'Compelling Identities: Nation and Lyric Form in Seamus Heaney'

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Voor Jacqueline en Victor Johannes

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Abstract

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Abstract

In Ireland's divided society in which everything is political except solutions, the evaluation and redefinition of the governing metaphors of political and cultural identity is a matter of public concern. For nationalist Ireland, the traditional centrality of the poetic imagination to the development of the legitimating tropes of national identity endows representative status upon all subsequent poetry which treats of these themes. The heated public and critical debate about the poetry of Seamus Heaney derives from the recognition that as nations are "imagined communities", so the form and content of the poet's imaginative process is heavy with political and social implications.

Heaney's poetic negotiation between the given collective traditions of his community and the transfigurative appeal of the individual imagination engaged with modernity, produces a sustained reflection upon the nature and implications of cultural identity in modern Ireland. What is implict in the tenor of the debate surrounding Heaney is explicit in Heaney's compelling poetic, namely, that in the modern age cultural identity remains central to social and political definition.

But whereas the fact of cultural identity is central to social definition, the form (either hegemonic or inclusivist) of any such expression of identity is dependent upon the discursive practices which imagine and construct such definitions. In this context what begins for Heaney as a lyric flirtation with the possibilities of language, becomes a critical reappraisal of nationalist ideology's

governing metaphors of place, history and belonging.

In order to situate and define Heaney's contribution to the preoccupying question of identity it is necessary to evaluate the history and discursive evolution of nationalism as an ideology. Such an evaluation demonstrates that nationalism as a product of post-dynastic modern societies, is dependent upon a number of figurative habits and discursive practices for its universal and universalising appeal. By identifying these formations and by establishing the connection between these figures of thought and the expression of cultural identity as a hegemonic or inclusivist narrative, criteria may be determined against which the status of Heaney's own expressions of cultural identity may be assessed.

Against the contemporary background in which nationalism appears to have acquired the status of a political metaphysics, Heaney's candid engagement with the cherished illusions informing this perception reveals him for what he is - a definitively modern poet announcing to those who will listen that there is and must be, poetry after Auschwitz.

Introduction

The extraordinary career of Seamus Heaney and the increasingly divided public and critical reception which has greeted his rise to prominence, poses in a particularly acute way the question which has preoccupied poetic discourse in the postwar world - what, if any, is the proper relationship between poetry and society?

In Ireland, the divided response to this question is itself indicative of the fundamental social and cultural changes which have occurred in the period coinciding with Heaney's career. For those who believe in a bright culturally agnostic modernity, such questions appear parodic, the atavistic cliché́s of a culturally retarded rump seeking justification for yet another nostalgic money-spinning summer-school. For others more fixated with the contemporary political ramifications of the past, the slightest movement towards or away from a socially conscientious poetic, signifies betrayal or even treason. Between the two extremes the fact remains that Heaney's work has, for a variety of reasons, taken on a representative status for many readers.

Why it has taken on this status has been the subject of much debate. Indeed what Desmond Fennell terms the "Heaney Phenomenon" has come to preoccupy critics in a particularly heated way.

The subject of this dissertation is neither the career nor the reputation of Heaney. The central concern of this dissertation relates to his poetry. For within the already extensive corpus of his work there resides a sustained critical examination of the very issues which so preoccupy his critics.

Upon consideration of this corpus, the critic may readily see that Heaney's work has become controversial precisely because it reflects the ambiguities, uncertainties and passions that characterise a culture and a society in the grip of change.

If Heaney's poetry may be said to be representative, it is so because of its preoccupation with the unrepresentativeness of received cultural and political values in a rapidly changing society. The unrepresentativeness of received cultural and political values may be more specifically defined as a recognition that the traditionally binding forces of a common culture appear to be inadequate in a society whose immersion in the socio-economic process of modernization has coincided with a return to the atavisms of sectarian warfare.

What occurs in Heaney's developing poetic is a negotiation between the instinctive impulses of a cherished common experience of tradition, and the transfigurative imperatives which modernity demands. Heaney's uncertain probing of his predicament, is in its very uncertainty, indicative of the common mood. What is focussed upon in this negotiation between a received tradition and a sustainable future is the issue of cultural identity.

In the context of nationalist Ireland the notion of 'cultural identity' has become hackneyed without either term being adequately explored. The sceptical viewpoint that cultural identity has more to do with tourist brochures than critical discourse has taken hold, because cultural identity has tended to be viewed as a tradeable commodity rather than as a central legitimating structure of modern social formations.

A sustained reflection upon the issue of cultural identity reveals that far from being an optional extra on the international commodities market of intellectual property, cultural identity performs a critical legitimating role in the definition and development of modern post-dynastic societies. In a society in which cultural identities are in conflict, this realisation is unpropitious for those who believe in the solutions of evasion, globalisation or amnesia.

But whereas the fact of cultural identity is central to social definition, the form of any such definition of identity is dependent upon the discursive practises which imagine and construct such definitions. Nations it is said, are imagined communities. But it is the discursive practises which structure these imaginings which will determine the prospects of the nation. And it is on this level, at the level of discursive formations, that the issue of the relationship between culture and society, which is a preoccupying theme in Heaney's poetry, becomes tendentious.

The principal philosophical recognition of the present century expresses the view that language maketh man. Society and culture are inextricably linked in their linguistic constitution. And as culture plays a central role in the determination and legitimation of social formations, the discursive practices which structure particular cultural narratives are deeply linked to the social and political ideologies which inform the actual events of a modern society.

In a society such as modern Ireland, the presence of profoundly conflicting ideologies accentuates the recognition that received cultural and political perceptions of identity are inadequate to the

demands of a heterogeneous society. In this context, the negotiation attempted by a writer such as Heaney, takes on the character of an arbitration with the determining force of his society's self-definition, and indeed, of the legitimacy of its communal imaginings. The central conceptual difficulty affecting this determination of an adequate and representative identity involves the conflict between the received perceptions of a shared experience and the recognition of the conflict which has followed the assertion in social and political formations of these particular identities.

In a divided society the assertion of identity may represent an expression of distinctness or a hegemonic claim to power. What preoccupies the poet is the determination of ways to express his particular cultural identity without asserting a corresponding political imperative. But just as language unites culture and society, its available discursive formations permit the separation of a particularising assertion of identity from a universalising claim to dominance. In the discursive practices available to poetry, the exploration of the indeterminacy of meaning permits a recognition that expressions of particularity may be presented in their provisionality, thereby avoiding the problem of hegemonic identities.

In the evolution of Heaney's poetic, the recurrent theme of imagining the particular contents of his cultural identity without surrendering to the universal imperatives of his political milieu is redolent of the preoccupying social and political quest of modern Ireland. To evaluate whether Heaney succeeds, and in what sense any such success may be measured, it is necessary to examine the discursive structures and figurative habits which inform the ideology

within which his original perceptions were formed. By examining nationalism in its discursive and ideological forms and by establishing the criteria against which any renegotiation of identity may be defined, the nature and significance of Heaney's poetic may be more clearly criticised. Whether Heaney's poetics of identity embody a fruitful negotiation between the claims of the past and the demands of the present may be evaluated against this background. Whether Heaney's poetic career represents the quirks of the marketplace or the genius of his age remains a question for posterity.

Chapter 1

Imagining Identity: Narratives of Intelligibility in Nationalist Ideology.

"L'Irlande est une petite contrée sur laquelle se debatent les plus grandes questions de la politique, de la morale et de la humanité."

de Beaumont 1839 [1]

For the modern Irish writer, language is a deeply preoccupied domain. In coming to consciousness of the expectations, assumptions and imperatives which accompany the literary expression of his own or his community's particular experience, the writer will invariably become aware of the need to come to terms with an unsolicited inheritance of predetermined meanings and reflex implications.

For a writer such as Heaney, the implications of this unsolicited inheritance are accentuated, as he has come to consciousness in a society in which the habit of accepting these predetermined forms has yielded to interpretative intransigence. Within this static interpretative framework, which is politically motivated and culturally defined, the deeply heterogeneous eventfulness of human experience is systematically reduced to its identity or non-identity with two competing (and mutually supportive) discourses of predetermined meaning - nationalism and unionism.

That these discourses "intern" the variousness of human experience within an inflexible paradigm of political and cultural signification, using a diminished interpretation of nationality, historical legitimacy, cultural identity, and constitutionality, is challenging enough for the artist seeking individual expression. But the fact that these static semantic paradigms provide, or are believed to provide, the ideological basis for a campaign of very discriminate killing, places the writer at the centre of a seemingly irresolvable conflict.

Confronted with this conflict, a writer such as Heaney is challenged with a number of fundamental questions. How can the writer express the particularity of his experience, which is the

principal basis for the determination of an individual voice, when the matter of his particular experience has been habitually identified by a discursive form (in Heaney's case nationalism) which seeks to reconfigure his particular experience in terms of a 'universal' paradigm of absolute cultural meaning and political value? How can he express his experience as a member of a nation without his account being nationalised (rendered nationalist)? How can he define his impressions of history without his definition being historicised (rendered historicist)? How may he explore the prime matter of his cultural identity without surrendering to an identitarian [2] discursive form which implicitly and explicitly suppresses the signs (and sometimes the signbearers) of difference?

Alternatively he is confronted with the question of how can he <u>not</u> explore his experience, reflect upon history, define his identity, if he is to create in his art a vision of reality, when his problematic reality is defined in terms of these forces? Is he, in the end, to be interned in a paradigm of totality, or released by a genial and depthless betrayal of his immediate reality? To this difficult choice Heaney announces at the height of the crisis that "I am neither internee nor informer" [3]. The challenge for the critic is to evaluate whether this is so, and if so, how he achieves this resolution in the evolution of his poetic.

Any such evaluation of Heaney's poetic necessitates a comprehension of the deep structures of that unsolicited inheritance, an inheritance whose discursive forms serve to preoccupy the domain of language with semantic and imagistic commonplaces. These discursive formations, which have been propounded and reiterated for

more than a century, involve the creation of a unitary narrative of cultural and political intelligibility which resists the deeply heterogeneous nature of human experience.

Such narratives of intelligibility function by imposing a homogenising imperative upon the field of signification, an imperative which serves to limit the compass of history, which narrows the criteria of ethnic inclusivity, and which significantly reduces the field of admissable political and cultural meaning by a systematic overdetermination of the signifier in the interpretation of key terms (Irish, nation, Ireland, history, territory).

The creation of just such a narrative of intelligibility is a normal part of the development and legitimation of a modern post-dynastic political system, since the emergence of the concept of the individual and the consequent need to engender loyalty and a sense of belonging in the individual towards a larger civic structure. It is not the fact of such a narrative which is most problematic. Indeed, as successive campaigns of political liberation have demonstrated, from the defeat of a variety of iniquitous totalistic regimes from Imperialism, through Fascism, to Communism, the development of just such a unifying narrative of collective political and cultural intelligibility may assist the removal of unjust and illegitimate regimes.

The problem arises when one such absolutist narrative is confronted by another within the boundaries of a shared experience. In Ireland, this problematic realisation was defined when nationalism's unitary declaration of distinctness against imperialism's totalistic declaration of political and cultural

integrity (in effect, an assertion of heterogeneity against the unitary imperatives of a homogenising empire), succeeded only to be confronted with a comparable assertion of distinctness by a large section of the island's population.

In the wake of revolutionary success, the unitary narrative which dictates that all political and cultural legitimacy is vested in the identitarian 'we' (i.e. Irish nation), having removed the predatory and illegitimate 'other' (i.e. British Imperialists) via a discourse which is dedicated through the expression of identity to the elimination of the 'other', was confronted with the fact that an unanticipated 'other' (i.e. Ulster unionists) now lay within the bounds of the pre-defined 'we'.

It is at this point that the nature of this discourse becomes problematic, for if it maintains its identitarian form when a popular political or cultural identity does not in fact exist, then the discourse is transformed from being an expression of legitimate cultural and political distinctness, to the expression of a coercive cultural or political totality.National identity which begins as an expression of content may also embody an imperative of form. For identity may embody an expression of distinctness or difference or it may propose an imperative of domination or sameness. Depending on its discursive structures, cultural identity may embody an inclusive sense of distinctness or an exclusive rhetoric of domination.

The recognition of this distinction is, I believe, fundamental to an understanding of the proper focus of the cultural and political issues which inhabit the Northern Ireland question, and is central to a comprehension of the problematic nature of that unsolicited

inheritance which challenges the writer, and against which his actual achievement may be gauged.

Habitually, this issue becomes clouded by a variety of critical combatants, from the revisionist/essentialist historical squabblers, to the literary campaign of attrition between nationalism's coercive memorialists and unionism's compulsive amnesiacs. Their concentration upon the legitimacy of the content of these competing narratives rarely reflects the distinct formal issues which define the discursive reality, issues which are elided in a welter of assertion and counteraccusation that fail to distinguish adequately between the objects of interpretation and the deeply significant manner of their interpretation. Thus, with a writer such as Heaney, to write about or 'understand' a particular cultural experience, as in "Punishment", is from this imprisoned view merely to condone, legitimate and identify with the ideological form. For the apologists of the quarrel, the content is the form.

Their concentration upon the content of this discourse, whether it be its inclusion of the particular experiences of history, language, and place which typify and define the competing communities, invariably evades the real issue which is the inappropriateness of the discursive form in which these legitimate (because existent) and insightful experiences are habitually couched.

The results of such an evasion are manifold. The past (or a carefully selected image of the past) is confused with the present, as for example, when the achievement of a distinctive, popular and broadly homogeneous Irish state is conflated with the totalistic campaign of the contemporary IRA. Particular cultural markers are

implicated as embodying in themselves a statement of totalistic intent, such as when the Irish language is viewed as being in some way innately sectarian, an accusation which implies a static, reified view of language itself. And particular affiliations to place and locale are reinterpreted as diagrammatic evidence of a wanton revanchism or a servile loyalty. Variations upon these themes arise time and again in the critical assessment of Heaney's (and his fellow northern poets') poetry.

The cultural options which such a view of ethnicity, history and language implies are twofold: one must either announce a sectarian ethnicity, or denounce it and all its pomps and works in favour of a depthless globalism or equally disingenuously,a witless aestheticism. In either case, the individual, whether poet or reader, will not be in possession of a form of intelligibility which adequately situates him as the contemporary inheritor of a deep and percipient seam of insight and vision. But it is a false dilemma which presses its disingenuous options upon poet and citizen alike by submerging the real discursive issue - which is the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the operative ideological form of the quarrel - beneath a well-rehearsed preoccupation with its constituent contents.

It is, in the words of Hayden White, "the content of the form" [4] - its context, narrative strategies, use of language, and implicit ends (whether totalistic or specifying) - which is indicative of the author's success or failure in escaping the interminable divisiveness of the discourse of internees and informers. And as the ideological form which pre-figures and engages with his poetic, political and cultural self-definition, nationalism, and the form of nationalist

discourse, invite critical evaluation for those who wish to trace his method of escape.

Situating Nationalism

The central critical difficulty awaiting those who wish to identify or determine an image of redemption from the frenzied oppositional culture of internees and informers, is the difficulty of avoiding surrender to the rhetorical terms and conditions which inform, define and perpetuate the crisis. In Northern Ireland's domain of cultural definition, the poesis of crisis is crafted in an imagined discursive workshop in which the ultimate aim of rendering everything ideologically instrumental is assisted by the assertion that everybody has an axe to grind, and that, should this not be so, axes will be provided.

For both critic and poet alike, this overgenerous ideological inclusivity which serves to implicate everyone and thereby legitimates its conceptual paradigm by just such a coercive universalisation, serves also to resist the very possibility of analysis or escape. But in its obsessive desire to implicate and include everyone in the terms of the quarrel, it reveals a primary characteristic of its rhetorical form - its resistance to being identified as a particular or contingent discourse devoid of universality, inevitability, or absoluteness. Beneath this obsessive resistance, which manifests itself in a discourse of historicist precedents (the inevitable teleology of nationality) and lingustic absoluteness (the natural and immutable significance of key terms), resides an overwhelming compunction for an intelligibility that is

universal, natural and unchanging.

Perversely, to accept this paradigm of intelligibility as natural, immutable and peculiarly indigenous, and therefore to reaffirm the view that the content is the form, is to re-iterate the age-old colonial caricature of irredeemable simians. Indeed, it was just such a caricature which served to legitimate imperialism's long campaign before its final defeat (at the moment of Irish independence), a barbarous campaign which created many of the conditions in which the construction of a discourse of national intelligibility proved deeply necessary.

However, the embodiment of a particular experience of history in a narrative form which serves to bestow universalisable meanings and values upon this experience for a community, in this case nationalism, reveals a deeply rooted desire to establish a norm of intelligibility, a desire that is common to many societies in the period of post-dynastic modernization. By examining the conceptual background and philosophical context of this common concern, the critic may determine the "content of the form" and in doing so identify the discursive urstruktur against which the poet's progress towards redemption may be accurately evaluated, and through which the local quarrel's coercively inclusive rhetoric may be evaded and appraised.

As the testimony of generations of its proponents and victims demonstrates, from the eloquent theatricality of the G.P.O, to the silent waste of Bosnia, nationalism enthralls modernity. Its hold over the imaginations of many modern societies is such that no principle or taboo, not even the cult of the individual, may easily

withstand the force of its appeal. In offering modern man a deeply familiarizing discourse of intelligibility, it proposes a solution to the characteristic fact of the experience of modernity - the experience of a profound and increasing sense of alienation.

In so doing it offers nothing less than a secular image of redemption. In this ideology, redemption is offered from the random barbarity of history, from the insufferable isolation of subjectivity, from the unbearable indeterminacy of meaning, and from the chaotic implications which mortality's indifferent signifier readily admits. In responding to the impact of modernity, nationalism offers a very different image.

"Nationalism", writes Ernest Gellner in his evocative analysis of the phenomenon [5],

> tends to treat itself as a manifest and self-evident principle, accessible as such to all men, and violated only through some perverse blindness, while in fact it owes its plausibility and compelling nature only to a very special set of circumstances, which do obtain now, but which were alien to most humanity and history. It preaches and defends continuity, but owes everything to a decisive and unutterably profound break in human history. It preaches and defends cultural diversity, when in fact it imposes homogeneity both inside and, to a lesser degree, between political units. Its self-image and its true nature are inversely related, with an ironic neatness seldom equalled even by other successful ideologies. 6

Nationalism is thus characterised by its desire to reconfigure its particularity - the distinctiveness of its originating circumstances, the particular context of its social and philosophical construction, and the selectivity of its discursive form - in an illusion of universality. The efficacy and appropriateness of the illusion (illusions <u>per se</u> being value-free mental constructs) may vary from

context to context, but the desire for a universal discourse of intelligibility remains constant wherever nationalism forms.

In its preoccupied concern with the construction, reiteration and legitimation of an illusion of universal intelligibility, nationalism expresses the epochal current of ideas and recognitions whose emergence activates such a tenacious desire for totality. The durability of such an illusory claim to universal intelligibility reveals as much about the modern episteme from which it arises, as about the nature of its response.

Elie Kedourie, in defining the nature of this response points to its political implications, whose own legitimation shares the illusory desires that identify its philosophical origins. Kedourie notes that

> N ationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It pretends to supply a criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state, and for the right organization of a society of states. Briefly, the doctrine holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government. [7]

The characteristic feature of nationalism's inventive legitimation for an exclusive discourse of power, is its illusion of naturalism. Its claim to express a universal discourse of intelligibility is inextricably linked to the illusion that it is a predicate of nature. This governing myth of nationalism, which responds to the modern perception of alienation by asserting a counternarrative of naturally or organically determined meaning, has profound implications for the character of those aesthetic and political discourses which serve to

legitimate its illusion in the process of identifying the "certain characteristics which can be ascertained". Whether it relates to the meaning of history, the interpretation of place, or the perception of the determinacy of primary meanings in language, the imperative to naturalise a particular illusion of intelligibility as organic, non-conventional and universal is central to the achievement of nationalism's desire for totality. In its habitual deployment of linguistic and imagistic commonplaces in the configuration of this illusion, the implicit equivalence between nationalism and naturalism and between nationalist and naturalist, forewarns the poetic explorer of these topoi, of the dangers lurking within. "But", as Kedourie states

> what now seems natural once was unfamiliar, needing argument, persuasion, evidences of many kinds; what seems simple and transparent is really obscure and contrived, the outcome of circumstances now forgotten and preoccupations now academic, the residue of metaphysical systems sometimes incompatible and even contradictory. 8

In the creation of such a discourse of natural determination, the process of familiarisation implies a particular use of language, a use which could serve the process of constructing an intelligible totality, by a habitual and systematic denial of the indeterminacy and conventionality of language. In order to sustain the conceptual equation between nationalism and naturalism, language, the very medium of all conceptualisation, is determined by the repetitive assertion of "natural" forms of significance in the interpretation of key terms.

Briefly, the evolution of a familiarising discourse of natural intelligibility from the ruins of an alienating discourse of

arbitrary perceptions, could be effected only by a systematic overdetermination of the signifier. For if language is not pictured as the repository of naturally evolving significances, its innate conventionality could serve as an icon of the arbitrary character of modernity, an arbitrariness which nationalism seeks to suppress with all the authority of its new-found natural intelligibility.

At the level of language, the process of conceptual naturalisation engineered by a particular view of the signifier, could serve nationalism's deepest and most necessary desire, to cover its own traces of particularity. The implications for language use are fundamental to a consideration of this central tenet of nationalist ideology, its natural and therefore universal status.

In identifying this primary ideological fact, the significance for the writer of nationalism's naturalist illusion may be highlighted at the outset. In this context, the birth of the naturalist illusion may inform the critic of Heaney's work of the implications which impel the early and necessary death of the naturalist and the rebirth of the prober and explorer of language's deeply conventional domain.

But, as Gellner implores,

> we must not accept the myth. Nations are not inscribed into the nature of things, they do not constitute a political version of the doctrine of natural kinds. Nor were national states the manifest ultimate destiny of ethnic or cultural groups. What do exist are cultures, often subtly grouped, shading into each other, overlapping, intertwined; and there exist, usually but not always, political units of all shapes and sizes. In the past the two did not necessarily converge. 9

It is not the mythically determined fact of the existence of nations which is problematic, but the manner of their inscription "into the nature of things". A nation may be, as Benedict Anderson suggests

"an imagined political community" 10, as all political groups transcending the limits of the individual's experience must be. But it is the nature of the process of imagining, and not the fact that the community is imagined that is vital. One might add, that as illusions of social and political intelligibility are necessary for the legitimation of a particular form of social organisation, it is the character of the illusion rather than the fact of the illusion that is significant. In a situation such as that which continues to exist in Northern Ireland, it is the inclusivity or exclusivity of the illusion of intelligibility which will ultimately determine whether a society integrates or self-destructs.

The nation may be imagined as a community which embodies a plurality of interests and allegiances, thereby facilitating the construction of an inclusive illusion which serves to describe the specificity and heterogeneity of a society's particular experience. Or it may be defined as an exclusivist identitarian body, in which membership is delimited by the defining imperatives of a discourse in which selective characteristics are invested with universal validity.

In the process of defining the nation, by inscribing it into the nature of things, it is the character of the discursive form which will determine the nature of the illusion. And it is the conceptual assumptions informing the process of imagining the community, and particularly those informing the perception of language, which will determine whether the nation is to be an embodiment of distinctive heterogeneity or the homogenising expression of the will to totality - the particular child of a Thomas Davis or the totalistic bombardier of an Adams or a Paisley.

Definitions of the nation, nation-ness and nationality, which increasingly abound in this age of nationalism, bear fruitful testimony to the fact that the nation as an illusory construct may be defined according to the ideological ends in view. In considering the discursive implications for the Irish writer who is confronted with an unsolicited inheritance of habitual imaginings, it is vital therefore, to place the discursive form of these imaginings at the forefront of critical evaluation. For as D.G. Boyce suggests, "nationalism is the attribute not of nations, but of nationalists" [11].

Accompanying this realisation is the recognition that the emergence of the nation as a political and cultural ideal is inextricably bound up with the social, political and philosophical concerns which found expression at the dawn of the age of nationalism.

> The great, but valid, paradox is this: nations can be defined only in terms of the age of nationalism, rather than, as you might expect, the other way round. It is not the case that the 'age of nationalism' is a mere summation of the awakening and political self-assertion of this, that, or the other nation. Rather, when general social conditions make for standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be natural repositories of political legitimacy. Only <u>then</u> does it come to appear that any defiance of their boundaries by political units constitute a scandal. [12]

In order to comprehend the ideological ends which inform and animate nationalist discourse, consideration must first be given to the

perceived social, political and philosophical needs that spurred it into life in the imaginations of post-Enlightenment Europe.

The Origins of Nationalist Discourse

Nationalism is an invention of modernity. The emergence of a modern episteme in the wake of the Enlightenment, signified a departure from the cognitive, socio-economic and philosophical norms which had formerly served to situate human activity within a secure and transcendentally ordained cosmos. Within the cognitive bounds of that metaphysically secured regime, the material and mental aspects of human activity were situated as predicates of an ontologically organic order, which manifested itself in dynastic hierarchical structures of political authority, in a sacral perception of language as innately non-arbitrary and transhistorical, and in the economic model of collective subsistence.

The radical cognitive coupure which facilitated the emergence of an industrially structured, growth oriented socioscape centred upon the epistemological sovereignty and socio-political primacy of the individual. This break was the culmination of a number of material, socio-political and philosophical developments.

The two principal cultural sytems which determined the social and philosophical mental maps of the pre-modern age were in Anderson's terms, the religious community and the dynastic realm, both of which he notes, "in their heydays, were taken-for-granted frames of reference, very much as nationality is today" [13]. Descriptions of the Ummah Islam and Christendom identify a common metaphysically determined commonplace of viewing and making contact with their

expansive cultural cosmos through the medium of a transhistorical, immutable text of sacred significance. As Anderson notes,

> A 11 the great classical communities conceived of themselves as cosmically central, through the medium of a sacred language linked to a supraterrestrial order of power....Yet such classical communities linked by sacred languages had a character distinct from the imagined communities of modern nations. One crucial difference was the older communities' confidence in the unique sacredness of their languages, and thus their ideas about admission to membership.[14]

Language characterised as sacred and unchanging, whose centrality as the defining interface between a fixed ontological order and an unfolding eschatological plan, controlled and embodied the cosmic order in these cultures. With so definitive a role in the order of things, access to language and to the interpretation of that God-given order was of the utmost importance. In this context, the debates over the untranslatability of the Koran, of the vernacular transmission of biblical and liturgical texts, and more notably of the theological controversy regarding transubstantiality (the perfect paradigm of language as both sign and reality, signifier and signified, historically incarnate and transhistorically immutable), may be understood. Given the centrality of maintaining an immutable sacred language, the question of access to interpretation thus became vital. In order to maintain this worldview, a largely illiterate society entrusted this defining responsibility to a limited clerisy.

In the dynastic political orders which accompanied and sometimes outlasted this worldview, the fixed and organic configuration of a hierarchical cosmos was embodied in the figure of the King (a concept with which Shakespeare's readers will be familiar). According to Anderson

> K ingship organizes everything around a high centre. Its legitimacy derives from divinity, not from populations, who, after all, are subjects not citizens. In the modern conception, state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory. But in the older imagining, where states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another. [14]

Such cultures were defined in terms of a stable and orderly chain of being, a definition which the conditions pertaining to the sacredness of text and language supported. In such a culture the inward realisation of a hierarchically configured discourse of purpose and meaning did not require an outward manifestation in terms other than that which the dynastic realm proposed in the figure of the King and his collective domain of ordered and self-sufficient subsistence. The point about the indeterminacy of boundaries is in sharp contrast to nationalism's obsessive concerns with boundaries as an index of identification. For dynastic society, being defined in terms of a vertically integrated chain of being, no such horizontal criterion of identification was definitive of society's sense of belonging. But by the time that nationalism would arise, societies, and the newly discovered individuals who would constitute and define them, would be characterised as a field of meaning rather than a chain of being.

The most dramatic contributor to the evolution of a modern post-religious, post-dynastic society was the significantly increased access to language and its interpretation, which improvements in the book-production process brought about. The proliferation of books, the first "mass-produced industrial commodity" [15], created the conditions in which the literate clerisy's hold on the interpretation of reality could be diminished. In Gellner's view,

> Equal access to a scripturalist God paved the way to equal access to high culture. Literacy is no longer a specialism, but a pre-condition of all the specialisms, in a society in which everyone is a specialist. In such a society, one's primary loyalty is to the medium of our literacy, and to its political protector. The equal access of believers to God eventually becomes equal access of unbelievers to education and culture.[16]

With the rise of literacy and the growing accessibility of texts, culture moves centrestage, and language is king.

Implicitly, the dissemination of texts would lead to a re-appraisal of the ideology informing social and political structures, as the fact of a proliferation of interpretations would in turn enhance the realisation that truth was not given but determined, not ontologically enshrined but epistemologically conditioned. The fact of a proliferation of interpretations would inevitably lead to a reflection upon the social, political and philosophical role and nature of the interpreters. Equally, the realisation of the centrality of language and the conceptual form in which language is determined (rationality) in the process of social and political formation, would find itself incarnated in the obsessive concerns to control the criteria of interpretation in the subsequent construction of newly imagined communities.

In summarising the emergence of the conditions in which nationalism could arise, Anderson states

> that the very possibility of imagining the nation only arose historically when, and where, three fundamental cultural conceptions, all of great antiquity, lost their axiomatic grip on men's minds. The first of these was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth. It was this idea that called into being the great transcontinental sodalities of Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and the rest. Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres - monarchs who

> were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation. Human loyalties were necessarily hierarchical and centripetal because the ruler, like the sacred script, was a node of access to being and inherent in it. Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical. Combined, these ideas rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all death, loss, and servitude) and offering, in various ways, redemption from them.[17]

With the decline of this ontologically defined, metaphysically guaranteed and organically integrative horizon of meaning, societies and the emergent individuals whose newfound role required their participatiion in the definition of society, were deprived of the naturalising discourse which pre-modern sacred discourse embodied. Adrift from a given place in the divine order of things, devoid of a legitimating hierarchical model of cultural definition, and increasingly uncertain of the epistemological first principles upon which a counternarrative of intelligibility could be constructed, society sought a new image of purposefulness and belonging, a new "omphalos".

The quest for a new social and political omphalos, a new legitimating focus of intelligibility created the conditions in which the nation could be imagined in these terms. Throughout the discourse of nationalism, the preoccupation with the determination of a response to this loss of a sense of cosmic belonging, of predestined purposefulness, and of a natural and intelligible role in the domain of history, conveys the centrality of the restoration of that lost omphalos to the whole nationalist project.

For all its rhetorical bravado, nationalism embodies a desire to

rediscover lost origins in a consoling and integrative cosmos. And despite its persistent enunciation of the centrality of the nation's future destiny in the nationalist project, in reality - underlying the discursive commonplaces of a static synchronically accessible history, the intransigent overdetermination of the signifier, and an obsessive proccupation with the boundaries of place - in the words of Karl Kraus, "Origin is the goal" [18].

With the emergence of technological progress and the development for the first time of the objective of economic growth concomitant with the recognition of the individual's need for self-improvement, self-aggrandisement and self-dependence, the requirements of economic growth and the need for cognitive growth coincided. The recognition that progress and the improvement of individual and collective circumstances were dependent upon the actions of individuals rather than upon providence deepened the need for the determination of a new discursive form. Such a form should be capable of legitimating a social formation in the pursuit of economic growth and should be answerable to the philosophical needs of a society of cosmological orphans. Culture would prove to be central to the definition of this discourse, in a manner that the old religious and dynastic forms could not. For, as Gellner states,

> A growth-bound economy dependent on cognitive innovation cannot seriously link its cultural machinery (which it needs unconditionally) to some doctrinal faith which rapidly becomes obsolete, and often ridiculous.
>
> So the culture needs to be sustained <u>as</u> a culture, and not as the carrier or scarcely noted accompaniments of a faith. Society can and does worship itself or its own culture directly and not, as Durkheim thought, through the opague medium of religion. [19]

With the birth of a modern society in which cognitive and economic

growth are inextricably linked, and in which "Work, in the main, is no longer the manipulation of things, but of meanings" [20], discourse and its constituent tropological and linguistic domain may become radically instrumentalised in the process of achieving mental and material imperatives. In such a society, language mediates the dispersal of power, just as it had served to hypostatize it in the dynastic age. All manifestations of language become potential manifestations of power.

By the end of the eighteenth century the philosophical needs of a cosmologically orphaned society were the subject of a sustained analytical quest for durable solutions. The ejection from the edenic garden of an ontologically inscribed cosmos of organic unity (however barbaric the experience of that organism may have been), coincided with the emergence of a process in which a new first principle of intelligibility was avidly sought. The birth of modernity had begun.

The recognition that the old ontologically inscribed order of intelligibility which informed the social, political and economic definition of dynastic and religious society could no longer suffice, gave rise to a current of doubt which initiated the process of modernisation.

Modernity is inscribed at every level with the hallmark of doubt. In coming to terms with the catastrophic loss of a consoling though flawed body of received truth, the motive force animating the modern quest for an alternative universal law of intelligibility was informed by a determination to establish an irrefutable description of reality. Such a description, which would be required to serve as the legitimating metanarrative of social, economic and political

formations, would not, so easily, succumb to the changing conditions which the evolution of ideas involve. In determining the nature of such a description, agreement needed to be reached upon the universal cognitive idiom in which such a description could be embodied, if it was to prove durable. From the scepticism of David Hume to the analytical inquisitiveness of Immanuel Kant, the search for an innately stable model of intelligibility was driven by the current of doubt.

It is fundamental doubt that necessitates an obsession with fundamental certainty. And as Vincent Descombes attests

> A ccording to the most considerable authorities, for once in agreement - Hegel and Heidegger for example - the pursuit of a truth that has the character of absolute certainty marks the inauguration of modern philosophy. [21]

The quest for first principles of intelligibility reflected a profound desire to establish an idiom of intelligibility in which a new social, economic and political reality could be legitimately expressed. The first traces of that idiom evolved from the Cartesian Cogito's quantum leap, a cognitive leap that substituted knowing rather than being as the omphalos of all intelligibility.

By the time Kant had completed his description or critique of human intelligibility he had identified reason as that universal cognitive idiom, in which any such intelligibility could be expressed. The implications of this idiomatic revolution are profound, as Gellner asserts.

> What underlies the two elements of the rational spirit...(orderliness and efficiency) is something deeper, well explored by Hume and Kant under the blithe impression that they were investigating the human mind in general: namely, a common measure of fact, a universal conceptual currency, so to speak, for the general characterization of things; and the esprit d'analyse,

> forcefully preached and characterized already by Descartes. Each of these elements is presupposed by rationality, in the sense which concerns us, as the secret of the modern spirit. By the common or single conceptual currency I mean that all facts are located within a single continuous logical space, that statements reporting them can be conjoined and generally related to each other, and so that in principle one single language describes the world and is internally unitary; or on the negative side, that there are no special, privileged, insulated facts or realms, protected from contamination or contradictions by others, and living in insulated independent logical spaces of their own....By contrast [to the pre-modern view], in our society it is assumed that all referential uses of language ultimately refer to one coherent world, and can be reduced to a unitary idiom; and that it is legitimate to relate them to each other. 'Only connect' is an intelligible and acceptable ideal. [22]

In endeavouring to construct a legitimating metanarrative for social and political formations, the implications for the role of language are significant when language is envisaged as the connective tissue in this rationally embodied idiom of intelligibility. Implicitly, the desire to connect with and to construct such a metanarrative, would increasingly depend on the formative capacity of language. In attempting to replace the sacred text of antiquity with a modern secular equivalent, language and its formative strategies, signifying processes and tropological devices, would perforce play the definitive role in fulfilling the omphaloid desire to connect, explain and belong.

But as Gellner notes, the possession of an absolute idiom is, in a manner of speaking, a 'double-edged sword'. For in accepting the universal validity of a cognitive idiom, the individual is limited to the resolution of any problematic perceptions which the exploration of that idiom brings forth, within the framework of that idiom. If the pursuit of intelligibility in the conceptual idiom of reason

should produce problematic results, one may not reasonably resolve these problems by abandoning the idiom. In the wake of Kant's critique of this cognitive idiom, this problematic dilemma became increasingly clear.

Pursuant to the construction of an unassailable principle of intelligibilty, Kant described in his "Copernican revolution" the position of the agent of intelligibility, the subject. In this description the subject, being central to the mental construction of its intelligibility was fundamentally isolated from any absolute means of verifying its sense of belonging to the reality which it sought to render intelligible. The subject was autonomous, sovereign and isolated. In this new idiom of intelligibilty, the subject had, so to speak, 'painted itself into a corner'. The perception of alienation had been given systematic expression and in an idiom that offered little sign of escape.

For the philosophical inheritors of the Kantian critique, this radical isolation of the subject deepened the desire to determine a narrative which could legitimately effect a collective expression of intelligibility [23]. Such a metanarrative while necessarily expressed in the rational idiom, would serve to transcend the extreme particularity into which the Kantian subject had been delivered. In determining such a metanarrative, a modern model of social and political order could be legitimated and the modern perception of vulnerability and precariousness could be subsumed within the universal consolation of an intelligible social, cultural and political totality.

In the process of exploring the grounds of such a totality,

sucessive philosophical observers increasingly came to realise the depths of human isolation which post-Enlightenment modernity implied. According to Terry Eagleton, this realisation is the defining truth of the Enlightenment.

> This is the kernal of truth of bourgeois Enlightenment: the abstract universal right of all to be free, the shared essence or identity of all human subjects to be autonomous. In a further dialectical twist, however, this truth itself must be left behind as soon as seized; for the only point of enjoying such universal abstract equality is to discover and live one's own particular difference. The telos of the entire process is not, as the Enlightenment believed, universal truth, right and identity, but concrete particularity. [24]

In Kant's own schema the escape route from this diminishing particularity was provided in the concept of the will. As the arbiter of its intelligible world, the subject could avail of this distinguishing characteristic and in so doing transcend his incarcerating particularity by connecting with the world of his experience. The role of the will in the determination of human intelligibility thus began to play a central part in the legitimation of universal metanarratives from the rise of German Idealism, through its (Idealism's) attempted abolition in the Nietzschean worldview, to its ultimate expression in the depravity of National Socialism. The perception of the will as definitive of the human condition in the new world order of Enlightenment rationalism is succinctly expressed by Friedrich von Schiller when he writes that:

> All nature proceeds rationally; man's prerogative is merely that he proceeds rationally with consciousness and intent. All other things "must"; man is the being that wills. [25]

The perception that the will is definitive of humankind's ability to transcend its own particularity by imposing itself upon the process of defining its intelligible reality, found corroborating evidence in the potent political symbolism of the French Revolution. In a vivid demonstration of the overthrow of the pre-rationalist political assumption "that the title of any government to rule did not depend on the origin of its power" [26], the revolutionary action in France provided a paradigmatic example of the puissance of the autonomous self in the determination of its social and political context. Implicit in this revolution of the autonomous will resides the concept that " S elf-determination" is "the supreme political good" [27]. Furthermore, as John Hutchinson states,

> with the growing popularity of concepts of popular sovereignty in the eighteenth century, so modern nationalism was born as an ideology legitimating the inquest of the dynastic state in the name of the community [28].

The role of the will in the determination of nationalist metanarratives of intelligibility has been the subject of some discussion by theorists of nationalism. Whether the expression of the collective will is a philosophical reality deducible by inference from the individual will, as Kedourie claims [29], or merely a wilful nationalist misreading of Kantian thought [30], is an argument which is tangential to present concerns. What is central to the consideration of the emergence of nationalist discourse is not the truth of its view of Kantian philosophy, but the reality of its particular perceptions.

The impact of the philosophy of the Enlightenment upon the construction of nationalist ideology may well have been due to

erroneous preconceptions. But this merely serves to point out that it is the assuagement of philosophical needs rather than the depiction of philosophical realities that characterises nationalism's process of imagining. The necessary illusion of the will is, furthermore, nowhere more actively apparent than in nationalism's manipulation of language and ideas in the pursuit of a universal form of intelligibility.

In the process of establishing a metanarrative capable of responding to the philosophical needs of autonomous and isolated subjects, the principal aim was to determine a discursive form which could transcend the subject's particularity through an integrative illusion of universal intelligibility.

The political shift from viewing the state as the unqualified embodiment of a preordained order to the realisation that the state was dependent for its legitimacy upon the popular will, implied a corollary. Henceforward the legitimation of the individual's social and political identity could be determined by the state,as the state would be inextricably linked with the determination of freedom and responsibility for the individual. In his Addresses to the German Nation, Johann Fichte noted this claim of the state upon the individual.

> This then is the full extent of the claim: that the state should be the creator of man's freedom not in an external and material sense, but in an internal and spiritual sense. [31].

The integration of a deeply isolated subjectivity into a consoling universe of collective meaning (the nation state) would implicitly involve an abdication of at least part of the subject's conceptual

autonomy. This abdication would favour a collective expression of intelligibility, whose expressed will to universalise would determine the legitimacy of the subject's particular perceptions and of its political, cultural and constitutional rights. In pursuing this consoling universe and by accepting the primacy of a collectively expressed will which might be inclusive or coercive in its definitions, modern man began to walk the path to Auschwitz.

The depth of modernity's depiction of human particularity, of humankind as the unwilling participants in an arbitrary universe, conditioned the necessity of an equally forceful discursive response. The dilemma of the autonomous subject's denaturalised relations with a world in which it sought intelligibility and purpose, brought forth the perception of displacement.

The displacement of modern consciousness, its perception of not being "at home" (the perception of "Das Unheimliche", "the unhomely/ the estranged" [32]), of not being organically continuous with its world, activated the desire to determine a discourse of belonging. For such a discourse to overcome successfully the metaphysical impediment of estrangement, the grounds of estrangement which the extreme particularity and heterogeneity of human experience represent, must of necessity be subsumed in a universalising narrative of homogeneous intelligibility. The reality of human particularity signifies the fact that difference rather than identity, and separation rather than inclusion, characterise the modern condition. By implication, to create a narrative embodying this reality would be to exacerbate rather than alleviate the traumatic perception of arbitrariness.

In the construction of this necessary illusion of universal meaningfulness, the urge to suppress particularity which is indicative of arbitrariness would play an equally formative role as the desire to suggest universality. In an ideology in which the will would play such an active role, the implications of this methodical suppression of difference, heterogeneity and particularity in the creation of a universal intelligibility, would manifest themselves in the charnelhouse of twentieth century extremism.

Nationalism as an illusion of universal intelligibility offers modern man an image of salvation from the modern subjects' estranged condition of modern particularity. It is, as Anderson points out, a peculiarly potent response to the predicament of modern societies in the wake of the Enlightenment.

> The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning...few things were better suited to this end than an idea of nation.[33]

The desire for a "secular transformation" of arbitrariness into intelligibility, of particularity into universality and of estrangement into familiarity, required the selection of a secular (or post-religious) idiom in which such transformation could be effected. Such an idiom should of necessity, be capable of expressing the wilful transformation of man's inner needs and experiences into an intelligible outward form, a form insusceptible to the endemic heterogeneity of modern consciousness. In constructing a discourse

which would legitimate the social, economic and political formation of a modern society, the facilitating conceptual idiom would have to provide a repository of primary significations, unitary symbols, paradigms of identity and universal values.

Culture is the hermeneutic idiom of modernity. In its interpretation of human activity as an innately intelligible narrative of continuous and constructive explanation, culture creates the conditions in which a narrative of universal intelligibility may be imagined. By being deployed as the idiom in which the secular transformation of abritrariness into intelligibility may be effected, culture is used, as Schiller asserts "to set man free and to help him to be equal to his concept" [34]. In its modern function, it may be added that culture serves to set man free by helping him to be equal to his illusions.

Culture's distinctive equation between activity and meaning provides a profitable basis for the definition of social, political and economic models of intelligibility. By way of such an equation, the collective welfare of a given social group may be given universal definition through paradigms of proper and improper actions and more significantly, proper and improper meanings.

If the overarching goal of a modern society is the attainment of a consoling narrative of universal intelligibility, then all constituent actions (be they linguistic, economic or political) should be subject to a collective imperative in which the implicit meaning of such actions are valued in accordance with their compliance or non-compliance with the universal illusion. The imperative to construct such a universal illusion creates the

conditions in which a narrative supportive of such illusions - a narrative of identity - becomes necessary. By implication, the creators of such narratives - philosophers, politicians and artists - are inextricably involved in the acceptance or rejection of the imperative so defined. In Fichte's view,

> This exaltation of the state also exalts the philosopher, the academic. He ceases to be the reflective man in whom understanding necessarily precludes action; he is no longer only a scholar who advances knowledge or a teacher of youth who guards and transmits the heritage; he now claims to be the true legislator of the human race. Politics on this view is intimately bound up with man's ultimate destiny; understanding, therefore, and action are not opposites. Understanding is the understanding of the whole, and right action is action which tends to absorption in the whole. Action is understanding, and understanding action.[35]

In the age of nationalism there are no "unacknowledged legislators". The age of aestheticism is dead.

For the writer, his inclusion within the process of imagining a narrative illusion of identity is dictated by the cultural equation of action and meaning. If the artist wishes to create an image of redemption from the totalistic consequences of such a narrative, he cannot do so by denying his position under the sway of the illusion. But by opening out the discourse of illusion to the teeming evenemential field of particular perceptions, indeterminate signifiers and arbitrary histories, he may expose the heterogeneous domain which the illusion seeks to suppress. In short, for the modern writer redemption may be imagined not by denying his involvement with the idiom of illusion, but by creating a discursive form which serves to expose the illusoriness of the illusion.

Modern society's overwhelming desire to escape the arbitrariness

which the individual's experience of an alienating particularity conveys, brought forth a number of socio-political discourses whose desire to assert a universal intelligibility are only equalled in intensity by the desire to suppress all indications of conceptual particularity. In nationalism, the legitimating premiss of a naturally determined, universally intelligible cultural identity requires a complex discursive infrastructure of justification.

For culture to legitimate the narrative of universal intelligibility, it must perforce become preoccupied with sustaining its own claims to be capable of such legitimating actions. Mimicking the self-worshipping role of religion (analysed by Emile Durkheim) in its pre-modern role as the idiom of legitimation, as Gellner suggests "culture needs to be sustained <u>as</u> a culture" [36]. Modern culture worships itself and in doing so establishes its universal (and universalising) credentials. The enactment of this self-sustaining functioning is thus central to the process of legitimating a universal illusion of intelligibility.

Evidence of the degree to which culture fulfils this role in modern society is nowhere more clear than in the evolution of nationalist discourse. In support of the assertion of the indivisible and inalienable culture of the nation a massive process of verification habitually accompanies the process of political legitimation from the outset. What begins as the genteel philological, literary and archaeological enquiry of the few in the age of post-Ossianic enthusiasm, emerges as a collective rage for order in the age of association.

In Ireland, for example, what begins as a taxonomical trickle at

the turn of the eighteenth century, swells in the course of the nineteenth century to a torrent of associations, societies and leagues that yield in turn to the twentieth century's tide of academicisations, disciplinisations, anthologisations, industries, colloquies and summer schools. What characterises this collective rage for order is the self-worshipping process of acculturation, a process which is fundamental to the transformation of particular experiences into universal intelligibility.

In its reiterative cycle of self-worship, culture, by its habitualising ritual, normalises the form in which its constituent discursive signs will be perceived. The ritual of self-worship aids the naturalisation of its particular narrative form. But if culture is to sustain itself successfully as the idiom of intelligibility, it must first sustain itself as a natural and unitary domain in which intelligibility may be universally configured. Culture, as the singularity of the term itself suggests, legitimates the pursuit of a unitary narrative of intelligibility for its displaced believers. And the impact of culture's autogamous ritual is significant, for as Gellner asserts " M odern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture".[37]

The rage for order which the obsessive pursuit of manifestations of cultural orderliness in the nineteenth century conveys, was predicated of a desire for ultimacy and purpose, in an age of self-consciously contingent beings. This desire for a sense of ultimacy, for purposefulness and intelligibility, arose in the wake of the recognition that the human subject is a profoundly isolated, arbitrarily determined alien in a world of his own making. Evicted

from the consoling ontological organicism of the pre-modern episteme, and impounded in the alienating epistemological autonomy of post-Kantian subjectivity, the subject finds itself displaced and denaturalised by its own particularity. To overcome the trauma of displacement and denaturalisation, the subject must of necessity overcome the inhibiting limits of its own particularity by incorporating itself in a new universe of incorporative intelligibility.

In the wake of German Idealism's exploration of the metaphysics of modernity, the image of the nation emerged as a paradigm of incorporation in a universe of unitary intelligibility for the subject. Through the depiction of the nation as a natural, providentially ordained unit, the subject could be provided with a consequently unitary discourse of intelligibility. "Every nationality", intones Friedrich Schleiermacher,

> is destined through its peculiar organization and its place in the world to represent a certain side of the divine image...For it is God who directly assigns to each nationality its definite task on earth and inspires it with a definite spirit in order to glorify Himself, through each one in a peculiar manner.[38]

Regardless of accepting or rejecting the theologian's divine trope, the philosophical implications for the citizens of modernity are clear. The nation is viewed as a distinct natural entity providentially inscribed as a unitary focus of collective intelligibility for its constituent subjects.

These principle features of the nation, its naturalness, providentiality, and unity, necessitate corresponding discursive affirmations in the process of defining the nation as the

familiarising universal home for a deeply alienated subjectivity. In affirming the existence of this new world order, history will convey a providential teleology. Ethnicity will be redeemed by a unitary narrative of identity. Language will serve to ratify the natural, non-arbitrary and non-conventional order of unitary meaning. And in the pursuit of the new omphalos of wholeness and intelligibility, all discourse will serve to assert a form in which the pursuit of a conceptual identity is enforced by the suppression of signs of conceptual difference.

To create a naturalising universe of unitary significance, the distinguishing features of modernity and the arbitrary cosmos of radically heterogeneous experiences that typify it, must be systematically suppressed. In order to attain the beatific vision of total meaning in this unitary universe of collective incorporation, the subject must surrender part of its conceptual autonomy by accepting that the unitary subject of universal intelligibility, the nation, will now become the arbiter of meaning.

Thus, that which problematically defines the modern subject, its isolating particularity, will be evaluated in accordance with its affirmation of the universal paradigm of intelligibility. For the subject to be intelligible in nationalism's discursive domain, it must seek out signs of the universal in its particularity. In effect the nationalist proceeds along the path to cognitive unity by renouncing the heterogenising nature of its particularity.

As such, nationalism endows the identity or non-identity of particular significance with the collective universal paradigm of meaning, as the criteria of intelligibility. In doing so, nationalism

denies the rule of the arbitrary by denying the subject's right to consider its experience of particularity as a sign of particularity. For in the nationalist imagination, each and every instance of particular experience is an instantiation of the universal rule, or it is nothing.

In order to belong in the unitary cosmos of nationalist intelligibility, the subject must seek out the rule of the universal in every aspect of its particular experience. Whatever signifies the rule of the arbitrary - perceptions of difference, the arbitrariness of the signifier, signs of randomness, symbols of barbarism, icons of insignificance - must be denied, suppressed or reconfigured. Consequently, whatever ratifies the identitarian form of a civilising illusion of intelligibility must be emphasised, reiterated, and naturalised.

In such a dispensation, history will be viewed as a teleological narrative in which barbarism's fragmentary dynamics are overcome by the civilising march of the unitary nation towards its intelligible destiny. Language will be hypostatised as a reified domain of absolute meanings and naturally (over)determined signifiers. And the individual's access to the rights and privileges which incorporation in the communally imagined political and cultural dispensation provide, will be determined by its correspondence with the identitarian criteria of admission.

Inversely, those who signify the rule of the arbitrary by embodying difference or representing the non-identical, may be viewed as threatening the legitimacy of this consoling illusion of unitary intelligibilty. As such, they become legitimate targets for those

who enforce the identitarian fiat by appealing to the incarnation of this providential unity as the supreme value.

The identitarian imagination of nationalism seeks through its various discursive formations, to instrumentalise every particularity as a sign of the universal truth. In the process of imagining the community, the nationalist imagination becomes preoccupied with the institution (or restitution/revival/renaissance) of a new omphalos, a new consoling universal focus of intelligibilty. And in so doing, nationalist discourse becomes preoccupied by the reiterative tropes and naturalising commonplaces which serve to pre-empt the heterogenising impact of particularity by prefiguring it as identical with the homogenising domain of universality. Thus in the wake of the Enlightenment, nationalist ideologues respond to the modern predicament by asserting that if humankind may no longer be naturalised, then the world must be "humanised".

Nationalism as Ideology

Conditioned by its intelligible idiom, the modern subject seeks to redress its inability to identify with its former ontological omphalos, by submitting to the rule of an imagined cognitive identity, the new epistemological omphalos. Where pre-modern societies could characterise their intelligibility in terms of unity of being, modern society would identify its intelligibility in terms of a parallel cognitive unity. The discursive code which supported pre-modern perceptions of intelligibility, characterised humankind's primary desire to participate in the chain of being in terms of the

pursuit of unity of being. The ultimate goal of such a worldview was the mystical experience of the pure presence of total being, the experience of parousia.

For modern consciousness, the chain of being had been superceded by the field of meaning as the governing imperium of intelligibility. Restricted by the nature of a single conceptual idiom (reason), isolated by the autonomy which rational subjectivity proposed, and motivated by the will to transcend its incarcerating particularity, the modern imagination sought a comparable image of universal incorporation. The ultimate goal of such a worldview would be the realisation of an intelligible illusion which would permit the identification of the subject with its conceptual realm.

Where the experience of parousia had constituted the telos of pre-modern society, now the experience of total meaning, the experience of total identity between the knower and the known (anastoniosis) would constitute the telos of modernity. In pursuing the ultimate experience of identity in the illusion of total intelligibility and total meaning, the arbitrary significance of particularity would be suborned by the identitarian form of universal meaning. This rage for order incarnated the age of ideology.

Ideology is as Descombes suggests "a particular or relative discourse, seeking to pass itself off as universal or absolute" [39]. The desire for a cognitive domain of total meaning underwrites ideological narratives of intelligibility. This hegemonic desire may be fulfilled through discursive formations which transform particularity into an illusion of universal intelligibility. To sustain the illusion of universal intelligibility using a

particularist discourse (and all discourse is particular) requires a systematic suppression of the signs of particularity, signs that serve to expose the illusoriness of this illusion.

When undiminished by considerations of compatability with ideology's "itinerary of the absolute" [40], every instance of particularity considered as particularity, implies a heterogeneous universe of intelligibility. The exploration of human experiences of particularity, in language, culture, politics and religious faith, brings to light a universe that is characterised as much by difference as by identity. This recognition, that the modern universe of intelligibility is constituted as a differentiated constellation of parochial identities rather than as an indivisible hegemonic essence of identity, is open to the arbitrary forces which ideology seeks to suppress.

The consideration of the particularity of the particular is, therefore,threatening to the hegemonic claims of an illusory universality. It is important to note this, for when the writer is confronted with the universalising habits of nationalism's culturally and politically hegemonic discourse, the significance of the endemic concerns of Irish writers since Kavanagh with the particularity of their experience and with the parochial form of a (by implication) constellatory aesthetic, becomes increasingly clear. For by exploring the particularity of the particular, the writer may evade the hegemonic demands which the consideration of the particular as merely representing an instance of the universal rule of ideology asserts.

Ideology serves to facilitate the illusion of cognitive identity

between the knower and the known. In doing so, it provides a response to the harrowing isolation of the subject. As Descombe notes, ideology serves

> T o temper the brutal element of existence, to absorb the heterogeneous, to give meaning to the senseless, to rationalise the incongruous; in short, to translate the <u>other</u> into the language of the <u>same</u> [41] .

