

Thesis  
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**Rewritings, Appropriations, Deformations:**  
**Aspects of Intertextuality in Contemporary**  
**Northern Irish Poetry**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to examine the ways in which four Northern Irish poets - Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, Paul Muldoon and Medbh McGuckian - have assimilated, or appropriated, other literary traditions, texts and influences into their own work, and how these appropriations express themes central to their work. A short introduction sets out the main themes and subjects: how the opening of the space of these texts through translation and what is called 'creative appropriation' links in with the poets' continual tussling with the ever-presence of politics and history.

The first chapter focusses on the influence of Robert Lowell and, particularly, Dante on what I argue have proven to be Seamus Heaney's 'pivotal' collections, Field Work and Station Island; and I relate the notion of 'translation' to Heaney's ideas of 'amphibiousness', of the artist being 'placed and displaced'. The second chapter looks at the ways in which Tom Paulin has 'de-formed' and 're-formed' his own poetry through assimilating the example of Russian and Eastern European writers, and how translation has also played a part in this. Chapter Three considers Paul Muldoon's relentless 'creative appropriations', his magpie 'intertextualizing' from other authors, as an expression of a central theme in his work: 'dis-integration'. The fourth chapter advances a reading of Medbh McGuckian's 'transgressive' poetry through an analysis of intertexts implicated in it: Freud, W.R. Rodgers and - in particular - the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam. My conclusion endeavours to draw various strands of the thesis together and forwards the idea of Northern Irish poetry proving exceptionally 'pervious' to outside influences.



## INTRODUCTION

'The term intertextuality applie[s] to Northern Irish poetry in a special, living sense: not as a theoretical dead letter, but as a creative dynamic working upon the mechanisms of traditional and cultural definitions alike...' (Edna Longley, 'Revising Irish Literature', introduction to The Living Stream. p.51)

Northern Irish poetry is fast becoming a crowded field of study, though the very phrase 'Northern Irish poetry' has been liable to send certain commentators into something of a strop. Thomas Kinsella, for one, in his introduction to The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse, dismissed as 'largely a journalistic entity'<sup>1</sup> what he called the 'Northern Ireland renaissance'<sup>2</sup> (as Neil Corcoran has wryly pointed out, 'He holds the term in the sterilised tongs of quotation marks'<sup>3</sup>).

'Journalistic entity' notwithstanding, it may not be an exaggeration to suggest that, especially since 1969, the poets of Northern Ireland have been perceived as the arbiters of 'Troubles culture'. Though Bernard O'Donoghue speaks (somewhat erroneously, it must be said) of the 'days of common purpose'<sup>4</sup> between Heaney, Mahon, Longley and James Simmons in the early 'seventies, many of the Northern Irish poets seem to have spent the past quarter-century anxiously wrestling with the question of their responsibility to themselves and their imagination as artists, and their civic responsibility as members of a particular community in the middle of a fraught social

situation. This is partly the nub, for example, of Derek Mahon's 'Rage for Order' ('[The poet] is far from his people, / and the fitful glare of his high window is as / nothing to our scattered glass'); and Seamus Heaney has crystallized the problem succinctly in an uncollected poem for Donald Davie called 'The Flight Path' (1992). At one point in this poem, a character accosts Heaney on the Enterprise express:

He sits down

Opposite and goes for me head on. 'When,  
For fuck's sake, are you going to write  
Something for us?' 'If I do write something',  
(This is one line I remember clearly)  
'It'll be for me, not you or anybody  
About to tell me what I should be writing'.  
Those were the months of jail walls smeared with  
shite.<sup>6</sup>

One of the ways in which Northern Irish poets have attempted to engage (in a disengaged way, perhaps) with the problems that Heaney's interloper raises is by the means of 'intertextuality' as raised by Edna Longley in my epigraph. One such intertextual nexus sharply illustrates the fraught, on-going tussle that Northern Irish poets have experienced between their perceived 'public' and 'private' roles. Robert Frost may seem a surprising target, but his is an influence that many of these writers have had to assimilate and/or negotiate. Edna Longley has exhaustively traced the Frostian allusions and appropriations through Paul Muldoon's work - in particular, his tour de

force 'Troubles poem' in Quoof, 'The More A Man Has The More A Man Wants'; and she concludes that it was Frost 'who steered Muldoon towards the insight that "all the fun's in how you say a thing"'7. But, in his poem 'Gold' (Meeting the British), Muldoon advances a more ambivalent view of the poet:

Just a year earlier  
old Frost  
had swung the lead  
  
while hailing Kennedy-  
'A golden age  
of poetry and power.'8

Muldoon's weighty phrase 'swung the lead' not only gives the lie to the 'golden age' that Frost proclaimed in his poem 'The Gift Outright', it also implicitly accuses Frost of betraying his vocation as a poet by setting himself up as a political spokesman, as a national figure. In Muldoon's view, the role of the poet is to be a 'free agent, roaming through the different states of oneself'9; and yet it's clear that the pull between the primacy of the imagination's workings and a poet's so-called 'poetic responsibility' is a consuming preoccupation. In his intertextual scrutiny of Frost, Auden, MacNeice, Yeats (in '7, Middagh Street' and 'Yarrow') and Neruda (in 'Yarrow', a 'poet who got his hands dirty'), Muldoon purposely foregrounds and examines these central arguments.

Similarly, Tom Paulin's characteristically antagonistic consideration of Frost in his collection Minotaur focusses on this aspect of his character, and he comments: 'Frost's presence on the platform at the Inauguration [of Kennedy] and his reading of 'The Gift Outright' at the ceremony became symbolic of this ambition to make the poet active in politics'<sup>10</sup>. But Ciaran Carson's own appropriations of Frost tend to bring the matter somewhat nearer home in a more explicit way than Muldoon's circumambulations. As Edna Longley points out, his references to Frost in 'The Irish For No' are a stick with which to beat one of his contemporaries:

They opened the door into the dark:

The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. Empty jam-  
jars.

Mish-mash. Hotch-potch. And now you rub your eyes and get  
acquainted with the light.<sup>11</sup>

In these lines, Frost - via 'After Apple-Picking' and a twist on 'Acquainted with the Night' - meets Seamus Heaney (and, of course, Keats); and what greets their eyes is Carson's idea of a grim joke: a grotesque suicide attempt with a Black-and-Decker drill. In a famously combative review of Heaney's North, Carson asserted that Heaney's mythic method of approaching the internecine conflict of the Troubles was culpably lacking. Commenting on a line from 'Exposure', he writes: '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'<sup>12</sup>. Which brings us back - or forward - to 'The Irish for No' and Robert Frost's 'rubbed eyes'.

Heaney has been such a target in this respect for the younger generation of Ulster poets - Paul Muldoon has alleged in an interview that Heaney 'flirted'<sup>13</sup> for a while with the idea of becoming a spokesman for his community - that perhaps he himself should be allowed his ha'penny's worth on Frost. In a Salmagundi essay, 'Above the Brim: On Robert Frost', he writes with what might almost be described as a 'There but for the grace of God...' feeling about the poet's 'immense popular acclaim during his own lifetime':

His apotheosis into an idol mutually acceptable to his own and his country's self-esteem ... his constantly resourceful acclimatization of himself to this condition... - it all generated a critical resistance and fed a punitive strain which is never far to seek in literary circles anyhow.<sup>14</sup>

(One can't help but hear a rueful 'I know the feeling' in the last couple of lines.) Though Heaney's negotiations in his essay aren't with what he terms Frost's 'stances, imaginative and civic, within American political and intellectual history'<sup>15</sup>, he does concede that these questions are part of the heart of this poet. Even here (and Heaney has forthrightly addressed this in other essays and poems), the vexed issues of the relationship between 'poetry and power', what responsibility art - and poetry in particular - should bear in times of social upheaval, the necessity for what Muldoon has called the 'separateness and supremacy of art'<sup>16</sup> even in such times (and especially in such times) are never far from the surface of things; and, as we have seen with their

'use' of Frost, part of these poets' approach to the problem has resulted in a sustained intertextual engagement -a critical dialogue with other texts and literary traditions.

In an examination of how four poets in particular have indulged in this kind of 'critical dialogue', I have entitled this thesis Rewritings. Appropriations. Deformations: Aspects of Intertextuality in Contemporary Northern Irish Poetry. Of course, 'intertextuality' is a problematic term, and I shall be using it problematically in this thesis. In many ways, the word 'translation' might have covered the process whereby the poets in question have reformed, or deformed, their work; but translation itself has come to assume an important role in the output of Northern Irish poets since Heaney's inclusion of Dante's 'Ugolino' in Field Work, and as I hope to demonstrate, their use (and concomitant analysis) of the form both rise out of and feed into these thematic preoccupations. It's clear that translation proliferated throughout the 1980s, and continues to make an important impact. Even as I write this introduction, Heaney himself is poised to publish a version of 'Beowulf'. (Since 1991 and Seeing Things - which was bookended by translated excerpts from Dante and Ovid - Heaney's only substantial published works in book form, apart from critical texts, have been translations: his translations of Ovid and Brian Merriman in The Midnight Verdict and, soon, of Beowulf.) Muldoon, Longley and Heaney have all contributed translations of the Romanian poet Marin Sorescu's work for The Biggest Egg in the World: Muldoon has published a book-length collection of his translations of Nuala ni Dhomnaill's work, The Astrakhan Cloak; Paulin, Heaney and Mahon have brought out versions of Greek plays; Longley's last two collections feature free translations from the Odyssey, and from a number of Dutch poets; Carson's latest collection First Language showcases an

important amount of translations from Rimbaud, Ovid and from the Irish. (He includes in his collection a poem in Irish, as well, which is something that other poets - Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon among them - haven't yet done in their own collections.)

My concern is to examine how Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, Paul Muldoon and Medbh McGuckian have opened the space of their texts to similar diverse and important influences, and how this in turn highlights aspects of the difficult relationship between poetry, politics and power. The first chapter looks at how Seamus Heaney has brought the examples of Robert Lowell and Dante to bear on his notion of 'amphibiousness', or the state of being able to exist in two places at once. Indeed, the ideas powering Heaney's influential Peter Laver Memorial Lecture on the poetry of Mahon, Longley and Muldoon - 'Place and Displacement' - underpin much of my discussion of the other three poets. Tom Paulin's progressive 'deformations' of his work through the influence of Russian and Eastern European poets such as Mandelstam, Rozewicz and Herbert can partly be seen as an attempt to unroot himself from the deadening cadences of English poetry (particularly Auden and Larkin) in his first two collections. Similarly, Paul Muldoon's 'creative appropriation' of numerous sources in his poetry is an important aspect of his aesthetic of 'dis-integration', a somewhat more complex expression of the inplaceness and displacement which Heaney advances in his discussion. And even the most abstruse of these poets, Medbh McGuckian, turns out, on closer inspection, to be one of the most intertextual of the four, with various concealed lines of influence criss-crossing in her inwardly resistant poems.

Clair Wills, in her study of Northern Irish poetry Improprieties, says in her

conclusion: 'While I would not wish to deny the importance of international stylistic movements on the poetry, there are I believe more pressing considerations'.<sup>17</sup> This thesis wants to take up the slack of her statement here, to proclaim the importance of such movements, because I believe, as Wills does, that though they may not be 'pressing', they certainly are freeing. By hinting at a fraction of the diverse range of material that these poets have drawn on for their work, I would like to illustrate some of the power behind the - to purloin one of Longley's opening phrases - 'creative dynamic' of Northern Irish poetry.



## Chapter One

### SEAMUS HEANEY: TRANSLATING FREELY

'Heaney is the poet of the vowel of earth'<sup>1</sup>, wrote Harold Bloom in a review of Field Work. For Seamus Heaney himself, at least in a lecture he gave in 1977, the land is the 'stable element', to which we should 'look for continuity'<sup>2</sup>. It was clear, however, that water - the 'unstable element' - held all the attraction and danger. The wells of 'Personal Helicon', the fascinated and horrified last line of 'Bogland' ('The wet centre is bottom-less'), right up to the poem 'Seeing Things' in his most recent collection: a constant love/hate (or love/fear) relationship with water has been a constant undercurrent in Heaney's work from its earliest times.

This chapter investigates the strain of 'amphibiousness' in Heaney's poetry, of being, in the words of his famous 1985 lecture, 'placed and displaced'<sup>3</sup> as a poet in the middle of social upheaval. An important element of this is Heaney's increasing use of translation in his work. Though he has said in an article that he first translated Buile Suibhne in the early 1970s (though he thoroughly revised this later), and though he offered a translation of Baudelaire's 'Le Squelette Laboureur' in North, the first substantial translation in a Heaney collection must be his version of Dante's 'Ugolino'. Baudelaire's poem fits in very neatly with the other, original poems centering on images of exhumed bodies and skeletons, but it seems to have no further resonance than to fill

out the sequence - Baudelaire is not one of those 'preoccupations' with whom Heaney can 'come to poetic terms with [him]self'.

Dante, on the other hand, is; and this chapter will also scrutinize the effect of several of Heaney's exemplars - Robert Lowell and Dante in particular - on his work and his poetic thought. The first section concentrates on the pivotal role of Field Work in the Heaney oeuvre under the influence of these artists, especially Lowell; the second section will go on to analyse the use of Dante in this collection, and to ponder some of the problems that the kind of translation he employs in Field Work casts up. The third and final section will look at the part translation plays in the poem 'Station Island', and how it has freed him into that desired state of 'amphibiousness', to be able to 'translate freely'.

Field Work has come to occupy a pivotal position in Seamus Heaney's oeuvre. It was the fruit of a four-year sojourn at Glanmore in County Wicklow, which, as he has written, was 'an important growth time when I was asking myself questions about the proper function of poets and poetry and learning a new commitment to the art'. On the one hand the poems in the book provide an endpiece to the earthbound ruminations of North (in the sequence 'Glanmore Sonnets', 'art' is still 'a paradigm of earth new from the lathe/ Of ploughs' ( I, ll.7-8 )); on the other hand, its refreshing emphasis on water and boat imagery prefigures the abiding images and preoccupations of Heaney's 80s poetry - Robert Lowell, for example, is imaged in his elegy as a boat whose course 'is set wilfully across/ the ungovernable and dangerous' (ll.43-44), the fisherman in 'Casualty' finding his 'proper haunt' in a fishing boat 'somewhere, well out, beyond' (III, l.24-5). Furthermore, the solitary meditations on human sacrificial remains (the so-called 'bog poems'), begun in Wintering Out and concentrated into North, has given way to a more gregarious, social persona. Field Work may still be haunted by the ghosts of the murdered, but it is also sustained by celebrations of the living, and, as we shall see, its note is tuned by the guiding presence of Heaney's role-models and exemplars.

It is plain that something has been made to happen to Heaney's voice and poetic persona in the gap between North and Field Work. As he has said, it was his aim to 'return to an opener...a more social voice', to 'pitch the voice out'; and the effect of

this can be gauged if we compare the final poem of North ('Exposure'), with 'Oysters', the first poem in Field Work. Critics have noted that the last poems of Heaney's collections are not merely epilogues to or quick resumes of the preceding work, but are also entrypoints into the concerns of the next book. 'Exposure', written from a self-imposed 'exile' in Wicklow, bases itself on Heaney's riven perspectives. In the first three stanzas, Heaney's evocation of the Wicklow countryside in December is heavy with exhaustion, decay, the pervasive sense of an end: birches 'inherit...the last light', the 'ash tree' - with its suggestion of a burnt-out fire - is 'cold to look at', the poet walks alone through 'husks, the spent flukes of autumn'. Set against, or above, this darkening landscape is the absent presence of a 'comet that was lost', keenly described in terms of an obliterating light ( 'those million tons of light' ), a blossoming in the dead of winter ( its 'glimmer of haws and rosehips', its 'pulsing rose' ), and which the speaker later misses. These juxtaposed images are made to reflect the poet's inner dilemma: the conflict between being mired in the exhausting predicaments of earth, in what he perceives as his own civic obligations; and his yearning to be enclosed in the self-contained creative burn of the imagination, freed from earth and intent upon its own wilful orbit. His problem, it appears, is not much helped by the advice of friends advocating the primacy of art ( their 'beautiful prismatic counselling' ), and the noise of 'anvil brains of some who hate me', which itself demands an answer. As he writes: 'I sit weighing and weighing / My responsible tristia. / For what? For the ear? For the people??/ For what is said behind backs?' The use of 'tristia' here sets off the analogy alarms - Osip Mandelstam published a volume of the same title, and, in time, he was exiled from Moscow to Voronezh, 400 miles south; the title of his book was taken from a series of poems written by Ovid during his exile from Rome in Tomis. Both poets

were exiled from the centre but kept within the bounds of the empire, at its edges. This decentering while remaining in place, as it were, is matched by the displaced perspective that Heaney struggles to come to terms with in 'Exposure', when, in the final three stanzas, he makes a famous attempt at self-definition:

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

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

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

The phrase 'inner emigre' pinpoints the simultaneous in-placeness and displacement which forms the focus of the poem. Heaney is geographically an 'inner emigre', having left Northern Ireland, though he is still within the bounds of Ireland; he is also an 'inner emigre', through his choice to retreat into his imagination and seemingly to turn his back on historical and social imperatives. The phrase turns the

notion of being in place and displaced inside out, and contributes to the destabilising of identity voiced in these stanzas. Any easy declaration of the self is undermined by the deeply-ambiguous orchestration of this single sentence. We begin with the assertion of what Heaney is NOT ( 'internee nor informer' ), and this tends to colour the next two suggestions of what he may be, both of which - through the use of semi-colons, attaching and detaching at the same time - are left unanchored, unresolved, displaced from the subject in line 30. Identity, instead of being fixed, becomes fluid, uncertain; although both the 'wood-kerne' and the 'inner emigre' are figures of exile, they express different versions of that exile. The 'inner emigre' demonstrates a measure of repose through deliberation, a hermit's dedicated meditation ( he is grown 'long-haired and thoughtful' ). The 'wood-kerne', on the other hand, has 'escaped form the massacre', an impulsive action which detaches him from the situation but leaves him in flight and in danger of his life. These contradictory notions - a meshing of deliberation and impulsiveness - might be said to reflect the contradictory nature of the creative process as described by Heaney in an interview with Seamus Deane. There, he speaks of mediating between 'the disobedience and peremptoriness of creative nature' and a 'deliberated poetic effort'. The betweenness of 'Exposure' enacts, perhaps for the first time, what Heaney says of Auden in a much later lecture ('Sounding Auden', 1986): that his poetry insists on

the necessity of a break, of an escape from habit,  
an escape from the given... and ... upon the  
necessity of these acts of self-liberation only  
to expose their illusory promise.<sup>4</sup>

Caught between a desire to escape the attachments of 'earth', and the awareness of his loss of the 'once-in-a-lifetime portent' of the comet, and its obliterating sense of liberation, all that Heaney can summon at the poem's end are the imaginative 'sparks' that he sends up from earth, and the 'meagre heat' they produce to comfort his rattle-bag of exiled selves.

This same riven quality can also be discerned in Field Work's opening poem, 'Oysters'. The first stanza deliciously describes the anticipation and the eating of the oyster as a merging of sea and sky ('As I tasted the salty Pleiades / Orion dipped his foot in the water'). The second, however, is devoted to a description of the fate of the oysters which reads more like a rape:

Alive and violated  
They lay on their beds of ice:  
Bivalves: the split bulb  
And philandering sigh of ocean.  
Millions of them ripped and shucked and  
scattered.

The violence of the vocabulary takes one aback here, especially the short-vowelled consonantal stabs of the stanza's last line. But what also makes us pause is its coupling with the illicit sexual act ( the overtones associated with 'violated', 'split bulb' and 'philandering'). ( I shall consider the link Heaney continually forges between sex and violence in his poetry in a later section. ) From this we move abruptly into the

third verse, which contextualizes the meal in terms of 'toasting friendship / Laying down a perfect memory / In the cool of thatch and crockery'. A comforting picture - which is immediately jarred by the way the fourth verse, following on from the second, imagines the oysters 'hailed by the Romans south to Rome', and their eating becomes contextualized as a spoil of imperialism, of colonization, of history: 'I saw damp panniers disgorge / The frond-lipped, brine-stung / Glut of privilege-' The distaste is evident in the grotesque language of greed and regurgitation ('glut', 'disgorge'). This continual see-sawing between a moment of personal happiness in the company of friends, and the spoiling of that moment by the intrusions of history - as though two separate poems on 'Oysters', one rejoicing in its inplaceness and the other soured by its displacement into a wider perspective, were struggling for supremacy within the body of one text - spurs Heaney to a final, clinching stanza:

[I] was angry that my trust could not repose  
In the clear light, like poetry or freedom  
Leaning in from sea. I ate the day  
Deliberately, that its tang  
Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb.

It is in this climax that we begin to realize the differences between the Heaney of 'Exposure', and the Heaney of Field Work. The former tramped dead woods in a depressed solitude, as unable to place trust in his ' friends' / Beautiful prismatic counselling ' in that poem as in the 'anvil brains of some who hate me', coming to terms with the 'exposure' of his self-imposed displacement. But the Heaney of 'Oysters'



(and Field Work) proves a far more social being, speaking of 'we' and 'our', enjoying an impromptu ceremony to 'toast friendship'. This is reflected in the 'opening-out' of his poetic style, the interplay between longer and shorter lines (which, as we see above, range from the sharp 8-syllabled fourth line to the first two 11-syllabled lines). This allows a sense of movement, air into the space of the text. ( He has said in an interview that the 'rhythmic contract of meter and iambic pentameter and long line implies audience'. ) This Heaney is also a more decisive, active being, denoted by the inordinate stress conferred on 'Deli-berately' by the line-break in the third line of the final stanza, and accentuated by the sharpness of that short line capped with the urgent, pointed anapaest of 'that its tang'. This takes us to the wish voiced at the end of the poem that the memory of the day, and the oysters, impel him to action, an essential poetic action that will resolve the contradictions embedded in the poem - a search for the 'verb, pure verb'. Instead of the inanity which pervades the atmosphere of 'Exposure', 'Oysters' is charged by the self-assertiveness of the final verse, the way Heaney takes matters into his own hands and refuses to be a hostage to circumstance.

This renewed desire for 'deliberate' self-assertion in 'Oysters' - the assertion of his freedom as a poet - forms the basis of his 'Elegy' for Robert Lowell, a thematically-central poem in Field Work. Heaney appears to have been voicing his aims in his memorial address for Lowell when he declared:

When a person whom we cherished dies, all that  
he stood for goes a-begging, asking us somehow to  
occupy the space he filled, to assume into our

own life values which we admired in his and  
thereby to conserve his unique energy.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the ways Heaney translates Lowellian 'values' - certain of his mannerisms and imagery - into the Field Work poems are fairly clear. Lowell is there in the several anthropomorphically-based poems like 'The Otter' (akin to Lowell's 'Dolphin'), and 'The Skunk' which brings out, whether it likes it or not, a comparison with Lowell's 'Skunk Hour' (particularly in the line 'I began to be tense as a voyeur', which recalls the moment in Lowell's poem when the poet 'looks for love-cars' as he cruises the hill overlooking the town). He is there in Field Work's constant resort to rhetorical questions: 'How perilous is it to choose / not to love the life we're shown?' ('Badgers'), 'What is my apology for poetry?' ('Glanmore Sonnets: IX'), 'Who's sorry for our trouble?' ('Triptych: I'). And he hovers between these lines from 'High Summer':

Snails in the grass, bat-squeak, the darkening  
trees...

'Christopher is teething and cries at night.  
But this barn is an ideal place to write:  
bare stone, old harness, ledges, shelves, the smell  
of hay and silage. Just now all's hot and still.  
I've scattered twenty francs on fishing tackle.'

The list of barely-connected descriptive phrases conjuring the atmosphere, the studied

use of ellipses as punctuation (until this collection Heaney had almost exclusively employed a curt dash), and the sudden snatch of seemingly-banal correspondence could be straight out of any one of the collections from Lowell's late period - Notebook, The Dolphin, Day by Day.

Heaney's appropriation of Lowell in Field Work has come in for some stormy critical comment. Donald Davie, in a poem called 'Two Poets' (Heaney and Lowell) agitates at Heaney about the book that there is 'too much Lowell'<sup>11</sup> in it. Desmond Fennell, in his vituperative attack on the nature of Heaney's popular status ('Why Seamus Heaney is No.1') brands Field Work as 'Heaney Lowellising'<sup>12</sup>. And Andrew Waterman, in his essay 'The best way out is always through', can hardly contain his astonishment at Lowell's influence on the book, piping, 'Heaney is knocked clean out of his own voice into pastiche of the compelling tones and idiom of the American'<sup>13</sup>. Yet Heaney is concerned with translating more than Lowell's ties and traits into his work. He is after the same quality he divines in Yeats when he remarks that the 'Yeatsian voice depended on a risk of heroism and exposure, the disdain and pride that he mustered'<sup>14</sup>. As with Yeats, so with Lowell, as Heaney's elegy to the latter makes clear. There he writes admiringly of Lowell's 'promulg[ation] of art's / deli-berate, peremptory / love and arrogance', which fuses the two contradictory impulses of the creative process imaged in the figures of exile at the end of 'Exposure'. Throughout the poem, Lowell's art is couched in forcefully manual, aggressive language, as though writing poetry were similar to unarmed combat: he is a 'welder of English', he 'bullies out' sonnets to his wife and child, his poetry is 'armourer's music'.

But the poem makes it clear that Lowell's 'arrogant' self-assertiveness as an artist both holds a fierce attraction for Heaney while filling him with trepidation. The first three lines of the poem state, aphoristically, the idea suggested in the final stanza of 'Oysters', that we are, to some measure, responsible for our own lives: 'The way we are living / timorous or bold / will have been our life'. The contrast between the 'timorous' and the 'bold' life extends through the 'Elegy', embodied in Heaney and Lowell respectively. Where Lowell is constantly characterized by amphibious imagery, as both boat and the boat's helmsman (he rides 'on the swaying tiller of himself'), and with the 'ungovernable, dangerous' flux of water as his supporting element, Heaney, on the other hand, is 'ribbed' by Lowell 'about [his] fear of water'. Faced with Lowell's strongwilled thrash of a poetry, Heaney can only offer what he calls in 'Casualty' his 'tentative art' ('always politic / and shy of condescension'). The second stanza neatly articulates how Heaney's timorous, grounded art is attracted and daunted by the lure of Lowell's amphibious example:

the sill geranium is lit  
by the lamp I write by,  
a wind from the Irish Sea  
is shaking it -

Heaney is still earthbound, bound up with earth, the man who writes in a 1977 essay ('The Sense of Place'), that 'it is to the stable element, land, that we must look to for continuity'<sup>15</sup>. But that stanza's image is amplified towards the end of the poem as the storm of Lowell's artistic presence - an uncompromising echo of 'The Quaker Graveyard

in Nantucket' - musters and breaks: 'And now a teem of rain / and the geranium tremens'.

The admission of Lowell's values of self-assertiveness and brazen artistic self-confidence into his poetic voice and persona is thus an attempt to aspire to the 'amphibiousness' he detects in his various exemplars. Yeats, for example, 'lived the amphibious inner and outer life so well'<sup>16</sup>; the Swedish poet Tomas Transtromer is 'amphibious between his own silence and the unignorable noise of the world'<sup>17</sup>; and he says of Mandelstam and other Eastern European poets that

there is still an unsettled aspect to the world  
they inhabit... one of the challenges they face  
is to survive amphibiously, in the realm of the  
times and the realm of their moral and artistic  
self-respect.<sup>18</sup>

To be 'amphibious' is to inhabit two lives easily, to occupy two positions; to be a member of the community ( and of history ), while also being true to the demands of the imagination and its need for creative freedom. It is a sense of being 'riven', of being a part of and yet apart from; and perhaps one of Heaney's most important models in this respect is Dante, whose literature, he asserts, was finely attuned to the conflicting obligations of the artist in troubled times: to be 'faithful to the collective historical experience and ... true to the recognitions of the emerging self'.<sup>19</sup> In the next section, I will attempt to show how Heaney uses his translation of Lowell, translations of Dante

and the form of translation itself to manifest this simultaneous inplaceness and displacement, to muster an artistic self-assertion; and yet how this approach in Field Work proves extremely problematic.

## II

To Heaney, Robert Lowell's use of translation exemplifies the way his art manifests its 'deliberate, peremptory / love and arrogance'. Lowell's collection of translations, Imitations (1961), was published to something of a critical stir, so much of a stir, in fact, that Stephen Yenser, in 1975, could still remark: 'The work has caused more controversy than any other single volume by Lowell...'<sup>20</sup> By Lowell's own admission, the originals of these 'free' translations of, among others, Rilke, Baudelaire, Montale and Pasternak underwent a serious manhandling. 'My licenses have been many', he writes in the introduction to the book, '... I have dropped lines, moved lines, moved stanzas, changed images, and altered meter and intent...'<sup>21</sup> Translation becomes a creative act, instead of its usual perception as a fundamentally derivative occupation;

Lowell's assertion of his own poetic intuition in the translation moulds it into something after his own image. Heaney comments in his 'Elegy' on Lowell, that Lowell's 'eyes [saw] what [his] hand did / as [he] Englished Russian'. The first line's paraphrase from Lowell's 'Dolphin' delineates the artist's sense of complete control over the act, of responsibility for that act. But Heaney's curious phrasing of the way Lowell translates - 'English[ing] Russian' - makes the act sound both like the respectful, loving touch of a restorer (implicit in the caressing sibilant of 'Englished'), and, conversely, like something or somebody being roughed up. This riven sense of disobedience towards and respect for the source text is married to the manual nature of the act. This is affirmed by the manner in which the hand turns 'English' into a verb, as if a literal forging were being effected, the translation - like other poems - an act of brute work. Lowell himself confirms this impression in his introduction: 'I have been reckless with the literal meaning and labored hard to get the tone...'<sup>22</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Heaney models his assumptions about translation on Lowell's example. He is attracted to its mediating influence between the 'disobedience and peremptoriness of creative nature' and a 'deliberated poetic effort'. As such it is also a means of artistic assertion. In a Salmagundi interview, Heaney expands on this idea when he speaks of the 'two good motives for translation'. The first, he says, the 'absolutely pure' motive, is based on love: '[The translator] will do everything that is possible to bring across the unique and beloved features of the original'. But this will necessarily lead to 'all kinds of precisions, equivalents and honesties'. The translator is led to compromise with the source text, lets it to some measure dictate the terms of its translation. In this so-called 'master servant' scenario,

the translator performs his/her task in order to bring the source text into the target language and culture without interposing his/her own voice and persona between the reader and the text. He/she aspires to be a window through which the reader perceives the source text, transparent, invisible, effaced. ( That said, it has been pointed out that this 'transparency' may have its own ideological agenda, to homogenize the values of the source text in the target culture by papering over the linguistic or cultural differences of that text. )

The second motive - what Heaney calls the 'impure motive' -is not so compromising. 'Dully', says Heaney,

you can hear something in the next room that  
is really interesting. And you say "God, I wish  
that was in this room". So you forage, you  
blunder through the wall. You go needily after  
something... [You] indulge in a Lowellian  
bullying of the original. I think that is the  
Lowell pattern... the notion of translation as  
taking it over... in the slightly imperial sense.

It is this 'Lowell pattern' that Heaney favours; he is NOT a self-effacing translator. Speaking of the way he excerpted and rendered Dante's 'Ugolino', he has said that he 'foraged unfairly in the Italian and ripped it untimely from its place'. This aggressive vocabulary - images of 'foraging', 'going needily after' something, 'bullying', 'taking



over' - highlights the deliberate recklessness bound up in this conception of translation. It is directly appropriative. The source text is seized, manhandled into the target language, and is thus absorbed not only into that language and culture, but, more importantly (in Lowell's and Heaney's case) into the translating poet's extant body of work. ( This is a quality of Lowell's translations that many critics took exception to; and Hayden Carruth has since wondered whether Lowell might not have been better retitling Imitations, Appropriations or Assimilations.<sup>24</sup> )

But it must be said, at this point ( because I will expand on it later ), that such an appropriative, 'creative' approach to translation depends to a certain extent on the status of the translator within the target culture, and the nature of the relationship between the translator and the translated. Heaney is recognised as an internationally-celebrated original poet, with an established voice and perceived continuity of content and theme. Alan Peacock, for example, in his essay 'Poet as Translator, Poet as Seer', refers to the 'avoidance of Heaneyisms in its language and poetry'<sup>25</sup> in Heaney's The Cure at Troy, and he must feel that such figures of speech are self-evident, because he declines to give examples of any. Because his work has reached such a level of visibility and pitch of recognition (his notorious sobriquet 'Famous Seamus' testifies to his elevated public status), Heaney's translations will be read as extensions of his own poetry, as new areas of exploration that both relate to and go beyond the poems already written. Therefore, one might say that the advocacy of the 'Lowell pattern' of translation is itself a statement consonant with the deliberate aim of Field Work as a whole - that he is aware of his public status as an artist, that he has an audience to speak to; and translation is part of his attempt at a more social, 'opener' voice, a way of

'pitching the voice out'.

