfast Lough, under the side of Carnmoney Hill. The 'Hood' came later, after the Troubles kicked off, and we had our own gangsters sprouting up on every corner ... But back when we were wee boys, it was a crackin' big place to live in, wasn't it? With mates on nearly every street, and no bombs or bullets flying around ... Anyway, the ma and da moved us in at the start, and my ma is still alive, and lives in the

same house. My da died a few years ago. To be honest, I didn't waste many tears, as he was a bit of a ballacks to all of us ... nearly always gave my ma a hard time, certainly when he was poleaxed, drinking his pay and all that ould shite ...

ME: Sad to hear about your dad, all the same, but glad to know your mum's still with us ...

TOWS: Well, she's really the family who has kept me here. She's on disability and all that, but she needs a lot of help, and I don't mind giving it. The brother and sisters have all moved to other parts of the estate, or nearby, like Monkstown, Fernagh ... got married, divorced, remarried! (laughing) But I've stayed in the estate for my ma's sake, just around the corner, with my wife and wains ...

ME: So family, your mum in particular, has "trapped" you? I mean your love for her, and sense of duty towards her?

TOWS: Now don't make me sound too fuckin' wimpy! (laughing) But I guess, yeah, though she hasn't trapped me, not intentionally, and has never asked me to hang around, but I know she needs help, and I'm happy to give it. She's your ma, ya know?

ME: I know. (smiling) If that's the "family" part, what about the next part of the equation, the "friends"?

TOWS: Ah, the friends, the friends ... the buddies you'd say now, yeah? (smiling) Well you lucked out with your mates, Ady, you landed on your hairy feet...

ME: What do you mean? My next door neighbour's da was head of the UDA!

TOWS: Oh, you know what I mean, big lad. His da may have been head of the hoods, but he was protected from it all, wasn't he? How fuckin' ironic is that?! But it's true, isn't it? You and his big son Marty (no disrespect to the dead, big man) packed off

to the grammar school every day ... to be “edu-ma-cated” ... (sly grins) ... while me and the rest of the ‘Coole dunderheads were feckin’ corralled inside the walls of Rathcoole fucking Secondary School, where, as your brother Annesley well knows, a teacher could get knee-capped by someone’s da for enforcing fucking homeworks! So friends and schooling, come to think of it, are really man and wife, ying and yang (or whatever you call it), Laurel and Hardy, for fuck’s sake - jail and jailer ... the friends I got had two real choices - become a hood, or become a cop (they’d take you in even if you were thick as a plank!). I got lucky with a steady enough job as a plaster, taking after the oul man, but most chose the first of those choices, and a lot have paid the ultimate price for it ... even some that chose the second did, too, at the hands of those IRA scum ... while you and Marty, and others, escaped to the good schools, out of the estate, mixing with a lot of snobby bastards, and rich country bumpkins, and gettin’ your ‘O’ levels, and ‘A’ Levels with the help of teachers whose kneecaps were safe, and then youse avoided bloody real work by skiving off to University! Jammy feckin’ bastards! Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as the Micks would say, have mercy on Ady’s privileged, protestant, edu-ma-cated soul! (red faced, but smiling big)

ME: Call a spade a spade, why won’t you ... (laughing)

TOWS: But it’s true, isn’t it? That oul chestnut of “education” ... youse got one, and outside the estate, and it took you outside of the estate for the rest of your lives ... But no big whopping sour grapes here, big man, honestly. Good luck to the likes of you, seriously. No one should be made to feel bad for gettin’ on in life. And, though this would take another wee interview, I’m not saddened to have stayed put. Rathcoole’s home. Always has been, always will be. For better or worse, just like me and oul missus (smiles). Sure, two of my own brood got the Quali exam (don’t ask me how! lol) and went to Belfast High School, and they’re now doing well for themselves. But they still love to come home to the ‘Coole to visit the da and ma, and to see their oul granny. And sure, look at you? Big poet/prof boyo, living across the Pond, but what are you still thinking of and scribbling about, eh? That’s right, the oul stompin’ ground back hame. It must have done something right for ye, eh? (smiling)

ME: Now that *is* a subject for another interview, so I'll be pestering you at some point in the near future, and I hope you'll be up for it. Thanks so much. Appreciated.