In order to facilitate this transformation of a heterogeneous realm of particularities into a homogeneous illusion of universal truth, ideology requires a discursive form which may systematically "translate the <u>other</u> into the language of the <u>same</u>". Such a form functions to assert the identity of universal intelligibility by admitting as meaningful only those signs which are supportive of this universal illusion. As the end of this process of universalisation is the redemption of the alienated subject from the grip of the arbitrary through its incorporation in a collective conceptual identity, the symbols of arbitrariness will be repressed. With this end in mind nationalist ideology describes reality as purposeful, history as teleological, and ethnicity as naturally (non-arbitrarily) defined.

In the construction of this homogenising narrative of unitary intelligibility, ideology subjects the deeply heterogeneous realm of perceptions to the "logic of identity". The "logic of identity" is in Descombes's words "a form of thought which cannot represent the <u>other</u> to itself without reducing it to the <u>same</u>, and thereby subordinates difference to identity" [42]. Its centrality to the process of ideological legitimation is evident in the evolution of Irish nationalism from the civilising warfare of D.P.Moran, through

the Irish Constitution's revanchist imperative, to the homocidal sectarianism of the IRA. In nationalist ideology the logic of identity means that if the identity of the nation is to be fully realised, then all signs (and by implication signbearers) of differentiation from or in the one, holy and apostolic universal truth, the nation, must be denied ("unionism does not exist, British imperialism does") , reconfigured ("unionists are part of the unitary nation whether they know or like it") or eliminated ("unionists are legitimate targets").

Thus the discursive form of ideological thought is identitarian, in that it subordinates all that is non-identical to the illusion of a unitary intelligibility. In practice, identitarian form and the identitarian imagination which imposes it, effect the transformation of particular significance into the fragmentary testimony of a total illusion of absolute intelligibity. Under the rule of the identitarian imagination, particular moments of significance are deemed intelligible only if they comply with the demands of a totalistic intelligibility. Under the sway of nationalist ideology, every sign of particularity may be rendered intelligible only if it is in accordance with the predetermined identitarian form of the universally absolute criterion of intelligibility, the nation.

Furthermore, as the pervasive cultural idiom of modernity equates action with meaning, all actions which serve to establish the rule of the nation's universal illusion are not merely legitimate but necessary. With the value of the particular dimensions of human experience so diminished, the consequences for the individual's claims to basic dignity irrespective of its relation to the

fulfilment of ideological imperatives are grimly clear. In Derry, Enniskillen, Belfast, Dublin, Darkley, and Warrington, places which are united by their experience of the identitarian imagination's most extreme apostles (both nationalist and loyalist), the meaning of that totality which the suppression of particularity signifies is clear.

For the critic examining the cultural narratives that coincide with the rise of Irish nationalism, the interpretation of the term "identity" is therefore problematic. Habitually, identity is used as a portmanteau term to describe the formal and contentual dimensions of cultural discourse that seek to characterise the distinctness of local cultural manifestations. This habitual use of the term identity, in conjunction with the terms national, or cultural, conflates the separate formal and contentual dimensions of the term and in doing so, renders any accurate discursive evaluation difficult.

Considered as a contentual description, cultural or national identity may represent an attempt to consider the particularity of a given cultural or political locus. Considered as indicative of a formal precept, the definition, pursuit, or incarnation of cultural and political intelligibility in terms of a universal identitarian norm, such a concept of identity is indicative of a universal ideological construct. In Irish nationalist discourse identity may, therefore, represent the consideration of the particularity of the particular or its denial. It may embody a universal imperative or a particular illusion.

Such confusion is clearly helpful for some who wish to reconfigure their ideological imperatives as being merely (naturally) the

expressions of a particular experience. This in itself serves to deny critical access to the fact of a universal illusion and naturally, to the means of exposing the illusoriness of the illusion. For this reason, the present work will attempt to differentiate between the conflicting implications of this term by deploying the term identitarian to denote the formal characteristics of nationalist ideological discourse. A discourse is, therefore, identitarian when the narrative inscribed attempts to transform a description of particular experience into an assertion of a universal totality by the suppression of non-identical signs.

Nationalist ideology arises as a response to modernity's characteristic insight which conveys the isolation and alienation of the subject in a world of irrepressible arbitrariness. The desire for a coherent form of intelligibility which results, culminates in a renegotiation between arbitrariness and intelligibility through the idiom of culture. Such a renegotiation postulates the nation as a universal criterion of intelligibility. In order to legitimate the nation as an intelligible norm capable of re-familiarising the subject as a purposeful constituent of a universal form of intelligibility, nationalism defines itself as a universal truth through the strategic formations of identitarian discourse.

In establishing the legitimacy of nationalist ideology, such discourse serves to suppress all signs of arbitrariness and indeterminacy by systematically universalising all discursive particularities. The subordination of the particularity of the particular, is effected via the operations of an identitarian narrative. Nationalism's identitarian narrative reconfigures history

as a teleologically structured discourse, language and its tropological forms as indicative of a semiotic conformity, and ethnicity as expressive of a monadic suprahistorically constructed subject - the nation. Nationalism invents the nation as a construct of the imagination. And it is the form of this imaginative edification of the nation which constitutes nationalism's problematic contribution to the traumatic conflict in modern Ireland. Furthermore, for the writer of the "Troubles", redemption from its barbaric cycle may only be effected by a sustained imaginative disengagement from the "content of the form".

1. de Beaumont. L'Irlande Sociale, Politique et Religieuse (Paris: 1839); cited by, Mansergh, Nicholas: The Irish Question (London:Unwin University Books, 1968) p.292.

2. In evaluating the concept of identity a distinction needs to be made between the two discursive functions which it may peform. Identity may assert difference or sameness. As a concept signifying distinctness or particularity, identity is expressive of a universe constituted by other particularities. It is, in other words, open to other expressions of distinctness as it defines itself as an instance of alterity.

However, it is the usage of the term identity to signify a delimited and exclusive sense of sameness which is problematic. In this sense identity is deployed to signify the collective norm of social or cultural intelligibility and this inevitably coincides with a political demand to legitimate this norm as the rightful criterion for inclusion in the constitutional and social formations of a given society. In this sense, identity implies a systematic suppression of signs of otherness and a systematic imposition of the norm so desired. In this sense identity performs a totalistic function in discourse, and all such instances of the term identity in this sense serve to suppress alterity in the service of a hegemonic ideal.

In the debate relating to the issue of identity the two senses of the term are commonly interchanged. To clarify the rhetorical grounds of the argument which follows in this dissertation, it is necessary to distinguish between the two discursive functions of the term. With this in mind the term "identitarian" will be used to signify the discursive habits of identity as hegemonic sameness. Thus when the term identitarian is applied it signifies a logic which suppresses difference and aims to impose a unitary hegemonic form of interpretation.

The term identitarian is derived from Theodor Adorno's writings on the identity thinking informing totalitarian discourse. It arises in Negative Dialectics, Ashton, E.B. (trans.) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), in the section headed 'Cognitive Self-Reflection' op. cit pp.148-151. The term identitarian is a choice of the translator, as the original text Adorno, Theodor Gesammelte Schriften : Band 6 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973) pp.152-155, does not provide a consistently used term conveying this meaning. However, given the difficulties relating to the interpretation of identity, the availability of such a clarifying term is useful for the purposes of this dissertation.

3. Heaney, Seamus. 'Exposure'. North (London: Faber and Faber, 1975)p.73.

4. White, Hayden. From White's eponymous analysis of the philosophy of history. The Content of the Form : Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1987).

5. Gellner, Ernest. Nations and Nationalism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell ,1983).

6. ibid. p.125.

7. Kedourie, Elie. Nationalism (London:Hutchinson University Library, 1961), p.9.

8. ibid. p.9.

9. Gellner, op. cit. p.49.

10. Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1991)p.6.

11. Boyce, D.G. Nationalism in Ireland (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1982) p.363.

12. Gellner op. cit. p.55

13. Anderson op. cit. p.12.

14. ibid. p.19.

15. ibid. p.34.

16. Gellner, op. cit. p.142.

17. Anderson, op. cit. p.36.

18. Kraus, Karl. Cited with a commentary in Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations (New York: Harcourt Brace and World Inc.,1968) p.263.

19. Gellner, op. cit. p.142.

20. ibid. pp.32-33.

21. Descombes, Vincent. Modern French Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p.1.

22. Gellner, op. cit. p.21.

23. For a detailed consideration of the impact of Kantian philosophy in the context of the philosophical emergence of nationalism, cf: Kedourie, op. cit. pp.19-30.

24. Eagleton, Terry. Nationalism: Irony and Commitment: Field Day Pamphlet no.13 (Derry:Field Day Theatre Company,1988) pp.10-11.

25. von Schiller, Friedrich. Naive and Sentimental Poetry and On the Sublime, Elias, Julius A. (trans.) (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966), p.193.

26. Kedourie, op. cit. p.15.

27. ibid. p.29.

28. Hutchinson, John. The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987) p.202.

29. Kedourie, op. cit. pp.80-81

30. Gellner, op. cit. pp.130-131.

31. Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. Addresses to the German Nation 1807-8 cited in Kedourie op. cit. p.47 .

32. For a discussion of the term's evolving significance in the critical discourse of modernity cf: Kearney, Richard. Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) pp.106-113 .

33. Anderson, op.cit. p.11.

34. von Schiller, op.cit. p.194; and for a discussion cf: Eagleton, Terry. The Ideology of the Aesthetic (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,1990) pp.102-119

35. Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. The Vocation of the Scholar 1794, cited in Kedourie op. cit. pp.49-50.

36. Gellner op. cit. p.142.

37. ibid. p.36.

38. Kedourie op. cit. p.58.

39. Descombes op. cit. p.137; this definition will inform my use of the term 'ideology' throughout.

40. ibid. p.144.

41. ibid. p.107.

42. ibid. p.95.

Chapter 2

Identifying Irish Nationalism

"As for Irish nationalism, how can normal countries understand it?"[1]

Daniel Corkery

Irish nationalism is a creature of bewildering proportions. In approaching the evaluation of its critical dimensions, the critic is repeatedly confronted with the prospects of deciphering a mental map that is characterised by a plethora of conflicting dynamics. For the mental map of Irish nationalism includes breathtaking genius and wilful stupidity, heroic passion and fatuous idealism, immense recognitions of humanity and total acts of barbarity, amongst its constituent parts. And even in terms of the establishment of critical criteria proper to Corkery's "normal countries", the critic must make a number of mental adjustments. For as Owen Dudley Edwards suggests, " I n Ireland,...the intending traveller needs maps with dimensions not merely of space but of time" [2].

But in spite of Corkery's messianic view of Irish nationalism as embodying the spirit of a people superior to the normal run of things (modernity's constituency), nationalism is obsessed with the process of determining norms. Pervading the discursive character of Irish nationalism is the overwhelming desire to normalise a particular model of cultural and political intelligibility as universally valid. Throughout its obsessive concentration upon the establishment and maintenance of such norms, Irish nationalism displays a distinctly modern fetish, common to many societies, with the normalisation of its illusion of intelligibility. For by normalising its illusion of intelligibility, nationalism may create the conditions in which the modern alienated subject may be naturalised as a citizen of an intelligible universe of meaningfulness and purpose.

The proliferation of definitions of the Irish nation convey both

the variety of motives underwriting the evolution of nationalist ideology and the actual heterogeneity of the nation's constituents which many of its definitions evade or repress. The ambiguity inhabiting the spirit of nationality was effectively expressed in one of the few remaining documents that survive one of the principal architect of enlightened nationalism, Sean Lemass. Writing at the end of the nineteen-twenties he notes that

> T he spirit of nationality is one of the most potent forces affecting the thoughts and actions of men and races and cannot be ignored. Its effects have sometimes proved destructive and even disastrous but, on the whole, they have been beneficial to humanity. It has brought us out of feudalism to democracy and it is, and will be, for a long time, the driving force of history. Pride in their country and a desire for its advancement can secure combined effort for the common good from men who would not be influenced by other circumstances. [3]

That such an inclusive definition of nationality should come from the mouth of an admittedly "slightly constitutional" politician, merely serves to emphasise the ambiguous force of these remarks. As Lemass recognised, the impact of nationality as the normative criterion of cultural and political intelligibility is both positively and negatively defined.

The "destructive and even disastrous" effects of nationality are brought about by the pursuit of its ideological imperatives in situations where the nation as an identitarian fact does not exist in actuality. The effects of nationalist ideology are clearly dependent on the degree to which the cultural and political assumptions informing that ideology reflect social, cultural and political actuality. How the nation is defined will evidently determine the treatment of those who reside within the boundaries of definition.

The definition of the nation may attempt to reflect a shared concern to express the particular interests of a given social group (e.g. U.S.A.), or it may pursue its definition in the ethnic ideological terms of nationalism which may quickly transform the depiction of particularity into the assertion of totality.

In the development of Irish definitions of the nation, what begins as an expression of particular significance in response to the experience of a brutal totality (British Imperialism), becomes over time the expression of an ethnically defined totality directed against a neighbouring community's expression of particularity (unionism). Disturbingly, the hypothesis informing ideological forms of definition, that it inevitably leads to a transformation of the particular into the totalistic, is further in evidence in the transformation of unionism's expression of ethnic particularity into a systematic expression of a barbaric political totality, with all its familiar accompaniments.

Whilst it is clear that nations as models of social and political intelligibility may incorporate diversity and engender civic values, it is apparent that the ideological imperatives inscribed in Irish nationalism's ethnically defined discourse of identity may not easily do so. For it is the particular discursive assumptions inhabiting the form of nationalist discourse, rather than any inherent aspect of the nation as an intelligible illusion (which, being illusory, may be defined in a wide variety of ways) which are problematic. In order to identify the origins of the Irish problem, it is necessary, therefore, to consider some of the formative expressions of nationalist ideology's "imagined community".

Underlying every definition of the nation, such as AE's belief that the nation is "but an imagination common to millions of people" [4], is the formal character of the process of imagining. The governing form of the nationalist imagination may be motivated by a wide variety of ambitions, as D.P.Moran so astutely observed prior to nationalism's revolutionary achievements.

> What is Irish nationality, and what in reality do we want to see realized in Ireland? Will a few soldiers dressed in green, and a republic absolutely foreign to the genius of the Irish people, the humiliation of England, a hundred thousand English corpses with Irish bullets or pike wounds through them, satisfy the instinct within us that says: "Thou shalt be Irish?"....The Irish nationality that has sprung merely from a misguided hatred, or effected hatred, of England has not been a brilliant success, if we judge it by its fruits. Hate, I suggest, inspires nothing but destruction. [5]

Whilst Moran's remarks remain apposite today, the complexity involved in responding to the ethnic commandment by asserting a particular image of the "genius of the Irish people" rather than a hateful and destructive totality, was clearly not envisaged by Moran who later became the philosopher of "Irish Ireland". By definition the creation of a republic that was not "absolutely foreign to the genius of the Irish people" would require the determination of an image of nativeness.

The character of such a definition would include the sense of sufficiency and solidarity which the construction of a universal image of intelligibility aims to provide as a response to the dislocating experience of modernity. These essential requirements for the creation of a collective image would of necessity require a definition of the criteria of solidarity, in a description of the nation's "essentials". The mindset informing this quest for the

nation's essentials in pursuit of defining the essential nation is embodied in the phrase which has served to identify the philosophy of Irish nationalism's most extreme protagonists - "Sinn Féin".

"Sinn Féin" (Ourselves/Ourselves alone) is as much a philosophical description as it is a political prescription. Politically, from the evolution of its usage as the nomenclature for Arthur Griffith's socio-economic movement, to its contemporary usage as the semantic formal dress of the IRA, the phrase conveys a sense of solidarity which may evoke or impose an identitarian image of the nation. As indicative of a political imperative it raises the questions as to how we "ourselves" are to be defined, and what are the implications for those who constitute that which is not part of our collective identitarian selfhood ("ourselves alone"), what is to be the fate of l'autre?

Philosophically, "Sinn Féin" represents an obsessive concern with the legitimation of an identitarian consensus of intelligibility, an intelligibility shorn of its confusing "otherness". Within this identitarian description of the nation, the self-sufficiency of this identitarian group suggests that the process of defining who we "ourselves" are may best be served by a consideration of this homogeneous group's essential characteristics. Implicit in the phrase's formal depiction of the nation is a denial of ethnic, political and cultural heterogeneity as a constitutive principle in the determination of a collective intelligibility. It represents a concern with the essential characteristics of a homogeneous nation, a nation which may be envisaged as unitary, sovereign and natural, through the discursive strategy of invalidating the symbols of

diversity.

That this is a characteristically modern response to the difficulty of constructing a universal illusion of intelligibility in a world that is replete with signs and symbols of arbitrariness and difference, is attested to by its similarity to contemporary essentialist philosophy.

Briefly, the methodology of the essentialist philosophy which Edmund Husserl developed in the nineteen-twenties, termed Phenomenology, overcomes the problem of constructing a universal criterion of intelligibility by reducing the heterogeneity of existence and focussing only on the essential perceptions that remain for the observer. The process by which this heterogeneity is parenthesised (via the epoché) aims at going back to essentials, or "back to the things themselves" as the catchcry of phemonenology terms it. In this return to essentials, the complexity of existence is bracketed in order to create a naturalising rapport for the subject with its experiential constituency.

This point is made to emphasise the fact that the essentialist demeanour of the identitarian philosophy which "Sinn Féin" represents is a shared modern response to the problem of constructing an intelligibility, however retrogressive some of its details may appear to be. For like all ideological narratives, the conceptual narratology of "Sinn Féin" is enthralled by modernity not history. Modernity is the problem, historicist essentials the reponse.

In defining the identity of the nation, nationalism effects its incorporation of an identitarian narrative through its definition of the essentials. Views regarding what constitute the essentials of

national identity differ, but Corkery's triumvirate of "great forces...working for long in the Irish national being...(1) Religious Consciousness of the People (2) Irish Nationalism; and (3) The Land" [6], express a common thread.

Corkery's depiction of nationalism as the consequence and not the creator of the nation so envisaged, embodies a commonplace desire to evade the charge of discursive particularism which the recognition of his view of the nation as an ideological construct would imply, thus denying it its naturalist illusion. But given the interrelatedness of Corkery's conception of culture and nationalism, it is reasonable to interpret his second category of essentials as referring to ethnicity.

This view that the nation may be defined in terms of abstractable essentials is closely related to the conception of the nation as a transcendental body, that is, transcendental of particular verification. As even the most cursory examination of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic reveals, the nation extends in all its essentiality beyond the individual representatives of the nation living and dead. As Richard Kearney notes

> T he appeal to Irishmen and women is not made by the signatories themselves, but only <u>through</u> them by Ireland. Ireland is addressed here as a material and mythical personification of the Nation who addresses her children in the name of God and those <u>dead generations</u> who have sacrificed themselves for her nationhood. [7]

The configuration of the Irish nation as a transcendental category of intelligibility which may be expressed or embodied only as a comparably essentialist ethnic, political or cultural totality (which is unattainable given the innately heterogeneous facts of

existence), is directly related to the urge to evade the conceptual difficulties which the consideration of particularities induce. For if the nation is considered as being identifiable in this or that particularity (individual, group, artefact, or experience), subject to this or that historical context, interpretable in terms of this or that discursive instance, its illusion of a universally homogeneous intelligibility would be exposed as illusory.

Its transcendental character assists the illusion of an attainable omphalos in which one day the knower and the known may be united (identified), and the modern Irish subject may be spared the rigours of its heterogenising autonomy - and thereby redeemed from its modernity.

This essentialist conception of the transcendental nation serves other totalistic purposes. For the totalistic ideology that underwrites the IRA's campaign in the period coinciding with Heaney's career is structured by this essentialist discursive trope of the transcendental nation. Kearney's description of this connection merits consideration.

> It would seem, therefore, that just as the Provisionals conceive of themselves as the legatees of the 'past' generation of 1916 (a conception which most Irish nationalists would, of course, dispute), this generation in turn has acted on behalf of an even older heritage of 'dead generations'. This extended genealogical invocation would have linked the 1916 heroes not only with their founding Fenian forebears of the preceding century, but also with former Irish patriots such as O'Donnell and O'Neill, and ultimately with the legendary heroes of mythological Erin i.e., Oisin, Cu Chulainn, Manannan, Caitlin Ni Houlihan and most importantly Fionn Mac Cumhaill and his warrior band, the Fianna....The suggestion here is that the <u>rationale</u> of the 1916 Republican movement - and by implication the Provisional Republican movement which lays claim to its heritage - may have as much to do with the mythic resuscitation of some sacred national 'tradition' as with revolutionary

> socialist scruples (although Connolly would seem to be an exception here). Is it possible that the the guiding motivation of militant Republicanism was, and still is to some extent, less the appropriation of the socio-economic means of production, than an exigency of sacrifice to a mythological Ireland: an ancestral deity who would respond to the martyrdom of her sons by rising from her ancient slumber to avenge them? [8]

Kearney's rather dramatically figurative description of the "guiding motivation of militant Republicanism" nevertheless describes much that reflects the ideological structure of nationalist discourse from the emergence of Celticism in the nineteenth century to the resilient sectarianism of the present day.

In responding to the claims of modernity, nationalism constructs a discursive illusion of totality, which rejects the heterogenising force of open unreconstructed historical, cultural and political narratives. Whether the tropological detail (Ireland as Caitlin, the dead as historically pro-active, tradition as a univocal continuity from the Fianna to the present day) of such discourse is actually believed by its adherents,is not a primary consideration. Its discursive function does not embody a desire to establish a narrative of historical or political veracity. Rather the peculiar mix of mythological and historical configurations, of legendary characters and historical figures, timely heroes and timeless contexts, living witnesses and undead exemplars, serve to assert not the contentual veracity of the narrative, but the ideological significance of the discursive form.

The operative question governing the nationalist's interpretation of any discourse is not "is it true?" but "what does it mean?". And the criterion of meaning is pre-established as that which accords or

fails to accord with the establishment of an illusion of universal intelligiblity (the unitary nation). Again, it is not the particularity of the contents of nationalist discourse that is primary, but their ability to reflect the dimensions of a universal intelligibility.

In considering the nature of nationalist discourse's characterisation of the nation it is notable that universal ideological imperatives rather than particular facts are constitutive of the dynamics of cultural and political interpretation. In nationalist discourse, all interpretation is preoccupied by the imperatives of a universalising intelligibility.

In Irish nationalism, as the 1916 Declaration attests, the nation imagined pre-exists the nation described, even as the nation described serves to legitimate the creation of the nation imagined. Evidence of this self-serving cycle of legitimation is abundant from the Irish Constitution's revanchist imperative (the territory of the nation is and is not the island of Ireland), through the moral contortions of the IRA (the nation is unitary, therefore we may eliminate non-unitary members of this unitary nation in the name of unity), to the ambiguous Southern attitude towards partition (the nation must achieve its unity by eliminating partition, but in doing so would eliminate the definitive ethnic grounds of national unity). For the nation to provide a centre of total intelligibility, it must be both origin and goal, context and destiny, illusion and reality.

Thus a conceptual <u>coup de theatre</u> by nationalism provides modernity with a replacement for the pre-modern age's divine centre of universal intelligibility - the nation as "unmoved mover". In its

overwhelming will to totality, nationalism thus responds to the perplexing conundrum that underwrites ideological thought, namely that "origin is the goal", with the illusion of a transcendental totality that evades the problematic particularities of time, space and subjectivity.

The consoling illusion which the figure of the nation as a unitary, suprahistorical, transcendental totality embodies, is attainable only when discursive conditions dictate that the idea of Ireland, rather than the fact of Ireland may serve to legitimate such a necessary modern illusion. As Seamus Deane writes

> T he Ireland we live in is only a proximate version of the entity to which we refer in literary, historical or political discourse. The idea of Ireland permits us to observe and comment upon the fact of Ireland...As a result, there are no isolated facts; they all subserve the dominant idea.[9]

It may be more accurate to assert that the primacy of the idea of Ireland, and a very particular idea of Ireland at that (however much it asserts its universal validity), permits us to transcend the diverse facticity of Ireland. As Deane rightly asserts, the purpose of such a conceptualisation is the suppression of this heterogenising facticity, "there are no isolated facts". The primacy of the idea, of the universal illusion of intelligibility, suppresses the pluralism of fact. And as the pluralism of fact conveys the arbitrary actuality of modernity, it must be rendered subservient to the totalistic imperatives which the primacy of the dominant or universal idea demands.

These characteristics of nationalism's conception of the nation, its transcendental form, its essential constituents, and its

detachment from the "tyranny of fact", remind the critic that such a nation is a discursive construct. The centrality of the role of discourse to the creation and legitimation of such an illusion of totality, suggests the degree to which the control of the process of signification is crucial to the construction of such an illusion. In the process of naturalising this illusion as the norm of intelligibility, formal control over the heterogenising nature of the signifier becomes vital. By examining how that formal control is exercised in the definition of Irish nationalism, the critic may identify the ideological dilemma of the writer, whose desire to escape the sway of totality is impeded by the preoccupied form of his cultural intelligibility.

The Content of the Form

The modern process of defining the Irish nation as an ideological construct began in the wake of the Enlightenment. The emergence of a culturally defined rage for order in the taxonomic pursuits of a wide variety of aesthetic research from philology to archaeology at the end of the eighteenth century, found parallel political expression in the developing national doctrine of the United Irishmen. The expression of a modern political philosophy based on the Enlightenment's vision of the rights of man by ideologues such as Theobald Wolfe Tone and William Drennan, was confronted at the outset by the question of how the body politic could be imagined and legitimated as a collective form.

From the beginning, Irish nationalism has been faced with the fundamental choices underlying any such attempts at defining and legitimating the nation. Would the nation embody a unitary form of

intelligibility or a pluralist one? What would be the defining criterion of any such political conception - a social, ethnic or economic norm? The two issues are powerfully related, for if ethnicity is normative in an ethnically diverse society the choice of a unitary form implicitly creates the conditions for the unfolding of a totalistic ideology. In their declaration of 1791, the United Irishmen recognised the fact of such diversity.

> We are separate nations met and settled together, not mingled, but convened; an incoherent mass of dissimilar materials, uncemented, unconsolidated, like the image which Nebuchadnezar saw with a head of fine gold, legs of iron, and feet of clay, parts that do not cleave to one another...[10]

In the immediate wake of the Enlightenment when the rights of man rather than the wrongs of Albion pervaded the thinking of Irish nationalism's primogenitors, the ineradicable fact of heterogeneity prefigured the indeterminate idea of unity.

That the high rhetoric of Irish nationalism as expressed on balmy Sundays at Bodenstown and in the grim quotidien "cemeterisation" of Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters by the IRA, draws comfort from this enlightened image, indicates the degree to which the character of the relation between the idea of Ireland and the fact of Ireland is fundamental to the outcome. For these extreme proponents of the national cause accept both unity and a minimalist idea of heterogeneity (e.g. Protestants though different are part of the nation whether they like it or not) as constituent parts of the relationship between the idea of Ireland and the fact of Ireland. But they reverse the envisaged relation between idea and fact, by placing the identitarian idea as the totally determining criterion of

particular facts.

For with the heterogeneous facticity of the nation as the governing part, the unity of the subsequent idea may be accommodated in a pluralist form. But when the unitary idea is dominant, the heterogeneous facticity must be subordinated, reconfigured or eliminated. For once the idea of Ireland as a unitary discursive construct becomes primary, the consequent realisation of the idea in the domain of fact will necessitate the execution of unitary discursive imperatives via pen and parabellum.Only when the diverse facticity of Ireland is uppermost in the definition of an accommodating idea may the rationale of the totalistic campaign of attrition be deconstructed. But to place such heterogeneity as the focal point of collective definition is to open out society to the metaphysics of modernity, as the last Irish Republicans tried to do in the 1790's.

Tone himself was not immune to the consideration of homogenising claims to authenticity, which the determination of a criterion of national belonging so imagined could provide. For despite his rhetorical defence of the primacy of the heterogeneous fact of Ireland, his consideration of the paradigmatic form (either pluralist or unitary) capable of creating a unifying idea for such a reality, led him to suggest that Catholics "are the Irish, properly so called" [11]. The problem of defining the nation as either a unitary idea expressive of a natural culturally defined particularity (howevermuch it was imagined to be a universal by its proponents), or as a pluralist facticity expressive of a universally modern intelligibility was present to the architects of nationalism from the

outset. Eagleton expresses the dilemma of post-Enlightenment nationalism in Ireland clearly.

> If Enlightenment radicalism means, in the context of Ireland, Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, the pieties of sensuous particularity mean the aestheticised politics of Young Ireland and much that has flowed from them. Particularity is either suppressed in the totality of universal Reason, the concrete Irish subject sublated to a citizen of the world, or celebrated as a unique, irreducible state of being impenetrable to all alien Enlightenment rationality. [12]

Deciphering the nation as either emblematic of a unitary or pluralist form of intelligibility would involve the resolution of three principal dilemmas. First, should the idea of Ireland or the fact of Ireland, ideality or actuality, constitute the basis of such intelligibility? Secondly, would the nation be better imagined in terms of a unitary or pluralist form? And finally, what should constitute the definitive norm of nationality: social relations, cultural norms or economic function?

As the recipient of Irish nationalism's apostolic sucsession, Thomas Davis sought to conflate two contradictory elements in his passionate defence of the national being. For Davis, the nation was envisageable as a pluralist form constructed on the basis of cultural definition.

> At last we are beginning to see what we are, and what is our destiny. Our duty arises where our knowledge begins. The elements of Irish nationality are not only combining - in fact, they are growing confluent in our minds. Such nationality as merits a good man's help and wakens a true man's ambition - such nationality as could stand against internal faction and foreign intrigue - such nationality as would make the Irish hearth happy and the Irish name illustrious, is becoming understood. It must contain and represent the races of Ireland. It must not be Celtic, it must not be Saxon - it must be Irish. The Brehon law and the maxims of Westminster, the cloudy and lightning genius of the Gael, the placid strength of the Sasanach, the marshalling insight of the Norman - a literature

> which shall exhibit in combination the passions and idioms of all, and which shall equally express our mind in its romantic, its religious, its forensic, and its practical tendencies - finally, a native government, which shall know and rule by the arrogance of none - these are components of such a nationality.[13]

The pluralist form of Davis's national definition is inescapably grounded in the diverse recognitions of modern epistemological facticity - " O ur duty arises where our knowledge begins". The epistemologically diverse realities (or facts) of Ireland would initiate descriptions of the idea of Ireland.

Davis's formative intellectual development in Germany (1839-1840)[14] brought him into contact with the principal philosophical developments of German Romantic nationalism. His reading of the philosophical writings of Fichte, Lessing and Schlegel brought him familiarity with the epistemological dimensions of modernity. In this experience he encountered the commonplace Romantic concern with the determination of an organic model of intelligibility capable of naturalising the isolated modern subject, an intelligibility which the incorporation of racial theories in cultural discourse embodied for his German contemporaries. More significantly, he recognised the heterogeneous actuality of an epistemological domain constituted by the diverse particularities of isolated subjects as an actuality which could only be successfully embodied in a pluralist form of political intelligibility.

Gathering together the twin aspects of his intellectual beliefs, the necessity of a pluralist form and the centrality of cultural discourse in the accreditation of that form, Davis created his ideological hybrid of a distinctively cultural nationalism. His

belief that culture, and literature in particular, should of necessity confine itself to the legitimation of the national idea was a formative innovation. It was also momentous in that it created the conditions in which the construction of an identitarian ideology could be effected by subjecting the aesthetic's de-familiarising discourse to the imperative to familiarise as intelligible only those semantic events which legitimated the naturalness and universality of the identitarian illusion.

More significantly still, Davis's choice of culture as the definitive criterion of nationality was fateful. His recognition of the particularity of all cultural expression in the context of a modern epistemological dispensation led him to believe that as such, culture, not being expressive of a naturally determined unity, could admit into its fold anyone who wished to accept its illusion of intelligibility. For Davis culture was an inclusive chosen idiom not a natural predicate.As D.G. Boyce points out, "Davis arrived at the conclusion that Irishness was the product, not of race, but of environment" [15].

In failing to recognise that culture's centrality to the process of modern self-explanation as the idiom of intelligibility is directed by a desire to salvage intelligibility from arbitrariness, belonging from isolation, and purposefulness from absurdity, Davis failed to acknowledge the overwhelming need to use culture as an illusion of natural rather than nurtured meaning. Furthermore, culture's propensity to self-worship which assists the ratification of its illusory particularity as a non-illusory universal truth, would have especially serious implications for the imaginative

freedom of the author. For in a society which accepts aesthetic discourse as a narrative function of such a fundamental truth, interpretation falls prey to the claims of totality.

Davis's dream of a pluralist form of nationality would be shattered by the unitary demands of those who sought through the primatial arbitration of the idea of Ireland, an ideal animated by the desire to determine a natural illusion of intelligibility in the discourse of culture. For the opponents of Davisite pluralism, culture was indicative of a natural and unitary truth. In a multicultural society, the instantiation of this truth could only involve the participants in a rancorous battle for sectarian hegemony.

In one of the most significant scenes in Irish history, the dream of a pluralist nation was shattered in an instant when Davis was despatched by the inevitable rhetoric of Daniel O'Connell and his sectarian claque at a meeting to debate the issue of non-denominational university education at the Conciliation Hall in Dublin in May 1845. The occasion merits lengthy quotation as it represents the death of a culturally defined popular pluralist nationalism in Ireland until its resurrection in the 1980s.

> O'Connell gave a long speech against the bill. When he had finished, a Young Irelander named Michael Barry defended the mixed colleges, speaking ostentatiously as a Catholic. The next speaker was a man named Conway, who had applied for membership of the Eighty-two Club and been blackballed. He attacked Barry as an irreligious Catholic, invoking the authority of St. Patrick, who "was no friend or patron of masked infidelity - or mixed education (hear, hear)." He then extended his attack to Young Ireland collectively. Davis came heatedly to Barry's defense. He took the floor and was addressing Conway scornfully as "my old college friend- my Catholic friend- my very Catholic friend" when he was interrupted by O'Connell: "It is no crime to be a Catholic I

> hope?...The sneer with which you used the word would lead to the inference." Davis sensed a fight impending and pleaded for calm and unity. "Disunion, alas, has destroyed our country for centuries", he said; but he would not recant, and he finished his argument in favor of the bill. O'Connell then rose again to speak angry words which echoed harshly in the minds of Irishmen for a century afterwards: The section of politicians styling themselves the Young Ireland party, anxious to rule the destinies of this country, start up and support the measure. There is no such party as that self-styled "Young Ireland" (hear, hear). There may be a few individuals who take that designation on themselves (hear, hear and cheers). I am for old Ireland (loud applause). 'Tis time that this delusion should be put an end to (hear, hear and cheers). Young Ireland may play what pranks they please. I do not envy them the name they rejoice in, I shall stand by Old Ireland (cheers). And I have some slight notion that Old Ireland will stand by me (loud cheers).[16]

Neither Davis nor his pluralist ideals survived for long, subsequent to this battering by the forces of O'Connell's antiquarian denominationalism.

This exchange is interesting for a number of reasons. Primarily it is a clear example of the Foucaldian truth, that he who seizes discourse seizes power. In a masterful demonstration of his ability to attain supremacy in the discourse of power (cratology), O'Connell reinforced the foundations of a unitary discourse of culturally defined nationality, a discourse which remains dominant today.

O'Connell's cratological logic accepts the Davisite principle that culture defines nationality. Then assuming the modern illusion that culture is naturally determined and not as Davis claimed collectively nurtured, O'Connell capitalises on his career as the champion of Catholic rights to defend the role of the eternal and consummately natural truth of the culture of Catholicism as indicative of the truth of the nation's unitary identity. "Old Ireland" in legitimating

the O'Connellite stance in favour of denominational education, is itself easily denominated. That Davis's pluralist doctrine of nationality should be defeated at the hands of an ideology which accepted culture as definitive of nationality, culture as naturally predicated, and sectarian divisions as reflective of natural cultural norms, was grimly prefigurative of the future course of Irish nationalist history.

That the issue upon which the tide of republicanism would founder should be the issue of non-denominational education, is ironic, given the dependence of contemporary "republicans" upon the atmosphere of sectarian hate which the achievement of O'Connell's dream of a denominationally divided education system guarantees in the North of Ireland. But what unites the original dispute and its contemporary consequence is the obsessive cratological concern with who "will rule the destinies of this country".

O'Connell was clear that it would not be left to Davis and his like. The "destinies of this country" would not be controlled by those who believed in a pluralist nation constituted and defined by a culture that was accessible to all. The nation would be defined as a culturally indivisible unit, organically determined through history, identified by right as Catholic and Gaelic in origin, entitled by right to seize hegemonically the "destinies of this country" in response to the oppressive barbarity of Protestant hegemony in Ireland since the Reformation.

Henceforward, the nation would increasingly represent for mainstream nationalists a unitary, culturally defined form with rights and entitlements to exercise hegemony over competing cultural

forms. The determination of a cratological imagination equal to the realisation of this hegemonic dream would depend largely on its success in characterising the nation as a unitary form, and culture as a legitimating unitary discourse.

The critic may with the benefit of hindsight envisage the tragic consequences which the adoption of a unitary form of national intelligibility would inevitably bring in a society of diverse identities. However, in the historical context of the Davis/O'Connell debate, in which the totalistic regime of British imperialism oversaw a catastrophic series of famines, the systematic exclusion of the majority from the process of self-government, the denial of the right to ownership and equitable tenure to the majority, and the maintenance of a sectarian administration by coercion, the rationale underwriting the O'Connelite view at that time is somewhat understandable.

The defence of a unitary view of the nation united in its definition as much by British policy as by ideological invention, as the prerequisite to the liberation of that unit from a morally indefensible regime was a logical ideological strategy while it appeared to be the case that such unity opposed a clearly identifiable external force. The mental habit of defining the nation as a culturally determined unitary form created an oppositional ethos whose end was the appropriation of political, economic and cultural hegemony.

However successful in removing the imperial opponent from the life of the nation so defined at the moment of Independence, the continuance of this mental habit of pursuing such hegemony on behalf

of a unitary nation derived from a homogeneous idea of Ireland rather than its heterogeneous facticity, would take on a very different character when the intransigent fact of national diversity challenged the unitary idea in the wake of Independence.

For in resisting the sway of an external aggressor the unitary nation could claim to embody a legitimate particularity, but in the wake of Independence the hegemonic claims of a nation so defined upon an "internal" source of difference could equally be said to embody a coercive totality. Whilst the triumph of a unitarian ideological form of intelligibility was perhaps inevitable in the context of British rule, the failure of Irish nationalism to develop Davis's pluralist thought when confronted with the heterogeneous fact of modern Ireland constituted and continues to constitute the gravest imaginative failure in modern Irish history.

But the failure to acknowledge the socially, economically, culturally and politically pluralist character of Ireland is a necessary consequence of that mental process which constructs an illusion of universal intelligibility upon ideal rather than factual foundations. To develop Deane's dictum, the primacy of an idea of Ireland rather than the fact of Ireland as the basis upon which ideological interpretation may proceed greatly simplifies the modern dilemma for the ideologue. For in the domain of ideas the illusion of a natural and unitary intelligibility may be easily constructed in response to modernity's threatening arbitrariness. The pursuit of such a consoling identitarian narrative of intelligibility is animated by a desire to belong, and equally by a desire to sublimate or suborn the arbitrary cosmos.

Signs of ineradicable difference indicate both the particularity of naturalist illusions of intelligibility and thereby represent the dynamics of randomness for the identitarian imagination. As the embodiment of a pluralist definition of the nation which the primacy of fact would dictate, would necessarily involve the recognition of difference as a dynamic principle of interpretation and indeed the signature of modernity, the defence of the idea of Ireland as the basis of interpretation remains paramount for unitary illusionists.

The debate about the choice of national models of description is of course shaped by the ideological assumptions informing those (including the present author) who participate. Those who attack pluralist depictions of the nation do so for a wide variety of reasons.

Religious zealots correctly identify pluralism with a recognition of the modern human dilemma, and being unwilling to embrace the engagingly complex theology of modernity, defend a unitary form which is de facto more susceptible to hegemonic domination. Cultural zealots mistake pluralism for a provincial cosmopolitanism, and erroneously assert that pluralism represents a denial of local expression in favour of a cosmopolitan homogeneity of value which is as totalistic, thanks to the wiles of consumer capitalism, as the imperial brand which nationalism successfully replaced. Other cultural zealots such as W.B.Yeats resent pluralism because they believe that it represents a levelling mediocrity of values, a gormless relativism which would obstruct the attainment of spiritual harmony, or the unity of being which he so eagerly pursued. This is to deny the fact that pluralism is not predominantly a question of

values but of meanings. In the course of his rather disturbing commentary on the pluralistic character of the modern fact of Ireland he rages that "where modern heterogeneity has taken physical form, a vague hatred comes up out of my own dark" [17].

But the most vociferous attacks on pluralist interpretations of Ireland originate in a need to defend the primacy of the idea of Ireland as the basis for ideological invention. The central problem preventing the acceptance of the fact of Ireland as primary for unitary illusionists, is the fact that one million Protestant counter-facts exist. And however unfamiliar their culture, or barbaric their political policy may appear at the extremes, they represent a substantial counternarrative that exists in fact. Discourse based on the fact of Ireland has no option but to accept the fact of social, political and cultural diversity in the process of determining a narrative of intelligibility.

However, the urge to respond to the challenge of modernity which the construction of nationalist ideology embodies in its devotion to the attainment of a unitary illusion of universal intelligibility, is deeply felt. For the proponents of the primacy of the idea of Ireland, all facts may be reconfigured however diverse and unsupportive they may appear to be. The unitary idea of Ireland may reconfigure this and any reality in pursuit of the ideological telos of cognitive totality. The fact of a large Protestant counternarrative may simply be dismissed (nationalists are opposed not by equally valid unionist views, but by British Imperialism), or reconfigured (they are in fact members of the nation but have been misled by British propaganda in a classic post-colonial coup). At

times those who reconfigure unionist belief, resemble the caricature of the British imperialist on holidays, who believes that if you shout loud enough at the natives that they will eventually understand and come round to his way of thinking.

Nationalism's totalistic demeanour which is dependent upon the primacy of ideas is described critically by the constitutional nationalist John Hume, who notes

> It has often seemed to me that Irish Nationalism in this century has tended to concentrate on concepts of Ireland rather than on the real Ireland. To many in the nationalist tradition, people and human life have been secondary to their objective. It is people and, in the real Ireland, Irish people are divided and cannot be brought together by guns and bombs. You cannot unite a people by dismembering them.[18]

Perhaps not in the Ireland of fact. But in the Ireland of ideas which is unitary, indivisible and predestined, as recent history demonstrates in violent paramilitary campaigns and in the actuality of the partitioned Southern state's unitary ethos, unity so prescribed may be attained only by dismemberment.

To recognise the fact of cultural plurality is not to accept the ethical or political validity of unionist extremism. That unionism has for a variety of reasons cherished sectarianism, systematically supported state terrorism, and distorted or defied the basic human rights which democratic civilisations defend, does not remove the reality that unionism is a social, political and cultural fact for a large section of the island's population. But for many of those who defend the unitary form of the nation by attending to the idea of Ireland, the experience of unionist totality is such as to deny any part of it validity in the interpretation of Irish reality. As such

unionism must be viewed either as the priapic local appendage of a rapacious British Imperialism in the land of Caitlin, or as its post-colonial afterbirth.

For some republican commentators, not merely the fact of unionism but the primacy of fact itself becomes ideologically unacceptable. In defending the primacy of the idea of Ireland and of its capacity to restore to modernity an illusory unitary intelligibility that is resistant to contemporary socio-economic factors and dismissive of heterogeneous reality, some nationalist critics lapse into a totalistic trance. The need to justify the urstruktur of a unitary cratology, presented through the monophonic medium of a univocal historically intended narrative, moves even normally perceptive commentators to reach for their rhetorical revolvers.

In a spirited response to some of the more fatuous claims of "revisionist" historians in the course of a national debate about the proprieties of commemoration on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Rising, Heaney's lifelong friend and fellow Field Day director Seamus Deane, attempted to expose the ideological agenda of the Southern liberal establishment that underwrites the revisionist campaign through a misplaced attack on what he terms pluralism, but what in fact bears all the hallmarks of provincialism. What is of particular interest to the critic of nationalism, is the manner in which he links his critique of Irish pluralism with a demystification of the idea of totality, a spectre which inhabits every ridge and covert in the identitarian imagination of unitary nationalism. Deane writes

> To theorize a total system is, perhaps, a contradiction in terms, since no system that is truly total would leave any space for anyone to stand outside it and theorize it.

That totality is an unattainable illusion in reality, does not prevent the misguided, the insane or the wicked from believing in the reality and attainability of the illusion. The experience of totality and of totalistic regimes is not the experience of an achieved totality, but of the ruthless and overwhelming desire to achieve it, however illusory it may in fact ultimately be. The fact that one becomes a victim of those who aspire to create a cognitive totality in the quotidien domain, does not lessen the trauma of the experience. The survivor of Auschwitz, the tank fodder of Srebrenica, and the grieving Ulster parent, comprehend this unsophistocated reality.They do not need to situate themselves epistemologically, or to theorize the ultimacy of that force which they have experienced to know the force of totality.

The illusoriness of totality like the illusoriness of any other universal claim, is immaterial to those who seek to create a comprehensive truth in the ideological process of universalising the particular illusion. Whether totality may or may not be attained in reality has little to do with those who kill and maim in the name of totality. It is abundantly clear, for example, that there can never be a unitary cultural and political totality in Ireland whilst the facts of Irish life include such radically different traditions. But such is the power of the illusion of national unity derived from the totalistic idea of Ireland, of the inevitable attainment of the historical telos, that the paramilitaries daily extend their totalistic legacy of orphans, widows and amputees. For those who work under the sway of totality, the difference between aspiration

and actualisation is purely semantic.

The issue of totality is sidestepped in Deane's critique of pluralism. The IRA and the UDA "theorize a total system" every working day, theory and praxis being inseparable bedfellows for the aspiring totalitarian. However ludicrous, illusory or contradictory, they continue to hallow the totalistic illusion with sacrificial victims almost daily, and however illusory it may ultimately be epistemologically, the experience of the illusion's motive force is ontologically convincing for the victims.

Deane's attempt to diminish the power of an illusion through his epistemological quickstep "since no system that is truly total would leave any space for anyone to stand outside it and theorize it" apart from being erroneous (we do not "stand outside" our epistemological processes) brushes over the fundamental aim of totalistic ideologies which is to ensure that there is no "space for anyone to stand outside it". The point of totalistic unitary forms is precisely that they aim to destroy anything which is suggestive of a reality 'other' than the identitarian illusion and to subordinate the subject's cognitive processes to rule of identitarian interpretation. Having attempted to diffuse the totalistic accusation that attaches itself to unitary illusionists, however articulate they may be, Deane moves on to the real object of his attack, the increasingly popular adherence to pluralist discursive conceptions of the nation in contemporary Ireland.

Deploying the term "liberalism" to identify those who oppose his unitary idea, Deane echoes the views of a range of deeply conservative Irish factions who oppose even the most moderate

gestures towards pluralism. Liberalism in Ireland, is more a term of abuse than a political or philosophical description. And as those who may be termed "Liberals" depending on the context, include reactionary unionists such as Conor Cruise O'Brien, the KGB funded superannuated paramilitaries of the Workers Party, the microeconomic hucksters of Fianna Fail's clientist government, the macroeconomic free market barons of Fine Gael and the Progressive Democrats, and even the conscientious tercermundistas of the Catholic Hierarchy's social justice campaign, then Liberalism may be viewed in the Irish context as a tactical allegation rather than a strategic philosophical belief. Indeed, the only definitively liberal thing about Irish Liberalism, is its semantic range.

Undeterred by this reality, Deane asserts that

> T he kindest view of liberalism in present-day Ireland would credit it with the wish to improve the existing political-economic system in such a manner that people would be economically secure and as free as possible from all the demonic influences of 'ideologies', religious and political. Its buzz word is 'pluralism'; its idea of the best of all possible worlds is based on the hope of depoliticizing the society to the point where it is essentially a consumerist organism.[20]

The righteous tone of Deane's stentorian evaluation evades the fact that what he has just described is the issue of political choice which underwrites pluralism as a discursive form. The aim of pluralism is not to depoliticize society, but to encompass as fully as possible the political heterogeneity of the nation. Deane's nannyish tone regarding the unfortunate political attractions of consumer capitalism in a democratic society, conveys the sense of exasperation of one who knows better in relation to what is essentially, in the Ireland of fact, a matter of belief. His

antipathy to western capitalism whose cultic obsession with the individual in the nineteen-eighties undoubtedly motivates the strength of his remarks, develops into a one-sided attack on the status of the individual per se in the process of determining a social, cultural and political discourse of intelligibility.

> The full realization of the individual self is regarded as an ambition that institutions exist to serve. Those that do not - religion, education, the 1937 Constitution, for example - are to be liberalized, gentrified or abolished. [21]

Deane's loyalty to the primacy of the collective idea issues in a misplaced attack on the heterogeneous facticity of an Ireland in which the individual is slowly achieving a counterbalancing recognition of its rights in a state which because of its unitary ideology has tended to emphasise the collective views of one predominant group. His earlier defensive demystification of the dangers of totality, now assumes its context in his aggressive attack on the dangers of radical individualism.

What underlies the tenor of these remarks, is an increasingly apparent attachment to the idea that the collective (or majority) will must take precedence over the rights of the individual (or minority). This viewpoint which is seminal to the ideological legitimation of the "republican" movement's campaign, is predicated by an overwhelming belief in the righteous primacy of the idea of Ireland as a unitary ideologically determinable reality. In the context of modern Irish history both North and South of the border, is the "full realization of the individual self" through the agency of constitutional provisions really as trivial as Deane alleges?

Peculiarly, in his defence of the primacy of the collective ideal,

Deane infers that a genuinely pluralist nation would liberalize, gentrify, or abolish, "religion, education" and the "1937 Constitution", because they do not serve the "full realization of the individual self". Howevermuch Deane may be parodying the shallow cosmopolitanism of his fellow ideologues who inhabit that provincial state of mind termed "Dublin 4" (Deane's own professional postal address at the time of writing), he fails to distinguish between his parodic description and the actual conceptual implications of a genuinely pluralist model of national intelligibility.

In his disingenuous evasion of the distinction between pluralism and provincialism, a distinction which was made with figurative aplomb in Patrick Kavanagh's aesthetics of parish and province as long ago as the nineteen fifties, Deane sidesteps the central formal diemma confronting those who wish to imagine the nation. His parodic description of provincialism, which some of his fellow mediatrices admittedly define as pluralism is redolent of a desire to assert the propriety of unitary illusions rather than define the alternative of an inclusive pluralism. In homiletic voice, Deane denounces "pluralism" from the unitarian pulpit of the church militant. His remarks would not be out of place in the pious republican rhetoric of a De Valera St. Patrick's Day "special".

> Self-fulfilment is not an aim that threatens any system that produces it. Rather the reverse: it is one of the achievements of capitalism to have created it. Its ultimate political expression is pluralism, the Pearsean-Connolly 'window-dressing' in the Proclamation. Its desire is for variety and accessibility. Its pride is to be modern, its dread to be out of step with what is deemed to be modernity, or Europe - commonly assumed to be the same thing. Its general attitude to what it does not like is that it is out-of-date, out-of-place in this wonderful world of the late twentieth century. Pluralism has only one time - the present; everything else is,

> literally, anachronistic. It has the egregious tolerance of the indifferent to anything or anyone else who is willing to live in a hermetically sealed microclimate of individual or group privacy.[22]

What Deane describes is not pluralism but provincialism. Pluralism as a discursive form through which the factual reality of the nation may be given constitutional, cultural and political expression must by definition, be inclusive. A genuine pluralism encompasses the spectrum of historical perspectives in its formation of an image of the nation. The past is admitted in its various images. Its time is not the present, but in legitimating the variety of images of the past, it identifies the fact that the "past" is not a unitary deterministic force as "republican" teleological rhetoric would have it, but a variegated narrative stream which offers interpretative choice not ideological truth to its contemporary recipients.

The idea that the "past" is not a unitary deterministic essence but a heterogeneous series of narratives which offer the present choices, is anathema to the unitary ideologues of "republicanism". The rote-learning of "republican" and unionist rhetoric consistently presents the past as a unitary and inescapable force which tyrannises the present and implicitly structures the future. To permit the heterogeneous reality of the present to challenge the chosenness of the homogeneous past is unacceptable to those who insist that the relationship should be one-way with a chosen image of the past exerting its "inevitable" pressure on the present.

A genuine pluralism admits both the heterogeneous realities of the past and the complex historical actuality of the present. It is not predicated by a desire to eradicate the grounds of its plurality,

which in the case of Ireland include a profound and ancient seam of cultural achievement and political upheaval. Unlike Irish provincialism, and its contemporary globalist pretensions, pluralism does not describe the nation in terms other than those which the facticity of the nation's experience dictates. The witless globalist of contemporary Ireland may view the past as irrelevant, the needs of the many as trivial, or the identifying marks of a rich cultural tradition (such as the Irish language or the achievements of religious thought) as embarrassing distinctions.

But a discourse of social, cultural and political intelligibility which is pluralist in form will seek to encompass the kaleidoscopic reality of Irish life. In the pluralist dispensation the legitimation of experiential diversity would include the regionalism of Dublin's metropolitan culture and rural Ireland's local heritage; the challenging theology of the Christian majority and the insight of other believers and non-believers; the cultural splendours of Gaelic and anglophone traditions; the ethnic diversity of a society that includes nationalist, unionist, new age and travelling people. It would, in short, create the conditions in which the fact of Ireland and not the idea of Ireland could find inclusive expression.

The decision to move away from the unitary illusion of nationalist discourse would have profound consequences for the future of "republicanism". Deane's ideological angst which articulately expresses the mindset that fosters the conditions in which nationalist ideology continues to coagulate in the body politic, is preoccupied with the admission of a modern discursive heterocosm of fact. He warns the reader that

> Ireland cannot afford to live in such present-ness. It must perforce live with its past. That is a matter of some resentment to this sort of liberal mind.[23]

For Deane and his ideological compatriots, the negotiation between the past and the present must be a one-way transaction. This "past", a unitary subject is teleologically structured and as such will inevitably determine the course of present events, and all for the greater glory of the ultimate attainment of a future totality.

That the past should be subject to scrutiny by present imperatives is inadmissable. Defending the primacy of the unitary idea of Ireland, of what Deane ironically refers to as "the Ireland we know", as the source and goal of all interpretation requires a forceful reconfiguration of the heterogeneous impact of modernity. In his defence of the identitarian discourse of nationalist illusions of intelligibility, Deane moves to discredit the significance of the process of modernisation for the individual. His ventriloquial resonance now extends to include a passable impression of (a latter-day) D.P.Moran.

> I do not think it is answer enough to say that, even if it could afford it, Ireland would not have pluralism. The abortion, contraception and divorce issue, seem to point that way, but if Ireland could afford pluralism, it would not be the Ireland we know. What we have instead is a dilapidated version of pluralism, media-led, centred in Dublin 4, a mini-metropolis that regards the rest of Ireland as the hinterland of its benighted past. Still, in so far as it can, Ireland now treats the past as a kind of supermarket for tourists, a place well-provided with 'interpretative centres' that will allow Newgrange and Joyce, flora and fauna of the Burren, the execution cells at Kilmainham, the Derrynaflan hoard and the Blarney stone to be viewed as the exotic debris thrown up by the conclusions of a history from which we have now escaped into a genial depthlessness.
>
> Easter 1916 or Ulster in 1912 - not to mention Ulster in 1991 - are altogether too present in their pastness to be commodified in this manner. It is perfectly in tune

> with this blandness that people in the South wonder what the killing is all about. 'Why can't they live in peace together and forget the Boyne and 1916?' They are irrational creatures, these Northerners, because they are caught in the past and still have to catch up with the present. It is all the more irrational because they belong to an economic world that would allow for pluralism.[24]

The constituent elements in Deane's critique of what he himself admits is the "dilapidated version of pluralism" which he has described, reveal the degree to which unitary illusionists are threatened by the impact of that modernity which their ideological enclosure seeks to resist. Without establishing precisely what characterises the reality of the "Ireland we know" Deane asserts that it cannot afford pluralism.