Thus, in Heaney's hands, his appropriative impulse as a translator involves a calculated displacement of the source text from its original context, and a re-contextualizing, a re-PLACING, of that text within his body of work. (On the other hand, a transparent translation of a source text - say the Divina Commedia - often comes with an elaborate apparatus that seeks to foreground the original context: notes, commentary, a bilingual text, an introduction that grounds the source text.) For example, 'Ugolino' is 'ripped untimely' from the Inferno and grafted onto the end of Field Work. The Sweeney of his more 'respectful' translation Sweeney Astray is further appropriated in Station Island for a group of poems called 'Sweeney Redivivus'; of these 'glosses'<sup>26</sup> ( as they are described - itself a kind of critical translation/rewriting ), Heaney remarks, 'I trust [the poems] can survive without the support system of the original story[, m]any of them ... imagined in contexts removed from early medieval Ireland'.<sup>27</sup> And his recent book The Midnight Verdict, sandwiches extracts from Merriman's 'The Midnight Court' between two translations from Ovid's Metamorphoses tale of Orpheus, 'because', he notes, the Irish poem 'took on a new resonance within the acoustic of the classical myth'.<sup>28</sup>

In the above examples, translation is made to demonstrate its capacity for a simultaneous inplaceness and displacement. This is apparent in the first 'imitation' of this kind, the extract from Dante's 'Ugolino'. It is not just a sudden irruption of Dante at the end of Field Work: this macabre tale of cannibalism, betrayal and enforced starvation is the culmination of a strain of Dantean allusion and imagery running through

the collection. In 'Leavings', Heaney ponders Thomas Cromwell's hellishly ironic punishment for burning down chapels: 'Which circle does he tread, / scalding on cobbles, / each one a broken statue's head?'. 'An Afterwards' is an imaginative rewriting of 'Ugolino' which conceives of poets' fate to be 'plunged [into] the ninth circle / ...tooth in skull, tonguing for brain... / A rabid, egotistical daisy-chain'. And 'The Strand at Lough Beg' -which I shall be considering later in this section - takes its note from the first canto of the Purgatorio, which provides the poem's epigraph and most of its final verse. So, in one sense, Ugolino's appearance at the end of Field Work is not surprising; but, on the other hand, its position in the book is curious. As I mentioned in the first section, the last poems of Heaney's tightly-organised collections aren't just endpieces, but springboards into the next book's preoccupations. As a result, they have proven among Heaney's most memorable and durable pieces - 'Personal Helicon', 'Bogland', 'Westering', 'Exposure'.

Yet, although the placing of 'Ugolino' at the end of Field Work declares its importance both to what has been and what is to come ( the full-scale translation of Sweeney Astray and the Dante-influenced 'Station Island' ), it also leaves the collection somewhat open-ended, without the clinching final poem the reader might have been led to expect. The postscript 'from Dante' - the last words of the book - not only acknowledges the source of the imitation, but also voices its intention to go beyond its original context. It ensures that it hangs between the rest of the poems in Field Work and its source in Dante's Divina Commedia, that this 'Ugolino' is neither wholly Dante's nor wholly Heaney's. Its situation in the volume testifies to Heaney's use of translation as a text which, to paraphrase Heaney's observation on those who live in

such a divided society as Northern Ireland, is 'patently riven between notions of belonging to other places'<sup>29</sup>; and for 'places', in this respect, read 'texts', 'cultures', 'voices'.

But if we look closely at the first 16-line section of the poem, it is clear that it is not only its position in Field Work which vouchsafes its concurrent qualities and inplaceness and displacement:

We had already left him. I walked the ice  
And saw two soldered in a frozen hole  
On top of other, one's skull capping the other's,  
Gnawing at him where the neck and head  
Are grafted to the sweet fruit of the brain,  
Like a famine victim at a loaf of bread.  
So the berserk Tydeus gnashed and fed  
Upon the severed head of Menalippus  
As if it were some spattered carnal melon.  
'You', I shouted, 'you on top, what hate  
Makes you so ravenous and insatiable?  
What keeps you so monstrously at rut?  
Is there any story I can tell  
For you, in the world above, against him?  
If my tongue by then's not withered in my throat  
I will report the truth and clear your name.

Heaney's description of how he 'foraged unfairly in the Italian and ripped [Ugolino] untimely from its source', is particularly apt in view of the way the poem begins ('We had already left him. I walked the ice...'). There is an abruptness to the opening that can leave the reader disorientated. The first narrator's use of 'we' at the beginning raises the expectation that it will be continued through his sections of the poem (the large middle section is narrated by Ugolino ); however the speaker never refers to 'we' again, and the subject elides into 'I' in the very next sentence without explanation or excuse. And not only this: 'We had already left him' plunges us into the tale in medias res, at the tail-end of a previous, never-mentioned incident. Who is 'him'? What is the circumstance of their leaving 'him'? Where are 'we'? The reader must already be acquainted with the context of the original to know the 'him' to be Bocca Degli Abati, whom the 'we' (Dante and Virgil) have left raving in the ice of Hell's lowest circle. It is, initially, a messy excerpting, like a page literally ripped from a book, trailing vestiges of the text that came before; and such an opening wobble in the translation both indicates Dante's displacement from his original context (while being accommodated into Field Work and appropriated into Heaney's oeuvre) and accentuates the simultaneous displacement of the translated text from its new context - the Field Work collection.

Various other superficial 'wobbles' in 'Ugolino' point to its riven nature. Heaney necessarily retains the specific historical and geographical references of the story ( there is a mischievous moment when Heaney has Ugolino say, after he has introduced himself and Archbishop Roger, that 'why I act the jockey to his mount / Is surely common knowledge', when, without annotations, it surely isn't ), as if respecting the context in

which Dante wrote the poem. But he again displaces Dante's voice at the end of the translation when he renders the very Italian 'Ugiccione' as an ostensibly Gaelic 'Hugh'. And, at certain points in the text, Heaney allows an element of the dreaded 'translationese' to creep into the work. In the third line of the first section quoted above, for example, he resorts to the phrase 'on top of other', which, by omitting the definite article, rings false. Later, in Ugolino's monologue, Heaney offers this rather stilted sentence as a theatrical aside: 'If your sympathy has not already started / At all my heart was foresuffering / And if you are not crying, you are hard-hearted'. This 'translationese' is what happens when the translator draws our attention, in a negative way, to the translated nature of the work - awkward phrasings, unfamiliar idiom, 'bad' (or wrenched) syntax. Again these inconsistencies set the text oscillating between contexts, tied down to neither.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the riven quality of this translation is in Heaney's reworking of Dante's verse. He has flattened out its shape, has homogenized the tercet form (usually represented with the second and third lines of the three lines indented and often with a line-break between tercets). And he prefers instead to break the narrative at its various points of tension - Ugolino introducing himself and his plight, his prophetic dream, the long starvation scene, and the first narrator's final vilification of Pisa. As such, Heaney's rendering of Dante is close to Robert Lowell's version of 'Brunetto Latini' in Near the Ocean, a book for which Heaney has sometimes made high claims; Lowell, however, remarked that that particular translation was as 'close as he could bear to be'<sup>30</sup> to the source text, because criticism of his strongarm style in Imitations left him ragged. The abandonment of these traditional aspects of the

verse is matched by Heaney's disturbingly sporadic imitation of Dante's terza rima. This distorted likeness, although nominally with the rhyme scheme axa, bxb, cxc, more often than not indulges pararhyme ('ice/other's' (ll.1-3), 'hate/rut' (ll.10-12)), and, at times, allows the rhyme to bubble over. For example, in lines four, six and seven, we find 'head/bread/fed' - the third of which seems to displace the rhyme in the third tercet, unless we count the matching of 'e' sounds in 'fed' and 'melon' (line 9) - followed in the middle of line 8 by 'head' again. Later in the translation, the three end-words of the tercet sometimes chime, as in ll.41-43 ('somnambulant/dreamt/rent'), and ll.47-49 ('company/Qualandi/Lanfranchi'). It might be said that this seeming inconsistency in Heaney's application of rhyme allows a freer, more fluent interpretation of the poem, without choking the urgency of the poem's pace with the need to invert phrases or reach for rhymes, unlike a version such as Laurence Binyon's, which, shackled by its obligation to Dante's scheme, is often painfully wracked by the way it twists English to meet terza rima's requirements. On the other hand, the shading of the verse into and out of terza rima again illustrates how 'Ugolino' is caught between its separate contexts, between its place in Field Work and its appropriation into Heaney's body of work, and its original position as part of Dante's Inferno and his oeuvre.

As straightforward as this may seem, the simultaneous inplaceness and displacement that characterizes 'Ugolino' has its problematic aspects. It is clear that no matter how appropriative (or creative) a translator can or may be, his/her own voice will always be slightly displaced by the presence of the source text behind it. When Horace Walpole published his Gothic novel The Castle of Otranto in 1765, he at first claimed that it was a translation of an Italian original, in order to offset criticism about the lurid

content of the book. (It is worth noting that he owned up to his deception when the book proved a success, apologizing in a subsequent preface for using 'the borrowed personage of a translation' in the first place<sup>31</sup>.) Similarly, Heaney uses the cover of the translation to sneak in several illuminating divergences from the source text. One of his most crucial innovations in this respect is the shock effect of the fifth line's metaphor of the 'sweet fruit of the brain'. This serves to accentuate the gruesomeness of the ninth line's description of Archbishop Roger's gnawed-at head: 'some spattered carnal melon'. Heaney's orchestration of open-mouthed 'a' vowels in these lines ('capping', 'grafted', 'famine', 'gnashed') vividly captures Ugolino's incessant, eternal devouring of his enemy's brain, but the undeniable craft of the language does not entirely counter doubts about the choice of metaphor. The comparison of the brain to 'sweet fruit', the eaten brain as 'spattered carnal melon' suggests more a savouring of the horror, allowing a lusciousness to be associated with this act of diabolical cannibalism which tends to negate the stark ferocity of the original. (This merely expresses the link between bread and its being devoured by a hungry man, which is an image of singular need not amplified by Heaney's violently luxuriating metaphors.) It is an impression reinforced when Heaney begins the next section: 'That sinner eased his mouth up off his meal / To answer me'. Dante's original lines read 'La bocca sollevo dal fiero pasto / quel peccator' ('That sinner lifted his mouth from his savage [or 'proud', 'fierce', 'noble'] meal' - a subtle pun considering the nature of the skull being eaten'). The word 'sollevo' is important here. It is usually translated in this context as 'to lift up', but it can be translated as 'to ease' instead (as in 'to relieve'). Heaney's decision to translate 'sollevo' thus, coupled with his deletion of 'fiero' to describe Ugolino's meal, shows that he is stressing the enjoyment Ugolino seems to be taking in the act, for all its



hideousness.

The use of these shock effects can be linked to a further disturbing feature of Heaney's version. In Dante, the lines ' O tu che mostri si bestial segno / odio sovra colui tu ti mangi' ('O you who show by such a bestial sign / the hatred for the man you eat') is rendered by Heaney into the startling "'You", I shouted, "you on top, what hate / Makes you so ravenous and insatiable? / What keeps you so monstrously at rut?'" The word insatiable and phrase 'monstrously at rut' (together with the suggestive 'on top') have, like it or not, a sexual dimension that both returns us to the horrific sensuousness of the earlier 'sweet fruit of the brain' and looks forward to the just as explicit 'spattered carnal melon' and to Ugolino's description of his position on Archbishop Roger as 'jockey to his mount'. This sexualizing, eroticizing of Ugolino's cannibalistic frenzy - which is manifestly not in Dante - appears to represent a deliberate heightening and sensationalizing of the tone of 'Ugolino' to something approaching a melodramatic horror piece. (As if it weren't enough of a horror piece already.) A 'famous purple passage'<sup>32</sup>, as Heaney has called it, is made even more disagreeably purple by his concealed efforts as a translator / interpreter.

What all this points to is the manner in which Heaney - as with Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* - 'borrows' Dante to ventriloquize a 'ferocity of emotion' that he cannot seem to voice as easily in an original poem. The translation becomes a mask: to quote Andre Lefevere, it grants Heaney a 'limited immunity'<sup>33</sup>. Because it seems to displace his poetic voice somewhat, it means that something of the burden of responsibility for that voice can also be lifted. He is able to linger over the most lurid

descriptions of carnage; he can sexualize violent acts; he can excoriate a 'divided city' for its sins against its younger generations and wish it 'deluged', wiped off the face of the earth. And a reader might presume it a faithful translation from Dante, because, after all, Inferno, has the reputation for such macabre setpieces.

It is instructive, in this respect, to consider 'Ugolino' alongside one of Field Work's other Dantean appropriations - the contentious 'original' poem, 'The Strand at Lough Beg'. This elegy for his murdered second cousin announces its guiding spirit in the very epigraph, from Dante's Purgatorio: 'All round this little island, on the strand / Far down below there, where the breakers strive, / Grow the tall rushes from the oozy sand'. The first verse, which reconstructs the moments before the murder, bears certain resemblances to his later Dante imitation in the book:

Leaving the white glow of filling stations  
And a few lonely streetlamps along fields  
You climbed the hills towards Newtownhamilton  
Past the Fews Forest, out beneath the stars -  
Along that road, a high, bare, pilgrim's track  
Where Sweeney fled before the bloodied heads,  
Goat-beards and dogs' eyes in a demon pack  
Blazing out of the ground, snapping and squealing.  
What blazed ahead of you? A faked road-block?  
The red lamp swung, the sudden brakes and stalling

Engines, voices, heads hooded and the cold-nosed gun?

Or in your driving mirror...

What Heaney says first drew him to Dante was the Tuscan poet's 'local intensity'<sup>34</sup>, and the specific geographical references here ('Newtownhamilton', 'Fews Forest', 'Lough Beg' itself) in conjunction with the 'high, bare, pilgrim's track', echo the same in Dante's work (in 'Ugolino', for example, we hear of Pisa, Lucca, Capraia, Gorgona). Similarly, the mention of 'Sweeney' in the sixth line mirrors Dante's own deployment of classical myth; the 'bloodied heads' in the same line recall how, in 'Ugolino', the myth of Tydeus and Menalippus is used as an analogy for Ugolino's cannibalism - Heaney's cousin, as we learn in the later 'Station Island', is shot in the head. ( It will not be the last time that Sweeney and Dante will be linked by Heaney. ) There is also the form of the verse, which anticipates the inplaced and displaced version of terza rima in 'Ugolino'. There appears to be no coherent rhyme scheme, although the poem flits in and out of that bastardized imitation of the verse pattern without ever locking securely into it.

This reconstruction of the murder, however, fragments into questions and speculations about its circumstances, and just before the act itself happens, Heaney cuts to the poem's soothing version of Purgatory: 'The lowland clays and waters of Lough Beg, / Church Island's spire, its soft treeline of yew', Immediately, we discern that, although 'Ugolino' and 'The Strand at Lough Beg' are grounded in horrific acts of violence, on the one hand, Heaney exacerbates the level and the nature of violence in his translation of Dante's original text, through its being sexualized, eroticized. On the

other hand, however, in 'The Strand at Lough Beg', he pointedly turns away from the scene of violence to contemplate the near-sacred area that gives the poem its title. The violence is displaced; it happens elsewhere.

This said, in the poem's second verse, Heaney can't seem to help himself, and a flurry of adjectives describing the 'spent cartridges' from duck shooters again suggests an unsettling sexual dimension to the poet's conception of violence: 'Acrid, brassy, genital, ejected'. The distastefully forward quality of these portents of violence - implicit in the choice of adjectives ('brassy', for instance, has connotations of a sexual vulgarity, a brazenness) and their bitter consonantal tang - is contrasted in the same verse with what Heaney considers to be the attributes of the cousin's and his own kind ('you and yours and yours and mine'). These people 'fought shy, / Spoke an old language of conspirators, / And could not crack the whip or seize the day'. The way Heaney pictures them, these are not self-assertive people. They are rather self-effacing in their resistance (to death, in particular - they are 'slow arbitrators of the burial ground'), yet are closely-knit (a community of 'conspirators'). They are attached to their place, to earth - they are 'herders, feelers round / Haycocks..., talkers in byres'. They are not destined for violent, quick deaths.

At this point, we reach the final stanza of the poem, where the problematic nature of Heaney's use of translation becomes clearer:

Across that strand of yours the cattle graze  
Up to their bellies in an early mist

And now they turn their unbewildered gaze  
To where we work our way through squeaking sedge  
Drowning in dew. Like a dull blade with its edge  
Honed bright, Lough Beg half-shines under the haze.  
I turn because the sweeping of your feet  
Has stopped behind me, to find you on your knees  
With blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes  
Then kneel in front of you in brimming grass  
And gather up cold handfuls of the dew  
To wash you, cousin. I dab you clean with moss  
Fine as the drizzle out of a low cloud.  
I lift you under the arms and lay you flat.  
With rushes that shoot green again, I plait  
Green scapulars to wear over your shroud.

The craft of the verse is hardly in dispute. Heaney arranges his set of long-vowelled sibilants (all those 'aze', 'ees' and 'eyes' words) with wonderful dexterity, so that it seems as if the lines' end-words melt into each other. He manages a remarkable liquidity in his language, reinforcing the importance of water in the poem as a cleansing, purifying agent rinsing off the 'blood and roadside muck' of the Inferno. And it does provide a powerfully poignant climax, nowhere more so than in the breath-catching 'To wash you, cousin' in the twelfth line, which affects in its straightforward simplicity. But the sudden appearance and the portrayal of the poet in this stanza are questionable. The final ten lines are an appropriation of the end of the first canto of Dante's Purgatorio.

following on from the scene-setting which provides the epigraph for the poem. The pilgrim Dante, emerging from the welter of the Inferno, has the stain of the place washed from his face by his master and guide Virgil; from a reed that, as in 'The Strand...' 'shoots green again' when plucked, Virgil also makes him a belt to tie up his disarranged robe. It is a moment of purgation, of cleansing. In 'The Strand at Lough Beg', what Heaney does is to translate his cousin into the figure of the pilgrim ( he had already signalled this intention when, in the first verse, he spoke of the road on which the cousin travels to his death as a 'high, bare, pilgrim's track'). At the same time, he appropriates for himself the role of Virgil, the guide and master. We see how, in the seventh and eighth line of the last stanza, the poet-figure has been leading the cousin out of Hell ('I turn because the sweeping of your feet/ Has stopped behind me'); and now, at the close of the poem, he replicates Virgil's action and cleanses the stain of his cousin's violent death so that he might lay him to rest.

This moment of absolution is echoed in 'Ugolino' when the first narrator enjoins Ugolino to recount his story and adds: 'If my tongue by then's not withered in my throat / I will report the truth and clear your name'. As a result of this, 'Ugolino' resolves itself into a tripartite structure: the first narrator asking the Count to tell his story; Ugolino's story; the narrator's verdict on the strength of what he hears. The narrator thus stands as a judge hearing evidence or priest taking confession from the defendant/confessor, and his final vituperative comments (which absolve the Count's children, but refuse to do the same for the father) smack as much of pulpit rhetoric as anything - those Edenic references.

That Heaney invests himself with this power to damn and absolve not only in Ugolino - where, after all, he is still translating what Dante is meant to have written - but also in 'The Strand at Lough Beg' is a measure of the self-assertion that he has been striving for, and looking to his exemplars for, in Field Work. And it is self-assertion through his role as a poet. In 'The Strand...', it is his art which Heaney imagines laying his cousin to rest. He speaks of using 'rushes that shoot green again [to] plait / Green scapulars to wear over [your] shroud', an idea tellingly repeated in another Field Work poem, 'The Harvest Bow', when Heaney suggests the 'plaited' (line 1) bow's motto to be 'The end of art is peace'. By appropriating the emergence of Dante and Virgil from the Inferno and Purgatorio for 'The Strand at Lough Beg', and by conferring upon himself the powers that Virgil had at hand to guide and absolve, one might say that Heaney is attempting to bring peace, make comfortable, to lay to rest, to put things in their place. (Heaney has said in an interview that the Purgatorio, like all great art, is 'in the highest sense, comforting'<sup>35</sup>.)

Herein lies the problem. One might also say that Heaney is conferring too much upon himself, that self-assertion, at this point, becomes self-aggrandisement. Alan Peacock has written about this final stanza that: 'The movement in this imagined ceremonial episode has somehow crossed the subtle marker between poet-as-cousin and poet-as-priest'<sup>36</sup>. Throughout the poem, Heaney has been stressing his sense of inplaceness: in the first stanza's attempt at a reconstruction of his cousin's final moments, and in the second stanza's definition of what constitutes 'you and yours and yours and mine'. Up to this point, Heaney empathizes with his cousin in his last moments (though he turns away from the violence), and numbers himself among that

part of the community. But in the last stanza, what appears to happen is that he allows a distance to come between himself and his cousin's death, a distance aggravated by the intervention of Dante's Purgatorio into the poem's climax. Heaney is no longer a cousin, and a member of his cousin's community; he has translated himself into Virgil, an absolving 'priest-poet', whose art endows him with a ritualistic power that sets him apart (note how the cousin is following Heaney).

There is a further consequence of the distance from experience caused by Heaney's use of translation. Instead of looking the brutal act straight in the face (as he will attempt to do in 'Station Island'), he puts his translation between himself and the act, diffusing the full horror of that violent death through the comforting displacement of Dante's 'great art'. The same principle (but in reverse) operates with regard to the violence that grounds 'Ugolino'. Because its context is taken 'from Dante' - an imaginative act of violence, as it were - Heaney feels no compunction about intensifying its lurid qualities, making it more grotesque. But because 'The Strand at Lough Beg' is rooted in a real incident of violence, and is so close to Heaney, translation is used to soften that blow, to insulate Heaney from its effects. It removes the stain of violence and lays that unquiet wanderer to rest. And this propensity in translation is exactly what he alludes to in 'Station Island', when he has this (second) cousin, still bearing his headwound, come to his penitent bedside to tell him:

You confused evasion and artistic tact.

The Protestant who shot me through the head



I accuse directly, but indirectly, you  
who now atone perhaps upon this bed  
for the way you whitewashed ugliness and drew  
the lovely blinds of the Purgatorio  
and saccharined my death with morning dew.

It could be said that - consciously or not - Heaney has invested this famous extract with a grim humour, which not only condemns but mocks the elevated stance he takes in 'The Strand at Lough Beg'. When the cousin opens his dialogue with the lines 'The red-hot pokers blazed a lovely red / the Sunday I was murdered', on the one hand we're made to hear how the phrase 'lovely red' is smirched by its half-coupling with 'murdered'. But these lines are already forming the later, explicit accusation. It could equally be argued that the over-emphatic description of the flowers - that clutch of stresses in 'red-hot pokers', the hyper-bole of linking 'blazed' with the colloquial 'lovely' - seems to mute the force of 'murdered' in the following line. Similarly, at the end of the second speech above, the cousin weighs heavily on that repetition of 'lovely' - in 'lovely blinds of the Purgatorio' - as he reaches the nub of his grievance in a voice that's changed from the chattiness of the opening to a strangely archaic, elevated style, full of otherwise prolix-sounding inversions such as 'you/ who now atone perhaps upon this bed'. The vatic pseudo-Virgil of 'The Strand at Lough Beg', whose act of translation is an act of insulation, is reduced by this ridicule to a 'pleading' figure made to answer for such presumption.

It is patent that Heaney's use of translation in Field Work is something that has,

like the phantoms of 'Station Island', come back periodically to haunt him. He has tried, as we shall see in the next section, to exorcise some of these demons in Sweeney Astray and Station Island, through the expression of various forms of translation as part of his 'penance'. But this was obviously not enough, because in an uncollected poem 'The Flight Path' (1992), a tribute to Donald Davie, he returns to 'Ugolino' in particular, and attempts to clarify the complex sense of allegiance and betrayal, of inplaceness and displacement, behind the translations of Field Work. While on a cross-border train journey, Heaney remembers what might be described as a representative composite character accosting him:

He sits down

Opposite and goes for me head on. 'When,  
For fuck's sake, are you going to write  
Something for us?' 'If I do write something',  
(This is one line I remember clearly)  
'It'll be for me, not you or anybody  
About to tell me what I should be writing'.  
Those were the months of jail walls smeared with  
shite.

The red eyes then were eyes on dirty protest  
Like something out of Dante's scurfy hell  
Where I walked by choice with the righteous poets  
(Traduttore, tradittore notwithstanding)  
Safe as houses and translating freely.

**When he had said all this, his eyes rolled  
And his teeth, like a dog's teeth clamping round  
a bone  
Bit into the skull and again took hold.<sup>37</sup>**

The phrase 'traduttore, traditore' is the old Renaissance slur on translators who would betray the integrity of the source text into another language and culture, and by doing so, would render a faithlessly inferior translation in the process. A more contemporary version of this is Frost's famous dictum: 'Poetry is what gets lost in translation'. And this applies to a certain extent to the above passage. But 'notwithstanding' his awareness of how a translator can betray source texts and their authors - a Judas to the 'righteous poets' through the disobedience of a free translation - his allegiance is clearly with them. He walks ('by choice') among them, he puts himself among their number apart from those mired in the 'scurfy Hell' of the Northern Ireland situation. This is the other translator's betrayal adumbrated in these lines, and set up by the encounter with the aggrieved member of the community at the start of the extract. It is the betrayal of the target culture through the very act of translation. Heaney, as an artist with an internationally high profile (as the encounter demonstrates), is perceived by his community to be one of the likeliest spokesmen for it ('When.../ are you going to write something for us?'), his heated response encapsulates the artistic self-assertiveness that he roadtests in Field Work.

The betrayal he enacts by such an attitude, by choosing to elevate himself to the level of his exemplars through the insulating medium of translation is delineated in the

movement of the lines beginning 'Those were the months of jail walls smeared with shite'. The monosyllabic plain-speaking of this intimates the miring, the imprisoning of those wholly caught up within the Northern Ireland situation (those on 'dirty protest' here, for example) within that situation; it is also couched in language that lacks any affectation, or any lip-service to the 'comforting' nature of 'great art' (the use of the demotic 'shite' is powerful in this respect). But this modulates through the next two lines to the allusion to 'Dante's scurfy Hell', and suddenly the insinuating power of his use of translation becomes apparent as Heaney then appears himself in the company of the 'righteous poets' (apart, one assumes, from the 'red eyes' of the damned) in a kind of sealed hubble of art. The 'jail walls smeared with shite' of the eighth line is thus contrasted with Heaney's 'blessed' state five lines later - 'safe as houses and translating freely'.

Heaney has said in an interview for London Magazine that 'there is some kind of voice in me that is entirely unimpressed by the activity [of writing], that doesn't dislike it, but it's the generations, I suppose, of the rural - not illiterate, but not literary'<sup>38</sup>. But the voice is almost entirely suppressed, or displaced (one might say 'betrayed') by the activity of translating. It is a purely literary enterprise, motivated in Heaney's case as much by a solidarity with particular literary canon (his massed ranks of interpenetrating role-models and exemplars), rather than purely grounded in the rural soil and society from which he emerged and from which he gained inspiration for much of his work. (Of course, his translation may spring from a response to that community and the situation beleaguering it; but it provides a displaced, 'oblique' perspective from which to comment.) The voice that speaks in translation is cosmopolitan,

internationalist, non-insular. It admits of, and admits, elsewheres; it is informed by migration, of an ease of movement across time and space. To quote Heaney on Robert Lowell, translation 'builds bridges to link up with undemolished past'<sup>39</sup>. But, by doing this, he is aware of a betrayal of that community. The problem with the use of translation in Field Work, however, is the delicate balance between inplaceness and displacement that he seeks often tips towards an arrogant sense of distance, as in his own representations as a 'poet-priest' in 'The Strand at Lough Beg'. As I hope to demonstrate in the next section, in later attempts at translation, Heaney redresses the balance through the idea of translation as an act of penance; but this does not prevent him still using the form as a means of self-definition, of self-assertion as an artist.

### III

In a short essay he contributed to Rosanna Warren's collection The Art Of Translation: Voices from the Field ( called 'Earning a Rhyme: Notes on translating Buile Suibhne'), Heaney outlines his approaches to translating the text that finally appeared as Sweeney Astray (1983). His account appears to describe the trajectory of the development I've been tracing in this chapter. The first version, written between 1972 and 1973, bears the hardman's scars and bruises of Lowell's influence: 'His unabashed readiness to subdue the otherness of the original to his own autobiographical neediness [was not lost on me]<sup>40</sup>. However the appropriative nature of this - where, Heaney admits, instead of 'showing [the text] off... it was being pressed into service to show me off'<sup>41</sup> - gives way in his revised version a less self-assertive, more 'obedient' method. He writes:

[The stanzas] should be cold, definite, articulated...  
should be tuned to a chaste, bare note; should be  
constrained and ascetic; more obedient to the metrical  
containments...of the Irish itself.<sup>42</sup>

'Chaste', 'bare', 'constrained', 'ascetic', 'obedient': translation as the act of a monk. These adjectives gather to themselves the attitude of self-denial and penitence that forms the starting point of Heaney's celebrated long poem 'Station Island', published the year after Sweeney Astray.

But where the composition of Sweeney Astray is more of a process of bringing his version back to the source text, or bringing it back as close as possible to the source text, from the greedy appropriative mitts of the Lowellian translator, 'Station Island' itself seems to enact the opposite - and for some of the same reasons. Donald Davie, in an article 'Responsibilities of Station Island', calls the poem 'insistently Dantesque'<sup>43</sup>; and its narrative spine - such as it is - of the pilgrim Heaney, doing the rounds of St. Patrick's Purgatory and meeting there the shades of his mentors and 'exemplars', ghosts of those he has known who were murdered or died young, indicates Dante's influence. Some of the cantos also approximate terza rima. It's a poem, however, that has undergone extensive revisions, even in print (Robert Lowell's dread hand once more); and it is clear that, at one point, Heaney had envisaged a closer tie between Dante and his own text. The original fourth canto was published in the 'Yale Review' in Autumn 1983, but was excised before appearing in book form. Some of the offcuts were absorbed in Canto III, some into the final Canto IV; and four tercets describing

Heaney's initial apprehension at the boat journey to the island might well have provided the basis of the first part of 'Seeing Things'. In this canto, he parks his car and watches the boat that will take him to his Purgatory appear out of the 'glare'. Crossing over to the island, he meets a shade ('a familiar / of famished stony places, anywhere heartfelt and desolate') who chides him to remove his shoes - 'The primrose path / ends here, my boy' - and who then begins to sing 'torqued sorrowing gracenotes', attracting the attention of the other pilgrims who 'gather ... quietly in a ring' around the singer. But this moment is brought to an abrupt end by the shout of 'a bad-tempered, scuffed soutane / and flat biretta'; the pilgrim disperse 'as if a warning shot / had scared the birds off field of new-sown corn'.

This is evidently an appropriation and rewriting of the end of the second Canto of the Purgatorio. In that, the pilgrim, newly-released and purged of the Inferno's stain, watches a ship, bearing the souls of the redeemed and piloted by an angel, appear gradually and berth on the shores of Purgatory. Among the souls disembarking Dante recognises one called Casella, whom he asks to sing. Casella gladly complies and the other souls stand 'enraptured / By the sound of those sweet notes'<sup>44</sup>. This interlude, however, is broken by the appearance of the 'Just Old Man' who scatters the souls with a rebuke: they break up 'as a flock of pigeons... peacefully feeding on the grain and tares... immediately abandon all their food... if something should occur which startles them'<sup>45</sup>. So Heaney not only reproduces the elements of the scene here (apart from the crucial fact that he numbers himself among the souls of the redeemed), he also translates his version of Dante's climactic image into his own idiom, giving (as in 'Ugolino') a more violent charge to Dante's original in that phrase 'warning shot'. It is as if, by

refusing himself a closer likeness to the Purgatorio. Heaney appeals to the spirit of self-denial that sparks the poem. Therefore, where Heaney appears to do penance for his presumptions by bringing Sweeney Astray nearer to the source text, in 'Station Island', his own work, he seeks to pull the poem away from its central influence and the temptation to appropriate it so specifically.

Heaney's 'self-denial' in 'Station Island' is expressed in his strangely passive pilgrim-self, who, despite his addresses and pleas, seems to have a less substantial presence than his shades. Unlike Dante's pilgrim, who is constantly on the move and physically approaches and confronts his shades, Heaney appears 'stationary' while his shades happen in on him. For example, he is 'parked in a car' when Carleton comes along 'walking fast in an overcoat ... big, determined'; he is lying in bed when he hears the voice of the hungerstriker; he's 'staring into the airy granite space' of the basilica when his friend and second cousin appear; he is 'idling... over the water' when the murder-victim 'enter[s] into [his] concentration'.

This passive presence of the speaker relates to one of 'Station Island's' central images: the source. In the third canto, he thinks of 'walking round / and round a space, utterly empty, / utterly a source' (lines repeated to great effect in the eighth sonnet of 'Clearances'). In the eleventh, he states: 'What [comes] to nothing [can] always be replenished', before he translates a 'source' text - the Juan de la Cruz poem about the 'source's source and origin'. Throughout the poem, Heaney is in the process of emptying himself out, to become 'fasted, light-headed, dangerous', as the shade of Joyce puts it at the end of the poem. This links to the testimony of the hungerstriker,



who calls himself 'a hit-man on the brink, emptied, deadly', and goes on to say 'When the police yielded my coffin, I was light / As my head when I took aim'. The twinning of Heaney and the hungerstriker, based on Francis Hughes, centres on this act of self-denial (Heaney appears to suggest that to perform terrorist acts in the service of a belief also requires self-denial); but, in contrast to the hungerstriker's extreme form of this, ending in death (self-abnegation), Heaney comes out of the experience a 'convalescent'. At the end of the poem, when he is carried back by the boat from his Purgatory, it is as if he has been translated from that state of the source to which his self-denial in the poem has brought him.

And yet, to say that Heaney actively exercises self-denial as a poet in 'Station Island' is somewhat misleading. One of the criticisms that has been levelled at the poem, and particularly at the James Joyce section, is that Heaney has imposed a voice and personality upon the writer that Joyce did not possess in real life. But this ventriloquism holds true for all the shades' speeches. In the previous section, I commented that the second cousin's accusation rises from a colloquial beginning to an oddly elevated diction, characterized by inversions and poetic cadences (that 'saccharined my death with morning dew'). It seems safe to say that this is hardly naturalistic speech. Heaney here, as in the other shades, translates himself into and asserts himself through these personae; he ventriloquizes their voices in order to accuse himself of his own failings, or to bolster his confidence about his artistic peremptoriness, about 'taking off' into his own imaginative space. Heaney speaks through his shades to himself in 'Station Island' in the way that when Heaney translates Dante, it's as much Heaney speaking through Dante, as it is Dante filtered through Heaney - and with the influence of Lowell's

translating example guiding Heaney's hand in 'Ugolino', we begin to see how Heaney's 'exemplars' interpenetrate each other to produce an intertextual complex that places while at the same time seeming to dis-place Heaney himself.