TOWS: No probs, big man. You'll know where to find me. (big smile) Unless, that is, you forget your wee way home ... (bigger smile, laughs).

Interview Transcript II

ME: So. Ok, old mate, I didn't forget my way home (smiling). It's been a wee while since our last chinwag, and although there are certain things I'd like to pick up on from near the end of that session, for the sake of any new readers I want to start now with some simple questions that we didn't manage to get to last time around. For gentle starters - Are you a typical Irishman? How would you want people to describe you?

TOWS: Well, welcome back, oul han'! Nice of you to grace us with yer presence again so soon. It's a Christmas miracle - in the merry month of May! (smiling)

ME: (laughing) I see you haven't lost yer wit. Now, you know the rules - just answer the bloody question!

TOWS: What a feekin' place to start, Ady! "Simple"? "Gentle?" (lol) Am I "a typical *Irishman*"? You serious? Ya want yer knees done?!

ME: Well, you do live on an island called 'Ireland', yeah? (smiling)

TOWS: What is this, the spider and the fly? (smiling) That question's as loaded as John Wayne's gun!

ME: (lol) How?

TOWS: *How* to you, too, Big Chief Rice (smiling). Well look here mate, it's history lesson time for yer yankee doodle dandy readers - I don't live in Ireland, I live in *Northern* Ireland. It may be one island, but it's two different countries, Northern Ireland (Nornlern Irelan!), and the Republic of Ireland (The Free State, as they like to call themselves). We have the blue skies, and they have their grey, grey mists, remember? (smiling) So if I'm Irish at all, I'm *Northern* Irish - crucial difference, big lad, as you should well know. And anyway, I prefer to call myself British, and am proud to be so, as our wee country, Northern Ireland, is part of the United Kingdom, whether the Taigs (and even some English boyos!) like it or not. So, we're British. It's the red-white-and blue of the Union Jack, oul son, not the green-white-and gold of the South that we salute! Yeah, I'd say I'm British, just as an Englishman, Scotsman or Welshman would say so, too ... hey, sounds like a joke coming on here ... (smiling)

ME: I hear you, but surely they're English, Scots or Welsh first, no? Then British?

TOWS: Oh, hair-splitting time, eh? Is this a wee trap you're setting for me, big lad? (smiling) Tryin' to snooker me, eh? Think yer Hurricane Higgy? (smiling)

ME: Moi? (innocent face)

Appendix B

Across a Crowded Room *in memory of Seamus Heaney (1939-2013)*

It's not every day that you get to meet your hero, for the first time, at his own front door. And then to spend the whole livelong day with him. I was so providentially lucky, twice. On the second occasion, I got to meet the great John Hewitt at his house on Stockman's Lane, Belfast, just a year before we lost him—an unforgettable experience for a man from Protestant Rathcoole, one of the Troubles' 'hoods', who had fallen in love with poetry at the tender age of fourteen, and then with the tradition of Protestant Dissent, not long after, through Hewitt's hero, Dr William Drennan, the Presbyterian poet who coined the phrase 'the Emerald Isle'. Hewitt was seventy-eight, one year from the end, but he gave his precious time, passionately, to wee me, and as I made to leave that day, I decided to renege on my parting plan to fetch his books from my car for him to sign (being too shy, believe it or not, to bring them in on arrival). But as John led me towards the door, he stopped and asked me if I had any books to be signed. I said I had brought just one, and it was in the car, (I lied—I had several), and that he didn't need to bother, as he'd given me more than enough already. He raised a huge smile, took me gently by the arm, and said: "You go get your book, for I've missed some great ones in my day." I ran like the wind and brought back the Blackstaff Press Selected Poems, which he slowly inscribed, "For Adrian, my new friend". And that's exactly how one of the greatest Ulstermen of all time had made me feel, like a friend.