Presumably the "Ireland we know" is not the factual domain where sectarian hatred fostered by the champions of a unitary totality pursues its hegemonic goal by discriminate and indiscriminate violence? Or perhaps, the "Ireland we know" is not the one in which the process of social and economic development is riven by the uncertainties, enmities and collective lack of national self-esteem which produce widespread unemployment, prevent the imaginative development of national resources, and demand that one sixth of the workforce must emigrate every ten years to serve the national interest? And is the psychological impact of the inevitable failure to achieve that which the unitary idea of Ireland dictates must be achieved as the principal national goal, included in this definition of the "Ireland we know"? In this "Ireland we know" is the nationalist fixation with an unattainable illusion of collective fulfilment partly responsible for the collective ethos of failure and

fatalism which has dogged the social and economic development of the nation so defined? And if so, can "the Ireland we know" afford not to consider pluralism? Whilst the rhetoric of these questions connects the shallow populism of certain contemporary forms of Irish politics with the deeper critical concerns of critical reflection, the issues involved remain to be addressed.

But the epistemological status of "the Ireland we know" is related to the domain of ideas not of fact. Deane pours scorn upon the domain of fact as it attempts to open up the process of interpretation to the heterogeneous nature of that Irish actuality which identitarian discourse seeks to suppress. The "exotic" nature of signs of historical and cultural diversity which abound in the Ireland of fact is indicative of the variety of this factual domain. But the ideological imagination of nationalist cratology functions by subordinating or suppressing the signs of heterogeneity and difference in deference to the unitary ambitions of an identitarian narrative of intelligibility. In the process of constructing its illusion of natural and universal intelligibility it suborns the particularity of particular signs, through the stratagems of identitarian discourse.

The identitarian discourse of nationalist ideology maintains its illusory homogeneity by restricting the semantic scope of the signifier to the reiteration of familiar and familiarising meanings. In the legitimation of a unitary narrative of historical intelligibility, therefore, that which is indicative of a narrative plurality of fact appears unfamiliar, or more specifically un-familiarised. The belief that narrative heterogeneity is "exotic"

reveals the degree to which the familiarisation of the signifier is central to the construction of a unitary form of intelligibility. The implications for the writer such as Heaney, whose aesthetic is animated by the process of de-familiarisation are significant.

For the unitary illusionist, the availability of the heterogeneous narratives of history to interpretation is to be scorned as a "supermarket for tourists". Presumably Deane's preferred view of history is a univocal narrative controlled like a cognitive command economy by identitarian discourse and offering the visitor to his intellectual supermarket the standard produce of such domains - the single unusable product on an otherwise empty shelf which is presented to those who survive the ageold ideologically formed queues for answers, from Belfast to Moscow?.

As one of the most accomplished suppliers to the cultural "supermarket" that so preoccupies him, Deane's claim that "Easter 1916 or Ulster 1912...are altogether too present in their pastness to be commodified in this manner" appears curious. If this is the case, how then does he describe the role of Field Day of which he is a director, and to whose efforts he has made perhaps the most critically perceptive contributions? Are the international tours, the glossy publications (of which the work in which this article is published is one) and the highly publicised first-nights immune to this process? And what of the endless stream of designer paperbacks that issue forth from Faber & Faber, Blackstaff and the like, the "Fabercation" of the Ulster question, a mini-industry in itself since the outbreak of the Troubles?

Presumably commodification is the preserve of those such as the

pluralists of the world of fact, whose belief in the heterogeneity of cultural objects renders them entranced by the dilapidated attractions of consumerism, unlike the unitary illusionist whose obsessive identitarian concerns admit the possibility of only one, holy and totalistic object, the unitary nation of the world of ideas? And as all discourse which subordinates the particularity of its expression to the universalising rule of a unitary totality becomes part of that identitarian illusion, part of a unitary object of cognition, may it not therefore be differentiated, reproduced or commodified? Deane's logic is difficult to follow in this instance, but it is certainly reminiscent of"the saddest heart in the supermarket".

In the course of his critique of "pluralism", Deane articulates what constitutes a recurrent motif of unitary illusionists from Yeats to Corkery. Their suspicion of a heterogeneously conceived image of the nation repeatedly returns to the issue of mediocrity in aesthetic and political formations. Deane's compulsion to condemn the legitimation of a "genial depthlessness" which is characteristic of both globalist consumerism and provincial insecurity, reverberates to Yeats's O'Connell Bridge epiphany of "a vague hatred". Directed towards the witless provincials whose response to the complexity of the modern Irish dilemma entails a denial of Ireland's cultural and political constellation of painfully achieved traditions, his comments would merit more consideration. But in the context of his attack on the possibility of a pluralist Republic, they raise rather difficult questions.

Those who may wish to reconfigure the complex scenario of Irish

history as a tessellated narrative mosaic of constituent particularities are accused of "blandness". The desire to re-situate the past in relation to the needs of the present by recognising in the problematic experience of the present a previously unacknowledged dimension of complexity in the many pasts that constitute Irish history, is derided. Deane's caustic parody of pluralism in the inane form of the question that serves to represent the soi disant position of Southern pluralists "Why can't they live in peace together and forget the Boyne and 1916?" is indicative of the uncongenial (and for Deane uncharacteristic) depthlessness of his analysis. One may presume that Deane is not so entranced by the unitary spell that he finds the idea of peace unpalatable, that he does not, in other words, go along with the Pearsean belief that "to fight is to win". Accepting this, one may assume that it is the nature of the pluralist's perception of history that is in the dock.

A genuine pluralism must by definition include its full historical constituency whether barbaric or civilised. The desire to refute the barbaric fact of human reality is merely another stratagem through which the arbitrariness of modernity is denied in favour of a consoling intelligible order.

But it is in fact "republican" ideology which refutes the barbarity of its actions by continuously reinterpreting them as indicative of a universal plan of intelligible civility. The extremist nationalist ideologist's aversion to the particularity of the particular, or to the barbarity of its barbarism, is repeatedly expressed in its logic of legitimation. The statements which accompany even the most callous deed inevitably testify to the

legitimacy of the action in the context of the universal truth. Acclimatised in the Ireland of ideas, and pursuing the attainment of a unitary form of intelligibility which is the deepest desire of those who are affronted by the facts of modernity, the "republican's" or the "loyalist's" most barbaric acts are systematically reconfigured as indicative of an ultimate consoling civility (the dream of unity). There is nothing arbitrary about the "republican" universe.

The pluralist demand is not that pivotal moments in Irish history should be forgotten, but that they should be re-situated in the context of the domain of fact. Both the Boyne and 1916 are fundamentally significant to an understanding of the present, but they do not constitute the present just as they do not constitute the past in its entirity. The pluralist recognition of the heterogeneity of the world of fact, past and present, issues from the epistemological fact that characterises modernity, namely, that discourse is constructed and chosen, not transcendentally given. The ideal imagination of the unitary illusionists resists this intransigent modern fact.

Thus the distaste with which nationalist ideologues view pluralist formations of the nation emanates from the same desperate distaste for modernity that motivates the ideological process. Pluralism, and all discursive forms which accept modernity as a heterocosm of meaning, include arbitrariness and intelligibility, barbarism and civility, identity and difference as inescapable epistemological facts. When Deane caricatures pluralism as representing the "egregious tolerance of the indifferent" he is in

fact asserting the identitarian agenda which instantiates a systematic intolerance of the different.

In the development of Irish nationalism's unitary view of the nation, from the rejection of Davis's Republican pluralism to the racy refutation of contemporary criticism, the pursuit of an intelligible illusion of totality gave rise to the conditions in which identitarian form could be imposed upon the cultural content of identity. The combination of unitary form and cultural definition in an ethnically diverse society could only serve to accelerate the drift towards the politics of totality. Most significantly, the cratological imperative to legitimate a unitary form of national discourse brought with it the hermeneutic imperative to limit the role of the signifier to the accreditation of those topoi which serve to familiarise this natural illusion of unitary intelligibility.

Identifying Unity -"the Ireland that counts"

As Davis asserted regarding the development of the national ideal, "Our duty arises where our knowledge begins". The manner in which the collective will of the nation would find expression, would be dependent on the insight which the formal and contentual identity of the nation would convey. In defining the nation as a unitary form, nationalist discourse after Davis presumes that "our knowledge" of the nation begins in the domain of ideality rather than fact. Thus the governing image of collective intelligibility has less to do with the "Ireland we know" as Deane alleges, than with the Ireland we imagine.

The origins within a unitary ideal form of nationalism's "knowledge" of Ireland, suggest that the actualisation of that idea may be determined by the dutiful construction of a complementary discourse of intelligibility. For as Davis indicates, the achievement of the cratological goal of national hegemony implies a legitimating discourse of compatible hermeneutic imperatives.

For the unitary ideal to be achieved, it must first be discursively imagined. And the imperative governing the interpretation of Irish experience thus requires that the specificity of Irish cultural, political and historical experience must conform to the total demands of the unitary goal. In pursuing the attainment of a unitary national universe of intelligibility, the particular fragments of a deeply heterogeneous reality must be transformed into universal testimony.

Although Davis's desire to envisage the nation as a pluralist form was consigned to history, his Romantic belief that the contentual norm of the nation's intelligibility could best be expressed in a cultural paradigm, triumphed.

As it is a fiction, the nation's norm of intelligibility may be configured in terms of social relations (pluralism), economic function (Marxism/Capitalism) or ethnicity. For a number of reasons, Irish nationalism elected to establish ethnicity as the definitive norm of national intelligibility. Pragmatically, culture as the most explicit expression of collective particularity, is the most effective means of opposing the claims of an invasive countercultural totality, such as British Imperialism. Sociologically, culture as a shared medium of intelligibility provides the individual with

discursive access to the collective illusion. And philosophically, as the idiom of modern intelligibility culture's self-worshipping process provides the displaced imagination of the modern subject with a regenerative, autosignifying process conducive to the maintenance of a universal illusion of intelligibility.

In countering the oppressive imperium of British rule, the creation of a culturally specific counternarrative provided the Irish revolutionary tradition with an alternative universal norm of political, social and economic intelligibility. In building a free and Irish nation as a discursive construct, culture would supply the edifying force. By determining that the response to the national commandment "Thou shalt be Irish", would involve an ethnically defined response in a society containing more than one ethnic group, when the nation was envisaged as a unitary construct, invested such claims to particularity with hegemonic dimensions from the outset.

This combination of unitary form and ethnic definition reveals its totalistic pretensions in the heady identitarian rhetoric of triumphant nationalism as the following exert from a Catholic periodical in 1924 amply demonstrates.

> The Irish nation is the Gaelic nation; its language and literature is the Gaelic language; its history is the history of the Gael. All other elements have no place in Irish national life, literature and tradition, save as far as they are assimilated into the very substance of Gaelic speech, life and thought. The Irish nation is not a racial synthesis at all; synthesis is not a vital process, and only what is vital is admissable in analogies bearing on the nature of the living Irish nation, speech, literature and tradition. We are not a racial conglomerate, not a national patchwork specimen; the poetry or life of what Aodh de Blacam calls Belfast can only be Irish by being assimilated by Gaelic literature into Gaelic literature.[25]

This catechismal summary of the extremes of nationalist identitarian discourse underlines the totalistic potential of an ideology which is unitary in form and ethnic in content. Its defence of unitary form resists plural or synthetic conceptions. Its parading of a culturally defined intelligibility exposes the degree to which art, language and history, may become the hermeneutic instruments of such a unitary illusion of intelligibility. And it accentuates the fact that nationalism's ideological defence against the arbitrariness of modernity involves a repudiation of heterogeneity,"otherness" and all signs that serve to implicate the arbitrary signature of "l'autre".

To be Irish in this unitary world of ideas, demands the suppression of all that is not so-defined in the life of the nation. The suppression of the non-identical is engineered by the discursive process which diminishes the play of the signifier to the unitary semantic testimony of identitarian rhetoric. As the passage cited indicates, the identitarian imagination constructs its narrative illusion of unitary intelligibility by restricting the play of the signifier to the familiarising semantic coordinates of the nation so desired. For the identitarian imagination, the narrative of Irish identity is signified through its univocal testimony to the teleological history of a unitary nation that is culturally Gaelic, theologically Catholic, aesthetically organic and territorially whole.

Whilst the establishment of an identitarian narrative most typically involved the reiteration of certain legitimating tropes, from time to time the implications of this unitary discourse could be recognised in the actions of its supporters. At various moments in

the unravelling history of modern nationalism the process of familiarisation of the tenets of identity are revealed in the explicit exclusion of the non-identical, the different. The process of seizing discourse to impose a hegemonic view of cultural intelligibility as often as not included the delegitimation of the claims to inclusion of those who embodied or signified difference.

Examples exist of this exclusionary force in the course of the definition of the unitary culture. In the realm of sport, the most representative body of Irish national life, the Gaelic Athletic Association, decided in 1887 that policemen, soldiers and those who played or watched "foreign" sports should be excluded from membership, in order to maintain the unitary vigour of an organisation that should be as Archbishop Croke suggested "racy of the soil" [26]. That the divisive ethos which this fostered persisted until very recent times is evidenced from the sporting deprivations of many a soccer-hungry Christian Brothers boy, to the sectarian abuse which greeted a Protestant County footballer in an Ulster championship game in 1993, abuse that culminated in his watching mother being physically attacked. More recently, the election of a Protestant as President of the Association indicates a positive shift in attitude.

In the heterogeneous domain of the factual discursive reality of modern Ireland, the suppression of difference has taken on many different forms. Although ostensibly a rarity in nationalist Ireland, religious discrimination has included an anti-semitic pogrom in the nationalist stronghold of Limerick in 1904, and remarkably in the land of Leopold Bloom it has been evidenced by the publication of

advertisements in An Claidheamh Soluis for companies who proudly guaranteed that Jews were not employed [27]. In another curious instance, the Parish Priest of Tuam attempted to exclude the celebrated Anglican writer Canon Hannay (George Birmingham) from the proceedings of a Gaelic League Feis in 1906 "on the ground that he was fundamentally unIrish" [28].

Perhaps the strangest instance of an overtly identitarian national description, arises in the preamble to de Valera's 1937 constitution. The exclusionary force of this sacred text of nationalist ideology is identified by Joseph Lee who inquires how Protestants and Dissenters could

> be expected to feel loyalty to a constitution.... introduced by the preamble 'We, the people of Eire, humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial'? Would this not instantly beg the question...'Whose fathers?' 'Our fathers' who sustained their trials at Derry, Enniskillen, Aughrim and the Boyne? Was this the same God that Protestant people celebrated as 'Our help in ages past'? 'Gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain the rightful independence of our nation' immediately eliminated the vast majority of the Protestant people as an integral part of 'our nation'. If there was only one Irish people, must the Protestant people jettison their heritage and deny their own fathers before they could become truly part of 'the people of Eire'? 29

The clearest expression of nationalism's identitarian philosophy was expounded by the pragmatic cultural commentator D.P.Moran. In his seminal work The Philosophy of Irish Ireland [30], and through the columns of his nationalist journal The Leader, Moran expressed with disconcerting honesty the ideological implications of unitary nationalism. Although the legacy of the philosophical ideas which he propounded as indicative of a particularist response to British

Imperialism was ultimately to contribute to the totalistic mindset of post-independence nationalism, his original contributions though extreme, aimed to simplify the dilemma confronting nationalists in Imperial Ireland. For as Boyce notes, Moran had

> the unpleasant knack of stating clearly and unequivocally the direction in which the Gaelic movement was heading, and its implications for the 'English who happened to be born in Ireland'; any racial undertones were ones that he recognized, not ones that he invented. [31]

Moran's exposition of what he termed "Irish Ireland" was rooted in the pragmatic belief that a pluralist socio-political national consensus could not be successfully forged as the agency through which British Imperialism's cultural hegemony would be defeated. Although an anglophone himself, Moran preached that cultural hegemony of the distinctive Irish nation could only be achieved through the exertions of a Gaelic and Catholic nation. His acidic derision of "shoneens", "west-britons" and their economic allies such as "Mr. Bung" (the collective term for the alcohol industry), was inspired by his conviction that the salvation of the national being could only be effected by a rigorous purgation of the alien influences of industrialised Protestant England. For Moran believed, as Hutchinson notes, that

> Nationalists could only break the hegemony of English values, radiating from the great centres of social and intellectual power in Dublin, Trinity College, and the Vice-Regal Lodge, by an uncompromising return to the Gaelic matrix and a rebuilding of Catholic religious and social life. [32]

Moran's enthusiasm for the revitalisation of Irish Ireland was such that the Catholic Association which he founded in 1903 to counter the influence of Protestantism in the jobs market was suppressed by

Archbishop William Walsh a year later!

However identitarian his envisaged national image, Moran was at least consistent in recognising its consequences in the domain of fact. For almost alone among identitarian ideologues, Moran publicly proclaimed the necessity of partition as a means of protecting the integrity of the unitary nation from the dangers of "dilution" [33]. The depth of Moran's convictions stemmed from his deep distrust of the Catholic middle-class record in the annals of Irish nationalism. In presenting his identitarian beliefs to them in his writings, he sought to remove the complexity which had, he believed, prevented the establishment of an authentically Irish Ireland. Defending the rigidity of his view he writes

> We are sick of "Irish National" make-believes and frauds; sick of shouting nation when there is no nation; and the much abused national consciousness of the Irish people cries for truth and light, and death to shams and impostures. [34]

The cold clarity of Moran's defence of the nation as a unitary form whose establishment would of necessity involve the "death" of counternarratives, was motivated by his conviction that nationality was a natural consequence of a particular civilised intelligibility. As a distinctly modern response to the problem of a conceptually dichotomised universe riven by the conflicting recognitions of arbitrariness and intelligibility, Moran's ideological position openly serves to eliminate the experience of alienation by eliminating the differentiating symbols of the alien. For Moran, to secure the realisation of an identitarian nation through the seizure of cultural hegemony, would be to secure the instantiation of a natural and organic illusion of intelligibility. As in Moran's view,

civilisation and nationality are the predicates of a reassuringly intelligible natural cognitive order.

> I have used the word civilization instead of the word nation: the development of nationality is the natural development of a distinct civilization, and any power that kills the one, is guilty of the death of the other. [35]

But ironically,in order to hegemonise this natural identitarian illusion, "the death of the other" is required.

The identitarian imperative to defend to the death the hegemonic claims of the unitary nation is thus legitimated by appealing to the cognitive equivalent of the natural order's ethical inviolability, in defending "the death of the other". The consequences of such a defence would not become clear until "the other" ceased to be the forces of British Imperialism, and became in the wake of Independence the internally defined "other" of unionist fact. In the identitarian domain of Irish Ireland, the will to intelligibility would result in an ideological environment in which identity as totality could overtake identity as distinction. In such a domain, even the most innocuous definition of the nation would be inextricably linked to the ideological context that produced it. In such a domain, even the genial depthlessness of Jack Lynch's memorably tautological assertion at the height of the Northern Troubles that "To me any Irishman is an Irishman" [36], could take on a sinister hue.

Moran's identitarian philosophy emerged as a consequence of his recognition of the heterogenising force of the modern world of fact. In outlining the rationale of his Irish Ireland philosophy he writes that "We are conscious that we are breaking into fragments, but yet we somehow manage to keep our spirits up" [37]. The virulence of

Moran's attack on the corrupting effect of this fragmentary modernity was animated by his belief that fragmentation was induced by the introduction of alien cultural discourse through the efforts of British Imperialism's hegemonic regime to alienate and marginalise the validity of Ireland's cultural and political specificity. As Moran notes in 1905, "Every incentive comes from abroad, and the Irish nation so deeply despises itself that it has ceased to develop by force of its own vitality" [38]

It was this failure to acknowledge and develop the discursive specificity of Irish experience that motivated Moran's strategic depiction of the identitarian character of the nation. For like many of his fellow nationalists, Moran recognised that only by establishing the particularity of the nation's cultural and historical tradition as natural, intelligible and legitimate, could a counter-hegemonic narrative be established with a view to the removal of Imperialist hegemony.

In asserting this view, Moran was stating a fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of a free and legitimate expression of national sovereignty. But the discursive form of his assertions, that all such particularity must be instrumentalised in the service of an identitarian universal intelligibility, would inevitably acquire totalistic connotations in the altered states of post-Independence Ireland. It would remain for Patrick Kavanagh to re-configure the redemptive significance of the particular, as being preeminently situated not within its compatability with universal doctrine, but within the very particularity (parochiality) of particular moments of aesthetic insight.

The nationalist aim in the age of revolution was the establishment of an image of a unitary culture as the norm of intelligibility. The process of determining this image had begun in the post-Enlightenment efforts of Sylvester O'Halloran, Charlotte Brooke, Charles Vallancey, and Edward Ledwich at the turn of the eighteenth century. Spurred on by the German Idealist tide of Romanticism, the rage for order gathered force and began to reconfigure every aspect of the Irish imagination. From the legends of Crofton Croker, to the stories of William Carleton, and from the national survey of O'Donovan, Petrie and O'Curry to the philological revelations of Johann Kasper Zeuss, the tide of imaginative discursive reformation swelled.

Recognising the incipient undercurrents of an emerging counter-hegemonic narrative, the ascendancy representatives of the status quo set about the process of instrumentalising these particularist recognitions by reinterpreting them in the light of British Imperialism's culture of heroic civility. From the hegemonic reincorporation of the subversively particularist "Irish Lyrics" of Hardiman, in the columns of the Dublin University Magazine [39], to the inculcation of aristocratic heroic virtue in the legendary narratives of Samuel Ferguson and Standish O'Grady, the instrumentalisation of cultural narrative as a hegemonic strategy unfolded.

Through the process of "Davisising" and "De-anglicising" national discourse, of instrumentalising its discursive particularities as indicative of the counterhegemonic narrative of nationalism's universal intelligibility, nationalist ideologues sought to seize power by seizing discourse. It is in the context of this counterhegemonic imperative, that the identitarian extremism of

commentators such as Moran and Corkery must be interpreted. However totalistic the legacy of their speculations ultimately became, their identitarian philosophy originated in a desire to counter totality, in a counterhegemonic narrative of instrumentalised particularities.

In order to construct successfully a counterhegemonic narrative capable of inspiring rebellion and engendering loyalty, nationalism's unitary illusionists needed to normalise and naturalise the particularities of the aesthetic discourse of identity as indicative of nationalist ideology's universality. The function of identitarian discourse in its obsessive concern with the subordination of the non-identical through its control of the process of signification, was to reconfigure every aesthetic particular as an instrument of the ideological universal. The legitimation of a universal illusion of intelligibility was dependent on the popularisation of a supporting narrative. Such a narrative would of necessity depict the nation as being naturally united, historically continuous, linguistically distinct, territorially integrated, and culturally indivisible.

The ultimate goal underwriting the elaboration of this unitary narrative was to be the achievement of national unity, or the restoration and revival of that imagined unity which the nation possessed in the edenic pre-modern age of a reconfigured antiquity. The goal of return to edenic origins, unscathed by the arbitrariness and complexity of the world of modern fact, required the identification of a comparable destination in the world of amodern ideas. In such an ideal place where the brute facticity of modernity could not penetrate, a place in which displacing uncertainties of modern consciousness could be rehabilitated in a centric

epistemological omphalos, the threatening nothingness of fact could be subsumed within the promissory nowhereness of utopian ideas.

If a utopian return to origins was to be the goal, then the determination of a utopian identity originating in the Ireland of ideas would require discursive images capable of resisting the gravity of fact. Such images would primarily serve to direct the flow of cultural and political signification towards the affirmation of a unitary cognitive illusion of intelligibility. In the battle for discursive hegemony, the legitimation of the unitary illusion would ultimately depend upon the ideologists's success in controlling the effects of meaning in culture's narrative domain. For the nation to succed in becoming an imagined community, imagination itself would have to be communalised.

The collective dream of an originary utopos, whose organic ideality serves to restore a deeply alienated modern consciousness to its desired state of intelligible wholeness is imaginable only in the Ireland of ideas. In the nationalist's utopian response to the arbitrary tyranny of fact, the collective dream of a return to national unity could serve the deepest needs of post-Enlightenment subjectivity, by providing in its identitarian commonplaces an imaginable state in which the subject could be renaturalised as a citizen of an intelligible and purposeful universe.

The Ireland of ideas, a historically intended, culturally univocal domain, could overthrow the hegemonic Britishness of fact, if its construction in the collective idiom of imaginative discourse was so suasive that it could seize the popular imagination's assent to its natural authority. By thus hegemonising the imaginative idiom it

could control the effects of meaning and through that control, appropriate the effects of power. For the utopian dream of the Ireland of ideas to attain its sovereign destiny in the cratological domain of fact, the idiom of a utopian imagination would be indigenised.

The indigenisation of the idiom of imaginative intelligibility would aim to construct an identitarian discourse which was motivated by the desire to return to or restore that consoling ideality for the alienated citizens of modernity. In expounding the dream of unity, the idea of Ireland would be indigenised through a number of controlling images that would provide an intelligible map of the universal ideal. Such images in conveying the unity, naturalness, continuity and integrity of the discursive dream would unify the image, by suppressing diversity in the field of meaning. By exploiting culture's self-worshipping cycle of signification, these images through the sheer force of reiteration would become indigenised as the natural or commonplace coordinates of an Irish utopia. The centrality of these commonplaces or topoi to identitarian discourse's illusory map of intelligibility, is revealed by the force with which they are defended. For the cumulative impact of these images is such, that they provided their proponents with a coherent discursive counterimage to the Ireland of fact.

This ideal image of Ireland, expressed through the identitarian discourse of nationalist imaginings, and indigenised through the topoi of Irish national identity, comes to constitute an alternative discursive reality, an indigenous utopian dream, a "hibernotopia", for nationalists transfixed by the dream of cultural and political

hegemony. It is to this hibernotopian reality, that the sacrificial leaders of 1916 appeal in the name of the "dead generations". It is in defence of this hibernotopian domain that the outrages of "republican" paramilitaries are habitually justified. And it is in deference to this hibernotopian illusion, that the aesthetic description of Ireland is habitually couched in terms of the primacy of ideas, from the organic illusions of revivalist Celticism, through the identitarian domains of "Hidden" and "Irish" Irelands, and the fanciful aspirations of de Valera's constitutional entity of overdetermined images and unenumerated rights, to the sophisticated philosophical dimensions of The Crane Bag's "Fifth Province". Ultimately, what the construction of this hibernotopian counternarrative essentially does, is give the idea of Ireland the character of fact.

For the proponents of an identitarian Ireland, the efficacy of hibernotopian discourse in the campaign to appropriate cultural and political hegemony would depend upon the character and quality of its aesthetic images. As AE advised regarding the definition of a national culture,

> Without reference to modern psychology or its theories a little thought would convince anybody that for anything worth while to be achieved there must be precise images in the mind...There can be no jerry-building of these images. [40]

In accordance with the modern ideological process of portraying the particular as a universal norm of intelligibility, the selection, reiteration and indigenisation of such images as commonplaces of the unitary hibernotopian universe of meaning would serve to resist the arbitrary sway of modern fact. The legitimation of this

universalised particularity would serve to assert the hegemonic cultural and political claims of what Corkery referred to as "the Ireland that counts" [41].

The description of this hibernotopian dream, is most clearly presented in the work of the Corkonian writer, commentator and politician, Daniel Corkery. Corkery's vigorous campaign to indigenise literary discourse through the assertion of an identitarian description of the nation originated in his belief that the "soul of a people is most intimately revealed, perhaps, in their literature" [42]. Recognising that British imperial political hegemony had been sustained through the control of cultural discourse, and believing that the literary discourse of the predominantly Anglo-Irish (community's) literary renaissance was supportive of that hegemonic hold, Corkery set about defining a counterhegemonic narrative of native aesthetic authenticity.

Sharing many of the ideological concerns of D.P.Moran, Corkery realised that in order to create the ideological conditions in which nationalist hegemony could be achieved, in order to legitimate the universal claims of the identitarian nation, the particularity of the nation must first be defined. The first part of this process of identitarian construction involved the denial of the heterogeneous facticity of Irish culture. The legitimate claims of the indigenised hibernotopian community would be established by denying any authenticity to the cultural counterclaims of the Protestant ascendancy's inherited particularity.

> If they [the ascendancy] have had a language and literature, it cannot have been a civilising language, cannot have been anything but a patois used by the hillmen among themselves; and as for their literature,

> the less said about it the better. In the course of time the natives become tainted with their doctrines; and cry approval when the untruths of the Ascendancy are echoed from some distant place [43].

In this discourse of natives and aliens, the definition of the native identity is transcendental to the claims of temporality, and the dictates of fact. Nativeness is not defined by temporal duration, but by compliance with the transcendental hibernotopian norm of ethnicity, with the ideal Ireland which Corkery alleges was hidden as a result of the hegemonic impact of imperial fact.

In this paradigm of identity, nativeness is not defined as a predicate of fact (that for example the duration of individual or community lives should merit inclusion in the discourse of identity), but rather a coordinate of ideality. Corkery's hibernotopian image of the Hidden Ireland, a culturally organic, confessionally homogeneous, Gaelic-speaking pre-modern community, reconfigures the particular cultural concerns of the identitarian nation of his time, as indicative of an originary truth of universal validity. For Corkery, the actualisation of this transcendental truth is the supreme ideological imperative concerning the principal interpreter of the idiom of modern intelligibility, the writer.

Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, Corkery's impassioned plea for the development of a literature that would embody the particular genius of this original nation, is as much a critique of that form of cultural snobbery which has inhabited the provincial mindset of bourgeois Ireland from the ersatz imperialism of Moran's "shoneens" to the witless globalism of Deane's "Dublin 4", as it is expressive of an ideological totality. In his vigorous attempt to universalise

the legitimacy of this national image, he was responding to the revivalist's general failure to include this particular cultural reality as emblematic of high cultural expression. In his energetic defence of the local genius, he was prefiguring the revolutionary poetics of particularity which Kavanagh would later develop.

Corkery was adamant that the high purposes of art should reflect the quotidian reality of the nationalist parish. The "high purposes of art", he asserts, demand "the shaping out into chaste and enduring form of a genuine emotional content, personal to themselves but conscionable to the nation" [44]. Literature's expression of the particularity of experience in forms "personal to themselves" should be subject to the universal imperative by being "conscionable to the nation". The writer's concern with the determination of meaning should be governed by the identitarian imperatives of the hibernotopian nation. The aesthetic process of narration should be governed by the imperative to identify and interpret the ideal nation. The writer's concern with the play of the signifier, should be informed not by a desire to explore the heterogeneous world of semiotic fact, but by a desire to affirm the identitarian world of ideological ideas. In complaining that the mass of Anglo-Irish literature "cannot be held up to Irish life as interpretative of it" [45], Corkery is alleging that such literature does not acknowledge the particularity of what he believes to be "national" life. As such, it does not provide the grounds to universalise that particularity. For by denying the admissability of parochial culture as a high aesthetic form, it denies that cultural form the opportunity to be "interpretative of" the hibernotopian illusion, an illusion which

legitimates his identitarian definition of this particular life as "national" in the first place.

For Corkery, the establishment of a counterhegemonic narrative was dependent on the availability to the ideologist of a particularist cultural narrative, which could then be transformed into the testimony of a universal illusion of intelligibility through its correspondence with the form of the hibernotopian dream. The primacy of this ideologically imagined Ireland, this "Ireland that counts" in the authentication of literary discourse as "interpretative" or non-interpretative of the nation, would sustain the nationalist's resistance to the arbitrariness of modern fact, which an open interpretative regime would not. In constructing a national literature, the conventionality of the signifier would be redetermined to suggest the naturalness of the nation so defined.

The identitarian nation as Corkery views it, is a natural entity. In keeping with the deepest desire of nationalist ideology's response to the arbitrariness of modernity, the native may be renaturalised as a member of the epistemologically unitary hibernotopia by submitting to the claims of its natural or national illusion of intelligibility. Nationalist ideology's promise of redemption from the arbitary tyranny of fact may be fulfilled if the subject submits the heterogenising perceptions of particularity to the rule of the universal. By subordinating the intepretation of the modern idiom of intelligibility (culture) to the dictates of the hibernotopian illusion, the mind of the subject in being nationalised could be naturalised as a constituent of an intelligible universe of meaning and purpose.

The equation between what is native and what is natural is explicit in Corkery's representative description of nationalist aesthetics. In condemning "ascendancy" writers such as Synge, he alleges that "his mind is cast in an unnatural because unnative mould" [46]. The writer as the principal interpreter of the idiom of modernity must therefore submit to the moulding or reification of the domain of significance, if he is to participate in the dream of natural redemption.

> To become natural interpreters of the nation they [writers] need to share in the people's emotional background; moreover they need to become possessed of a culture based on that emotional subconscious. In the case of the writer sprung from the people all that is necessary is a mental equipment fitted to shape the emotional content that is theirs, as well as the nation's, into chaste and enduring forms. [47]

For Corkery and the mainstream of Irish cultural nationalism, this promissory renaturalisation of the subject was indicative of nationalism's messianic power through which the isolated subject could be redeemed from the thrall of modernity. Its power to naturalise the imagination by familiarising the discursive constituents of interpretation is nowhere more evident or necessary for Corkery, than in the usually defamiliarising discourse of poetry. Relating the salvific force of the nationalist imagination to the hegemonic potential of a compliant poetic he writes,

> As for Irish nationalism, how can normal countries understand it? If one cannot live in Ireland long enough to have it penetrate one's being, driving one although quite a foreigner to take sides, as has so often happened, the only other way to get to know it is to learn the Irish language and read the poetry in it; for such is the nature of Irish nationalism that it demands sincerity, intensity, style for its utterance, in other words, poetry. We who have lived in Ireland in recent years, who have seen what we have seen, need no further instruction to believe that prose is no medium to express

> it in, no more than it was for the Jews in their ancient captivity. Like all forces, it wrecks as well as saves. We here are not concerned with the wisest way of dealing with it; we would only point out that it is one of the deepest things in Irish life, searching into the souls of men, drawing sanction, as it does, from hundreds of battlefields, slaughterings, famines, exoduses, as well as from hundreds of heroic lives and the piety of verse.[48]

The identification of poetry as a pious medium of ideological legitimation ratifies Corkery's contention (which is representative of the proponents of national literature) that the aesthetic effects of meaning must subserve the "moulding" or reification of the signifying process, so that redemption from the flux of facticity may be achieved.

Aware of the totalistic implications which such an identitarian approach may encompass, ("it wrecks as well as saves"), Corkery nonetheless appeals to the poet to envisage within the barbaric arbitrariness of Irish imperial experience, a counterhegemonic image of intelligibility. The predominant facts of the imperial strand of history, a wanton brutality in the service of a totalistic imperative, the imposition of an imagined identity upon a different people, the explication of barbarism in terms of an illusory civility, provoke a counterhegemonic ideal.

Instead of probing within this repetitive narrative of civilising barbarity to determine an inclusive discourse comprising modernity's definitive dualism of arbitrariness and intelligibility, Corkery's nationalist poet is expected to ignore such "wisdom" and accept Imperialism's terms of reference by subordinating the very real heterogeneity of Irish fact to the legitimation of a homogenising ideal. The "piety of verse" is thus expected to hallow the

totalistic spirit whose imperial handiwork litters the historical landscape of Ireland, its "battlefields, slaughterings, famines, exoduses", pogroms and persecutions, rather than learn from its profane facticity.

The desire to achieve collective redemption from the savage profanity of fact through the illusory pursuit of an ideal and exclusionary identity, carries within it the promise of totality which so disturbs the piety of poets in contemporary Ulster. The legacy of that identitarian discourse of which Corkery was so representative challenges the contemporary poet. Through its omnipresence in the unsolicited poetic inheritance of codes, tropes and topoi, nationalism seeks to transfigure discourse's profane domain into the sacred testimony of a unitary illusion of intelligibility.

Nationalism's expectations - that poetry should embody a pious affirmation of the illusion, by colluding with hibernotopian discourse's familiarisation of modernity's arbitrariness, - challenge the contemporary Irish writer to redeem the particularity of his experience from the tyrannical piety of totality. To do so, the writer must come to terms with the impact of identitarian intepretation upon the signifier's domain.

Ideal Terrain - Territorialising the Illusion

For nationalists, the "piety of verse" resides within its figurative power to legitimate the hibernotopian dream. The function of the writer is as David Lloyd suggests, vital to the transformation of this ideal terra incognita into a cratologically effective terra

firma. Reflecting upon the evolution of this role he writes

> But, while the martyr provides the high points or, as the 1916 nationalist leader Patrick Pearse was later to express it, the 'burning symbols', through which the call to identify achieves its moment of intensity, it is the function of the writer to mediate the continuity of the national spirit.[49]

The writer as mediator of ideological continuity, subserves the pious imperatives of nationalism, by creating a relation in language between the heterogeneous world of fact and the unitary telos of hibernotopian imaginings. The national illusion of universal intelligibility may be discursively mediated through the imposition of an identitarian narrative of interpretation. As the aim of this interpretative mediation is the legitimation of the hibernotopian ideal, the mediator is required to construct this narrative using the tropology of ideal Ireland, rather than the emblematic debris of fact. In affirming the illusion of universal intelligibility by thus subjecting the particularity of particular perceptions to the rule of identity, he may create in language a matrix of interpretation.

By delimiting the role of this matrix to the codification of nationalist intelligibility, the nation may be envisaged as a coherent, self-affirming and unitary form of collective intelligibility. In mediating the continuity of the nation's illusion, the writer effectively mediates the discontinuity of modernity. Through the mediating matrix of nationalist identity, the will to intelligibility may suppress the rule of the arbitrary. In this process of codification, the imagined outlines of the hibernotopian illusion may be structured and defined as a matter of fact.

Thus,in its reiteration of the tropes of nationalist intelligibility, and through its identitarian restrictions upon the play of the signifier, writing realises the universal ideal. By reifying the evanescent flow of signification and hypostatizing the heterogeneity of meaning through the universalisation of selected images, writing may ground or territorialise the imagined community as a natural fact. In Lloyd's view

> Writing is accordingly endowed with the function of grounding, a term which serves to conduct the uneasy shifts between organic metaphors of the spirit and growth of the nation, and architectural metaphors of the construction of an institution. The slogan of The Nation succinctly expresses the ramifications of the nationalist project: 'To foster public opinion and make it racy of the soil.' The act of fostering, by which a people 'separated from their forefathers' are to be given back an alternative yet equally arbitrary and fictive paternity, is renaturalised through the metaphor of grounding: through its rootedness in the primary soil of Ireland, the mind of Ireland will regain its distinctive savour. The 'root' meaning of culture is implicit here, and certainly, in so far as a literary culture is envisaged as the prime agent and ground of unification, it is literary taste which is subjected to the most rigorous 'reterritorialisation'. In an essay entitled 'Our National Language' Davis diagnosed the consequences of imposing a foreign language on a native population as a primary deterritorialisation, a decoding of the primitive relation of the Irish to their territory, 'tearing their identity from all places'. Their deterritorialisation is seen by Davis as occuring in three main forms: in the relation of identity to territory; in the relation of place-name to territory; in the relation of the people to their history, envisaged as the continuity of a patrimony. Language mediates each of these relations.[50]

Language as the mediator of reality situates the writer as the mediator of intelligibility. And as nationalism, like other modern ideologies, seeks to determine an illusion of universal intelligibility through the idiom of culture, the writer is particularly responsible for the mediation of acceptable continuities

which may serve to legitimate the hibernotopian illusion of an indigenous, unitary intelligibility.

As Lloyd notes, the ideological imperatives of cultural nationalism after Davis require that the writer reconfigure the conventional coordinates of an imagined community as the natural determinants of cratological claims to sovereignty in the realm of political fact.

Just as every act of writing may be an act of re-reading, so the ideological process of de-codifying the matrix of Imperial intelligibility, involves a simultaneous re-codification of the matrix of collective intelligibility in nationalist form. In order to realise the hibernotopian ideal, therefore, the constituent ideas of the hibernotopian illusion must be grounded in the discourse of cratological fact as natural, continuous, and universally valid. For the primacy of the idea of Ireland to maintain its formidable hold over the development of the Ireland of fact, it must establish its ideal outlines as legitimate and puissant configurations in the discursive domain of fact.

The imposition of identitarian discourse with its reiterative cycle of unitary tropes, overdetermined meanings, and universalised particularities, reconfigures the particular norms of the hibernotopian illusion as the natural commonplaces of a redemptive national truth.

The process of creating in the discourse of fact semantic maps of the hibernotopian domain, is thus effected via the writer's control of the process of signification. The illusory domain of Irish ideality may be realised or given the character of fact by grounding

its ideal components through the tropological devices of literature's re-codification of intelligibility, in the representation of Irish fact. The imagined terrain of the hibernotopian illusion may thus be territorialised through the tropes and topoi of literary expression.

The Deleuzian terms 'territorialisations', 'deterritorialisations' and 'reterritorialisations', serve to reflect the fundamental historical process of coding and decoding in the development of ideological metanarratives [51]. The Deleuzian paradigm of coding (reterritorialising) and decoding (deterritorialising) as the dialectical forces of history, although referring to the regulation of social production in the rise of capitalism, may be usefully transferred to define the linguistic processes of coding and decoding which underwrite the construction of a collective illusion of cultural intelligibility. Thus, the deterritorialisation of the Imperialist code, is achieved by nationalism's reterritorialisation or recoding of the narrative of collective intelligibility via the "territorialities" (beliefs, forms, images) which the writer imparts.

The territorialities upon which the nationalist process of recoding depends, originate within the hibernotopian terrain of imagined Ireland. Their purpose in the literary process of signification is to transform the conventionality of the imagined domain into a natural illusion of universal intelligibility. The implications for the writer, whose work depends upon the conventionality of language are therefore grave. And for a writer such as Heaney, whose unsolicited inheritance of national tropes and commonplaces of natural intelligibility are the products of one hundred and fifty years of reterritorialisation, the implications for

his consideration of his own particularity, when the force of these territorialities serves to universalise any such specificity, are central to a consideration of his work.

The forma mentis of Irish nationalist ideology, are characterised in their claims to naturalness by a desire to abjure modernity and assert a consoling unitary illusion of total intelligibility. In effect, the territorialities of nationalist discourse aim to root the process of signification in the imaginative urgrund of ideal Ireland's identitarian field of meaning. By rooting the signifier in the diminishing field of identitarian interpretation, the whole process of signification may become rooted, or radicalised, as a static channel of received meanings. This radicalising of the signifier's conventional domain, is achieved mainly through the reiterative impact of the territorialities of nationalist intelligibility.

The realisation that nationalism depends upon the power of particular images is a cratological commonplace from Moran's prayer at the moment of the new state's foundation, "God give the Free State a good conceit of itself: a good conceit of itself will be half the battle" [52], to de Valera's statement that "our Constitution was intended to be as explicit as it possibly could be, with as few fictions as possible" [53]. The efficacy of national conceits and fictions in the process of recodifying the collective intelligibility, could and does lead to a sometimes fatal confusion in the minds of those committed to the realisation of the unitary illusion.

The totalistic campaigns of Ulster's sectarian paramilitaries who

maim and kill in the service of such identitarian illusions serve to point up the power such images may exert over the human mind. In desperate recognition of this fact, Eoin Mac Neill vainly sought to differentiate illusion from reality for his Volunteers prior to the outbreak of rebellion. "We have to remember", Mac Neill writes,

> that what we call our country is not a poetical abstraction, as some of us, perhaps all of us, in the exercise of our highly developed capacity for figurative thought, are sometimes apt to imagine - with the help of our patriotic literature. There is no such person as Caitlin Ni Uallachain or Roisin Dubh or the Sean bhean bhocht, who is calling us to serve her. What we call our country is the Irish nation, which is a concrete and visible reality. [54]

Whilst Mac Neill's anxieties betoken his concern with the metaphysically bewildered condition of those who were subject to the high salvific rhetoric of the Pearsean era, his concerns astutely recognise the potency of "poetical abstraction". And whereas the nation has been territorialised as a unitary subject in the anthropomorphisms of visionary "speirbheans" and dilapidated old crones in the high rhetoric of nationalist discourse, the configuration of the nation as a unitary subject has predominantly been grounded in broader identitarian formations.

Nationalist ideology territorialises the illusion of a unitary national form through its identitarian discursive formations. From the implicit significance of the 1937 constitution's preamble, to the misappropriation of German reunification as a national parallel by Messrs. Haughey and Reynolds, the territorialities deployed relate that the identitarian character of nationalist discourse may be expressed in illusory formations. Hibernotopian "aisling"s appear in many forms.

One characteristic way of radicalising the process of signifying the illusion, is simply to deny the existence of "l'autre". De Valera, for example, asserted that "This Ulster is a thing of the mind only, non-existent in the world of reality" [55]. Charles Haughey speaking in 1981, engages in a similar discursive strategy when defining the homogeneous heritage of "Christian" Ireland, he singularly denies the radical heterogeneity of this heritage by sheltering under the transhistorical wings of the "Covering Cherub" of continuity.

> Except perhaps for the eagerness with which the Irish accepted his [St. Patrick's] divine message, nothing is more remarkable about his missionary journey in this welcoming island of ours then the homogeneity of cultural and social life he found wherever he went. The high kingship at Tara may not have meant much in terms of central government as we know it today, but neither were there the political divisions we now have. Because Ireland at the time of St. Patrick and for many centuries afterwards possessed a cultural unity transcending its petty political divisions, the partitioning of their land was and has remained an almost inconceivable eventuality to the vast majority of Irish men and women. [56]

Throughout this synchronic narrative formation the term "Irish" shapeshifts from signifying a specious religious and cultural homogeneity from the fourth century to the present, through a transcendental unity immune to the "petty" divisibility of political belief, to a "vast" entity whose majority is in some way related to the remarkable cultural and religious homogeneity of ideal Ireland since Patrician year-zero.

Yet the degradation of a timeless homogeneity into a disbelieving majority is not related to the domain of fact in which the minor (or "petty") political reality of Ireland's political, cultural and social plurality, signified by the term 'Irish' that applies to the

diverse array of religious and political belief from Pelagian Ireland to unionist Ulster, is simply denied. Thus, while that which is signified by the term 'Irish' is an evolving and heterogeneous field of meaning in the realm of fact (which is "inconceivable" to the bemused rhetorician), that which is signified as 'Irish' in his synchronic historical framework of hibernotopian ideality is deemed to be constant, identitarian and unchanging.

The territorialisation of the national illusion's sovereignty in the discourse of the present, is radically dependent upon the reterritorialisation of the Irish pasts. The particular image of the nationalist past as a univocal, identitarian, narrative of intelligibility, casts a mesmeric spell upon the illusionists of the present. To naturalise the nationalist subject as the citizen of a universally intelligible domain, this process of ideological redemption from the disturbing discontinuities of an arbitrary universe begins by reconfiguring the significance of that discursive form in which the Irish perception of randomness and barbarity is most pronounced - history.

Although all history is a re-reading of memorial narratives, the significance of nationalism's retelling of the past resides primarily in the formal matrix of interpretation which it imposes on the contentual detritus of a brutal and civilised antiquity. In nationalism's re-reading, the particularities of Catholic nation's totalistic experience of British Imperialism - the process of colonisation, of disenfranchisement and dispossession, of religious persecution and a sectarian legislature, of Imperial acculturation and economic marginalisation - the ineradicable heritage of British

barbarism, are reconfigured in a discursive reterritorialisation which serves to transform the barbarous experience of a particular heritage into the universal intelligibility of an identitarian narrative.

In responding to the claims of modernity, the arbitrary significance of British Imperial domination is transformed into the promissory intelligibility of an identitarian ideal. The primacy of the identitarian illusion in this narrative of nationalist intelligibility is underwritten not so much by a desire for redemption in history, but by the desire to be redeemed from history.

The synchronic temporal framework which structures nationalism's hibernotopian narrative is indicative of this fact. The nation may be redeemed from the thrall of modernity by its transfiguration in the unitary ideality of hibernotopian recodification, an ideal code that serves to situate the process of cultural signification in a temporally transcendent domain. By thus situating the process of signification in a synchronic discursive framework that is historically transcendental and temporally disengaged, the signifying process may be hypostatised and the past may be interpreted as a continuous identitarian narrative of historically transcendental truths and immutable meanings.

By centering the signifying process of nationalism's historical interpretation in the primatial domain of unitary ideas, rather than in the grim facticity of a radically diverse past, the ideologist may construct a narrative of total intelligibility that is identitarian in form and teleological in process. By so reducing the field of historical signification to the monological confines of an

identitarian illusion, he may of course claim hegemony in the context of the present. For as the unionist commentator A.T.Q. Stewart notes, "To the Irish all history is Applied History, and the past is simply a convenient quarry which provides ammunition to use against enemies in the present" [57]

As the Haughey speech cited exemplifies, the legitimation of an identitarian illusion is radically dependent upon the assertion of an indivisible historically transcendental continuity. For the unitary illusion to be signified as the universal norm of intelligibility through which the subject may be redeemed from the discontinuities of modern perceptions, nationalism places the very process of signification under the care of what Harold Bloom refers to as the "Covering Cherub" of continuity.

> The Covering Cherub then is the demon of continuity; his baleful charm imprisons the present in the past, and reduces a world of differences into a grayness of uniformity. The identity of the past and present is at one with the essential identity of all objects. [58]

This "demon of continuity" transfigures the "world of differences" into "a grayness of uniformity" by reducing the role of the signifier to the reiteration of static, temporally immune significations. This demonisation of the signifier serves to identify the past and present as a narrative continuum and ultimately reduces the signified world to a clutter of particular significances (nationality, language, Irishness, the past) which have the character of objects. By reducing the signifier to the reiteration of immutable signs of continuity, the demonic continuity of nationalism's historical formation, reifies the world of the signifier and creates the conditions in which those such as Heaney, who wish to explore the intelligibile flux of the

signifier may experience a profound sense of displacement. For in the hibernotopian narrative of continuity, the hypostatisation of the signifying process, by reducing the signifier to a static ahistorical reference in a world of immutable semantic objects, creates the perception that in the presence of such a world of historical objects, the displaced observer is an "artful voyeur".

Territorialising this historical continuum in the discourse of power is a primary function of identitarian narrative, as de Valera recognises when he writes that

> the nation that for seven hundred years resisted all the power that could be brought against it, that nation is going to continue till it sees a united nation. [59]

The territorialisation of the nation in history is dependent upon an illusory view of temporality. Rooted in the Ireland of ideas, the 700 -year-old undifferentiated nation described by de Valera, a commonplace in the hegemonic discourse of contemporary "republicanism", maintains its identity through its immunity to the differentiating impact of temporality. This identitarian nation whose significance remains unchanged despite the enormous upheavals in social, religious and economic actuality, transcends the interpretative bounds of a temporally calibrated signifying process. In this context, the signifier is taken out of history, so that history may be stationed by the signifier.

The territorialisation of this historical ideality is effected by the continuous reiterations of the stationing signifiers of identitarian discourse. The stationing signifier is the semantic building block of the identitarian edifice of history. Through its stationing of the signifier's playful domain as a static pre-defined

network of fixed meanings (the past, 'our national history', 'our language', death as martyrdom, sacrifice, destiny, Irishness etc.) and imperative formations (tradition, history, destiny, origins, unity) the stationary signifier reifies the subject's perceptual domain as totalised, objectified, and identified. The impact of the stationing signifier, the static signifying channel of an identitarian discourse of national historical intelligibility, upon the Irish poetic imagination may be identified in Heaney's preoccupied investigation of the hold of the past upon the process of signifying the present within the ideal confines of this "Station Island".

The effect of the stationing signifier is to hypostatise the heterogeneous domain of historical signification by imposing a delimited historically transcendent interpretation of the national past. One consequent absurdity of interpreting the past in this way, is the manner in which the nation as a transhistorical ideality may attempt to dictate the rights and privileges of those who exist in the domain of historical reality. Nowhere is the chasm between real and ideal Irelands more evident than in this recurrent commonplace of historical authenticity as defined by collective duration. R.V. Comerford describes it accurately.

> A preoccupation with origins leads Irish nationalists of a particular type to patronise unionists, as when the Dublin leader writers affecting a Thomas Davis pose reassure them that they have the right to be in the country because they have been 'here' for three hundred and fifty years. Such reassurance is self-defeating. If it matters how long a group has been 'here', who can decide after what number of years it ceases to matter? Would two hundred and fifty have sufficed? The fact is that only a handful of us have been 'here' for more than a century (and they have a telegram from President Hillery and Queen Elizabeth to acknowledge their

> stamina). And the majority of the islands inhabitants have been 'here' for less than thirty years.[60]

Of course "here" is a stationing signifier that refers to the Ireland of ideas and not the Ireland of fact. Such "hereness" signifies the naturalisation of the subject in the ideal domain of hibernotopian illusions. It is indicative of a consoling sense of "inplaceness", through which the nation reterritorialises the displaced historical subject in an intelligible continuum. In such a domain time is calibrated in accordance with the ideological imperatives of the identitarian illusion. To interpret the "hereness" of the nation in terms of the Ireland of fact, would open up the national illusion to the diverse "whatness" of that same domain.

To legitimate the identitarian illusion of intelligibility the discourse of historical imaginings is calibrated in terms of another register of time. By calibrating the discourse of historical imaginings in terms of an ideal register of temporality, memory itself may be hypostatised, and modernity abjured.

The indigenisation of the past through the temporal territorialities of continuity, has been a commonplace of literary invention since Ossianic Romanticism yielded to the euhemerist fictions of Standish O'Grady and his Celtic companions. What begins in O'Grady's heroic narrative as a surrender of memory to the immemorial horizons of a temporally transcendental intelligibility, develops in the course of cultural nationalism's rage for aesthetic order into an ideological imperative to literally extemporise (take out of its time) history.

In the resultant quest to determine an illusion of total

intelligibility, the extemporising of historical signification evolved from the euhemerist historiography of the Celtic "Revival", through the visionary gnosticism of Yeats's wheel of fortune in A Vision, and the radical extemporisation of the signifier in Joyce's temporal panegyric Finnegans Wake, to the untimely arrival of Beckett's timeless tramps in Waiting for Godot.

The centrality to the process of cultural recodification of the extemporisation of nationalism's historical intelligibility , is amply demonstrated in what amounts to a cultural counternarrative in the novelistic departures of post-revolutionary Irish fiction. For nationalism's extemporal agenda is incisively portrayed, from the sardonic political representation of Eimar O'Duffy's "Cuanduine Trilogy", to the brilliant extempore metaphysics of Flann O' Brien's hibernocosm of literalised euhemerism (At Swim Two Birds), bicyclical essentialism (the "Omnium" inspired philosophy of The Third Policeman) and transubstantial timewarps (De Selby's Augustinian realisation in The Dalkey Archive).

The resignification of the past as an indigenised continuity consonant with an identitarian illusion of the present, is facilitated through the extemporisation of the signifier by what John Wilson Foster terms the "Irish chronophobic imagination". Foster notes that

> that Irish chronophobic imagination without which the cultural revival would have been impossible... overthrew more decisively than Arnold could have anticipated "the despotism of fact".[61]

This "chronophobic imagination" reconfigures a particular image of the past as hermeneutically indivisible from that timeless universal

ideal, through which the diversity of the factual present may be "identified". This extemporal historicity, a particular discursive formation masquerading as a universal truth, is one of the principal interpretative instruments of nationalist ideology. Problematically for the writer, the identitarian "concept of the contemporaneity of the past" [62] as Oliver Mac Donagh phrases it, encloses the particular significance of memory within a universalising ideological form. The interpretative closure which the extemporisation of cultural memory imposes upon the nationalist subject in its legitimation of an intelligible narrative of continuity, threatens the author's freedom to interpret the particular significance of his individual perception of the past as particularly significant.