As a result, the notion of translation also proves of importance to the poem as it epitomises the concomitant sense of self-denial and self-assertion that pulses thematically through the text. A subtle instance of this is the translation of the Juan de la Cruz poem 'Song of the soul that is glad to know God by faith'. Heaney is directed to translate the poem as 'penance' by a 'monk's face', a monk who seems himself to be translated by his journey to Spain: 'his consonants aspirate, his forehead shining' (reminding us of the 'light-headedness' of Heaney at the end of the poem). On the surface it appears a straightforward, 'obedient' rendering of the piece. But, all through 'Station Island', there have been intimations of Heaney's distancing from the faith in which he was raised, crystallised by the moment in Canto IV when the priest says, in one of Heaney's distressingly preposition-clogged phrases, of Heaney's presence:

...all this you were clear of you walked into  
all over again...

What are you doing, going through these motions?...  
Unless you are here taking the last look...

If we return to the Juan de la Cruz translation, we can see that where, in the source text, full rhymes are used throughout, Heaney pointedly employs half-rhymes

('away/secretcy', 'beautiful/fill', 'bottom/fathom'). In the context of my discussion, this might be interpreted as the oblique assertion of the poet's imagination against the apparent self-denial and penance indicated by the act of translating the poem.

Translation, in the poem, is constantly expressed in terms of water and light. The translation of Canto II of the Inferno in Station Island's Canto VI centres on the image of 'little flowers that were all bowed and shut / By the night chills, ris[ing] on their stems and open[ing] / As soon as they have felt the touch of sunlight'; that 'touch of sunlight' is what revives the speaker like 'somebody set free'. In Canto X, the mug with the corn-flower pattern is 'dipped and glamoured... by its translation' into a 'loving cup' when once used by a small travelling theatre company: 'dipped' harks back to the idea of baptism (which stems from the Greek meaning 'to dip'). Later in the canto, the mug is itself fancifully translated into the priest Ronan's psalter that Sweeney, in the Buile Suibhne, throws into a lough and which is later retrieved by an otter. The 'dazzle of impossibility' of this translation, of how the ordinary can be carried across into the realm of the miraculous, is made concrete in the canto's closing image (altered to this for the New Selected Poems): 'the sun-filled door' which is 'so absolutely light it could put out fire'. Similarly, at the heart of the translation from Juan de la Cruz - the 'source' text being the poem 'Song of the soul that is glad to know God by faith' - we find 'the eternal fountain' that sources the text 'so pellucid it never can be muddied / and I know that all light radiates from it / although it is the night' (that strange 'pellucid' neatly bringing together the elements of water and light again).

The significance of relating the act of translation to water and light is crystallised

in perhaps the poem's strangest moment, the nightmare in Canto IX:

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 shed breast,  
My softly-awash and blanching self-disgust.  
And I cried among night waters, 'I repent  
My unweaned life that kept me competent  
To sleepwalk with connivance and mistrust.'  
Then, like a pistil rising 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.

The stanzas in this particular canto (the canto that begins with Heaney's ventriloquizing of a hungerstriker) seem to resolve themselves into sonnets, and the first eight lines above are tensed with the presence of a further shade: there's the same self-lacerating, hour-of-the-wolf dread here as in a Gerard Manley Hopkins 'terrible sonnet'. It might be said that an echo of the 'terrible sonnets' resonates in the octet's rhyme scheme, that boxing-in 'a' rhyme in 'waste/breast/disgust/mistrust'; but Heaney's pressuring of the verse serves to slant much of the rhyme into pararhyme (as in the arguable

'flood/corrupt'), reinforcing the sense of things running out of whack. The par rhyme is matched by Heaney's suddenly intermittent punctuation - why should 'mucky' and 'glittering' be spaced with a comma, and a comma be lost between the second and third line (where it's needed), and between 'huge' and 'corrupt' in the third line? All handholds, all directional aids have been lost. Adjectives proliferate like pustules - in the nightmare's five lines, there are ten alone, compared with a mere one adjective in the 'steadied-up' last three lines. And as Heaney 'drifts' further, we can hear how his sense of terror mounts in the longer and longer vowels, the swelling of assonance. For example, 'swirl' in the second line expands to 'surreal', 'huge' sickens into 'bloom' and then to the 'blanch' of 'blanching'; just as 'waste' at the end of the first line finds itself drawn out to 'awash'. At this point, the fifth line's arrangement of elongated 'o's and 'a's, coupled with the dominant sibilance of 'softly-awash' and 'blanching' forces the nightmare to its full, tumorous horror.

Heaney's immediate exclamation of penance then effects a translation in more ways than one. The 'shed breast' becomes a 'whole bright-masted thing' - a lightship, a moored craft with a beacon to warn or guide, linking to the image in the first stanza of 'Canto XI': 'As if the prisms of the kaleidoscope / I plunged once in a butt of muddied water / surfaced like a marvellous lightship...' This resolves itself into a 'monk's face' which commands him to 'translate' Juan de la Cruz, again as a mark of penance. (The 'lightship' itself recalls the ship that brings the souls of the redeemed to the shores in Purgatory in The Divine Comedy.) Aside from this particular 'translation', we might hear in the word 'pistil' (the feminine part of a flower) and the last phrase 'my heart revived', a re-voicing of the Dante extract originally rendered in the sixth

canto ('So I revived in my own wilting powers / And my heart flushed').

Here the 'given' translation of Dante - a 'love-offering', with all its overtones of 'self-sacrifice' - transmutes itself into the lightship of Heaney's renewed sense of self-assertion as an artist. There are also echoes here of the amphibious imagery that Heaney used in his 'Elegy' for Lowell. In the same way that Lowell 'rode on the swaying tiller / of [him]self', setting course across 'the ungovernable and dangerous', Heaney's 'lightship' steadies itself in 'currents it had gone with / [that] were what it rode and showed'. Although still undergoing the penitence initiated by his re-version of Sweeney Astray, Heaney's implicating of the free elements of light and water into the act of translation itself points to the final, freeing advice from the shade of Joyce (his description of 'echo soundings... allurements, / elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea'), and the absolved Heaney's re-appropriations of Buile Suibhne in 'Sweeney Redivivus'.

## Chapter 2

### TOM PAULIN: A PASSIONATE DISSIDENCE

In the Poetry Book Society Bulletin of Spring 1977, Tom Paulin explains the impetus behind some of the poems in his first collection, A State of Justice. He writes "Incognito"... imagines a relationship in terms of a scene from a Russian novel: the story-line would be something like a revolutionary and his mistress who are escaping from exile. They are travelling towards a city, towards a political situation...<sup>1</sup> It might seem that much of Paulin's poetry is 'travelling...towards a political situation', if not already in the middle of one; and many critics, principally Edna Longley, have criticized what she sees as Paulin's explicit yoking of politics to poetry. There is something of the perception that Paulin is the Ian Paisley of the literary world, whose criticism is merely a vehicle for his strident political views, and who is too often trundled onto talk shows to pour intransigent scorn on some poor Booker Prize nominee.

That this is too simplistic (and wrong) a view of Paulin's complex work is one of the themes of this section of my chapter. Paulin represents the dissident voice in Northern Irish poetry, and his reference to 'Russian novels' and 'revolutionaries' in the above quotation is a first suggestion of a major influence on the evolution of this stance: the example and work of Central European and Russian poets. In this section,

I intend to examine the seeming disjunction between the poetry of The Strange Museum and Liberty Tree in order to demonstrate how Paulin's perception of Mandelstam, in particular, has introduced what might be called a 'passionate dissidence' into his work; and in the second section of the chapter, I would like to show how his appreciation of Polish and Czech poets, and of the act of translation itself, has occasioned various revisions and redirections in his own poetic thought.

In The Strange Museum, Paulin returns to the idea of the 'revolutionary' first broached in the State of Justice poem, and expands upon it to such an extent, one often feels that two distinct worlds exist in the book: Northern Ireland and the Russia of the revolution. For example, the only proper names Paulin alludes to in the collection are either figures from Ulster history (as in 'Still Century', in which he mentions 'Ewart and Bryson, Carson and Craig'); or prominent 20th-century Russian personalities: Lenin, Trotsky, 'Anastasia', Mandelstam. In several poems, Paulin explicitly marries the two areas and eras. In 'Anastasia McLaughlin', the lost daughter of Tsar Nicholas II - 'Anastasia' - becomes the 'lost daughter' (l.33) of an ailing Ulster linen baron; and, in the last stanza of the poem, Belfast and the 'cradle of the revolution', St. Petersburg, are linked when Anastasia's father talks with a friend in Great Victoria Street, before 'he starts his journey to the Finland Station' (l.42). And 'The Impossible Pictures' is a 'parable of vengeance' (l.1) which imagines an analogue for Ireland in the frozen prison yard where Lenin's brother is executed, for revolutionary activities, and resolves itself into the ominous moral that 'every revenge is nature, / Always on time, like the waves' (l.29-30).



Much of the rest of the book delineates an anonymous state of gloomy stasis, variously imaged in the collection by the humid dark in a stretch of empty city street, or a winter that doesn't end; the 'dead middle' of afternoons or the grey nothingness of drizzly weather. In the opening poem, 'Before History', Paulin characterizes this state as a 'dank mitteleuropa' (l.9), sunk in 'a long lulled pause / Before history happens' (l.11-12). Everything sours in a stagnation that Paulin applies, particularly, to personal relationships and human contact. These either become furtive, anonymous, as in the poem 'Personal Column', which pictures lovers conducting their affairs through the small ads of newspapers, lovers who wish to be identified only by their initials - 'like spies whose thoughts touch before their bodies can' (l.12). Or love proves passionless, loveless, 'formal' as though conforming to a set pattern, an impersonal etiquette. In 'The Civil Lovers', Paulin describes the aftermath of intercourse: 'An after-kiss, it's kind of formal, / Like saying thank you for a supper... / ...after knowledge comes a dull / Politeness and the wish to sleep' (l.1-2, 13-14). The Strange Museum goes straight to the heart of what Paulin described in A State of Justice as the 'neap'. In that book's 'From', he writes:

In that still light and silence the long hills  
That ring the bay are brittle, fixed in glaze.  
The island below you is a lost place  
That no one can cross to in the neap,  
The winter season.

(ll.10-14)

This image relates explicitly to the situation in Northern Ireland of which Paulin has said, 'Before the conflict started, the province was lulled in a state of absence and aphasia, almost as though its inhabitants were "without history"<sup>22</sup>; and has agreed that its people still 'exist in an ahistorical vacuum'<sup>23</sup>. In 'A Partial State', he writes specifically about this:

The chosen, having broken  
their enemies, scattered them  
backstreets and tight estates

Patriarch and matriarch,  
industry and green hills, no  
balance of power. Just safety.

Stillness, without history,  
until leviathan spouts,  
bursting through manhole covers

in the streets, making phones ring on  
bare desks. 'The minister is  
playing golf, please try later.'

( ll.13-24 )

This portrayal of Northern Ireland before and at the cusp of the Troubles is manifestly

aware of the class dimensions of the 'neap' enforced on its working-class population, in which the Catholics were disenfranchised and silenced, and the Protestants were dragooned into an attitude of 'servile defiance' in the interests of the manufacturing middle-classes. Ingrained sectarian and religious rifts were aggravated to keep the population divided against each other and therefore 'safe' (this is implicit in the Biblical references in the first stanza above- the 'chosen' scattering their enemies has the tang of an Old Testament description of the Jews smiting Amalekites). Paulin's verse in the midst of the neap rids itself of any verbs, to enforce its static quality; which is contrasted with the flurry of present tense action verbs when violence erupts: 'spouts', 'bursting', 'making'.

But this poem also clarifies the link that Paulin is intent on making between Northern Ireland and revolutionary Russia. The line 'stillness, without history' is a reworking of the last lines of 'Trotsky in Finland', in which Trotsky, having left his place of exile for St.Petersburg with word of civil unrest in the city, 'crosses the frontier and speaks / To a massed force at the Institute // Plunging from stillness into history' (ll.38-40). At several points in the book, 'history' defines itself in the outbreak of the Russian Revolution (as in 'Trotsky...' and in 'The Other Voice', the Revolution is characterized as 'history ...happening' (l.70)); and Paulin sees this as a 'necessary' breaking of the stasis enforced by the state and the ruling classes. (His naming of this neap as a 'mitteleuropa', and his later concentration on that polity, shows prescience in view of the same breaking of the stasis in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia at the end of the 80s.)

However, the listless, passionless state of the neap that Paulin depicts in The Strange Museum tends to afflict the poems themselves. The book's 'plain, pared-down, flat lyricism', as the blurb has it, mostly produces flat, drab poems, essentially because Paulin recycles an extremely limited vocabulary and set of images. Of the book's thirty-nine poems, the word 'dry' appears thirteen times, 'dead' ten times, 'dull' nine times, 'hard' seven times, and 'broken' and 'formal' six times apiece. Other constantly-used words reinforce the hard, discomfiting drabness of Paulin's poetic imagination in The Strange Museum: 'lost', 'chill', 'bruised', 'fixed', 'grey', 'bitter'. Cumulatively, the obsessive circling around twenty or so key adjectives renders the collection rather like the 'past' in the poem 'In The Egyptian Gardens' - somewhere 'costive and unchanging' (1.9). Too many times we happen on hard, dry stools of poems like 'Without Knowledge':

In the dead middle of the afternoon  
When nothing happens and the light is dull  
The will fastens itself on every object  
In the room, clamping cups to the table,  
Each chair to the floor. There is no sound then,  
And only anger can break its tyranny,  
The gentler evenings when the lights come on.

The last line's melancholic echo of Larkin does very little to dispel the aridity of the language as a whole (dead phrases such as the 'dead middle of the afternoon'), which, of course, conveys the arid nothingness that the poem describes; but after six or so

poems with the same constipated air, the same vocabulary used and re-used, the reader may have a clearer idea of Paulin's vision, but they will also be struggling for air, for a new space in which to breathe. This is denied by the recurring images of empty houses, dull rooms, waste ground, deserted streets, and, in several poems, 'a rectory on the broken coast'. All of which contribute to The Strange Museum's taut absence of event, its gloomy, constricted atmosphere, its state of the neap.

How can art survive in such a political situation? It is the search for a poetic voice that resists the tyrannical torpidity of the neap which forms the core of The Strange Museum's longest poem, 'The Other Voice', a poem which most explicitly juggles the Ulster and Russian dimensions in the book. In this piece, Paulin identifies and works through the various voices which represent the (seemingly) conflicting influences on and claims to his poetic imagination. On the other hand, two voices adumbrate something close to an 'Anglican' ideal of art, proffered in the first section by a 'Gowned schoolmaster' (1.3) who, amid images of dankness (a 'mild village' (1.11), a 'mossy fragrance / Of damp branches under trees, / The sour yeast of fungus' (1.12-14)), seems the embodiment of that 'visionary mustiness' which Paulin has berated in Geoffrey Hill; and in the third section by an unnamed speaker who defines the culture of 'small mercies' (1.52) to which the poet must address his/her art:

A glass of wine, a pungent shade

And a cagey friendship

Grace is a volume of Horace,

Bishops and pigeons  
Cooing in a woggles shire.

Life, my dear, is a fixed order  
And your verse should flow  
With a touching sweetness.

( ll.53-60 )

The nimbling and precious manner of this speech is perfectly caught in the annoyingly wuffly cadence of 'cooing in a woggles shire', and the extremely unPaulin insert of 'my dear'. This is married to what might be called an Arnoldian art of conformity, the presence of which is signalled by the appearance of the word 'sweetness' at the end of the quotation (an echo of Matthew Arnold's artistic ideal of 'sweetness and light'). This sense of a bourgeois conformity and what Paulin sees as its patronising, sentimental nature is marked by the use of the modal in the line 'your verse should flow', while its intrinsic superfluosness engenders nothing more than a 'touching sweetness' in the reader.

Opposed to this in the poem is Paulin's depiction of a more revolutionary art, a Marxist polemical art freed from such bourgeois constraints. Paulin, before he left university (he attended Hull and Oxford), was briefly part of a Trotskyite movement in Belfast, and the poem's second section highlights the helplessly romantic notions that underlay their political aspirations:

Plekhanov flares like a firework,  
Trotsky crosses Siberia  
Turning the pages of Homer

Raskolnikov wears a long coat  
And the end justifies the means.

( ll.28-32 )

A youthful iconoclasm, and its attraction to a noisy, gleeful (superficial) dissidence, evolves for itself here a romantic figure of the revolutionary - dashing, a thinker, vital, and, above all, fashionable (that long coat). Everything is movement and happening, as in the three action verbs of the stanza above ( flares, crosses, turning ). The revolution is a party to a Beatles soundtrack and any violence is only a vivid, playful prelude to the blossoming of a new art.

But the tone of the poem changes in the fourth section as 'history happens', the actual revolution intrudes, and Paulin centres on the Russian revolution to show how ideals sour to tyranny, and how art is corrupted as it is put at the service of the state. (After all, Raskolnikov was a murderer.) This too, like the Arnoldian bourgeois concept of art, is an art of conformity: 'I hear the same opinions / In a muddy light. // I hear a regiment of clones / Waving their arms and shouting... / Identikit opinions / In the camps of the punks' (ll.86-9, 92-93). This is what he terms a 'glossy brutalism', which allows no place for an individual, dissident voice; and any intimation of an apartness possible between art and history is savagely negated: 'The theatre is in the streets, /

The streets are in the theatre,/ The poet is torn to pieces' (ll.94-6).

The choice, then, is between an art that insulates itself against history/politics ( and, in doing so, serves the state by letting it get on with its business and remaining 'sweetly' disengaged from that kind of involvement ), and is therefore trivial and redundant; or an art that is so engaged with the state, that it is corrupted into an expression of the state and its purposes, and so renders that trivial and redundant. As George Orwell wrote: 'To lock yourself up in the ivory tower is impossible and undesirable. To yield subjectively, not merely to a party machine, but to a group ideology, is to destroy yourself as a writer...'<sup>6</sup> Both are arts of conformity which allow no room for dissent, and therefore, for a nonconformist like Paulin, there is no choice between the two. His belief in the primacy of the artistic imagination in the poem ( manifest when he ponders: 'What does a poem serve? / Only the pure circle of itself' (ll.97-98)), and its dissidence under these conformist circumstances leads him to pray to and to summon 'The Other Voice': 'A shadow wandering / Beyond the cold shores / And tides of the Baltic" (ll.109-111). That shadow is Mandelstam. In a scene reminiscent of Heaney's 'Station Island', Paulin devotes most of the last part of the poem to a monologue by the shade of this persecuted Russian poet, who, despite the most monstrous punishments inflicted by the state (exile, imprisonment, torture and finally death in a camp and burial in an anonymous 'general grave'), placed his trust in what Bernard O'Donoghue has termed the 'hegemony of the artistic imagination'<sup>7</sup>. His conviction of the integrity of art and its apartness from history is made plain in the poem's closing lines:



In the great dome of art

( It was this we longed for

In our Petropolis )

I am free of history.

Beyond dust and rhetoric,

In the meadows of the spirit,

I kiss the Word.

( ll.144-50 )

For a poet commonly diagnosed as primarily politically-motivated (particularly by Edna Longley, who has used the example of Paul Muldoon's seemingly apolitical obliquity as a stick to beat Paulin with), this is a strangely transcendent view of art to endorse. These lines are infused with an almost-religious fervour, particularly in the way words like 'spirit' are bandied about, and in the capitalisation of 'word' into the sacred 'Word'. But the irony here is that Mandelstam's dedication to the integrity of art (expected from a poet who conceived of art as a religious vocation), for all its claim to be 'free of history', could be construed as a political stance. Clarence Brown notes in his story of the poet, that 'It was not in Mandelstam's character to make concessions to the regime when those concessions would put his art rather than himself at risk'<sup>8</sup>. So Mandelstam's unshakeable belief in the 'hegemony of the creative imagination' results in a kind of disengaged engagement in which the perceived hermeticism of an art that serves 'only the pure circle of itself' becomes ranged against ever-encroaching threat

of history and the state. Paulin's perception of Mandelstam as an artist who reacted against the straitjacket of an art controlled by the state - he has the Russian poet inform him that 'those ideals [i.e. those of the revolution] will fit you / Like a feral uniform' (ll.128-29) - renders him The Strange Museum's one exemplary figure, the one oasis of enlightened nonconformism in a desert of conformity.

Mandelstam enters Paulin's third and very different collection, Liberty Tree, with a cameo in that book's most acclaimed poem - 'The Book of Juniper' - which similarly emphasizes his sacred, vatic significance:

Exiled in Voronezh  
the leavening priest of the Word  
receives the Host on his tongue -  
frost, stars, a dark berry,  
and the sun is buried at midnight.

(ll.100-104)

Before I consider this depiction of Mandelstam, it is important to set it within several contexts, particularly within the context of the poem. Juniper has been a touchstone image in Paulin's work since A State of Justice, in which, in 'The Hyperboreans', he writes of these people that their 'pine huts/ ...fresh keenly / Of green juniper' (and the striking use of the adjective 'fresh' as a noun here emphasizes this singular quality of the plant). 'The Book of Juniper' expands on its features of 'freshness' and 'keenness' to evolve an image of a tenacious plant, that, despite being forced to 'keep...a low

profile' (l.39), and despite its solitary, somewhat astringent nature (it 'skirts the warped polities / of other trees' (l.144-45)), is still equable and egalitarian in its ability to marry with other, opposing elements (it 'matches venison / as the sour gooseberry / cuts the oily mackerel' (ll.124-26)), and is able to be 'distilled / into perfumes and medicines' (ll.122-23).

This exploration of the 'bittersweet' juniper tree, the portrayal of its survival through history's upheavals (for instance, in a section which contrasts its implacable if low-lying presence outside 'a Roman spa / in Austro-Hungaria' (ll.60-61) clotted with decadence and presentiments of collapse), and its treatment at the hands of others - the section which contains the stanza on Mandelstam - defines one of the poem's, and Liberty Tree's, major themes: Paulin's passionate resuscitation and celebration of buried, hidden or dormant dissident values. The often-quoted climax to the poem locates the impetus behind the symbol of juniper, and the title of the collection, in the 'buried' history of the United Irishmen (the 'liberty tree' was their symbol). What Paulin sees as their enlightened republican Presbyterianism has become a pointedly ignored adjunct to Ulster Protestant history, and it serves as a corrective to the soured and bigoted Paisleyite 'Free Presbyterianism' of today:

and I imagine  
that a swelling army is marching  
from Memory Harbour to Killala  
carrying branches  
of green juniper...

now dream  
of that sweet  
equal republic  
where the juniper  
talks to the oak  
the thistle,  
the bandaged elm,  
and the jolly jolly chestnut.

(ll. 158-62, 169-76)

It is clear that the tone of the above is at several removes from the drab sameness of much of The Strange Museum. The verse is infused with its uplifting vision of political harmony - implicit in the 'swelling' of the second and third lines to match the stirring picture of the army of freedom on the march seemingly armed with nothing but juniper - and it centres on the half-command, half-prayer of 'dream' at the beginning of the poem's final stanza. Nevertheless, in its pointed imperative, the 'dream' barely conceals a frustration at the neglect of the United Irishmen's egalitarian values, and the lack of ANY dialogue that might, in time, find its way to a 'sweet' settlement.

What all this points to is that, where The Strange Museum was a largely passionless affair ( even its more lyrical poems seem tired and lacklustre ), Liberty Tree is intensely passionate, ready to celebrate and quick to anger. It registers, and is attracted to, a passionate dissidence. Which is where we return to Mandelstam. Not

only is he emblematic of that same buried juniper spirit with which Paulin illustrates the values of the United Irishmen (his an art that refused to bow to the wishes of the state, that answered only to itself, and which proved inviolate even though the poet himself could not remain 'free of history'), his example, and other expressions of the Russian imagination, seem important if we consider Paulin's change of direction and tone in Liberty Tree.

We can see just how important in a review article of a Solzhenitsyn book - 'The Writer Underground'<sup>9</sup> - published in 1980. (1980 seems to be a pivotal year for Paulin, because he cites it as the year he changed his views about Northern Ireland, partly, he has said, through a sustained reading of Irish history.) In this review he attempts a definition of certain 'distinctive qualities of the Russian imagination'<sup>10</sup>, through a discussion of the work of Mandelstam and Solzhenitsyn. One of the qualities which informs Paulin's depiction of Mandelstam in 'The Book of Juniper' is the linking of 'suffering and the idea of the sacred'<sup>11</sup>. So Mandelstam is seen as a 'priest of the Word', for whom the act of poetry, fidelity to which made him 'exiled in Voronezh' and finally condemned his body to an unknown grave, is also an act of communion - 'the Host on his tongue'. Another facet of this imagination is its huge 'mnemonic capability'<sup>12</sup>, a capacity to remember everything which is 'essential to the recovery of one's sense of being human'<sup>13</sup>. (Mandelstam himself held all his work in his memory, saying in his excoriating 'Fourth Prose': 'I have no manuscripts, no notebooks, no archives. I have no handwriting, because I never write. I alone in Russia work with my voice, while all around me consummate swine are writing'<sup>14</sup>.)

When Paulin writes about Mandelstam, Solzhenitsyn, the 'Russian imagination' and its culture in this review, it is obvious that he detects in these things a valuable correlative. The key-word in the article is 'passionate': Mandelstam has a 'passionate eagerness'<sup>15</sup>, Solzhenitsyn possesses a 'passionate'<sup>16</sup> voice, and Paulin sees Russian culture as being 'passionately provincial'<sup>17</sup>: 'Everyone knows each other and there is much malicious gossip, sudden tenderness and equally sudden rage'<sup>18</sup>. (It is hard not to see an element of Irishness in this amused observation.) He praises Mandelstam's 'visionary spontaneity'<sup>19</sup> and 'exclamatory quality'<sup>20</sup> ('which', he says, 'is altogether different from the lyric melancholy ... of an English writer'<sup>21</sup>); and admires Solzhenitsyn's dissidence, how this writer 'refuses to conform to [Western] prejudices'<sup>22</sup>, while attacking in 'spiky ... lacerating, ironic'<sup>23</sup> tones, 'corrupt institutions, codes of conduct and manners'<sup>24</sup>. Paulin's own excavation of United Irishmen history in Liberty Tree shares this passionate force, in which celebration and frustration chafe against each other, as in the stresses bearing on the word 'dream' in 'The Book of Juniper'. We can discern both sides of this passion in the close of the poem, 'Father of History':

Folded like bark, like cinnamon things,  
I traced them to the Linen Hall stacks -  
Munro, Hope, Porter and McCracken;  
like sweet yams buried deep, these rebel minds  
endure posterity without a monument,  
their names a covered sheugh, remnants, some brackish  
signs.

( ll.12-17 )

The list of names of United Irishmen has the immediacy of a mnemonic aid, or a charm against all ill, and the poem registers Paulin's delight in his discovery with the 'sweet' references in 'cinnamon' and 'sweet yams'; but the ending of the poem simmers with anger at their neglect, which only breaks with the disgusted fricatives of 'sheugh' and 'brackish'. As in his description of Solzhenitsyn, Paulin's tone here is 'bitter and righteous', and extends to other poems such as 'Presbyterian Study' and 'Desertmartin', in which he ponders further on how 'a plain / Presbyterian grace sour[s], then harden[s]' (ll.15-16).

Apart from Paulin's translation of Chenier's 'Iambes' (which I shall look at in the next section), Liberty Tree's approach to translation in 'A Nation, Yet Again' itself embodies something of the 'visionary spontaneity' and 'passionate eagerness' that Paulin discerns in Mandelstam. (Again Paulin yokes Russian and Irish imaginations by giving his Pushkin-inspired poem - it's partly based on Pushkin's 'To Chaadaeff' - the title of a song by Thomas Davis.) In 'The Book of Juniper', Paulin subtly links Mandelstam and Pushkin in that somewhat-cryptic last line to the Mandelstam stanza: 'And the sun is buried at midnight'. This is a reference to the Mandelstam poem 'We shall meet again, in Petersburg / as though we had buried the sun there'<sup>25</sup>; but it also refers to an essay which Mandelstam wrote in 1915 called 'Pushkin and Scriabin'. In his exemplary study of Mandelstam, Clarence Brown unearths some remaining fragments of this (fragmentary) essay which point directly to the imagery of the later poem: 'Pushkin was buried at night. He was buried secretly... They put the sun into

the coffin at night...'<sup>26</sup> After he was killed in a duel, Pushkin was buried at night because he was perceived as a dissident (he was known as a liberal, and was enthusiastic about the ethos behind the French Revolution) by a repressive Tsarist state. The poem 'To Chaadaeff' mourns the death of his own and his friends' youthful revolutionary idealism, though by the end of the piece, he is still hopeful that these ideals will win through ('We wait with fervent hope and anguish / The moment of our freedom sweet / As lovers, destined soon to meet / In pain and longing pine and languish'<sup>27</sup>, as an especially naff translation has it).

So, for Paulin, Pushkin, like Mandelstam, is an exemplary artist-as-passionate-dissident, whose dedication to poetry brought them into conflict with the state that, in the end, buried both of them; and his version of Pushkin in Liberty Tree aligns his own nonconformist, now passionate poetic imagination alongside these Russian poets:

I'm tense now: talk of sharing power,  
prophecies of civil war,  
new reasons for a secular  
mode of voicing the word nation  
set us on edge, this generation,  
and force the poet to play traitor  
or act the half-sure legislator.  
No matter; there's a classic form  
that's in the blood, that makes me warm  
to better, raise, build up, refine



whatever gabbles without discipline:  
see, it takes me now, these hands stir  
to bind the northern to the southern stars.

(ll. 13-25)

Again, as with many of the poems in Liberty Tree, frustration sparks against a passionate sense of hope, noticeable here when Paulin ranges his irritation at the pressures on the poet in such a 'tense' climate (being forced 'to play traitor / or act the half-sure legislator') against the closing lines' swelling optimism. This swelling is particularly noticeable in the list of infinitives in the fourth last line, which, with each caesura, we find the voice pitched upward, outward, on a series of breath spaces and strongly-stressed syllables (as in 'raise, build up') that reacts against the regularity of the iambic tetrameter in the rest of the poem. The line following - with its fast, chatty flurry of weak stresses ( and the demotic of 'gabbles', which seems somewhat incongruous here ) - represents a slight dip in that upward movement; but in the straining of the three stresses ('these hands stir') at the end of the penultimate line, Paulin finally releases the tetrameter in a ten-syllabled mix of iamb and anapaest to vouchsafe the vision of an art that 'binds the northern to the southern stars'.

Part of Paulin's prescription for the 'classic form' he mentions in 'A Nation, Yet Again' is the deployment of a 'tough new style / that draws the language to the light / and purifies the tribal rites' (ll. 10-12). In 1983, the year that Liberty Tree was brought out, Paulin published a pamphlet essay in association with the Field Day Company (of which he is a director) called 'A New Look at the Language Question'<sup>28</sup>.

The language question, in particular, is a question of 'nationhood and government'<sup>29</sup>, and the essay advocates the promulgation of a 'federal concept of Irish-English'<sup>30</sup> (incorporating Ireland and its neighbours' various dialects - 'Irish, the Yola and Fingallian dialects, Ulster Scots, Elizabethan English, Hiberno-English and American-English'<sup>31</sup>). The means by which the identity of such a dialectal language would be formed and strengthened, he argues, is by the compiling of an Irish-English dictionary to match the 'separatist'<sup>32</sup> endeavours expressed in the publication of the Scottish National Dictionary or the Dictionary of Jamaican English; and half of his polemic is devoted to an examination of how certain influential dictionaries (Johnson's, Noah Webster's, and the OED) have formed and consolidated cultural identities. Especially Webster's, which Paulin puts forward as exemplary in the way it eked out an identity based on an American-English and thereby separated itself from British and British-English dominance. (That said, Paulin, as we shall see in the next part of the chapter, has had reason to change his mind radically about Webster, and about dictionaries in general.) On the other hand, the OED, according to Paulin, is a cornerstone of British imperialist culture - 'part book and part sacred natural object'<sup>33</sup>; it is a 'monumental work of scholarship and possesses a quasi-divine authority'<sup>34</sup>, the influence of which, he implies, has imposed a cultural hegemony on the English language as a whole.

Fundamentally, Paulin's conception of a Dictionary of Irish-English posits the redemption of purely vernacular expressions from what he sees as an intrinsically 'homeless'<sup>35</sup>, if, by the same token, a 'romantic and unfettered'<sup>36</sup> existence. And this endeavour in his own work is what, at a basic level, also makes Liberty Tree such a striking departure from his first two books. Fizzing with linguistic diversity,

pugnacious, witty, startlingly fresh and alive after the neap that afflicts The Strange Museum. Liberty Tree matches its joyous and abrasive resuscitation of dialect words to the celebration of the hidden history of the United Irishmen and their dissident, egalitarian values and, as an extension of that, the dissident creative imagination as embodied in the example of Mandelstam. In the course of the book, we come across 'sheugh', 'boke', 'cack-handed', 'daft eejit', 'duskiss', 'sleakit'; and the inclusion of such words has raised just as many hackles. One unimpressed reviewer of Paulin's work termed the intrusion of the Ulster dialect as 'boking in the sheugh'<sup>37</sup>, and Edna Longley has invoked Edward Thomas to attack this aspect of Paulin's style: 'Paulin has invented a new form of poetic diction by sprinkling his poems with dialect, or would-be dialect words (in Edward Thomas's phrase) "like the raisins that will get burnt on an ill-made cake"'<sup>38</sup>.