I met Hewitt in 1986, when I was twenty-eight. It was the year of my first poem. Because of the towering example of the already legendary Ulster poets—Montague,

Heaney, Mahon, Longley, Simmons, et al—I knew not to write until there might be something, something worth any of their reading. Writing wasn't for therapy in Belfast—we had enough pubs for that. Both the first poem and Hewitt meeting were made possible by my close friendship with Ulster artist, Ross Wilson. And it was Ross who had also arranged my very first meeting with my other living poethero, the Man himself, just one year before, in 1985.

The Fenderensky Gallery in Belfast had hosted an exhibition by Ross that year of charcoal portraits of famous literary folk, including some of my international heroes, like Joseph Brodsky and Raymond Carver, and Seamus knew of these and commissioned a family portrait from Ross, in charcoal. (I still sit open-mouthed when I think of Ross coming into my cottage on Islandmagee, throwing down signed copies of both men's books and saying, "Do you know these guys?" He then proceeded to inform me that he had just spent time with them in Belfast, as they had sat for his sketches. He owed me Heaney!) When Seamus called to commission the portrait, I remember Ross suspecting that someone was pulling his leg on the phone. But no, it was really Seamus Heaney, and it was quickly arranged for Ross to travel to Dublin to spend a day with the whole Heaney family—no mean feat to achieve—to take as many black-and-white photos as Ross could manage, to help him with the portrait. Being the thoughtful guy that he (still) is, Ross asked Seamus if I could come down to Dublin with him, and wonderfully, amazingly to me, Seamus said yes. So, soon after, we girded up our youthful loins and headed for Strand Road, and the house of Heaney.

When we reached the Heaney home, we were so nervous that we parked around the corner and sort of composed ourselves before driving round into the driveway and

walking to the door like a couple of giggling teens. Seamus answered the door, in a gray woolen sweater and jeans, and our hearts nearly stopped. As Woody Allen is reported to have said of first meeting Bob Dylan, the man was clearly more mysterious than the myth, in the nicest, earthiest way. His first words were, “Hello boys.” I think we said hello back, but I can’t be sure if we said anything. Our legs were ‘watter.’ He led us into the family kitchen, which was a welcome sign for us. Straight to the hearth, as it were. No messing around with awkward, artsy living room sitting spells. ‘You’re in your Grannies now’, was the immediate feel, and that felt good. Marie was right there to mirror the warm welcome, and we met the lovely wains pretty quickly too—especially noting the Seamus-double that was Michael, the first born—and found that they were just as cool and friendly and down-to-earth normal as their illustrious parents.

Ross took a lot—I mean a lot—of pictures that day. Seamus and the family were saints. In between the many pics, we ate good Chinese (this was a working day, and Marie was not allowed to cook), and Seamus played some soulful records for us. I distinctly remember him putting on an American classic about ‘walking the dog.’ “Boys, we’re gonna walkkkkk the doooggggg!” he joked, more than once. Marie gave one of those knowing, loving, Seamus smiles. He also spun one LP which led him to declare, “I’m gonna wreck the house!” Marie gave an even bigger Seamus-smile at that empty threat. (And Ross reminded me just recently about Seamus measuring the living-room fire breast, above which the portrait was to be eventually hung. Seamus couldn’t find a tape measure, so, in true Bellaghy fashion, he used a length of simple cord.)

One of the many highlights of that awesome—yes, I said awesome—day was when Ross and I were brought up to see Seamus’s study at the top of the house. Seamus

opened the narrow door and led Marie and us up the stairs to his workroom. We were struck by the small, humble, twoplanked, unvarnished wooden desk, and the fact that the only work of art hung up there was a small, greeny oil painting from Ross. Seamus must, surely, we thought later, have placed that there, just for the occasion. Maybe not. Whether or which, it was a wonderful thing to behold for Ross, and for me, as his friend. Seamus and Marie then posed for even more pictures, as Ross wanted to make sure that I got in on the memorable act. How they managed to crack another smile is beyond me. As she smiled, and he signed gift books for us both, I was grateful for the Herculean effort. Pictures to treasure, I knew then; even more so, now.