The centrality of literary figurations to the territorialisation of an extemporal past, is principally attested to in the abundant use of mythical imagery as an index of national intelligibility in Irish literature. As the etymology of the term suggests, myth (from "muien" - to close) serves to enclose the interpretation of cultural origins within an extemporal framework of intelligibility. It is, as Jean Paul Sartre suggests, a consoling strategy through which the insufferable arbitrariness of our discontinuous perceptions of modernity may be transformed through an intelligible ideality.

> Myth, in other words, is a strategic mode of consciousness whereby we seek to negate a real world that has grown intolerable in order to transform it into an imaginary world in which we can tolerate. [63]

The desire for a redemptive illusion of epistemological unity which animates the nationalist ideologist's quest for a narrative of origins, for a representation of the omphalos of intelligibility, is

embodied in this extemporal appeal to a mythic narrative. And as Richard Kearney suggests, the extemporal character of mythic narratives facilitates the representation of an originating continuity.

> The mythic appeal to the Sacred Time of the originating heroes of the nation or community is, of course, an appeal to an order outside of historical time (understood as a linear sequence of contingent events). By virtue of their repeatability, the mythic acts of the founding fathers became timeless; they operate according to ritualistic and circular paradigms which redeem us from the depressing facts of the present; they bring history to a standstill and enable us to attend to ancestral voices; they make us contemporaries with the 'dead generations' of the past, transmitting the discontinuities of our empirical existence into the unbroken continuity of an imaginery essence. In short, they create what generally goes by the name of <u>tradition</u>.[64]

This mythic appeal to an extemporal intelligibility, situates the process of intepretation within the ideal domain of hibernotopian illusions. By using mythic paradigms to structure the interpretation of memory, memory itself may be enlisted to legitimate the identitarian continuum of nationalism's historical narrative.

Extemporising the context of signification and interpretation, as Kearney suggests, amounts to "bringing history to a standstill". By extemporising the past, the matrix of historical interpretation may be rendered static. History may thus be reduced to a reiterative cycle of univocal depictions and immutable truths. The past may be stationed as a reified intelligible essence, interpretable only as national through the stationing signifiers which reaffirm the immutable truth of a tradition that is identitarian, immutable and inescapable.

This extemporal past facilitates the resignification of a

temporal present. The removal of the heterogenising force of temporality, permits the birth of the national illusion of universal intelligibility as historically transcendental. Immune to the accidental force of historicity, the nation is conceived in a hypostatic union between the past, the present and the future.

In this extemporal continuum of interpretation, all actions and meanings may be resignified as indicative or otherwise of the national destiny. In this interpretative domain, all such resignifications are affected by the belief that each particularity (action or meaning) is enacted within the extemporal framework of a teleologically structured history. In this teleological domain, each particularity is either indicative of the universal truth of the national destiny or it is subversive of that destiny. As such, the consideration of the particularity of the particular (of the radical individuality and heterogeneity of sensibility, belief, illusions, memories, traditions) may _in extremis_ be viewed as ideologically subversive, a heretical denial of the natural order of nationalism's historical and political identity.

Under the sway of this extemporal illusion of historical order, all that represents particularity, heterogeneity and difference may be legitimately targeted, so that the _Geist_ of a teleological history may be cleansed of the ethnic and political impurities which prevent its realisation in the world of fact.

The redemptive destiny which the _Geist_ of identitarian history promises, is expressed in the IRA's philosopheme of extemporal intelligibility "Tiocfaidh ár Lá" (our day will come). Under the sway of this vicious eschatology, the territorialities that transform the

particular data of memory and imagination into universal symbols of identity, themselves become transformed from assertions of universal desire into complicit symbols of totality. They are transformed from being "symbols adequate to our predicament" [65] to being symbols constituent of our predicament.

It is in surrendering the signifying force of particularity to the totalising force of universality that this transformation occurs. For by permitting the particular perceptions of subjectivity to be familiarised as indicative of a universal illusion of unitary intelligibility, the imperium of political and ethnic totality may be legitimised.

The extemporal dimensionality of nationalist history serves another useful purpose in the domain of illusion. The ironic myth that lies at the centre of nationalism alleges that nationalism is an ancient truth, whose atavistic images and forms testify to its legitimacy as the most effective response to the threatening realisations of modernity. Of course, nationalism is distinctively modern in its ideological configurations and this is undoubtedly the reason for its incomparable success as a facilitating illusion in the modernisation of western civilisation.

Ironically the homogenisation of society which nationalist ideology effects, creates the conditions in which economic and social modernisation may be achieved. The sacred goal of modern economic ideology, economic growth, could not be achieved without a centrally organised social order with an expanded clerisy, and a collectivised comprehension of the individual's social, cultural and economic functions within the larger scheme. And much as a modern

horizontally integrated economic culture replaced the premodern vertically ordered dynastic regime in the age of nationalism, so the governing metaphysics of spirit are replaced by the governing metaphysics of capital, and the Holy Ghost is replaced by interest rates as the governing developmental metaphor of social intelligibility.

But the extemporal character of nationalism's identitarian narrative, provides a discursive platform for the resistance of modernity through its tropes of antiquity, and its messianic teleology.

The eschatological tenor of nationalist historiography, conveys a sense of righteousness in the representation of the nation's path to destiny, a righteousness which is supportive of a totalistic approach to reality. The ideological goal of redemption from the fragmentary reality of modern perceptions may also subserve the anti-modernist theology of nationalist Ireland's indigenous brand of Catholicism. In pursuing the theology embodied in Pope St. Pius X's anti-modernist 1907 encyclical Pascendi Gregis: de modernistarum doctrinis, as in its hounding of W.P. Ryan's The Irish Peasant a year earlier, the excommunication of Fr. Tyrrell and the sacking at Maynooth of Fr. O'Hickey demonstrated [66], Irish Catholicism invigorated the nationalist response to modernity with a righteous theological imperative. The confluence of the two anti-modern imperatives would have significant effects in the determination of extremist nationalism as a heroic assertion of extemporal totalistic truths. For as Hutchinson notes, in the wake of Irish Catholicism's bracing attack on modernism

> Gaelic Ireland gradually became the Catholic insula sacra: a unique spiritual haven of traditional folk simplicity, free from all the evils of modernity - a secular literature, alcoholism, sexual immorality, socialist agitations and materialist ideals.[67]

The Irish Catholic Church's choice to resist the impact of modernity rather than apply the more complex religious thought of modern theology to the harrowing spiritual dilemma of modernity, has had significant effects on the development of religious thought in nationalist Ireland. More directly, however, the injection of a righteous strain of anti-modernism in the extemporal domain of nationalist ideology has helped to engender a messianic culture of redemption which finds its expression in the ritual of sacrifice and the righteous eradication of difference, which finds its legitimation in the identitarian cult of a sacred national destiny. Or as the Catholic Bulletin, the uncompromising journal of messianic Catholic nationalism proclaimed in 1933,

> You sometimes hear Ireland charged with a narrow and intolerant nationalism, but Ireland today has no dearer hope than this: that, true to her holiest traditions, she should humbly serve the truth, and help by truth to save the world.[68]

Nationalist Ireland's "holiest traditions" include the tradition of blood sacrifice, whose rationale subordinates the particular significance of the blood spilt (whether of the nationalist martyr or the nationalist's victim) to the universal imperative which an extemporal vision of national destiny propounds as total intelligibility. This extemporal vision of history, rooted in the hibernotopian Ireland of ideas, and territorialised through the dehistoricising topoi of literary myth, asserts an image of collective destiny in which the individual's particular rights and

needs are subordinated to the total requirements of the transcendental nation. In an extraordinarily vivid depiction of this subordination of the individual's needs in the factual domain of Ireland to the identitarian imperatives of the messianic Ireland of ideas, Paul Vincent Carroll writes

> She [Ireland] may well be destined to be the saviour in a world jungle of rank material weeds, and perhaps distracted foreigners, driven to despair by the ever-multiplying complexities of a machine-and-gadget-ridden age, will visit her to try to relearn, from that tattered woman trudging her way to the slum hospital to have her baby, or from that peasant lost in wonder at the yellowing barley, the unutterable simplicities of living....If <u>that</u>, instead of prosperity, population and efficiency, is the destiny of Ireland, then surely she is the divine instrument of a pitying God, and I, as one Irishman, will be well content.[69]

But in the modern world of epistemological fact, we are all "distracted foreigners", subjects alienated by the harrowing sovereignty of reason. And the subordination of the subject's particular cultural genius to the messianic imperatives of nationalist ideology does not as recent history demonstrates, assuage this alienation but rather serves to deepen it. The submergence of the sovereign particularity of the subject to the thrall of an ideological totality deepens this sense of alienation when the totality asserted is an affront to the subject's world of fact.

In the modern world there is much that is "unutterable", but the totalistic illusion described by Carroll as "the simplicities of living" is not amongst them. In modernity, and particularly in the wake of the "simplicities" of Auschwitz, the ideological simplicities of the identitarian imagination - beauty, organic belonging, historical redemption, and cultural exultation - are hard-won in a

world rendered immeasurably complex by the impact of totality.

But even in the heart of the totalistic storm, the nationalist's extemporal vision of the messianic nation as an antidote to the complexity of modern fact may be expressed in terms of an ideal organic illusion of totality. At the height of Nazi tyranny in Europe, de Valera states

> That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age.[70]

This organic ideality of the nationalist urvolk, was expressed as vast numbers of Europeans were consigned to the "things of the spirit", when the European countryside was indeed "bright with cosy homesteads" as its "fields and villages" were razed to the sounds of German industry's finest, and when the forums of modern wisdom took shape in the Holocaust into whose fire the "sturdy children", "athletic youths" and "comely maidens" of European Jewry were cast, in the name of an identitarian "dream".

De Valera's expression of Irish nationalism's extemporal dream of an organic nation redeemed from the thrall of modernity by compliance with the ideological illusion of totality, however ludicrous an ideality, takes on in post-Auschwitz Europe, an insidious demeanour as the identitarian objective for nationalist territorialisations in the domain of Irish fact. The evil which results from the pursuit of an identitarian illusion in the heterogeneous world of fact is amply

evidenced in the rote of killing and retaliation that characterises the modern history of the island. But nowhere is the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of an absolute adherence to the identitarian illusions of an extemporal ideology more exemplified, than in ~~of~~ de Valera's expression of condolences to the German Ambassador on the death of Adolf Hitler, weeks after the truth of Auschwitz had been revealed to the world. This action alone, intended as it was to express the ideological purity of Irish neutrality, exemplifies that moral blindness which may accompany the nationalist's righteous ideological disengagement from the modern world of fact, when he surrenders his mental and spiritual particularity to the ideal imperium of totality. That this illusion of totality is in part derived from the territorialities of literary discourse, deepens the acute dilemma of the writer in the age of totality.

Nationalism is a modern response to the alienated subject's desire for a redemptive intelligibility. In imagining the community as a connective, historically intended, naturally determined unitary illusion of intelligibility, it suborns the particularity of its illusions and mediates through language a universal norm of social, cultural and political belonging. That Irish nationalism embodies this ideological transformation of arbitrariness into intelligibility through discursive formations that are unitary in form and ethnic in content in a society that is ethnically and politically heterogeneous, renders its legitimating illusions open to the charge of totality.

In modern Ireland, the writer is the acknowledged legislator of illusion's transfigurative domain. But he is also the legatee of an

unsolicited inheritance of identitarian interpretative reflexes, restrictive territorialities, extemporised histories, and hibernotopian priorities. Enthralled by the ideological force that preoccupies the domain of illusion with the restrictive signifying practices of the identitarian imagination, the Irish writer such as Heaney is challenged to accept the "tribe's complicity"[71] or to discover in exploring his own field of experience, an image of redemption from the profane consequences of such totalistic complicity. To do so, he must recognise the character of totality in the identitarian imagination's hold upon poetry's particular domain and respond to the aesthetic consequences of familiarity between poetry and totality. In recognising this, he may discover in poetry the intoxicating freedom of illusions, as Louis Mac Neice notes, a freedom that is heady with "the drunkenness of things being various"[72] .

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Chapter 3

Imagining the Lyric: the Quarrelsome Reception of Seamus Heaney

Approaching Ireland: The Quarrel, the Lyric and Modernity.

In the North of Ireland, where everything is political except solutions, the relationship between lyric and society is repeatedly instrumentalised as proof or refutation of the region's constitutional legitimacy. That the politicisation of every aspect of human life in Northern Ireland extends to include the discourse of lyric poetry is unsurprising, given the centrality of literary production to the process of political acculturation in nationalist Ireland's successful struggle for independence at the outset of the twentieth century.

What is less unsurprising, is that many of the most vociferous politicisations of lyric discourse pour forth from the heart of the Irish literary establishment, North and South. The cultural presuppositions, political aims, and doggedly hibernified critical quarantine of this increasingly inward-looking debate, reveal the structurally unsound conceptual artifice which this politicising discourse aims to prop up. For within the sometimes personally vicious critical disagreements between unionism's aesthetic window-dressers and nationalism's righteous undertakers, there resides a deeply shared desire to maintain the ideological structure of a domesticated quarrel. As the poet and critic W.J. McCormack has noted in writing of the critical climate in the period coinciding with Heaney's career

> one of the general tendencies of the period under consideration...has been the failure to see Irish affairs in relation to anything else, anywhere. [1]

For the critic seeking to unravel the complex cultural and political

assumptions which involve so conscientious an artist as Heaney, and so passionate a critical establishment as that which exists in both parts of the island, the recurrent critical failure to distinguish between the distinctive content of the Irish context and the particularity of its ideological form is suggestive of consensus rather than accident. Indeed, the recurrent (though not unanimously exercised) critical reflex of accepting the mutually supportive ideological forms of nationalism and unionism, sometimes suggests that the particular domestic content of the quarrel in some way presumes the legitimacy of viewing its chosen ideological form as universal. This willingness to endow a particular discursive agenda with the illusion of a natural and therefore universal intelligibility, is characteristic of ideological closure.

By thus reducing the conceptual scope of the debate to the familiar and familiarising forms which the local content readily suggests, conditions are accepted in which the essential familiarity of the ancient quarrel may be admitted and the existential alienation that characterises modernity may be refused. Just as other ideologies claim total intelligibility in response to the arbitrary universe of modernity through familiarising tropes of intelligibility, so too do Ireland's principal ideologies resist modern alienation with ancient familiarities. In the 'Godless' universe of modern public discourse, it would appear, the devil you know is not merely better than, but vital to the avoidance of the devil you don't know.

The existence of a consensus among a number of Heaney's most vocal critics, regarding the proper ideological form in which the

plurality of events and meanings that constitute life in Ireland shall be considered, creates a number of difficulties for critics and poets alike. In the first instance, the nature of these ideological frameworks of interpretation take on a coercive character when their most extreme ideological allies create a violent crisis-ridden atmosphere in which interpretation will take place. This coercive environment is embodied critically in a pre-emptive reduction of all available discourse to the status of sound or unsound ideological testimony. In such an environment, all meaning is intentionalised, all plurality scorned. In consequence, the logic of division is maintained and the crisis legitimated.

By pressing every aspect of sentient life, however distinct its discursive function, into the service of legitimating one or other ideological anachronism, what is largely being defended is the Churchillian "integrity of the quarrel" [2]. By this is meant the right to defend the conceptual economies of mutually dependent and mutually exclusive ideologies (Irish nationalism and Ulster unionism), ideologies which are characterised by a profound resistance to the deeply heterogeneous character of modernity.

The problem for both critic and poet alike, involves the determination of a way out of the coercive logical cycle without evading the very real content of the quarrel. But the habitual legitimation of the structure of the quarrel via tropes of ideological intelligibility, demands caution on the part of those who wish to evaluate the actuality which these tropes reconfigure. For it is through these tropes - in which the various experiences of British rule become the oppositional dialectic of colonialism,

through which the multivalent experiences of "Catholic" Ireland become the univocal discourse of nationalist historiography, and through which "Protestant" Ireland's experiential diversity becomes reduced to the conceptual equivalent of a thermometer of loyalty - that the content becomes the form.

This familiar transformation from the Irishness of content to the Irishness of form provides in its domestication of larger issues a conceptual equivalent of Irish neutrality. In such a state of mind, the necessity of domesticating form is perhaps more central than the domesticity of content. This necessity is also most suggestive. The manner in which the quarrel is described is itself indicative of this deep need to domesticate and possess the modern world in which the quarrel arises. For, as Mc Cormack suggests

> even the term 'the Troubles' carries with it a sense of intimate possession. Unlike gangsterism, mugging, or 'the consequences of alienation within a decaying urban environment' your Troubles are your own. Only the Italians with their Cosa Nostra rival the Irish in the possession of their unhappiness. [3]

The persistent urge to domesticate the arbitrary conditions of existence, in such a manner, suggests that behind the coercive critical imperatives of Ireland's vociferous ideologists there abides a deep fear of modernity. Ideology is the form whose illusion of universal validity resists the arbitrary nature of modernity. Viewed as part of the larger context of the age of ideology as a response to the impact of modernity, it may be argued that the ideology of the quarrel's insistent transformation of Irish content into Irish form, attempts to veil the fact that the form <u>is</u> the principal content.

This is to suggest that the principal theme informing the Irish quarrel is revealed by the insistent form of the quarrel. That this form instantiates the details of the conflict in habitually univocal terms of a perpetuative cycle of mutual exclusiveness, signifies a profound resistance to the actual plurality of modernity. In evaluating the meaning of critical and poetic discourse in this milieu, modernity is the real issue, not history.

Thus within the ideological thickets of the critical debate relating to the use of lyric, it is useful to note that amongst some of the commentators, there abides a deep-rooted resistance to the embodiment of the arbitrary structure of modernity in public discourses such as politics and aesthetics.

For public discourse (as distinct from private discourses such as religious belief), post-Götterdammerung, post-religious modernity, represents the fact that the nature of human existence is characterised by arbitrariness rather than intelligibility. Civilising discourses which effect the legitimation of various social formations and behavioural norms by domesticating this arbitrary universe through naturalising tropes of intelligibility (the divinely ordained nation, the 'path' of history, the organically reassuring significance of place, the economic function of humankind), do so by ignoring the discursive elisions which facilitate just such a transformation. Modern lyric discourse, however, does not.

The distinctive function of much postwar lyric poetry is defined by its obsessive attempts to open out the process of its own specific conceptual and linguistic production to the universal forces of conventionality and indeterminacy, which govern both the making of

meaning and the origins of feeling in memory and experience. Accordingly, for the postwar lyric to embody an image of redemption from the thrall of totality, it must maintain the distinctiveness of its discursive function. For such a lyric, empowering its distinctive function involves resisting, in the moment of production, the foreclosure of meaning which the coopting of lyric by other discursive forms represents. In so doing, it resists its foreseeable instrumentalisation for ideological or civilising purposes, and undermines, in its defamiliarizing treatment of the signifier, the creation of intentionally structured discursive practices for the manufacture of desirable delimiting meanings.

Indeed, the redemptive lyric is characterised by its inability to foresee the full determinacy of the signifier. It is a discursive form which hallows and is constituted by the unexpected existential note. As such, the lyric is a form of discourse uniquely suited to the exploration and depiction of modernity. It is furthermore suited to denuding the civilising devices which are consequent to the recognition of this threatening modernity, devices through which the arbitrary universe becomes legitimated as an intelligible social world and through which terror is harnessed and beauty abjured.

The function of lyric discourse is deeply suggestive of the rule of the arbitrary. In its self-parenthesising descriptions it resists the ideological temptation to suppress the arbitrary by asserting (through the instrumentalising habits of the logic of identity) total intelligibility, total meaning. It is this resistance to the lie of total intelligibility - a totality which achieves social and political definition in the concept of social, political or national

identity (when the term identity is used in its identitarian sense) - which defines the postwar lyric's redemptive function.

In modernised societies where constitutional and social legitimation are vested in the plurality of constituent interests, the function of lyric poetry presents a rather marginal point of interest. In Northern Ireland's ideologically polarised society, both competing groups pursue ideologically structured political aims whose existence (unionism) or possible achievement (nationalism) both imply the elimination or suppression of divergent interests.

Both nationalism and unionism (which may be characterised as an inverted form of nationalism) as ideologically structured, ultimately facilitate a desire for domination without distinction. Their ideological structures are generated by a discourse which legitimates the distinctness and singularity of their right to govern/dominate by the natural/godgiven intelligibility of their discursively achieved world of meaning. Their discourses of domination exist by virtue of their suppression of the arbitrariness of human existence, a suppression which serves to establish a naturalised intelligibility which modern human society so desperately craves.

Difference is an affront to this desperate intelligibility in that it affirms the arbitrary background of the chosen social form. Difference asserts that what is paraded as natural is, in fact, chosen. For an anti-modern society such as Ulster, in which the legitimation of social forms is equated with the naturalness of the cultural or political intelligibility which are embodied in mutually exclusive concepts of identity, signs of difference are deeply threatening. In such a society, signs of difference threaten not

merely the immediate hegemonic imbalance of power, but the right to envisage society in these terms. Discourses which embody the plurality and difference of human meaning as their modus operandi are thus profoundly challenging for those who prefer the familiar horror of the local quarrel's consoling structure to the dreaded unknown of an arbitrary universe.

In defending the vicious consolation of this social form, therefore, cooperative discourses which legitimate the claimed identity of the dominating group are required. As a society in which the legitimacy of its present or alternative constitutional forms of domination remains vitally in the balance, the desire for dominance without distinction manifests itself in the extreme anxiety with which uncooperative discourse is viewed. A discourse which serves to highlight the arbitrariness of existence, the conventionality of language, the indeterminacy of signification and the selectivity of discursive attempts to naturalise certain meanings, will naturally appear tendentious to the poorly submerged interests involved. In the Irish context the lyric, being just such a discourse, becomes explosive.

As a discourse which embodies, investigates and re-imagines the process in which the arbitrary public universe becomes the meaningful private world, modern lyric discourse may threaten the "integrity of the quarrel" in two principal ways. Thematically, in its exploration of the artist's immediate world of feeling, the lyric's transformation of this specificity of experience into a universally resonant image may include as its subject matter the very images and emblems which are used to legitimate social forms through

naturalising tropes of intelligibility. The lyric's exploration of such potent themes may well conflict with sacred thematic imperatives. Furthermore, the very nature of modern lyric discourse is threatening to the ideological discourses of social legitimation. The lyric's modus operandi presumes the rule of the arbitrary in its defamiliarizing procedures, and demands that attention constantly be drawn to the unnatural act of language formation and discursive selection. In such a mode, and particularly in the context of the six counties, the lyric actualises Mallarme's injunction that "To disturb language and signify forms would be to disturb the community" [4].

In evaluating the relationship between the lyric and society in the career of Seamus Heaney, an elaboration of the ferocious debate regarding the reception of his work and an analysis of the nature of what is implicitly at issue, may serve to clarify the form and painfully achieved conceptual context of his poetic. The fact that in the course of his career, his poetry explores and threatens the legitimating discourse of the quarrel both formally and thematically, may explain why the politically motivated criticisms are so deeply felt.

It may indeed, shed light on the urgency of the desire to depict Heaney as a representative figure, and to use this artificially constructed persona as target for criticism of a self-consciously representative type. Such a desire perhaps facilitates a concerted attack upon the otherwise evanescent forces which inhabit much of his work and which define and engage the modern Irish imagination - cultural pluralism, individuality, the dualistic reality of terror and beauty and the consequent alienation that desires truthful

intelligibility and redemption. In remembering terror and desiring beauty in such a way, the Irish imagination would be equipped with the forces of redemption. But such forces, if legitimated, would deny the philosophical grounds of the noble quarrel and perhaps even threaten an ignoble peace.

Rooted in a feeling of existential alienation, the desire for a truthful and redemptive intelligibility in the modern Irish imagination abjures the easy familiarities of form and theme that characterise the traditional ideological battles against modernity. In the discursive practices of the postwar lyric, there resides an opportunity to render this individual experience of alienation intelligible, while accepting, through the virtuality (or non-absoluteness) of its assertions, a continuous awareness of the rhetorical strategies which effect this deliverance into intelligibility. Thus the function of the modern lyric, which is defined by its self-conscious rhetorical form, may admit both arbitrariness and intelligibility, or in other words the experience of modernity. It does so by resisting the temptation to naturalise, totalise or universalise the conventional meanings which it brings to consciousness in an openended and indeterminate way. The relationship between the function of modern lyric and the nature of modernity is thus emblematic of the contemporary human dilemma in which the deep desire for intelligibility continuously confronts the "unbearable lightness of being" [5]. For, as de Man reflects

> The question of modernity reveals the paradoxical nature of a structure that makes lyric poetry into an enigma which never stops asking for the unreachable answer to its own riddle [6].

In opening out to the meaning of modernity, the rhetoric of the postwar lyric thereby opposes the rhetoric of Irish sectarian ideologies.In considering the implications of the vituperative critical debate regarding the relationship between Heaney's lyric and society, it is worth bearing in mind, therefore, that what links the integrity of the participant's political quarrel to the ferocity of their critical reception, is a profoundly shared resistance to the arbitrary character of modernity.

The Significant Reception of Seamus Heaney

Whether or not Heaney is in fact the most significant Irish poet of his generation is a peripheral issue which only posterity may decide. What is certainly true, however, is that he is its most controversial. For the very large number of people who have come in contact with the poet, this controversiality is rather bemusing. The personality of Heaney as outlined by Declan Kiberd is not one which would tend to give rise to such bitter controversy. "Part of the man's charm", writes Declan Kiberd, "is his refusal to take poetry or himself over-seriously. He loves to deflate the intensity which only he himself can create, with shrugs, shakings of the head or sly self-puncturings" [7]. This public demeanour of the man with "those Ghenghis Khan eyes" whose "unaffected friendliness towards readers makes him unusual in a profession sometimes more noted for arrogance and downright bad temper" [8], is something of a contrast to the usual demeanour of Ireland's teeming poetic milieu which is sometimes characterised by a deeply avaricious intellectual chauvinism. As Thomas Kinsella remarked "Contemporary poetry in Ireland is a blood

sport or championship" [9].

Heaney's considerable success has attracted along with the accolades the familiar "anvil brains of some who hate me" [10]. But the existence in some quarters of this honorable spite for "Famous Seamus" and the "Heaneyboppers" does not account (as some would wish to assert) for the depth, duration and nature of publicly disclosed feeling regarding the status of Heaney, nor does it suffice as an explanation of its significance.

For in the longstanding public debate about what has been termed the "Heaney phenomenon" [11], his celebrity has taken on ideologically representative dimensions for his most vociferous critics- to such an extent that what Heaney attempts to represent in his poetry is sometimes less significant in their evaluation, than what they allege he represents as a cultural and political phenomenon.

That Heaney is a cultural rarity, in that sometimes he himself represents as much in the public mind as he attempts to represent in his private poetic world, says much about the rare cultural presuppositions which inform public discourse in Ireland. It also indicates the persistence in the public imagination of an addiction to symbolism, an addiction which sometimes serves to neutralise the very demanding literal realities of modern Irish life and to render even the most marginal gestures potentially subversive.

That Heaney has been transformed by some of Ireland's figurative addicts into a cultural icon, has much to do with the dilemmas confronting Irish society North and South, and the traditional role of poetry in legitimating the 'special category status' of the quarrel. Partly in recognition of this traditional role (and partly

as a genuinely civilised response to the value of art in the life of the state), the official perception of the publicly beneficial relationship between poetry and society is embodied in the unique (and in a state which is notable for its iniquitous tax system very symbolic) tax-free status which writers enjoy thanks to one of the more patrician gestures of Charles Haughey. In this respect at least, the Irish State sees reason to diverge from its usually Platonic line.

However, in so doing, the Irish state recognises a state of affairs which is implicit both in the ideological view of the usefulness of poetry and which serves as a point of departure for those who have accused Heaney of an unconscionable careerism. This state of affairs involves the fact that the poet is no longer an outsider in society, but rather one of those involved (however indirectly) in its "culture industry", an industry which serves to legitimate its discourse of social intelligibility.

In a candid interview given to the principal trade journal of the British publishing industry, Heaney admits to this literal fact about which so many other Irish poets are as publicly shy as they are privately obsessed

> After all, books are business. That's the new thing in Ireland. All that finding of markets and mastering of distribution methods and such. And suddenly there's a book buying public. It used to be that it was all more literary. Every Irish book was supposed to be a masterpiece. And a failure. [13]

As an author, the exact scale of whose success arises mantra-like as an issue in a number of critical reviews [14], Heaney's pragmatic recognition of this literal reality and of the implicit discursive

ramifications which it may have for the successful functioning of the modern lyric, is viewed with suspicion by those who would rather project a more naive symbolic image of the contemporary Irish artist. But as Heaney notes

> it's difficult to be a starving artist today unless you really want to be one. You can make more money than ever before from public readings, from broadcasting and from journalism. But that's exactly the kind of creeping privilege that Patrick Kavanagh's generation would have resisted. They had a distrust of becoming part of the establishment, as any good writer should. The middle-range talent will benefit, and after all, they are the bedrock of any publishing business. The stronger talents will use the money and bite the hand that feeds them whenever it becomes necessary. A generation ago, the myth of the writer as outsider was overwhelming. Kavanagh was the personification of a talent driven to wasteful pursuits. And all that was very attractive then.[15]

In admitting to the very different circumstances engaging the contemporary poet in Irish society, Heaney both identifies the reality and the dangers inherent in the poet's position as envisaged by the culture industry in the discursive process of social legitimation. Heaney's remarks are particularly apposite, given that the culture industry and Irish society's legitimation of a consumerist model of political intelligibility have become so intertwined, that a distinguished Irish poet-professor was involved in a recent advertising campaign to advertise the merits of a Japanese saloon car!

The public acknowledgement of Heaney's representative significance in this cross-fertilised world of Irish culture, surfaced most noticeably when Heaney decided to move from Belfast to become domiciled in Wicklow. On 17th August 1972, Heaney's lecture to the Yeats Summer School in Sligo entitled "The Choice" and referring to

the Yeatsian choice between "perfection of the life or of the work" , was accompanied by an announcement which the Yeats scholar John Kelly made on his behalf [16]. The response to this decision by a public poetic veteran of some six years is indicative of the aura of representativeness which was even then developing around Heaney, and which was among the reasons for his deciding to escape the spotlights which pursued him as a spokesman in the Northern Troubles.

The following day, Heaney's decision constituted the subject of the leading editorial in the Irish Times. The editorial is worth quoting in full, as it is a rare example of the manner in which the function of a poet is viewed in public life. It is also an interesting reflection upon the thoroughly consumerist criteria which had by then dominated Southern Irish society's legitimating criteria of social intelligibility. The interests of poetic production, and the use of poetry in the legitimation of the economic discourse of reproduction are curiously interlinked in this editorial response to a deeply conscientious decision on the poet's part. Entitled "A Poet's Life", it states,

> The news report that Mr. Seamus Heaney intends to retire from the staff of Queen's University, Belfast, to live in County Wicklow and devote himself to poetry raises some speculation.
> Can any poet- if it is not an impertinence to ask the question - live from poetry? That one should even contemplate doing so has such an encouraging sound that it may be perverse to pursue the inquiry.
> Scott has something to say to the effect that no man should depend altogether on his writing. He retained for most of his life legal appointments. Mathew Arnold was an inspector of schools. Byron's aristocratic soul resented the idea of making money out of poetry (he tended to give it away), but he earned a great deal by his pen, and, then, he had private means. Wordsworth took a sinecure to help him live for poetry. Burns was given a job.
> Nearer home, Yeats presumably made nothing as a director

of the Abbey Theatre, and can be taken as the great exemplar of a wholly dedicated life. But there are usually supplementary streams to feed the river of an acknowledged genius. Joyce found it so.

* * *

Museums, universities, Civil Service (old style) - these provided means of livelihood for poets. Yeats attempted unsuccessfully to get on to the staff of Trinity College. Hyde was a professor in University College, Dublin. James Stephens was appointed Registrar to the National Gallery. Not every poet could command £1,000 for a poem, as Tennyson did (once), or catch the popular taste as Kipling taught it.

Nowadays, the universities of America provide a middle way for the writer. Part of the year can be spent there, and it subsidises the rest. This is a more suitable soil for raising literature in than hectic lecture tours.
Mr Haughey's famous legislation, which spares creative artists from the toll of income tax, presupposes that they have income to tax. The amount a poet makes is unlikely at any time to contribute much to the national exchequer - not, certainly, a poet with wife and family.

But there is no need to worry over Mr. Heaney's brave decision. A poet nowadays, who has attained his reputation, will be offered ways of supplementing the income from his verse. Mr. Angus Wilson, the novelist, gave up his position in the British Museum to devote himself to writing. He discovered that the time taken up by television and radio, by lectures, by all the other lives, came to more than the hours he gave up daily to the Museum.

* * *

Friends of T.S. Eliot came together to rescue the poet from his place in a bank. He might have been quieter there than a poet in the hills, where the media may haunt him.
The great thing is that Mr. Heaney should do what is best for his art. Good poets are in short supply. They always were.[17]

There exists nowhere in this editorial a suggestion of what Heaney terms the "myth of the writer as outsider". That an editorial in such an influential newspaper whose readership spans the border should be given over to a consideration of the economic function of a poet, is indicative of the degree to which (through the mediating impact of the culture industry) the distinct discursive <u>function</u> of poetry may become increasingly entwined with the <u>use</u> of poetry as

legitimating testimony to alternative social and economic discursive forms of intelligibility.

The business of poetry and poetry as business are indistinguishable discourses in this conflation of the function and use of poetry. The distinction between the poetics of literary production and the socio-economic discourse of cultural reproduction may thus become increasingly blurred. In the leader writer's unfolding employment record for many of the English literary canon's leading figures, the representative value of the poet is couched in terms of the basic law of the discourse of economic intelligibility, that of supply and demand - "Good poets are in short supply" - not of aesthetic intelligibility. The issue of representativeness therefore, permits the consideration of poetic function as an aspect of poetic use.

The rather curious choice of editorial slant tends to overshadow the significant fact that Heaney's choice merited an editorial. While this editorial is rather marginal in its treatment of the discursive function of poetry, it does as a curiosity piece reveal the degree to which the distinctive function of poetry may become subsumed in the explication of other distinctive discursive issues. That Heaney's choice should be a matter of national public record recalls previous public perceptions regarding the public responsibilities of the poet in a time of crisis. However, the Irish Times piece is at least benevolent, in that it does not ascribe to Heaney the responsibility to perform a distinctive economic function in the process of poetic production however much it is presumed. Other critics of Heaney's representativeness would not be so

percipient.

That Heaney's move merited such coverage clearly highlights the representativeness of the poet by that time. Bardism has many faces. That his representativeness should be discussed in the rather curious terms of his economic function in society reveals the degree to which the question of representativeness may involve the intersplicing of alternative discursive assumptions. In such a fusion of discursive practices (i.e. culture/politics, art/ideology, culture/economics) the use of one discourse may distort the function of the other.

In this case the use of poetry for the familiarization of socio-economic ends may imply that the distinctive defamiliarizing function of modern poetic discourse, which resists the illusory full determinacy of meaning upon which such non-aesthetic discourses depend for the legitimation of their intelligibility, may be submerged.

What these discursive conflations indicate is that the desire to establish representativeness as an inextricable aspect of poetry, involves an instrumentalisation of the function of poetry in the service of another discursive end. The issue of the representativeness of the poet involves the subservience of the function of modern poetry to the use of poetry by other discursive forms. The function of modern poetry serves to imagine the universal freedom which the illusoriness of its intelligibility permits, while the use of poetry by other discourses serves to define a representative restriction which the imperatives of these discourses demand.

The other distinctive editorial response to Heaney's decision is

more than clear about what it perceives to be the real agenda of this discourse of poetic representativeness. In its editorial entitled "CHEERIOH", the Protestant Telegraph, an increasingly popular sectarian newspaper which had been founded in February 1966 by Ian Paisley, expressed its disdainful tribute to the departing poet

> I hear that Seamus Heaney has left Ashley Avenue to move to his spiritual home - County Wicklow, to be precise. His departure from the Ulster scene certainly will not be regarded with regret in Protestant quarters. This man is described as being one of the foremost "Irish" poets and intellectuals of modern times, but personally speaking, I cannot discern any aspect of his writings which would engender incredulous amazement at his talents. Indeed, his work seems to be rather rechauffe as we have read and seen something like it before. Some months ago a programme for schools was broadcast which included a piece by Heaney, and I was filled with astonishment and resentment that such an item was considered suitable for dissimination [sic] by radio. It struck me as being as blatant a piece of papist propaganda as I ever listened to....However, if reports be true, Heaney has removed himself to the Pope's colony and it is to be hoped he will remain domiciled in that land flowing with milk and honey. [18]

Given that the lead up to Heaney's decision to move South included death-threats from loyalist paramilitaries [19] who would presumably be amongst the targeted readership of Paisley's paper, the emergence of a transsectarian consensus regarding the representativeness of Heaney as constituting an issue, clearly involves deeper ideological suspicions than such protestations of local colour would suggest. Bearing in mind that it is the Heaney of Wintering Out who is so regarded in these remarks, three years prior to the controversial reception of North, one may deduce that from an early point in his career he did not seem to fit into the structure of the quarrel in a way that was acceptable to the quarrel's main protagonists.

The subsequent public demonisation of Heaney in certain quarters as

a representative figure, includes attempts to situate him and his work within the familiarising discursive framework of the quarrel by forcing his lyric testimony to repay the cultural debts of its conceptually bankrupt ideological economy. Almost twenty years later, he would again become the subject of a campaign of demonisation in the national media, but this time it would emanate from a stout defender of "the Pope's colony" who would himself attack Heaney's failure to place as the central subject of his work "that land flowing with milk and honey".

Fennell's Romantic Ireland and the "Heaney Phenomenon"

On the eve of the Irish state's commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, the Irish Times initiated its coverage of "the relevance of the Rising" [20] by including an article penned by the nationalist commentator and critic Desmond Fennell condemning Heaney's poetic reputation as the result of a carefully devised sell-out of nationalist imperatives. The political context of Fennell's remarks serve as a reminder of the ideological subtext which underwrites the passionate controversy that ensued.

Fennell has been a prominent protagonist in the "revisionist" debate regarding the proper historiographical treatment of Ireland's revolutionary narrative [21], a debate in which the central ideological presumptions of Irish political, historical and cultural discourses have been heatedly discussed.

Fennell's ideological position is unequivocally nationalist (or "republican" in the irredentist sense of the term) who, according to an interviewer "describes the use of violence in the North as a

response to the denial of the national identity of 600,000 people" [22]. The absence of a qualifying adjective defining the ethical validity of this "response", permits the critic to include among the range of interpretations of this statement, an assumption that the assertion of "the national identity" is an ideological precept so absolute in character and exclusive in nature as to legitimate the killing and maiming of those who by definition are not included in this identitarian nation.

Fennell's ideological position defines the outer reaches of nationalist opinion in Ireland. It is noteworthy that his analysis of the situation in the six counties consistently distinguishes between what he believes to be the problem (the self-evident depravity of sectarian aspects of unionist rule), and the violence which he views as being an exceptional response to the problem.

In the face of a depressing welter of evidence regarding the cyclical nature of sectarian violence in Ulster and indeed of its disturbingly constant geographical definition along the "narrow ground" of conflict, Fennell asserts of the Northern Catholic community that "it was not in their accepted character to produce men and women of the IRA whom we have seen in action these past twenty years; in terms of character alone, this was a revolution" [23].

The author's characterisation of the revolutionary character of the IRA (implicitly extending beyond "character alone") as an exceptional response to difficult circumstances, serves to legitimate the idea that their actions are a response to the content of the problem rather than embodying the ideological form of the quarrel. Such a distinction refutes the view that the IRA (and their violent

opponents) embody and perpetuate the problem through actions which serve to legitimate the ideological form of the issue by perpetuating the cyclical savagery of the content. For this nationalist critic, the killing of more than 3,000 people in a close-knit society is a "sub-theme" which diverts attention from the larger theme of Northern Irish society. In describing how this sub-theme has been received as the problem he states that

> the armed conflict between a small section of the Irish community and the British forces and their supporters, which, because of its noisy drama and lethal character, has come to signify 'the Northern Ireland conflict' internationally [24].

In this struggle in which the Irish who constitute a "community", are opposed by a group who are defined alternatively as the "supporters" of British force, the concentration on the violent aspect of the complex cultural situation is viewed as a distracting substitution of effect for cause. Whilst this view is aimed to counter the equally misleading aspect of unionist denial of the intrinsic form of the problem - a view which asserts that what occurs is merely a "security" problem remediable by a combination of constitutional prejudice, state terrorism and political closure - it does so by denying the larger truth. Violence in the province of Northern Ireland (and the category of "men of violence" has at various times extended to include paramilitaries, clergymen, soldiers, policemen and politicians in both parts of the island) is both part of the problem and a response to the problem. Violence embodies both the content and legitimating form of the quarrel.

Fennell's avoidance of this fact is rooted in his passionate defence of nationalism's ideological form in the domains of art and

politics. His self-consciously representative critique (he is inordinately fond of the "royal we") embodies a rearguard action against the revision of the ideological premisses which constitute the "integrity of the quarrel".

In rendering so transparent the ideological agenda which motivates and defines his public demonisation of Heaney, Fennell provides an invaluable resource to the critic who seeks to contextualise the reticent rationale of Heaney's lyric poetics. His critique, which manages to include most of the commonplace assumptions of Irish nationalism's ideological view of the use of literature as a legitimating discourse, also succeeds in situating this utilitarian view as a defensive response to the experience of modernity which the function of the postwar lyric so depicts. For within the controversial debate which Fennell evoked there resides a public parallel to the private struggle which is central to Heaney's career - the struggle to envisage a redemptive lyric in irredentist times.

The timing of Fennell's intervention coincided with a national debate regarding the appropriate manner in which the events of 1916 should be commemorated. A resume of this debate will serve to define the context and broad implications of Fennell's criticisms.

The proposed commemoration was to contrast with the tide of triumphalist nationalism which had characterised the commemorative celebrations of 1966. The earlier celebrations involving pageants in Croke Park and elaborate and costly televison docu-drama had involved writers, including Heaney [25], in a public celebration of the Rising as the defining moment in Irish history. These commemorations also coincided with heightening tensions in Northern Ireland where any

such signs of nationalist culture were countered by a stringent unionist response.

In the commemorative month of April 1966, the B Specials were mobilised, and a ban was imposed to prevent "trains from the South from coming to commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Rising" [26]. In the month following the commemorations the first victims of the present cycle of violence were claimed. The murder of Mrs. Gould on May 7th, followed by the shooting of John Scullion on May 27th, and culminating in the "Malvern Street Murder" of Peter Ward on June 26th, verified the recommencement of another tragic bout of sectarian killing which the UVF had announced in a communique on May 22nd which stated that "from this day on we declare war against the IRA, and its splinter groups. Known IRA men will be executed mercilessly and without hesitation" [27]. The familiar "Troubles" had arrived to counter the forces of modernity, heterogeneity and difference.

By 1991 the age of patriotic pageants had surrendered its naivety to the brute-force realities of twenty violent years. The decision to mark the occasion with a minimalist display of official recognition, was seen by nationalists to represent a victory for the forces of historical revisionism. In summary, the decision by the State not to celebrate the event with anything other than a cursory gesture, was deemed to recognise that the defining moment of Irish independence and, therefore, of the foundation of the Irish State, included within it a violent pretext from which the civilised State wished to dissociate itself for fear of legitimating the rhetoric of the contemporary quarrel.

That this dissociation implied the consistency of the violent logic of the IRA with the logic of 1916-22, did not appear to register. What was indicated was a confusion regarding a conflation of national content with nationalist ideological form. In this moment of confusion, the history of the liberation of Ireland would be surrendered, (as the Gaelic language had also been displaced) as too provocative a narrative. Rather than reimagine the form in which it could be interpreted, the content was surrendered as the implicitly legitimate preserve of the forces of violence.

Such an argument was, in the main, an evolution of the soi disant revisionist position, which emerged as a historiographical response to the deeply mythocentric reading of history which had informed public political discourse until the 1960s.

The State's attempts to tackle the content of sectarianism's ideological imagination, ignored the central problem of how that content is formed in the discourse of cultural and political legitimation. The failure to reconsider the discursive form of Irish political and cultural appropriations of history had once again led to the evasion of legitimate content.

That the events of 1916 are fundamental to the political and cultural fact of the Irish State's existence is not the problematic issue; how these events are re-configured in contemporary discourse is. But to reconsider the ideological form which defines Irish social discourse would involve a great deal more upheaval than a quietist surrender of historical content. It might perhaps involve the very problematic recognition of a pluralist form of social intelligibility. And this would mean a surrender to modernity.

The formative ideological subtext was ironically revealed in the course of the commemorative ceremony which had been the subject of so much controversy, and which constitutes the background to Fennell's attack. In a rather postmodern sequence of events, which could only have been conceived by an ineradicably symbolic frame of mind, each of which seemed to parody its own purpose, the minimalist commemoration unfolded.

Gathered outside the G.P.O. a small group of politicians awaited the arrival of the President, whilst outside their protective cordon at least one alleged veteran was refused admission. The arrival of President Robinson, the first female Head of State and emblem of Irish modernity, was effected with the use of Eamonn DeValera's antique limousine. Upon her arrival, the combined marching bands of the armed services performed the anthem and wheeled away without playing a single military marching tune. Finally, the President, accompanied by the Taoiseach Charles Haughey completed the ceremony by unveiling at the G.P.O. - a new collection of stamps. In this moment, the new literalism of Irish revisionist discourse was exemplified. In an honorable attempt to evade the rhetoric of the quarrel, the new literalism had become symbolic, and the symbolism literal.

It is the deep ideological significance of this new literalism which constitutes the centre of gravity of Fennell's scathing attack on Heaney's reputation. Fennell's pamphlet which was published almost a fortnight after his initial journalistic broadside of March 30th 1991, takes as its title Heaney's own ironic anthem "Whatever You Say, Say Nothing". Its original use in North's eponymous poem

serves to underline the caution with which the poet should approach the fatuous demands and interpretations of some forms of journalism.

What Fennell terms the "nothing-saying" [28] quality of Heaney's poetry, which is the allegation that links the somewhat disparate and often contradictory aspects of his critique, is an ideological accusation. What Heaney is essentially accused of is that, as with the proponents of the new literalism, he does not have anything to say about the national question.

> In no instance, however - not even in 'Ministry of Fear' which, without the fudging, might have been an exception - does he depart from his standard practice of avoiding clear, quotable statements about general matters. His poetry says nothing, plainly or figuratively, about the war, about any of the three main parties to it, or about the issues at stake. [29]

Or rather, when he does say something about the national question, which is an innate function of art for nationalism, he does not do so in a correct form suggestive of ideology's structured intelligibility, which is equivalent in Fennell's mind to not saying anything. Form and content being symbiotic partners in the process of legitimating particular discourse as universal truths, that is, in the process of verifying an ideology, this equivalence in Fennell's mind is not surprising. As Fennell asserts

> When I say that he has avoided clear statements about general matters, I mean - lest I be misunderstood - that none of his poems, nor a part of any of them, makes such a statement. It follows that his poetry conveys no structured worldview and is in this sense intellectually poor. [30]

For nationalism, the business of the poet as representative, involves the deliverance or legitimation of a "structured worldview". Fennell's nostalgic penchant for forms of universal intelligibility

in public discourse, which animate his desire for structure and order, is so fundamental to his ideological position that he discounts the possibility of any statements which do not serve this purpose as having any determinable validity. Decrying Heaney's opening lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford for embodying the profane equivalent of Catholic monasticism's ecclesial spiritual economy, he rebukes him for being a "free-lance mystic, outside the framework of an ordered doctrine of reality" [31].

In this proscription, it is the freedom which Heaney's cultural non-conformism represents which formally gives offence to the doctrinal form which the ideological imagination believes imperative. To underline the legitimating function of such doctrinal form, Fennell counters Heaney's poetic trope of redress, an aesthetic trope of the free redemptive intelligibility which the defamiliarising conventionality of postwar lyrics may embody, with an ethical deflation. "It is not easy to believe", intones Fennell,

> that, with no part in it for God or a spiritual economy managed by Him, a man of no proven virtue, perhaps even a bad man, effects social redress - corrects the world's imbalances - by mediating and delivering verses which 'contain the coordinates of the surrounding reality'. [32]

Without the free redemptive function of postwar poetry surrendering to the doctrinally formed uses which ideology demands, there can be no aesthetic salvation. What this belief seeks to resist, is that any such surrender denies the possibility of a distinctively aesthetic act of redemption in modernity. This is in spite of the fact that it is the distinctive 'Godlessness' (in both the post-Nietzschean and post-dynastic senses) of the public discourse of modernity, from Auschwitz to Enniskillen, that necessitates a new redemptive

discourse.

Fennell's godly critique, unveils its ideological form and its anti-modern agenda in a number of forceful observations. In situating the conspiratorial efforts of the "academic-poetic complex" [33] to establish Heaney as a radiant exemplar of modern aesthetic values, the critic again counters with explicitly ethical considerations.

> Just as the kind of poetry which Heaney practises is a product of the consumerist era, and must be seen in this context, so, too, with the critical theory which supports this poetry and judges Heaney's work the best contemporary example. As consumerism in the 50s and 60s extended and corporatised the public power, it carried out a massive assault on Victorian ethics. Victorian poetry may have ended in the early years of the century, but the puritanical morality, legitimised by religion, which we call 'Victorian', had endured for several decades longer. Now this morality was driven, by propoganda, the devaluation of savings, and legal enactments facilitating libertinism, from its bastions in personal money management, drinking habits and dress, and from its chief stronghold in the family and sexual relations. And because it had used religion as its justification, and made purity of the soul, and eternal salvation, its overriding purposes, now religion, too - for the first time in English-speaking countries - was declared an illegitimate intruder in the public domain, and human reality redefined as effectively physical and non-transcendent. [34]

The large number of issues which this passage gives rise to without reference to the distinctive discursive regimes pertaining to these issues, reveals again the nationalist's failure to appreciate the plurality of discursive forms which his ideology simply does not see. The ethics of public and private morality in both Victorian times and during the rise of consumerism constitute a large enough field of enquiry in themselves. The social depravity which appears to accompany any unrestrained form of free-market economics would

constitute another.

But the ethics of behaviour is not the metaphysics of modernity. His demonisation of modern public discourse is grounded in the ideologist's mindset in which only one legitimate truth-telling discourse may exist. The metaphysics of modernity do not deny the validity of religion as a legitimate discourse in the public domain. What post-Götterdammerung modernity does assert regarding religion is that its claims to embody a public universal truth, are no more legitimate than the absolute claims of any other public discourse. Religion, however redemptive it may be as a discourse of private intelligibility, is one of a plurality of discourses laying claim to intelligibility, none of whom may claim absolute validity. Again this is due to a question of epistemological form. Objectivity and the natural/absolute intelligibility which such objectivity would offer, is ultimately unattainable in a world in which the subject is an unknowable intruder in its own field of cognition, and in which language performs so erratically in the process of cognition. This indeterminacy characterises the metaphysics of modernity.

Fennell's conflationary condemnation of modernity, which he believes Heaney and his supporters represent, is part of his nationalist lament for the right to consider reality ideologically, as an organism whose intelligibility may be totally expressed in univocal tropes of history, language and culture. Not content with its status in a deeply heterogeneous world, the real core of the ideologist's complaint involves the question of authority. The overwhelming desire to legitimate an ideology as a unitary discourse of absolute intellibility and value, is supported by virulent

contempt for anything that in representing difference lodges a counterclaim to truth. Fennell peculiarly characterises the malicious forces of modernity which laud and inspire Heaney as "puritan" (which with his assertion that it is all a ploy of "Anglesaxondom" adds a rather piquant flavour of sectarianism to the mix). He writes

> The upshot was that puritan morality, which had shaped American culture from the start, and British middle-class culture for a century, became a homeless outlaw, searching, with its religious zeal intact, for new purposes and habitations. As the 60s passed into the 70s and 80s, it found its most popular new purpose in the pure, disease-free body, and its most popular habitations in the movements for healthy food, real ale, organic farming, unchlorinated water, clean air, smokeless lungs and slim figures - with slimming, jogging, aerobics, squash and marathons supplying the requisite pain. Its antipathy to sex found sectional lodgements in radical feminism and homosexuality. PC, Political Correctness, guaranteed purity of mind to intellectuals. And a fellowship of literary critics and related poets - principally in America, but with notable adherents in the British Isles - gave the displaced puritan morality a literary cause in the cult and pursuit of the puritan poem.[35]

For a poet whose defining characteristic is its "nothing-saying" quality, this is saying something. Fennell's analysis of the contemporary western climate, bears an uncanny resemblance to a depiction of the medieval Albigensians, whose manichean beliefs could only be treated with a firm Inquisitorial hand. In condemning a culture of difference in which human dignity is not determined by ideology's political or sexual anxieties, he is not utterly unrepresentative of aspects of Irish nationalist society in which traditional aversions to political pluralism often coincide with similarly identitarian rejections of social pluralism (regarding different lifestyles or beliefs).

By linking the modern forces of a decadent 'puritan' plurality with the issue of representativeness in Heaney's career, Fennell gives notice that his defence of the identitarian closed form of the quarrel is a last-ditch defence against the open form of modernity.

Determined by indeterminacy, unified by its plurality, the form of modernity admits only a literal reception of the fact of subjectivity. It does not admit as objectively legitimate the pre-emption of the randomness of subjective experience by a figurative discourse of total intelligibility (an ideology), however useful that discourse may prove to be in liberating peoples, popularising local culture, or in raising the fundamental metaphysical questions of human existence.

In the nationalist critique of which Fennell is so self-conscious a representative, the resistance to the ouverture of modernity embodies a defence of that ideological clôture which prefigures the eventfulness (erlebnis) of Irish experience. In this pre-emptive ideological strike, all discourse (regardless of its distinctive function) is regarded as sound or unsound testimony in the legitimation of a narrative of 'natural' intelligibility, in which the Geist of an essentialist history animates the functions of a sectarian body politic.

The coincidence of the issue of modernity and the issue of reticence in Fennell's attack on Heaney, signals a recognition of the formal rebellion which the openness of the redemptive lyric wages against the closure of the irredentist quarrel. It is a recognition that far from embodying the reactionary poetics of a "victorian" aesthete (Alvarez [36]), or of an atavistic conspirator (Simmons et al

[37]), Heaney's defence of the distinct function of lyric discourse embodies the open rebellion of a distinctly modern weltanschaunng.

In the closed mental world divided into the categories of sound and unsound ideological testimony, the failure of a poetic to embody within the creative moment that defines its discursive function, a prefigurative assertion of its discursive use as a tool of ideological legitimation, is viewed as an aesthetic failure. But, of course, what Fennell depicts as aesthetic criteria of evaluation are indicative of ideological form. For the ideologist, blind to the plurality of distinctive discursive functions and obsessed by the achievement of certain ends, the use and function of poetry are one and the same thing.

It is due to this conflation of the instrumental use of poetry by other discourses and poetry's own discursive function that the issue of the representativeness of the poet becomes so vital a criterion for the proponents of ideological propriety. To claim that the nature and form of the poet's creation in the moment of production (which is the moment proper to the discursive function of poetry) is successful to the degree to which it envisages and asserts its own ideological usefulness, is to acclaim the universal sway of ideological ends.

In the context of the new literalism, in which events are evaluated in terms of their actuality rather than their symbolism, thus removing the ideologically motivated necessity to symbolise everything, to reconfigure everything as ideologically supportive or otherwise, there abides a deep desire for redemption from the savagery of the quarrel. In this desire to accept the discursive function of things on their own terms (poetry as a virtual discourse

of interpretation, politics as a pragmatic discourse of conflicting views) there resides a first step towards plurality and through plurality to peaceful co-existence.