But Paulin's point is that by including the words in his printed poetry, he somehow strives to redeem them from a purely local usage; there is a sense in which print empowers a language, and Paulin's redemption of a 'homeless' dialect in Liberty Tree is instrumental in his self-appointed task to help form and empower a cultural identity (the Ulster identity) that is, at the moment, formless. (In the next section, I would like to expand on this to show Paulin's reaction to print has altered considerably - if not performed a U-turn - as he has come more into contact with Polish poets such as Tadeusz Rozewicz.)

But Paulin himself is drawn to this abrasive quality of the Ulster accent and delights in the way it sounds - in the words of one of Paulin's rogue's-gallery of

Stormont civil servants in 'Martello' - like 'dustbins / being dragged over concrete'. It is a harshness that W.R.Rodgers, a poet with whom Paulin has a great deal in common in this respect, especially cherishes in this well-known passage from his 'Epilogue to the Character of Ireland':

I am Ulster, my people an abrupt people  
Who like the spiky consonants in speech  
And think the soft ones cissy; who dig  
The k and t in orchestra, detect sin  
In fornication, get a kick out of  
Tin cans, fricatives, fornication, staccato  
talk,  
Anything that gives or takes attack,  
Like Micks, Tagues, tinkers' gets, Vatican.  
An angular people, brusque and Protestant,  
For whom the word is still a fighting word...<sup>39</sup>

Paulin's own language in Liberty Tree bristles with this fricative liveliness, a direct and often belligerent diction which tends to challenge instead of soothe, as in this virtuoso passage from the poem 'Politik':

The headmaster of a national school  
chalks Ginkel on the blackboard  
as a flag snicks a big NO

over the mudflats and barracks;  
the city is like a locked yard  
that's caked with grey pigeon-cack;  
the Chief stalks, stalks, like the Kaiser  
and crowds bristle at the docks.  
Krekk! Kkrek! the stubborn particles  
trek through my carbon dater,  
each chipping past like a spiked curse  
stamped with the numbers: 1-9-1-2.

(1.1-12)

The verse crackles with the internal dissonance of sibilants and fricatives rubbing up against each other ('caked / cack / Kaiser / Krekk') as Paulin's imagination reacts against the tyranny of the headmaster (the 'Chief'), and the arid Protestant history that he teaches. 1912, the year of Carson and the Covenant, is one of those touchstone dates for modern-day Ulster Protestants, which leads, in Paulin's view, to a 'snarl of superficial and negative attitudes [the flag (the Union Jack, no doubt) with its NO...] ... a provincialism of the most disabling kind'<sup>40</sup>. Paulin's poetry here snarls back a jagged consonantal declaration of its identity, a dissident, Ulster, enlightened identity that is as capable of a surprising lyricism and vision - as in 'The Book of Juniper' - as it is of taking the skin of someone's backside with its vituperative force. (That said, however, some would say that Paulin's own historical imagination seems - apart from the nod to Milton - to go no further back than the 1790s.)

Although this itself might seem indicative of a 'disabling provincialism' (as in the complaints of many reviewers about the use of language they didn't understand), Paulin's championing of the Ulster vernacular in his work over the dominance of British-English is linked to his interest in Russian and Eastern European verse. He relishes Solzhenitsyn's 'spiky, passionate, lacerating and ironic tones'; and with regard to the writer's voice, he quotes Mandelstam's description of Russian verse's 'wicked and gay sibilance'<sup>41</sup>. Fascinating with respect to this seeming kinship is a review - 'Notes on Poetry'<sup>42</sup> - that Mandelstam wrote in 1923 about his contemporaries Pasternak and Khlebnikov. In this rather combative essay, Mandelstam describes the war over control of the Russian language as a linguistic struggle between what he sees as a 'Latin Russian'<sup>43</sup>, a 'Byzantine poetry'<sup>44</sup>; the written language of the monks (and, by extension, the intelligentsia) against the 'secular'<sup>45</sup> language, the vernacular of ordinary, lay people. There is no doubt where Mandelstam stands on this issue: 'Whatever tends to secularize the language of poetry ... does good to the language, gives it longevity'<sup>46</sup>; and later in the essay he describes the use of vernacular in poetry as 'Lutheran' - 'the joy of hearing secular speech in poetry ... is the joy the Germans felt ... when they opened ... their fresh Gothic bibles'<sup>47</sup>. Mandelstam speaks of Pasternak's poetry as 'birdsong'<sup>48</sup> (which characterises the evanescence of the speech moment), and as a 'cure for tuberculosis'<sup>49</sup> (his poems 'get one's throat clear ... fortify one's breathing ... renovate one's lungs'<sup>50</sup>). It is clear that, beneath a certain Marxist patina (in the berating of the once-institutionalized, and by 1923, persecuted and reviled organised church in the Soviet Union, and the same treatment of the intelligentsia and their 'Church-Slavonic, hostile, Byzantine literacy'<sup>51</sup>), pulses Mandelstam's love of the orality, the physicality of the vernacular in poetry. It is, in his view, a life-giving force.

And, in the same review, Mandelstam locates the source of the life-force of the Russian vernacular - what he terms its 'vitality' - in the consonant. 'A lessening of linguistic awareness', he writes, 'means atrophy of the feeling for the consonant ... Russian speech is saturated with consonants; it clicks, it crackles and it hisses with them. A real secular speech. Monastic speech', he contends, 'is a litany of vowels'<sup>52</sup>. Mandelstam's enthusiastic portrayal of the vernacular is close to Paulin's own spiky depiction of his beloved Ulster speech in Liberty Tree: so it is no surprise that, although Paulin admits to knowing no Russian (which hasn't stopped him translating Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova and Mayakovsky), he comprehends a kinship between the 'harsh, jagged, spiky sounds'<sup>53</sup> of Russian and the guttural harshness of the Ulster voice. This is at the basis of the poem 'Black Bread', dedicated to Ann Pasternak Slater, Boris Pasternak's niece, whom Paulin namechecks as helping him translate Pushkin for 'A Nation, Yet Again':

Splitting birches, spiky thicket, kinship -  
this is the passionate, the phonic surface  
I can take only on trust, like a character  
translated to a short story whose huge language  
he doesn't know. So we break black bread  
in the provinces and can't be certain  
what it is we're missing, or what sacrament  
this might be, the loaf wrapped in a shirt-tail  
like a prisoner's secret or a caked ikon,  
that is sour and good, and has crossed over versts,

kilometres, miles. It's those journeys  
tholed under the salt stars, in the eager wind  
that starves sentries and students in their long  
coats...

( ll.1-13 )

The poem revolves around Paulin's experience - and a sense of kinship - with the Russian language, and the imagination within the language, as he approaches it through an attempt at translating some of its verse. (The 'translation' from Russian -or 'crossing-over' - is literally enacted in the tenth and eleventh line, in the movement from the Russian unit of distance 'versts' through the European standard 'kilometre' to the British 'mile'.) His initial lack of Russian means that he is attracted first to its 'phonic surface', bristling, as the first line communicates, with the similar sibilant and fricative spitting and kicking of the Ulster vernacular. The key-word, again, is 'passionate'; and Paulin's own 'passionate' definition of the Russian language and imagination within the poem, and his kinship with them, provokes a certain train of images that leads us back to his depiction of Mandelstam in 'The Book of Juniper', and his review of Solzhenitsyn. Thus the act of apprehending Russian verse and translating it becomes imbued with a Christian sensibility: it becomes an act of communion, the gravity of which is signalled by the slow plosive stresses of 'break black bread' in the fifth line, and made more explicit when Paulin later refers to it as a 'sacrament'. (However, one might yet question the use of Christian imagery here, and in 'The Book of Juniper', if these are applied to Mandelstam - called a 'priest of the Word' in 'The Book of Juniper' - a poet who later in his life began to assert and proclaim his own



Jewishness.)

Caught up with this sacred notion of poetry is a perception of the suffering behind it, a collocation that informs the likening of this verse to 'a loaf wrapped in a shirt-tail / like a prisoner's secret or a caked ikon'. Suddenly, Paulin makes an imaginative leap in the poem to include one of the more famous and chilling examples of the state coming up against the integrity of art: the phone-call Stalin made to Boris Pasternak to seek his opinion of the arrested Mandelstam's work - 'Claudius is on the phone... / his thick acid voice in your uncle's conscience, / "I'd have known better how to defend my friend"'. This comprehends the dangerous dissidence that the exemplary artist personified in a totalitarian state, a dissidence that Paulin clarifies towards the end of the poem, as he forges a final link between the Russian voice and his own: 'It's a lump of northern peat, itself alone, / and kin to the black earth, to shaggy speech...'

The twinning of orality and dissidence, particularly the dissidence displayed by post-war middle-European poets, constitutes a major thematic element of Paulin's next collection, the contentious Fivemiletown (1987). In the next section I shall expand my analysis of Paulin's use of translation with regard to the versions of Russian poets in that book, and consider his assimilation of the influence of writers such as Holub and Rozewicz; I shall also attempt to disentangle the web of historical and cultural intertexts that weaves itself into and out of these complex, crabby poems.

## II

In 1986, Faber published the Paulin-edited Book of Political Verse. However, the controversy about the anthology had begun some time before that. A much-publicized disagreement between Paulin and his editor, Craig Raine, ostensibly about their definitions of 'political verse', found a somewhat farcical outlet in the letters page of the London Review of Books<sup>54</sup>. The two poets started abusing each other over Paulin's skew-wiff metrical analysis of the word 'twilight' in a Geoffrey Hill poem. As the spat heated up, Paulin accused Raine of being 'reactionary' and an 'Arnoldian' (the supreme insult). Raine suspected Paulin of prosodic 'tinnitus', and rebuked his tendency to divine a political agenda behind every work of art. Paulin developed this difference of opinion with Raine into a weighty introductory essay for the anthology. In this, he names his Aunt Sallies: Arnold, Eliot and Leavis, and also Burke and 'that reactionary theologian, C.S.Lewis'<sup>55</sup>, whose Anglican 'aristocratic, hierarchical, conservative tradition ... [has been] floated as the major cultural hegemony in these islands'<sup>56</sup>. These critics and intellectuals, Paulin alleges, have sought to bleed the political out of the study of art and literature; they have conspired to convince students that 'poems exist in a timeless vacuum or a soundproof museum, and that poets are gifted with an ability to hold themselves above history, like skylarks or weather satellites'<sup>57</sup>.

As a result - Paulin argues - a whole other tradition of republican literature,

beginning with Milton, has been silenced or denigrated; a tradition which is 'witty, tough, idealistic, and resolute with a sense of egalitarian integrity'<sup>58</sup>. This classical, dissident spirit is embodied in a strain that includes Bunyan, Burns, Hazlitt, Joyce, and finds its extreme form in the work of Russian and Central European poets. In these writers, whose influence on Paulin I will consider later, poetry most powerfully recaptures a stark awareness of historical process and sense of social obligation. Paulin suggests that these poets 'speak to us in cipher from an underground culture...like prisoners tapping out messages along the heating-pipes in a cell block'<sup>59</sup>. If they act as 'wakers-up', they themselves are woken at dawn 'like a man being arrested or a prisoner about to be shot'<sup>60</sup>.

In this part of the chapter, I would like to demonstrate how the constant process of 'reformation' in Paulin's poetry, which continues into his landmark collection Fivemiletown (1987) and the recent Walking a Line (1994), and informs his critical writings, is the result of an ongoing dialogue between these two artistic factions. On the one hand, he is combative and often intransigent in his distaste for ahistorical Arnoldian 'sweetness and light' and the 'punitive aporias of subsidized deconstruction'<sup>61</sup>, critical trends which favour socially-distanced and arid texts. On the other, his poetry promotes a sense of solidarity with exemplary dissident artists by letting their influences generously permeate his work. I intend to trace these influences in order to illustrate the concerns treated with such complexity (some have said wilful obscurity) in his poetry of the late '80s.

In Liberty Tree, Joyce, Chekhov, Pushkin and the guillotined French

Revolutionary and poet, Andre Chenier, jostle against references to the 1981 Solidarity crisis in Poland, the hungerstrikes in Northern Ireland, the fight for Algerian independence in the 1950s. One of the sources for this technique, road-tested with such assurance in that collection, proves to be Paulin's primal republican dissident and artist: Milton. In a later essay, he points appreciatively to Milton's 'complex allusiveness, his [way] of merging different historical periods, personalities and textual sources'<sup>62</sup>. Restlessly analogizing the early 1980s situation in Northern Ireland, the allusions speak out of a need to define a national identity, an identity that Paulin discovered in the egalitarian ideals of the United Irishmen. As complex as that volume seems, however, it does not quite prepare the reader for the stramash of forbidding, intensely-impacted, often (perhaps too often) arcane poems in Fivemiletown.

Everything about Fivemiletown signals a brooding intensity, even (as Michael Hofmann has noted) the film-noir monochrome of the front cover. This is the first indication of a darkening in Paulin's mood from the charged, life-affirming enthusiasms and frustrations of Liberty Tree (the front cover of which is an appropriately republican green, white and orange). The blurb tells us, unhelpfully, that the governing subject of Fivemiletown is 'Protestant identity'; what the collection presents us with is a tour-de-force compression of over 500 years of post-Reformation history, from the 'smoke-trace / of Jan Hus' and the 'Big Bang / of Luther's Bible' through the Thirty Years' War, the French and Russian revolutions, the Wars of Revolution against Napoleon, both World Wars, the post-Second World War consolidation of Communist rule in Central Europe, and the Cold War, right up to the significant (for Unionists) events in the history of the Northern Ireland troubles (the suspension of Stormont in 1972, the

Anglo-Irish agreement in 1985). Indeed, the signing of this agreement forms the basis of the poem, which provides a typical example of Paulin's method and themes in the collection:

Here we are on a window ledge  
with the idea of race.

All our victories  
were defeats really

and the tea chests in that room  
aren't packed with books.

The door's locked on us  
so we begin again

with cack on the sill  
and The Book of Analogies.

It falls open at a map  
of the small nations of Europe,

it has a Lutheran engraving  
of Woodrow Wilson's homestead

in a cloon above Strabane,  
and it tells you Tomas Masaryk

was a locksmith's apprentice.

This means we have a choice:

either to jump or get pushed.

Perhaps the first thing that needs unravelling is the title. It conflates the famous incident (the 'Defenestration of Prague') that began the Thirty Years' War, and the castle at which the Anglo-Irish agreement was signed. This document - which basically allowed Dublin a say in the affairs of Northern Ireland - was drawn up between the British and Irish governments without any Unionist consultation, and subsequently condemned (by the now-Irish President, Mary Robinson) as 'unacceptable to all shades of Unionist opinion'<sup>63</sup>. (The Official Unionist MP Harold McCusker's speech about the agreement - 'I stood outside Hillsborough ... like a dog'<sup>64</sup> - is woven into another poem, 'An Ulster Unionist Walks the Streets of London'.) It should be noted that the analogy comes not from Paulin, but from the DUP MP Peter Robinson, who commented at the time that 'We've been put out on the window-ledge'<sup>65</sup>. Thus it is clear that Paulin is ventriloquizing this consciousness, not necessarily identifying with it, but certainly sympathetic towards it.

The poem's measured tone, however, seems far removed from the usual wounded harangue of an aggrieved Loyalist: the careful, restrained two-line stanzas,

and the obvious note of resignation in the 'really' in line 4, and the 'so we begin again' in the eighth line, point to a mentality unillusioned about the processes of history and the significance of their precarious position. The Defenestration of Prague was carried out by Protestants on two of the country's Catholic rulers. Now those who were in power find themselves deprived of power, just as the Unionists who held sway in Northern Ireland before the Troubles began have here been marginalized and made impotent. (It was an added insult that the SDLP had been involved in the talks about the Anglo-Irish agreement, and they had been excluded.) In much of Fivemiletown, we are made aware of the cycle of established power structures collapsing, and the reformation of new power structures on that clearance. The Thirty Years' War was instrumental in the final break-up of the Holy Roman Empire, and its disintegration led to a reconstruction of the map of Europe. In the same way, the collapse of the defeated middle-European states at the end of World War I - of Germany and Austria-Hungary - led to the creation of what Eric Hobsbawm has termed the 'independent Wilsonian petty states'<sup>66</sup>.

But the poem's second-half yoking-together of Wilson and Masaryk, and the references to the 'Lutheran engraving' of Wilson's Ulster homestead and Masaryk's apprenticeship as a 'locksmith', need further explication. Both Wilson and Masaryk had formative Protestant backgrounds and influences. Wilson was known as an 'inflexibly idealistic'<sup>67</sup> Presbyterian, and Masaryk was an 'advocate of English Puritan ethics and the austere teachings of the Hussites'<sup>68</sup>. It was with Wilson and Masaryk negotiated the nature of the independent Czechoslovakia during the Versailles talks; and the phrase used of him - 'locksmith's apprentice' - in this respect brings us back to line 5 in the

poem - 'The door's locked on us' - and can be glossed as a reference to the way Masaryk cannily returned himself and his nation to a state of empowerment. (He remained president from 1919 until his retirement in 1935.) Paulin detects in these two statesmen the vestiges of that Protestant egalitarianism, that 'enlightened Republicanism' to which he was attracted in the United Irishmen. (A darker resonance concerning Masaryk and defenestration is audible if we remember that Jan Masaryk, Tomas's son, died 'in mysterious circumstances' - he either fell, or was pushed out of a window - as the Communists were consolidating power in post-Second World War Czechoslovakia.) What all this resolves itself into is the poem's, and Paulin's, bottom line on the subject of a 'British' Ulster Unionist future after the Anglo-Irish agreement. Instead of farcically clinging to a shit-stained window-sill, that is, to the edge of an identity now closed to the Unionists (and not much of a desirable identity, come to that), the choice is 'either to jump or get pushed'. In any case, to get resigned to the fact of their disenfranchisement and disempowerment.

The extensive exegesis required for a adequate understanding of even a simple-looking twenty-line poem is instructive of the way that Paulin has formidably layered contemporary events and history to produce his narrative of historical process: the cycle of deformation of existing power structures under the pressure of war and revolution, and the reformation of new power structures which, in time, themselves deform and collapse, and so on. The figure in 'The Defenestration of Hillsborough', pushed to the side, treated with indifference if not contempt by a more powerful state it once found favour with, finds its corollary through Fivemiletown in a series of poems dealing with relationships on the verge of bitter dissolution. The couple in 'Waftage' split up after



the (Ulster) speaker gives his French lover a 'tin of panties / coloured like the Union Jack' - an encrypted allusion to the disaffiliation of most Ulster Protestants from the French-influenced ideals of the United Irishmen. (An interpretation exists which attempts to read the Frenchwoman as Margaret Thatcher.<sup>69</sup>) The bereft lover of 'Sure I'm A Cheat Aren't We All' remembers the time he and his lover 'made a heavy pretence of love / I mean we'd a drunken fuck in the afternoon' on the same day the Stormont parliament was prorogued. History and politics write themselves over and into these relationships. In 'The Caravans on Luneberg Heath', the signatories of the document of surrender ending the Second World War in Europe (signed on Luneberg Heath) light 'cigarettes the way young people used to / after sex in the daytime'. The personal is always under enormous pressure from the political, the historical; and one of Paulin's concerns is to show how heavily the weight of history, of ideology, of what he calls in 'Are Those F-111s?', 'the social moment', bears down upon individuals, communities, 'tribes'.

'The social moment' does not only bear down upon these, but also upon the artistic imagination. Emblematic of this, and his ceaseless refracting of contemporary events through historical and cultural analogies, is the skein of translation which winds through the collection. In addition to translating poems by Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva and Mayakovsky (to which I'll return in a moment), Paulin includes renderings of Sophocles (from his version of Antigone, The Riot Act), Strindberg, Heine and an interesting, extremely free version of Goethe's poem 'Symbolum', or 'Mason-Lodge'. The first verse of this is closest (but that's not saying much) to the original:

The mason lives  
in this or that street  
and all his actions  
are like yours or mine.  
He makes us equal.

Paulin seems to feel an instinctive attachment to secret societies (Edna Longley has mischievously classed the Field Day Company among these exclusively-male cabals<sup>70</sup>); and, oddly, he finds in the Masons another seedbed of the egalitarian ideas he espouses. (Though not without strong caveats. In the first stanza of 'Now For The Orange Card', for example, he writes of 'a mason/ wanting to express "freedom" / in a sharp design' immediately undercutting this with a disturbingly expressionistic depiction of what this ideal has hardened and degenerated into: 'blood and coins / the metric rod / and a girl crying / "I don't like it now"'. His attitude to the Masons finds itself further expressed in this particular poem's original title, 'Now For The Orange Card: Tom's Palinode' - a 'palinode' being a poem that revises or corrects views in a poet's earlier work.) In his translation of Goethe, Paulin keeps at a distance from the mason, whereas in Goethe's source text is a wholly-immersed call to the heroic Masons and their principles; but the last stanza, with its image of the mason about to build on a cleared area, effectively conveys Goethe's message:

The sun shines  
on his foundations -  
a pentagram

cut in packed soil,  
the bricks stacked ready.

Goethe's source text is dated '5. December 1815'. (Paulin must be aware of this, as this translation also figures in his Book of Political Verse.) By the end of 1815, the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon and his empire had come to an end. During the autumn of the previous year, statesmen were already gathering in Vienna to work out a peace, and reconstruct a Europe that had been shattered by twenty years of war. One of the outcomes of the Congress of Vienna was the shaping of a new Germany, and the date ascribed to the poem is also the date of the dissolution of the Prussian parliament, an act which was regarded a necessary step towards this reformation. Goethe's poem, then, is an optimistic rallying-cry to the task of building a better future on the opportunity, on the clearance left by the disintegration of the established order.

The poem is also ghosted by the spirit of Thomas Carlyle, who uses his own translation of it as a talisman throughout his polemic Past and Present. He translates the last lines thus: 'Here is all fullness, / Ye brave, to reward you; / Work, and despair not'<sup>71</sup>. Written during the time of the Chartists and the Anti-Corn-Law Leagues, and of the social upheaval caused by their protests, Past and Present is a paean to Carlyle's work-ethic (that 'work is worship'<sup>72</sup>) which he believes will heal the divisions in 1840s England. This element of Paulin's translation also serves to undermine his admiration for the Masons - one of a recent series of his articles attacked Carlyle and his trumpeting, triumphalist rhetoric. But whether Paulin knew or not about the various strands implicated in his act of translating Goethe's original (chances are he did), that

such strands can be picked out of a study of this text repays his dedication to returning the historical and political aspects to literary criticism.

Paulin's 1984 essay, 'In the Beginning was the Aeneid: On Translation'<sup>73</sup>, has an important contribution to make to the issue of translation in Fivemiletown. In this piece, Paulin warns that 'the translator must always be aware of the possible identities which the activity implies'<sup>74</sup>. He distinguishes at least four types of translator. The first translates in order to bolster the cultural armoury of an already-established state; another translates to strengthen, culturally, a weak, unstable or burgeoning national identity (for example, the translations of Irish poetry into English by Irish translators, seeking to open a locked culture and history). These modes of translation could be classed as 'Virgilian'<sup>75</sup>, Paulin argues, because they are undertaken as a service to the state.

On the other hand, Paulin also defines two other types of translator. The first uses translation to forward the concept of a 'stateless language'<sup>76</sup> (Paulin suggests Pound's 'pellucid international English'<sup>77</sup> translations in Cathay); and the second sets out to subvert the state and its culture through translating texts that might indirectly question or criticize the target culture. In this last case, Paulin argues that 'Polish translations of Irish poetry' have an 'invisible reference to the idea of being dominated by a foreign power'<sup>78</sup>. Paulin's stress on the 'Virgilian' aspects of translation, however, seems overshadowed by his conclusion to the essay. He instances Paul Muldoon's 'Ovidian' version of the Irish 'Immram Mael Duin' saga - 'Immram' from Why Brownlee Left - as showing 'that the enterprise of translation and imitation need not

necessarily involve a Dryden-like commitment to a masterful national identity"<sup>79</sup>. Apart from Seamus Heaney's translation of 'The Golden Bough' extract for Seeing Things, concentration on classical translation (in Northern Irish poetry, in particular) has focussed not on the Aeneid, but on Ovid's work, and especially on Metamorphoses. A recent collection of translated bits and pieces of Metamorphoses - After Ovid - has recently been published, to which Paulin himself (and a more mythless poet there never was) has contributed a version of 'Cadmus and the Dragon', and which, perhaps predictably, moves the focus of the metamorphoses from the realm of myth to that of history, equating the figure of Cadmus with John Locke, Edward Carson, 'Willie Whitelaw' and Stormin' Norman Schwartzkopf. Even in his version of Ovid, Paulin is determined to indulge his 'morphing' of history into analogy after analogy, and his attacks on the state; but if 'In the Beginning was the Aeneid', in the end is Metamorphoses.

If we expand briefly on this point, we can see that translation, its remakings, its deformations and reformations, establishes itself as a covert critical literature. It pulls the source text apart, questions it, revises it, writes over and into it; not only that, each translation can act as a critical commentary on preceding translations, on existing commentaries and interpretations of the source text. In this way, translation can be a profoundly transient form of literature. No translation can ever be purely definitive. (Nor, it appears, can the source text - Paulin points out that any Irish literature, even work of neutral or vaguely Unionist leanings, takes on that Polish dimension of 'being dominated by a foreign power' when translated.) In effect, what translation does is to engage in a dialogue with the source text, its context as a source text, and its

subsequent history as translated text. It also allows communication between the source text and the target culture; and, of course, it involves a form of dialogue between the writer of the original and the translator him/herself. Translation is a textual form that uniquely refuses to speak in a historical vacuum.

This dialogic aspect of translation can be discerned in Paulin's versions of the three post-Revolution Soviet writers. Bernard O'Donoghue comments simply that these poets 'are all there to represent the literary imagination under duress'<sup>80</sup>, and, to a certain extent, this is true. Each of the poems illuminates Fivemiletown's theme of the artist's response to what Karl Jaspers called 'Grenzsituationen'<sup>81</sup> - extreme situations, extreme times. The Tsvetaeva poem 'Andre Chenier', dated '4. April 1918', looks through two revolutions, refracting the situation of post-Revolution life in Russia ('iron, iron and cordite, these days / and a burnt tenor') through a reference to the Terror which followed the French Revolution. This claimed the poet (and revolutionary) Andre Chenier, one of whose final poems Paulin translated for Liberty Tree and included in the Book of Political Verse. Certainly, as O'Donoghue says, it evokes the despairing, constrained position of the artist's imagination in a time of social upheaval and state oppression. But Tsvetaeva's method of portraying this dilemma - through analogy, through refraction - clearly anticipates the strategies employed by the Central European poets under the Communist regimes (and, by extension, Paulin), as does her description of life as a grim, dehumanized and dangerous existence: 'There are times the daylight's a quick terror / and no-one living looks quite human'.

Such a dialogue deepens in the two other translations. But with that deepening,

certain problems begin to emerge with Paulin's use of the translation form. His version of Anna Akhmatova's 'Voronezh' (originally written in the 1930s) chafes against a grim landscape with a fricative relish:

I trimp on ice,  
the sledges skitter and slip.  
Crows are crowding the poplars,  
and St. Peter's of Voronezh  
is an acidgreen dome  
fizzing in a flecked light.

What Paulin responds to, as I suggested in earlier part of the chapter, is the passionate tang of the Russian language, its spiky 'phonic surface'. Here his orchestration of sibilants and fricatives vividly points up the difficulty of moving through the winter-heset town. The 'trimp' of the first line quoted above, though obviously a neologism, perfectly catches the sound of footsteps trying to gain purchase on ice; the difficulty of this is compounded by the way the next line alliterates a series of slippery sibilants. But the above depiction of the town is a coded political statement. Voronezh was the town to which Mandelstam chose to be exiled after being forbidden to live in any of the Soviet Union's biggest cities; he and his wife remained there for three years. Thus the hardship of moving in the town, the crow-crowded trees, and the sight of the vaguely poisonous green dome become metaphors for the attempted circumscription of the artistic imagination by a society in which you might be constantly under surveillance (as Akhmatova became), or betrayed by anyone. This is made clear at the very end of

the poem, lines that were censored from the first edition of Akhmatova's poems to be published in her own country:

Judas and the Word  
are stalking each other  
through this scroggy town  
where every line has three stresses  
and only the one word, dark.

(The cryptic last two lines, Paulin's invention, seem to allude to Milton's Samson Agonistes. 'O dark dark dark, amid the blaze of noon' - the lament of another betrayed, imprisoned dissident far from home, and further evidence of Paulin's impacting of historical and cultural reference.) However, these lines raise a doubt in the back of the reader's mind about the manner in which Paulin's voice infiltrates these translations. We might be able to accept words like 'trimp' and 'skitter', but 'scroggy' in line 26 proves extremely intrusive. The intrinsic absurdity of the noise the word makes (similar to a child expressing distaste about something) damages the gravity and foreboding of the poem's last lines.

It could be said that if Paulin does a slight disservice to Akhmatova in 'Voronezh', it arises from his interpretation and attempted reconstruction of the poem's 'phonic surface' in his own idiom. The same consonantal kick is amplified in his version of Mayakovsky's 'Last Statement'. This poem was probably the last that Mayakovsky worked on, and several lines from it are included in his suicide note. An



increasingly-isolated and sneered-at figure, Mayakovsky was forced to join RAPP (which translates to the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), a state-run group with which he had constantly quarrelled, and to whose social-realist belief he found himself diametrically opposed. As a result he had to submit himself to stern reproof and 're-education' when he joined; the strain and indignity of this, coupled, it's said, with the misery of an unrequited love affair led to his suicide in 1930. Again the theme of the artistic impulse borne down upon by the pressure from the state, and of social circumstance is implicit; and, as in the Akhmatova poem, Paulin is concerned to recreate the vibrant colloquial snap of the language in his imitation, as the last third of the poem demonstrates:

Ack, the night has jammed  
each signal from the stars,  
and this, this is my last  
stuttering, grief-splintered  
call-sign to the future.

Christ, I want to wow  
both history and technology...

I could tell it to the world right now.

In Paulin's hands, the poem begins a crescendo with that exclamatory 'Ack' in line 18, the pitch of which is raised by the doubling of 'this' in line 20, and the remarkable staccato effect of 'stuttering, grief-splintered' in the next line. The further exclamation of 'Christ' builds the momentum even more, until Paulin allows the poem to level out

with the longer last line, and that trailing 'now'. The rest of the poem has a knockabout, slangy quality ('you're in the sack', 'my slogans / in daft capitals', 'our fucks and cries') that seems an approximation of the 1920s Mayakovsky, his vibrant, earthy, confrontational voice, a poet devoted to the 'nowness' of his essentially oral verse. However, the source text is described by Edward Brown in his book Mayakovsky: Poet of the Revolution as a 'tender, moving lyric'<sup>82</sup>, and he translates the last lines 'Just see how quiet the world is. / Night has laid a heavy tax of stars upon the sky. / In hours like these you get up and you speak / To the ages, to history, and to the universe'<sup>83</sup>. This contemplative, clear-headed tone is at variance to the wired Mayakovsky Paulin presents to the reader (another translation of the poem in Viktor Woroszylski's Life of Mayakovsky seems to confirm Brown's analysis<sup>84</sup>). Paulin's coarsening and invigorating of the original's language in his version, though somewhat suspect (George Steiner, for example, expressed outrage at Paulin's 'vulgarized, brutalized'<sup>85</sup> version of Chenier's 'Iambes'), is not merely an gratuitous act of literary graffiti. His translations manifestly reject notions of fluency (because he recasts them in the Ulster vernacular), textual fidelity, the translator as invisible entity. They are dissident translations of dissident writers.

Furthermore, in the Akhmatova and Mayakovsky versions, his method is informed by the conviction that, despite the grossly constrained circumstances in which the original were composed, and the social conditions which they reflect, what provides a provisional shelter is the sheer vibrancy of the living language. These writers register an oral dissidence to the constraints imposed by the state upon their creative imaginations. It can only be oral because the act of writing itself becomes a state-

monitored and -regulated (and thus suspect) activity: what might have saved Mandelstam from instant execution over the famous case of his 'Stalin epigram' was the fact that the poem was never committed to paper. Allied to the oral is what Paulin has termed 'the mnemonic compulsion to preserve the past and the dead'<sup>86</sup>. For example, Mandelstam's widow memorized her husband's poetry after his death (in case the manuscripts were lost, or needed to be destroyed), and she constantly recited it to herself so that it might not be consigned to oblivion. These aspects are brought together in Paulin's free interpretations of the source texts: their appearance in Fivemiletown represents a celebration, and a dialogue with, these beleaguered dissident poets.