The commissioned picture, the family portrait, took several months to materialize. Ross walked round and round it, fretting, waiting for something to strike. I reminded him that this was The Heaney that we were talking about, and that he needed to get the job done. But he kept faith with his own muse. Then one day, he called me to say that it had appeared, in a rush, in a matter of hours, and that I needed to come see it, to see if it “was any good”. I saw it, and saw that it was better than good. As we stood there in Ross’s Ballycraigy cottage studio, he handed me a stick of charcoal and told me, as I was a part of that day, that I should do some charcoal squiggles in the top left hand corner, and sign and date them, which I did. He then told me that I was not to tell Seamus—until he signed the check.

The portrait was finally framed and ready. We set off for Dublin to deliver the goods. When we arrived, we were greeted by Marie who lovingly, but firmly, informed us that we had but thirty minutes this time. Seamus was entertaining a Dutch guy, who was translating his poems, and he had flown in for just one hour, and then we were next.

Seamus appeared and I was quickly designated to herd the Heaney's into the kitchen, and keep them there until Ross hung the portrait above the family fireplace. You can imagine my knocking knees. Picture hung, the family was released, and they all loved it. After Seamus wrote the check, Ross pointed out my meager efforts. All was still well, thankfully. Before we made our exit, Seamus or Marie spotted that Ross had written along the bottom of the piece, in pencil, on the charcoal, the phrase, "May the circle be unbroken", and that seemed to 'please them no end', as we'd all say up North.

Well, sadly, inevitably, the circle is now broken; at least temporarily, though not eternally. So what is there left for this wee poet to say? That Seamus was the real deal. A proper Poet. The pick of the crop. An ultimate example. Our omphalos. That we were lucky to have the best poet in Ireland also being the nicest. Yes. Yes. Yes. And that every time you wrote to him about anything, he always, always, wrote back. And that he gave me my very first book blurb—what a risky thing to do! And that the last time I met him in the flesh, up close, was at a literary gathering in his adopted town of Dun Laoghaire, in a post-festival hotel. Some of the usual suspects were parked beside him, and many other friends and admirers were coming to and fro, so I naturally kept my distance. (I always remembered his comment on a postcard he sent to me in transit from Krakow to Munich, on another grueling tour: "I feel like an old wireless dial". No one worked harder.) But every now and then, I would glance over at the great man, and it magically seemed that every time I did so, he was there, right there, present, prescient, to wink or nod or smile. When the crowd eventually dwindled, Rand Brandes and I moved in to quietly say our farewells. As I reached out a hand, Seamus just gave me a big hug and whispered in my ear, "Across a crowded room." And I thought—that's about it.

That's the honest best you can be, as fully human as you can be, to those who are your family or friends or fans or fanatics or PhD students, to those who come to you daily, minutely, seeking a word. Seamus always gave himself, and gave that word, the right word, even to the very end: his last text, in Latin: 'Noli timere.' 'Do not be afraid.' Not, I'm afraid. But: you, my beloved wife, do not be afraid. And now we're all blessed to be left with his written (and, thankfully, recorded) words. And they do ease the pain, still sending their tremendous signals out across the crowded room.

Rice, A. (2014). "Across a Crowded Room," *Irish Studies South*: Iss. 1, Article 25.

Appendix C

Poems for the Dissertation Poets

BUDGIE

for William Drennan

*Drive the Demon of Bigotry home to his den,
And where Britain made brutes, now let Erin make men!*
– from “Erin” (1795) by William Drennan

It seemed like every single house had one
Except us, though we had an aquarium,
The other housed comfort of the working class,
One behind the bars, the other behind glass.
I thought it odd that the underprivileged
Would happily keep something tanked or caged,
Considering our hard human condition.
I guessed it was our identification
With creatures as poorly predestined as we
Often believed our hand-to-mouth selves to be.
Keeping birds in seed is a real kind of love,
And sprinkling fish-flakes like manna from above.