By thus emphasising the significant particularity of events rather than the neccesity to determine from this a universally binding intelligibility, the arbitrary terror of modernity may yield to an intelligible beauty. For the lyricist, this possibility facilitates the free determination of an image of social redemption. But, as Adorno notes, this is conditional upon the protection of the distinctive function of lyric discourse from its manipulation by the forces of totality. For, according to Adorno

> The specific paradox belonging to the lyric poem - this subjective, personal element transforming itself into an objective one - is bound to that specific importance which poetry gives to its linguistic form, an importance from which the primacy of language in all literature (prose form as well) derives. For language itself has a double aspect. Through its configurations it submits to all possible stirrings of emotion, failing in so little that one might almost think it is language which first produces feeling. On the other hand, language remains the medium of concepts and ideas, and establishes our indispensible relations to generalities and hence to social reality. The most sublime lyric works, therefore, are those in which the subject, without a trace of his material being, intones in language until the voice of language itself is heard. The subject's forgetting himself, his abandoning himself to language as if devoting himself completely to an object - this and the direct intimacy and spontaneity of his expression are the same. Thus language begets and joins both poetry and society in their innermost natures.[38]

Adorno's vision of this redemptive rapport between the lyric, which unfolds within the indeterminate margins of memory and experience where language interflows with consciousness, and society in which that consciousness reveals its distinct humanity by reflecting upon its political (in the Aristotelian sense) nature, identifies language

as the proper ground of this rapport between the polis and poesis. For the lyric to discover its redemptive role in modernity by resisting the "sway of totality" is to intone "in language until the voice of language itself is heard". In Heaney's terms this is figuratively depicted as "that moment when the bird sings very close / to the music of what happens" [39].

In decrying Heaney's lyric craft, Fennell seizes on this phrase as indicative of the unappealing modernity of his craft and technique. "Heaney's poetry", he writes,

> is not musical, in the ordinary sense of having the melody and rhythm which make a verse, or verses, clamber into the memory, or impel the reader to recite them for a companion. (Significantly, apart from a few well-turned and apt patterns, Heaney is not quoted.) The sound patterns are either just that and nothing more, falling flatly on the ear, or else they are pleasing in the manner of shingle sounding when a wave breaks, or water lapping against a boat. Alternatively, they recall the 'concrete music' of some modern composers, in which metallic and mechanical things, with their clankings, hisses, whistlings, thuds and gratings, sound off against each other. I suspect that a recurrent, almost philosphical motive in Heaney's use of language is 'the music of what happens' [40].

Whilst a number of aspects of Heaney's poetry may invite critical dissent, the allegation that his poetry is not "musical" and does not possess "melody and rhythm" is the least critically plausible (as I will demonstrate in later chapters relating to the analysis of his poetry). What the nationalist commentator means, in fact, as his numerous qualifying clauses demonstrate, is not that Heaney's poetry is not musical, but that it is not musical in the right way.

In this critical view, sound must be fully indicative of sense. As nationalism's ideological sense involves the recognition of fully determined signifiers representing a Geist of unitary forms of

intelligibility in language, culture and history, likewise sounds must make sense. In this light, the pluralist aurality of "pleasing" indeterminate sonority, and of more cacophonous "concrete music" of "metallic and mechanical things" (hardly a mainstay of Heaney's repertoire), represents an ideological aberration. It is indeed, suspiciously modern.

Fennell correctly deduces that "the music of what happens" is indicative of Heaney's philosophy of poetry, and revealingly defines any such philosophical ambitions as "suspect". In the mindset of totalistic discourse, this equating of "philosophical" and "suspect" reveals an inherent incapacity to acknowledge diversity as being anything other than subversive of the monological agenda. Similarly, the rejection of a sonic repertoire representative of the diversity of modern experience, in favour of an ideologically harmonious sonic cordon sanitaire, means that intelligibility must be imposed on the arbitrary. Even within the sensorium of audition, the sound must renounce the unsound.

Fennell's ideological precriptions regarding the propriety of sound exclude as aesthetically legitimate many modern artforms, from Schoenberg's atonal music, to Beckett's theatrical quietism. In presenting a matter of taste as a matter of aesthetic form, Fennell uses his symphonic predilections to bolster his ideological argument, that in being modern and in rejecting the use of poetic discourse as a discourse whose primary concern is the production of fully determined signifiers, Heaney is not a national poet, nor, it appears, even an Irish one.

In a characteristic evasion of the distinct discursive practices of

English literary form and Irish nationalist precepts, Fennell deploys the literary arguments of one of Heaney's commentators to make this political point.

> Thomas Foster, in his book, remarking on the 'terseness of an early Heaney poem, says that 'it recalls a characteristic tone in contemporary British and Irish verse: defensive, tight-lipped, understated.' From 'characteristic' subtract 'Irish'; the operative word is 'British', and more precisely, English.[41]

In defining Heaney's poetics as 'British' (a republican weasel-word which denominates the bearer as the enemy, however decorously presented), Fennell challenges the very public distinction which Heaney had made between his political allegiance and his poetic function in An Open Letter [42] some years previously.

The ideologically motivated attempt to deny the distinction between the discourse of political belief and the discourse of poetic creation which this denomination embodies, lies at the centre of Fennell's critical ambition. It is in nationalist terms an accusation (the ideological import of which is not lost on the British Irish whom nationalists wish to 'embrace' in the moment of unity), which serves to exclude from the unitary nation's cultural and political membership those whose discursive practices differ from the totalistic precepts of nationalist ideology.

Linking his earlier concerns with the distinctly unnational sounds of modernity, with this fundamental accusation of ideological heresy, Fennell rounds off his denationalisation of Heaney with an appeal to the foreignness of modernist form.

> Given that poetic modernism in English was pioneered by Americans, it is not surprising that, by comparison with Britain where there is little, **and Ireland where there is none** [my emphasis], poetic theory plays a big role there. In this respect, and with various groups of poets

> practising different isms, the American poetry scene is more like Central Europe than the British Isles. To a degree which must have surprised Heaney, this world of theory, especially on the East Coast, accommodated this kind of poetry.[43]

Whilst these observations regarding the origins and location of modernism will come as news to readers of Irish poetry from Yeats to Denis Devlin, and from Beckett to Kinsella, its ideological purpose is to alienate Heaney's writing from the mainstream of what he would view as "politically correct" national literature. Its inaccurate implication that before Heaney there was no modernism (modernity), whilst echoing a famously illusory claim by the nationalist T.D. Oliver J. Flanagan that there was no sex in Ireland before television, aims to make an ideological assertion rather than a statement of fact. What impels this critique of Heaney's representativeness, is just as much disdain for what he represents (modernity, pluralism, discursive independence) as for what he fails to represent (ideology, sectarianism, the integrity of the quarrel).

Underlying each of the aesthetic criticisms lies a representative defence of the outer limits of nationalism's discursive form. In accusing the poet on the grounds of musicality for failing to create ringingly memorable verse, he defends an aesthetic equivalent of rote learning against the indeterminacy of meaning which Heaney's melodic overtures embody [44]. By attacking him, as others such as Alvarez have, for his choice of words [45], he attempts to reduce the expressive domain of poetry to an ideologically imprimatured lexicon of aesthetic correctness.

The discourse of foreignness which permeates Fennell's critique is similarly aimed at the restoration of the structure of the quarrel in

the evaluation of Heaney as a representative figure. In prefacing his remarks about the foreign nature of the poet's achieved celebrity, Fennell expounds this rationale very clearly.

> Of the nine books which now exist about the work of of [sic] our most famous contemporary poet, Seamus Heaney, only one, by Elmer Andrews of the University of Ulster, has been written (or edited) in Ireland. This pamphlet is not a book, but it is, remarkably, apart from Andrews's work, the longest study of Heaney yet by an Irish writer....Apart from our general reluctance to write at length about our writers, it occurred to me, reading the foreign books on Heaney, that there may be a particular reason in his case. We simply do not have so much to say about his poetry as the book-length commentaries. On the one hand, we are familiar with the remoter and contemporary background to his work; on the other, we know that not quite so many of his poems or verse contain recondite allusions to Yeats, Joyce, Irish history, Northern Ireland politics or the 'oppressions of Catholicism', as those writing abroad imagine. Texts thus interpreted often mean simply what they say or represent; Heaney is not being an 'Irish poet' all the time.[46]

It is indeed remarkable that apart from the work of Elmer Andrews, whose position as a critic in the heart of the Ulster literary establishment would presumably render his views suspect for the nationalist, Fennell's work is the first of its kind in the Irish Republic.

Keen to seize the representative ground, Fennell voices his comments in the first person plural, as if speaking on behalf of the unitary essence of the Irish nation. This absorption in the essentialist discursive habits of nationalist ideology leads him to expound at one moment as a spokesman for the Mylesian 'plain people of Ireland' [47], and at another to see De Valera-like into the hearts and minds of the bookbuying nation [48]. In depicting Heaney as a "cute hoor" [49] the manipulative recipient of "all those prizes,

lectures and honorary degrees in foreign parts, and the legend of Seamus touring England in a Faber and Faber helicopter" [50], Fennell is preparing the ground for a critical position which is wholly in keeping with the critical tradition of cultural nationalism. The combination of foreignness, "nothing-saying" on the national question, and engagement with the modern reality of the book-trade, serves to situate Heaney as an escapee from the rigorously defined ideological boundaries of the quarrel.

The controversy which Fennell's remarks created was indicative of the reality of an Ireland that has manifestly changed from the Fennellesque memories of nineteenth-century essentialism. For the critic attempting to situate the background to Heaney's conscientious preoccupation with the proper relationship between lyric form and social content, Fennell's critique is doubly significant. In one respect Fennell provides an invaluable shorthand account of the ideological presuppositions which inform nationalism's cultural expectations. In another respect, the very public nature of the reponse provides the critic with empirical evidence of just how modern Ireland views both the issue of representativeness and the poet's dilemma which has in many respects served as a public commentary upon the difficulty of exploring the content of a local culture without surrendering to the ideological form of a local quarrel. Bearing in mind that the context of his remarks involved a period of national reflection upon the significance of historical commemoration, his criticisms provoked a tide of public debate which implicitly recognised (as Fennell himself presumed in seizing the representative ground) the ideological significance of the debate.

In other less symbolically addicted circumstances, a spat about the poetics of lyric poetry would involve a coterie of commentators in the margins of critical theorising. Fennell's remarks became the subject of a national debate. Beginning with a series of letters in the columns of the Irish Times the controversy continued from March until June and involved academics, poets and the bookbuying public. An indicative viewpoint of those who rejected Fennell's accusations stated

> All the codology about Seamus Heaney sleeping his way to the top, the attacks on "say-nothing" poetry, all of this is a smokescreen for the real nature of his beef with Heaney - the belief that by refusing to root for the Provos in poetry, somehow, a terrible duty is scorned. [51]

The reading public's recognition that literature in Ireland has become a surrogate domain for ideological debate, was duly borne out when the poets joined the fray. On the Pat Kenny Radio Programme in the week following Fennell's article, Theo Dorgan of Poetry Ireland referred to Fennell's critique as "shite". In reviewing these remarks in what was by now a multi-media debate, the radio critic of the Sunday Independent recounted Dorgan's position which led him to this intemperate outburst thus

> This view of Heaney as a kind of Poetry baron, a Larry Goodman of iambic pentameter, offended Theo, who responded nobly: "Poetry is suffering at the edge of language" [52]

Returning to the fray in the columns of the Irish Times, the poet and critic Dorgan proceeded to educate Fennell in the implications of poetic "suffering at the edge of language" by outlining his objections to the ideological tenor of the nationalist's remarks. "My quarrel with his pamphlet", he states,

> is that it betrays a Stalinist cast of mind, one which

> would prescribe not only to Heaney but to all poets what they acceptably write. I must confess, with a lively awareness of 20th century literary and political history, that I fear this cast of mind and will continue to combat it as robustly as good manners allow. [53]

This accusation succeeded in drawing Fennell into a debate involving the status of the Soviet embassy, and the belief that in defending the nationalist position against the tide of revisionism he was, in effect, striking "a blow for glasnost in Irish literary criticism" [54]. The public rebuff to Fennell's ideological tract, which culminated in a debate on the RTE television programme Questions and Answers involving Eileen Battersby who has written a number of journalistic articles on Heaney [55], was most excoriatingly defined by the poet Paul Durcan who wrote

> A propos of the pamphlet "The Importance of being Desmond: why Dr. Fennell is No.1, it has four curious features.
> First, the doctor's ignorance of poetry in general and of Seamus Heaney's poetry in particular. I have spent 30 years on a daily basis practising the art of poetry and if there is one beast I have learned to recognise it is the sort who - to borrow Patrick Kavanagh's phrase - does not know a poem "from a hole in the ground".
> Secondly, the doctor's muffing of an opportunity to report in detail, depth and breadth on the phenomenon of the relationship (or non-relationship) between education and poetry.
> Thirdly, the doctor's male-chauvinist-pig cuisine which together with his formula of intellectual honesty (weedkiller marked "Disingenuous") makes for a virginal aromatic blend.
> Fourthly, the doctor's despicable allegations against Seamus Heaney vis-a-vis the IRA and the nightmare of Northern Ireland. It is ugly enough watching the doctor mounting yet again his hobby horse but to see him perform while applying dollops of manure to Seamus Heaney's face is - well, a blasé brothel keeper would blanch at the spectacle. [56]

Unsurprisingly, the debate concluded with a series of intemperate letters, in which Fennell not without cause donned the mantle of the

nationalist martyr to revisionism [57].

Apart from providing in a very public way evidence of the ideological pressures which Heaney has repeatedly referred to in his poetry and prose, the fact that so apparently literary an issue should become so publicly political a debate reveals just how deeply the form of the quarrel underlies any consideration of public discourse in Ireland. It demonstrates the fact that, as Denis Donoghue epigrammatically states, "In Ireland language is a political fact"[58].

In manoeuvreing to exclude Heaney from being "an Irish poet all the time" and in suggesting that his status is dependent on the view of Ireland ("Ireland was not consulted on the matter")[59] , Fennell deftly links the content of his thesis with the essentialist form of nationalist discourse.

For traditional nationalism, Irishness is an essence which the poet may or may not possess or have bestowed upon him. As Leopold Bloom discovered, the fact of being born in Ireland does not qualify in the Cyclopean view. The ideological proprieties of a unitary Geist-driven discourse of natural and therefore national intelligibility, define and dispense this essence. In asserting this essentialist viewpoint, Fennell is out of step with the more accommodating vision of his fellow nationalist Seamus Deane whose revision of nationalist cultural discourse is redolent of a more deeply reflective, if still resolutely ideological position. In a memorable peroration Deane writes

> The dissolution of that mystique [of traditional obsessions with national identity] is an urgent necessity if any lasting solution to the North is to be found. One step towards that dissolution would be the

> revision of our prevailing idea of what it is that constitutes the Irish reality. In literature that could take the form of a definition, in the form of a comprehensive anthology, of what writing in this country has been for the last 300-500 years and, through that, an exposure of the fact that the myth of Irishness, the notion of Irish unreality, the notions surrounding Irish eloquence, are all political themes upon which the literature has battened to an extreme degree since the nineteenth century when the idea of national character was invented....It is about time we put aside the idea of essence - that hungry Hegelian ghost looking for a stereotype to live in....Everything, including our politics and our literature, has to be rewritten - i.e. re-read. That will enable new writing, new politics, unblemished by Irishness, but securely Irish.[60]

In this instance the nobility of Deane's ambition fails to consider adequately the philosophical aversions to so modern a proposition which the form of the quarrel embodies. As he would discover when his "comprehensive anthology" was launched, the principal ideological commentators are so attuned to the formal significance of the quarrel, that the ideological form of any rewriting, re-reading or revision would constitute the acid-test of any such ambition. However radical the presentation of the issues, without a radical departure from the forms which <u>in extremis</u> perpetuate the quarrel, such an ambition would inevitably falter when confronted with a body of opinion which is more securely quarrelsome than Irish/British.

In the nationalist side of the quarrel, the provision of an effective political discourse which serves to legitimate its constitutional claims is dependent upon the illusion of its universal intelligibility, of its truth. This illusion is not of course specific to nationalism, as the demands of social formation such as the provision of a stable and equitable government, depend upon the loyalty of its citizens, a loyalty which in turn is generated by the

acceptance of a particular political model as universally true. In a society whose constituents share a broadly homogeneous cultural tradition, the illusion of the universal intelligibility of a discourse such as nationalism, may be in some ways benign, as the substantial constitutional, cultural and economic achievements of the Irish State demonstrate. However, in a society in which this is not the case, the implications of the identitarian form of this universality are grave. For the politician, the possibility of redemption from the savage consequences of this illusory form, will ironically involve the determination of new political arrangements which while embodying the plurality of constituent interests must, if they are to succeed, embody an equally illusory claim to truth. But this is inherent in the function of political discourse, in which some illusions are necessary and some unconscionable.

For the lyric poet, the domain of necessary illusion in which a redemptive image of humanity may be discovered, is facilitated by its discursive function which in exploring the indeterminate dimensions of language, presents a virtual image of reality. To be redemptive in the modern world, the lyric must have no illusions about its illusoriness.

In the context of the Irish quarrel, the protection of these virtual claims involves a conflict between the aesthetic function of lyric discourse and the political uses of lyric for ideological ends. Nationalism is legitimated as a discursive truth, through hibernotopian tropes of history and tropes of place which serve to create the illusion of a natural or universal norm by a systematic overdetermination of the signifier. In this field of signification

(which focusses on the meaning of 'Ireland', the 'nation', 'tradition', 'identity', and 'territory'), the determinacy of signifiers is reduced to a predetermined horizon of ideologically correct interpretations. This process of determination, is clearly demonstrated in Fennell's aesthetic methodology.

"Poetry", Fennell asserts without distinction, "is a combination of language craft and public speech" [61]. As he goes on to demonstrate, this implies that all poetry, from the ballad to the lyric, regardless of formal distinctions, serves one purpose. That all poetry embodies in different fashions a form of public discourse, is not envisaged by the critic. Public discourse ranges from the operating instructions for the use of a B52, through the conventions of multidimensional geometry, to the labelling of Austrian anti-freeze. "Public speech" comprises many different language -games. Fennell admits this fact without recognising its discursive implications.

> Public speech, and by extension the public speech of poetry, has potential for good as well as harm. The poet who is aware of this - and of the implicit danger that he may do harm to himself or others [Heaney] - can want and try to use his poetry, boldly and prudently, for doing positive good to both. Consequently, he is able to use it for this purpose; able to speak boldly to clarify the world for his generation or to emulate the greatest poets and become one of them. He can comfort or encourage the oppressed or despairing, build a poetic bridge between opponents, satirise or castigate tyrants, ridicule cowards, lift the hearts of **his** [my emphasis] people, admonish his friends for their good or warn their enemies, glorify God or praise virtue. [62]

But public speech is <u>not</u> "by extension" the public speech of poetry. This is the ideological view of the subordination of poetry as a mere participant in the language-game of political legitimation. That

poetry may do all of the above is not an acknowledgement of its discursive similarity. For lyric poetry in particular, its dream of redemption is dependent upon not being an extension of the discourse of totality. As Heaney's poetry ably demonstrates, the lyric may involve many of these themes, by embodying what the poet refers to as "declarative voice" [63]. But the aesthetic nature of this kind of declaration in the redemptive lyric, is dependent by definition upon its discursive form. The very essence of the redemptive lyric's testimony against the brutal forces of totality, is embodied in its refusal to accede to the foreclosure of the signifier which ideology demands. Lyric foregrounds, ideology forecloses.

Fennell's willingness to evade this distinction is revealed as an ideological imperative when he defines Heaney's "effective silence" [64] in terms of its failure to accede to the dogma of total meaning. In approaching this point, the critic initially objects that Heaney's poetry has "very little world" [65], but that in spite of this " T he most striking features of the world-image which Heaney's poetry suggests are materiality and non-transcendence" [66]. The world which Heaney is failing to include is clearly characterised, then, by its ideality and transcendence. The ghost of Hegel arises once again.

What lies behind all this talk of "world" and "non-transcendence", is the issue of transcendental meaning. By this I am referring to the predetermined signification of nationalism's essentialist discourse, which excludes the existential diversity of historical, cultural and linguistic fact that characterises modernity, by imposing a univocal discourse which transcends this diversity. This discourse creates the illusion of transcendental truth, by its

reductive determination of the signifier. And this is the crux of the matter.

In order to legitimate discourse which evades the reality of a deeply heterogeneous modernity, it must control the structure of interpretation. As language is the medium of interpretation, it must be determined as supportive of this illusory metanarrative. Lyric functions by highlighting and exploring the indeterminacy which language reveals. Clearly, the lyric is thus an uncooperative discourse in the legitimation of a coercive ideology. This fact is exposed by Fennell's self-confessed irritation with poetry's resistance to the ideological imperatives of total intelligibility, total meaning.

> One way or another, there is an excess of poems that do not stand on their own feet - **do not yield their meaning, or their full meaning** [my emphasis] - without some introduction, background knowledge, or elucidating commentary....It is almost unfair **to inspect, for universal meaning,** the many fine Heaney poems which depict a person or persons in a setting. The infusion of such meaning into a particular reality requires the poet to be concerned primarily with his subject [67].

The use of poetry is thus about the pursuit of "universal meaning", which the function of Heaney's poetry resists. This ideological expectation is borne out when Fennell elaborates upon precisely what he means by "public speech", what it should declare, and why Heaney is at fault for failing to collude.

> The poet speaks as if speech was a dangerous minefield, and therefore unnaturally and uneasily, the language craft taking precedence over the contents. He 'says nothing' by avoiding saying anything about 'important' matters. But 'important matters', in the speech of a public speaker, means matters of interest to his audience - which for a poet comprises literate people in general. Let us call such matters general matters. So the poet 'says nothing' by avoiding clear quotable statements (in plain or figurative language) about general matters: the

> human condition, current affairs, the state of his country or the world, men, women, history, the future, nature, beauty, fear, love, death, and such like. [68]

Heaney's poetic failure is identified as his willingness to let "the language craft" take "precedence over the contents". It is thus the lyric's formal appropriation of the signifier, which is definitive of the function of lyric, that defeats the use of lyric for ideological ends. It is unsurprising in the light of Fennell's ideological views, that the contents which should subordinate the form are defined by the rhetoric of nationalist overcommitment. Ominously designating the proper content of a truly idealist and transcendental poetry as that of "home affairs"[69] , he criticises Heaney for his alleged sins of omission.

> Important sub-themes of this central drama are the general rise from subservience to self-confidence of the Six-County Irish during the past twenty years; the relative decline in self-confidence and power of the Ulster British; and the hunger strike of 1981, led by Bobby Sands, which for months, while ten men demanding better prison conditions died slowly, stirred the world. Neither the main drama nor these, likewise dramatic, sub-themes have shown up in Heaney's poetry, except where, in one veiled poem in Station Island, the funeral of a hunger-striker in the poet's home place figures. [70]

The poetic which Fennell so vigorously defends, embodies the ideological imperatives which put these men in prison and moved them to surrender their lives for the greater glory of a transcendental metanarrative. Fennell's willingness to perpetuate the quarrel by demanding that the poet accept its ideological terms, reveals the ultimate consequences of the logic of identity whether it occurs behind the perimeters of Auschwitz or on the streets of Enniskillen, Derry or Belfast, namely, that in the end human life is a secondary

matter, a "sub-theme". It is the realisation of this in modern Ireland, which explains the ferocity with which his critical excursion into poetry was greeted.

The nature and scale of the Fennell controversy, reveals the degree to which the traditional commonplaces of Irish nationalism have become deeply problematic for artist and public alike. The conceptual methodology of nationalism has been so successful in conveying the illusion of universal intelligibility in relation to the extraordinary riches of Irish culture, that some ~~acquaint~~ equate a refutation of the quarrel with a refutation of the culture. In such a situation the uniquely educative insights of a beautiful language (Irish) and a terrible history, may be surrendered in favour of a witless globalism, which is equally homogenising but less explicit than the present quarrel, in which the consequences for humanity of an identitarian discourse (however well packaged) are all too painfully clear. For the artist and for society in search of redemption from such a vicious consensus, the challenge remains to liberate the overture of ethnicity from the closure of ideology.

When the cultures of Ireland may contribute through the specificity of their insights to the recognition of a humane generality of experience, meaning and value, then such redemption may come. For such a moment to be envisaged, the traditional formal imperatives which seek to impose the particularist illusion of a universal intelligibility, must be surpassed by the formal requirement to see in the particular reality of every expression of intelligibility an image of a deeply heterogeneous universe of possibility. For the lyric poet, the creation of such an image

arises in the indeterminate domain of language.

Throughout Heaney's career, he has been aware of the demands which such traditional forms make upon his literary undertakings. Within his evolving poetic the riddle of how to write poetry which includes being "unblemished by Irishness, but securely Irish" abides as a recurrent theme. Repeatedly, in his critical prose and poetry, his reflections return to the relationship between the lyric and society, a relationship which is deeply problematic in so ideologically polarised a world. Drawn to the traumatic experiences of his fellow citizens, and threatened by the ideological closure which any surrender to the logic of the quarrel would impress upon his poetry, he comes to represent a conscientious figure bordering the threshold between a culturally specific tradition and a culturally liberating modernity.

For most of his career, the domestic political and cultural climate has been dominated by the very "hungry Hegelians" of the quarrel whose ideological prescriptions draw upon a long and entrenched tradition different in conviction to that which Deane so elegantly defines.

As one of the last of the "hungry Hegelians", Desmond Fennell provides an invaluable portrait of the ideological climate which has so preoccupied Heaney. And it is important for the critic to note, that despite the sometimes antiquarian aspect of his remarks, it is his ideological viewpoint which has predominated in the years of the quarrel, on the streets of Belfast, in the presuppositon of much of the critical writing of the period (which remained transfixed with ill-defined notions of identity, tradition, society) and more

significantly in the constitution of the Irish Republic. Whilst his brand of nationalism may at times appear unpalatable, it embodies a set of suppositions which have been very problematic for Heaney, and which, while too extreme nowadays for the vast majority of Southern nationalist opinion, remains a foreseeable consequence of the ideological form of nationalist presuppositions.

Flags and Emblems, Pap and Poetics: David Lloyd's Identity Crisis

Although Seamus Heaney's literary career has been the subject of a vigorous critical debate about the relationship between his poetic and the ideological imperatives informing nationalism's deadly contribution to the Northern troubles, none of the criticism to date has been quite so articulately accusatory as that presented by David Lloyd in his provocative 1985 article " 'Pap for the dispossessed': Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of of Identity" [71].

Although Lloyd's article only treats of Heaney's poetic output up to Field Work, and was not, curiously, subject to expansion or revision in the light of Heaney's subsequent work when the article was republished in Elmer Andrews's useful collection of essays (a full year after the publication of Seeing Things) or in his own recent collection of essays), Lloyd's critique provides an articulate theoretical context within which Heaney's reputation may be evaluated and indeed, challenged.

Lloyd situates his critique of Heaney's poetics against the background of an analysis of the aesthetics of Irish nationalism. The critic's analysis is sympathetic in its ideological orientation

to the class-politics of the Freudo-Marxist critique of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari [72]. Lloyd's critique originates within the belief that

> Nationalism, and the concomitant concern with racial and cultural identity, are, as has been suggested political phenomena, oriented towards the production of a sense of popular unity and conceived within a generally oppositional framework.[73]

In thus reducing all manifestations of identity to the discursively particular form of politics, he aims to relate his analysis to the inappropriateness of political structures operating in Ireland, and by implication to accuse Heaney of complicity in the ideological conservatism of these popular structures. He states that

> The anomalous character of recent Irish history derives from the fact that, unlike most other Western European states, the moment of nationalist victory did not constitute a moment of apparent national unification, but rather institutionalised certain racial and sectarian divisions. The treaty of 1922, which, after prolonged guerilla warfare, established the Irish Free State, did so only at the expense of also establishing Northern Ireland as a self-governing enclave with a deliberately and artificially constructed majority of Protestant citizens. But, although the treaty appears thus to have instituted simply another divisive factor in Irish politics, within the two states themselves its effect was to perpetuate forms of nationalist ideology as dominant and hypothetically unifying forces.
>
> In the Republic...the perpetuation of partition has permitted the persistence of what is effectively a two-party system, dominated by parties whose origins lie in the initial rejection of the treaty's provisions by one group of nationalists. Since both parties - Fine Gael and Fianna Fail - serve urban and rural bourgeois interests respectively, the insistent articulation of Irish politics in relation to the questions of the border and of Irish identity has historically been detrimental to the development of the smaller Labour Party.[74]

Whilst Lloyd's reductive political analysis may have been applicable fifteen years ago, the reorientation within Irish party politics in the intervening years involving the fragmentation of Fianna Fail, the

rebirth and demise of Fine Gael as a social democratic party, the emergence of the Progressive Democrats and the Democratic Left and more recently (and this the author like most of the nation could not have foreseen) the transformation of the Labour Party into a party whose political principles involve the attainment of power without responsibility and the buttressing of a troubled regime's attempts to stanch the flow of political reform in modern Irish politics. However, aside from the political inaccuracies of Lloyd's description, (with which a timely revision of his article could have dealt) it is the ideological motivation underwriting this description which is most significant for the reader of his critique of Heaney.

In Lloyd's reductive interpretation of the complex political and cultural weave of modern Irish history, he singularly refuses to accept that the aesthetic is a distinct (though not disconnected) discourse of intelligibility from politics. Within this uncritical assumption resides a failure to identify whether aesthetic discourse is in any sense distinct from political discourse's signifying practices. Political discourse is self-evidently a normative discourse, whose signifying practices serve to instrumentalise every moment of interpretation for the attainment and establishment of the norms so desired in the organisation of social formations. It is a discourse whose signifying practices are normative and instrumentalising. Aesthetic discourse if it exists at all, is definable as a discourse whose signifying practices are illusory (non-normative representations) and defamiliarising (non-instrumentalising).

Unquestionably, in a situation such as that which obtains in

modern Ireland, the interaction of political and aesthetic discursive forms creates difficulties for anyone attempting to distinguish the nature of the signifying practices which underwrite any given action. To deny this complexity in attempting to depict the peculiarly persistent and deeply-felt nature of the quarrel is to evade the issue. To depict the conflict as the unfortunate outcome of the existence of the wrong kind of politics, and redeemable only by the adoption of a class-based analysis, is as oversimplistic a reduction as to assert that an economic response would bring solutions. More fundamentally, it embodies a failure to acknowledge the central role which culture plays in the legitimation of forms of social intelligibility for the modern subject.

Indeed, the reductiveness of Lloyd's political depiction is challenged by the historical failure of leftist politics to override culture even in the most extreme socio-economic circumstances. The complexity of this area of overlap between culture and politics is typified in the Ulster context by the events surrounding the transformation of Belfast's Outdoor Relief Riots in the nineteen thirties from a cross-sectarian "working class" rebellion into sectarian riots [75]. The transformation from class solidarity to sectarian division was facilitated by the surrender of political interests to the imperatives of cultural solidarity, and this at a time of unparalleled shared socio-economic deprivation. And like these riots, the general situation in Northern Ireland is irreducible to simplified categories or singular aetiologies. The complex interaction of political, religious and cultural forces that serve to create the situation may only be disentangled by a studious attention

to the manner in which each particular discursive form interacts with the other. The ideological framework of Lloyd's analysis does not admit these discursive distinctions, and this inattention leads to a general inattention to the distinctly poetic form which situates the making of meanings in Heaney's work.

Lloyd's interpretation of the poetics of identity is inextricably bound up with his displeasure with the politics he believes to be implied therein. For as he writes

> The politics of identity, precisely by locating division and difference at the border of the Irish state, has tended to obscure another internal political reality: class difference.[76]

In coming to terms with the accusations which Lloyd unhesitatingly levels at Heaney, it is important to note at the outset, that these political criticisms inform his "reterritorialisation" of Heaney's poetic and of Irish literature in general.

Lloyd's analysis of nineteenth-century Irish nationalism provides an intelligent review of the manner in which literary and political discourse became so entwined as Irish society endeavoured to configure an alternative social, cultural and political formation to that which imperial discourse had thus far imposed. He asserts that

> It is within the matrix of British Romanticism that the question of Irish identity is posed, with the result that the critique of imperialism is caught up within reflected forms of imperialist ideology.[77]

Whilst Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century is indeed indebted to Romanticism for many of its tropological commonplaces, the recording of any such debt is incomplete without reference to the centrality of German Romanticism in the age of Mangan and Davis. However, Lloyd's intention is to describe Irish nationalism as an

ideological reflection of British Romanticism. This is to recapitulate the central thrust of Joseph Leerssen's intriguing study of national images in Anglo-Irish literature. In Leerssen's terms what Lloyd is suggesting is that Irish nationalism is an "imagological" discourse, a discourse whose own

> auto-image is primarily the implied negative counterpart of a given hetero-image...the auto-image is thus the embodiment of the ethnocentricity against which the foreign becomes recognisably foreign.[78]

But in Lloyd's analysis the question of Irish identity posed within the "matrix of British Romanticism" and "caught up within reflected forms of imperialist ideology", is only posed in these terms and only, it appears, posed once.

At the outset, the author fails to differentiate between the rhetoric of domination which nationalism's identitarian discursive form embodies and the rhetoric of differentiation which nationalism also claims to represent. The many literary responses to the problem of releasing cultural specificity from its politically totalistic ideological form, which writers raised within the nationalist tradition have long sought to express are thus precluded from being distinctive forms of "posing" identity at the outset.

Although the commonplaces of nationalism's rhetoric of identity-as-domination are characterised as Lloyd so articulately suggests,indeed characterised as belonging to an unchanging extemporal domain, the rhetoric of identity-as-differentiation which is subsumed within this illusion has continued to be "posed" in various ways by a number of artists. Thus whereas the discourse of domination may not have developed significantly from its origins in

the naturalising signifying practices of Romantic Idealism, the discourse of identity-as-differentiation, as the expression of aesthetic particularity, has continued to evolve.

But Lloyd's failure to distinguish between the ideal hibernotopian narrative that defines identity in terms of the dominative identitarian commonplaces of Romanticism, and the aesthetic narratives which have attempted to define identity in terms of the cultural specificity of contemporary experience, serves another purpose. By defining all expressions of identity in terms of the dominative logic of nineteenth century Romanticism, he may conclude that any expression of cultural identity, regardless of whether its formal strategies are universalising or particularising is expressive of a reactionary and retrogressive politics of domination. Such a conclusion enables him to close the circle of his argument by asserting that, therefore, all such aesthetic expressions are indeed politically instrumental and that aesthetics and politics are identical.

In evaluating Lloyd's circular argument it is important to note the principle evasive strategies which he deploys to justify his vigorous attack on Heaney's poetic. First, he does not differentiate between the discursive forms specific to political and aesthetic discourse. Secondly, he does not differentiate between identity as an expression of domination (identitarian discourse) and identity as the expression of specificity (distinctness of cause). Finally, having failed to make the two former distinctions, his argument naturally fails to depict how the distinctively aesthetic signifying practices which inform Heaney's work attempt to release the specificity of his

cultural experience from the totalistic imperatives of nationalism's universalising illusion of intelligibility. For within the preemptive confines of Lloyd's definitions no such liberation is possible.

Lloyd's criticisms of Heaney's poetics of identity are summarily stated when he argues that

> An isomorphism can be traced not only between Heaney's formulations of his poetic and poetic theories current at the inception of Irish nationalism, but, furthermore, between his poetic and the aesthetic politics whose 'atavisms' and 'archetypes' it pretends to sound.[79]

To claim that Heaney's poetics bear an isomorphic relation to the theories of nineteenth century nationalism, is to assert that the poet accepts the norms of hibernotopian discourse which have been formerly outlined. This is to assert that Heaney believes that language fulfills a naturalising function reflective of its constitution as a static, reifying relation between organically conjoined signifiers and signifieds,and that his depiction of experience merely instrumentalises this non-conventionality of language to assert extemporal illusions of universal truth.

Furthermore, this isomorphic allegation, asserts that Heaney's poetics do not envisage the relationship between language and the expression of meaning as being problematised by the inherent indeterminacy of the signifying process. In making this assertion, the critic is alleging that Heaney's poetics do not embody a concerted engagement with contemporary poetic discourse's attempts to explore the implications of this indeterminate universe of language, through the poetic strategy of defamiliarisation, which a conscientious exploration of the material, semantic, and somatic

contexts of verse form enacts upon the signifier.

In light of these allegations, one is confronted with an image of Heaney's oeuvre as the critic's objective corrrelative to one of the poet's bog people, a body of work retrieved untarnished by the workings of modernity on the naive transcendental imagination informing it, indicative of an atavistic world in which language is ritually sacrificed to the nominalist deities of a determinate organic universe of static meanings, transcendental histories and teleologically progressive civilisation processes.

This critical assumption which serves to portray Heaney as the last of the identitarians (after F.R.Higgins), also confuses the distinction between the concerns inhabiting nationalism since the Romantic age (the legitimation of cultural specificity, the question of individuation in relation to social, cultural and political norms) and the ideological forms in which these concerns have been habitually couched in nationalism's identitarian discourse of domination.

Unquestionably, Heaney's poetic involves matter that is common to Romanticism and indeed to other literary genres, as his exploration in the context of poetic form of the significance of nature's organic process, the epistemological status of poetic insight, the relationship between culture and society, and the import of mortality attest. Whether Heaney's treatment of these issues is an uncritical reiteration, as Lloyd suggests, or a reflective return within the parameters of contemporary philosophical realisation, may only be fully determined by an attentiveness to the way in which his deployment of poetic form acts upon the matter of his enquiry.

But Lloyd argues that this alleged isomorphism is indicative of a vital and emblematic insufficiency in Heaney's work.

> Rather, it is to address a crucial insufficiency in the poetic itself, one which permits Heaney to pose delusory moral conflicts whose real form can better be understood as a contradiction between the ethical and aesthetic elements of bourgeois ideology. Heaney's inability to address such contradictions stringently stems from the chosen basis of his poetic in the concept of identity. Since this concept subtends the ethical and aesthetic assumptions which his poetry registers as being in conflict, and yet at the same time thoroughly informs his work, he is unable ever to address the relation between politics and writing more than superficially, in terms of thematic concerns, or superstitiously, in terms of a vision of the poet as a diviner of the hypothetical pre-political consciousness of the race.[80]

This is the central preoccupying focus of Lloyd's thesis. The contradiction which is under consideration is characterised by the critic as "a contradiction between the ethical and aesthetic elements of bourgeois ideology". These underwrite what he terms the "delusory moral conflicts" that he characterises as central to the writer's concerns. Here the reader is faced with the problem of terminology. Given that the issue of redemption from the forces of totality and the problem of alienation is characterised by the quality of the poet's response to the relationship between art and actuality, is it proper to describe this issue which is a constant theme in Heaney, as being a moral one with aesthetic implications or an aesthetic one with moral implications?

If Heaney alleges that it is primarily a moral one, as Lloyd's simplification of the issue asserts, then he is asserting that poetic discourse has a normative function, and that in certain circumstances the whole apparatus of defamiliarisation which renders poetry distinct from the purely instrumentalising signifying practices that

permit the discourse of totality, should be laid down in favour of an instrumentalisation of discourse for the assertion of normative values. To accept the dilemma as a moral one with aesthetic implications, is to surrender the primacy of language's functional indeterminacy as the very definition of what makes aesthetic discourse aesthetic.

However, to accept the primacy of 'estrangement' as the distinguishing feature of aesthetic discourse and therefore to suggest that the status of aesthetic statements is illusory (constituting non-normative mental constructs), does not preclude the aesthetic from embodying exemplary or detrimental implications. The artist's particular discursive concern involves an awareness of the dangers of surrender to the totalistic consequences of signifying practices that deny freedom, but his action however so susceptible, is not intended as a normative discourse of value. Thus, it would probably be clearer to suggest that Heaney poses aesthetic questions with moral implications, whose "delusoriness" are limited to the realisation that art's function however susceptible and conscientious it may be, is not a normative one.

Lloyd states that Heaney fails to address the conflict between the ethical and the aesthetic and that this failure "stems from the chosen basis of his poetic in the concept of identity". The basis of this alleged failure is fundamentally determined by what is taken to be Heaney's "concept of identity" and its relationship to what the critic defines as the aesthetic.

In setting his argument within his ideologically particular view of the nature of the Ulster crisis, Lloyd identifies the recurrent

themes and conflations that inform his critique.

> The real basis of the present struggle in the economic and social conditions of a post-colonial state, and the peculiar twist given to class differences by such conditions, has consequently been quite systematically obscured. This obscurantism has further permitted, both within and without Ireland, a quite subtle knotting in popular liberal and conservative interpretations of Irish history: vociferous mystification as to the apparently insistent repetitiveness of Irish history combines with a pervasive insinuation that the reasons for repetition lie in the nature of Irish identity. It is the argument of this essay that such mystifications are inherent in the cultural and aesthetic thinking which dominates both the Irish and English tradition, and that the apparent freedom of the aesthetic realm from politics is in itself a crucially political conception. The political function of aesthetics and culture is not only to suggest the possibility of transcending conflict, but to do so by excluding (or integrating) difference, whether historically produced or metaphysically conceived, in so far as it represents a threat to an image of unity whose role is finally hegemonic.[81]

Lloyd's claim that aesthetic discourse which functions in this collusive manner with identitarian discourse performs a hegemonic role is clearly sustainable. However, the question arises as to whether this description of all aesthetic expressions of national experience as inherently identitarian is accurate. The mystifications which he criticises are indeed emblematic of the hibernotopian imagination that informs nationalism's contribution to the quarrel. But are all expressions of experience within the within the domain of nationalist experience necessarily so defined? Identity may be dominative or differentiating, depending on the discursive context. The critic's own reduction of the situation to a particular ideological description that denies a distinctive role to aesthetic discourse emphasise this fact. Perhaps, alongside many impassioned critics what he is lamenting is not so much the fact of

its embodying an "obscurantism", but that it fails to embody Lloyd's preferred obscurantist form.

However, the impact of his own particular ideological illusion serves to deny culture as a primary aspect of the quarrel. His evasion of the centrality of cultural discourse to the definition of the quarrel is then projected in his allegation that all who attempt to establish an aesthetically expressed relationship between art and actuality, claim an "apparent freedom of the aesthetic realm from politics". Again this is a deliberate oversimplification of the relationship between art and actuality, or aesthetics and ethics, and it follows from his failure to identify the aesthetic as a distinct "realm" typified by its estranging signifying practices.

The aesthetic may be identified as free from certain defining features of political and ethical discourse, in that it does not necessarily embody normative political imperatives as part of its approach to the problem of meaning, but this is not to say that it is not accountable or open to political and ethical implications. Lloyd's inattentiveness to primary definitions permits these obscurantist conflations to weaken his argument which is in other respects salutary.

His undue haste to score ideological points results in his failure to address adequately the complexity involved in defining his primary terms. His analysis of the concept of identity is exemplary in this regard. What begins as an excellent critique of the evolution and incorporation of nationalism's hegemonic discourse of identity, is offset by a desire to characterise this hegemonic strain as indicative of <u>all</u> expressions of identity in the domain of

nationalist experience. He notes that nationalism's identitarian imperative places stringent limits upon the interpretation of identity.

> The identity of the individual, his integrity, is expressed by the degree to which that individual identifies himself with and integrates his differences in a national consciousness. This identification becomes in Ireland, as across the whole spectrum of European nationalisms, a precondition to politics rather than a political option.[82]

In developing the literary implications of this identitarian imperative he provides a valuable critical appraisal of the manner in which any literature which accepts these identitarian imperatives in its signifying practices functions. Such writing, he argues,

> is accordingly endowed with the function of grounding, a term which serves to conduct the uneasy shifts between organic metaphors of the spirit and growth of the nation, and architectural metaphors of the construction of an institution. The slogan of The Nation succinctly expresses the ramifications of the nationalist project: 'To foster public opinion and make it racy of the soil'. The act of fostering, by which a people 'separated from their forefathers' are to be given back an alternative yet equally arbitrary and fictive paternity, is renaturalised through the metaphor of grounding: through its rootedness in the primary soil of Ireland, the mind of Ireland will regain its distinctive savour. The 'root' meaning of culture is implicit here, and certainly, in so far as a literary culture is envisaged as the prime agent and ground of unification, it is literary taste which is subjected to the most rigorous 'reterritorialisation'. In an essay entitled 'Our National Language' Davis diagnosed the consequences of imposing a foreign language on a native population as a primary deterritorialisation, a decoding of the primitive relation of the Irish to their territory, 'tearing their identity from all places'. That deterritorialisation is seen by Davis as occurring in three main forms: in the relation of identity to territory; in the relation of place-name to territory; in the relation of the people to their history, envisaged as the continuity of a patrimony. Language mediates each of these relations.[83]

Lloyd's depiction of how nationalism's identitarian expectations were

embodied and expressed from the outset in particular literary imperatives is a significant contribution to the debate about the poetics of identity.

However, a number of clarifications would aid the reader in his appreciation of the bearing of these observations upon Heaney's poetics. As interpretation is never conceived in a vacuum and always involves recoding/reterritorialisation and decoding/deterritorialisation, is the determination of the status of these acts of coding as either hegemonic or liberating dependent upon the extent of their claims to intelligibility? May one differentiate between hegemonic acts of coding and liberating acts of coding by determining whether their claims to intelligibility embody normative or illusory status? And if, as it would seem, this is so, is the determination of this distinction not fundamentally dependent upon a recognition of the distinct discursive parameters which contextualise the process of interpretation in different language games?

It would seem reasonable to suggest, that in order to evaluate whether a particular body of expression is indicative of hegemonic imperatives - represented in this instance by the territorialities of Irish nationalism - or supportive of these territorialities, that the question of discursive formation is central. For whether literature serves to ground or foreground is finally determined by its signifying formations, and not by the mere fact of its involvement with particular themes. This recognition is vital to an attentive appreciation of whether a poetic that treats of experience that falls within the compass of nationalism's concerns is suggestive of nationalism's hegemonic identity, or is in fact expressive of a

differentiating identity.

But in Lloyd's view, the identity available in a specific culture which nationalist ideology reconfigures as its own is always hegemonic and never differentiating. Implicit in this view is the belief that to write of the matter of Ireland is to write of it in only one way. That a poetics of identity may seek to embody the cultural specificity of a region as an example of difference, by considering its particularity as particular in the act of foregrounding is not admitted.

> That the concept of a common culture can be seen to double that of the common land (whence, indeed, the concept of 'culture' has always derived its specific etymological and metaphorical resonances) conveniently underwrites the nominal decentralisation of literary production. Preprogrammed as this development is, the resulting notion of the revitalisation of the centres of culture through the influence of less deracinated, less cultivated regional sensibilities continues to subserve the continuously linked fictions of indigenous and subjective identity. Just as rhetoric about enterprise and the free market exploits the image of individualism while masking the actual diffusion of power through larger heterogeneous structures, so the celebration of regionalism dulls perception of the institutional and homogenising culture which has sustained its apparent efflorescence in the very moment at which the concept itself of locality, enclosed and self-nurturing, has become effectively archaic, and indeed, functions as such.[84]

Lloyd fails to recognise that cultural identity may also embody a discourse of differentiation, which poetry's signifying practices may seek to explore as indicative of redemption from the homogenising imperatives of ideology's hegemonic vision. In doing so he fails to identify that the poetics of identity, which a writer such as Heaney strives to express, may emerge as a response to the hegemonic politics and poetics of identity which other "institutional and

homogenising" cultures such as British Imperialism, Ulster unionism and Irish "republicanism" enforce. That such a poetics of identity, in foregrounding the contents of a common culture as particular expressions in a universe of other particulars could represent an opening out to modernity is inconceivable to the critic. For Lloyd's rejection of regionality asserts that any expression of identity indicative of the particular genius of a common heritage is collusive with the poetics of domination.

For the critic, nationalism's poetics of identity which express hegemonic desires by configuring its particularity as a universal intelligibility in the act of grounding, is the only show in town. In Lloyd's view, the treatment of the matter of Ireland as representative of a poetics of identity is always already identitarian. Identity exists only as sameness never as difference. In delimiting the duality of cultural identity to the rhetoric of domination, the critic reiterates the false dilemma which has challenged critics and poets alike in modern Ireland, namely, that to cherish the distinguishing marks of one Irish tradition is to collude with the hegemonic imperatives in which nationalist ideology reconfigures these distinctions. This argument which is supportive of "Dublin 4's" (à la Seamus Deane) witless renunciation of a problematic identity, is even more resonant in the context of Northern Ireland's recent history. For in denying the availability to artists of a model of identity that is different but not dominative, Lloyd is reiterating the logic informing Northern Ireland's notorious Flags and Emblems Act (1954) whose suppression of all expressions of non-unionist culture was justified in the same

terms, and which is indeed, reiterated in the kind of academic criticism with which Heaney is received in certain unionist quarters.

Lloyd's failure to recognise the availability of alternative approaches to identity is inextricably linked to his inattentiveness to the distinct function of the aesthetic's various discursive forms. His definition of the aesthetic which informs his critique of Heaney's poetry is singularly lacking in attention to the various discursive distinctions that typify the aesthetic's different modes.

> Aesthetics, understood here to involve the concept of man as producer and as producer of himself through his products, conceives of an original identity which precedes difference and conflict and which is to be reproduced in the ultimate unity that aesthetic productions both prefigure and prepare. The naturalisation of identity which an aesthetic ideology effects serves to foreclose historical process and to veil the constitution of subjects and issues in continuing conflict, while deflecting both politics and ethics into a hypothetical domain of free play.[85]

The author's failure to attend to the specific discursive distinction of aesthetic narratives is here compounded by his conflation of differing aesthetic conceptions of identity. He fails to attend to the fact that aesthetics is inherently defined as a discourse whose procedures serve to explore the illusoriness of its own illusions and in doing so provide a "hypothetical domain of free play" in which the indeterminacy of language permits a transfigurative evaluation of all epistemological assertions.

Within this definition, aesthetics may serve identitarian purposes as he suggests, or express an illusion of redemption from the twin threats of totality and alienation. In either case the illusory status of the expression frees it from the normative demands of politics and ethics whilst it remains, however, accountable for

the political and ethical implications of this freedom.

But in this, as in the literary criticism of Heaney's early poetry that flows from it, Lloyd's view of aesthetics and his monocular view of identity is in the end just as identitarian as the poetics which he attacks. But in spite of the fact that Lloyd's identitarian analysis is misapplied, his critique defines challengingly some of the criteria against which Irish poetry, and Heaney's poetry in particular, may be evaluated as indicative or otherwise of that aspect of identity which nationalism embodies as a hegemonic force.

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4 Mallarmé, Stephan. Descombes, Vincent, op. cit., p.108.

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12 "Culture Industry" the term used by Adorno and Horkheimer in Dialectic of Enlightenment to define the relationship between the aesthetics of production and the economic values of reproduction, cf: Jay, Martin, Adorno (London: Fontana, 1984), pp. 111-160.

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19. Kiberd, Declan, op.cit., p.35.

20. Irish Times March 30, 1991. 'Today and all next week: the relevance of the Rising 75 years on'.

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27. op.cit., p.236.

28. Fennell, Desmond. 'The Heaney Phenomenon', p.5.

29. Fennell, Desmond. Whatever You Say, Say Nothing, p.16.

30. ibid p.14.

31 ibid p.42.

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70. ibid p.15.

71. Lloyd, David. 'Pap for the Dispossessed: Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of Identity', in Andrews, Elmer (ed.) Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 87-116. This article was originally published in Boundary 2, (Winter 1985), pp. 319-342.

More controversially, Lloyd's absolution from the critical imperative to situate the scope of one's remarks when the critique applies to a particular period years prior to the republication of the article, has been compounded by his most recent comments in relation to the question of re-editing the piece. In the introduction to his recently published collection of essays, he absolves himself of the need to either situate his comments in relation to a particular body of work, or revise the essay in the light of the four subsequent collections of poetry and one further play. He writes,

"Though it addressed only the poetry up to Field Work, I have not felt it necessary to update the essay since the central arguments have retained their validity".

Lloyd, David. Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment, (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993), p.4.

72. For a clear description of the philosophical structure of Deleuze and Guattari's Freudo-Marxist critique, cf: Descombes, Vincent. op.cit. pp. 173-180.

73. Lloyd, David, op.cit. p.92.

74. ibid p.92.

75. For an outline of these events cf: Farrell, Michael. Northern Ireland: The Orange State. A briefer and more dispassionate account is available in, Buckland, Patrick. A History of Northern Ireland, (Dublin:Gill and Macmillan, 1989), pp.70-72.

76. Lloyd, David. op.cit. pp. 92-93.

77. ibid p. 88.

78. Leerssen, Joseph Th. Mere Irish & Fior-Ghael: studies in the idea of Irish nationality, its development and literary expression prior to the nineteenth century, (Amsterdam:John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986.), p.9.

79. Lloyd, David. op.cit. p88.

80. ibid p.88.

81. ibid pp. 93-94.

82. ibid p.89.

83. ibid p.90.

84. ibid p.113.

85. ibid p.91.

Chapter 4

The Early Purges: Identity Formations in Heaney's Early Writing

"the artist is the custodian of human values, of sanity and tolerance, and these are qualities most needed in the North of today."[1]

Seamus Heaney, 1963.

From the delighted anecdotal insights of "Incertus" [2], through the prevaricating hesitancy of the Glanmore "wood-kerne", to the suasive professorial oracle of Harvard and Oxford, Seamus Heaney's poetic development has been sustained and motivated by an enraptured meditation upon the place and power of poetry in modernity's grim domain. His career as poet, critic, industry, national objective correlative, political bête noir or angelus dei, has been infused from the outset with an aura of representativeness.

As his career has evolved, the atmosphere enveloping his critical reception has become increasingly febrile. From the blitzkrieg unionism of Edna Longley and James Simmons, through the semiotic semtex of Desmond Fennell's nationalist detonations, to the ideological depth-charges of David Lloyd's class analysis and the flighty Romantic tribute of John Carey and Helen Vendler, the reception of Heaney as a representative figure has increasingly become a debate about the degree to which his poetic is representative of and responsive to the general dilemma of contemporary poetry.

In these increasingly vigorous critical and popular depictions of Heaney as contemporary literature's 'great white hope' or as

troubadour to the court of complacent conservatism, there resides a recognition that what he claims as his preoccupying poetic concern is indicative of one of the most profound philosophical question facing modern society. This question has dominated critical discourse since the Second World War. It demands an answer of our post-religious, linguistically constituted world, in which culture as the hermeneutic idiom of modernity has revealed the dangers inhabiting a collective desire to establish universal paradigms of intelligibility in a world characterised by fragmentation and arbitrariness. It has been asked in many ways, and it may be depicted in the following form: given the harrowing insights which the metaphysics of modernity provide, how may humankind envisage in a cultural idiom, redemption from the twin evils of totality and alienation?

For the poet, the issue is more specific. As a participating discursive form in culture's illusion of intelligibility, how may poetry embody a form of redemptive intelligibility that is neither evasive nor conniving? This query in turn questions the effective relation between poetry and the actuality which it depicts. Is poetry merely an elaborate hoax on the margins of an irredeemable society, or can it under certain conditions provide an image of redemption that is as intelligible in the actual world as it is evocative in the aesthetic's particular domain?

Much of the criticism that seeks to canonise or demonise the Heaney corpus, tends to limit the scope of its enquiry to the particular circumstances obtaining in the quarrelsome domain of recent Irish history. By limiting the definition of Heaney's poetic to the affirmation of sound or unsound testimony regarding the

particular political criteria which apply in that bitter conflict, such criticism closes off the possibility of examining his poetic as indicative (or otherwise) of a response to the general human dilemma in modernity, a dilemma of which the Northern crisis is an example and not an exception as its protagonists would claim.

To limit the consideration of Heaney's poetic to the particular ideological horizons of the quarrel, is to collude in the illusion of universality which animates and sustains the quarrel. And whilst the 'matter of Ireland' is thematically central to Heaney's poetic, it is only by considering the significance of his formal response to this matter as being **indicative** of a larger poetic enterprise, that his poetry may be evaluated in terms of the general modern dilemma of poetry.