The same oral dissent is what draws Paulin to Central European poets, such as Tadeusz Rozewicz, Miroslav Holub and Zbigniew Herbert. In the essay 'On Translation', he images these artists as 'mnemonists, oral historians, underground rivers, dissidents'<sup>87</sup>; and his appreciation of them deepens throughout the 1980s with several illuminating essays on their work. With the end of the Second World War, the discovery of the death camps, the consolidation of a Communist totalitarian regime, these writers found themselves in a situation that what Rozewicz has called 'the dance of poetry'<sup>88</sup> could not adequately reflect. Rozewicz himself continues:

The departure in such 'Grenzsituationen'  
[ ultimate situations ] from the special  
"poetic" language has produced those poems  
which I call "stripped of masks and  
costumes"...<sup>89</sup>

A poetry emerged mostly divested of rhetoric, rhyme and even punctuation. A poem could no longer be a Pater-like object of 'beauty', as timeless and covered with stour as a museum-piece; it could no longer be spelled with a capital 'P'; poets were not acolytes, priests in the art. These poems, stripped of any ornamentation, express a taut immediacy, vulnerable as if they were about to be broken in on at any moment and arrested. Any notion of a lyric transcendence is refused. As Rozewicz put it in a 1959 poem 'They Shed the Load' - 'contemporary poetry / means struggle for breath'<sup>90</sup>. Paulin is forthright about this quality. Herbert's poems are 'clandestine speech, speech-risk[s] taken in a void'<sup>91</sup>; similarly Rozewicz's work 'exist[s] as clandestine speech, wary phrases, oblique gestures'<sup>92</sup>. He applauds their 'rigorous scepticism'<sup>93</sup>, and the critical language that he employs reinforces their paradoxical dedication to an 'anti-poetry'<sup>94</sup>: they 'refuse'<sup>95</sup>, they 'deny'<sup>96</sup>, they 'refute'<sup>97</sup>, Rozewicz 'articulates the moment of the poem as a kind of nothing that happens nowhere'<sup>98</sup>. And yet, despite these poets' denial of any heroic status, Paulin's assessment of them (Holub is a 'magnificent, astringent genius'<sup>99</sup>, Herbert's 'Elegy of Fortinbras' is a 'great'<sup>100</sup> poem) often strays awkwardly towards reverence and awe.

It is clear that his close readings of these poets have had a profound effect on Paulin's poetry. In Liberty Tree, he wasn't so averse to the odd lyrical climax or two. 'Ceremony', for example, ends: 'Honeyed wines and spicy cakes, / A fluid light and a fine / Twist of air - a song is rising / To a gold-bellied sail / That takes, takes and quickens us'. The endings of 'To the Linen Hall', 'Amphion' and the well-known 'Book of Juniper' also betray Paulin's latent romantic impulse. But Fivemiletown's darker mood precludes such overt lyricism. This is particularly marked in the book's

approach to that most lyrical of poetic genres - the love poem. As I mentioned earlier, these are poisonous accounts of break-ups, and queasily de-eroticized depictions of sexual encounters. In 'Really Naff', the speaker's lover is 'all thumbs ... in bed' and he/she (the gender is never made clear) is 'jabbed like a doorbell'; the poem ends with the speaker trying to give a transcendent lift to the picture of her object of affections, and failing miserably: 'I put in / ocean, fathoms, light / but he's as bare as need, poor guy / or the sole of that trainer'. In 'Breez Marine', the protagonist's farewell gesture to his soured relationship is to 'stick [his] wine-dark tongue / inside her bum / her black-haired Irish bum / repeating in [his] head / his father's prayer / to shite and onions' (and we note the coded references here to Joyce and Homer, which, when brought together with the deformed Mallarmé allusion, refer to departure, flight, journeying). He then calls his lover 'my summum pulchrum' (the 'highest beauty'), who, instead of utterances of transcendent love, tells him that the relationship is over. Paulin successfully throws water on any notion of ecstatic sexual union with these crabbed acrimonious pieces.

It is also difficult not to point to the influence of the Central European poets when we consider how Paulin 'deforms' many of the poems in Fivemiletown. Punctuation has been progressively stripped away, apart from the odd expressive dash, or an aside, or to indicate an especially important line-break. Sometimes there is the indentation of a line, or blocks of lines, in the manner of Herbert or Holub. This refusal of punctuation is primarily an echo of an act of aesthetic dissidence. In his essay on Herbert, Paulin speaks of punctuation as a 'state apparatus'<sup>101</sup>, as 'social engineering'<sup>102</sup>, and that its absence from these poets' work brings their writing 'closer to immediate

speech than to the controlled linearity of a punctuated printed text<sup>103</sup>. As he intimates in his introduction to the Faber Book of Vernacular Verse, he is engaging in a dialogue not just with these Central European figures. John Clare's mostly unpunctuated, misspelled, essentially oral poems are absorbed into Paulin's poetic de/reformations, as is the example of Emily Dickinson, who also shunned punctuation but for the dash. (In his essay on Dickinson, Paulin maintains that she disliked seeing her poems in printed form; in fact, she desperately wanted her poems published, but the negative (male) response to their innovative style discouraged her, and she never submitted her poems for publication again.) For Paulin, these writers are the standard-bearers of oral dissent, whom state (or male) editorial control has sought to shape and repress, and whose work values primarily the immediacy of the speaking voice.

This dedication to orality, in Paulin's words, 'seeks to break with and subvert official forms'<sup>104</sup>. His charge seems to be that 'received', institutional language (formed by the empowered culture that forms and 'speaks' us) is surrounded by a carapace of consensual approval - sanctioned by academics, educators, by dictionaries, by those in power. This is also the language of print, to which, since Liberty Tree, Paulin has reacted with growing antipathy. As I indicated in the first part of this chapter, Paulin, in a 1983 essay, put forward the idea of empowering the 'homeless' Irish-English dialect by housing it in dictionary form. He pointed to Noah Webster's Dictionary of American-English - a 'great, originating work, the scholarly equivalent of an epic poem, or a prose epic like Ulysses'<sup>105</sup>.

But, four years later, in an essay on Emily Dickinson, he describes this poet

'subverting American English as Noah Webster had defined it in his smugly Calvinist manner'<sup>106</sup>, and also deriding Webster's 'literally chauvinist delimitation of language'<sup>107</sup>. It might be churlish to take Paulin to task for this volte-face - people, even critics, are allowed to change their minds, even those as dogmatic and intransigent as Paulin appears to be - but it does provide a revealing insight into how this poet's thinking has progressed. Now, dictionaries 'fix' and 'limit' language; they are part of that 'state apparatus' which sets out to flatten linguistic differences, heterogeneity, the play of the imagination. This 'fixing' and 'purifying' of the language is the enemy of vernacular, of orality. So, by championing the primacy, the 'nowness' of the speech-moment, Paulin must also align himself against the tyranny of print, of received grammar, pronunciation and spelling. Therefore print is cold, fixed, something almost undead; it is imaged as 'bondage', as 'chains'<sup>108</sup>, it is associated with legal documents, bureaucracy; it's the four thousand miles of Stasi files on East German citizens discovered after the break-up of that Communist state; it's the file after file detailing the KGB persecutions of Soviet writers recently unearthed in Moscow. And, according to Paulin, it is out to extinguish the free, innocent, 'anarchic'<sup>109</sup> and warm world of orality, its 'primal ... lovingkindness'<sup>110</sup>.

To this end, the moments of genuine alleviation in Five-miletown from the claustrophobic piling-on of historical and cultural allusions, and the depiction of disintegrating relationships are specifically oral. The volatile, intoxicating yawp of 'I Am Nature', for example, has a preacher's hair-raising fervour:

hear me sister!

brother believe me!

just banging on

like a bee in a tin

like the burning bush

cracking dipping and dancing

like I'm the last

real Hurrican Higgin

critter and Cruthin

scouter and skitter

witness witness

WITNESS TREE!

This final crescendo is a moment of 'pure energy' that clamours to be read aloud in order to savour its thrilled consonantal detonations. There must be a certain satisfaction for Paulin in the fact that, despite the capital letters and the exclamation mark, print badly undersells the scream of the last line. Its inclusion - as a homage to Jackson Pollock, whose 'action paintings' appeal to Paulin's love of 'nowness' - is the most blatant example of how Paulin makes the spoken word chafe against and subvert its printed form. 'I am Nature' isn't stripped to reveal the vulnerability of orality; it's stripped for a fight.

But, in the main, Fivemiletown's oral epiphanies are intimate, infinitely fragile,



child-like. In Minotaur (as in his Book of Vernacular Verse, which includes children's rhymes), Paulin celebrates the 'oral anarchy'<sup>111</sup> of children who create 'a now of utterance ... chucking harmless pebbles of pure sound against the moral walls of adult discourse'<sup>112</sup>. Their restless, curious delight in the world and in language offers a respite (though not, as we shall see, escape) from history. 'The Give-Thanks', part of the sequence 'Jefferson's Virginia', links the coming of spring with a 'wee kid who dips / through my blossomy room - / "Sing dada, my dadar, / a poppy new song"'. In 'Mythologies', he speaks of his 'oral childhood'; and when later in the poem he laments that 'some daft ould map / had joined the Farcet's mouth / to the mainland', we are to understand that this refers to the usurpation of the vernacular (the 'Farcet's mouth' - the Farcet is now a mostly-underground, absent river which gave its name to Belfast) by a centralized, state-legislated form of the language. Perhaps the role that children have to play in Paulin's argument is most clearly seen in the short poem 'Where's This Big River Come From?':

We were walking back along the river,  
me and Noel Sloan,  
two schoolkids wanting to be writers.  
'Could you make new words up?',  
he asked me, 'not puns but'.  
I said that 'sdark' was the only one  
had ever slipped into my head.  
'It's wick, though - too Nordic, don't you  
reckon?'

I felt a bit like a bishop saying that.  
Noel kept quiet, till at Queen's Bridge  
he asked, 'D'you ever say "jap"?'  
We could try stick it to a spat of water.

What Paulin dramatises here is a child's pleasure in playing with sounds, in the spontaneous creation of original, striking noises. There could well be an implicit response here to critics who, like Hugh Kenner, upbraid Paulin for using vocabulary that they have never heard before and can't quite comprehend (Kenner complained of a lack of footnotes). All through the poem there is an awareness of the fundamentally provisional nature of the oral. The speaker's 'sdark' 'slip[s] into his head'; they 'try stick' the word 'jap' to something as spontaneous and momentary as a 'spat of water'. The children play around with a slippery, makeshift, hard-to-pin-down language to arrest hard-to-pin-down moments, to illumine the moment within the moment. The narrative voice itself is deformed by the hiccups and burps of the vernacular disrupting the smooth facility of print. The disturbed syntax of 'not puns but', for example, seems to resist its appearance in print, though its emphatically buckled construction is a perfectly natural one for speakers from Northern Ireland to use; and the ellipses of 'the only one / had ever slipped into my head' and 'we could try stick it' conjure that same rushed, transient quality inherent in the children's 'made-up' language. These combine to give the seemingly-slight epiphany a vivid colloquial presence. But even in this poem, Paulin subtly evokes the shades of adult circumscription, which will soon seek to regulate the child's anarchic creativity. When the speaker dismisses his own concocted word, he says he feels 'like a bishop'; with this intimation, and the reference to 'Queen's Bridge',

what is communicated is the all-pervasive, if concealed, weight of history and ideology against which the children unknowingly launch their invented vocabularies.

Such a brief respite from history is also outlined in the poem 'Mount Stewart', where the oral impulse is twinned with a love-act that takes the lovers outside the 'tribe / and [where they] disappear from [them]selves'. 'The buzz in our voices', he writes, 'brought blood to our cheeks - / we'd gone to ground as friends / so we rolled, touched and broke / only in speech'. The act returns the pair momentarily to an Edenic, innocent state (the Miltonic strain is never far away from Paulin), in the same way that the two lovers at the start of 'Fivemiletown', 'meet[...] in [a] room / with no clothes on / to believe in nothing, to be nothing' ; and yet the transcendent climax longed for is rudely undercut:

Now, in the dream of our own plenitude,  
I want to go back  
and rap it as milk, jism, cinnamon,  
when it might be a quick blow-job  
in a 6-motel,  
or a small fear just  
in a small town  
in Ireland or someplace.

(ll.48-55)

That sweet, nourishing, fertile moment of 'primal oral loving-kindness' experienced at

first becomes debased to a moment of 'oral loving' of quite a different kind, somewhat sordid and furtive (that '6-motel'); the most intimate and private acts in Paulin, whether they be sexual or speech-acts, are only pauses - can only exist as pauses - in the general melee of history.

### CONCLUSION

There is a distinct difficulty attendant on Paulin's advocacy of the 'newness and nowness'<sup>113</sup> of the oral moment, on the immediacy and 'lovingkindness' of the vernacular. Rodney Pybus, in his introduction to Kenyon Review's feature on 'New British Poetry'<sup>114</sup>, glances at it when he says that the reader of Paulin needs to act as a 'translator'<sup>115</sup>. Pybus is referring to the poems' vocabulary (and he is, after all, writing for an American readership); but the reader must also excavate stratum upon stratum of impacted historical and cultural allusion in a typical Fivemiletown poem in order to be able to see clearly into it. A short poem such as 'Defenester', for example, trots gaily through the beginnings of Protestantism, while alluding to its founding principles, such as 'remanence', and we still have to decode the references to 'horse-shit' and 'Schwarzerd'. He cherishes the 'instantaneous' in a poet like Miroslav Holub. But his poems in Fivemiletown often prove as instantaneous as a Kabbalah primer.

This, of course, needs to be seen in the light of the contradictory forces which chafe against each other in Paulin's poetry and his criticism. (Though another criticism

levelled at Paulin is that his poems often seem like adjuncts to his critical essays - and it's true that much of a particular poem can't be grasped without prior knowledge of Ireland and the English Crisis or Minotaur.) He believes that 'being inside any social or historical moment is like being tossed into a crazed tumble-dryer'<sup>116</sup>; and his poems set out to describe the pressure of 'any social or political moment' through this extraordinary barrage of allusion, translation, arcana, personal reference. That, coupled with Paulin's increasing dislike of the power of print, provide the 'intertextual' pressure which has led to the gradual deformation of his own work.

The poems in his latest collection Walking A Line, however, sacrifice some of this pressure to produce poems that affect in their simplicity and directness. There is another model for this: the artist Paul Klee, who provides the collection's title, and whose wondrous, often child-like paintings and sketches seem to have impressed Paulin with their immediacy. The last poem of this collection - 'That's It' - ebbs and flows and drifts in a capital-less, punctuation-less plain style strikingly similar to his master Rozewicz's later work:

...isn't prose a garment  
a kind of social skin?  
we wear it and it goes  
- no we wear it and it stays  
therefore prose is process  
not a driftwood chest

all of which says only  
that though I may be lying on a mattress  
really I'm afloat  
on a pool of light and illusion  
yes light  
and yes illusion

### Chapter Three

#### PAUL MULDOON: DIS-INTEGRATIONS

'The notion of staying or going is one that occupies anybody who lives in Northern Ireland. We're a nation of voyagers.'<sup>1</sup> This particular comment, from a 1987 interview he gave to the Irish Literary Supplement, expresses a central theme in Paul Muldoon's work. His poetry is giddy with sudden comings and goings, with journeyings, with wanderers, 'renegades', exiles, expatriates: characters such as Brownlee who up and off, 'follow their own bent', 'youths', as the folk song has it, 'that are inclined to ramble'. His own rambling, westering imagination has married the notion of Celtic diaspora to the Western film genre (exemplified in the Welsh Indians sought after in Madoc); to a hardboiled, wisecracking Chandleresque film-noir milieu (in 'Immram', which itself means 'journey'); to the Amerindian myths and legends, notably the Trickster myth which informs the narrative method used in his difficult long poem 'The More A Man Has The More A Man Wants'. One could say that, in this respect, Muldoon has remained faithful to the trope of migration that forms a distinct part of the Irish consciousness.

And yet it is clear in Muldoon's work that the untram-mellings of the migrant imagination are often ranged against a more fragmented, dislocated 'reality'. In the Why Brownlee Left poem 'The Weepies', a crowd of children gather in a cinema on

a Saturday afternoon to indulge in the 'recurring dream / Of a lonesome drifter / Through uninterrupted range'. But this collective reverie of youths who hanker to ramble - and the fact that it's a 'dream' links it directly to unrestricted, 'singleminded' imaginative rambling - is broken by the 'weepee' which invades their imaginative space on one particular Saturday. In this particular scenario, 'The crippled girl / Who wanted to be a dancer / Met the married man/ Who was dying of cancer'; and under the pressure of these intimations of mortality, doomed relationships, broken dreams, and thwarted desires, even the orange-peel stripped off in a 'single, fluent gesture' by the children's gang-leader falls apart.

A somewhat similar 'dis-integration' happens in the Meeting the British poem, 'Sushi', in which the imaginative musings and ramblings of the speaker as he watches a sushi-bar 'apprentice/ ...scrimshander... a rose's / exquisite petals / ...[from] the tail-end of a carrot' - itself a 'work of art' comparable, perhaps, with the gang-leader's stripped-off orange-peel in 'The Weepies' - gradually block out the argument that his partner is trying to have with him. Her final, parenthesized complaint - ('I might just as well be eating alone') - gives way to the 'singleminded swervings' (to quote the poem 'I Remember Sir Alfred') of the speaker over a series of seemingly-unconnected phrases ('the smack of oregano, / orgone, / the inner organs / of beasts and fowls'). As Mick Imlah points out, what these particular phrases have in common is the riff 'r.g.n', and, as he says, 'it does make sense if the origin of this rhyme sequence ... is the word "origin"<sup>22</sup> - that unattainable place where, as Frank Lloyd Wright believes of his 'Midway Gardens' complex in 'Shining Brow', everything is 'somehow integral'. What Muldoon calls the 'supremacy and separateness of art'<sup>23</sup> is interminably at odds



with historical and social circumstance.

In this chapter, I want to examine this theme of 'dis-integration' in Paul Muldoon's work, with the emphasis on both of the prefixes implicated in the term. In the first section, I would like to focus on the particular figures Muldoon uses in order to body out this idea: the figures of the migrant and the 'mule'. Both of these put any notion of an 'origin' themselves in doubt, as they embody a simultaneous sense of rootedness and 'unrootedness'; and the apotheosis of this is the character Gallogly in 'The More A Man Has The More A Man Wants', whose strange migrations across Northern Ireland's blighted rural landscape are caught in an web of references, allusions and intertexts that further express this 'dis-integrated' ideal in Muldoon's poetry. As Clair Wills portrays him, Muldoon is a 'craftsman who borrows re-uses and parodies elements of literary and historical tradition'; and in the second section, I intend to concentrate on the long poems '7, Middagh Street' and 'Madoc: A Mystery', which weave intertext after intertext into their own texts to express this constant tussle between the imagination and the pressures of history.

In 1971, Muldoon brought out his first pamphlet of poems, called Knowing My Place. Implicit in this title is the influence of a poetic genre, the 'Dinnseanchas', which, as Muldoon has observed, expresses the 'insatiable and deep-rooted interest in the lore of place names', and which was, as Clair Wills elucidates, 'a celebration of rootedness, of knowing one's place through the etymological understanding of the roots of the place-name, and the history that goes with it...'<sup>6</sup> The 'dinnseanchas', therefore, puts forward and venerates our own origins through language and historical fact, through the name given by man to a rigidly-defined space. It is the origin as defining presence. As Geoffrey Kirk writes in his book Myth: Its Meaning and Functions, 'Things are accepted because their genealogy can be stated... Those kinds of aetiology are ... a charter for the rightful existence of an object or person...'<sup>7</sup> With the publication of Why Brownlee Left in 1980, however, it became clear that Muldoon was using the figure of the migrant to put the ideas of rootedness, origin and destination to the test. The implications of depicting and celebrating the transcendence of boundaries and borders in earlier work, especially in his image of the 'mule' are clear: Muldoon's migrant sensibility, as I hope to demonstrate, reveals a fundamental precariousness in man's concepts of 'place' and its corollaries, 'home' and 'belonging'.

Muldoon's comments on the origins of Why Brownlee Left are telling. The

central themes of the collection stem from the image of Muldoon's father agreeing to leave for Australia with a friend on a certain day; but the friend did not show up, and his father went back to his old life. It was an image, Muldoon says, that

troubled me for ages, since it underlines the arbitrary nature of so many decisions we take... Suddenly my poems were filled with renegades, some of them bent on their idea of the future, some on their idea of the past. All bent, though.

The 'arbitrary nature of ... the decisions we take' is highlighted in the title of the first poem of the book, 'Whim', in which a chance sexual encounter results in a more literal union than anticipated: 'Once he got stuck into her he got stuck / Full stop'. It is also worried over in the sonnet 'October 1950', which date approximates the date of Muldoon's own conception, and which makes him run through the possible circumstances ('Whatever it is... Whatever it is... Whatever it is'), which may have led to that conception: 'Cookers and eaters, Fuck the Pope, / Wow and flutter, a one-legged howl, / My sly quadron, the way home from the pub - / Anything wild or wonderful'. The poem keeps undercutting our certainties about origins (the 'it'), and how we came to be; even the bare biological facts of intercourse and fertilization ('My father's cock / Between my mother's thighs') are undermined by the niggling uncertainties of time ('Might he have forgotten to wind the clock?' - a sly Tristram Shandy allusion to the arbitrariness of Tristram's conception) and place - 'A chance

remark / In a room at the top of the stairs / To an open field... / Under the little stars'. Thus the arbitrariness of the occasions on which we are conceived is set against the essential importance of our individual conceptions, and this dichotomy uncovers a fundamental lack of control which manifests itself in our lives. Like the 'mule' in the earlier poem (but with far less premeditation), we cannot control how we are brought into being. The last line of the poem - 'Whatever it is, it leaves me in the dark' - may be interpreted as the foetus Muldoon implanted in the 'dark' of the womb by that seemingly arbitrary, indefinable 'it' that occasions his parents' intercourse; and as the accompanying, persistent feeling of having no control over one's life (note the present tense - 'whatever it is'), of being constantly 'in the dark' about the essential things in our lives.

As such, a disturbing 'absent presence' is shown to be at the centre of our lives, and it is this central lack of definition, the lack of a definable origin (and, consequently, the lack of an origin as a defining presence) which Muldoon attempts to capture in his poetry. The title poem of Why Brownlee Left, and one of Muldoon's best-known, manages to do so successfully:

Why Brownlee left, and where he went  
Is a mystery even now.  
For if a man should have been content,  
It was him; two acres of barley,  
One of potatoes, four bullocks,  
A milker, a slated farmhouse.

He was last seen going out to plough  
On a March morning, bright and early.

By noon, Brownlee was famous;  
They had found all abandoned, with  
The last rig unbroken, his pair of black  
Horses, like man and wife,  
Shifting their weight from foot to  
Foot, and gazing into the future.

The 'why' in the poem's title demands, in the same way that the reader expects, explanations, facts, answers, clarity - in other words, definition, form. But Muldoon immediately, and perversely, resists these demands: 'Why Brownlee left, and where he went, / Is a mystery even now'. The indefinability of 'whatever it is' that causes Brownlee to leave is set against the way that Brownlee himself is defined by the community in terms of the boundaries of his farm, and the belongings (loaded term) within those boundaries; we note how the line 'It was him' is followed by a catalogue of his lands and goods, as if this on its own should form the man. (I shall be considering the 'unforming' propensity of such lists later in the chapter.) The place is thus shown to confer identity upon Brownlee - in the eyes of the community - which is why we get the strange sense of a blur where he used to be. Now that he has abandoned the place, he appears to have relinquished his identity there (we get no indication of who the man was, of any character or personality), yet the 'mystery' still resonates within the sharply-defined boundaries of the local community, 'even now'.

He is absent yet, at the same time, present. The sestet further deepens the undefined, unresolved quality of the poem; not only do we find that Brownlee has left 'all abandoned, with / the last rig unbroken', but also the rhythm of the piece which had, up until then, been ruminatively measured, steady and well-defined (most of the lines end-stopped, the line-breaks in the right place) becomes off-balanced, out-of-step, as Muldoon breaks the line abruptly in the middle of phrases - 'His pair of black / Horses', 'Shifting their weight from foot to / Foot'. It is as though Brownlee's absent presence were allowing a disquiet to gather beneath and deform the defined voice of the community.

There is reason for this unease. Just as Brownlee is defined by the boundaries of his farmland, and his belongings within them, so his farmland is defined by Brownlee's presence. When he leaves 'all abandoned', it's as though he were relinquishing control of the land itself to the waiting forces of Nature. A place confers identity upon us only by virtue of the fact that we impose our identity upon it; we carve settlements from the wilderness (Muldoon's emphasis on the colonising of the Wild West is an elaboration of this), cultivate farms and gardens, put boundaries on land and create borders between people. But the absent presence of Brownlee serves to undermine, to dis-integrate the faith that is put in these boundaries and defined places.

That said, if we return for a moment to Muldoon's comment in the introduction, we find that the phrase 'a nation of voyagers' articulates a curious fusion of 'inplaceness' and 'displacement': for how can one have a stable, defined 'nation' of people who are continually heading off elsewhere? Muldoon has imaged this particular

paradox remarkably in the figure of the 'mule', which he first brought to notice in the book of the same name (1977). Fabulous half-human, half-animal creatures, they become embodiments of what Michael D. Higgins describes as characteristic of the migrant: 'Carriers of fear, wonderment and hope'<sup>8</sup>. Certainly the contents page of Mules seethes with the 'wild and wonderful': 'Centaur's', 'The Bearded Woman', a 'Mermaid'- it reads like the roll-call of a freak show. The delicate, lithe little poem 'Blemish' demonstrates as well as any what sets these creatures apart:

Were it indeed an accident of birth  
That she looks on the gentle earth  
And the seemingly gentle sky  
Through one brown, and one blue eye.

The girl is the offspring of seemingly-irreconcilable opposites, a mating of the 'earth' and 'sky'. (Like the mule, of which it is said: 'We might yet claim that it sprang from earth / Were it not for the afterbirth / Trailed like some fine, silk parachute / That we would know from what heights it fell'.) This combination of earth and sky illuminates Muldoon's blending of ideas of 'inplaceness' and 'displacement', of rootedness and unrootedness, which results in the girl, like the mule, being suspended between the two - 'neither one thing nor the other', and apart from both. She merely 'looks on' the earth and sky, as though an impartial observer attached to neither. The notion is reinforced by the subtle use of the word 'gentle', which both intimates the integration of an earthly 'gentleness', and a wilder, more unpredictable, sky-given quality (implicit in that obvious adverb 'seemingly', meaning as changeable,

perhaps, as the weather); at the same time it also returns us to simultaneous rooted and unrooted idea if we remember that the derivation of 'gentle' is the Latin for 'of the same clan'.

What also strikes us in 'Blemish' is the typically cunning use of the subjunctive in the first line, which seems merely thrown away, but which must ultimately lead us to wonder whether or not the particular, distancing quality possessed by the girl has not perhaps been premeditated, manufactured, instead of seeming an 'accident of birth'. After all, in 'Mules', the poet's father and neighbour 'loose' one's horse and the other's ass into the same field in order to create 'their gaunt, sexless foal' of a mule, described in that poem as though it were a Frankenstein-monster of terror: 'It was though [my father and his neighbour] had shuddered / To think of their [mule] / Dropped tonight in the cowshed'. (The migrant as a figure of fear.) We find this attitude towards these mulish creatures expressed in the title of the quoted poem, 'Blemish', defined in the dictionary as a 'noticeable imperfection'. It is this 'imperfection' which sets these figures apart from the rest of us. They represent a 'dis-integration': by their very bringing-together of opposites, they disturb, they seem 'deformed', they 'deform' - like Brownlee - certainties, rigidly-defined notions and topologies. If they are a part of us, they are also apart from us, suspended in an area which is 'neither one [place] nor the other'.

This point is supported by the fact that the mule is 'dropped in a cowshed', not a stable, and is therefore, if not placeless from birth (it is born on a farm, at least), then certainly displaced. One might say that, to these creatures, a sense of being caught



in between inplaceness and displacement is a 'natural', a 'given'. And there's another, just as important, sense in which 'Blemish' - in particular - is in-placed and displaced. Seamus Heaney, in his lecture 'Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland', squinnies into this poem and is disturbed to find 'a character in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude with just the blemish that Muldoon describes here'; therefore, he asks, 'is this a literary allusion or an archetypal image?'"<sup>9</sup> Discovery of the unspoken intertext unroots the poem in such a way that it floats - rather like the girl herself - between Marquez's original and Muldoon's 'remake' of the image.

An elaboration of this is provided by 'The Mixed Marriage', in which Muldoon uses as his formative structure the juxtaposition of the rooted, earthy world of his 'servant-boy' father who 'took up billhook and loy / To win the ground he would never own'; and the sky-bound world of his 'school-mistress' mother, who was of the 'world of Castor and Pollux' (the mythical Dioscuri who were transformed by Zeus into the Gemini constellation). The Acts of the Apostles are ranged against 'the factions of the faction-fights', Aesop's Fables against 'hunting with ferrets', when, tellingly, Muldoon's persona makes an entrance for the only time in the poem:

She had read one volume of Proust,

He knew the cure for farcy.

I flitted between a hole in the hedge

And a room in the Latin Quarter.

The poet, the offspring of what Heaney has termed 'the local subculture' and the

'mothering literate culture' is again rooted and unrooted, oscillating between the down-to-earth country values and inplaceness of his father, and the imaginative, allusive, displaced world of his mother. The choice of the word 'flit' to describe the poet's movements between these formative worlds is particularly apt: its connotations of a bird-like passage made 'lightly and quickly from condition to another' (as the Penguin dictionary defines it) captures the restless, rather arbitrary motion expressed by Muldoon's migrant sensibility, and stemming from the poet's own displacement from birth, having been born into an environment fashioned from separate, opposing impulses. ('Flit', I might add, is also used to describe Muldoon's succession of house-moves in the course of the later poem 'The Soap-Pig', from Meeting the British.)

The imaging of the poet with bird-like characteristics leads us to consider the pedigree of Muldoon's mules. In this respect, one cannot overlook the influence of the mythical figure of Sweeney: his transformation into a half-man, half-bird by an aggrieved cleric, his 'strange migrations' across Ireland and Scotland, declaiming as he does so, poems to the landscapes he has visited, hated and loved - these have certain parallels with Muldoon's own placed and displaced creatures. Seamus Deane describes Sweeney as 'everything that is not time-bound, place-bound, guilt-trapped'<sup>10</sup>; on the other hand, Seamus Heaney sees him more as

a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty,  
assuaging himself by his utterance... It is  
possible to read [Buile Suibhne] as an aspect  
of the quarrel between free creative imagination

and the constraints of religious, political and domestic obligation.<sup>11</sup>

It is perhaps instructive to note that where Heaney discerns a 'quarrel' between these continually tussling opposite forces, Muldoon recasts it in his mulish figures as marriage, fusion, a coming-together and blending. It inclines more towards Deane's description of the character that transcends all boundaries, that, as Higgins declares of the migrant, 'break[s] the inherited links to space, time and cultural certainties'<sup>12</sup>. (Muldoon has himself said of the writer's job: 'It's to be a free agent, within the state of oneself, or roaming through the different states of oneself'<sup>13</sup>.)

Muldoon explicitly links the character of Sweeney to his own apotheosis of the mule - Gallogly in Quoof's tour de force, 'The More A Man Has The More A Man Wants'. Gallogly is guilty of something: of being the 'go-between' for arms deals, or of the accidental, perhaps imagined death of a girl called Alice during his trip to America. The fragmented narrative of Gallogly's restless flittings from Belfast to the 'stretch of Armagh/Tyrone / border... / planted by Warwickshiremen', on the run from several agencies after his blood, do recall, as John Kerrigan points out, the 'windings of the Buile Suibhne'<sup>14</sup> as much as they resemble the poem's other main foundation, the violent, malicious, cartoon-like stories of Native American Winnebago Trickster cycle. In Buile Suibhne, a man is turned into an animal; in the Trickster cycle, the hero (strictly anti-hero) Coyote is an animal with human, and magical, characteristics. Gallogly is described throughout the phantasmagoria of 'The More A Man Has...' in terms of his half-man, half-animal dual nature; he is first seen 'squat[ting] in his own

pelt', and later, revealingly, as a 'baggy-kneed animated / bear', emphasizing the cartoon element of the poem. He can nevertheless 'shape' in and out of people's houses and, towards the end, after being caught by an army patrol for 'nosing around' a bomb crater and imprisoned, he miraculously escapes from the H-block with mole-like ease 'delv[ing] / through sand and gravel/ shrugging it off / his velveteen shoulders and arms'.

Gallogly is both placed and displaced in the poem: he is 'dis-integrated', and spectacularly so at the end when he kicks a bucket full of explosive as an act of 'contrition' for his unspecified crime. At home, it seems, anywhere, he can name 'the forgotten names / of apples / ...off pat', 'his eye like the eye of a travelling rat' can eke out the places where terrorists hide their rifles and bomb-making equipment, he can 'shape[...] past the milking parlour / as if he owned the place', like some genius loci. But he is also, as Muldoon indicates, 'A hole in the heart, an ovarian / cyst. / Coming up the Bann / in a bubble' - part of the whole, but still - and detrimentally so (he is a terrorist, after all) - apart from it. This simultaneous 'inplaceness' and 'displacement' registers in the series of names Gallogly surrenders to the paratroopers who arrest him:

Gallogly, or Gollogly,  
otherwise known as Golightly,  
otherwise known as Ingoldshy,  
otherwise known as English.

Gallogly already sounds like a drunken slur through 'gallowglass' (the mercenary -

usually Scottish - soldiers recruited by the Irish to fight against the English), and 'Gaelic', and it chimes with the 'Oglala' Sioux on his trail; now this further slippage of identity both points to Gallogly's ability to transcend boundaries (mules as 'carriers of hope'), and his own 'dis-integrated' nature, neither wholly man nor wholly animal, neither wholly Irish nor English, somewhere in between but apart from both and causing his own disturbances and deformations as he seeks his destiny by kicking the bucket.

At one point Muldoon directly alludes to an image from Buile Suibhne when the ne'er-do-well imagines:

... A milkmaid sink[ing]  
her bare foot  
to the ankle  
in a simmering dunghill  
and fill[ing] the slot  
with beastlings for him to drink.