Now by a strange quirk of imagination –
Some new light from within, something gene-given –
Every time I saw a map of Ireland
I rebelled against the usual notion,
The bird's-eye, map-driven visualization
Of Ireland backed to the masculine mainland,
Her leafy petticoats eyed-up for stripping,
Her feminine fields ripe for penile ploughing.
Even as a child, I refused to see it
As a victim, back-turned towards Brit-
Ain, inviting colonial rear-ending.
I saw it as a battling budgie, facing
The mainland, proudly, prepared for what might come
Winging over the waves from the gauntlet realm.
Though couched by Drennan to properly provoke

His fellow Irishmen to throw off the yoke,
It was no 'base posterior of the world',
Arsehole waiting to be slavishly buggered
By a foreign foe even our side flinched at.
No more servile hung'ring for the 'lazy root',
But male and broad-shouldered as The Hill of Caves –
Where the United Irishmen first swore slaves
Would be set free by jointly overturning
The home-based kingdom of the sectarian –
Our bold-hearted budgie had come of age,
Had climbed the ladders and looked in the mirrors,
Then ignored the dudgeon doors and bent the bars,
Self-paroled, assuming independent airs.

So turned towards the royal raven of England,
To my mind, our Irish budgie was crowned
With the head of Ulster: the tufty hair of
Wind-blown Donegal, the brawn and brains of Radical
Belfast, the 'Athens of the North',
With the clear blue eye of Neagh, and beak of Ards,
Heart, lungs and Dublin barrel-bulge of Leinster, The
fiery feet and claws of mighty Munster,
And thrown-back western wings of mystic Connaught.
Four provinces, four-square, forever landlocked,
Friend of brother Celts, but full of righteous rage
Against the keeper of the keys to the cage,
The Bard's 'blessed plot', his 'precious stone set in
The silver sea', his 'dear, dear land', his England. Yes,
no Catholic cage, nor Protestant pound,
Could hold my dissenting ideal of Ireland.
For in spite of spite, it was Drennan's Eden,
'In the ring of this world the most precious stone!' His
'Emerald of Europe', his 'Emerald Isle'
Which no vengefulness would finally defile.

(from 'Eleventh Night')

PLANTED

for Seamus Heaney

*We have no prairies
To slice a big sun at evening –
---Seamus Heaney, 'Bogland'*

I

We have no porches to share a slice of melon on back home,
To sit on to watch the sun go down, least not where I come from:
No tree frogs, no cicadas, no rhythmic rattling in treetops.
Closest we come to them are the squeaky brakes of passing cars,
Or the sing-song goings-on of late evening's emptying bars.
And no fireflies. Lightening bugs. Blinking on and off like sudden
Thoughts. Nearest we come to them is on soggy, foggy nights when
Unmanned, landlocked lighthouses attempt to keep us off the rocks.

II

Planted here, though, enjoying the electrons of evening,
I can picture certain characters from home as they lean
Against door lintels, or perch on front-step chairs and look out,
Or gather on public benches on the outskirts of town
To swap stories, then silently stare at thinning traffic,
Well past sundown, under the scrubbed spud of a summer moon.
I probably share some genes with such curbside Calvinists,
Happy to sit and watch as heat waves shiver into mist.

(from *Hickory Station*, 2015)

WAKE UP

in memory of Seamus Heaney

A Carolina cardinal charging the study window
Woke me up to the Dundas winter
When a cat cried all night outside the big bay window

In the snow, black heart on cold white slab,
Coffin-lid thick. And I woke next morning
To the loss of the Russian Bard,

Disappearing just before the century closed.
And then today, in Hickory, seventeen years on,
Birds banged against the bedroom window

All morning long, while I lay with my boy
In the bed, resting our late night heads.
And I woke to the loss of the Irish Bard,

And knew well what the birds had been beating out:

Wake up!
Wake up!
Wake up!

The Poet's dead!

(from *The Clock Flower*, 2013)

SELF-ASSEMBLY

for John Hewitt

On hands and knees,
assembling cheap
shelving to take
the book weight.

Still stacking
the wooden tombs.

More flat pack gaffer
than apprentice.

A liver spot or two.

More coffin-maker
than crib-man.

These shelves believe
in resurrection,
imagination breathing
through dead sheaves.

New light dawning
with every read page.