Heaney establishes the criteria of evaluation in what he terms the "central preoccupying questions" of his poetic.

> how should a poet properly live and write? What is his relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world? [3]

These preoccupying questions suggest criteria of critical evaluation against which his own poetic may be judged in the context of redemption.

Accepting the criteria which Heaney repeatedly asserts, the critic may evaluate the merits of his poetic enterprise by establishing whether the discursive formations which he employs in the treatment of the "matter of Ireland" are in the end indicative of a generally intelligible poetic of redemption for a modern consciousness that is troubled by the threat of totality on the one hand and terrorised by the dread of alienation on the other. By establishing the quality of

his response to the distinctly modern forces that animate the local quarrel, the critic may determine whether Heaney succeeds in answering his most preoccupying question by creating a modern poetic of redemption.

The critical determination of how Heaney's poetic relates to the problematic dilemmas of "his contemporary world", may be established by analysis of his "relationship...to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage", in so far as these relations encounter the discursive formations that characterise the impact of modernity on the contemporary imagination.

At its most extreme, the impact of modernity on aesthetic discourse is expressed in Adorno's maxim that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric"[4]. Underwriting this assertion is a recognition that Auschwitz is the iconic moment in which the post-Enlightenment desire for a remedy to the radical isolation of the subject through the unitary illusions of identitarian discourse, realises its hegemonic potential in the experience of totality. The systematic destruction of "the Other", which Auschwitz represents for modernity, is the culmination of discursive formations that embody the "logic of identity", which is as Descombes writes

> a form of thought which cannot represent the <u>other</u> to itself without reducing it to the <u>same</u>, and thereby subordinates difference to identity.[5]

As the signifying practices of poetry involve a negotiation between identity and difference in a number of ways, then any poetic with pretensions to redeem humankind from the evil of totalistic thought, must envisage a relation to actuality which does not surrender to the logic of identity. For a poetic of identity embodying this logic in

its discursive formations connives with the "philosopheme of pure identity"[6] which, as Adorno reminds us, implies the death of "the Other". The graveyards of Europe provide ample reminders of the truth of this observation.

But the impact of Adorno's dramatic claim regarding the modern place of poetry also denies any redemptive force to a poetic which disengages from the gravity of fact. For to develop a poetic which is deliberately and uncritically disengaged from the actual world, is "from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of the victims" [7].

Thus for a modern poet to claim redemptive force for his poetic, he must come to terms with the gravity of fact as it presents itself to him in his actual domain and he must do so without surrendering to the logic of identity. For, as Czeslaw Milosz writes

> The poetic act changes with the amount of background reality embraced by the poet's consciousness. In our century that background is, in my opinion, related to the fragility of those things we call civilization or culture. What surrounds us, here and now, is not guaranteed. It could just as well not exist - and so man constructs poetry out of the remnants found in ruins. [8]

By coming to terms with the claims of this "background reality" in the process of developing a poetic strategy, the poet may discover ways "to go out of the normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate" [9], through his conscientious awareness of the contemporary map of meaning. Poetry's discursive form admits an exploration of the fragility of modern illusions by exploring the conventionality and contingency of meaning in the act of foregrounding. Conscientiously pursued, this exploration may restore art's testimonial function by discerning in the "remnants found in

the ruins" the lineaments of a modernity that is characterised by a radical heterogeneity which refutes the claims of totality and in so doing merits celebration as an image of redemption.

In evaluating whether Heaney's literary corpus embodies a poetic of redemption, the critic must determine whether he successfully deconstructs the identitarian poetics of identity without denying the claims of the actual. In doing so, the critic may determine whether his compulsively felicitous approach to the function of the lyric, is an affront to the gravity of fact or a promissory image of redemption.

The nature of Heaney's response to poetry's postwar dilemma may be delineated in terms of his treatment of the issue of poetic discourse's negotiation with the claims of identity. The themes of individual, cultural and national identity have resurfaced again and again in modern Irish literature without producing a coherent body of analysis relating these themes to the larger discursive implications which would serve to situate the particularities of the local concerns within the larger context of modernity. By implication, the habit of accepting as sufficient the labelling of certain forms of writing as concerned with 'identity', without pursuing the ramifications of such a classification within the given critical context of modernity, is to suggest that in certain respects Irish literature and Irish society exist in a state of conceptual neutrality.

As strong poets such as Yeats and, indeed, Heaney profess, Irish literature does not enjoy a 'special category status', free from the demands which the lessons of modernity impose. In a world that is

constituted and ordered by language, no discursive expression may claim immunity from the prosecution of conscience. By considering the quality of Heaney's response to the local manifestation of modernity's characteristic obsession with the problem of identity against this background, the critic may determine whether Heaney's poetic represents an elaborate guidebook to the limits of a provincial imagination, or a transfigurative map of modernity.

The Irish response to the problems of social, cultural and political intelligibility since the Enlightenment has largely been shaped by the dynamics of nationalist ideology. In responding to the impact of modernity, nationalism posits a unitary narrative of cultural and political intelligibility which suppresses the deeply heterogeneous reality of human experience through the signifying practices of identitarian discourse. Through identitarian discourse's reiterative cycle of unitary tropes, overdetermined meanings, extemporal historicity and providential destiny, nationalism reconfigures the particular norms of its ideal hibernotopia as the natural and naturalising commonplaces of a redemptive truth for a society in crisis. For more than a century, literature has been implicated in the process of territorialising as universal, the particular territorialities of hibernotopian discourse. So, the topoi of Irish literary discourse to the present day may involve a negotiation with the hermeneutic imperatives of nationalism's ideological inheritance.

In determining the conditions of this negotiation, the critic must take into consideration that while nationalist ideology as a discursive formation universalises as normative a particular

expression of cultural and political belief, the dominative desire embodied in this universalisation does not necessarily negate the legitimacy of the particular cultural expression of distinctiveness being represented in this ideological form. Whilst nationalist ideology embodies a strategy of representation which gives rise to the problem of totality, when the strategy imposes an identitarian view via the logic of identity, the content of its representation - the common culture or the particular perceptions of a group whose linguistic, historical, economic, religious and political experiences in the context of British Imperialist hegemony have been radicalised by the experience of alienation - is characterised by the problem of alienation. Thus the poetic problem of responding to the challenge of modernity is bifocal.

Identity may express difference or sameness, distinctness or domination. It is this dualism at the centre of the concept which problematizes any description of the poetics of identity. The analysis of the poetic's treatment of identity must, therefore, evaluate the dualistic nature of the problem. Identity may be expressive of hegemonic desires or inividualistic indeterminacy. It may be dominative or differentiating. When expressive of distinctness, of particularity and of a consequently heterogeneous view of actuality, identity and a poetics of identity is open to the recognition of alterity. When identity, and its consequent poetics represents a denial of alterity, difference and of the heterogeneous nature of meaning, when it seeks to reconfigure the fields of meaning in accordance with the desire for sameness, it embodies in its hegemonic form an identitarian poetics. Whether a poetics embodies a

narrative of distinctness or a hegemonic identitarian narrative of domination, may be determined by evaluating its discursive form. A poetics of identity may embody a surrender to totality if it accepts the identitarian signifying practices of nationalist (or any other) ideology. In doing so it will express identity as a rhetoric of domination. But a poetics of identity may also incorporate a response to the experience of alienation which characterises modernity and in response to which dominative ideologies have evolved.

If such a poetics concentrates on the particularity of the particular experiences, then it may express identity as a rhetoric of difference. In evaluating whether the poetic of a writer such as Heaney embodies a transfigurative poetics of redemption, the critic must evaluate whether he successfully responds to the dual obligations to abjure identity-as-domination and envisage identity-as-difference.

For Heaney, this dualistic problem is most clearly explored in the evolving relationship between the topoi and discursive formations of nationalist ideology and his poetic treatment of the matter which these formations seek to represent. The historical context in which the poet's work has evolved serves to accentuate the immediacy and difficulty of this dualistic dilemma.

Nationalist ideology includes within its dominative rhetoric of identity, identitarian signifying practices whose systematic suppression of the heterogeneous meanings of actuality foresees the legitimation of a totalistic politics. For the poet to collude uncritically with these discursive formations is to admit the charge

of connivance with the politics of totality, which organisations such as the IRA and the UVF actualise.

But nationalist ideology also appropriates a differentiating rhetoric of identity, in that it appropriates within its ideological structures the contents of a specific cultural experience of deprivation. For the poet to deny the legitimacy of this specifying experience of alienation, particularly when it informs his own historical experience, is to evade the claims of the actual.

The critical problem which arises because of the conflation of a rhetoric of domination and a rhetoric of differentiation in nationalism, is nowhere more clearly depicted than in Heaney's domestic political context. In Northern Ireland, nationalism embodies a response to the totalistic politics of supremacist unionism which have informed the government of the region. By embodying a claim to the legitimation of the minority's collective experience, nationalism serves to express a rhetoric of differentiation.

But, as the campaign for legitimation has evolved, the discourse of differentiation has given rise to a discourse of domination, which the IRA studiously represent. This rhetoric of domination is grounded in the larger discursive field of Irish nationalism's hegemonic claims upon the whole island of Ireland since the nineteenth century. The ideologists of unionist supremacy in turn, ground their defence of the politics of totality and indeed their defence of the political legitimacy of the six-county province, as a response to this dominative rhetoric of identity. Thus in the context of Heaney's Ulster, the rhetoric of identity is expressive of

both domination and differentiation. This same rhetoric of identity which nationalism incorporates is both a response to and constitutive of the political problem.

Given this situation, how may a poetics of identity be expressed which will respond to the problem of alienation by embodying the specificity of his particular experience, without surrendering to the universalising imperatives which their habitual representation in nationalism's dominative ideological form guarantees? In responding to this dilemma, the poet may provide an indicative response to the general poetic problem of connecting with the actual world of suffering without surrendering to its actual cause, which is domination.

The warweariness in Irish criticism of recent years has tended to result in the presentation of the problem of identity as being a one-sided issue. The combined responses of an embarrassed provincial "liberalism" (in the sense caricatured by Seamus Deane), an unrepentant and forgetful unionism, and an unconscionable globalism, have resulted in the problem being depicted simply in terms of domination. Whilst nationalist ideology (like its unionist counterpart) embodies through its identitarian signifying practices a rhetoric of domination, the matter which it represents in these ideological terms is indicative of a rhetoric of differentiation.

For the poet the challenge resides in the difficulty of representing the specificity of a different experience without accepting the ideological form of the quarrel. If in the course of his poetic development, the work of Seamus Heaney can be shown to have released the specificity of his experience from the totalistic

desires of its associated ideological form, to have seen in the particularity of these particulars an image of the heterogeneous reality of the world of fact, and to see within the representation of this release from a dominative rhetoric the possibility of transfiguration, then his poetic may be viewed in a redemptive light.

The "Early Purges": the Wake of Identity in Heaney's Poetic

> What the situation in the North of Ireland enforces is some kind of ethical consideration of the function of literature at all. [10]

From his earliest experiences growing up in a mixed community in postwar South County Derry, to his mature reflections upon the place of poetry in the postwar world, Seamus Heaney's consciousness has been challenged by the limits which the expression of identity has sought to impose on his free exploration of his perceptual horizons. In his youth, his earliest impressions of the meaning of identity were informed by the obsessive concerns with boundaries, limits and definitions that characterised the history and raison d'être of his troubled region.

> From the beginning I was very conscious of boundaries. There was a drain or stream, the Sluggan drain, an old division that ran very close to our house. It divided the townland of Tamniarn from the townland of Anahorish and those two townlands belonged to two different parishes, Bellaghy and Newbridge, which are also in two different dioceses: the diocese of Derry ended at the Sluggan drain and the diocese of Armagh began. I was always going backwards and forwards. I went to school in Anahorish School, so learnt the Armagh catechism; but I belonged, by birth and enrolment, to Bellaghy parish. So I didn't go with the rest of the school to make my first

> communion in Newbridge. And when I was confirmed in Bellaghy, the bishop had to ask us these ritual questions and I didn't know the Derry catechism. When we moved to the other end of the parish when I was fourteen, I still played football for Castledawson, though I was living in the Bellaghy team's district. I seemed always to be a little displaced; being in between was a kind of condition, from the start. [11]

These early experiences of the degree to which identity is informed by the selections and exclusions of description, and the aporetic fate of the individual who is not initiated in the doctrinal niceties informing these divisions, is ironically prefigurative of the poet's lifelong difficulties with the rhetoric of identity and division.

In his later experiences of the deep ideological fissures dividing and disrupting his original domain, the poet came to realise that the rhetoric of division did not simply embody a discourse of delimitation but served also to express a rhetoric of expectation. Unlike his early experience of episcopal magnanimity, the community whose collective definition of intelligibility was legitimated by the nationalist imperatives of boundaries and divisions demanded of its rhetoricians a public incantation of their catechism of belief. Even in these expectations the young Catholic writer was divided from his Protestant contemporaries. As Heaney recalls

> the lot of what we may call the Protestant writer is radically different from that of his Catholic counterpart. For the Protestant sensibility, the Troubles were an interruption and a disruption of the 'status quo'. I don't think the Protestant writer had to change his vision. He could deal with the challenge to the established order in liberal or in reactionary terms. Eventually, somewhere in the blueprint of his thinking it would be predicted that normality would return. So I don't think that imaginatively he had to change his action. For the Catholic writer, I think that the Troubles were a critical moment, a turning point, possibly a vision of some kind of fulfilment. The blueprint in the Catholic writer's head predicted that a history would fulfil itself in a United Ireland or in

> something. These are very fundamental blueprints. In the late 60's and early 70's the world was changing for the Catholic imagination. [12]

That the "blueprint" of nationalist thinking would bring about "some kind of fulfilment" indicative of the totalistic form of the blueprint of nationalist identity in the shape of a savage and unceasing reign of terror, was unclear to the Catholic "visionaries" of the nineteen-sixties. For the Catholic writer the novelty of change commenced as a challenge to the unionist "blueprint" of sectarian hegemony at a time when any expression of identity, regardless of its ideological implications, appeared to offer a challenge to the "status quo" of the province's totalistic narrative of boundaries, limits and exclusions.

In the process of defining his proper response to the expectations of his community, Heaney divided his public voice between the direct accusatorial domain of journalism and the indirect reflective realm of his emerging poetic. In contrast to the elaborate exploration of the relationship between art and actuality which has preoccupied his poetic work, a brief consideration of Heaney's forays into journalistic discourse highlights the fact that his acclaimed poetic ambivalence is inextricably related to his deepening awareness of the nature and claims of aesthetic discourse as a distinct discursive practice as he came to recognise the implications and responsibilities of his gift.

Heaney's regular interventions in the columns of The Listener and The New Statesman, although never hectoring in tone, were initially characterised by the impatient demands so indicative of his generation's naive optimism. As late as 1968 he wrote in The

Listener

> We were all afraid, and still are, of returning to the old Orange and Green polarisation of public life. Two years ago, in an article on Belfast, I tried to present both sides as more or less blameworthy. But it seems now that the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland at large, if it is to retain any self-respect, will have to risk the charge of wrecking the new moderation and seek justice more vociferously...'The enemies of Ulster' - a favourite tag for extremists - must now embrace all those who march to complain about discrimination.[13]

As the humane optimism of the mid-sixties gave way to the intractable polarisation of the early nineteen-seventies, the journalist's concentration began to focus upon the ideological and discursive practices structuring the competing cultural and political "blueprints", and sometimes with surprising results. Writing during his sojourn in Berkeley in 1970 he noted that

> Northern Ireland has long been trapped in a ritualistic language that cannot, it seems, be unlearned. Bernadette Devlin's tart socialist blast is the first lesson in the new tongue.[14]

Within a year the tart blasts of the "new tongue" had begun to impinge upon Heaney as having a great deal to do with the old tongue of "republicanism" and unionism's identitarian blueprints of division, terror and coercion. By Christmas 1971 the implications of the uncritical acceptance of this "ritualistic language" of totality were grimly clear as the victims of paramilitary and state terrorism gave to this language its deadly inflection. In a spirit of self-recrimination and despair Heaney provided a profoundly honest account of the disturbing dilemma which many of his peers experienced and continue to experience in the vicious self-perpetuating confines of the Ulster quarrel.

> I am fatigued by a continuous adjudication between agony and injustice, swung at one moment by the long tail of

> race and resentment, at another by the more acceptable feelings of pity and terror. We live in the sick light of TV screens, with a pane of selfishness between ourselves and the suffering. We survive explosions and funerals and live on among the families of the victims, those blown apart and those in cells apart....A little good-will in the Establishment here towards the notion of being Irish would take some of the twists out of the minority. Even at this time it is difficult to extend full sympathy to the predicament of that million among us who would ask the other half-million to exalt themselves by being humbled. You see, I have heard a completely unbigoted and humane friend searching for words to cope with the abhorence of the Provisionals and hitting on the mot juste quite unconsciously: These...these...Irish. [15]

In this confessional account resides the paradoxical dilemma of modernity for the poet. For the nationalist community's demands for equitable status and a recognition of their cultural identity emerged from the experience of alienation which was a direct consequence of unionism's hegemonic politics. But in seeking to assert the validity of their particular cultural and political point of view they ran the risk of reactivating the counterhegemonic politics which nationalism's identitarian discursive form permits. For the poet the problem was profoundly difficult to unravel. How could he explore as the material proper to his own imaginative terrain the particularity of his cultural identity as a response to alienation, without appearing to legitimate the totalistic universalising imperatives informing nationalist ideology's identitarian form and realised in extremis by the heinous activities of the IRA?

From an early stage Heaney recognised that the relationship between the "ritualistic language" informing the quarrel and the governing mentality of overdetermined boundaries was central to the structure of the quarrel. The inhabitants of Northern Ireland's habitual concern with the determination of identity in the narrowest

terms is a primary interpretative imperative in the quotidian life of the region. The visitor to the province is repeatedly confronted with the first principle of all interpretation which is the determination of cultural and political allegiances in the geography of localities and in the significance of individual nomenclature. This habitual mental reflex is indicative of the degree to which the imperatives of identity formation are rooted in signifying practices that function by reducing the horizons of interpretation to the overdetermined commonplaces of identitarian discourse.

Heaney's account of his friend's search for the mot juste typifies the degree to which the "ritualistic language" of the quarrel is dependent upon the discursive practice of overdetermining the signifier, of placing the signifier in a static extemporal relation with an ideologically delimited range of signification, a practice which underwrites the politics of totality. In realising that the instrumental discursive practices of journalism were ironically constitutive of "that useless focus, where I seemed to be speaking as a spokesman" [16], and whose formations did not provide an adequate method for the exploration of the depth-grammar of the "ritualistic language that cannot, it seems, be unlearned", Heaney committed himself to the exploration of the depth-grammar of identity by a sustained meditation on the illusory power of language in the discourse of poetry.

Although most of Heaney's public pronouncements since the early seventies have been expressed in self-consciously aesthetic terms, it is notable that from time to time the poet has intervened directly where issues in the political domain have touched his deep antipathy

to the rhetoric of domination. In relation to the excruciating events of Ulster's recent history, Heaney has been a co-signatory on letters denouncing internment and supporting "Initiative 92's" [17] campaign for a reevaluation of the region's future. At a reception hosted by The Times in 1988, he took the opportunity to remind his audience of the responsibilities which writers and other members of the Establishment bear towards the upholding of justice, in a society in which political expediency had led to numerous miscarriages of justice against members of Britain's Irish community.

> Yeats's challenge to the writer was to hold in a single thought reality and justice, and the same challenge is in effect in Westminster and Fleet Street. The danger is that in the interests of expediency or quietism, an appeal to the pseudo-justice of the old Lord Widgery sort or the newer Lord Denning sort could lead to an averted gaze, by government or the generations of public opinion, from the abiding reality.
>
> My plea, therefore, is for a renewed self-consciousness in the expression of just national concerns by the British media, an avoidance of the high ground, and an ongoing example of the free, self-regulating debate which has distinguished the British democratic process. [18]

Although increasingly rare, such examples of Heaney's willingness to recognise the journalistic medium as the proper discursive form for a direct instrumentalisng use of language proper to the consideration of primarily political issues, testify to the extent to which his poetic explorations are viewed as embodying a distinct discursive function. His willingness to address particularly political expressions of hegemonic discourse is not limited to the matter of the quarrel.

In the heated debate surrounding the 1983 reform of the Irish Constitution's provision's relating to the prevention of abortion, Heaney once more addressed the implied political imperatives in a

letter to the Irish Times.

> Sir, recently some poems of mine were included in an anthology entitled The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry. I have since felt it necessary to demur at the adjective "British", an adjective which was nevertheless applied with constitutional exactitude since I was born in Northern Ireland. Yet the constitutional definition did violence to who and what I believed myself to be. I was simply embarrassed to be called British.
>
> If the proposed amendment to the Constitution is passed, a significant number of people from this state are likely to be even more embarrassed to be called Irish. Their constitution will have infringed their intellectual, emotional and moral identity. And since abortion is already outlawed, I do not believe that this affront to their inner freedom is necessary.
>
> Yours etc. Seamus Heaney [19]

As this letter demonstrates, Heaney's comprehension of the politics of identity is sensitive to the various forms in which the rhetoric of domination may impose itself on the "inner freedom" of the individual. In concentrating his attempts to explore the relationship within identity between the discourse of domination and the discourse of differentiation in the distinct discursive domain of the poetic, Heaney sought to discover a possibility of redemption from the grammar of totality and alienation.

Heaney's critical reflections upon poetry's discursive domain provides the reader of his work with an indicative context in which the assumptions informing his verse may be evaluated. For the critic the admission of his critical output as interpretative of his literary work presents a number of difficulties. A thorough theoretical anaylsis of his critical essays would have to include an investigation of the degree to which the author is endeavouring to situate his own work within the canon in a particular way which may serve to delimit the range of subsequent critical interpretation.

Similarly the critic must be cautious of viewing his critical output as an intended index to his poetry. But given these reservations, Heaney's critical reflections upon the place of poetry in modernity provide a thoughtful background to the themes which arise repeatedly in his verse.

Central to Heaney's conception of poetic discourse is his belief that it must be opened out to the full somatic and semantic dimensions of human experience. Heaney's assertions regarding the aurality of the poetic serve to return poetry to the aesthetic's original acceptance of the beautiful as determined by the somatic and the semantic (remembering that as Terry Eagleton suggests aisthesis represents a "discourse of the body" [20]). In asserting what Paul Valery terms the "auditive rhythms" [21] of the incarnate imagination as a central current of interpretation, Heaney is endeavouring to widen the field of interpretation. By accentuating the acoustic dimension in his poetic, the writer aims to displace the ideologically informed habits of interpretation which inform and structure the grammar of the quarrel. By subjecting the prime matter of his experience to the estranging force of poetic form, the poet may begin the process of disengaging the discourse of identity from the axiomatic commonplaces of identitarian discourse's rhetoric of boundaries, divisions and limitations.

In essence, what underwrites Heaney's preoccupation with the "auditory imagination", is a recognition that the ideologically structured desire for certainty which inhabits identitarian discourse, is dependent upon the depiction of the signifier as a static and determinate channel of interpretation. By giving free

reign to the auditory rhythms of the poetic imagination's reconfiguration of events, the process of signification may be subjected to its endemic indeterminacy. In such a context the received habits of identitarian discourse may be subjected to an enlarged auditorium of interrogation and the imagination freed to unlearn the "ritualistic language" of the quarrel.

Heaney's critical definition of the role of aurality in the poetic's reconfiguration of events is borrowed directly from T.S.Eliot. Throughout his critical prose he returns to the centrality of the "auditory imagination" as a description of poetry's distinctive somatic enlargement of the horizons of interpretation. "One of the most precise and suggestive of T.S.Eliot's critical formulations", Heaney writes

> was his notion of what he called 'the auditory imagination', 'the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back', fusing 'the most ancient and the most civilized mentality'. I presume Eliot was thinking here about the cultural depth-charges latent in certain words and rhythms, that binding secret between words in poetry that delights not just the ear but the whole backward and abysm of mind and body; thinking of the energies beating in and between words that the poet brings into half-deliberate play; thinking of the relationship between the word as pure vocable, as articulate noise, and the word as etymological occurence, as symptom of human history, memory and attachments. [22]

Within the resonating auditorium of this imaginative realm, the word appears through its conventional genealogy, its habitual associations and its ineffable transfiguration when combined in various rhythmic patterns, as being irreducible to the static identitarian code of overdetermined signification. In adopting this auditory quality as a

suggestive channel of interpretation, Heaney is alluding to the indeterminate margins of meaning in which language arises and through which discourse may be reconfigured.

In accepting this auditory dimension as indicative of poetry's distinctive power, he is challenging the illusory modern desire informing ideological discourse which pursues and presents meaning as overdetermined and easily declared. For assisted by the resonance of aurality, poetry may resist the modern "intellect's eagerness to foreclose"[23]. In his resistance to the interpretative habits of ideology, Heaney is thus bolstered by his belief that "Poetry of any power is always deeper than its declared meaning" [24]. And in this appropriation of the auditory imagination in his poetic, he is pointing out the resources which poetic discourse makes available to the exposition of ideology's illusory claims to a universally determined intelligibility. Unlike ideological assertions, poetry thrives on the charged negotiation between arbitrariness and intelligibility, through its exploration of the signifying process's adjudication between the determinacy and the indeterminacy of language. For as Heaney suggests,

> Poetry...is arbitrary and marks time in every possible sense of that phrase...it does not propose to be instrumental or effective. Instead, in the rift between what is going to happen and whatever we would wish to happen, poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves.
>
> This is what gives poetry its governing power. [25]

In performing its arbitrary exegesis of intelligibility, poetic discourse may abjure the instrumentalising claims of identitarian rhetoric. In Heaney's habitual auditory self-gratification there

abides, as Elmer Andrews attests, "a kind of pleasurable excess over precise meaning" [26].

Although Heaney's predeliction for the aural gratification which a self-consciously poetic ordering of verse form traditionally admits is reduced by some commentators to a paralytic enchantment with "the Group" and "Movement" poetics of the "well-made poem", it does in fact embody a desire to displace the modern poetic consensus's concentration upon effects of meaning.

However radically misarranged and howevermuch its proponents claim that the obsessive concentration upon figures of thought in modern poetry challenges the desire for certainty which underwrites the ideological discourses of modernity, without the complementary resources of poetry's auditory sensorium, modern poetry risks a diminution to a merely distorted reflection of the hermeneutic imperatives of modernity. Jonathan Holden articulates the contemporary consensus in which the poetry is increasingly seen less as a matter of sound than sense. He notes that

> at the present time,...the ruling convention of our verse - more fundamental than rhyme and rhythm - is our assumption that verse asserts closure, that there must be some reason for isolating only <u>these</u> words together in the middle of a page....Whereas it used to be assumed that the fundamental <u>raison d'être</u> of verse is its ability, through measure and tempo, to approximate the ultimate relationship between form and content found in song, the popular assumption now is that the capability of verse to assert closure, to compel a sense of an ending, and to imply figurative meaning is at least as fundamental....Contemporary poetry still strives to marry form and content; but the "feeling" in a poem which has traditionally been borne by the "music" of verse as song, is now, more often than not, borne by metaphor. [27]

Heaney's gift and desire for the restoration to poetry of its auditory force, embodies an attempt to increase the poetic's access

to the interrogative resources of language. By restoring auditory resources to the practice of poetry he is endeavouring to extend his exploration of language's arbitrary power by restoring another criteria in which "precise meaning" may be exceeded by the ineffably pleasurable sensation of the "music of what happens".

In restoring this traditional aspect of poetry as a central imaginative tenet, Heaney may be accused of upholding a reactionary stance. But given that the present century's aesthetic consensus weighs heavily in favour of a reductive pessimism which finds expression in a critical suspicion of overtly pleasurable aesthetics, a case may be argued for the restoration of this auditory resource as a response to the governing consensus. But for the poet, and the lyric poet in particular, to claim this resource as conscionable in the shadow of Auschwitz, he must apply it as an interrogative expression in his response to the challenge of totality if he is to harness it in a poetics of redemption. For Heaney, this involves a consideration of how poetry may serve a humane and assuaging function as he attempts to come to terms with the preoccupying issue of identity.

Excavating Identity: Heaney's Early Poetry

"Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rest; snug as a gun." [28]

The opening distich of Heaney's first collection of poetry provides a number of indications regarding the fundamental tensions that have animated his excavation of identity. His opening line situates the poetic as a somatic discourse, signifying his intention to return poetry to the enlarged discursive auditorium of sound and sense that is both supportive of the original meaning of aesthesis and indicative of the distinctive signifying practices that characterise poetry as discourse.

The self-conscious awareness of his "writerly" disposition which underwrites the imagistic framework of the poem, is repeatedly highlighted as he returns throughout the poem, somewhat surprised, to describe his identity as a poet in relation to the actual world beyond the window's threshold where his father engages in the historically indicative act of digging.

In attempting to define the relationship between his poetic identity and the actual quotidian domain beyond the threshold of his distinctly literary place, the poet seeks to establish the relation through a connecting metaphor. At the poem's outset, the problem of constructing such an intelligible relation between the writer's arbitrary domain of illusory signifying practices and the instrumental actions of his father's economically intelligible discourse of labour, is indicated by the problematic figurative correspondence between pen and gun.

Faced with this correspondence the reader is moved to question in what sense is the gun a vehicle for snugness? Even in the historically resonant context of rural Ulster, the gun maintains an aura of abnormality and discomfiture. That the gun belongs in a

somatic posture similar to the pen is clear. But as a poetic vehicle of unproblematic belonging, the choice of the gun as a figure for the self-possession of the author's poetic identity, highlights the theme of uncertainty and inadequacy that underwrites the poem's development.

In a clear demonstration of the manner in which the "auditory imagination" may assist the poet's interrogation of meaning, the sonic structure of the distich's final elaborative clause "snug as a gun", pays into the poem's uncertain tone. For the almost perfect sonic chiasmus of this final palindromic clause, suggests a sense of auditory closure which conflicts with the semantic dubiety of the phrase's actual implications. In this phrase alone, the conflict between poetry's beautiful sounds and the actual domain's problematic sense is pointed up in a moment that prefigures the writer's lifelong meditation on the relation between the poetic and the actual.

The unfolding in "Digging's" subsequent stanzas of the poet's reflections upon what distinguishes the norms of authorial identity from the received discourse of identity of his upbringing, which his father represents as a patrimonial figure, highlights the problematic nature of this distinction.

In many ways "Digging" is a paradigm of authorial disinterment from the organic seasonal inclusivity which is presented in the bucolic image of the father at work in nature opening and cultivating, restoring and reseeding the native patrimonial ground. For the poet <u>as</u> a poet is, as the liminal image of the dividing window suggests, at one remove from such a naturalising engagement with actuality. His identity which is defined by his hold of the pen

rather than the spade or gun in the distinct discursive world behind the window, may not be naturalised or grounded in these inherited forms. His is an inescapably linguistic condition and the distance which he must travel to connect with the actual world of historical consciousness beyond the window, will be determined by his ability to forge linguistic connections that adequately include the problematic nature of that threshold which divides and unites the world of poetry and the world of events.

In this poem Heaney attempts to bridge this threshold in the metaphor of digging. But the naturalness of his father's cultivating action, which at one point evokes an overenthusiastic and slightly disingenuous response, "By God, the old man could handle a spade./Just like his old man", contrasts with the author's displaced recognition that "I've no spade to follow men like them" [29]. But the author's determination to legitimate his poetic identity by establishing a figurative relationship with his father's natural disposition, produces the pen/spade metaphor which serves to deepen the tone of uncertainty. The distich of the poem's opening has now been significantly transformed into the less cluttered and more orderly poetic form of the concluding tercet.

> Between my finger and my thumb
> The squat pen rests.
> I'll dig with it. [30]

This attempt to establish an identity between the action of poetry and the action of history, which metaphor represents as a figure of thought, is confounded by the realisation that the pen is decidedly not like the spade in its discursive domain. It may approximate in its aesthetic aspirations to produce images of renewal and fecundity

in the actual domain, but it is clearly not the implement of an instrumental discourse which may guarantee these effects. There exists a sense of displacement between the tenor and vehicle of this metaphor, which is emphasised by the unconvincing tone of the persona's resigned conclusion.

The fact that the metaphor of digging does not fully deliver a naturalising intelligibility to the consciousness of the narrator, a fact which the poetic failure to consumate the naturalising trope of pen and spade presents, is indicative of the problem of grounding, homecoming and naturalisation for the modern subject. The inconclusiveness of this figurative connection is indicative of the inconclusiveness which poetic discourse may explore as the matter proper to its own excavations of intelligibility. And the failure of this metaphor to fully cross the threshold between the organic world of belonging and the poetic world of estrangement is in the end a successful portrayal of the poet's dilemma as a modern linguistically constituted subject.

For the metaphorical structures in "Digging" signify not organic figures of belonging but linguistic figures of displacement. In this prefigurative poem the poet demonstrates that he is deterritorialised as a mover in language from the organic and cyclical naturalising practices which his father embodies in the world beyond the threshold of poetic form.

The depiction of this divided world provides the first of what John Wilson Foster refers to as his "correlatives of ambivalence" [31], and with the benefit of hindsight it seems to refute what one of his earliest critics lamented in her review of Eleven Poems [32] when she

suggested that

> Perhaps what one misses is a sign of originality, or, on the other hand, of some special formal passion. But either or both of these may yet develop.[33]

Heaney's early elaboration of the meaning of identity for the poet returns repeatedly to the conflict between the author's literary artifice and the organic universe of ruralitas in which his sensibility was formed. The title of the collection's eponymous poem "Death of a Naturalist" expresses the profound sense of displacement that characterises his fall into language. Originally, the poem was titled "End of a Naturalist" [34] and the alteration of the title serves to express a more emphatic break with an organic universe of meaning.The poem's Wordsworthian treatment of the growth of consciousness via an interchange with nature and the growth of identity through the nurturing forces of terror and language, broadens the scope of the poet's investigation of the relationship between writing and actuality.

The fatal event suggested in the poem's title refers to the persona's fall into the linguistically constituted condition of human consciousness. That this happy fall coincides with the psychological process of individuation moves the poet to explore the conditions that link the problematic determination of his poetic identity or voice, to the definitive features of a distinctly poetic imagination's obsessive concerns with the power of language.

The poet's exploration of language in the artificial formations of lyric discourse leads him to reflect on the dependence of his mode of consciouness upon the governing principle of individuation. For as the poem's narrator attests, identity is predicated by the growth of

a denaturalising intelligibility whose motive force is language. By reflecting upon this, the poet may pursue some of the issues suggested in "Digging", and particularly the fact that his poetic identity is radically dependent upon the denaturalising or estranging power of language. This is to initiate an examination of poetic discourse which will continue throughout his poetic, for as Richard Kearney suggests

> All of Heaney's writing is informed by an awareness that the poet as a resourceful dweller in language has replaced the naturalist as an innocent dweller in nature. So that if Heaney occasionally seeks to retrieve the experience of the 'naturalist', it is at best, hankering after something that he knows full well is irretrievably lost. Homecoming thus becomes a dialectical search for some forfeited or forbidden presence in and through the awareness of its absence.[35]

"Death of a Naturalist" dramatises a critical conflict between poetry's actual weakness and poetry's illusory power. The recognition at the level of the poem's emplotment that identity predicated by a fall from nature into language initiates the experience of alienation which is typified in modernity by the experience of dread in the face of the arbitrary, is countered at the level of the poem's discursive formation with an illusion of intelligibility whose force is empowered by the vigorous auditory impact of the poet's descriptions.

The images of the flax-dam's threatening and almost autochthonous forces of corruption, purulence and decay are redolent of a profoundly threatening arbitary power which displaces the youth's consciousness into the differentiated world of linguistically constituted identity. But this primeval arbitrary force is countered by the writer's poetic illusion of intelligibility which the sonic force of his descriptions convey.

> Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles
> Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell [36]

In this unrhyming couplet, the purulent cycle of corruption suggested by the busy play of the contaminating "bluebottles" and subversively reiterated by the submerged contamination's rising throaty "Bubbles" is transfigured from an arbitrary threat into an assertion of poetic intelligibility by the workings of the author's imagination. Through the couplet's meandering enjambment of "bluebottles/ wove" and the hypnotic assonantal entrancement that rises in the narcotic vowels of "wove/strong/gauze and culminates in the spiralling broad-vowelled diphthongs "sound/around", the dreadfilled event is transformed into a felicitous poetic moment.

Throughout the poem the auditory imagination of the poet transfigures the traumatic parable of identity formation into a felicitous poetic formation of aesthetic intelligibility. From the primeval natural world of rampant fecundity through the linguistically nurtured world of the classroom lessons in interpretation, to the final climactic images of the flaxdam's insurrectionary hoards, the mind that meditates upon the conditions of identity formation enlarges to assert a statement of poetic identity that is opening up to the perils and freedoms of its inescapably linguistic constitution.

But as George Watson accurately asserts

> landscape in Ulster poetry ('stars and horses, pigs and trees') is rarely neutral, rarely simply pictorial, rarely a refuge from the 'hot pressures' of the divided society. Rather, it is freighted with an enormous weight of cultural codings, and at times even becomes the very emblem of the sectarian divide. [37]

In Heaney's early exploration of the birth of a denaturalised citizen

of language, the principal "pictorial" descriptions of his imaginative territory suggest the poet's first glimpses of the territorialities that underwrite his traumatic coming to consciousness of his identity. His later explorations of the figurative depths of these early impressions of displacement are implicit in his situating the source of corruption at the flaxdam "in the heart/ Of the townland".

The emergent political subtext of this undeveloped image is more clearly explored in "Lint Water" a poem which Heaney wrote in 1965.

> The flax was pulled by hand once it ripened,
> Bound into tall green pillars with rush bands
> And buried underwater, roots upwards.
> When the dam was full they loaded stones and sods
> On top, then left the whole thing for three weeks
> To rot, to stink: a pit of rotten eggs
> Could not have generated such a fug
> As flax decaying, steaming like a bog,
> Wafting its heavy, nauseating fallout.
> As soon as stems had turned to slime and smut
> The dam was emptied: men stood waist deep
> In the fouled water, with fork and four-pronged grape
> Pitching out sheaves like half-gone carcases.
> They spread it dripping, then, flat on the grass
> To crisp and dry hard in the summer sun
> Until it could be stooked up, stiff as broom
> And whistling in the wind. Toughened to sticks,
> The stems were milled, spun, woven into fabrics.
> The dam was cleared, poured down into the river
> Its poisonous bellyful. "Lint Water"
> It was called. Across the stream it swirled brown froth
> That scummed clean stone and sickened fish to death;
> And if the drains were blocked, it still seeped down,
> Filtering unseen contamination.
> Putrid currents floated trout to the loch,
> Their bellies white as linen tableclothes. [38]

The "nauseating fallout" that emanates from this pre-manufacturing stage of the linen production process, contaminates the surrounding natural environment with emblematic efficiency. The implication of a comparison between the primary fibres of unionism's economic power,

the "sheaves of flax", and the "half gone carcasses" is a politically potent image. Heaney has emphasised just how potent such a connection can be in his imagination.

> Ulster linen. Linen. Huguenots, bleaching greens, Belfast, industrial power, curse the Pope, God save the Queen. Linen stands for 'independent, rattling, non-transcendent Ulster', for all that is better or worse in the planter tradition, and when it goes with Ulster, it effects a semantic change in that ancient word. Ulster shrinks to a six-county region, its hero is not Cuchulainn but Carson, and its Great O'Neill is not a rebellious chieftain from sixteenth century Tyrone but a Unionist Guards officer from Co. Antrim.[39]

Thus the centring of the corrupting process of denaturalisation in the flax-dam, which is depicted in "Lint Water's" redolent image of the decomposing carcass, suggests an original need within the poet's imagination to come to terms with the distinctly historical tenor of the incipient contagion. The contagious effects of suppressing these historical elements are figuratively implied in the events that unfold when the dam of historical suppression empties its "poisonous bellyful" of "brown froth".

The "unseen contamination", suggested in "Death of a Naturalist" and described in "Lint Water" is the putresecent historical experience that is inscribed in the Ulster landscape, and which continues to pollute and threaten the surrounding forms of life. At this early stage, Heaney could perceive dimly that the continued suppression of this historically pungent register of identity, might threaten to overturn the "natural order" (as the upturned trout signifies). This process of corruption and its apocalyptic consequences (in each of the poems), exemplified in the juxtaposition

of the dead overturned trout and the linen emblems of civility, illustrates the urgency of the poet's early need to determine a legitimate and adequate poetic response to the contamination of his original environment through an exploration of the dimensions of identity.

The corrupting force which the flaxdam represents for the neophyte poet is central to the general perception of displacement that characterises his emerging poetic relationship with his immediate world of events. In the vigorous poetic transfiguration of the flax-dam's apocalyptic threat, the young poet implicates an urgent primary need to decipher the conditions informing this perception. By moving beyond the anecdotal privacy of the embattled subject out into the "heart of the townland" he may begin to explore the cultural and political dimensions of the sense of displacement that permeates his formative impressions of the linguistically constituted postlapsarian world of poetic consciousness.

The anecdotal poetics of intimacy that typify his original response to the determination of a poetic voice are incapable of supporting such a general excavation. For the poet to come to terms with the figurative dimensions of displacement, he must enlarge the range of his poetic by extending his aesthetic strategies of depiction to encompass the figurative resources which Irish literary discourse makes available to him.

By reconfiguring the prime matter of perceptions and events in a poetry of figurative depth, he may attempt to deepen his interpretation of the problematic threshold that separates and unites the penholder and spadewielder. The danger implicit in remaining

within the private world of unreconstructed personal description resides primarily in the propensity of such poetry to disengage from the modern conditions of intelligibility which affect all forms of discourse. In some of Heaney's poetry before North there are a number of poems which are paradigmatic of poetic craft without attaining what is in his own critical terminology the redemptive force of poetic "technique". They are indicative of what Terry Eagleton refers to as "paradigm poetry" in which

> the poem trades entirely on the intrinsic interest of the materials rather than on any imaginative transformation it submits them to...It is sentimentalism to believe that memories are valuable in themselves...To write of regional memories...is often enough a way of evading struggle with meaning, for such lovingly preserved experiences seem deceptively meaningful in themselves, and the act of narrating them assures an auratic significance for which it has not sufficiently paid.[40]

However, the danger of surrendering to the privative evasions of such paradigm poetry is counterbalanced by the equally dangerous possibility of surrendering the informing figurative structures of a more public poetry to the Northern quarrel's rhetoric of domination. The dangers implicit for the Northern Irish poet in this regard are highlighted by the fact that even poetry which is not explicitly concerned with the ideology of the quarrel may be instrumentalised for ideological purposes. This consideration is borne out by Andrew Waterman who recalls the use of Heaney's "The Early Purges" [41] as unionist propaganda![42]

Just as Heaney's early poetry includes a number of examples of paradigm poetry, so too does his work include a number of poems in which the desire for a more publicly resonant poetry yields to the rhetoric of the quarrel. Perhaps the most notable example of his

discursive engagement with the hibernotopian discourse of domination occurs in his poetic response to the nationalism's 1966 festival of commemoration - 'Requiem for the Croppies'[43].

In attempting to reconfigure the historical dimension of his original political identity as a member of the nationalist community, Heaney endeavours to extend his poetic range by exploring one of the governing territorialities of nationalist ideology - the extemporal historical tropology of synchronicity, sacrifice and return. The sonnet which provides a nationalist account of the revolutionary uprising at Vinegar Hill in 1798, the annus mirabilis of Irish republicanism, highlights the ideological habit of extemporal identification which structures nationalism's chronophobic view of historical signification by the author's uncritical identification with a participant in the event which the ventriloquial use of an insurgent's voice as poetic persona indicates.

The poetic strategy of voicing the poem in this manner precludes the creation of any critical space between the contemporary poet and the historical event. In identifying so uncritically with the revolutionary discourse of the "dead generations", the poet surrenders the distinguishing particularity of poetic transfiguration to the universalising ideological formations of nationalism's identitarian discourse. The sonnet's final lines, assert a disturbingly uncritical ratification of nationalism's hibernotopian illusions.

> They buried us without shroud or coffin
> And in August the barley grew up out of the grave.

This final image is indicative of the Pearsean high rhetoric of blood

sacrifice that will vouchsafe the nation's rebirth, or to translate it into the catchphrase of the Gaelic Hegelians of the IRA - "Tiocfaidh ár Lá".

This poetic capitulation to the Romantic rhetoric of domination is notable in Heaney's work because it is so exceptional. It is indicative of what Conor Cruise O'Brien described in a famous phrase as a "particularly unhealthy intersection, in a particular island, of a certain form of literature and a certain form of politics" [44]. O'Brien's argument relating specifically to what he terms the "tragic heroic mode" (and not as subsequent critics have claimed to each and every expression of the politically significant in literature), teases out the implications of such an uncritical relation between poetry and the high Romantic rhetoric of identitarian discourse. In a dramaticising peroration O'Brien ironically expresses the motivating psychology of this hibernotopian logic of ideality.

> To minds that are possessed by that idea of sacrifice it is irrelevant to prove that a campaign like the current I.R.A. campaign, for example, cannot possibly accomplish any desirable political objective. That can be demonstrated, it can be quite logically and clearly demonstrated, but it doesn't matter. The objective is to become part of 'history' in the abstract or mythological sense, to achieve immortality by getting oneself killed for Ireland's sake....Ireland, in this version of history, has been oppressed for 800 years, and it really does not much matter whether it is oppressed for another 800, provided the blood-sacrifice is repeated at appropriate intervals. Indeed, if Ireland were ever to cease to be oppressed, what would happen to "history", how would one get into it? [45]

The ironic truth of O'Brien's account of the dangers of romanticising the brute facts of history is perhaps, nowhere more poignantly attested to than in his own subsequent surrender to the romanticising of unionism's parallel universe of hegemonic ideals.

Heaney's own defence of the poem is based on a consideration of the context of unionist supremacy in which the poem was originally written

> in 1966 I wrote a poem called 'Requiem for the Croppies', which is a deliberately espoused nationalist Irish poem about the insurrection of 1798, which was the founding of Irish Republicanism. Now, writing in 1966 in Northern Ireland, where the Unionist hegemony was in position, where there was also a new slight air of liberalism, it was all right for me, and I'm very glad I did it, as a Nationalist minority poet to use the poem to stake out an imaginative claim for this sensibility. So the poem did have cultural affiliations, did have political meaning, but it did not have violent implications for that society. It was just saying remember us, take us into account. Twenty years later, that poem, which is about the act of rebellion and the Croppies being killed and sacrifice and violence, can be read as a code poem in support of the IRA, can and has been. Now that's that, it's okay. That poem and the IRA and myself grew out of the same bed, the same heritage. But for me to write that poem now, it would in fact be a poem of violence rather than a poem of imagination. So the second demand that arises is that you beware of the fallout of your words, and perhaps I've been unduly aware of that, of the relationship between lyric and life, of the responsibility for what you say.[46]

Heaney's defence of naivety, is one which would apply to a large number of people whose actions and gestures in the years before the Troubles were blind to consequences. Although with critical hindsight contemporary Irish society is now more clearly aware of the ideological undercurrents and implications inhabiting particular formal depictions of history, it is primarily a consequence of the violent realisation of these imperatives during the intervening years. From a critical point of view, it is nonetheless important to accentuate the ideological complicity of the poem, because it serves as something of a benchmark against which his subsequent and more celebrated poetic strategies of depiction may be compared.

Heaney's determination to extend his imaginative range by engaging with the historical narratives characteristic of his inherited beliefs led him to experiment with verseform as a dramatic medium. By 1970 he had completed a verse-play for BBC radio dealing with the events surrounding the uprising of the United Irishmen in 1798. Munro outlines in verseform the arrest, capture and execution of General Henry Munro whose role as a leading member of the United Irishmen is depicted in the play's exposition. The dramatic exposition of the play is voiced through a contrapuntal series of exchanges between a Singer, the Reader, and the principal military characters of Munro and the arresting officer of King George's imperial army General Nugent.

Throughout the play there resides a recurrent theme of Munro's claims to be a legitimate military representative of the Irish people. Curiously, this claim is demonstrated by depicting the similarities between Munro's code of honour and the "gentlemanly" rules of warfare which are embodied in the British Officer's imperial demeanour. The exposition of the legitimacy of the United Irishmen's cause, reiterated through the various balladic interventions of Reader and Singer, is thus grounded in a reflection of imperial civility, whose barbarous civilising machine the United Irishmen set out to overthrow. This curious exposition is elaborated in the Reader's opening verses.

> And victory and defeat find solitude.
> General Henry Munroe [sic] stood
> On a scaffold outside his door
> Until they brought him his ledger
> And money. Then he settled up
> As if he were in his own shop.

It was not the fear of solitude.
Not a bid for a hero's fall.
Just that, a draper turned soldier,
Routines of decency were clear.

It was no victory or relief
For him to drop the handkerchief
That signalled he was ready,
Proceeding, without advice, to die. [48]

The play proceeds to describe the arrest and preparation for execution of Munro, and the action is centred upon a stilted series of exchanges between the two Generals while Munro, who is a linen dealer by trade, settles his affairs generously as a consequence of his last will and testament, to which the British General bears witness thereby indicating his recognition of Munro's military status.

The exchanges between the two fighting men about the question of the legitimate status of the republican's claims to represent the military interests of his oppressed people, bears a subversive message for the Crown Forces of contemporary Ulster. In the following exchanges, the rhetoric of military legitimacy bears an uncanny resemblance to the contemporary terms of the argument about terrorists and freedomfighters.

Munro:
My dear general,
Your manners are, of course, impeccable
And it's natural of you to suppose
That the expression of my beliefs
Is a recitation of mottoes.
"For King and Country" - at that you'll doff the hat,
Stiffen your spine and hush the messroom chat,
But for some men the truth is not so pat.

Nugent:
The truth, about which one seems so concerned,
Is simple and cannot fail to be discerned
Even by you. You are a condemned prisoner.
My men erect your scaffold in the square
And I am in your cell, a sympathetic observer.

My courtesy has extended so far
Since you are no criminal. Let us say, a prisoner of war,
Though God knows why that brush with your rabble
Should be dignified as war. Or, indeed, as battle.

Munro:
And still you are concerned with forms of speech:
A scuffle, an engagement - which is which?
But can't you see the jargon of the trade
Has little bearing on why wars are made?
And obviously you don't care to recall
That even though your exchange was a scuffle
Our pikes and pitchforks had you on the run
At Creevy Rocks. All was not simply won.[49]

The expressed indifference to ideology, "the jargon of the trade", marks the development of Heaney's poetic beliefs at their embryonic stage. He had yet to sophistocate his critical conception of the function of lyric as a distinct discursive order and to make his commitment to poetry in Glanmore's Orphean surrounds. But his determination to broaden his poetic range had led him to attempt his first incursion into the distinct literary discipline of dramatic verse. By the time he would return to this form more than twenty years later, he would be totally "concerned with forms of speech" having recognised the discursive truth that ideology's signifying practices have every "bearing on why wars are made".

The urgency of determining a figurative strategy capable of sustaining his enlarging poetic concerns was heightened in these early years of the Troubles. In his poetic exploration of form he sought to define various means of expressing his feeling in words adequate to his sense of crisis. A variety of techniques evolved in which he sought to define his position as a literary member of the minority. The quality of his response varied as he veered from experimentation with a mythological framework in "A Lough Neagh

Sequence" [50] which reconfigures the local poachers world on the waters of the lake that was transferred into British ownership at the time of the Plantations, to the brutally direct balladic form of 'Craig's Dragoons' [51] and the declarative ire of "Intimidation" [52] which states

> Each year this reek
> Of their midsummer madness
> Troubles him, a nest of pismires
> At his drystone walls.
>
> Ghetto rats! Are they the ones
> To do the smoking out?
> They'll come streaming past
> To taste their ashes yet.

By the time the nature of the quarrel was becoming clear and the implications for writers in the ideological war of words that sustained it clearer still, Heaney had begun to return his poetic gaze to the primary issue of the relationship between language and intelligibility.

With the publication in 1972 of Wintering Out Heaney's individual vision of the function of poetic discourse was becoming more coherent. His return to the particularity of lyric expression is beautifully rewarded in the placename poems of that volume.

In 'Anahorish' [53] the aquatic transparency of the poet's images of his original terrain refracts the simplicity of the poem's act of naming as its pure surface yields to the undercurrent of linguistic complexity.

> My 'place of clear water',
> the first hill in the world
> where springs washed into
> the shiny grass
>
> and darkened cobbles
> in the bed of the lane.
> Anahorish, soft gradient

of consonant, vowel-meadow,

The gentle fluvial progression of the lyric's meandering prosody, flows from a lucid transliteration which erodes the hegemonic hold of the conquerer's act of naming, through a pastoral image of replenished origins, into the confluence of image and theme that merge in the last couplet. What begins as a transliteration, as a return to a historically richer intelligibility of this particular image of place, swells to become an investigative influx which probes the source of its own intelligibility in the merging of signifier and signified.

The poem's naturalising image of the origins of description and denomination in the felicitously arbitrary combinations of vowel and consonant, is problematised by the fundamental indeterminacy which the act of naming suggests. For at the poem's centre resides the conundrum of speech and interpretation. How is the reader to pronounce Anahorish? The present writer was enlightened regarding his mispronunciation only after hearing the poet's own pronunciation at a reading. The problem of pronunciation which arises in the poet's other placename poems, signifies a break from the universalising presumptions of his earlier declarative poems.

For in referring to Anahorish or Broagh, Heaney is focussing his lyric imagination on the restorative estrangement which a concentration on the particularity of his particular experiences provides. These acts of transliteration and repossession signify a return to the particularity of his identity and they constitute an irrigation of the linguistic channels that link cultural specificity with its origins in a linguistically ordered form of intelligibility.

These lyric moments represent a return to the parochial genius of an identity that is formed by the discourse of difference in its reflective response to the dicourse of domination which originally situated 'Anahorish' as a moment of linguistic conquest. The subtle concentration upon the particularity which informs the act of identification, naming and pronunciation resists the universalising claims to total intelligibility which characterises the conquerer's anglicising reduction as an act of historical erasure.

But the placename poems of this collection, whilst serving to restore a deeper seam of signification in response to the ancient imperialist's palimpsestal endeavours, do not surrender to nationalism's universal illusions by denying the problematic nature of language. In fact as the poet attests, the ethos of linguistic and cultural particularity which these lyrics embody represents a cross-sectarian experience of intelligibility.

> The English can't altogether manage that last gh sound, that guttural slither. Broagh is bruach, riverbank in Irish. But Protestant and Catholic can say it perfectly in this part of the world. [54]

This assertion of particularity, of a discursive instance of differentiation that is not expressive of domination, serves to identify what Neil Corcoran describes as a "community of pronunciation" [55]. In this lyrical compression of the differentiating identity of the local and the particular, Heaney begins to express a promissory image of redemption. The source of his renewed poetic vision abides in his return to the defamiliarising reality of poetic language, which is perfectly illustrated in the arbitrary impact of "Broagh"'s confounding "gh"[56], which makes "strangers" of the poem's

readers and in doing so opens out the particular moment of intelligibility to the arbitary force of language.

The interpretative problems furnished by the morphemic "gh" serve to disturb the complacent interpretative assumptions about language that underwrite identitarian discourse's habitually universalising interpretations of history, culture and politics. That this momentary morphemic disruption of interpretative familiarity is activated by the extreme particularity of his parochial cultural expression, indicates the degree to which a poetics grounded in (or foregrounded by) the particularity of immediate events may explore the historical, cultural and linguistic dimensions of the poet's identity without surrendering to the ideological imperatives of identitarian discourse's universalising form of intelligibility.

What is emerging in these placename poems is a fundamental reconfiguration of the the relationship between poetic discourse and the matter of cultural and political identity. Whilst a number of critics have sought to characterise these poems as being reducible to identitarian affirmations of nationalism's territorial imperatives, their ideological accusations are grounded in a monocular view of the discursive formation of identity. In this particular view, all expressions of identity by a writer whose experiential world of allegiances and perceptions originates in the nationalist community's particular heritage are coterminous with nationalism's identitarian form.