In his review of Seamus Heaney's Station Island and Sweeney Astray, Muldoon describes the image of the 'cowdung brimming with milk' as 'luminous'<sup>13</sup>; and he could obviously not restrain himself from including its moment of transcendence in the midst of the poem's nightmarish swirl of Irish legend, Native American myth, Ovidian metamorphoses, the violent landscape of the Ulster 'troubles' and a veritable stramash of literary, artistic and historical allusion. The poem certainly breaks 'inherited ... links

to space and time and cultural certainties'. The 'stretch of Armagh/Tyrone / border' on which most of the story fits-and-starts stretches both ways, spatially and temporally. A place 'planted by Warwickshiremen' also encompasses the 'Las Vegas Lounge and Cabaret' and 'hacienda-style / farmhouse[s]'; the petrol station where Gallogly meets his fate - 'hotfoot from a woodcut / by Derricke' - is a 'picture... / of a gas station in the mid-West / ...by Edward Hopper'; the 'Indian', Mangas Jones, who looks forward to Muldoon's mythical Welsh Indians in Madoc, arrives ostensibly to 'trace the family tree / of an Ulsterman' implicated in the massacre of Wounded Knee. Robert Louis Stevenson (Kidnapped, Treasure Island) tumbles against Robert Frost (Edna Longley has followed the strand of Robert Frost intertexts that weave through the poem, from the nod to 'North of Boston' to the ending which thieves, apparently, from 'The Mountain' and 'Directive'); Alice in Wonderland metamorphoses into Aldous Huxley's The Doors of Perception between Heaven and Hell; Knut Hamsun (perhaps a reference to Derek Mahon's poem 'Knut Hamsun in Old Age' which, following an intertextual web, itself implicitly takes Tom Paulin to task) and Picasso rub shoulders with Jackson Pollock and Gertrude Stein. This cornucopia of melting allusions and intertexts is made to integrate in a narrative that seems constantly on the verge of disintegrating, which in turn serves to unroot the locales in which the story happens.

The slippage of 'Gallogly' through to 'English' identifies another area of disintegration in the poem. 'The More A Man Has...' is the space for a virtuoso display of Muldoon's patented sly-rhymes, in which words, as John Kerrigan has pointed out, 'glissade'<sup>16</sup>. Where the rhyme scheme normally locks a poem into some integrated form, in Muldoon's hands, the way words slip through each other unroots any such

notion of form. Throughout the poem, there is a constant play on 'Hash, hashish, lo perfido assassin... hacienda... hush-hush' winding all the way down to the last, dismissive 'huh' of the unnamed rustic chorus ('Hertz' and 'Hamsun' might also be caught up in this fragmented trail). In the fourth stanza of the poem, we find these lines:

While the bar man unpacks a crate  
of Coca-Cola,  
one cool customer  
takes on all comers in a video game.  
He grasps what his two acolytes  
have failed to seize.

Again 'Coca-Cola' slips into 'cool customer', 'all comers' and 'acolytes', but is it enough to say that all Muldoon is doing here is to indulge his astonishing ear for assonance? The 'video game' that the man is playing is set in Vietnam - 'he drops his payload of napalm' at the end of the stanza (and there may well be a dark allusion here to material also used by the IRA in bombings) - and this, linked with the flip phrase 'cool customer', lead us back to the trademark 'Coca-Cola', and that bastion of cultural imperialism. The rhymes here touch and taint everything with complicity in violence.

In this respect, there is another, more pointed, intertext that ravel into the poem. The stanza which ends with the rewriting of Buile Suibhne (already a signpost)

also contains the jokey allusion to Seamus Heaney's 'Broagh': 'Gallogly lies down in the sheugh.../ "Sheugh", he says, "sheugh". / He is finding that first 'sh' / increasingly difficult to manage. / "Sh"-leaps.' If Muldoon jibes at Heaney's 'Wintering Out' place-name poems here, he is also implicitly critical of Heaney's methods in 'North'. Where Heaney digs into the earth and finds in the preserved bodies of sacrificial victims stratum after stratum of mythic allusion to the Northern Ireland 'situation', Muldoon lifts 'scraws of turf', and finds a more explicit sign: 'A tarpaulin. A waterlogged pit. / ...[A] Kalashnikov... / seven sticks of unstable / commercial gelignite / that have already begun to weep'. And where Heaney constantly translates the parts of these bodies into 'things' - as in 'Bone Dreams', in which he describes an unearthed body thus: 'her knuckles' paving, // the turning-stiles / of the elbows, / the vallum of the brow / and the long wicket of collar-bone' - Muldoon translates that into somewhat more contentious, immediate terms. A U.D.R. corporal, for example,

hit by a single high-velocity  
shot...  
...slumps  
in the spume of his own arterial blood  
like an overturned paraffin lamp

Atomised by a car-bomb, a councillor's 'calf / ...stems / from his left shoe like a severely / pruned-back shrub'. Such bone-cold flippancy in the face of carnage has even caused Muldoon's strenuous admirers to demur at this aspect of his work. William Scammell, in an otherwise glowing review of Quoof, comments that the poet 'is...likely



to be accused of formalism, an unfeeling playing-around with the tragedies of Ulster'. But Muldoon's own grappling here with Heaney's method in North metamorphoses the just-murdered and disintegrated, not the long-dead and preserved, into banal, everyday objects ('a paraffin-lamp', 'a pruned-back shrub'), not into 'vallum' or 'Hadrian's Wall'. This is partly his intention to indicate how the violence in Northern Ireland has become banalized, domestic, suburban (the 'shrub' of a suburban garden), has been absorbed into the fabric of society, and as such, we have become desensitized to its effects.

Muldoon's intertextual dialogues (and not just with his contemporaries) take on a more complex form in his subsequent collections; and in the next section of this chapter, I want to focus on two of his centrepieces: '7, Middagh Street' and 'Madoc: A Mystery', again with a view to adumbrating the increasing importance of the theme of 'dis-integration' to that work.

## II

As we saw with 'Sushi' in the introduction, the central concern of Muldoon's Meeting the British is something of an oscillation between Forster's dictum '...only connect...' and Eliot's 'On Margate Sands / I can connect nothing with nothing'. In 'Paul Klee: They're Biting', the speaker studies a painting by Klee of fishermen trying to catch 'caricature fish' while around him a plane 'skywrit[es] / I LOVE YOU over

Hyde Park' and a fish 'mouths NO' at him from a fishmonger's 'otherwise-drab window'; before he sees 'the exclamation-mark / at the painting's heart', he asserts that 'At any moment all this should connect'. (That 'exclamation mark' might well constantly shade into a question-mark at the heart of Muldoon's poetry.) It is the constant sense of 'dis-integration' - of trying to connect, or connect with, things that forever seem on the verge of coming apart into disparate, random elements - that powers Muldoon's own poetic vision.

Meeting the British's most complex expression of this 'dis-integration' is also a step towards the intertextual difficulties of 'Madoc' and, perhaps to a lesser extent, 'Yarrow'. '7, Middagh Street' focusses, with meticulous accuracy, on the artistic coterie which mostly resided in the brownstone building of the title, and which assembled there for a meal on Thanksgiving Day, 1940. Members of this coterie included Auden, MacNeice, Carson McCullers, Gypsy Rose Lee (engaged at the time with writing her mystery novel, The G-String Murders), and Benjamin Britten - whom 'Carson' in the poem calls 'strait-laced' due to the fact that neither he nor Peter Pears could quite adjust themselves to the house's Bohemian lifestyle - and Muldoon structures his poem as a series of interconnected monologues by these characters. As Muldoon himself has said, the poem is grounded in 'a crucial time and a crucial place'<sup>17</sup>; and this set of exiles, transients (7, Middagh Street had something of a floating population) and social outsiders, all artists of a kind, take as the core of their monologues the debate about the response of artists to their times, particularly times of social upheaval. (The notion of a coterie of artists grouped so closely together, caught between states, and debating such issues brings to mind, perhaps, the same sort of

artistic menage in Belfast during the Troubles.)

The Spanish Civil War forms the focal point in this respect, as the Second World War barely impinges on American consciousness; indeed one of the few references to the war is a German propaganda film Sieg im Poland, being shown to the German contingent. On the one hand, 'Wystan' maintains the line that 'history's a twisted root / with art its small, translucent root // and never the other way round'; at the other end of the spectrum, there is 'Louis', who asserts that

poetry can make things happen -  
not only can, but must -

and the very painting of [an] oyster  
is in itself a political gesture.

Between these poles Muldoon contemplates most shades of artistic opinion: the 'Gypsy' and 'Carson' monologues, far from merely providing, as a reviewer rather unkindly put it, 'local colour', deal with fraught notions of being the observer and being the observed. McCullers 'readily dismisses' the goings-on in the brownstone through the grotesque distortions of her snowy glass globe (referring somewhat bitchily to 'Chester's Kwakiutl / false-face and glib, / Jane and Paul Bowles, the chimpanzee // and its trainer'), but is rocked into lyricism at the end of her monologue - 'flute-music, / panting of hinds, her spindrift / gaze' - by the sudden pressures of physical attraction. In many ways, she seems to represent a distaff version of 'Wystan'.

(Muldoon's poem itself seems deeply indebted to Virginia Spencer Carr's biography of McCullers, The Lonely Hunter, a whole chapter of which is devoted to the menage at Middagh Street.) 'Gypsy', on the other hand, the focus of others' desire, finds herself having to grow 'accustomed / to returning the stare / of a life-size cut-out of Gypsy Rose Lee', and retains the Vaudeville 'papier-mache cow's head' mask in case she needs to duck back into anonymity.

And yet, Muldoon contrives each tail-off and take-up in such a way that the 'quinquereme of Nineveh' with which 'Louis' ends in Belfast, metamorphoses back into the ship which brings 'Wystan' to New York. As Edna Longley says, 'The poem has its tail in its mouth'<sup>18</sup>; but its structure, ending with a return to Britain, which feeds back again into the initial arrival in America from Britain, seems more akin to a Moebius strip. This paradoxical form is decidedly appropriate to a poem which negotiates each of its opposed arguments into one design: itself a kind of overall 'dis-integration'.

Again, the issue at stake is just as much to do with rootedness and unrootedness, the 'lonesome drifter' of the imagination ranging itself against the historical moment. Both 'Wystan' and 'Louis' have been advanced as voicing Muldoon's own thoughts on the subject, but since each of the characters sounds like Muldoon, anyway, it might be more accurate to say that he is merely working through the various positions, 'roam[ing] through the different states of [him]self'. Not that each of these is held unproblematically. Much of the central thinking of Auden's monologue, for example, seems to derive from a passage in Humphrey Carpenter's biography of Auden which

cites a letter that Auden wrote to E.R. Dodds. In this letter, Auden claims that 'For the past ten years we have all been talking about the isolation of the artist from the community [and] the importance of roots. I am now quite certain that 90% of what we said was bosh... The ice-cream soda jerker is every bit as isolated as the highbrow artist'<sup>19</sup>. This sense of complete individual isolation was, as Carpenter informs us, influenced by Auden's readings of Kierkegaard, who 'claimed to regard Man as standing alone with his sins before God'<sup>20</sup>. The last words of 'Wystan', however, express a truly 'in extremis' imaginative situation:

For I have leapt with Kierkegaard  
out of the realm of Brunel and Arkwright

with its canals, mills and railway-bridges  
into this great void  
where Chester and I exchanged love-pledges  
and vowed

our marriage-vows. As he lay asleep  
last night the bronze of his exposed left leg  
made me want nothing so much as to weep.  
I thought of the terrier, of plague,

of Aschenbach at the Lido.

Here was my historical

Mr. W.H., my 'onlie begetter' and fair lady...

In the jibe at the 'realm of Brunel and Arkwright', Muldoon picks up on Auden's censure of the 'Machine Age'<sup>21</sup> for the destruction of communities and the consequent unrooting of individuals (also pointed out in his letter to Dodds); and the reference to the 'great void' is taken from a letter to Naomi Mitchison: 'I like it [in America] because it is the great void where you have to balance without handholds'<sup>22</sup>. But despite his Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith', Wystan's final images of unrootedness are informed by a striking ambivalence. The sight of 'Chester's' 'exposed left leg' fosters images of disease - mention of the 'terrier' sends us back to the 'abscessed paw' of the pup in the second section - and death. The allusion to Death in Venice, while linking across the 'great void' with, through her father, Erika Mann, and with Benjamin Britten (again this manic process of connecting), not only points up these sudden terrified flashes of mortality (Auden also thought America 'terrifying'), but also fuses them with the passionate yearning of love. Duplicity and deceit are also bound up in Chester's leg, inasmuch as it echoes the image of the exposed feet of the murdered Japanese spy in the second section: Kallmann's promiscuity was rampant, as his own - sonnet-length - monologue intimates. In fact, this coda seems not only a more complex reiteration of the 'weepie' - note how Auden 'weeps' himself - which causes the children's ideal of a lonesome drifter's 'uninterrupted range' to disintegrate, it is also underwritten by the famous line in Auden's 'September 1st, 1939' which caused the poet endless grief: 'We must love one another and/or die'. In Muldoon's reading of the line in this passage, the distinctions, then connections, Auden tried, and failed, to make between love and death are collapsed. (He admitted, 'We'll die anyway'.) The

creative impulse in man (and, in the reference to 'onlie begetter', a kind of procreative impulse - this is further explicated in 'Yarrow') is always twinned in Muldoon with its destructive, and self-destructive, aspects.

Such a 'semantic quibble' as the one which forced Auden to drop 'September 1st, 1939' from subsequent collections is meat and drink, as ever, to Muldoon, and '7, Middagh Street' frequently plays on slips, lacunae, misreadings. Some turn on names (this poem has a thing for pet-names): 'Carson' calls 'Wystan', 'Wynstan', inadvertently and mischievously politicizing the newly-apolitical Auden; in the same way, she renames Britten as 'Benjamin Britain'; a British minister mistakes Auden for the tennis player 'Bunny' Austin (and perhaps another slyly-hidden connection is hinted at here - Auden's own appearance was often described as rabbit-like); MacNeice's name, at the end of Louis's monologue, is mistaken by a Harland and Wolff foreman for a 'Fenian name'. 'Louis' also, and surprisingly, elides two lines from Yeats's 'In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz' in his own opening line 'Both beautiful, one a gazebo' - a dis-integration in itself, as it takes up 'Carson's' quoting of the same.

But perhaps the most striking lacuna in the poem is the appearance of Salvador Dali among the cast of characters. Though he did live at '7, Middagh Street' for a while, he had moved on by the time of the famous Thanksgiving meal. Muldoon is aware of this: in his interview for the Irish Literary Supplement, he makes it clear that all the named 'except Dali' were present at the meal. And the poem knows this as well. 'Louis' wishes at one point that 'O'Daly [his pet-name, it seems, for the artist] were

here / today to make his meaning absolutely clear' about the content of Two Pieces of Bread Expressing the Idea of Love. So why the absent presence of Dali in this poem? On the one hand, Dali's assertions in his monologue of the 'integrity of our dream-visions' over 'moral and aesthetic considerations' recall Muldoon's own rather combative statements in the Irish Literary Supplement interview about the 'separateness and supremacy of art', and his belief that, as a poet, he hasn't 'a responsibility to anything at all'<sup>23</sup>. (A more explicit insinuation of Muldoon into this particular monologue can be discerned in the lines 'Which side was I on? / Not one, or both, or none', which recalls Golightly's dilemma in the Why Brownlee Left poem 'The Boundary Commission' : 'He stood there, for ages, / To wonder which side, if any, he should be on'.) Muldoon's dressing up in masks in this poem shows a kindred spirit with Dali, who, in his Secret Life of Salvador Dali (from which, incidentally, Muldoon seems to have taken much of his material), calls disguise 'the key to one of the most mysterious, magical secrets of nature'<sup>24</sup>; and there's something of the same conjuror's disappearing act about the way Salvador escapes out 'the back door' of Barcelona before the Spanish Civil War as in Muldoon's own disappearing acts - not just in his migrant figures, but also, for example, in his absent presence throughout his contentious anthology, The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Verse.

Though MacNeice too slips out a 'back door' at the end of his monologue, it's not into the lonesome and 'uninterrupted range' of art and the imagination, it's in fact out of that particular realm (characterised by a bar called 'Muldoon's') and into a crowd of Belfast shipyardmen and the old entrenched bigotries (Prod and Fenian). Dali, on the other hand, slips the other way, from the same kind of territorial and political



bigotries ('the Anarchist taxi-driver carry[ing] two flags / Spanish and Catalan') to the 'one-man-show' of his imagination. (It might be said in passing that Muldoon slips himself on the date of Dali's first one-man-show in New York - it was in November 1933, not October 1934.)

That said, Dali is just as, if not more, differentiated from Auden in the poem. Auden's notion of art as the 'small translucent fruit' of 'history's twisted root' is set against Dali's vision of the 'perennial' acanthus, which, according to his Secret Life (and reiterated via Muldoon in his monologue), he imagines as 'reborn, green, tender and shining, among the cracks of a flamboyant ruin': 'it is as though all the catastrophes of history', Dali continues, '... were destined ... to come at all times to nourish the perenniality of the acanthus'<sup>25</sup>. Where Wystan's espoused isolationism will isolate everyone in a great rootless void with nothing but the unstable flickerings of 'love' to keep us connected, Salvador images something approaching Muldoon's own 'dis-integrated' ideas:

Among the broken statues of Valladolid

there's one whose foot's still welded

to the granite plinth

from which, like us, it draws its strength.

The half-obliterated, half-rooted statue is fashioned into a further riff on Muldoon's keen sense of a simultaneous inplaceness and displacement, of being both rooted and

unrooted, of being - as with his girl with the 'Blemish' - earthed and yet un-earthed.

There is, of course, another intertext lurking here. Where Seamus Heaney's collection Station Island, with its 'flittings', its pattern of comings and goings, might be subtitled 'Why Heaney Left', Muldoon's '7, Middagh Street' is obviously his take on the centrepiece of 'Station Island' itself. Like Heaney doing the rounds of his own Purgatory, wrestling with the rupture between a sense of artistic freedom and social obligation, with his accusing and cajoling shades, Muldoon's poem similarly 'does the rounds'. Unlike Heaney, however, who puts his (rather passive) persona at the centre of his poem, Muldoon prefers a thinly-veneered 'non-presence' in his.

Heaney has also been bound up with 'Madoc: A Mystery'. Edna Longley, for one, views 'Madoc' as something of an 'in-joke, with Southey and Coleridge representing Heaney and Muldoon in America'<sup>26</sup>. 'Dis-integration' is also the structural and thematic principle behind this seminal, perplexing anti-epic, which the author himself has described somewhat (dis)ingenuously as a 'ripping yarn with a strong humorous element'<sup>27</sup>. If anything, what's ripped is either the reader's patience or certainty with the text in hand. 'Madoc' is partly a critical rewriting of Southey's own epic poem of the same name, which concerns the forced departure of a Welsh prince and his retinue for America, and, as Southey tells us in his 'Preface' to the poem (and which Muldoon quotes in the body of his text): 'Strong evidence has been adduced that Madoc reached America, and that his posterity exist there to this day ... retaining their complexion, their language and... their arts'. In his own deformation of that text, Muldoon pushes Southey himself, Coleridge and their Utopian Pantisocrat ideals (like

Madoc in Southey's original, 'in search of a better resting-place') into the burgeoning United States to found a settlement on the Susquehanna. But everything goes disastrously wrong. Coleridge's wife disappears; the first settlement is destroyed and most of the Pantisocrats murdered; Coleridge loses himself and his quest to find his wife in a drug-addled haze among the Native Americans where she may be; in his second settlement - 'Southeyopolis' - Southey becomes a tyrant and is finally hacked to bits by the Indians he had subjugated.

This, however, is not the full picture (if there is one with this particular poem). In the 'Preface' to his own 'Madoc', Southey has appended a number of 'triads' which advance Southey's definition of (capital P) 'Poetry': the 'three things that must be avoided in Poetry [are] the frivolous, the obscure and the superfluous'; the 'three excellencies of Poetry [are] simplicity of language, simplicity of subject and simplicity of invention'; and the 'three indispensable purities of Poetry [are] pure truth, pure language and pure manners'<sup>24</sup>. Muldoon's poem reacts with serious mischievousness against all these lofty tenets, particularly, as we shall see, with regard to the notion of 'purity'. He channels his 'what if' scenario through a framing science-fiction section (allowing him to indulge himself in some cyberpunk vocabulary - 'Zens', 'Omnipod', 'saniteam', 'wetset') in which the character South is apprehended at 'Unitel' with a scrap of toilet paper, bearing a 'gloss in sympathetic ink' on what's called the 'Roanoke Rood'; in the course of trying to escape with his knowledge, South disintegrates himself on 'razor-ribbon' and, in an attempt to fathom the mystery of his gloss, his 'disintegrating' eye is hooked up to a 'retinagraph' so that, as a section named '[Heraclitus]' has it (each of the bits and pieces that make up the narrative are headed

with the name of a philosopher or scientist), 'all that follows / flickers and flows / from the back of his right eyeball'.

The import of this particular 'gloss' on the 'Roanoke Rood' ( 'CROATAN' giving, according to South, 'Coleridge RObert Southey The SATANic School') gives us some indication of what's to come, and of Muldoon's overall objective in his 'ripping yarn'. 'Roanoke' was the island colony established by Walter Raleigh off North Carolina in the 1580s - and prefigured in his earlier poem from 'Why Brownlee Left', 'Promises, Promises' - which, by 1590, had disappeared without any trace left of the settlers. Re-writings, encodings and decodings (the 'sympathetic ink' - for the invisible qualities of which Muldoon no doubt has an affinity), unexplained disappearances, what-might-bes and what- might-have-beens, all set against colonization and its legacy: all are implicated in South's and Muldoon's alternative histories.

Because what in fact 'flickers and flows' throughout 'Madoc' is South's own historical narrative, running parallel to - but then, with terrible consequences, pushed into - what might be termed an 'established' historical narrative. His own suppositions and hypotheses about the fate of the Pantisocrat expedition are constantly being written into and over extant historical 'fact'. Muldoon weaves into the narrative bits and pieces of the journals of Lewis and Clark, Southey's and Byron's (among others') poems, George Catlin's book on the customs of North American Indians, Sara Fricker's actual 'lingo grande' (so cherished, in 'real life', by Southey); 'real' historical figures such as John Evans and Jefferson share the fragmented space of the text with fictional characters such as the treacherous and brutal Scots-Irish scout, Alexander Cinnamond

and South. Against the sorry story of the Pantisocrats is pitched not only a meticulously-researched historical account of the 'birth-pangs' of the United States - the Burr/Blennerhassett attempt to seize power, the 'clandestine' nature of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Jefferson's doomed attempt to find Welsh Indians (which brings us back to Kirk's assertion quoted in the first section about 'things being accepted because their genealogy can be stated') - but also of the literary duels and vendettas going on back in the old country. (This is no doubt a sly glance at similar vendettas unleashed in the world of Irish letters - one of which has concerned Muldoon's own anthology The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Verse.)

We might say that 'Madoc' itself is produced out of one of these literary vendettas. South's parallel history isn't just the hypothetical incursion of the Pantisocrats into the burgeoning new nation, it's also a narrative of 'dis-integration', the disintegration of Utopian ideals into the machinery of repressive regimes: the formation of secret police, political intrigues, covert operations, clandestine missions and, in the extreme, the extermination of indigenous tribes in order to consolidate power. In the narrative's most overt example of 'dis-integrating', Southey actively represses the Cayuga Indians on his estate by, amongst other things, banning their native customs, such as the White Dog Ceremony (which is part of the World Renewal Ceremony -an end to begin again), and by physically punishing those he accuses of continuing them. (Muldoon's portrayal of Southey 'drawing a circle with his goose-quill pen' - one of the pens he had shoved into the eyes of Cinnamon - around the name of the woman he suspects of reviving the White Dog Ceremony implicitly connects the complicity of art in violence and oppression.)

Little wonder that the 'wetsets' at 'Unitel' wish to repress South and the bits and pieces of knowledge that he carries. But their projection of this knowledge through the apparatus of the retinagraph, their forcing of South's own suppositions into the grand unified narrative of history (the components of 'Unitel' - 'Unit/Unite/Tel[1]' - speaks of that particular narrative which brooks no divergence), still 'sends a shiver' through Unitel's own eye, its 'iridescent dome'. All the Utopias implicated in South's story founder: both of the settlements set up under Southey meet violent ends; Blennerhassett's 'New Atlantis, / City of the Sun' is put to the torch by avenging government troops; in one resonant visual joke, [Ptolemy], Muldoon shows a map in which Athens, Pennsylvania is just a little downriver from Ulster, Pennsylvania. The 'Roanoke Rood' - the use of 'Rood' here gives the object the sense of a religious icon - actually turns out to be the 'bog-oak lintel' which Blennerhassett has unearthed from 'his god-forsaken / family estate / in Kerry' (another sly look askance at Heaney?), and which he makes the centrepiece of his estate on the Ohio. South's imaginative attempts to 'decipher' the meaning of this 'scorch-marked lump of wood' - his 'eyeball-to-eyeball' with Unitel - not only describe the descent of Utopia into totalitarianism, but the descent of all states into pieces, fragments, bits of wood partly scorch-marked, partly mud.

But there's one wild card in Muldoon's stacked deck, and its name is Coleridge. Coleridge's quest to find his wife peters out halfway through the narrative, and he spends the rest of the poem slipping in something of a drug-addled haze through identity after identity; he becomes, at various times, 'Silas Tomkyn Comberbache' (when he is detained as a British spy by Lewis and Clark on their 'clandestine'

exploratory mission), 'Higgenbottom' and 'George Rex'. That said, and as Tim Kendall points out in his essay on 'Madoc'<sup>29</sup>, it is Coleridge who gets closest to the truth of the Welsh Indians, and who is best able to 'integrate' into the Indian way of life. On a peyote trip to 'Southeyopolis', he carries only a 'calumet' (an Indian peace-pipe) and 'a smidgen of laver-bread', and is guided to Southeyopolis by a 'cormorant' (a Welsh spirit-bird) and a 'white coyote' (as the White Dog Ceremony makes plain, a sacred animal to Native Americans).

But, like Dali in '7 Middagh Street', Coleridge tends to slip out the back door of happenings in 'Madoc'. Towards the end of the poem, in a section entitled '[Gramsci]', we see him lost in the dis-integrating landscape of his own imagination:

Coleridge casts a paternoster into the murky  
stream.

He himself has only a remote  
idea of his whereabouts...

Try as he may, he has but a dim

recollection of why he might have cut  
these wind-chimes

from a cloudy, yellow lump of agate  
and strung them like icicles

in the thatch...

The references to 'The Aeolian Harp' ('the wind-chimes' made from agate) and 'Frost at Midnight' ('icicles / in the thatch') fuse with further allusions to a note written describing the composition of 'Kubla Khan': 'On [Coleridge's] return to his room [after dealing with the man from Porlock], [he] found to his no small surprise and mortification that though he retained some ... dim recollection ... of the vision ... all the rest had passed away like images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast'<sup>30</sup>. Coleridge's slippage through his own barely-remembered texts here, his 'lonesome drifting' through his own imaginative range (one image of Coleridge is of him 'wheedle-warpl[ing] himself / into the well, well, well, / of his own fontanelle') compares with his eventual demise in '[Levi-Strauss]'. After further skewed images from his own poems ('the burden / of a hurdy-gurdy / played by one Modoc damozel' is obviously a take on the 'damsel with a dulcimer' in 'Kubla Khan'), and a list of plants which seems to correspond to such lists Coleridge wrote in his notebooks, the poet 'insinu- / ates himself through [a] crack into the vaults / of the Domdaniel'. Although Tim Kendall may have a point when he says Coleridge's death has echoes of the Indian shaman Handsome Lake's departure<sup>31</sup>, we must also be aware that the 'Domdaniel' is the scene of the climax in Southey's 'Thalaba the Destroyer', a text which itself runs continually through 'Madoc'. Perhaps in the end, Coleridge doesn't so much achieve the mystical 'departure' of the Native Americans, as become a rogue intertext, slipping, like Muldoon's own 'dis-integrations', into and out of other established literary constructions.



## Chapter Four

### MEDBH MCGUCKIAN: 'SHE WHICH IS NOT'

Were Medbh McGuckian to be filed away in one particular box - the way Muldoon might be tidied away under 'mischievous' and Paulin under 'pugnacious' - that box might be marked 'mysterious'. Everyone uses it about her poetry. Even the blurbs backing four of her five collections feature the word prominently: The Flower Master's poems are 'mysterious and sensuous'; Venus and the Rain brings together her 'mysterious and erotic' poems; On Ballycastle Beach consists of 'mysterious and unsettling' poems - exactly the same description used of the work in Marconi's Cottage. Everyone thinks she's mysterious. Critics habitually fall back upon it in reviews: even the estimable Terry Eagleton has called her style 'mysteriously metonymic'<sup>1</sup>. And one brave interviewer (in the Irish Literary Supplement) pointedly asks McGuckian about her 'mysterious'<sup>2</sup> quality.

As such, articles about McGuckian's work abound in speculative exegeses, which often, and by their own admission, fail to dispel the 'mysteriousness' of the subject. These exegeses are mostly shot through with phrases like 'it would seem' or 'it might be that', the noise of scholars floundering. Even Wills, for example, in her valuable study of McGuckian, ends a discussion of the poem 'Venus and the Rain' with the faintly exasperated 'It is plain, however, that this interpretation can not come near

to the meaning of the poem, as it raises as many questions as it answers'<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps we should not be surprised, then, to note that 'mysterious' stems from the Greek meaning 'to close the eyes and mouth'.

It is obvious that McGuckian herself sees this mysteriousness as a fundamental part of her poetics. Clair Wills quotes her as saying 'I don't want men to underestimate women ever. I feel that if they do they will put us in a lower category where they have always put us. And I can only make them understand us, not by competing with them but by baffling them...'<sup>4</sup> In other interviews she has stressed the 'hiddenness' and 'inwardness' of woman's nature, speaking of 'a woman's hiddenness, her secrecies, her facets'<sup>5</sup>, and of 'feeling everything from within - most women's reflexes are deeply hidden'<sup>6</sup>. The linking of McGuckian's 'resistant inwardness' with a challenge to what she sees as a male tendency to subordinate women will form an important theme of this particular chapter.

Eileen Cahill remarks in her essay on McGuckian that 'Just as Derrida explains "differance" as "not", McGuckian's writing is not linear, not authoritative, not coded, not appropriating, not logical, not polemic, not masculine, not neuter'<sup>7</sup>. Although I would concur with her emphasis on McGuckian's 'negative potential', that she likes to present herself as 'she which is not', this chapter takes issue with at least three of the things Cahill believes McGuckian isn't. This poetry, as I hope to demonstrate, *is* coded, *is* appropriating (and how), and as a result of this, *is* covertly polemical - and I stress the contradiction inherent in that phrase. The first section foregrounds what Thomas Docherty sees as the 'transgressive'<sup>8</sup> impulse in McGuckian, through her particular use

of the trope of painting (articulating what seems to be the resistant inwardness of her own poetry), through her trademark 'unforming' poetic style, and in her creative, covert appropriations of other writers' work. I shall expand on this last point in the second section with reference to her 'borrowings' from, in particular, Osip Mandelstam.

In Vermeer's Girl With Turban (otherwise known as 'Girl With a Pearl Earring', or 'Head of a Girl'), a young woman sits side on to the viewer, against a strikingly dark background, but she addresses us with an over-the-shoulder gaze. The background seems darkened by the shining green-gold, white and light blue of the girl's head-dress and chemise, by the brightness of her skin. And yet the girl's pose, the expression on her face ( wide-open eyes, parted lips ) resist any conclusive interpretation. Neil Corcoran suggests that the look is 'caught between erotic invitation and shy reproach at being intruded on'. There might also be a sense of yearning in the look. Though there is an openness about the subject, in the parted lips, the directness of the gaze, the forehead's luminous skin, there is also something tantalizingly closed and elusive about it. Perhaps this lies as much in the way the girl's eyes, some of the iris, all of the pupil, seem to retain the darkness of that impenetrable background; as if the face itself, having emerged from the dark, had left something deep-rooted, essential, hidden back in there.

It is perhaps not surprising to find this portrait at the heart of one of McGuckian's earlier poems, 'The Flitting' from The Flower Master. The first stanza of this poem seems to delineate a moment of crisis in the speaker's life - a vague recollection of having 'been carried from one structure to the other / On a chair of human arms' gives way to ellipses and the sudden awareness of 'my own life hit[ting] me in the throat'. (This violent rupture of the self seems to have been demarcated in

the poem's opening unattributed direct speech: 'You wouldn't believe all this house has cost me - / In body-language terms it has turned me upside down', as if this were 'my own life's' prelude to lashing out at the other parts of the self.) As if berating herself for her passivity in being ferried from one masculine 'structure' to another (her 'weightless', almost complicit involvement with the 'fraternity of clothes' - whose ministrations she confesses to having 'liked') - as Longley puts it, 'from being a daughter to being a wife and mother' - the speaker's 'own life' reveals itself in the 'telling ... bumps and cuts of the walls' of her 'house'. The speaker then attempts to forestall this moment of crisis (this 'return of the repressed') - of the pain of her life having been suddenly uncovered - by 'papering over' these blemishes with Vermeer's studies of women engaged in their home-makings and harmless pursuits ('making lace, or leaning their almond faces/ On their fingers with a mandolin').

For the speaker to appeal to Vermeer's work seems particularly apt. Longley comments that Flemish painting generally 'implies repression and false security'<sup>10</sup> (in Vermeer especially, those pictures of women being plied with drink, pawed over or watched (guarded) by men); but Lawrence Gowing, in his study of Vermeer, ventures another view. 'Vermeer is well-protected', he writes, 'little of life or personality pierces his armour... When some disturbing experience does penetrate within the shell, he proceeds to cover it in a pearly covering of style until its sharpness is assimilated'<sup>11</sup>. As with Vermeer, so with McGuckian's use of Vermeer in this first stanza. But the poem itself suddenly pivots on the speaker's contemplation of 'Girl With Turban' as the 'dreamy / Chapelled ease' of the girl portrayed (the nod in 'Chapelled' to another 'structure') allows an altogether more subversive ('transgressive') reading to be made:

She seems a garden escape in her unconscious  
Solidarity with darkness, clove-scented  
As an orchid taking fifteen years to bloom...  
Who knows what importance  
She attaches to the hours?  
Her narrative secretes its own values...