(from *The Chances of Harm*, 2024)

SOMETIMES I THINK

for John Hewitt

Sometimes I think that my happiest days
Have been spent in bookshops;
Especially when everything's in bloom,

When the trees have hung out
Their flags on every street,
And the clouds have gone AWOL

Or been safely penned
By that orange collie of the skies:
Even then you can't keep me

From feasting my eyes
On those book-shelved spines.
It's then that I'm in my element

Because, because there's magic in the book.
Even Hewitt, custodian of reason,
Was moved to heresy as he took me

By the elbow in his house
To tour his library, his working collection,
And pointed to a buckramed book

On the jam-packed shelves. *See this one?*
Believe it or not, and I sense you will,
Roberta and I were in Edinburgh,

*And as we hurried past a second-hand
Bookshop, I suddenly stopped and said
That I needed, quickly, to go in.*

*I knew, somehow I just knew,
That there was a book on the shelf
That was somehow meant for me.*

*So we entered, and I went straight
To it, reached for it, and took it.
Now, that's all that I can tell you.*

*It was there. And it was for me.
My friend always says that we
Need to choose our addictions well.*

I think I have. Only time will tell.

(from *Hickory Station*, 2015)

FREEDOM

*for John Hewitt
& Bert & Ed and Ashley & Jen*

It was the size of an eagle,
but it must have been a hawk,
sat on top of the YMCA floodlights
that edge our local playing field,
whose baseball diamonds and soccer pitches
were all but emptied by a thunderstorm,
except for the robins and wagtails
whose field-day had suddenly dawned.

I'd juked in on the way home from the store,
doing a mercy run for bread and wine,
to dander a couple of laps of the track
in-between showers. With an eye to the sky,
I hurried round under hanging branches,
and smiled to feel that as the wind rose,
it just kind of rained again. And then,
there it was, sitting all 'Big Billy Bad Ass'

on its chosen perch, assuming its ownership
of the surrounding scene. But before I could
bend to its presence, robins and wagtails
shot out of the trees, in two's and three's,
taking their turns to attack it. At first,
it merely ducked its mighty head or raised
an armoured wing, but then it screeched
a long, classic screech, and flew to the next floodlight.

But the small birds hadn't finished yet.
Risking their lives, they harried it from
floodlight to floodlight around the track,
until the hawk acknowledged a measure
of defeat, gave up, and left the field.
Walking back to my car, the old dissenter's
words came back to me, and I dared to think
that even the hawk might have agreed –

“You must give freedom if you would be free.”

(from *The Strange Estate: New & Selected Poems 1986-2017*, 2018)

THE LONGLEY LINE

for Michael Longley

Preparing for bed, I rake the grate,
pat the white-hot ashes delicately
with a small black shovel
to keep them tight and intact,
and set off for the back door determined
the carpet will remain singe-free.

Not a man on a risky ropewalk,
nor a teenager tiptoeing a lover's landing,
I walk hot ashes into the wind-fresh lane
like Longley walks words along the Longley line.

(from *The Chances of Harm*, forthcoming 2024)

ZAPPER

for Paul Durcan

Almost couchant on the porch,
goggling the eye-candy
of our freshly mown yard,
fighting the thought
that so many of my favourite
things are no more than
professional killing machines,
when a gentle garden redcoat
does some floppy mid-air karate
to take down an ambling bug.

As I instinctively avert my gaze,
swiveling the periscope of my showered
head, a ginger tabby pads its way
onto the road and hunkers down,
tail slowly sweeping the sun-warmed tarmac,
eyes lasering in on another robin
plying its own murderous trade
on the cleanly shaven lawn.
And so I rise up to scupper
the tabby's deadly intent.

But then comes the first ever
avenue sound of a bug zapper!
Least that's what I'm calling it,
for now; a phosphorescent slab of light,
luminating near the garage doors
of the old Marine's house opposite:
a sinister contraption, a perilous attraction,
reminiscent of Kubrick's obelisk
that so enchanted chimps. This one
fries every bug that gravitates too close.
A white hole, if I've ever seen one.
It's a killing ground over there.
A perpetual evening electric chair.

Sometimes, Paul, it's all too hard to thole –
almost enough to drive one to thon crystal meth –
that in the midst of this silver sliver of life,
we are always so much in league with death.