What these poems in fact express, is the possibility of repossessing the particularity of one's culturally specific experience as particularity. The implicit discursive form that

structures this interpretation of identity trades on the indeterminate dimensions of language to foreground the matter of identity as a specifying and not a universalising description of cultural and political intelligibility. The rhetoric informing this poetics differentiates without dominating.

If these poems through their restorative toponymies constitute acts of poetic reterritorialisation in response to the anglicising ordinance of Britain's nineteenth century imperialist ideology, then these reterritorialisations embody a different discursive form. For these acts of linguistic resignification differentiate themselves from the governing code of a hegemonic discourse of unitary British identity through the discursive expression of particularity in the poems' foregrounded language.

Unless the critic assumes the hegemonic ideological position of the Flags and Emblems Act which defines all such expressions of difference from extreme unionism's totalistic intelligibility as implicitly counterhegemonic assertions of domination, then the elaboration of a specifying form of identity must be admitted as a humane and redemptive poetic response to the problem of identity in modern Ireland. Furthermore, a poetics of identity which may assert specificity without signifying a dominative universality of meaning, prefigures a possible response to the problem of conflicting identities in the normative discourse of politics.

In this light, the expression of cultural specificity which the poems' defamiliarising strategies of denomination embody, represents an emerging poetics of identity in Heaney's work that is grounded in (or foregrounded by) the differentiating signifying power of language

and history in the lyric's transfigurative domain. Far from embodying an identitarian poetics of totalistic intelligibility, these poems function by exploring the particular moments of linguistic indeterminacy that express cultural narratives as fragmentary narratives of difference.

It is the failure of some critics to envisage the poetic discourse of identity as being capable of representing identity as either a differentiating discourse of specificity or a hegemonic illusion of totality, that underwrites the ideological accusations which typify some of the most vigorous receptions of these poems. Lloyd's ideologically informed misreading in particular, summarises the critical results which such a monocular view of identity produces when he writes that

> Place, identity and language mesh in Heaney, as in nationalism, and because naming performs a cultural reterritorialisation by replacing the contingent continuities of a historical community with an ideal register of continuity in which the name (of place or object) operates symbolically as the commonplace communicating between actual and ideal continua. The name always serves likeness, never difference.[57]

By the early nineteen seventies Northern Ireland was deep in crisis. The events that fuelled the worsening crisis - the burning down of neighbourhoods, the discriminate and indiscriminate killing, the suspension of habeas corpus and the general lawlessness of citizens, militias, constabulary and troops - served to reiterate violently the ideological stalemate that had configured life in the region in the conceptually bankrupt politics of nationalist and unionist extremism. That these ideological forms were (and are) legitimated by an identitarian view of culture and politics, only deepened the writer's

problematic awareness of the relationship between the poetic and the discourse of identity.

One of the characteristic aspects of the divided communities' response to the events was a deepening allegiance to the ideologies that guarantee the quarrel. The political and cultural intransigence that characterises Ulster politics to this day, is remarkable for the almost perverse sense of relief that accompanies representatives' assertions that their ideological illusions of intelligibility have been proved correct. For unionists and nationalists alike this response is couched in terms of the cyclical quasi-predestined historical Geist that underwrites the inevitability of their conflicting positions. There is almost a sense of pleasure in decay, because the "inevitability" of the crisis affirms an order of historical intelligibility whose cyclical testing of the collective resolve serves to rescue them from the arbitrary facticity of modernity.

In reality these forms of intelligibility are chosen discursive forms which transform the particularity of each cultural narrative into a universal illusion of intelligibility. But they represent a discursively formed response to the arbitrary origins of power and meaning in modernity. In essence they represent what Herbert Marcuse defines in another context as "consciousness of crisis Krissenbewusztsein : a pleasure in decay, in destruction, in the beauty of evil" [58].It is this mysterious "consciousness of crisis" which moves to the centre of Heaney's exploration of the relationship between historical conceptions of identity and the discourse of poetry during the early nineteen seventies.

Confronted with the actual world's deepening challenge to his poetic role, Heaney himself became crisis-ridden. A number of profiles and interviews of this period present Heaney as doubtful, poetically insecure and surprisingly inarticulate. In an Irish Times interview of 1973 he says

> I'm not sure what I'm writing at the moment. I'm not really writing...I tend to work in swoops. All right, I dunno, it seems to be a matter of a fluency, of language and connections, a sense of something growing, the words coming and lifting off and bringing things up....you know I have always been unsure and afraid of taking it to my ego, ascribing it to my name....I am, of course, haunted, not by guilt, but by a vague feeling of missing a historical moment, but I think anyone who has lived for thirty-three years in the North of Ireland has the history layered into him irretrievably. I'm thirty-four and I've taken the risk, not just of leaving, but of risking the sense of yourself in these ridiculous verses which are only a habit in some ways.[59]

A year previously, some three months before his move to Glanmore, his uneasiness at the ceaseless journalistic reductions of his position had led him to terminate an interview and supply the Irish Times interviewer with a letter outlining the exact nature of his poetic predicament. "All through my work", he writes,

> long before the symptoms of our disease became so glamorous that the television crews of the world came like glossy flies to a dungheap, I have been writing poems out of history. It's the hump we live off. I have my tap-root in personal and racial memory. The famine, the '98 rebellion - things like that have surfaced in my imagination and they are a living language here -they are a papist preoccupation. They're like being called Seamus. They imply an idea of Ireland, an affiliation to a way of thinking at odds with the "no surrender" mythology. In a way they are public statements.
>
> I realise that there is a public expectation, a pressure, that poets will rise to the public occasion with work to engage the mass audience; and I realise that I can make gestures of solidarity, disaffection, protest, interpretation and so on in the medium of verse. I've done things like that too. But until that deliberate and political story of the mind is flooded by the more secret and engendering energies of the subconscious the result

> as far as I'm concerned is likely to be less than satisfactory. I like the meaning of a poem to reside as much in its smell and echoes as in its sentiments.[60]

Here in essence is the central poetic dilemma of Heaney's literary life. How may he be faithful to his particular cultural experience without surrendering his poetics to the identitarian implications of the "idea of Ireland" with which it is habitually associated? How may he respond to his own sensibility's common demand for a response to his society's and his community's predicament without engaging with the dominative rhetoric of the quarrel or evading the human claims of the actual world of suffering upon his aesthetic world of illusions?

In the final lines of this excerpt there is an embryonic response to these dilemmas. By displacing his poetic from the deterministic imperatives of ideology through the interanimating forces of subconscious suggestion and linguistic indeterminacy, and by displacing himself from the public world of the quarrel, he could envisage a poetic whose auditory imagination and foregrounded language would open out towards a possible image of redemption.

Writing in the Guardian a week later he summarised this deepening realisation.

> On the one hand, poetry is secret and natural, on the other hand it must make its way in a world that is public and brutal. Here the explosions literally rattle your window day and night, lives are shattered blandly or terribly, innocent men have been officially beaten and humiliated in internment camps - destructive elements of all kinds, which are even perhaps deeply exhilarating, are in the air. At one minute you are drawn towards the old vortex of racial and religious instinct, at another time you seek the mean of a humane love and reason. Yet is your raison d'être not involved with marks on paper? As Patrick Kavanagh said, a man dabbles in verses and finds they are his life.[61]

Heaney's growing realisation of the centrality of "marks on paper" to his life and of the urgency to relate these identifying marks to the discourse of identity defining the vortex of instinct and reason, led him to deepen the technical ambition of his poetry and to instantiate this more ambitious commitment to poetic resourcefulness by moving to County Wicklow.

The already problematic issue of the relevance of his lyrical gift in the deteriorating circumstances of the Ulster region, developed into a more immediate sense of crisis about the relationship between his own personal poetic illusions of identity and those of his community, now under attack, in which his sensibility was nurtured. The engagingly naive first person singular of the early poems now yielded to his reconsideration of the distinctly unroyal "we".

To increase the imaginative range of his lyric voice in the context of a historicallly configured collective social and political upheaval he began to search for figurative resources capable of sustaining the conceptual dimensions of his historical exploration. Writing with a Yeatsian sense of self-consciousness about the challenge for poetry in the wake of 1969's grim events he notes that

> From that moment the problems of poetry moved form being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament. I do not mean liberal lamentation that citizens should feel compelled to murder one another or deploy their different military arms over the matter of nomenclatures such as British or Irish. I do not mean public celebrations or execrations of resistance or atrocity - although there is nothing necessarily unpoetic about such celebration, if one thinks of Yeats's 'Easter 1916'. I mean that I felt it imperative to discover a field of force in which, without abandoning fidelity to the processes and experience of poetry as I have outlined them, it would be possible to encompass the perspectives of a humane reason and at the same time to grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable

authenticity and complexity. [62]

What Heaney was seeking to include within his imaginative range was a poetics of witness. But the difficulty of determining "images and symbols adequate to our predicament" through a penitential inquisition of the atavisms, illusions and treasured forms of bigotry informing the discourse of identity that serves to constitute the predicament as a collective form of intelligibility, resides in the explicit danger of surrendering the lyric's particular voice to the universalising imperatives habitualised in nationalism's collective narratives.

What is notable about the poet's sentiments is the fact that he characterises this particular period of his poetic development as a search rather than as a conclusive disquisition. The extraordinary impact of North has tended to overshadow the fact that the poet's imaginative disposition at this time was racked by doubt about the adequacy of his imagistic response, about the ultimate ideological significance of his central mythological trope, and about his own personal doubts about his commitment to writing.

The orderliness of his verseform, and the deterministic arrangement of his poetry in the collection, combined with what one critic describes as "the axiomatic rightness of the images" [63], tend to misrepresent the conflicting tone of the volume which pits the author's exultant feeling at the discovery of a potent poetic resource against the poet's overwhelming sense of doubt about the exact significance and import of these poetically empowering images. In deciphering the status of these symbols in relation to Heaney's interrogation of the poetics of identity, it is, therefore, important

that the critic remain attentive to this ambiguity which serves to present the symbols as both representative of the predicament and interrogative of their own relationship to the predicament's discursive constitution.

"Civilized Outrage": Heaney's Bog Poems

Heaney's discovery of the bog and its preservative powers have been well documented [64]. But prior to his fateful encounter with the work of P.V.Glob [65] the poet's search for a more resonant figurative range had led him to explore the bog as a potent objective correlative for the mythological and historical dimensions of ethnicity. In "Bogland" [66], the concluding poem of Door Into the Dark, Heaney begins his exploration of the bog's figurative potential as a correlative to the territorialities of Ireland's nationalist culture. In this poem the bog's preservative powers and its consequent capacity to bring the matter of history to contemporary consciousness is described in terms of its physical, geographical and historical indeterminacy.

> The ground itself is kind, black butter
>
> Melting and opening underfoot,
> Missing its last definition
> By millions of years.[67]

This indeterminacy is the conditional factor which allows the bog to bring to light the perfectly preserved objects of an age long past. Thus it is the bog's indeterminacy which brings to light images of the reifying impact of historical discourse's palimpsestal reconfiguration of the past "Every layer.../Seems camped on before", through its own layers of forgetting, suppression and selection.

This image of the bog as metaphor of poetically restored historical consciousness yielding forth the reified remnants of historical erasure, implicitly places poetic discourse in conflict with the ideological discourse which such historical palimpsest signifies. For the poetic act of recovery is empowered by the bog's suggestive indeterminacy and the poetic's exploitation of this indeterminate dynamic in its linguistic improvisation that opens and melts the categories of interpretation in its act of foregrounding, by "Missing its last definition". The ideological narratives of historical erasure function in exactly the opposite way.

For nationalism's extemporising narrative of history hypostatises the heterogenising significance of facticity by characterising its primary signifiers as interpretative of a fixed and unchanging universe of ideal meanings, meanings which configure the chronophobic discourse of historical representation as synchronic, teleological and immemorially defined.

The conceptual closure that characterises nationalism's identitarian reduction of historical discourse is predicated by its timeless illusion of truth. Thus, while poetry's exploration of the suppressed significance of history is predicated by the ouverture of indeterminate definition, nationalism's extemporal suppression of these heterogeneous facts is predicated by the clôture which its unwillingness to open out the process of historical interpretation to continuous redefinition represents. Poetry reveals by "Missing its last definition" whilst ideology conceals by deliberately "Missing its last definition/By millions of years".

In his later poems' more structured exploration of the bog as

historical metaphor, he tries to fathom the figurative and ideological dimensions of its significance. At this point however, the bog may indicate an aperture upon a larger discursive domain in which the static identitarian form of the quarrel may be foregrounded - "The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage", or it may present an unfathomable pool of irretrievably atavistic forces. Either way, for the poet seeking "symbols adequate to our predicament" its indeterminate depths provide a promissory focus in which his poetic may renegotiate the terms between arbitrariness and intelligibility as the "wet centre is bottomless".

'The Tollund Man' [68] describes a contemporary object or an artefact (given its presentation at Silkeborg Museum) whose engorgement by the bog has permitted a distinct interpretative change in the way in which it may be signified and described. The contemporary observer viewing 'Tollund Man''s' remains through the museum's enshrining glass is presented with a literal realisation of history's reifying impact on humanity.

For the bog has aided the process of dehumanisation which permits poet and tourist alike to view an individual's mortal remains as a fabulous artefact that is less important in itself than for what it may suggest about the discourse of history. Here within the quintessentially post-Enlightenment context of a museum, is a literal realisation of the power of certain discursive forms (history and aesthetics to name but two) to hypostatize human experience in the service of particular discursive imperatives. For the lyric poet whose discourse embodies an exegesis of feeling the central critical question relates to the quality of the response to this dehumanising

reality. In exploring the figurative potential of the bog as objective correlative, does the poet collude with the forces at work or foreground their disturbing implications?

In 'The Tollund Man' the poet's fascination with his poetic resource leads him to probe eagerly the descriptive variations available to him in the first section. The poetic persona's awe leads him to reconfigure the bog's biochemical processes in mythological terms.

> I will stand a long time.
> Bridegroom to the goddess,
>
> She tightened her torc on him
> And opened her fen,
> Those dark juices working
> Him to a saint's kept body, [69].

The poet broadens his description from an intimate account suggestive of the sacrificial myth rituals of ancient Denmark, to incorporate the informing mythological intelligibility of sacrifice and fertility into the poem's own anthropomorphic tropes. The unitary illusions of intelligibility which mythological narratives serve to enforce are reconfigured in the anthropomorphic trope of an extemporal unitary subject which the image of the bog as "goddess" conveys. That this conceptual reformulation of intelligibility is a commonplace of hibernotpoian discourse, is an imaginative bridge that will be crossed in the second section of the poem.

> I would risk blasphemy,
> Consecrate the cauldron bog
> Our holy ground and pray
> Him to make germinate
>
> The scattered, ambushed
> Flesh of labourers,
> Stockinged corpses
> Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth
Flecking the sleepers
Of four young brothers, trailed
For miles along the lines.[70]

The logic of the poet's prayer for some form of redemptive intelligibility in the context of contemporary Northern Ireland is in this instance difficult to fathom. By associative transference he wishes to reconfigure the Irish bog as the sacred emblem of the nationalist community's collective historical intelligibility. It is significantly "Our holy ground", identified as such by the harrowing descriptions of the actual nationalist victims of Northern Ireland's state terrorism which was enacted with characteristically paramilitary vigour by the "B Specials" in the formative years of Stormont's totalistic regime and duplicated in the sectarian savagery of the UDR at the time of the poem's writing.

But the poet's appeal, that the 'Tollund Man', a victim of ancient mores and contemporary dehumanisation, should "make germinate" the arbitrary slaughter of these nationalist victims raises the problematic question as to what this act of germination signifies. Is this an affirmation of the Pearsean "unhealthy intersection" between sacrifice and historical intelligibility or a poetic plea to envisage in the contrapuntal images of barbarism and civility the need to interrogate the discourse of sacrificial intelligibility in the potentially transfigurative domain of poetic expression?

The poet's speculative imaginings regarding the probable impact of such a visit upon his sensibility move towards a nervous resolution in the third section's ambiguous peroration. Opening with an act of empathetic identification between poet and victim, the writer

imagines that

> Something of his sad freedom
> As he rode the tumbril
> Should come to me, driving, [71].

What does this "sad freedom" signify? Perhaps the author is alluding to the fact that freedom as a predicate of cultural and political intelligibility is always supplemented by the cultural and political restraints and renunciations that permit an intelligible discourse of identity and belonging to exist in the arbitrary cosmos of human experience. Freedom is always already defined by a certain loss of freedom. To experience the freedom of belonging neccessitates the acceptance of certain intelligible norms which define the categories of belonging or which in other words express identity. For Tollund Man his freedom is rendered intelligible by the mythological discourse of sacrifice and germinative rebirth. Ultimately his freedom is therefore conditional upon his willingness to accept these sacrificial norms of intelligibility, even to the point of his own sacrificial annihilation. His identity is culturally defined by his willingness to accept the discursive imperatives of a sacrificial philosophy of history. The parallels for the author in the crucible of nationalist rebellion are clear.

For the poet, the "sad freedom" which nationalism's sacrificial illusion of historical intelligibility offers is deeply problematic. If he is to collude with the discursive imperatives involved by becoming "Bridegroom to the goddess", he may avail of an easy solution to the problem of alienation. But to do so, as the poem's own artefactual treatment of Tollund Man in the opening stanzas attests, is to collude in the dehumanising process which such an

identitarian illusion of intelligibility admits. Not to do so accentuates the poet's increasingly disquieting sense of displacement which is reinforced by the distinct aesthetic demands which poetic form imposes on the author. If he renounces the "sad freedom" of a sacrificially legitimated ideology, he will remain enveloped by the "sad freedom" that separates the poet from the common tongue of cultural and political imperatives.

In the concluding images of the poet's imagined voyage through Jutland the "sad freedom" of poetic displacement is signified in the description of the poet insulated from the actual world by the vitrine threshold of the car's windscreen vision (which is a topos of displacment in Heaney's poetry). Here the liminal concerns of the Study-bound poet in 'Digging' resurface. But in this poem, the poet's displaced dilemma behind the car's glass-framed image of the actual world reflects back upon Tollund Man's glass-encased artefactuality. And in this reflection the "sad freedom" which connects the two men is the realisation that such a sacrificial discourse of intelligibility is finally dehumanising or in the poem's own terms "man-killing". To fossilise history by surrendering the heterogeneous facticity of human experience to the intelligible imperatives of such an identitarian discourse of identity, is in the end a fundamentally dehumanising act.

For the author's sensibility, the collusion with such dehumanising forces may result in the reification of sensibility, in the reduction of the drunken variousness of human relations to a commodified world of ruthlessly determined dehumanised objects whose value lies solely in their capacity to represent the diminished economy of

ideologically correct meanings. The savagery of Ulster's competing violent narratives of intelligibility, with their dehumanising view of individuals as objects that may be instrumentalised in the service of ideological domination, typified in the discourse of "legitimate targets", "normal casualties of war", and the transformation of the term "security" into a signifier of terror, embodies the reality of this "sad freedom" in a discourse of identity and belonging that is all too familiar to the poet. And its displacing impact upon the writer's poetic sense of himself is sadly clear.

> Out there in Jutland
> In the old man-killing parishes
> I will feel lost,
> Unhappy and at home. [72]

For the poet the dilemma remains to determine the possibility of imaginative parishes that are not "man-killing", and to do so he must investigate the conceptual topography of these places by discovering just what he is driving at and beyond in this imagined voyage.

In fulfilment of his promise Heaney visited Denmark in October 1973 during which time he made the descriptive annotations in the Museums of Jutland which would form the basis of North's bog poems. His attraction to the bog trove as correlative symbolic resources was accentuated by his deepening need to find a form capable of sustaining some degree of poetic distance from the immediate horrors of the Irish crisis. His rationale in exploring the bog's symbolic potential as a response to the gruesome quotidien reality of Northern Ireland is explicit in his remarks to Brian Donnelly.

> My emotions, my feelings, whatever those instinctive energies are that have to be engaged for a poem, those energies quickened more when contemplating a victim, strangely, from 2000 years ago than they did from

> contemplating a man at the end of the road being swept into a plastic bag - I mean the barman at the end of our road tried to carry out a bomb and it blew up. Now there is of course something terrible about that, but somehow language, words didn't live in the way that they have to live in a poem when they are hovering over that kind of horror and pity. They just became inert. And it was in these victims made strangely beautiful by the process of lying in bogs that somehow I felt I could make offerings or images that were emblems. [73]

Heaney's emblematic response in his bog poems serves both the exposition of the "horror and pity" through his metaphorical distancing of the terrible event's psychic energy and the reflexive interrogation of his poetry's own complicity in the rhetoric of the quarrel. For the critical question that recurs throughout his various adaptations of the bog image focusses on why the bog's transhistorical significance should be an appropriate trope of distance or objectivity, if it serves to embody the rhetorical structure of the quarrel's illusory historicity? If the bog provides an accurate metaphorical parallel for nationalism's identitarian discourse of history, how may he explore its figurative potential without surrendering to the mythological presumptions of Irish nationalism?

'The Grauballe Man' [74] provides a thoughtful exposition of these issues. Through the artesian quatrain form that drills the heavily stressed semantically twisting lines "Inwards and downwards" [75], the hidden psychic deposits that animate the bog's imaginative power are forced under pressure to the poem's rhetorical surfaces. In this poem as in many others of this period, the poet's inquisition of poetic doubt is literalised in the tight lipped stanza-forms whose heavily stressed prosodic contortions seem to dart towards and recoil from

their own implicative force in the typographically dominant unwritten margins.

The determined querulous squirming of the short-line form's dunting progressions, signifies both a resolve to get to the bottom of the rhetoric's "wet centre" and a nervous sense of unease about the capacity of traditional longer line prosody to be sufficiently scrupulous in raising history's "dark permanence of ancient forms" [76] to the surface. The scrupulous poetic voice of much of North is motivated by the desire to interrogate the relationship between his own poetic voice and the scrupulous interpretative meanness of nationalism's overdetermined discourse of identity. In these interrogative poems the auditory imagination's amplitude is compressed to sound out the artesian wells of communication that link a scrupulous historical identity with a generous imaginative disposition.

The scrupulous poetic conditions of crisis-ridden Ulster are explored through the conditional focus of 'The Grauballe Man's' exacting depiction.

> As if he had been poured
> in tar, he lies
> on a pillow of turf
> and seems to weep
>
> the black river of himself. [77]

The exactness of the figurative description, whether through the durable similes that become compressed into figurative assertions of identity (from "the ball of his heel/**like** a basalt egg" to "His hips **are** the ridge/ and purse of a mussel") is recurrently undermined by the figurative ambiguity of key moments of description. For whilst

the exact description of the textural similes assert an overdetermined stream of signification, these hard-edged reifying configurations are confounded by the indeterminate force of the poem's underdetermined images.

The durable solidity of the physiological determinations ("wrists/bog oak"; "heel/basalt egg"; "instep/ swan's foot"; "spine/eel arrested") is counterpointed by the indeterminacy of the poet's own increasingly interventionist imagination. The Marvellian reflexivity of the opening stanza's "self inwoven simile" (to use Christopher Ricks's Empsonian terms in describing this rhetorical commonplace in Heaney [78]) "and seems to weep/ the black river of himself" functions by presenting a radically underdetermined relationship between signifier and signified.

This reflexive imagery foregrounds its own imagistic impact by centering the logic of its own interpretation in the image's own figurative structure, without determining that figurative structure's context of correspondence between the image's signifiers and the actuality signified. This reflexive strategy is a rhetorical commonplace in Heaney's poetics and it serves to foreground the superficially determinate logic of the poem's general thematic coherence with imagistic figures of indeterminacy whose circular rhetorical structure evades simple transcriptions, by returning language to its own indeterminate centre.

But this particularly ambiguous figure prefigures the ambiguous status of the subject of description, Grauballe Man, who is both artefact and human, descriptively exact and conceptually indefinable. As the poetic descriptions progress, the ambiguity deepens. The

power of the poetic imagination to describe the chin above a violently slashed throat as "a visor", a visionary inlet, suggests a sceptical awareness about the inhumanity of such poetic transfiguration that lies at the heart of such moments of imagistic brilliance. This ambiguous collusion with the dehumanising forces that have victimised him is embodied in the poetic's aestheticisation of his actual condition as a human victim of extreme violence. And this collusive ambiguity is memorably expressed with oxymoronic force in the image of the cured wound.

In what sense is Grauballe Man's fatal wound "cured"? The wound is manifestly the uncured site of his fatality, it remains open and indicative of the actual world of violence. But the preservative processes of the bog have "cured" and polished the body and in doing so have aided the process of dehumanisation by presenting the murder-victim's body as a beautiful object. The victim has in a sense become desomatised, his bodily reality which the gaping uncured wound signifies is denied as a direct result of the bog's historical process of preservation, a process that the artist duplicates in his poetic reconfiguration of the actual victim's aesthetic significance.

This poetry, like that form of history which aims to reconfigure the heterogeneous facticity of human experience as a static homogeneous body of truth, may serve the process of dehumanisation which leads to a reified sensibility by failing to attend to the actual specificity of human nature which this object presents. Alternatively the historically desensitised sensibility of identitarian discourse will render its needy imagination incapable of humane and sympathetic identifications with the realm of the 'Other'.

This dilemma is summarised in the poem's ambiguous questions which ask indicatively

> Who will say 'corpse'
> to his vivid cast?
> Who will say 'body'
> to his opaque repose? [79]

Who will admit his mortality or envisage his distinct identity when the forces of history and aesthetics collude to present his estranging presence as indicative of a form of intelligibility that instrumentalises his extraordinariness as an object of discursive legitimation? This reifying intelligibility that reduces the world of meaning to a timeless continuum of semantic objects and legitimates the annihilation of pathos and thus permits the extreme instrumental violence of totalistic discourse, is a form of intelligibility that threatens the very possibility of poetry.

Remembering the exactness and determinacy of his earlier on-the-spot descriptions, the poet realises that his appropriation of the victim's significance was like the image of the "Dying Gaul" on the victim's shield - "too strictly compassed". In the final penitential stanzas, he restores the victim to the full compass of all poetic intelligibility which is defined by "beauty and atrocity" and arraigned by the gravity of fact,

> with the actual weight
> of each hooded victim,
> slashed and dumped. [80]

Poetry's strenuous negotiation between arbitrariness and intelligibility, between terror and beauty, between linguistic indeterminacy and a deterministic imagination, is most scrupulously exposed in Heaney's most controversial poem, 'Punishment' [81]. In

this poem Heaney deepens the excavation of nationalism's mythocentric historicity to such a degree that the presumptuous intelligibility of identitarian discourse's legitimating narrative of civility and its ruthlessly mundane instrumental narrative of barbarism are at times indistinguishable.

The poetic persona through which the poem is narrated expresses an unambiguous identity. This narrating "I" does not permit an inuring sense of complexity to come between the primary emotions under consideration and the poems reader. The relieving distances of earlier poem's is forgone so that all who engage in this act of scrutinised punishment experience the brunt of the crisis. But this narrating "I" is the only stable and unambiguous point of identification in the poem's harrowing progression. Who "she" is, what "she" constitutes, what 'Punishment' signifies, who this punishment refers to and what it denotes about this unambiguous, unpunished "I", remain unclear.

"She" is a representation of "Windeby Girl" executed by her tribe for breaking the collective taboo, for asserting her own instinctive needs, her identity, against the discursive imperatives that structured the tribe's social and political norms as universally intelligible. "She" is a contemporary artefact, whose necrological fascination blinds the contemporary day-trippers to the realisation that their artefactual view reiterates the dehumanising process which the bog's mythopoeic powers engender and which recycled and reduplicated the original annihilation of her human identity. As an artefact, a reified victim of the aesthetic imagination, she queries the capacity of poetry to view her without surrender to the selfsame

dehumanising evasions of overdetermined meanings.

The title of the poem initiates this ambiguous inquisition of poetic propriety. 'Punishment', if it applies to Windeby Girl's fate, is the kind of euphemistic distortion of language which totalistic discourse instrumentalises to transform its arbitrary narrative of barbaric empowerment into a legitimating narrative of civilising intelligibility (consider the typical IRA example of summary "justice", the "punishment shooting" in which an errant member of the local community has their ankles/elbows/kneecaps shattered by a bullet or sometimes by a sledgehammer or electric power drill).

There is implicit in this euphemistic description an indication of the collusive power of language in the construction of identitarian discourse's totalistic imperatives. For in the exact and overdetermined language of ideological intelligibility, its civilising illusions are dependent upon the restriction of the signifier's power to explore its signifying range. In the domain of nationalist illusions of historical and cultural intelligibility, language is the first to be punished.

But reflecting the artefactual reduction of the girl's human identity, the gradual extension of the meaning, context and nature of punishment in the discursively reductive arena of nationalist ideology, is poetically realised by the narrating Ego's complacent aesthetic reconfiguration of the brutal emotional tensions which undeflow this act of linguistic distortion.

The naivety of the narrating Ego's unpunished identity increasingly conflicts with the culpability which the poem's gathering semantic momentum evokes. For the poetic exposition of

linguistic duplicity and ideological suppressions renders increasingly ironic the narrating voice's involvement in the selfsame process of dehumanisation which its view of the girl as artefactual, sexual and mythopoeic object signifies. For as the poetic voice's empathetic descriptions of the victim develop, its ingratiating illusion of objectivity increasingly betrays a sensibility that is itself victim to the objectifying or reifying intelligibility of nationalism's identitarian discourse of hypostatic signifiers, idealised histories, and universalising territorialities.

Nationalist ideology's instrumental view of human dignity, which is typified by its discursive reduction of the heterogeneous complexity of human meaning to a homogeneous illusion of universal identity, is predicated by discursive strategies which departicularise the uniqueness and identity of the individual through the suborning collective territorialities of unification. That this illusory imperative is grounded in an instrumental view of history, language, religion, and place accentuates its punishing impact upon the individual's capacity to create and develop an individual sense of identity without surrendering to the reifying dehumanisation which such instrumentality promises.

As the poem explores the meaning of this euphemistic distortion, the poetic instrumentalisation of the girl's dilemma begins to expose its own aesthetic terms of reference as indicative of the general ideological dilemma. What begins as a direct empathetic identification "I can feel the tug/ of the halter at the nape/of her neck" develops to become an external description whose fascination with its own instrumental powers of depiction increasingly distances

the narrator from the victim as she becomes reified by his linguistic imagination, an object sexual with implication

> 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,....
>
> 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. [82]

The narrator's voyeurism extends beyond the dubious sexual tone of these descriptions. For he is presented with the import of suffering and in attending to his victim his imagination draws him to the verge of becoming a mere voyeur of suffering. In the aesthetic wake of Auschwitz, when the artist is called upon to attend to the suffering voices of humanity the artist is faced with this extreme dilemma. By attending to the victim in the distinct discursive domain of the lyric, the lyric's animating force (which is feeling) places him perilously close to instrumentalising or exploiting the suffering victim and thus reiterating the original crime. If these lyric reconfigurations of suffering uncritically attend to the poet's pleasure-drive alone, which is external to the subject's rhetoric of suffering, then he is guilty of aesthetic collusion with the forces of totality.

If however, he may return his poetic figurations to the source of this rhetoric of suffering, by implicating the suppressed rhetoric of domination through the poem's confession of its own discursive dilemma, then he may answer this charge conscientiously. For the poem's discursive dilemma involves the negotiation between the overdetermined meanings of nationalism's mythocentric intelligibility which supplies the implied conceptual background to the poem's interpretation, and the indeterminate status of poetry's reconfigured narrative which explores the psychological terms and conditions structuring this form of intelligibility. Whether the poet may evade the charge of collusion is dependent upon his ability to expose the poem's own indebtedness to this form of intelligibility, to expose his own imaginative victimisation and in doing so to envisage poetry's linguistic strategies as a means of disrupting this process of victimisation which the identitarian imagination demands of its adherents.

The increasingly self-conscious persona initiates the confessional process in which the poem's rhetorical complicity will be revealed in language that is biblically resonant.

> 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 muscle's webbing
> and all your numbered bones: [83]

Windeby Girl has become a "scapegoat" for the persona as he attempts to comprehend the depth of his involvement in the rhetoric of

domination by sacrificing her implicative power to his imaginative need. In this imaginative act of sacrifice, he has sacramentalised language by conjoining the aesthetic consideration of the theme of dehumanisation with an actual reenactment of the process in language. In recognising his predicament as an "artful voyeur" he is confessing that art and actuality are inextricably conjoined by their mutual linguistic constitution.

In this context the "stones of silence" take on a renewed figurative meaning. Silence, the suppression of signification, is an extremism of identitarian discourse's interpretative imperatives to reduce the play of the signifier to the illusory restrictive practices of nationalism's view of history, culture and belonging. The erasure of historical diversity, the suppression of the heterogeneous world of cultural facticity, the denial of the indeterminacy of meaning, all serve to legitimate nationalism's discourse of intelligibility which functions like the mythopoeic bog, to engorge the subject and reconfigure it as an instrumental object in the rhetoric of domination's cultic victimisation of difference.

The rhetoric of domination which is grounded in the signifying practices whose deliberate reduction of the field of interpretation creates the overdetermined signifiers through which its actions are legitimated is thus dependent on the suppression of language's radical indeterminacy. For the poet, the failure to attend to the reiteration and exploration of language's radically diverse constituency of meaning, is to collude in this rhetoric of domination by casting the stones of silence and permitting these essentialist interpretations to remain caste in stone.

Thus the poem begins to evolve into an aesthetic confiteor of poetry's inextricable connection with the actual world. The naive belief that language permits an unproblematic distance between narrator and narrative is increasingly eroded as the victim of punishment becomes less the dead girl and more the narrative voice.

> 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. [84]

This parallel with the contemporary victims of identitarian discourse's pious narratives of collective propriety deepens the meaning of punishment. These easy victims, instrumentalised by nationalist extremists as signs of a depraved breach with the norms of collective intelligibility, and as a warning to those who may wish to pursue their own instinctive fascination with the otherness of their immediate world (which a perilous fling with soldiers or Protestants may represent), are victims of an "exact" world of discourse.

For the identitarian discourse of nationalism's cultural, historical and political intelligibility is fundamentally dependent on a reduction of the field of interpretation to the "exact" overdetermined signifiers of its unitary illusions. The violent economics of hate flow from this primarily linguistic illusion, and the pious retributive sectarian cycle of killing and maiming is rendered intelligibile and legitimate only by the discursive exactions of a reduced field of meaning. It is in this exactness,

this obsessively determinate view of language that the rhetoric of domination is born.

For poetry to provide a redemptive image of culture and history it must explore the indeterminacy of language and counter the illusions of civility with the barbarous reality of a world that is as arbitrarily formed as it is intelligibly defined. To "connive/in civilized outrage" is to evade the real predicament of modern consciousness and serves to deny to poetry its redemptive force in a world after Auschwitz.

In one sense this denial of poetry's freedom to redeem the author and his society from the sway of totality is "the exact/ and tribal, intimate revenge." It represents the ultimate punishment for an imagination whose identity is inextricably linked with "marks on paper". The progressive enlightenment of the narrating voice's status as an imaginatively punished victim develops into a final comprehension of his position as collaborator and victim of the tribe's "intimate revenge". By surrendering to the suasive mythopoeic illusions of intelligibility which the bog's extemporal power signifies without recognising the fundamentally dehumanising force of its figurative significance, by surrendering in other words, to an uncritical acceptance of nationalism's formal depiction of identity, the poet may fall victim to its instrumentalising hold on language, feeling and human identity.

For the poet to survive, he must escape the punishing hold of nationalism's identitarian discourse and return his imaginative gaze to the world beyond this exact, delimiting horizon, to the primary conditions from which the need for such exact illusions of

intelligibility arise. Beyond the mythopoeic bog there lies a desire to consider it as mythologically intelligible. And this desire begins as all others do in the recognition of a primary relationship between arbitrariness and intelligibility. It is a recognition that animates modernity's ideological formations and it arises as a consequence of defining human consciousness as that which is constituted by language's uncertain force.

In recognising that art is always already punished by the actual world because of its linguistic involvement, Heaney begins to probe the deeper meaning of human identity by exploring through language's indeterminate power the determining questions of modern consciousness. To transcend the poetics of connivance Heaney must of necessity re-envisage his poetic concerns. To comprehend the poetic meaning of modernity he must reappraise the role of place, past and psyche in a poetics now reaching out beyond the restrictive illusions of ideology.

The rather high-pitched reception of 'Punishment' has tended to overlook the fact that the eponymous term does not suggest a sense of closure. 'Punishment' is coterminous with that state of mind which views history from the point of view of the Ireland of ideas, in which all present actions are symbolically reinterpreted in terms of a mythologically calibrated legitimating illusion of cultural and political intelligibility. That this illusory discourse of identity functions by departicularising the specific immediacy of individual experience is borne out in the way in which the bog as a correlative trope dehumanises both victim and poet alike, as its fascinating suggestive power leads the persona's imagination to duplicate its

reifying treatment of humanity.

To envisage the present only in terms of a mythologically incribed discourse of intelligibility whose definition relates to an ideal register of meaning, rather than in terms which the present itself suggests, will always result in the punishment of sensibility, imaginative freedom and human dignity. The allegations that the poet is in some way content with this realisation, given its aesthetic and political repercussions, are inattentive to the poem's own emotional tenor and oblivious to the poet's subsequent renunciation of the ideological terms which such forms of nationalist discourse propose as inevitable in any treatment of Irish identity. To claim as Blake Morrison does that

> the whole procedure of North is such as to give sectarian killing in Ulster a historical respectability, which it is not usually given in day-to-day journalism [85]

is to misappraise the central ambiguity which structures the poem's rhetorical development. Ciaran Carson's response, though equally righteous in its oversimplifying response to the fundamentally distasteful truth of what Heaney describes as inherent in the nationalist imagination, is perhaps, closer to the truth when he writes that

> No one really escapes from the massacre, of course - the only way you can do that is by falsifying issues, by applying wrong notions of history instead of seeing what's before your eyes, or by taking blurbs at their face value [86].

Heaney rarely surrenders his poetic instincts unambiguously to the dangerous illusions of hibernotopian ideals - 'Act of Union's' [87] priapic imperialist glamour being an astoundingly reductive exception. Neither does he surrender to the equally false simplicity

which a denial of these barbaric forces represents in the savagely genteel illusions of unionist criticism.

Indeed, what emerges from the poet's confessional interrogation of the quarrel's illusory form, is a profound recognition that for his poetic voice to function he must reappraise his aesthetic comprehension of identity. The journalistic declarations of North's second section merely serve to outline the problem. The poet is overwhelmingly aware of the pressure which the issue of identity will exert on his imagination, so long as he continues to construct a poetics of identity which attempt to incorporate the universalising illusions of nationalist ideology. What he requires is a vision of poetry's capacity to transfigure the cultural and historical particularity of his experience into impressive images without surrendering to ideological closure or unconscionable denial. In coming to terms with the imaginative implications of identitarian form, he has realised more clearly than many of his contemporaries as his bog poems demonstrate that "the philosopheme of pure identity is death" [88] for consciousness, imagination and human freedom.

His sense of exposure to this grim realisation expresses the personal and poetic ramifications of such oppressive imperatives.

> I am neither internee nor informer;
> An inner emigre, grown long-haired
> And thoughtful; wood-kerne
>
> Escaped from the massacre,
> Taking protective colouring
> From every bole and bark, feeling
> Every wind that blows; [89]

That these lines were written after Heaney's retreat to Glanmore where he finally decided to commit himself to poetry reflect somewhat

instructively on the imaginative distance travelled by the author since 1966 when he wrote "Of course the uncommitted and the sceptical tend to leave, or to be elbowed out". [90]

The poet who crossed the threshold of commitment entering Glanmore's aesthetic hedge-school both sceptical (of received notions of identity) and committed (to poetry's capacity to reimagine his identity), would respond to the problem of identity in a uniquely poetic way. Ultimately, Heaney's subsequent reconfiguration of cultural and political identity would embody the realisation which another of his undead creations James Joyce, would voice for him in the penitential confines of Station Island

> 'You are raking at dead fires,
>
> a waste of time for somebody your age.
> That subject people stuff is a cod's game,
> infantile like your peasant pilgrimage.
>
> You lose more of yourself than you redeem
> doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.
> When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim
>
> out on your own and fill the element
> with signatures on your own frequency,
> echo soundings, searches, probes allurements,
>
> elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea.' 91

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2. "Incertus" was the nom de plume used by Heaney during his student days at Queens University Belfast, cf. Parker, Michael. Seamus Heaney: The Making of a Poet, (Houndsmills:The Macmillan Press, 1993), pp.24-25.

3. Heaney, Seamus. Preoccupations, p.13.

4. Wiesengrund-Adorno, Theodor. Prisms, Weber, Samuel and Sherry (trans.), (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1967. p.51.

5. Descombes, Vincent. op.cit.

6. Jay, Martin. op.cit. p.20.

7. Eagleton, Terry. The Ideology of the Aesthetic, p.343.

8. Milosz, Czeslaw. The Witness of Poetry. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) p.97.

9. Heaney, Seamus. Preoccupations, p.47.

10. Taylor, Wanda. Taylor is quoting Heaney in: 'Seamus Heaney: an Interview' The Scrivener Vol.4, No.1, (Winter 1983), p.7.

11. Corcoran, Neil. op.cit. p.13.

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20. Eagleton, Terry. op.cit. p.13.

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22. Heaney, Seamus. Preoccupations, p.150.

23. Heaney, Seamus. The Government of the Tongue, (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) p.92.

24. Heaney, Seamus. Preoccupations, p.186.

25. Heaney, Seamus. The Government of the Tongue, p.108.

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28. Heaney, Seamus. 'Digging', Death of Naturalist, p.13.

29. ibid p.14.

30. ibid p.14.

31. Foster, John Wilson. 'The Poetry of Seamus Heaney', Critical Quarterly, Vol.16,No. 1,(Spring 1974), p.46.

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Craig's Dragoons (Air of Dolly's Brae)

"Come all ye Ulster loyalists and in full chorus join,
Think on the deeds of Craig's Dragoons who strike below the groin,
And Drink a toast to the truncheon and the armoured water-hose
That mowed a swathe through Civil Rights and spat on papish clothes.

We've gerrymandered Derry but Croppy won't down,
He calls himself a citizen and wants votes in the town.
But Saturday in Duke Street we slipped the velvt glove -
The iron hand of Craig's Dragoons soon crunched a croppy dove...

O William Craig, you are our love, our lily and our sash,
You have the boys who fear no noise, who'll batter and who'll bash.
They'll cordon and they'll baton-charge, they'll silence protest tunes,
They are the hounds of Ulster,boys,sweet William Craig's Dragoons."
cf: Corcoran, Neil. op.cit. pp.26-27.

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Chapter 5

Redeeming Identities: Heaney in the Lyric's Particular Parish

Bogged down in the static mythological intelligibility of nationalism's historical universe, Heaney sought to extricate his imaginative impulses from a stultifying exposure to the rhetoric of the quarrel by moving to his Wicklow hedge-school. In Glanmore, Heaney's renewed commitment to poetry symbolised his determination to escape the massacre of meaning which the quarreller's rhetoric of domination engineered, through the reduction of culture's heterogeneous diversity to the static homogeneous illusions of competing fictions of identity. As his bog poems symbolised, nationalism's identitarian narrative of culture served merely to reify the imaginative landscape of meanings. In thrall to the universalising imperatives of its idealisation of identity, the poetic imagination could similarly fall victim to its dehumanising habit of departicularising the experiential world of events where lyric finds its voice.

Nationalism's identitarian reduction of historical, cultural and political events to a seamless homogeneous narrative of universal intelligibility, functions by departicularising the diverse and differentiating eventfulness of the individual's world of meaning. By interpreting identity as indicative of the Ireland of ideas, rather than constructing it from the eventfulness of the Ireland of fact, nationalism universalises, or departicularises, contemporary events, and in doing so reduces the field of legitimate interpretation.

The particularity of events signify their openness to the forces that render them particular. What is experienced as particular is indicative of that which identifies it as particular, and that force

which differentiates the particular as particular is generated by language's indeterminate force. To consider the particularity of particular experiences is to recognise that the discursive formation of identity is grounded in difference as much as in sameness. Thus to envisage a poetics which may evade the universalising hold of ideology by exploring the specificity and particularity of experience is to release poetry from the rhetoric of domination.

In responding to his ideological dilemma, Heaney's return to the particularising insights of lyric form embodied a critical response to the actual problem, not an evasion. Confronting the urgent need to bear witness to the painful specificity of his experience without surrendering to the hypostatic imperatives of nationalist form, Heaney sought to develop a poetics which could attest to the profound insight of his cultural experience without colluding in the rhetoric of domination through which nationalist ideology reconfigures such insight as indicative of the right to suppress, destroy or deny all signs of otherness and difference.

Merely describing the depraved ideologically informed structure of the quarrel would no longer suffice for the writer who had made poetry his life. For poetry to validate his choice, it would need to provide an image of its capacity to matter, of its capacity to redeem the contents of Irish culture from their disabling, vindictive political form. But the poetic imperative to bear witness to the suffering which totalistic discourse brings into the world of feeling in the postwar world, invalidates as ~~put as~~ redemptive a poetics evasive of one's immediate and shared cultural perceptions. In order to develop in his poetics an image of identity capable of

engaging with the reality of suffering and free from the identitarian forms which guarantee the suffering in modern Ireland, the poet would have to situate identity as a constituent of difference, and cultural particularity as indicative of a heterogeneous world of other particular views. To do so, his poetics would have to return language to its animating force, to that indeterminacy which admits language's signifying power. Through the poetic technique of foregrounding, the particular assertions of intelligible discourse may be subject to the realisation that they are only particular assertions.

By developing his poetic as a reflection upon the primal negotiation between arbitrariness and intelligibility, between the indeterminacy of language and the determination of imaginative vision, and between poetry and actuality, he may respond to the demands which the actual world imposes. In doing so, he may configure identity as an instance of difference and his cultural claims as supportive of the equally implicit claims of the "other", which in his immediate situation means his Protestant neighbours.

By so measuring his particular image of identity against the implied heterogeneous world of other particularities he may attend to the needs of the victims without surrendering his gift. To fail to accommodate difference and indeterminacy as the implied measurements of identity is to surrender to the rhetoric of domination. Or to return to Adorno's dramatic definition of such a failure

> If thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniement with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims. [1]

In devising such a conscientious poetics of foregrounded particularity the poet may reenvisage his lyric gift as unusually suited to the redemption of society from the dominating impulses of identitarian illusions. Lyric poetry is thus envisageable as a profoundly critical dicourse of social formations. In a brilliant exposition of how lyric poetry fulfils such a social finction, by resisting the socially normative discourse of cultural, historical and political intelligibility, Adorno expresses in analytic terms the argument which Heaney has continued to make in his critical prose to date.

> Let me return to your misgivings. You respond to lyric poetry as something set against society, something purely individual. You feel strongly that it should remain this way - that lyric expression, released from the heaviness of material things, should evoke images of a life free of the impositions of the everyday world, of usefulness, of the dumb drive for self-preservation. This demand, however, that of the untouched virgin word, is itself social in nature. It implies a protest against a social condition which every individual experiences as hostile, distant, cold, and oppressive; and this social condition impresses itself on the poetic form in a negative way: the more heavily social conditions weigh, the more unrelentingly the poem resists, refusing to give in to any heteronomy, and constituting itself purely according to its particular laws. Its detachment from naked existence becomes the measure of the world's falsity and meanness. Protesting against these conditions, the poem proclaims the dream of a world in which things would be different. The idiosyncracy of poetic thought, opposing the overpowering force of material things, is a form of reaction against the reification of the world [2].

Heaney's poetic reformation occurs after his experience of the "reification of the world" which his bog poems convey in their exposition of the deadly static impact which nationalism's hibernotopian imperatives effect on the aesthetic imagination. What he seeks to recover as 'Exposure' suggests, is the "once-in-a-

lifetime portent,/The comet's pulsing rose"[3], or an ec-static poetic vision of identity.

This ecstatic poetic dimension is available to the lyric when it explores its experience of particularity as indicative of the general human feeling of displacement. This feeling of displacement, from which the modern urge to construct ideologies as renaturalising illusions of intelligibility has emerged, arises in the modern recognition that we are denaturalised creatures of language rather than organically naturalised creatures of a unitary consciousness. The lyric imagination is particularly suited to the exploration of this definitively modern fact which underwrites so many social formations. For as Adorno notes

> what we mean by lyric...has within it, in its 'purest' form, the quality of a break or rupture. The subjective being that makes itself heard in lyric poetry is one which defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective and the realm of objectivity. While its expressive gesture is directed toward, it is not at one with nature. It has, so to speak, lost nature and seeks to recreate it through personification and through descent into the subjective being itself. Only after a transformation into human form can nature regain anew that which man's rule over her has taken away. Even lyrical creations which are untouched by conventional, material existence, by the crude world of material objects, owe their high worth to the power the subjective being within them has, in overcoming its alienation, to evoke an image of the natural world. Their pure subjectivity, apparently flawless, without breaks and full of harmony, actually witnesses to the opposite, to a suffering caused by existence foreign to the subject, as much as it shows the subject's love toward that existence. Indeed, the harmony of such creations is nothing other than the mutual correspondence of such suffering and such love.[4]

Viewed in this light, the shift in Heaney's poetics after North from a consideration of nationalism's universalising forms to his own particularising lyrics, represents a critically sensitive response to

the problems of identity formation in the modern world. By revising the terms of his poetics, through a conscious disengagement from the quarrelsome territorialities of nationalism, and by surrendering his imagination to the indeterminate margins of language as he reconfigures his experiential parish, Heaney's poetics envisage a socially intelligible image of redemption from the dual strains of totality and alienation.

Elegising Nationalism: Heaney's Poetic Transformation after North

After North, the evolution of Heaney's poetics constitute nothing less than an elegiac reflection upon his original identity. Throughout the increasingly revisionary depiction of his cultural experience, Heaney returns repeatedly to take a last look at the pieties and mystifications which structured his imaginative worldview before his poetic departure to Glanmore.

His subsequent critical and creative writing embodies a sustained reflection of the meaning of this abrupt departure. Throughout these reflections, his growing conviction of the appositeness of this move emerges from his increasingly deep realisation of the inappropriateness of his original ideologically fixated image of identity. In coming to terms with the deeply social relation between lyric testimony and ideological censure, he recognises the larger implications of his revisionary poetics. Reflecting on these developments in The Place of Writing [5] he states that

> After 1969, however, there was a more than literary motive for such castigation for the myth of Ireland as a spiritual entity, a mystical principle which could elicit religiose devotion of not only the young Yeats but also the executed poet and revolutionary, Padraic Pearse, martyr of Easter 1916 and sponsor of the blood-sacrifice

strain in Irish republicanism. With the outbreak of civic violence in Belfast and Derry, Irishism was perceived to be not only a manifestation of ethnic kitsch but potentially a code that spelled loyalty to the aims and (by extension) the methods of the IRA. Hence, as the seventies advanced, it became increasingly difficult to express fidelity to the ideals of the Irish Literary Revival, which were essentially born of a healthy desire to redress the impositions of cultural imperialism, without seeming to become allied with a terrorist campaign that justified itself by self-righteous rhetoric against British imperialism of the original, historically rejected and politically repugnant sort.

Add then to the first native literary backlash and to this subsequent political one a third factor deriving not only from a deconstructionist suspicion of the ideological depth-charges in all literature, but also from the well-urged doubts about the very possibility of justified language arts after Auschwitz: it all added up to a situation in which the literary intelligentsia of Britain and Ireland were anxious to confine the operations of imaginative writing to a sanitized realm that might include the ludic, the ironic, the parodic, the satiric, the pathetic, the domestic, the elegiac and the self-inculpatory, but which would conscientiously exclude the visionary prophetic, the patriotic witness, the national epical. It was not the place of writing to encompass these ends any more.[6]

Heaney's recognition that the minimalist posturing of much postwar poetry was a direct result of the impact of writing's uncertain connivance with the ideological imagination, spurred him on to devise a poetics capable of surmounting the equally ideologically fixated limits of this "sanitized realm". By disposition Heaney's lyric imagination was strongly attracted to the votive and "visionary prophetic" potential of poetic discourse. But confronted with the complex array of aesthetic, moral and political taboos associated with any uncritical re-engagement with these traditionally sublime expressions, he sought to free his poetic imagination from any collusion with the discursive forms that served to render suspect these instinctive impulses.

For Heaney the process of imaginative disengagement would begin in a revision of the relationship between his poetic and the ideological form of Irish nationalism, a form whose identitarian dynamics are indicative of the larger global problem with the rhetoric of totality which Auschwitz iconically represents for the postwar imagination. To admit the radical otherness which a visionary poetry embodies, he would first have to accommodate otherness as a governing force in his poetics of identity. As nationalism's identitarian form serves to suppress otherness and dominate difference though its hibernotopian reconfigurations of reality, his first concern would be to identify the specific nature of the relationship between writing and the rhetoric of the quarrel in modern Ireland. In a recent discussion he summarises his comprehension of this relationship incisively.

> National independence, national identity, national distinctiveness are usually conceived in books before they are carried by the ballot. Yet it is necessary to beware of too easy an assumption that the breaking of political bonds necessarily and successfully issues in the forging of a new literary idiom: in such enterprises of renewal, it is likely that a conflict of interest will arise between the imaginative and the activist wings. The identity which seeks autonomous political status or some sort of independent condition is usually posited on archetypes, images of the ideal community which are nevertheless envisaged with reference to the idealised past. There tends to be an element of Eden in the plan of campaign and if independence is gained or the revolution is successful, that Edenic prototype is going to be the one which the political wing will characteristically attempt to impose...
>
> Many writers will of course be ready to massage the political programme and continue to discern lineaments of the old dream in new conditions. At its most reprehensible, this is party hack-work and betrayal; at its most understandable it is lack of talent and pure cliché. The writers of greatest integrity, however, will respond to the new conditions themselves and stay as alive to the shifts of consciousness engendered by the new society as they were alive to the exacerbations of the old. They will register how it is rather than how it ought to be. In prose the result may be satire, irony

> and parodic fantasy rather utopian fables and programmatic realism. In poetry it may be hermetic allusiveness and private vision rather than party tunes and national solidarity. [7]

What Heaney here describes is a poetics of modernity, which may engage with the Ireland/Glanmore/Sandymount of fact by exploring the poetic potential of its envisageble particularity in the light of imagination's transfigurative power. In coming to this realisation, the poet had identified the distinct discursive role which poetry had played in the legitimation of nationalism's identitarian rhetoric.

Far from being oblivious to the connections between his poetic form and the structure of a totalistic political ideology, Heaney began to recognise that even in acts of minimal rhetorical consequence, the author must be aware. Thus, in conversation with Frank Kinahan he was moved to suggest that "in artistic circles, the adjective "Irish" effects a deleterious change on the noun to which it is applied - as in Irish tenor, or Irish poet" [8].

Such sensitivity to the poetics of identity arose from his developing awareness of the distinctly modern context in which the expression of cultural identity in Ireland is situated. In defining the relation between his lyric poetics and the social realities which it serves to transfigure, it was imperative that the Ireland with which he was reacting was situated in the contemporary world of fact and not in the nationalist dreamworld of ideas. The world of modern Ireland was no longer hidden in the idealistic fantasies of Corkery's hibernotopia as the poet realised.

> For a century now, there has been an equal and opposite program to the program of the colonial oppressor, as it were. There has been a colonized resentment in saying to the British, "We are not like you at all; we have this separate identity". For a while I myself was attracted to

> that whole Hidden Ireland approach, and I found it very fortifying as a basis of refusal of the whole Unionist machine in the North. But it is not as simple as that.[9]

This central reality in Irish cultural and political discourse challenges the writer to include the specificity of his cultural inheritance without surrendering to the anachronistic pieties of colonialism, imperialism, or single-ethos nationalism.