The girl now embodies such forbidden desires as the desire to 'escape', the desire to be free of controlling structures. She isn't governed by the demands of time - schedules, obligations, appointments, habit - as the speaker reveals herself to be later in the poem ('I am well-earthed here as the digital clock'). Her resistant inwardness refuses any obligation to explain itself: 'Her narrative secretes its own values'. (The first line of the poem 'Problem Girl' also recalls this Vermeer painting, and its attendant subversive force: 'I'm a sitter-out in a darkened room'.) The mesmerising sibilance of these lines highlights the temptation that this 'midnight garden' holds for the speaker; and the transgression implicit in these musings on what such 'escape' might represent ('the half of her that welcomes death' - a destructive urge?) is made plain when she alludes to painting herself 'in a faggotted dress, in a peacock chair'. As Brewer's informs us, the 'faggot' was sewn onto the clothes of heretics who had recanted, to remind them of the fate they had missed; and the peacock is the sign of the traitor.

Painting in general is associated with covert feminine transgressive behaviour in McGuckian. Poems in Marconi's Cottage which refer to the artists Paula Modersohn-

Becker, whose candid paintings of women and children pointedly exclude male presences, and Gwen John gesture towards this notion. The title of the poem by Gwen John ('Road 32, Roof 13-23, Grass 23'), as the note at the back of the book informs us, 'derives from the note-books of the artist Gwen John and signifies the graduated numbers of the spectrum of colours she used'<sup>12</sup>. Sir John Rothenstein, in his survey of Modern British Painters, harrumphs about this system, saying that 'however helpful to her, [it] makes her notes on painting and schemes for pictures unintelligible to anyone else'<sup>13</sup>. (Particularly Sir John. Which, as McGuckian suggests by purloining elements of this system for the title of her own inscrutable poem, is perhaps the point.)

So the coupling of women and art, as I discussed in 'The Flitting', often points towards a transgressive element, of using art to act subversively against masculinist power structures. The opening of the Browningsque dramatic monologue 'The Witchmark', from The Flower Master, more than hints at this:

You paint, Miss Churchill? Pray go on.  
Then you would know a dangerous face.  
How spirit lusts towards us as we to it, like  
The play of different lights. Your body,  
That naked altar, how would you show  
Behind a picnic, gloves and violets, its readiness  
To be roused, its hopeless snow?

The disruptive force of this speaking voice - we note how the poem stems from an

interruption - is tensed by a constantly shifting complex of religion ( 'PRAY go on', 'spirit', 'altar') and transgressive desire, in the references to 'lusts', 'naked', 'its readiness/ to be roused'. It is imagined here that art has access to those subversive sexual energies which will crack the seemingly-dignified and innocent - or, repressed and repressive - surface of the speaker's society ( she presumes the artist will 'know a dangerous face' ), or at least would be able to represent those lurking libidinal pressures. This latter is detectable in the speaker's startlingly forward question about how the artist -Miss Churchill, whose 'hopeless snow', perhaps connoting a virgin? - would portray her own sexual longings. The lusting 'spirit' refers as much to freedom, to breaking the bounds of this society's constraints.

But the artist needs to know how to use her art, like any weapon. Instead of being able to harness its subversive impulse, the artist can turn art into a violation. In an interview, McGuckian has commented, somewhat vehemently, that 'By writing the poem, you're becoming a whore. You're selling your soul which is worse than any prostitution - in a sense you're vilifying your mind'<sup>14</sup>. Perhaps the violating aspects of art are most clearly represented in the poem 'The Sitting ':

My half-sister comes to me to be painted:  
She is posing furtively, like a letter being  
Pushed under a door, making a tunnel with her  
Hands over her dull-rose dress. Yet her coppery  
Head is as bright as a net of lemons, I am  
Painting it hair by hair as if she had not



Disowned it, or forsaken those unsparkling  
Eyes as blue may be sifted from the surface  
Of a cloud; and she questions my brisk  
Brushwork, the note of positive red  
In the kissed mouth I have given her,  
As a woman's touch makes curtains blossom  
Permanently in a house: she calls it  
Wishfulness, the failure of the tampering rain  
To go right into the mountain, she prefers  
My sea-studies, and will not sit for me  
Again, something half-opened, rarer  
Than railroads, a soiled red-letter day.

At one level the poem appears to outline vividly a 'half-opened' narrative of sexual repression, longing, frustration - a narrative of wishfulness. The artist/speaker interprets her subject's 'furtive' pose as a covert communication - she makes the sign of a tunnel into herself - assenting to the represent-ation of her innerness by the artist. The poem appears to proceed on hints, body language, encoded signals. However the artist's interpretation of that innerness focusses on surface details, the hair, the eyes. It is significant that she realises these details in the same way as she would a still-life ( the head as bright as a net of lemons ), and a landscape ( eyes like the blue sifted from the surface of a cloud ). These details coalesce into a picture of the half-sister that is really a wish-fulfillment exercise by the artist: she describes the sitter's 'coppery head' as 'disowned', her eyes as 'forsaken', and it's clear that the portrait becomes an attempt

to rescue the half-sister from her own repressed or repressive nature. The artist turns the 'subject' of her painting into an object. The half-sister is imaged as a negative, deadening force in the poem, questioning the positive view presented in the painting. So the artist is seeking to inject a vitality into her representation, as witnessed in the phrases 'brisk brushwork', 'a note of positive red', and indeed in the subtle red motif which pulses through the poem: the initial 'dull-rose' is transmuted through 'coppery' into 'positive red' until, with the half-sister's rejection of the portrait, the poem subsides into its final 'soiled red-letter day'.

This impulse is somewhat darkened by that phrase 'the note of positive red in the kissed mouth I have given her'; the implication is that what motivates her reading of the sitter is a longing which veers into incest. This crystallises the element of violation, transgression, of damage done in the poem which was signalled at first by that caesura and pivotal 'Yet' in the fourth line, the only sentence-break in the poem ( and reiterated more explicitly in the reference to 'tampering rain', and the poem's climactic 'soiled red-letter day' ). And yet in the words 'brisk' and 'note' we sense the artist's superficiality of representation, which the half-sister 'questions' and which she dismisses as 'wishfulness, the failure of the tampering rain to go right into the mountain' ( which links with the sign of the tunnel that the sitter is perceived to make into herself at the start of the poem ). Both the artist and the sitter seem to be working under separate codes of repression, the sitter covertly wanting her inner self portrayed, the artist wanting somehow to express her longing for her relative. Both aspirations chafe against each other, fracturing the body of the poem - we note the poem's idiosyncratic use of the colon and semi-colon (the intimation of an opportunity

receding?) and the way the poem seems to disperse (to unform) at the end into fragments of regret, recrimination, knowledge of damage done, the sense of a wasted opportunity - 'something half-opened, rarer / Than railroads, a soiled red-letter day'.

But in the matter of how such transgressive impulses manifest themselves in her own art, in poetry, McGuckian's style is an obvious entry-point. Edna Longley remarks that she writes a "pseudo-syntax"<sup>13</sup>; and Terry Eagleton says, mysteriously, that her poetry is 'mysteriously metonymic'<sup>16</sup>. As with John Ashbery (another painterly poet), the reader finds him/herself following a sentence which seems more and more to deviate from its initial sense the more it proceeds. From the beginning of her career she seems to have been attracted to the elongated, meandering sentence, often a stanza, sometimes a poem long. In such a sentence, clause follows clause, clause impacts against clause, until the signposts guiding the reader - the subject of the sentence, the object, which belongs to what in the structure - become less and less trustworthy. Beneath the apparent fluidity of her line lies a riot of fissures, lacunae and dislocations, as if some subliminal detonation had crazed the poem's internal connections. Take, for example, the ending of 'Ode to a Poetess' ( Venus and the Rain ):

It is ten o'clock, I am thinking of those  
Eyes of yours as of something just alighted  
On the earth, the why that had to be in them.  
What they ask of women is less their bed,

Or an hour between two trains, than to be almost  
gone,  
Like the moon that turns her pages day by day,  
Letting the sunrise weigh up, not what they have  
seen,  
But the light in which the garden, pressing out into  
The landscape, drew it all the more into its heart.

We find the syntax of the closing six-line sentence not only complicated by the subordinate 'less...than' and 'not...but' clauses, but also by its sudden accretion of nouns - 'women', 'bed', 'hour', 'trains', 'moon', 'pages', 'sunrise', 'light', 'garden', 'landscape', 'heart', and the concomitant web of personal and possessive pronouns ('I', 'yours', 'her', 'them', and in the final line the uncertainty over whether 'it' or 'its' refers to 'light', 'garden' or 'landscape', or any of the other nouns in that long, long sentence) that tends to cloud the distinction between subject and object. It seems that the dominant subject for most of the above passage is 'those / Eyes of yours', although this becomes submerged in the course of the poem's final sentence, as the simile in the sixth line foregrounds the 'moon'. The 'eyes' surface again in the phrase 'not what they have seen' (or does this pertain to the 'women?'); but their appearance is again lost in the flurry of nouns ('light', 'garden', 'landscape', 'heart') with which the poem ends. Thus, paradoxically, the effect of these proliferating nouns and clauses suggests there is a kind of screening at work in McGuckian's style: a style which at the same time, like the garden 'pressing out into the landscape' in the last lines of the passage above (and, perhaps, like the Girl with Turban who haunts 'The Flitting'), appears to open

out while drawing itself in.

There is perhaps a better way of expressing McGuckian's style. The slow accumulation of clauses in one of her long sentences inclines the reader to think that the sentence is progressing to some meaningful end, that it is forming towards some final clarification, a pay-off. But in a McGuckian sentence, each clause presents us with a gradual and concurrent 'unforming' as it seems that the poet is moving farther and farther from the initial idea. (How far removed from that departure point we aren't aware until we reach the end of the sentence.)

The sense and the significance of this constant forming and unforming at work in McGuckian's poetry may well be articulated in the title and certain lines of 'She Which Is Not, He Which Is' from Marconi's Cottage. This poem seems in particular to 'paint the half' of McGuckian 'which welcomes death', as she yearns to do in 'The Flitting'. The 'elm box without any shape inscribed' in the first line might allude to a coffin (with various echoes of Sylvia Plath in 'elm box' gonging around): after all, there are various intimations of mortality associated with the speaker throughout the poem. She speaks of her 'last spring'; she says that her 'eyes will not be the eyes of a poet / Whose voice is beyond death'; she says, pointedly, at the end 'Carry me who am death / Like a bowl of water... / From one place to another'. But also through the course of the poem there are references to this simultaneous becoming and 'becoming-not': 'My words will be without words', 'Without the help of words, words take place', 'Unforgettable time, / During which I forget time', 'Compared with this absence [ of, I take it, words ]... presence is abandonment, / Absence his manner of

appearing', 'Each instant of light / Wipes away a little of it'. And this relates also to the information in the poem's title that 'she' is that 'which is not'.

This might constitute an ironic take on Jacques Lacan, who infamously defined woman as the 'not-all-there'; but in her poetry, McGuckian herself will often accentuate the negative. She seems especially fond of the 'un-' prefix, and in Marconi's Cottage alone, there are almost seventy 'un-' words, mostly verbs and adjectives, ranging from odd constructions which call attention to themselves, like 'unroselike' ('Swallows' Wood, Glenshesk'), 'un-beringed' ('Gigot Sleeves') and 'un-English' ('The Partner's Desk'), of which more in a moment; to striking concatenations of 'un-' words such as this stanza from 'Marconi's Cottage':

Another unstructured, unmarried, unfinished  
Summer, slips its unclenched weather  
Into my winter poems, cheating time  
And blood of their timelessness.

The summer is defined by what it is not: it is not structured, it is not married, it is not finished. The form that the summer takes is its constant unforming, not just its own formlessness, but also in the way it 'unforms' McGuckian's established 'winter poems', their 'timeless' lyric poise. It becomes the chaotic ('unclenched') element in McGuckian's imagination, in just the same way as the speaker of 'The Flitting' is drawn to the 'garden escape' from the 'structures' of her life offered by the 'Girl With Turban'. In that poem, McGuckian paints herself as a heretic and traitor for these

thoughts; in the above stanza, the 'summer' is also an agent of dissimulation - it 'slips...its weather' surreptitiously into her works, it 'cheats' the predestination of 'time and blood'.

McGuckian's use of 'un-' words means that the word is, in a manner of speaking, 'undone' by itself; the nature of 'un-' is that it shows what something is NOT (by retaining that element of the word), while not saying, or not able to say, what exactly something IS. It refuses fixed definitions, to be boxed in, bordered up. One 'un-' word which pertains to McGuckian's methods is the expression she uses of her language in 'The Partner's Desk': 'un-English'. In an interview, she has said she sees English as an 'alien language', and her attempts to unEnglish her own English occur in several ways. It is not just the seemingly subliminal syntactical disruptiveness of her sentences, in which the distinctions between subject and object, pronoun and antecedent, nouns and verbs, progressively lose definition; it is also the way she will nod towards the grammatical structures of other languages in her poetry. Her tendency to genderise objects - feminizing the moon, masculinizing the sun, assigning genders to things like seasons of the year, for example - is particularly 'un-English' (as Clair Wills comments, it nods towards German and Russian). And the way she will often stitch together words to form new compounds (for example, from Captain Lavender - 'a too-well-laid-out path', 'winter-quiet', 'dream-quilted', 'heart-stained', 'frost-voluptuous') recalls its use in German; as Michael Hamburger has written in his introduction to a selection of Paul Celan's poems: 'German...lends itself to the formation of compound words in a way that English does not'<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, in this respect, many of McGuckian's recent poems are especially reminiscent of translations from Paul

Celan, if only that they also sound like too-literal translations of a difficult poet's work (as in this torturous example from 'The Over Mother': 'My cleverly dead and vertical audience, / words fly out from your climate of unexpectation / in leaky shallowised night letters - / what you has spoken?')

The last line is a question which could certainly be levelled at various McGuckian poems, poems which are in fact a kind of 'literal translation' themselves. These poems perhaps constitute the most contentious space of transgression in McGuckian's work, and the poem 'Slips' is a striking example of how she tends to 'unform' extant texts while forming them into her new text:

The studied poverty of a moon roof,  
The earthenware of dairies cooled by apple trees,  
The apple tree that makes the whitest wash...

But I forget names, remembering them wrongly  
Where they touch upon another name,  
A town in France like a woman's Christian name.

My childhood is preserved as a nation's history,  
My favourite fairy tales the shells  
Leased by the hermit crab.

I see my grandmother's death as a piece of ice,



My mother's slimness restored to her,  
My own key slotted in your door -

Tricks you might guess from this unfastened button,  
A pen mislaid, a word misread,  
My hair coming down in the middle of a conversation.

This poem constantly teases at its addressee. If we look at the first stanza, for example, the three apparently disparate and yet strangely vivid images are made to crossfade filmically into each other - the 'cooled' of the second line takes up the first's puzzling 'moon roof' ( a roof shaped like the moon? A roof with moonlight shining off it? A roof-shaped sliver of moon?), 'apple trees' becomes 'the apple tree'. There are perhaps hints even in this tantalizing opening stanza about McGuckian's hidden aim in this poem: a careful reader will note the references to 'STUDIED poverty' and 'whitewash'. This is a poem that plays around with what we shall see is a favourite McGuckian trope: coverings-up, dissemblings, which tend to jibe at what Freud called the 'masquerade of femininity'. This first stanza appears to build towards something, its 'mysterious' set of images seeming to represent stages in a 'forming', which the tail-off ellipses and the next stanza's throwaway (and wrong-footing) 'But I forget names' serve to unform. Something does 'slip' between the first and second stanza, in time for the second stanza to adumbrate a further 'slippage' in the poem: 'But I forget names, remembering them wrongly / When they touch upon another name'.

Eileen Cahill, in her article 'Medbh McGuckian's Solitary Way', swoops on

'touch upon' as an allusion to Luce Irigaray<sup>18</sup>, (though Cahill herself slips when she misquotes the above lines as 'But I forget names, remembering them ONLY / When they touch upon another name' - which somewhat alters the meaning). Irigaray is perhaps helpful here: as Cahill says, 'McGuckian's technique resonates with the feminist linguistic theory of Luce Irigaray who writes: "Within herself ... [woman] is already two - but not divisible into one"<sup>19</sup>. She quotes further from Irigaray: '...if "she" says something ... it is already no longer identical with what she means. What she means is never identical with anything, moreover; rather it is contiguous. It touches (upon)<sup>20</sup>. (Thomas Docherty also invokes Irigaray for a particularly torturous explication of 'Tulips'.) But the name that actually slips from this poem is - who else - Freud himself.

The poem's title, and the actions its speaker describes ('a pen mislaid, a word misread'), do, of course, lead us in the direction of Freud, and his Psychopathology of Everyday Life, which deals with 'forgetting, slips of the tongue and bungled actions'. In fact, over half of the poem has been transplanted from this text, in particular Chapter Four ('Childhood and Screen Memories'), and, to a lesser extent, Chapters Eight ('Bungled Actions') and Nine ('Chance and Symptomatic Actions'). For a start, the fourth line is a paraphrase of Freud's 'cases in which a name is in fact not only forgotten but wrongly remembered'<sup>21</sup>. The mystifying third stanza comes a little sharper into focus when we discover that the reference to the 'childhood preserved as a nation's history' is drawn from the observation that '...The childhood memories of individuals come in general to acquire the significance of screen memories.. and in doing so offer a remarkable analogy with the childhood memories that a nation

preserves in its store of legends and myths'<sup>22</sup>. The next two lines base themselves on a footnote in the same chapter: 'Fairy tales can be made use of as screen memories in the same kind of way that empty shells are used as a home by the hermit crab. These fairy tales then become favourites without the reason being known...'<sup>23</sup>

The fourth stanza consists of paraphrased examples from this and another chapter. 'I see my grandmother's death as a piece of ice' rewrites the sentence 'One of the informants instanced a piece of ice as a screen memory for his grandmother's death'<sup>24</sup> (it is apparently a 'symbol of antithesis for an erection'<sup>25</sup>); 'My mother's slimness restored to her' appears at the end of the 'Childhood and Screen Memories' section, as part of Freud's interpretation of one of his own childhood memories: 'I understand why in the translation of this visual childhood scene my mother's slimness was emphasised: it must have struck me as having just been restored to her'<sup>26</sup> (after pregnancy). The line about 'my own key slotted in your door' is a paraphrase of a section in the chapter 'Bungled Actions' - 'On several occasions', writes one informant, 'I found myself making serious attempts to open the door with my housekey'<sup>27</sup>. The action, apparently, is 'equivalent to the thought "Here I feel at home"<sup>28</sup>, although it can also be regarded as it is in The Interpretation of Dreams, as a phallic symbol. Finally the last line of the poem is wholly lifted from the chapter in Psychopathology Of Everyday Life on 'Symptomatic and Chance Actions': 'Girls who are proud of having beautiful hair are able to manage their combs and hairpins in such a way that their hair comes down in the middle of a conversation'<sup>29</sup>.

It is as if McGuckian has taken 'slips' of Freud's text (to use a horticultural

analogy) and grafted them onto her new poem: But to what purpose? The fact that she has appropriated ( and ventriloquises ) certain examples which stem from male informants' dreams and anecdotes - the grandmother as a 'piece of ice', Freud's own dream of his mother, the phallic key in its lock - seems significant. In their original context, these examples intimate anxiety (over sexuality and death) and a sense of feeling threatened - usually by women. But, voiced through McGuckian, they not only serve to ironise their source text (one can't help but feel that McGuckian poking a satirical finger into Freud's flabby parts). But McGuckian inserting herself into and asserting herself through Freud's text also lends her 'thefts' the sense of a female self-assertiveness leading to liberation, especially when she imagines her 'mother's slimness restored to her', and the stress applied to 'own' in the line 'my own key slotted in your door' (which also, through reversing the original positions, usurps the masculine phallic quality of the key and speaks instead of women's empowerment). This sense of female empowerment finds its focus in the word 'Tricks' (applied to the 'slips' in question) in the final stanza, which appears to contradict Freud's point that such 'slips' are unconscious actions which reveal what we're really thinking. McGuckian images them as subterfuges, contrived, planned (which the addressee of the poem 'might guess', but might not) linking up with the poem's emphasis on coverings-up and dissemblings (seen in the 'screen memories' which start the poem) and pointing to the underlying theme of how women are to achieve equal empowerment ('liberation') within what McGuckian perceives to be masculinist social and cultural structures.

The 'grafting' method used in 'Slips' seems partly to confirm Clair Wills in her notion that McGuckian's poetry 'constructs a "Common European home" of

"European" Romantic and Modernist poets<sup>30</sup> - though she doesn't mention Freud and believes that this particular style is 'a striking development'<sup>31</sup> in her later collections. ('Slips' is from McGuckian's first book.) In the following sections, I suggest instead that - as 'Slips' proves - McGuckian has been writing poetry in this way from the start of her career, and her sometimes extreme manner of appropriating source texts can cast up more problems than solutions; and that far from fashioning anything as benign as a 'home' (or even a 'plantation'<sup>32</sup> - another of Wills's analogies), McGuckian's appropriations often relate directly to the subversive, transgressive (and concealing) impulse in her poetics I have attempted to outline in this part of the chapter. As I hope to illustrate, nowhere is this subversive element, or the problems associated with it, more evident than in her large-scale 'misappropriations' from the Russian poet, Osip Mandelstam.

II

Clair Wills, in her book Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry, is perhaps the first, and so far only, critic yet to consider the existence of Osip Mandelstam's work in McGuckian's poetry. But it is clear that Wills herself hasn't realised the scale of McGuckian's appropriations from this writer. In that particular section of her chapter, she only mentions 'The Dream Language' and a couple of poems from Marconi's Cottage which 'allude' to other Mandelstam poems. However, 'The Theatre' (from The Flower Master), 'The Invalid's Echo' and 'Visiting Rainer Maria' (from Marconi's Cottage), and three poems - 'The Finder Becomes the Seeker', 'Elegy for an Irish Speaker' and 'The Aisling Hat' - from her most recent collection Captain Lavender, all employ the same method used in 'The Dream Language of Fergus'. ( There are also echoes of Mandelstam, in 'Ode to a Poetess' from Venus and the Rain, and several other poems - 'Balakhana', 'Yeastlight', 'The Bird Auction' - in On Ballycastle Beach insinuate phrases from Nadezhda Mandelstam's first book of memoirs, Hope Against Hope.)

It may well be that Wills simply doesn't have the right translations. Which

translation of Mandelstam is read alongside McGuckian's Mandelstam poems is extremely important; it marks the difference between seeing an allusion to Mandelstam, or seeing a theft from him. The opening line of the third section of 'The Dream-Language of Fergus' is a case in point. 'Conversation is as necessary', according to Wills, derives from this extract of 'Conversation about Dante', concerning Canto X of Inferno: 'Every effort is directed towards the struggle against the density and gloom of the place ... Conversation is as necessary here as torches in a cave'. This is the Selected Essays translation. In the translation for the Collected Critical Prose, we read instead: 'All our efforts are directed towards the struggle against the density and darkness of the place... Here strength of character is as necessary as a torch in a cave'<sup>33</sup>. In her later Mandelstam poems, those in Captain Lavender, McGuckian cribs from the wider riches of the Collected Critical Prose. (A separate set of notes to this chapter follows with as many of the citations from Mandelstam as possible in these poems included.)

Wills's discovery of Mandelstam in 'The Dream Language of Fergus' is central to her subsequent reading of the poem; it begins from the premise that McGuckian 'situates meaning "between" the source text ... and the new text, her own poem'<sup>34</sup>, and that, by doing so, she engages in a dialogue with Mandelstam about the application of his theories of 'Hellenism and poetic method'<sup>35</sup> to her own time, to her own riven concept of language, to her own oscillating sense of rootedness and unrootedness. 'McGuckian's conversation with Mandelstam', she writes,

occurs as his phrases, placed in the context of the

poem and reorganized by her, are pulled towards new meanings, while still retaining a sense of their original implications.<sup>36</sup>

This decontextualizing of Mandelstam's (translated) words from his own texts, and their recontextualizing in McGuckian's poem alter, according to Wills, the significance of the Russian poet's poetic theories (particularly about the Russian language, and Dante's use of language and imagery) by putting them in the context of 'thoughts about a child's language acquisition and the history of language in Ireland'<sup>37</sup>; and McGuckian's technique here of 'layering meanings onto phrases, altering their direction by altering their context'<sup>38</sup> is used to examine her own 'habitual circling and inconclusive narratives, and her borrowing, "translating" method'<sup>39</sup>.

At this point, Wills directs us to a footnote which further relates McGuckian's method to Tsvetaeva's so-called 'translating' of Rilke. Tsvetaeva is quoted as saying, 'Today I would like Rilke to speak - through me ... to lay again the path he has already laid [but] laying anew a path... I will translate Rilke into Russian and he, in time, will translate me to the other world'<sup>40</sup>. With these intertexts firmly established, Wills then forwards a complex and rigorous treatment of 'The Dream Language of Fergus' which relies heavily on her relating aspects of Mandelstam's thoughts on poetry and poetic language to McGuckian's 'new' poem.

And all this despite various provisos throughout her own analysis that 'reading "The Dream Language" in terms of Mandelstam involves the critic in a contradictory



exercise<sup>41</sup>. In the texts from which McGuckian appropriates her poem, Mandelstam apparently 'argues against this habit of digging for meaning by tracing literary allusions or symbolic equivalences'<sup>42</sup>. Yet Wills does exactly this, demonstrating the obvious influence which she feels the source texts have on McGuckian's poem. If the words of the poem do, as she sees it, achieve their own 'self-sufficiency'<sup>43</sup>, why go to such lengths to implicate and explicate through Mandelstam?

Because, of course, Mandelstam is there, but never mentioned. Wills's seemingly exhaustive exegesis of 'The Dream Language' has left out this crucially important element. Her argument partly bases itself on the false premise that we already know that Mandelstam ghosts this text. McGuckian never directs the reader's attention to the fact that her poem derives from Mandelstam. If we follow Wills, meaning in 'The Dream Language of Fergus' is 'situated between the source text and the new text'. But if the reader isn't aware of the presence of a particular source guiding the new text, where is meaning then? It resides in the new text alone. However, Wills's reading of the poem (and the poem itself) are grounded so deeply in Mandelstam that we get the impression any other interpretation of the poem without reference to him would be, in some sense, lacking.

It seems somehow significant that the (cursory) 'Notes and Acknowledgements' for Marconi's Cottage should explain the title references in 'To Call Paula Paul', 'Road 32, Roof 13-23, Grass 23' and 'A Small Piece of Wood' - all of which stem from statements made by or about women (the painters Paula Modersohn-Becker and Gwen John; and Tolstoy's daughter) - but remain silent on the provenance of, for example,

'The Invalid's Echo'. In Hope Abandoned, her second volume of autobiography, Nadezhda Mandelstam writes that 'When death was already close at hand',

M. used to take me to a tearoom called The Invalid's Echo to drink tea, read the newspaper, and chat with the man who ran the place. He had that rare ability to see the world before his eyes, and, consumed by curiosity, he drank in every detail<sup>44</sup>.

McGuckian's silence about pinpointing the allusion in 'The Invalid's Echo', compounded by her silence in pinpointing Mandelstam in general, is matched by the red-herring quality of a title such as 'Visiting Rainer Maria'. Clair Wills suggests that it 'echoes the unfulfilled pact made between Tsvetaeva and Pasternak, "What would you and I do if we were together?... We would go and see Rilke"<sup>45</sup>. But this talk of Rilke, Tsvetaeva and Pasternak merely screens off the real (absent) presence within the poem - Mandelstam, a reference to whose poem 'Silentium' Wills correctly identifies in the poem's closing sentence. Her identification of Mandelstam in these lines is only partial, however; she doesn't seem to realise that the bulk of the poem is woven together from threads and strands of Clarence Brown's study of the poet. That closing sentence is, in fact, lifted directly from Brown's explication of the difficulty that 'Silentium' presents in translation: 'The first word [of the poem] is something of a problem... [It] is a Russian pronoun that can mean 'it' or 'she' depending on the antecedent... The 'it' of my translation means "silence"; the 'she' of [another translation] meant "Aphrodite"<sup>46</sup>.

Both the way that McGuckian leaves certain crucial allusions unsourced, and the way she may also divert attention away from the source material seem to suggest that it is a conscious decision on her part NOT to name Mandelstam. ( As for being diverted from source material, Wills herself falls a little into this trap when she ascribes the influence of 'Journal Intime' to Rilke - an allusion, maybe, to Rilke's 'Fragments d'un journal intime'? - when it draws much more heavily on Gilbert and Gubar's pioneering feminist critical text The Madwoman in the Attic.) We see the same impulse in her poem 'Venus and the Rain' when she writes of the 'poetess' in question 'I will not write her name although I know it', but at least she is explicitly refusing to name her (in all likelihood, Marina Tsvetaeva - though the title itself may contain a glance at Mandelstam, who once notoriously attacked Moscow's 'poetesses', and in particular Tsvetaeva). At one extreme, it might be argued that as a result of this and of McGuckian's method, Mandelstam lies unmarked and unremarked in these texts. By absorbing him into her own body of work, in her skilful re-weaving of his words, and of others' words recalling and analyzing him, he is effectively silenced, effaced. He fades to an absent presence, a ghost haunting the space of his re-housed text that observers might, but probably won't, chance to glimpse.

Wills's odd oversight in not addressing McGuckian's refusal to acknowledge (particularly) Mandelstam must be seen alongside her comments on Paul Muldoon in the following chapter. There, she describes Muldoon's poetic 'habit' - of 'stealing' from other writers - as 'tendentious': '[It] reveals a lack of deference to customary notions of "ownership" (or "propriety") of poetic material... The writer is...a craftsman who borrows, reuses and parodies elements of literary and historical traditions'<sup>47</sup>. One

of Wills's examples is the 'Salvador' section of '7 Middagh Street' which, she says, 'is a patchwork of Dali's declarations culled from various texts'<sup>48</sup>. McGuckian's method in 'The Dream-Language' (and in many of her other poems, not just those that find their roots in Mandelstam) is surely similar; but Wills never uses such loaded language as 'stealing' and 'tendentious' of McGuckian. Indeed, her analogies are surprisingly benign and 'feminine': McGuckian 'sews'<sup>49</sup> her appropriated phrases together; she makes a 'plantation' out of them; her method is essentially a form of 'transplanting'. In fact, it may be said that McGuckian's method is far more 'tendentious' than Muldoon's - after all, his 'thefts' from Dali are still under the ascription 'Salvador', in a poem that, simply through its ventriloquizing of historical figures such as Auden and MacNeice (or 'Wystan' and 'Louis'), obviously points towards the presence of other texts. To Wills, McGuckian 'borrows', Muldoon 'steals'. It puts one in mind of Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan's refrain in Act 2 Scene 3 of Muldoon's *Shining Brow*: 'Do you mean "purloined" or "borrowed"? // I mean "purloined"'<sup>50</sup>.

The certain 'lack of deference to ... notions of ownership' Wills ascribes to Muldoon's purloinings echoes even in McGuckian's appropriations from Mandelstam for 'The Dream-Language of Fergus'. Knitting the poet's words and phrases together, she purposely drops a few stitches. Wills does point out that when McGuckian writes 'So Latin sleeps, they say, in Russian speech', she 'directly contradicts her source which states, "It is untrue that Latin sleeps in Russian speech... Only Russian sleeps in Russian speech"'<sup>51</sup>. But there are several other puzzling 'mistranslations' in the poem. The lines 'what began as a dog's bark / Ends with bronze, what began / With honey ends in ice' are 'mis'-taken from Mandelstam's 'Conversation with Dante':

The semantic cycles of Dantean cantos are constructed in such a way that what begins, for example, as "honey" ("med"), ends up as bronze "med'", what begins as "a dog's bark" ("lai") ends up as "ice" ("led")<sup>32</sup>.

Similarly, in the third section, 'Quando has grown into now' is a double mutation and mistranslation of Mandelstam's comments on Dante's metaphor: 'It seems to me that Dante's metaphor designates the standing-still of time. Its roots are not to be found in the little word "how", but in the word "when". His "quando" sounds like "come"<sup>33</sup>. In her version, McGuckian mishears 'come' ('how' in Italian) as 'now'.

These particular 'mistranslations' might be said to underline the poem's privileging of the presence of the human voice, of 'conversation', over the cold, hard 'bronze' and 'ice' of texts. 'No text', she writes, 'can return the honey / In its path of light from the jar' - itself another misappropriation from 'Conversation about Dante'. But that said, it's arguable whether or not it makes a difference for 'honey' in McGuckian's poem to be 'ice', instead of 'bronze' - the underlying meaning that McGuckian wishes to extract from its appropriation (the sweetness and pliability, the dynamism, of sound and speech hardening in unspoken texts) surely remains the same. Her misreadings of Mandelstam seem to point in another direction, one that will form the basis of my discussion in this part of the chapter. As I hope to demonstrate, a kind of subliminal (hidden) tussling is at work between the source text and the target text in McGuckian's re-voicings of the Russian poet (a similar struggle is present in her

graftings of Freud onto 'Slips'), a conflict in which the 'un-naming' of one of the combatants -Mandelstam himself - is an effective weapon.