(from *Hickory Station*, 2015)

EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT

for Derek Mahon

The mountains are wearing grey wigs.
Rain clouds are hanging their drapes.
Down here, it's hot and dry.
The cicadas are back.
Night-waves for the land-locked.

I'm Piedmont-porched.
I've been away for a few days,
Head-down in the books,
Wrestling with Morgan's
"Interests, Conflict, and Power".

(An American comma
After "Conflict" – not ours.)
But now I'm back on the street.
Back at the real work. The poesy.
A couple of nights ago,

A bubble-blow of fireflies
Meterored my study window,
As if they were signalling me
To come out to play – like we
Did with wee torches in our day –

As if they had missed me as much
As I had missed them.
And now, tonight, they're putting on
A display, some of them even
Rounding the porch like they're

Anointing it with light
Everything is going to be all right.

(from *Hickory Station*, 2015)

Appendix D

Publisher Permission for Chapter Two

Forwarded email to Adrian Rice from Mark Eaton, Publisher giving permission to include **Chapter Two: William Drennan and the Poetry of Presbytery** in this dissertation.

June 12, 2023

Dear Adrian Rice:

I am writing to inform you that you retain the rights to republish your article in a dissertation or book as long as you acknowledge prior publication in the journal *Christianity & Literature*.

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Thank you for your contribution to the special issue on Irish Writing in the journal *Christianity & Literature*.

Sincerely,

Mark Eaton, Ph.D.

Editor, *Christianity & Literature*

Vita

Adrian Rice is from County Antrim, Northern Ireland. He graduated from the Ulster Polytechnic with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) in English & Politics, and a Master of Philosophy in Anglo-Irish Literature from the University of Ulster. He has delivered writing workshops, readings, and lectures throughout the UK & Ireland, and America. His poems and reviews have been broadcast internationally on radio and television, and published in international magazines and journals. *Muck Island* (Moongate Publications), a limited edition poem/image box-set collaboration with Ulster artist Ross Wilson, has been collected by the Tate Gallery (London), and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, among others. His first full collection, *The Mason's Tongue* (Abbey Press), was shortlisted for the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Literary Prize, and was nominated for the Irish Times Prize for Poetry. In 1999, as recipient of the US/Ireland Exchange Bursary, he was Poet-in-Residence at Lenoir-Rhyne College (LRC), Hickory. Rice returned to LRC as Visiting Writer-in-Residence for 2005. Since then, Adrian and his wife Molly, and youngest son, Micah, have settled in Hickory, from where he commutes to Boone to teach on the First Year Seminar (FYS) program (also teaching FYS for the Honors College). During his time in Hickory, Adrian has taught English and Creative Writing at Lenoir Rhyne University, Catawba Valley Community College, and at Appalachian State University for the Reading program. He has also teamed up with Hickory-based and fellow Belfastman, Alan Mearns, to form 'The Belfast Boys,' a dynamic Irish Traditional Music duo. Their album, *Songs For Crying Out Loud*, regularly airs across the Carolinas. Adrian's stateside poetry titles, *The Clock Flower* (2013) and *Hickory Station* (2015), are both published by Press 53 (Winston-Salem).

Hickory Station was nominated for the Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry, and a poem from *Hickory Station*, “Breath,” was a Pushcart Prize nomination, and was the (London) *Guardian* ‘Poem of the Week.’ His latest book is *The Strange Estate: New & Selected Poems 1986-2017* (Press 53). A new book, *The Chances of Harm*, is due fall 2024. Adrian’s poems are also included in Arlen House/Syracuse University Press’s *Open-Eyed, Full-Throated: An Anthology of American/Irish Poets* (2019), and in *Crossing the Rift: North Carolina Poets on 9/11 & Its Aftermath* (Press 53, 2021). In 2020, he received the Rennie W. Brantz Award for Outstanding Teaching in the First Year Seminar. He is now a Senior Lecturer at App State. Adrian’s passion is centered on proving the educational, sustaining power of Poetry and the Arts in his Appalachian classrooms.