In developing a modern poetics capable of responding to the fear of alienation and the terror of totality, the poet would focus his lyric energies on the determination of a lyric voice that was attentive to the actual dilemma but not in thrall to its informing intelligibility. In modern Ireland, given the ideological hangover which the years of violence have induced in the nationalist mind such a determined act of detachment would risk the charge of "irrelevance". By 1982, Heaney had grown sufficiently confident in the efficacy of his voice to risk that charge and, indeed, to condemn others for failing to do likewise, for as he suggests

> To contemplate for too long the stalled politics of Northern Ireland, the rickety economy of the Republic, the general lack of trust in a fulfilling future, is to confront a gorgon more withered than withering, one which does not even have the power anymore to petrify us but can indeed induce inertia and self-rebuke. The extreme reaction to all this is a sterile violence, the petulant reaction is a hollow post-colonial resentment and a masquerade of codified feelings as a unique ethnic resource...This [responding to this ethos] requires a courage and a readiness to dare the challenge of "irrelevance", but no work of beauty or truth which emerges from an awareness of the prevalence of their opposites is irrelevant. Indeed the charge could be more properly levelled at works which punt along on the current of current affairs.[10]

Heaney's move to Glanmore signified his willingness to "dare the challenge of irrelevance", and there his poetry evolved out of the

ruinous imaginative encounters of North to encompass an enlarged and more particular vision of his imaginative parish which he discovers in his revisionary Field Work [11].

The moment at which Heaney's imaginative release from the overdetermined universe of national concerns into the ecstatic experience of a radically underdetermined moment of particular vision occurs, is described in the third "Glanmore Sonnet".

> This evening the cuckoo and the corncrake
> (So much, too much) consorted at twilight.
> It was all crepuscular and iambic. [12]

In the midst of his demanding encounter with the overdetermined world of nationalist intelligibility, his auditory imagination was momentarily overwhelmed with the beauty of his immediate world of experience for which language is unable to determine an adequate sense of meaning. In this moment of heightened experience, he recovers a profound sense of the inadequacy of language confronted with the overbrimming feeling of pure joy. Instead of the exact illusion of language as a determined world of fixed and fixated meanings, he experiences in this sublime moment the profoundly indeterminate nature of those experiences which the signifier seeks to represent. He is thus momentarily released by language's singularly underdetermined response to signifying this profound feeling -"(So much, too much)" - and in that indeterminate space between the struggling signifier and the underdetermined signified, he encounters the animating force of lyric poetry.

That this revelatory moment of transfiguration should have occured in the midst of writing 'Punishment', is indicative of the deep resistance of his lyric imagination to the constraints of collective

imperatives. Heaney's account of this central experience acknowledges its general significance in his poetic development.

> So I just wanted to do something else, and I can give you, as it were, the lived example of this change precisely. In Glanmore, in the cottage, when I was writing some of those North poems - 'Punishment', the inward, twisting things - I was happy enough, yet unhappy enough too. But one evening I was sitting upstairs in the study in the month of May. There was a cuckoo calling on the hillside in the wood; there were rabbits playing up the field; there was a corn-crake. And this iambic, melodious line - "This evening the cuckoo and the corncrake/(So much, too much) consorted at twilight" - came to me, and I was really attracted by it; and I skimmed on and did the sonnet...Back then I thought that that music, the melodious grace of the English iambic line, was some kind of affront, that it needed to be wrecked; and while I loved the poem, I felt at the time that its sweetness disabled it somehow.
>
> I suppose, then, that the shift from North to Field Work is a shift in trust: a learning to trust melody, to trust art as reality, to trust artfulness as an affirmation and not to go into the self-punishment so much. I distrust that attitude too, of course. Those two volumes are negotiating with each other. [13]

This surrender of poetic voice to the gift of the particular moment signifies a gathering sense of confidence in the poet's lyric sensibility. The movement towards trust in the instinctive and humane lyric impulse, and away from the grand universal formations of received wisdom, is one which underflows the current of feeling in Field Work.

The elegiac tone of much of the collection conveys a profound reappraisal of his poetic response to the actual world in which ideology's punishing toll of victims continued to increase. But now his approach to identity is becoming grounded in the instinctive responsiveness of particular impressions, rather than in any deterministic response to a universal scale of ideal values.

The particular victims who plead for penitence and comprehension

in this collection, are no longer dissembled or dehumanised by an intervening myth of value. In seeking a humane response to ideology's victims, his own instinctive feeling moves him to absolve and anoint the victims rather than surrender to the rhetoric of punishment.

> How culpable was he
> That last night when he broke
> Our tribe's complicity? [14]

Heaney asks of the instinctive drinker Louis O'Neill who refused to obey orders. "How culpable was he"? - about as culpable as any human being is for placing their existential needs before the diktats of the quarrel, about as culpable as Heaney for choosing or being chosen by poetry, about as culpable as anyone who prefers their own "irrelevance" to the imperatives of an illusory identity. In this moment of absolution Heaney releases his imagination from the dehumanising rhetoric of punishment and retribution which underscores the rhetoric of the quarrel.

In developing his lyric poetics after North Heaney re-envisages his sense of identity by transfiguring the static world of the identitarian imagination through his newly displaced vision. The revisionary perspective of the Glanmore wood-kerne is nowhere more clearly evident than in his acute depiction of the determinism and exactitude of the identitarian imagination which had displaced him. Through the reconfigured and reborn image of Sweeney, himself an original victim of doctrinaire demands, the poet re-envisages the terms and conditions of that punishing doctrinal mind which had so threatened his poetic gift. The characteristic overdetermination of historical and cultural interpretation which nationalism embodies is

arraigned by this estranged avian paraclete in "The First Kingdom" [15].

As a symbolically resonant figure of displaced identity, Sweeney (who is neither flesh nor fowl), probes the imagination that structures the kingdom of ideology from which he is displaced because of his fidelity to his original impulses. His description of this 'First Kingdom' in which he once reigned surpreme until his primary fidelity to his original impulses led him to assert his unique particularity, is resonant with implications for the poet reflecting on his former relation to the demands of collective illusions of intelligibility. It could, indeed, be considered as an intelligent response to the world of Irish literary criticism.

> Units of measurement were pondered
> by the cartful, barrowful and bucketful.
> Time was a backward rote of names and mishaps,
> bad harvests, fires, unfair settlements,
> deaths in floods, murders and miscarriages.
>
> And if my rights to it all came only
> by their acclamation, what was it worth?
> I blew hot and blew cold.
> They were two-faced and accomodating.
> And seed, breed and generation still
> they were holding on, every bit
> as pious and exacting and demeaned. [16]

By thus reconfiguring the ideological imagination of ancient grudges, temporally immutable historical meanings, and fetishistic observance of the fixity and determinacy of ideology's principal legitimating interpretations, Sweeney creates a sense of distance between the free imponderable state of lyric vision and the "weights and measures" school of political "correctness".

This revision of the place from which the reborn lyric imagination has come, is part of a larger cycle of poems which seek to establish

the lyric's imaginative coordinates by reinterpreting and re-evaluating the territorialities which it seeks to escape. From the slivering lyric reflections of the "Sweeney Redivivus" cycle, through the penitential peregrinations of "Station Island", to the figurative torsion of The Haw Lantern's [17] allegorical visions, Heaney's middle poems encompass a desire to liberate the lyric imagination from the illusory strictures of identitarian discourse. By subverting the deterministic imperatives of his ideological upbringing through the poetic's capacity to revise, reconstruct and re-invent illusions of identity, the poet outfaces the demands of the quarrel.

In this regard, what is most significant about his version of the middle Irish Menippean epic Buile Suibhne [18], which he presents in the hugely diverse verse-forms of Sweeney Astray [19], is its textual development. Originally envisaged as a children's story to be interpreted by the brilliant Beckettian interpreter
Jack MacGowran [20], Heaney spent his first months in Glanmore transforming the sequence into a descriptive political allegory of contemporary Ulster. That he considered this work as representative of his professional commitment to poetry, signifies the degree to which his early vision of the legitimacy of poetry in the actual world was limited to his belief in the necessity of a directly intervening poetics of description. The shift in Heaney's understanding from reducing poetic legitimacy to its ability to describe the quarrel, to expanding the criteria of poetic authority to include free impulsive lyric moments, is reflected in the textual evolution of his Sweeney version. What originates in his hypnotic enthralment to the demands of the quarrel evolves to become a series

of crystalline verse improvisations of enraptured lyric freedom. Speaking with Neil Corcoran he recalls that

> A first version of the whole thing was completed very quickly, by April 1973, done with 'a strong sense of bending the text to my purposes' (St. Ronan, for instance, was referred to as 'the bully boy', when the Unionists were accused of using 'bully boy tactics' in the North; and Sweeney was given such lines as 'My relief was a pivot of history').[21]

The evolution of the Sweeney text from political diagram to lyric improvisation developed as a consequence of his own poetic revision of the value of lyric expression. He describes the correspondence between poetic development and textual revision as indicative of his general disposition at the time to Donna Campbell and Thomas O'Donnell.

> When I went to Wicklow and had enough time for the first time and was going to be solely a writer, I felt I had to have a task that kept me going. And the Sweeney material is very attractive in places; it's delightful nature poetry, and with Early Irish clarity about it. But it's long and boring as well; there are chunks of it that are very repetitive. But first of all I thought, I'll make a children's story out of this. And then -- Sweeney being cursed and turned into a bird living in the trees and so on -- when I got the thing, you know, I thought, "Ah, no, don't rip it off -- do the whole thing". And it was very important to me that I would finish a draft of it. I didn't want to start it at all, if I would feel that I had failed the first time. So my first year in Wicklow I did a version of the whole poem, poetry and prose. There's about a hundred pages. It was written in free verse, and it was full of excitement, which was also full of very free handling of the Irish. And when I had it finished, I thought, this isn't quite right. And anyway toward the end of the enterprise, I was rhyming the poem, and I had begun it in free verse so the artistic thing was lopsided in itself, so I knew I had to start it all again some day. I swooped on it in 1979, seven years later, had a great charge, and I knocked a lot of it into rhymed stanzas, and I got a different intonation from it.[22]

This indicative textual movement from an overdetermined

schematisation of his creative impulses towards a more trusting disposition in the power and value of lyric discourse, marks the general movement in his poetics away from the static hold of identitarian demands.

This emergent trust in the implicative power of lyric form is evocatively described with paradigmatic force in 'The Harvest Bow'.

> As you plaited the harvest bow
> You implicated the mellowed silence in you
> In wheat that does not rust
> But brightens as it tightens twist by twist
> Into a knowable corona,
> A throwaway love-knot of straw. [23]

This paradigm of <u>poesis</u> suggests the manner in which the poetic act arises in the indeterminate "mellowed silence" of language's implicative domain. The act of making something "knowable" through the poetic's transformation of the straw-like inconsequentiality of the immediate, is described in the gentle redeeming creation of a traditional sign of fecundity (the harvest bow) from the frivolous debris of the harvest.

The action of transfiguring the random strands of straw into a beautiful symbol of fertility, is itself transfigured into an implicative paradigm of art through the auditory imagination's burnishing touch. The aesthetic resonance of the action being described is immediately asserted as the assonantal hold which the internal rhyme of "plaited/implicated" establishes, fords the two currents of interpretation. The deepening implicative force of this craft is represented in the increasing assonantal torsion that moves from the generous broad-vowelled indefiniteness of "bow/mellowed/you" to the compressed sonic specificity of the narrow-vowelled

"brightens/tightens", a compression that is audible in the sibilant contortions of "rust/twist/twist". As this sonorous tightening conveys the process of transfiguring the random into the well-formed, the poem's evocative auditions embody a reflexive sounding of the poem's own process of construction.

Language, sound and image literalise their own implicative force as the indeterminate margins of "mellowed silence" in which language arises yield forth a "knowable corona" of signification. That the "throwaway" status of this poetically "knowable corona" should identify itself in contrast to the absolute force which annihilated Louis O'Neill's "still knowable face" [24] in 'Casualty', is indicative of the poet's deepening belief in the propriety of lyric form's distinct response to the comprehension of human identity in beautiful and pacific images of particular events. Indeed, the opening stanza of 'The Harvest Bow' may be read as Heaney's apology for lyric poetry.

Heaney's reappropriation of Coventry Patmore's dictum, via Yeats, that "The end of art is peace", is indicative of his changing poetic vision of identity. For peace, as Adorno defines it, "is the state of distinction without domination, with the distinct participating in each other" [25]. If the "end of art is peace", then it may achieve its end by attending to its own state of discursive distinctness, a discursive state that is animated by the exploration of language's implicatively indeterminate domain.

By grounding his poetics in the exploration of the "mellowed silence" of human consciousness, the incipiently transfigurable domain at the margins of meaning, he may source his lyric poetics in

particular assumptions of ultimately indeterminable meanings. His adoption of a poetics that recognises its own illusory status, the "throwaway" nature of its "frail device", which originates in the lyric's exploration of language's suggestive otherworld of silence and difference, symbolises his renunciation of the hostile imperatives of identitarian discourse.

For the lyric to achieve its pacific end which legitimates it as a conscientious discourse, it must dwell within the "mellowed silence" and by probing the lingusitic domain of difference and indeterminacy in which all particular expressions arise, it may assert a vision of "distinctness without domination". In this sense, the "end of art" may be achieved, when the lyric's poetic form is animated by the desire to recognise in its particular impressions the liberating indeterminacy of language, an indeterminacy which permits the particular to be considered as such, and which further serves to notify the imagination that all expressions of identity are finally grounded in the recognition of difference. To attain the "end of art" Heaney must ground his poetic in the estranging particularity of his distinct but not dominating parish of lyric transfiguration.

In a number of poems of this middle period, Heaney returns to explore the nature and function of poetry as a theme. The urgency of his desire to reconfigure his cultural and historical experience as a source of liberating inventiveness, issues in a number of poems which outline the imaginative procedures which he must first undergo to facilitate this final liberation. In a sense, many of the poems in Station Island and The Haw Lantern are rehearsals of the imaginative strategies which he hopes to incorporate in a more fully matured

poetic vision.

In 'Unwinding'[26] for example, he dramatises the conceptual process of disengagement from the received identitarian interpretative reflexes. The "sex-pruned and unfurtherable/moss-talk" which signifies the familiar pieties of the social discourse of limitations and prescriptions which ideology embodies, and

> which will have to be unlearned
> even though from there on everything
> is going to be learning.

This normative discourse of consensus will have to be deconstructed if he is to discover finally a redemptive image of identity for himself. He must dissassociate his use of language from the fixed teleologically structured interpretative reflexes of nationalist discourse, an action which he describes and instances in the tropological unravelling of the twine.

> So the twine unwinds and loosely widens
> backward through areas that forwarded
> understandings of all I would undertake.

How this process of unwinding may take place without losing the connective cultural thread that binds his imagination to his particular inheritance of events and memories, is the subject of another of his reflexive poems about poetics, 'Making Strange' [27].

In 'Making Strange' the poet rehearses and resolves the central preoccupying problem that confronts the poetics of identity. How may the poet encompass the inspirational uniqueness of his cultural perceptions without surrendering to the habitually associated rhetoric of domination? An outright rejection of the value of his specific experience would deflate his poetic power and leave him isolated and alienated like many of his contemporary generation of

evasive globalists. This ambiguous dilemma which results in the poet fearing a debilitating sense of indecision, is strikingly portrayed in his parochial parable of the lyric's virtuous estrangement.

> I stood between them,
> the one with his travelled intelligence
> and tawny containment,
> his speech like the twang of a bowstring,
>
> and another, unshorn and bewildered
> in the tubs of his wellingtons,
> smiling at me for help,
> faced with this stranger I'd brought him. [28]

In this scenario the animating conflict in the poet's life between roots and reading, between his original culturally delimited identity and his discovered culturally liberating aesthetic, is personified in the aporetic impact which the intervention of strangeness or otherness effects in the original world which his father represents. But his poetic imagination rehearses a possible form of resolution by suggesting that he integrate the particularity of his original experience in the discovered discursively transfigurative form of poetic estrangement. To resolve his problematic negotiation with identity formation his instructing voice counsels him

> 'Be adept and be dialect,
> tell of this wind coming past the zinc hut,
>
> call me sweetbriar after the rain
> or snowberries cooled in the fog.
> But love the cut of this travelled one
> and call me also the cornfield of Boaz.
>
> Go beyond what's reliable
> in all that keeps pleading and pleading,
> these eyes and puddles and stones,
> and recollect how bold you were
>
> when I visited you first
> with departures you cannot go back on.' [29]

This poetic voice imparts an image of resolution to the preoccupying

problem of identity both in its expressed suggestions and in the poem's literary inscriptions of these suggestions in the poem's own defamiliarising form. His poetic may continue to attend to the actual demands of his original consciousness by rooting his lyric vision in the particularity of his immediate world of experience. This advising voice arises out of "the field across the road", thus its own originating ground bears out the advice which it freely proffers. Its advice that the poetics of identity should "'Be adept and be dialect'" signifies that the poet's imagination should reconfigure the eventfulness of his particular experience by bringing it into the estranging discursive adeptness of aesthetic form.

By so grounding the poetics of identity in the particularity of the particular, in the transfigured parish of his lyric imagination, he may not only overcome the aporetic threat of alienation but also the equally suppressive threat of totalistic imperatives. For in the lyric's transfigured parish, empowered by the reconfiguration of experiential particularity through language's differentiating witness in the moment of estrangement, he may relate his particular parish to an implicitly parochial universe. Having renounced the poetic rhetoric of domination which identitarian aesthetics embody in their homogenising discourse of identity, the poet may begin to explore his poetic parish of particularity as indicative of a heterogeneous world of other parochial identities.

In this heterogeneous poetic world of particularised identities, otherness may be accommodated and the familiar transformed as the poem's inspiring voice suggests when it advises that he may "love the cut of this travelled one" and "call me also the cornfield of Boaz".

This recognition of the poetic conditions in which distinctness without domination is possible in the determination of identity, is a rehearsal of that form of peace which distinguishes art's own end. That the discursive form which may accommodate this deliverance into "distinctness without domination" is the governing poetic form of estrangement, testifies to the absolute legitimacy of poetry's power to bear witness to the needs of the actual and, indeed, to provide an image of redemption that is resonant with historical and political implications.

Thus grounded in the estranged parochial discourse of particularity, which the poetic technique of estrangement serves to admit, he may accept his vision of identity as an instance of otherness. Through the poetic's defamiliarising treatment of language the indeterminacy of language may redeem the poetics of identity from the charge of totality by grounding it in the otherness which experience and language suggest through its transfiguration of the particular experience into an instance of a heterogeneous world of meaning. So transfigured, he may indeed carry the stranger with him

> through my own country, adept
> at dialect, reciting my pride
> in all that I knew, that began to make strange
> at that same recitation [30]

The original need to consider the dialectal specificity of his cultural experience as capable of transfiguration into an adept heterogenising discourse of wider implication, is reflected in the transformation of the poem's original title from the dialectal 'Near Anahorish' [31] to the more philosophically and formally adept 'Making

Strange'.

The duality of the poet's newfound lyric strategy recognises that he must be redeemed in history and not from history. The immediate data of his personal experience form the parochial basis of an estranging visionary transformation. But the adeptness of his poetic strategies may only function as redemptive in the immediate context of his historical experience by admitting the particular dialectal nature of his specific identity. The poetic engagement between the familiarity of his particular perceptions and the transfigurative ouverture of its encounter with the otherness of meaning, insists upon the recognition that for discourse to accomodate otherness, estrangement and indeterminacy, it must first accept the original ground of individual consciousness.

The parochial poetics of redemption involve a fine balance between the familiar and the defamiliarised, between what is dialect and what becomes adept. It suggests neither a witless surrender to an endless relativism, nor obedience to an absolute doctrine of intelligibility. By including the dialectal as the prime matter of transfiguration the historically pressing demands of the actual world may be accommodated.

It is within this context that Heaney's celebrated rebuff to Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion's overeasy co-option of his work as "British" in The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry [32] may be interpreted. To include Heaney's poetry in a collection of "English" verse would merely serve to recognise his adept contributions to the culturally and politically heterogeneous canon of this transnational tradition. But to subsume his dialectal

identity in the distinctly politically inscribed and nationally defined term "British" is to deny the particularity of his cultural and political identity. Thus in the celebrated Burn's stanzas of An Open Letter [33] Heaney spells out the primacy of being attentive to the particular by attending to the historically sensitive act of naming in a series of ironic elaborations.

9 To think the title Opened Ground
Was the first title in your mind!
To think of where the phrase was found
Makes it far worse!
To be supplanted in the end
By British verse....

13 Yet doubts, admittedly, arise
When someone who publishes
In LRB and TLS,
The Listener -
In other words, whose audience is,
Via Faber,

14 A British one, is characterized
As British. But don't be surprised
If I demur, for, be advised
My passport's green.
No glass of ours was ever raised
To toast The Queen

15 No harm to her nor you who deign
To God Bless her as sovereign,
Except that from the start her reign
Of crown and rose
Defied, displaced, would not combine
What I'd espouse.

16 You'll understand I draw the line
At being robbed of what is mine,
My patria, my deep design
To be at home
In my own place and dwell within
Its proper name - [34].

Heaney's vigorous defence of the propriety of the dialectal in any definition of his poetic identity conveys his lifelong concern with keeping language in touch with historical reality. The act of

naming, though rarely an exclusionary device in Heaney's poetry, is inclusive of the particular ground of his poetic identity. And in recognising the importance of accurately depicting the particular dimensions of the individual's identity he notes that

> Names were not for negotiation,
> Right names were the first foundation
> For telling truth. [35]

The dialectal current of particularity is central to the development of a truth-telling poetics of identity notably when what is dialect has been reconfigured or made strange by poetic effects of meaning. At key moments in his work, the transfigurative impact of poetry's adept reconfigurations leads the poet to reconsider the untransfigured aspects of his original experience.

One such moment occurs amidst the narcotic confessional thrum of 'Station Island's' revisionary pilgrimage. Subsequent to his confrontation with the ghost of the IRA hunger-strike victim Francis Hughes (a native of Heaney's own Bellaghy) the persona's dialectal involvement with a victim and agent of the local quarrel is transformed by the transfigurative intervention of his adept imagination. The gunman's account of his own death bears out the bog-poetry's images of the dehumanising impact of nationalism's instrumentalisation of human life. The paramilitary whose allegiance to the identitarian illusions of a rhetoric which instrumentalises all human life in the service of hibernotopian ideals, finally falls victim to the same instrumentalising process as he obeys standing orders and surrenders his life to the cause. His portrayal imagines his own death as a realisation of the identitarian imagination's reifying force

'My brain dried like spread turf, my stomach
Shrank to a cinder and tightened and cracked'. [36]

In response to this harrowing dialectal event, the poetic imagination adeptly intervenes with a transforming image of art's power to reconfigure the amputated perceptions of totalistic vision.

I dreamt and drifted. All seemed to run to waste
As down a swirl of mucky, glittering flood
Strange polyp floated like a huge corrupt
Magnolia bloom, surreal as a shred breast,
My softly awash and blanching self-disgust.[37]

This emblem of corruption in the rhetorical current of the body politic brings to the enclosed neighbourly understanding of the hunger-striker's fate a sense of the potentially apocalyptic consequences for art and society if such a rhetoric were to be accepted out of embarrassed sympathy. Challenged by this apocalyptic image he renounces his past life's failure to free his dialect from the universalising illusions of identitarian discourse and in doing so dedicates his poetic voice to the redemptive estrangement of his encroaching origins.

'I repent
My unweaned life that kept me competent
To sleepwalk with connivance and mistrust.'
Then, like a pistil growing from the polyp,
A lighted candle rose and steadied up
Until the whole bright-masted thing retrieved
A course and the currents it had gone with
Were what it rode and showed. No more adrift,
My feet touched bottom and my heart revived. [38]

For the poetic to "touch bottom" in the actual world of violent destructiveness, it must "repent" its "unweaned life" and, in the moment of repentance, rediscover the imaginative prospect of redemption through the weaned adeptness of transfigurative form.

For the parochial imagination to transform the hidebound rhetoric

of self-righteousness which hypostatises the imagination through its fixated reiterations of age-old complaints and self-justifications, it must transcend the historical conditions which seek to assert closure on the ways in which the particularity of the parish may be envisaged. To transcend the limits which the ideology of the quarrel attempts to impose, the poetic imagination must accept its actual dilemma and having done so find within its own figurative power a vision of the dilemma which admits forgiveness, transcendence and release.

Returning to the dramatic theme of history's inscribed cycle of despair, Heaney described the transcendental power of forgiveness which imagination admits in his verse-play adaptation of Sophocles' Philoctetes for the Field Day Theatre Company in 1990. Premiered at the Guildhall in Derry on October 1st 1990, The Cure at Troy [39] presents a dramatic exposition of the imaginative impasse that results from an unwillingness to transcend the injustices of history. The play's principal character Philoctetes embodies the atrophying effect which an unforgiving cherishing of unjustly inflicted historical wounds will bring about in the human soul. A victim of Odysseus's political expediency, his enforced alienation from the centre of power which is caused and symbolised by his suppurating wound, is nurtured by his unwillingness to transcend the woundedness which human nature repeatedly exposes in history. The enforced return of Odysseus to Lemnos, again for reasons of political expediency, finds Philoctetes unable to transcend his self-inflicted imaginative wounds which have infected his perception of human trust, when an opportunity to be restored to human society is presented.

Philoctetes' love of his woundedness conveys the ideological fixation with the "backward rote of names and mishaps,/bad harvests, fires, unfair settlements,/deaths in floods, murders and miscarriages" [40], which characterises the wilful sectarian intransigence of the identitarian imagination in the North of Ireland. This habitual unwillingness to rise above the brutal facts of history by applying the imagination's humane power to envisage alternatives for future generations, is conveyed by Philoctetes' difficulty in surrendering the self-justifying self-eviscerating woundedness of memory to the healing power of forgiveness which an imaginative reconsideration of his dilemma may effect. The play's unselfconscious acknowledgement of this emphatic attachment to the ideological certainty which such woundedness permits is clearly expressed at the opening by the chorus.

> Philoctetes.
> Hercules.
> Odysseus.
> Heroes. Victims. Gods and human beings.
> All throwing shapes, every one of them
> Convinced he's in the right, all of them glad
> To repeat themselves and their every last mistake,
> No matter what.
>
> People so deep into
> Their own self-pity self-pity buoys them up.
> People so staunch and true, they're fixated,
> Shining with self-regard like polished stones.
> And their whole life spent admiring themselves
> For their own long-suffering.
> Licking their wounds
> And flashing them around like decorations.
> I hate it, I always hated it, and I am
> A part of it myself. [41]

This wilful surrender to the illusory form of ideological imperatives unites the quarrelers who are "All throwing shapes". The reifying impact of such identitarian fixations with the debris of history

reflects in their hypostatised identity which is "like polished stones". The dehumanising impact of such an endemic surrender to the discourse of victims and wounds is indicative of that consciousness of crisis (Krissenbewustsein) which is symptomatic of modernity and which manifests itself as a feeling of pleasure in decay. The possibility of escaping this contagious condition is dependent upon the discovery of a vision of imaginative possibility that may intervene between the arbitrary impact of the Gods and the intelligible reductiveness of human ideology. For the poet, this is the transfigurative domain of poetic vision.

> Between
> The gods' and human beings' sense of things.
>
> And that's the borderline that poetry
> Operates on too, always in between
> What you would like to happen and what will -
> Whether you like it or not.[42]

Poetry functions along the borderline between history and consciousness and it comes into being as a negotiation between arbitrariness and intelligibility. To envisage an image capable of redeeming the arbitrary dilemma of human being from a desperate surrender to the embittered politics of total intelligibility it must accept the dilemma and transfigure it. Poetry's redemptive image of identity must be, therefore, grounded in the dialect of alienation and transfigured by an adept vision of assuagement. The chorus stoutly propounds this unavoidably difficult situation for poetry in the world of the walking wounded.

> Human beings suffer,
> They torture one another,
> They get hurt and get hard.
> No poem or play or song
> Can fully right a wrong
> Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in gaols
Beat on their bars together.
A hunger-striker's father
Stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
Faints at the funeral home.

History says, Don't hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justic 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.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.

Call miracle self-healing:
The utter, self-revealing
Double-take of feeling.
If there's fire on the mountain
Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing
The outcry and the birth-cry
Of new life at its term. [43]

The poet's contemporary references bear out the underlying theme of the necessity of forgiveness and of the urgency to reconfigure the language of cultural and political imaginings. A return to hope is conditional upon the capacity to heal oneself and this may be achieved through the "Double-take of feeling", the reflective reconsideration of human values through an enforced attentiveness to the messages which an afflicted sensibility may wish to convey. "No poem or play or song/Can fully right a wrong", but poetry, and lyric poetry in particular, may provide a partial image of restoration through its visionary exploration of the ground of human feeling.

For redemption to be achieved, for the Miloszian couplet of "hope

and history" to "rhyme", society must break the form that guarantees the quarrelsome cycle of retribution. By envisaging a pacific alternative "On the far side of revenge", the "longed-for tidal wave/Of justice can rise up,/And hope and history rhyme". Poetry's reconfiguration of the familiar events and experiences of the quotidien world may embody an exemplary image for history. For it asserts that through the indeterminacy of language any conceptual ob~~ject~~ state to peaceful coexistence may be reimagined, reinvented and transcended.

Vision is a condition of peace. And as the end of art is peace, the poetic's visionary power must be restored to pursue its assuaging end. Belief in the very possibility of reinivention and reimagining is fundamental to the evolution of a humane response to the debilitating conditions of history's barbaric force. Poetry announces this potential and as with the poetic depiction of Philoctetes' ultimate redemption from the cult of the wound (a variation on the blood-sacrifice theme), so too may poetry's other constituents consider the measured advice of the final chorus

> Suspect too much sweet talk
> But never close your mind.
> It was a fortunate wind
> That blew me here. I leave
> Half-ready to believe
> That a crippled trust might walk
>
> And the half-true rhyme is love. [44]

The Ecstatic Parish: Provisional Identities in Heaney's Later Poetry

> The parochial mentality...is never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish. All great civilizations are based on parochialism - Greek,

Israelite, English. [45]

The revision of the poetics of identity in modern Ireland originates in Patrick Kavanagh's lifelong quest to release the matter of experience from the stultifying hold of nationalist ideology. Kavanagh redefined the possibilities of poetry in his parochial reconfiguration of cultural perceptions in post-Yeatsian Ireland. Rejecting the hibernotopian "myth of Ireland as a spiritual entity" [46] as the proper basis for the lyric's exploration of identity he sought to restore the particularity of immediate experiences and perceptions as the ground of imaginative freedom.

The implicative force of this poetics of particularity would be conveyed, he believed, by the strong poet who Kavanagh describes as dreaming "from his tiny foothold of the known to the unknown" [47]. The parochial and the particular were indicative of a larger poetic universe of other parochial and particular identifications, as from this aesthetic point of view "The self is interesting only as an illustration" [48]. Kavanagh's awareness of the reductive impact of identitarian discourse's formal strategies led him to assert that the incorporation of such essentialist strategies in the aesthetic domain was <u>de facto</u> anti-art.

> Irishness is a form of anti-art. When you meet one of these artists you discover he has no passionate faith in art. The tentacles of allusion he throws out are aimed at no Promethean theme...To deny Ireland as a spiritual entity leaves so many people floundering without art. [49]

Heaney has recorded his indebtedness to Kavanagh in a number of thoughtful essays [50] and indeed, he has recalled an early meeting with the elder poet in terms that recognise the poetic continuity which this meeting symbolised [51].

Heaney's developing critique of identitarian discourse transforms the enlightening perspectives of Kavanagh's parochial poetics into a more coherent response to the distinctly modern dilemma of the lyric imagination. Where Kavanagh had sought to dwell on the wondrous particularity of the parish, Heaney moves a stage further in seeking to express the conditions in which this perception of wonder arise as language engages in the subconscious negotiation between arbitrariness and intelligibility.

Whilst Kavanagh was content to assert the indicative force of a parochial view of the aesthetic, Heaney wishes to sound out these indications in a modern poetics of identity. Kavanagh's parochial poetics of identity implies a heterogeneous universe of particular experiential parishes. For Heaney implication is insufficient. His poetic imagination hungers to envisage the shape and form of these implications. Thus what is implicit in Kavanagh will become conceptually realised in Heaney as he seeks to determine, within his poetic treatments of parochial perceptions, the nature of that heterogenising force which permits poetry to bear witness in the age of ideology.

Heaney's development of the poetics of particularity recognises that all expressions of human identity are grounded in language's provisional admission of intelligibility. As the process of signification unveils the conventionality of language, the expression of meaning is constantly reminded of its provisional status in the epistemologically indeterminate world of modernity. For the poet this admission of provisionality is an admission of possibility, as the poetic's visionary reconfiguration of the rudiments of individual

identity may thus be re-evaluated as a probing into the actual hermeneutic dilemma of modernity rather than as an unconscionable evasion.

Heaney's recognition of the value of a parochial aesthetic combines with his increasingly sensitive awareness of the linguistic dilemma of modernity as he moves to re-envisage the lyric. Thus re-envisaged, the lyric's investigation of the particularity of individual experience may embody a profound exploration of the general dilemma of modern consciousness when that investigation reflects upon the central role of language in that investigative process.

The contemporary dread of alienation and the consequent resort to ideological exclusiveness are consequences of the epistemological upheavals which have unceasingly followed on from Kant's "Copernican revolution". What Heaney's parochial poetics aim to legitimate is a reversal of the impotent dilemma of modern consciousness. For in the lyric's meditation upon the relation between the process of individuation and the insight of particular experience, the poet signifies a belief in the centrality of the individual imagination in the determination and reinvention of its cultural,historical and epistemological identity.

The concentration upon the local, the parochial or the regional compass of perceptions signifies in Heaney's poetics a "Ptolemaic revolution" in which the individual's capacity to inform, configure and transcend his identity is returned to him as a consequence of the provisional status of all expressions of meaning which the poetic's exploration of language bears out. The individual, like the cultural

provinces, must no longer define his identity in terms of the dominating centres of certainty, whether they be ideologies, metropolitan illusions of centrality, or delusory philosophical prescriptions. The poet who envisages in the particularity of his regional or parochial perceptions the outlines of a general human dilemma, may assist the process of redemption through his testimony to the provisional nature of any cultural or historical expression of identity. "The task of talent", Heaney writes, "is to reverse things to a Ptolemaic condition" [52]. In this Ptolemaic condition, the aesthetic imagination may begin to re-empower the meaning of identity with the capacity to transcend the atavistic restrictions which the demands of solidarity sometimes impose. For as Heaney notes, the poetic definition of identity involves a "second command" which is

> besides the command to solidarity - and that is to individuate yourself, to become self-conscious, to liberate the consciousness from the collective pieties. [53]

For the poet, obedience to this "second command" begins in an attentiveness to the particularity of immediate impressions and is transformed when the exploration of language's indeterminate potential reveals the provisionality of identity formations. Thus transformed, the individual is liberated to reinvent himself and reconfigure the terms of his involvement with his community and freed to break the quarrel's illusory form.

Poetry's capacity to initiate this process of re-identification through the interrogation of language is animated by its continuous arbitration between the familiar and the defamiliarised, between "marks on paper" and the encroaching margins, between the determinacy

of beautiful expression and the indeterminacy of its linguistic origins. In envisaging the horizons of the individual's identity, poetry must determinedly pursue this redemptive arbitration as 'The First Gloss' advises.

> Take hold of the shaft of the pen.
> Subscribe to the first step taken
> from a justified line
> into the margin. [54]

In the lyric's excavation of the margins of consciousness the particular perception is transformed into a testimony of the exhilaratingly provisional nature of collective prescriptions. The particularity of immediate place may thus be fully explored as an instance of difference in a heterogeneous world of wondrous eventfulness, rather than surrendered as indicative of nationalism's identitarian imperatives. For in the parish of provisional identities, as the poet writes

> Everywhere being nowhere,
> who can prove
> one place more than another? [55]

Liberated to re-imagine the immediacy of his particular cultural identity, and free from the disabling ideological form of identitarian interpretation he may thus return "Into the heartland of the ordinary" [56] where poetry may legitimately transfigure the deeply pessimistic spirit of modernity.

Beyond the totalistic clôture which nationalism's interpretative homogenisation of the variety of historical and cultural meaning imposes, through its teleological illusion of history, in the free space of an openended imagination, poetry may rehearse identity as "distinctness without domination" and thereby prefigure the

conditions of peace.

In 'The Pitchfork's' representation of the transfigurative power which the parochial imagination's comprehension of particularity may embody, Heaney demonstrates the exemplary force of this realisation.

> Riveted steel, turned timber, burnish, grain,
> Smoothness, straightness, roundness, length and sheen.
> Sweat-cured, sharpened, balanced, tested, fitted.
> The springiness, the clip and dart of it.
>
> And then when he thought of probes that reached the farthest,
> He would see the shaft of a pitchfork sailing past
> Evenly, imperturbably through space,
> Its prongs starlit and absolutely soundless -
>
> But he has learned at last to follow that simple lead
> Past its own aim, out to an other side
> Where perfection - or nearness to it -is imagined
> Not in the aiming but the opening hand. [57]

This visionary transformation of the mundane object exemplifies a refutation of any instrumentalising reduction, any teleological imperative to interpret the experience as indicative of a world of absolute meanings. The provisional identifications of the poet's description (javelin/sailing past/starlit) exemplify how the immediate content of individual perceptions may be transfigured by the lyric imagination's exploitation of language's arbitrary realm.

In contrast to the uneasy and displaced persona in 'Digging', this opener of the ground of consciousness "has learned at last to follow the simple lead", beyond the discursive imperatives of identitarian teleologies and instrumentalisations. For the poet will pursue language beyond its determined range, "past its own aim", to seek out in the transfigured image of his distinct perceptions the provisional possibility of peace and "perfection". But as the concluding line's disclosing image asserts, such an image may be imagined not through

the discursive clôture of ideological imperatives, but through the improvisational ouverture of the writer's "opening hand".

Heaney's desire to write with the "opening hand" of visionary inscription is manifest in the transcendental imagery of Seeing Things. Throughout this collection the "appetites of gravity"[58] are transfigured by the appetites of grace. The theme of transcendence which recurs throughout the book repeatedly follows a particular pattern of exposition. The poetic voice is confronted with the stolid hypostatising intransigence of a familiar object and within his deepening concentration upon the particular perception of intransigence, language improvises a transcendent image of redemption from stasis, immutability and sameness. The process is clearly described in the transfigurative imagery of 'Field of Vision' [59].

What begins as a description of physical paralysis, develops to encompass an imaginative correlative of paralysis and stasis in the immutable and undifferentiated particulars of the woman's surrounding environment.

> I remember this woman who sat for years
> In a wheelchair, looking straight ahead
> Out the window at sycamore trees unleafing
> And leafing at the far end of the lane.
>
> Straight out past the TV in the corner,
> The stunted, agitated hawthorn bush,
> The same small calves with their backs to wind and rain,
> The same acre of ragwort, the same mountain.
>
> She was steadfast as the big window itself.
> Her brow was clear as the chrome bits of the chair.
> She never lamented once and she never
> Carried a spare ounce of emotional weight.

The exactness of the woman's emotional response which forbids her to release herself through utterance from the imaginatively exacting

circumstances of her disablement, is indicative of the general sense of stasis, immutability and hopelessness which the poem conveys in the undifferentiated landscape that she perceives. Her identity is fixed by the paralysing exactness of her emotional restraint. Her emotional suppression of woundedness and vulnerability which issues in the "steadfast" resolution of her silence, serves to hypostatise her imaginative comprehension of her dilemma. Her physical paralysis is thus doubled by her imaginative stasis, as her perception of identity is one that reduces every aspect of the inexact and teeming world of sensibility to a hopeless reified landscape of irredeemable sameness ("same small calves/same acre of ragwort/same mountain").

This parable of identity, which instances the way in which a passive resignation to the received coordinates of one's particular intelligibility may lead to a desperately deepening sense of alienation and resigned fatalism, reveals the importance of utterance to the process of reconfiguring even the most demanding situations.

The poet's response to the stationing hold of this steadfast exactness is to bring utterance to bear on the reified landscape of this paralysed and paralysing imagination. By exploring this particular memory through the indeterminate openness of poetic discourse, the sameness and station of this reified identity may be reconfigured as an estranging and potentially redeeming site of humane intelligibility.

> Face to face with her was an education
> Of the sort you got across a well-braced gate -
> One of those lean, clean, iron roadside ones
> Between two whitewashed pillars, where you could see
>
> Deeper into the country than you expected
> And discovered that the field behind the hedge
> Grew more distinctly strange as you kept standing

Focused and drawn in by what barred the way.

By focussing upon this particular image and seeing (through its particularising force) an estranging "field of vision" which poetic discourse registers as it explores the boundary between what is familiar and its defamiliarising prospect, the poetics of identity may reconfigure the paralysing hold of identitarian discourse through the revisionary impact which the otherness of immediate experience may admit.

In ways this poem is a parable of Heaney's poetic rebuke to the "steadfast" exactness of the identitarian imagination's reifying imperatives. The lesson of this visionary parable conveys the poetic truth that by allowing the imagination free reign to re-envisage the heterogenising particularity of its immediate parochial world by engagement with the estranging otherness inherent in every perceptual act of identification, the actual may be redeemed from its exacting limits.

The imaginative stasis which the identitarian imagination demands, symbolised by the wheelchair's resolute incumbent, must be transfigured by the ekstasis which the visionary potential of poetry's encounter with ~~the~~ alterity admits. In this revisionary encounter with alterity, identity as an expression of cultural and historical intelligibility may be situated as provisional, always already open to reconfiguration, reinvention and restoration, always already capable of incorporating the arbitrary charge of modern consciousness, and always capable of forgiveness, transcendence and redemption.

Many of the poems in Seeing Things present a visionary encounter

with the alterity of experience, an alterity which emerges out of the surfeit of indeterminate significations which are available to consciousness at the margins of meaning. In these transfigurative encounters between the particular and the possible, the reader is constantly reminded that discourse always employs a selective and radically underdetermined series of signifiers.

The signifier may at any point be overwhelmed by the teeming realm of possible significance, and thus any absolute claim to the truth of a discursively constructed identity is manifestly illusory. In these ecstatic explorations of alterity, the poet reminds his readers of the vulnerability of all discursive expressions of intelligibility to the arbitrary force of language. In this light, poetic discourse may serve to present the provisional dimensions of identity. For as Heaney writes

> Our capacity for imaginative sympathy and the sheer range of our linguistic receiving stations greatly exceed the given circumstances and determining logic of our social milieux. The poetic space available is not confined to what is politically or sociologically predictable. As well as being a symptom of origin and a clue to predelictions, language can also give access to provisional identities and antagonistic positions without demanding our earnest allegiance to any of them.[60]

Throughout the improvised revisions of Seeing Things, the consideration of particular experiences and perceptions as apertures of this free provisional field of imagination, transfigures the actual world of limits and prescriptions into the grounds of redemption. The simplest action or image when illuminated by this revisionary light provides a restorative sense of redress to the hapless closure which the actual world's despairing perceptual limits impose upon the modern mind. When thus transfigured by the sheer

ecstatic encounter with that alterity which language inherently admits, the most innocent particularity of parochial eventfulness may prefigure an image of redemption.

In 'Casting and Gathering' [61], the simple description of the rudimentary actions of freshwater fishing, expands to become a paradigm of the poetic mind's revisionary comprehension of its identity as an equilibriate negotiation between "the banks of self" [62] and alterity. This image of identity as a complementarity of sameness and difference, trust and uncertainty, particular affections and provisional possibilities, is expounded in the negotiating forces of the final stanzas.

> One sound is saying, 'You are not worth tuppence,
> But neither is anybody. Watch it! be severe.'
> The other says, 'Go with it! Give and swerve.
> You are everything you feel beside the river.'
>
> I loved hushed air. I trust contrariness.
> Years and years go past and I do not move
> For I see that when one man casts, the other gathers
> And then vice versa, without changing sides.

Thus liberated from the unitary discursive form of identitarian imperatives into the complementary forces of selfhood and difference, the poetic may begin to envisage the range of possible imaginative negotiations between intelligibility and arbitrariness and thereby re-envisage the potentially redemptive capacity of modern consciousness.

The imperative of a modern poetics in response to the pessimistic stasis of the postwar imagination no longer involves a collusive surrender to the limits of the ideological imagination but a transfigurative vision of the capacity of the human spirit to transform the actual. In the course of writing Seeing Things, Heaney

acknowledged this ecstatic imperative

> Well, I would like to be able to be less heavy....I would like to be more susceptible to impulse and fantasy, you know? And to make things up more, to transform things more. I think I began with some notion of myself as responsible to things, to re-telling, being faithful to what's there. But now I think that's an error. You have to change what's there. You have to transform it. I would like to be able to put things through myself and make them different. I would like to be lighter...I would like to be freer. [63]

In the process of freeing himself from the limits of ideologically prescribed illusions of identity, Heaney had come to realise that poetry's discursive exploration of language's provisional intelligibility situates it in the very centre of modernity's discursive dilemma. To place the investigation of language's indeterminate milieu at the centre of poetic concerns is to place the preoccupying question of modernity under scrutiny.

In the context of modernity, in which the ontological certitudes of the religious age have been replaced by the linguistically constituted epistemological agnosticism of the contemporary world, the probing of language embodies a probing of the limits of intelligibility.

The pessimism through which the modern age approaches its newfound status, embodied in the spirit of heaviness (Geist der Schwere) that permeates critical discourse since Nietzsche's deicidal announcement, admits the illusory redemptions which totalistic ideologies have so destructively offered in the twentieth century. To envisage within the provisionality of language the outlines of redemption from the necessity of pessimism (and pessimism is after all a chosen response), to express in this potentially uplifting experience of

alterity a hopeful image for history in the expression of the felicity and lightness of being (Heiterkeit), the poetic may contribute to the actual world's capacity to recover from the shock of modernity.

In 'Fosterling' [64], Heaney describes the recognition of this original poetic need to open out the poetic imagination to the full force of alterity which the wonderous particularity of his parochial imagination admits.

> Heaviness of being. And poetry
> Sluggish in the doldrums of what happens.
> Me waiting until I was nearly fifty
> To credit marvels. Like the tree-clock of tin cans
> The tinkers made. So long for air to brighten,
> Time to be dazzled and the heart to lighten.

In Seeing Things, Heaney's light-hearted use of a sublime vocabulary challenges the limitations of modernity's peremptory taboo which proscribes the exploration of the radically indeterminate sphere of metaphysical introspection. In a deeply profane age the last taboo proscribes the consideration of the human imagination's sacred impulses even when these impulses originate in a recognition of the deeply provisional nature of human intelligibility. Heaney's willingness to experiment with the resonance of these sacred impulses through the lyric's votive imagination, signifies a final refusal to be constrained by the limits of ideological prescription. For the provisional status of the poetic's discursive expressions frees him to revise the full range of intelligible impulses that constitute human identity, without constraint. Speaking to Blake Morrison he acknowledges the extended scope of his liberated imagination.

> I found myself using words like 'spirit' and 'soul', words which I had disallowed myself for a long time, because there was so much prejudice against them in my

> literary education. Then you realise that's attenuating, and that there is a space that's covered by them. [65]

In responding to what he has elsewhere referred to as "chronic metaphysical stage-fright" [66], Heaney broaches the most challenging aspect of language's indeterminate intelligibility. By forcing his poetic imagination to enter into the arbitrary margins of consciousness by the adoption of provisional identifications, Heaney hopes to deepen his imaginative foothold by grounding it in the most comprehensive awareness of its intelligible status which the recognition of extreme perceptions of indeterminacy admit. The way in which an engagement with the radical alterity of perceptions may deepen the imagination's sense of its own identity is suggested in the 'The Disappearing Island' [67] where it is noted that

> The land sustaining us seemed to hold firm
> Only when we embraced it <u>in extremis</u> .

In the extreme visionary embrace of <u>Seeing Things</u> even the most unsettling perceptions of indeterminacy may be transfigured into provisional rehearsals of the human imagination's capacity to transcend and perfect itself and its environment, as the image of the slide in 'Crossings xxviii' [68] illustrates.

> We were bringing to perfection, time after time
>
> Running and readying and letting go
> Into a sheerness that was its own reward:
> A farewell to surefootedness, a pitch
>
> Beyond our usual hold upon ourselves.
> And what went on kept going, from grip to give,
> The narrow milky way in the black ice,
>
> The race-up, the free passage and return -
> It followed on itself like a ring of light
> we knew we'd come through and kept sailing towards.

As the heuristic visionary transfigurations of the brilliant

'Squarings' sequences demonstrate, the static hold of ideological limitations must surrender to the ecstatic perceptions which poetry's radical revision of humanity's arbitrary context admits, if consciousness is to redeem itself from the reifying effects of intellectual closure. For fundamental to the construction of modern illusions of intelligibility, as language and philosophical reflection recognise, is the fact that "Everything flows. Even a solid man"[69].

This engagement with an agnostically sublime vision of the perceptions which constitute the outer limits of human consciousness's definition of identity, moves Heaney's poetic into the forefront of aesthetic conception. His willingness to consider the most radically indeterminate margins of consciousness which constitute the lightness of human being at the metaphysical boundaries of perception, encompasses a willingness to represent

> a music of binding and loosing
> Unheard in this generation, but there to be
> Called up or called down at a touch renewed. [70]

This depiction of the poet's sacerdotal power in the "music of binding and loosing" conveys the power of the poetic's provisional identities to express even the most indeterminate and unacknowledged impulses of the modern imagination. This is what the votive and religious sensibility of lyric poetry may ultimately admit. In this music the religious suppositions that were "once a proof of God's existence" may serve to prove the redemptive alterity of poetry's engagement with the limits of consciousness, "As long as it admits things beyond measure" [71].

The poetics of redemption are grounded in or foregrounded by the

indeterminate perceptions which the lyric's meditation upon the margins of linguistic signification admit. Thus renewed, poetry reminds modern consciousness in the grip of despair, that the human capacity to redeem itself from barbarism is promised by language's provisional admission that the human soul incorporates "things beyond measure". Thus assuaged, the human soul may, like the justly condemned thief, respond to the promise which Heaney's lyric poetry provisionally identifies in its lightening of being

> And lightening? One meaning of that
> Beyond the usual sense of alleviation,
> Illumination, and so on, is this:
>
> A phenomenal instant when the spirit flares
> With pure exhilaration before death -
> The good thief in us harking to the promise![72]

The sense of imaginative empowerment which Heaney's later poetry explicitly seeks to convey, through the provisional identifications which the perception of otherness and alterity readily admit, represents more than a mere reaction to the limited identitarian intelligibility of his original world.

Heaney's poetics have moved beyond the particular delusions of nationalism's poetics of Irish identity, to encompass a historically resonant poetics of human identity, a poetics which envisage modern humanity as it would appear in the messianic light of self-transcendence. His poetics are ineradicably modern as they move to sound out the deepest needs of modern consciousness and thereby situate poetic discourse as a source of provisional redress. For as Heaney notes,

> Poetry, let us say, whether it belongs to an old political dispensation or aspires to express a new one, has to be a model of active consciousness. It has to be able to withstand as well as to envisage, and in order to

do so it must contain within itself the coordinates of the reality which surrounds it and out of which it is generated. When it does contain these co-ordinates, it becomes a power to which we can have recourse; it functions as the rim of the silence out of which consciousness arrives and into which it must descend. For a moment, we can remember ourselves as fully empowered beings.[73]

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28. ibid p.32.

29. ibid p.32.

30. ibid p.33.

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I stood between them,
the one with his tawny intelligence
and fencer's containment,
his speech like a bowstring,

and another, unshorn and bewildered
in the tubs of his wellingtons,
smiling at me for help,
faced with this stranger I'd brought him.

Then the cunning voice of poetry
came out of the wood across the road
saying, "Be adept and be dialect,
tell of this wind coming past the zinc hut,
call me sweetbriar after the rain
or snowberries cooled in the fog.
But love the cut of this travelled one
and call me also the cornfield of Boaz.
Go beyond what's reliable
in all that keeps pleading and pleading,
these eyes and puddles and stones;
and recollect how bold you were

when I first visited you
with betrayals you cannot renege on.

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Conclusion

Whilst the matter of Ireland is thematically central to a large part of Seamus Heaney's poetic, it is only by considering the significance of his formal discursive response to the matter as being indicative of a larger poetic enterprise, that his poetry may be evaluated in terms of the general modern dilemma of postwar poetry. What Heaney's proccupying concern with the relationship between lyric and society readily suggests is that Irish poetry is confronted with the global postwar aesthetic conundrum which Adorno so effectively expressed in the wake of the Second World War's harrowing lessons in the consequences of identitarian thought.

Accepting the historical specificity of its contentual background, Irish poetry may no longer pretend to exist in a state of conceptual neutrality. What Heaney's treatment of the problem of identity demonstrates is that the determination of "symbols adequate to our predicament" requires an awareness that this predicament is indicative of the general poetic and socio-political predicament which modernity presents. What the development of his later poetry suggests is that in the shared context of modernity, Ireland is interesting as an example of, and not as an exception to this predicament. The failure of some critics to accept this is indicative both of an unwillingness to transcend the limits which the rhetoric of the quarrel imposes, and more seriously a failure (shared by others in Irish society) to come to terms with the need to reimagine the community and the individual in the light of changing circumstances.

The persistence and integrity which Heaney has shown in confronting the ambiguities and uncertainties which this situation presents, and the manner in which he has succeeded in reinventing himself and reimagining his community is suggestive of the possibilities which art, and the lyric form in particular, may present to a society in crisis.

Heaney's poetic pointedly refutes the false opposition which pits tradition or the specificity of the parochial tradition against modernity or the need to renounce the "atavistic" contents of a local tradition in favour of a culturally anodyne globalism. In the course of his poetic development, the poet demonstrates that the hegemonic instrumentalisation of the content of cultural identity may be deconstructed when the lyric deploys its defamiliarising strategies in its representation of the very familiar contents of national experience.

Throughout his evolving poetics of identity the writer shows that one may explore and represent the contents and discontents of a particular cultural identity, without imposing an identitarian interpretation. Indeed, the effectiveness of his lyrical exploration of this problematic field of meaning demonstrates the degree to which art may inform and redeem society.

For as Heaney's poetic demonstrates, the poetic's discursive form admits an exploration of the fragility of modern society's deepest and most necessary illusions through its reconfiguration of the conventionality and contingency of meaning in the act of foregrounding. Even the most familiar and determinate sites of value may thus be recovered and transformed within the full compass of

poetic intelligibility. When this intelligibility is defined by beauty and atrocity, arraigned by the gravity of fact and empowered by the grace of an opening imagination, the most intransigent habits of interpretation may be redeemed from the rhetoric of the quarrel.

For poetry to provide a redemptive image of culture and history, it must explore the indeterminacy of language and counter the illusions of civility with the barbarous reality of a world that is as arbitrarily formed as it is intelligibly defined. To "connive / In civilized outrage" is to evade the real predicament of modern consciousness and merely serves to deny poetry its redemptive force in a world where Auschwitz and Vukovar counsel despair. In recognising this poetic truth, Heaney demonstrates that the lyric's discursive concern with the particular may imply a profoundly critical reflection upon social formations which are legitimated via hegemonic assertions of universal value.

If "the end of art is peace", as Heaney reiterates, and if as Adorno reminds us "peace is the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other", then for art to achieve its end, it must reconfigure the discourse of identity in a manner which admits the distinctness of each particular moment of culture without surrendering to the illusion of total meaning.

Heaney's poetic provides a cogent demonstration of the manner in which art may prefigure the conditions of peace, without for a moment compromising the cherished cultural particularity which would define anysuch peace as meaningful. It is this poetic achievement which distinguishes Seamus Heaney.

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