### SWEET REFUSALS

McGuckian's wilful 'misreadings' of Mandelstam in 'The Dream-Language of Fergus' (actually 'mistranslations' of an existing translation) might be described as symptomatic of the type of relationship she builds with her precursor in this series of poems. The complex and fraught - one might say 'combative' -nature of this relationship is clear right from the first stanza of the first of the Mandelstam collection: 'The Theatre'.

This is our second friendship, recent  
And jealous, a treaty cold  
As your distrust of music.  
Though you understand  
Poetry better than men, I trust your tongue  
As I would a stone that thirsts after the weather,  
Little stay-at-home, living without  
Perfecting itself.

As in 'The Dream-Language', this is woven together from phrases and sentences not just from Mandelstam's essays, but from Clarence Brown's celebrated 1973 study of the poet. 'Our second friendship' refers to Akhmatova and Mandelstam resuming their friendship through Mandelstam's wife: '[Akhmatova] often told me that her new friendship, the second friendship, with Mandelstam came about through me [Nadezhda Mandelstam]'<sup>54</sup>. 'Recent and jealous' is how Tsvetaeva described Mandelstam's wife when she discovered Mandelstam had removed her name from poems once dedicated to her<sup>55</sup>. The phrase 'a treaty cold' was used by Mandelstam in 'Journey to Armenia' to describe the relationship - 'something on the order of a state secret' - 'established between the viewer and a picture'<sup>56</sup> when looking at a painting; a similar allusion to state intervention in art ghosts the phrase 'distrust of music': '[In the ancient world] the distrust of music as some dark and suspicious element was so great that the state took music under its own supervision'<sup>57</sup>. 'Though you understand / Poetry better than men' derives from a description of the poetry lover and murderer Blyumkin (who on several occasions tried to shoot or otherwise maim Mandelstam), of whom Brown comments: 'It seems more surprising he should also have been an admirer of the somewhat more demanding poetry of Mandelstam. If he was, he understood poetry better than men'<sup>58</sup>. The reference to 'a stone thirst[ing] after the weather' doesn't only allude to Mandelstam's volume of poems entitled Stone, but also - and more directly - to his well-known essay 'The Morning of Acmeism', where he aligns the writing of poetry (using 'Tyutchevian stone') with the process of architecture - 'Reverently the Acmeists pick up this mysterious Tyutchevian stone and lay it in the foundation of their building. The stone thirsted, as it were, after another existence...'<sup>59</sup>. 'The Morning of Acmeism' is also the source of the phrase 'Little stay-at-home' which he uses to

distinguish between 'Symbolists' - who were 'bad stay-at-homes' -and 'architects', who were 'good' at it<sup>60</sup> (he also uses the epithet of himself in a letter to his wife: 'If you ran across me...now, you wouldn't recognise me. Fool that I am, I sat still like a stay-at-home'<sup>61</sup>). The stanza's last phrase 'living without / Perfecting itself' stems from 'Addenda to "Journey to Armenia"', and is applied by Mandelstam to himself: 'I am living poorly now. I am living without perfecting myself; rather I am squeezing out of myself some last bits of residue, some remnants'<sup>62</sup>. (This might be a coded reference by McGuckian to her source material -McGuckian compares her addressee to a 'stone', and Mandelstam's first collection was itself called 'Stone'.)

However, reading this opening stanza without the glosses, we can see that McGuckian's view of this particular 'second friendship' is remarkably ambivalent. Although there is a grudging compliment in the lines 'Though you understand / Poetry better than men', this relationship is characterized by a lack of trust, indeed a marked distrust. It's a 'cold treaty', 'recent and jealous'; the comment that it's a 'second friendship' suggests that it had been broken off, or lost, beforehand, and the lack of respect that the speaker now feels for her addressee gives rise to the derisive, patronising tone of the stanza's closing phrases - 'little stay-at-home, living without / Perfecting itself'. The contradictory nature of this combative, somewhat loveless friendship seems further to be underscored by the chain of assonance through the stanza, which plays 'jealous' off 'music', 'distrust', 'trust' and 'thirsts' ( and also demonstrates how carefully McGuckian has crafted the poem from her source material).

The second stanza pointedly turns on an insistent, almost mocking repetition of



'you' and 'your':

You are always hungry, not made  
For prison; you have no handwriting  
Because you never write. Yours is the readership  
Of the rough places where I make  
My sweet refusals of you, your  
Natural violence.

The clauses of the stanza's first sentence are taken both from Mandelstam himself (the 'handwriting' reference appears in his apoplectic 'Fourth Prose'<sup>63</sup>), and from others' memoirs of the poet. Clarence Brown quotes Igor Stravinsky's widow's recollection that 'Mandelstam was always ardent and always hungry'<sup>64</sup>; and Brown also reports an incident during the Russian Civil War when Mandelstam was arrested by the White Army: 'When they put him into solitary confinement, he began to knock on the door [saying] "You must let me out - I'm not made for prison"<sup>65</sup>. The phrase 'rough places' derives from a letter from Pasternak to Mandelstam admitting that for a long time he had only been 'superficially acquainted' with the latter's first book, *Stone*: '[W]hen we met you must have guessed that more than once from your knowledge of me and of those rough places in me'<sup>66</sup>. And 'sweet refusals' finds its source in 'Journey to Armenia' when he describes the party atmosphere in a zoologist's house: 'The filling of wineglasses with Moscow wines began, accompanied by the sweet refusals of the women and girls...'<sup>67</sup>.

'Sweet refusals' crystallises the deep ambivalence at the heart of this 'second friendship', strengthened in its new context to designate the speaker's refusal to be pressured by a dominating male influence. ('Sweet' in Mandelstam's source text has something of a patronising tone, whereas in McGuckian's poem, especially when what's being sweetly refused is the addressee's 'natural violence', 'sweet' is returned with a cold, tight-lipped smile about it.) And yet the refusal is sweet because if one element is denied, then another is accommodated: McGuckian appropriates Mandelstam without actually acknowledging his presence in the poem.

McGuckian's cut-and-paste technique here, and in the other poems, suggests a point of contact with, and perhaps a refinement of, the poet Hugh MacDiarmid's own 'plagiaristic' impulse. Much of MacDiarmid finds its source in various book reviews and other journalism, scientific and critical texts, sometimes (notoriously) others' poems and short stories. In the course of a poem he will include appropriation after appropriation doctored in order to fit its new context. Such an approach culminated in the controversy over the eight-line poem 'Perfect', seven lines of which derived from a short story by the Welsh writer Glyn Jones. Alan Riach, in his study *Hugh MacDiarmid's Epic Poetry*, puts the case for MacDiarmid succinctly: '[Perfect's] typographical rearrangement of prose material brings out a degree of assonance and rhythm to effect a meaning that we can justifiably ascribe to MacDiarmid'<sup>68</sup>. It is possible to argue that MacDiarmid's own opening line ('I found a pigeon's skull on the machair') effectively re-contextualizes the following material anyway, and that, as Riach suggests, his engineering of the source material (mostly through judicious line-breaks, and drawing the reader's attention more towards the language's alliteration) is

as much of a creative act as the original.

Riach goes on to suggest that the MacDiarmid appropriations, on the one hand, result in the 'notion of authorial originality [being] undermined'<sup>69</sup>; but, on the other, they 'each imply a community of insight, a vision to be shared, a kind of participation'<sup>70</sup>. But perhaps more apposite to McGuckian's own 'borrowings' from Mandelstam are W.H. Herbert's observations in his book To Circumjack MacDiarmid that, though MacDiarmid's plagiarisms 'created an immediately identifiable personal register ... [through] the profusion of authors which made up the tessitura of his epic poetry'<sup>71</sup>, they could also be construed as the poet's 'lack of faith in his own authority as a poetic voice'<sup>72</sup>.

Such a struggle to forge a personal, authoritative voice under the pressure of a smothering (male) influence might well be at the basis of her 'sweet refusals' to indicate Mandelstam's presence in her poems. 'The Invalid's Echo', as we have seen, was the name of the tea-room Mandelstam and his wife used to frequent in Voronezh; but that title itself has further echoes. In the chapter 'Our Alliance' from Hope Abandoned, Nadezhda Mandelstam portrays the curiously-entwined nature of her marriage to Mandelstam: 'From me he wanted only one thing, that I should give up my life to him, renounce my own self and become a part of him'<sup>73</sup>. It was encapsulated in a comment made to Mandelstam by his brother-in-law: 'Nadia doesn't exist. She is just your echo'<sup>74</sup>. The speaker in McGuckian's poem, complicit in her subordination to a stronger male presence, echoes these thought herself:

...I would have spent  
The rest of my life felling his timber,  
Never taking my eyes off him,  
Always looking straight at his mouth,  
If that was how he liked it.

#### PERSONAL RE-VISIONS

The ambivalence which characterizes McGuckian's Mandelstam poems - in their depiction of the tussle and friction of a close male/female relationship - reflects something that from time to time surfaces in Mandelstam's own criticism: the issue of gender. His visceral (and somewhat macho) descriptions of the efficacy of good poetry can remind one of an exercise manual - the rhythm-and-rhyme workout program. Pasternak's work, for example, 'clears your throat, fortifies your breathing, fills your lungs'<sup>75</sup>; it is 'a cure for tuberculosis... a collection of marvellous breathing exercises'<sup>76</sup>. It achieves the aim of poetry - a 'masculine force and truth'<sup>77</sup>. Mandelstam's gendering of poetic material also leads him to conclude, as McGuckian indirectly quotes him, that 'the iambic is an exclusively masculine development and precludes intimacy'<sup>78</sup>. ( McGuckian has formed this from two statements. In an essay on Henri-Auguste Barbier, he writes that Barbier 'used the masculine iambic line, a line restrained by its meter'<sup>79</sup>; and in a letter to his sometime-mentor Ivanov, he mentions the 'anti-intimate nature'<sup>80</sup> of the iambic, and that it is a 'rein on mood'<sup>81</sup>. Further evidence of

McGuckian's thorough knowledge of Mandelstam's works.)

On the other hand, in his notoriously vituperative article 'Literary Moscow', he lashes out at 'feminine poetry' - 'the worst aspect of literary Moscow'<sup>82</sup>. '[It] offends the ear, offends the historical, poetical sense'<sup>83</sup>, he exclaims. Of the few 'poetesses' that he names, Marina Tsvetaeva (the poet claimed by Wills to be closest 'in spirit' to McGuckian) is singled out for special attention. Her poetry, in particular, is 'tasteless [and] historically inaccurate'<sup>84</sup>; it is 'pseudo-populist and pseudo-Muscovite'<sup>85</sup>; it is 'Madonna-like needlework'<sup>86</sup>. To Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva lacks - perhaps surprisingly, considering the power of her verse, even in translation - this sense of a 'masculine force and truth'. (In 'Addenda to "Journey to Armenia"', he compounds this masculinist (and sexist) view of art when he declares that 'Feminine lips, beautiful in gossip and idle chatter, cannot formulate a genuine concept'<sup>87</sup>.)

McGuckian is obviously aware of this article - she appropriates a phrase of it (Mandelstam warning Mayakovsky that he's 'in danger of becoming a poetess'<sup>88</sup>) for 'Elegy for an Irish Speaker' - and the questions that it raises are ones that she has addressed time and again, in her poetry and in interviews. In an interview collected in the book Sleeping with Monsters, she constantly oscillates between the male and female aspects of her profession. On the one hand, in a statement that echoes Mandelstam's verdict on Tsvetaeva, she calls her poetic technique 'embroidery [and] very feminine'<sup>89</sup>; a little later she says, 'I think of myself as being ... as much male as female, or as being sexless - not essentially female anyway'<sup>90</sup>. Both of these admissions relate to what she says still further on in the interview:

I basically see the role of the poet as a male role  
which I have adopted... I wanted to do something that  
would make me into a man, or give me the status of a  
man... not to survive, but to be myself, to be authentic.<sup>91</sup>

The subversive impulse behind these statements, and its bearing on McGuckian's series of 'Mandelstam poems', breaks the surface in the course of a short appreciation of Eavan Boland ('Birds and their Masters') that appeared in the Irish University Review. Boland, she asserts,

address[ed], with more arrogance than mere confidence,  
even with aggression, not just the contemporary male  
poets ... on equal terms or as competitors, siblings,  
possibly with contempt; but also, on their own  
Petrarchan ground, such sonneteers as Yeats and  
Shakespeare.<sup>92</sup>

For McGuckian, Boland's pieces on Jean-Baptiste Chardin epitomise this poet's transgressive attitude towards her 'fellow' artists. The first (and earlier) poem - 'From The Painting, Back from Market, by Chardin' - 'pays obeisance to the painter's importance'<sup>93</sup> by actually naming him in the poem's title. This betrays an 'acceptance...of authority; an unrebelling reading'<sup>94</sup>. But the second poem, 'Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening', relegates Chardin to the body of the text itself, where, somewhat like a virus

being attacked by the body's immune system, it has to fend off the 'mocking' rhymes of 'woman', 'children' 'garden'. In this poem, Boland imagines herself 'not only [Chardin's] woman, but him, his equal in art'<sup>95</sup>. 'All deference is gone', McGuckian concludes, '...Eavan is unfrocking herself of the ornamental poetic vocation'<sup>96</sup>.

McGuckian's analysis of Boland turns on the word 'equal'. By seeking to write on an equal footing with male poets, she suggests, the female poet must 'address', subvert, interrogate, challenge, and even accuse both her male contemporaries, and, especially, her male precursors. Of course, her method of doing this differs more problematically from Boland's in that, as she attempts to become 'him' (here, Mandelstam), she 'un-names' him (because to name him would be to acknowledge the importance of his influence); and she does this while appropriating and re-voicing Mandelstam's source texts. As she says of Boland's second Chardin poem, her 'I' in her 'Mandelstam' poems is a 'personal distortion or re-vision'<sup>97</sup> of those texts, of that life, of this authority.

But this reading of her creative appropriations still leaves question after question, most notably - why this obsessive pillaging of Mandelstam in particular? It's clear that his influence is deeply-ingrained in McGuckian - she even quotes him in her Boland piece, and anyway her purloinings range far and wide over his writings, their various translations, and others' writings about him. Her conclusion to the Boland piece is a lengthy extract from a text that might help clarify, if not explain, matters: Gilbert and Gubar's seminal feminist analysis of nineteenth-century women's literature, The Madwoman In The Attic. The paragraph she quotes relates to 'the female poet's basic

problem ... the anxiety of authorship'<sup>98</sup>. According to Gilbert and Gubar, that poet's struggle is not with 'her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her'.<sup>99</sup> What we have here is something akin to the Bloomian 'anxiety of influence' theory, which itself influenced Gilbert and Gubar; but distorted to account for the way women artists must confront their 'fathers' and 'brothers' (or 'Brothers and Uncles' as a poem in Marconi's Cottage has it) through their texts (covertly) in order to individualize themselves, to free themselves from the social structures imposed by the male principle. The Madwoman In The Attic certainly seems to have had a major impact on McGuckian's thinking, particularly during the composition of Marconi's Cottage: she threads bits and pieces of that text together in 'Journal Intime' and 'Brothers and Uncles'. ('Journal' mostly thives from the first two chapters of the book: 'The Queen's Looking Glass' and 'Infection in the Sentence'; the latter alluding specifically to the Charlotte Bronte section.) These specific pointers and appropriations, and the overall theme of these poems, lead one to suggest that her 'Mandelstam' texts form a space where she can confront and attempt to silence what she sees as the too-powerful influence of the male poetic principle.

And yet it's surely a contentious issue to 'silence' Mandelstam in this way, and for such reasons, which is probably another factor in his 'un-naming' in her work. It is almost as if any adverse critical comment amounts to blasphemy. The veneration now accorded to Mandelstam approaches that bestowed upon a saint. Bruce Chatwin encapsulates this attitude when he calls him 'this century's literary martyr'<sup>100</sup>; and McGuckian's own Northern Irish contemporaries, Seamus Heaney and Tom Paulin have themselves reinforced this explicitly religious view of the poet and his poetry. As we



saw in the second chapter, Paulin portrays Mandelstam in 'The Book of Juniper' as a 'priest of the Word / receiv[ing] the Host on his tongue'.<sup>101</sup> In an article on 'Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam', Heaney describes Mandelstam's manuscripts as an 'altar-stone of a forbidden faith',<sup>102</sup> with his wife depicted as a 'hunted priest in penal times'<sup>103</sup> as she sought to preserve his poems. (There might be a cause for comment on the overtly Christian cast of these analogies, when Mandelstam himself was Jewish.) Therefore, McGuckian's appropriating of and concomitant refusal to name Mandelstam must also be seen in the light of her denial of the 'priestly' role in poetry, that vatic tendency - particularly in times of social and historical 'Grenzsituationen' - with which Heaney himself, as we have seen, has had to come to grips. Boland is, after all, applauded for 'defrock[ing]' herself. It could be that there is also an implicit rebuke to her peers here - Heaney is, strictly, a precursor as well - for inserting such masculinist analogies into Mandelstam's tragic circumstances; Nadezhda Mandelstam is masculinized as a 'priest', for instance.

That said, in her most recent collection Captain Lavender, McGuckian seems to have reached a culmination in her appropriative relationship with Mandelstam. Having grappled with a lover-figure (or friend-figure) in 'The Theatre', 'The Invalid's Echo' and 'Visiting Rainer Maria', and addressed a sleeping male child in 'The Dream-language of Fergus', her accounts of struggling with the male principle through Mandelstam now involve a father-figure, in the three poems 'The Finder Has Become the Seeker', 'Elegy for an Irish Speaker' and, the climax, 'The Aisling Hat', one of her longest pieces. These poems are almost wholly stolen from Mandelstam's two greatest prose works 'Journey to Armenia' and 'Conversation about Dante'; and they appear at

the end of the first part of the collection, 'much of which', reads the blurb, 'was prompted by the author's father's death'. As such, the ambivalence central to her other Mandelstam poems might appear alleviated: 'Sleep easy, supposed fatherhood', she writes in the first line of 'The Finder has Become the Seeker'. That 'supposed' (surely an odd word to use of her own late father) points to the presence of Mandelstam in this text - or at least to another presence ghosting this text - and the injunction to 'sleep easy' signals a new tenderness in her approach to her precursor; but this has already been established by the fact that she has fashioned an elegy for her father from Mandelstam's own words.

The title 'The Finder has Become the Seeker' alters a statement made by Jane Gary Harris in her introduction to the Collected Critical Prose describing Mandelstam's trajectory as a prose writer: 'The essence of the "I" [in Mandelstam's texts] has undergone many changes associated with maturity of the poet, but basically the seeker has become the "finder"'.<sup>104</sup> McGuckian's reversal of the terms of this observation might then suggest loss, the unravelling of a once-coherent identity. But it ties in with the poem's opening command, lifted from the conclusion of 'Journey to Armenia': 'Sleep is easy in nomad camps. The body, exhausted by space, grows warm, stretches out and recalls the length of the journey...'<sup>105</sup> (So this quotation both tops and tails McGuckian's poem.)

'Journey to Armenia' is the unmentioned tap-root of this poem, and of 'The Aisling Hat'. After his spleen-emptying philippic 'Fourth Prose', Mandelstam was able to construct on that clearance this dazzling, sensuous, life-enhancing essay: according

to Jane Gary Harris, 'Armenia [for Mandelstam] symbolised everything connected with life and the life-giving force... The thematic emphasis is on the idea of organic continuity perceived in the life-cycle: birth, growth, decay, death, rebirth'.<sup>106</sup> However, endeavouring to see McGuckian's poem through this new screen of Mandelstam filches, there appears to be a stress on the notion of death as a desired state (we recall how she would heretically paint herself 'welcom[ing] death' in 'The Flitting'). The dead father is associated with a renewed sense of fertility : he 'resembles a flowerbed', his 'leaves [are] newly opened', his 'outcast sounds scatter their fluid carpet'; and his epic status in death is confirmed in that line 'Homericly studded in your different planting'. On the other hand, the speaker - in the midst of the 'desolation and glass' that the father's 'mouth works beyond' - is 'exhausted', needs 'strength' to individualize herself (to 'distinguish [herself] from' her father). Much of her address to the father is phrased as a plea: 'open somehow / your newly-opened leaves', 'give me the strength', 'oh do not heal, dip your travelling eye'; and this again connotes that ever-present pressure of the male influence that the speaker needs to 'distinguish herself from'.

The poem develops in this way as a fraught dialogue with Mandelstam, in which she appears to put forward her case for appropriating his texts. 'You desire to exist through me', she writes, 'I want to disappear exhausted in you'. There are two separate elements to consider here. In the first line, does McGuckian really think herself to be a kind of spiritual conduit, a poetic medium, the Doris Stokes of verse? Surely the way that Mandelstam 'exists' in her texts, un-named, re-voiced, his words sometimes turned against him, would mitigate against this. On the other hand, the suggestion that McGuckian 'disappears exhausted' into Mandelstam's words might very well be the

unkind opinion of those not predisposed towards her work. But, again, only Mandelstam disappears into McGuckian's Mandelstam appropriations. In a way she will only manage to distinguish herself from him by refusing to acknowledge fully his influence.

These three poems are finally as much ambivalent paeans to Mandelstam as they are celebrations of her father. In 'Elegy for an Irish Speaker', she writes to a 'most foreign and cherished reader': 'I cannot live without / your trans-sense language / the living furrow of your spoken words / that plough up time'. Apart from (as far as I can tell) 'I cannot live without', these phrases are Mandelstam's. 'Most foreign and cherished reader' stems from the essay 'On the Nature of the Word': 'How can one equip this ship [the human word] for its distant voyage without furnishing it with all the necessities for so foreign and cherished a reader?' 'Trans-sense language' was a phrase Mandelstam used of the Futurist movement: 'In [their] work ... it is difficult to distinguish the theme from the device, and the experienced eye ... will see only the pure device of the naked language of trans-sense'. And 'the living furrow of your spoken words / that plough up time' proves an amalgam of 'Poetry is the plough that turns up time' (from 'Word and Culture') and (from 'A Word or Two about Georgian Art') 'The life of a language is revealed to everyone... every spoken word leaves a furrow in the language'.

And yet it must be conceded that not every poem which McGuckian gleans from another source necessarily describes a tussle with the ever-dominant male principle. In fact, 'Dear Rain' (from Marconi's Cottage) delineates a relationship with a male figure

that lacks the elements of struggle. However, the poem itself begins wearily in the midst of such conflict:

I have seen men with the colouring  
Of the torso of this heavy day ( of time  
Stolen from sleep ) and felt the Irishness  
Of my face ( less than ever mine )  
Settle into a cloud of bitter bone.

The parentheses, apart from their functions as asides and clarifications, seem to retard the progress of the verse, as does the vocabulary ('torso', 'heavy', 'Irishness', 'settle', 'cloud'), and the constant repetitions of 'of' - emphasised by its prime position in the second and fourth lines. (Various forms of repetition prove important in this poem, as we shall see.) The impression reinforced by this opening stanza is one of grinding, wearying monotony that's in danger of hardening the speaker (that final 'bitter bone'). There's also the claustrophobic linking of the body with the weather - the 'heavy day' is imaged as a 'torso', the face settles into a 'cloud of bitter bone'; the press of this corpse-like atmosphere is drawn together with the first line's 'men' and the third line's 'Irishness'.

But all this is immediately dispelled in the following stanza, and by the rest of the poem. 'But one journey - one man - washes out / Another; and a clear evening turns / Its cadaverous cocoon in front of me / Like a book-lined room, or a child / Simply forgetting to hate'. This stanza presents an almost complete volte-face to the first verse.

The brackets have been replaced by a more forthright and thrusting set of dashes; the 'torso of this heavy day' gives way to the 'cadaverous cocoon' of a 'clear evening' - whereas the first seemed to represent a kind of oppressive death-in-life, the second is weighted with intimations of a rebirth out of a dead shell. (We might also note the alliteration on 'clear/ cadaverous/ cocoon', the assonance that plays on 'journey' and 'turns', on 'cocoon', 'book' and 'room' - all of which tends to speak against Calvin Bedient's assertion that McGuckian's poetry is particularly 'rhyme-rationed'<sup>107</sup>). This sense of a rebirth is picked up at the end of the stanza with the picture of the 'child/ Simply forgetting to hate'; this is part of a thread of imagery that goes through the poem and which links the 'Irishness of my face [like a] cloud of bitter bone', the man who 'bent towards the murdered/ Past as a sunflower, and did not talk/ Of victory', who 'did not like his talk/ To have its North and South' and the concluding hope of 'another, no less innocent, surrender'. These seem, almost explicitly, to gesture towards some comment on the 'Troubles'. But I shall return to this presently.

This 'man' for whom the speaker leaves is constantly imaged in terms of light (in stanzas three to five, light, and its derivatives - 'lightly', 'lighter' - are mentioned five times) which, in McGuckian's image-index, is associated with 'maleness' (as we saw in the first verse with the men 'the colouring/ Of the torso of this heavy day'; and, to take a further example, in the poem 'Road 32, Roof 13-23, Grass 23' - which might, as suggested by its title, concern the artist Gwen John - McGuckian writes of a woman's 'fear of light,/ Which began when his coat hung over her chair' ). But this sense of light is different. We note that the speaker's awareness of the man, and the rebirth that he portends, happens on a 'clear evening'. In the fifth stanza, he is

described as 'an outward light, a night-long/ Splendid summer'; he is also imaged as a 'skein of dreams walking'. She perceives him (or at least, since he's dead, his spirit) neither to be threatened nor alienated by the darkness which, again in McGuckian, is a female 'medium'; and this is confirmed by the poem's last lines, in which the woman declares her wish to be 'his any hope/ Of another, no less innocent, surrender/ To midnight, to winter, or to wine' (all of which tend to have a feminine gender in this poetry).

But not just this. The female speaker actually voices her intention to be the man's reborn spirit: to be, as it were, his double. Much of Marconi's Cottage takes the notion of the double as a focal point, from the pregnant woman carrying an other within her, from image after image of mirror, reflection, echo (and, indeed, the double itself, as in 'Brothers and Uncles' where she refers to 'my truest and darkest double'); to the widespread use of alliteration (an extreme example of this comes towards the end of 'Venus and the Sea' - 'Wiping off the painted pinpoint pupils') and a kind of echolalic syntax which reverberates through the volume. The best example of this occurs in the fifth stanza of 'Dear Rain':

The background in which  
His language made sense made  
His light voice lighter and himself  
An outward light, a night-long  
Splendid summer.

After a stanza like this, how can Bedient's claim that McGuckian's poetry (in Marconi's Cottage) is 'rhyme-rationed' be substantiated? (The use of internal rhyme and assonance is habitual in McGuckian, and particularly in this collection.) The first thing the reader should notice is the way in which McGuckian propels the line upwards and outwards on the back of her repetitions: 'made sense made', 'light voice lighter'; the resulting sense of expansion finds its measure when it strikes the phrase 'outward light', and, as if catching its breath with the insertion of the comma, manages to reach a higher pitch in the climaxing 'night-long/ Splendid summer'. The zig-zagging assonantal quality of this particular stanza is further exemplified in the play between 'language', 'light voice' and 'night-long', a means by which McGuckian fuses the feminine and masculine principles (light/night) that inform the poem, and demonstrate the speaker's attraction to this dead man. We might also draw attention to the proliferation of trochaic words in this verse - 'background', 'language', 'lighter', 'outward' etc. Each two-syllabled word is a trochee; and this also lends the verse an eerie effect of echo as it lifts to the climactic phrase. Aside from this, the repetition of 'l' words and the verse's last line - 'Splendid summer' - are also part of the system of alliteration that McGuckian makes prominent in the poem. In addition to these, 'bitter bone' and 'cadaverous cocoon' (strange phrases on their own account), we also find 'liked/ Light', 'second spring', 'fatal as the first run'.

But these particular facets of the poem are brought together by a further, secreted level. The 'giveaway' (if that's not too strong a word in these circumstances) is the central 'He did not like talk/ To have its North and South'. This is lifted almost word for word from Dan Davin's introduction to the Collected Poems of the Northern



Irish poet, W.R.Rodgers, and refers to the poet's way of conducting a conversation (he loved the monologue, in contrast to MacNeice's penchant for the dialogue). Several other sentences and phrases are also purloined from Davin's introduction. The first line - 'I have seen men with the colouring' - comes from a description of MacNeice on his death-bed ('I had seen men, their bullets fatal, with that colouring, that look'<sup>108</sup>); the last line of the first verse's 'cloud of bitter bone' derives from part of Davin's description of Rodgers: 'the bone of bitterness that is beneath and supports the ripple of Irish laughter'.<sup>109</sup> The phrase 'fatal as the first run' is used in a letter by Rodgers to Davin about the long-promised and never-finished 'Epilogue' poem to his and MacNeice's long-promised and hardly-started book The Character of Ireland; he is pleading time to revise what he has written of the 'Epilogue' because, as they say of whiskey-distilling, 'the first run is fatal'.<sup>110</sup> And the phrase 'night-long cocoon', which is split in the poem also appears in this rather boozily sentimental memoir of Rodgers.

Again the question must be - why Rodgers? Rodgers has come to be seen as a minor poet (though he did burst spectacularly on the scene with his first volume - Awake!); in many ways, a failed poet - in the shadow of Dylan Thomas, Hewitt and, particularly, of MacNeice. It's commonly accepted that he never really fulfilled his potential, or lived up to others' initial estimation of his worth. As Tom Clyde has commented: 'His incessant alliteration breaches the boundaries of taste, to the extent where one begins to wonder if the surfeit of noise isn't intended to cover a lack of meaning; sometimes his poems feel like they could fall apart in your hands'.<sup>111</sup> As I have attempted to indicate, McGuckian's celebration of Rodgers (coded as it is) includes his - often annoying - taste for alliteration. (This rears its head even in his

better poems, as these two lines from 'The Swan' indicate: 'I saw lingering, late and lightless / a single swan, swinging, sleek as a sequin'.<sup>112</sup> Many of the descriptives used of the swan similarly start with an 's'. )

But, whatever his technical handicaps, Rodgers did manage to write some of the most nakedly sensual, startling poems of his time, and they still retain their power; startling in that the poems' sensuality was imbued with a religious sensibility - not surprising as Rodgers was a (disaffected) Presbyterian minister at Loughgall in the 'thirties. His poem 'Lent', for example, posits a sexual relationship, or, at least, a relationship with sexual overtones, between Jesus and Mary Magdalene - some years before Kazantzakis wrote about the same idea in The Last Temptation of Christ. His love poems (although sometimes ham-strung by his predilection for alliteration) are often straightforwardly fleshy ('The Net', perhaps). It's little wonder, then, that McGuckian feels an affinity with this still-believing apostate who celebrated things of the flesh in his own way, considering the religious and sensual entanglements in her own poetry. (Maybe he constitutes a complete polar opposite. A Presbyterian minister to her Catholic upbringing (both outspokenly disaffected)). And the sense is strong in the poem that her attraction to Rodgers rests in her belief that she can 'be him' - in the same way that Chardin's woman in the Boland poem can 'be' Chardin, be his equal - because he doesn't constitute any threat; he hasn't been canonized (that particular word carries its own ironies as regards its religious and literary meanings), he hasn't been instituted as any kind of precursor by those following after, his work - misread, it seems, according to McGuckian - is still in process, unfinished, not carved in stone. As such, the last lines of her poem figure a resurrection for Rodgers, and a deliverance

for her.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought partly to explain the aura of 'mysteriousness' that hangs over McGuckian's poetry, through an analysis of the transgressive, subversive impulse that hides at the heart of her poetry, and directly related to this, her covert appropriations from Freud, Mandelstam and about Rodgers. The absolute hiddenness of these appropriations does pose a problem for the critic, and for the reader: if I fail to understand a McGuckian poem (and, by her own admission, if you are a man, failing to understand her poems is almost a given), is it because of McGuckian's style and technique, or is it because I have failed to locate the intertexts speaking, however distorted, through her text?

McGuckian's appropriations raise question after question that merely being able to place an allusion or a theft cannot quite alleviate, and in this chapter I have tried to foreground some of these. Clair Wills's suggestion that such appropriations are

'translations' doesn't seem to answer satisfactorily their combative nature. It is not only a matter of saying so-and-so supplied this or that line (or this or that poem); we have to come to grips with McGuckian's deliberate strategy of un-naming her sources, un-fixing their presence in the text. With a source such as Mandelstam, 'un-named' historically for so long by the Soviet state, this particular method is obviously contentious. But, on the other hand, these creative appropriations are consistent with what might be described as the subliminality of McGuckian's work. Her style appears to describe the effects of a shock, of a detonation, somewhere deep within the text, which unglues the resulting poem's connective tissue. Her images angle towards screens, disguises, masks; words that a reader might think had a fixed meaning - such as her repetitions of 'blue' - alter, proliferate, contradict themselves.

Similarly, in her creative appropriations, there is a subliminal opening-out, a freeing, in the poem; where the surface seems closed and hermetic, beneath there is process, a dynamic, a dialogue. That that dynamic takes the form of a struggle against the male principle, against the influence of the precursor from whom she is appropriating (and in this way, becomes, as I said in the introduction, covertly polemical), does not refute the process of individuation symbolised by this struggle. In her poems of appropriation, and especially in her Mandelstam poems, McGuckian stares at you in the same way the 'Girl With Turban' stares at the speaker in 'The Flitting'. The resistant inwardness of that gaze subverts the marks of a man's work, the darkness at the centre of those eyes connoting a subliminal freeing, an opening, an escape from the structures of the male principle.

## CONCLUSION

Seamus Heaney famously said in 1973 that he 'wanted to take the English lyric and make it eat stuff that it has never eaten before ... and make it still an English lyric'<sup>1</sup>. Fifteen years later, in an interview he gave to the magazine Salmagundi, he said about several of the poems in The Haw Lantern that 'they are like pseudo-translations from an unspecified middle European language'<sup>2</sup>. The focus on combatting the 'English lyric' seems to have faded, or at least been side-stepped, in favour of a more European focus; and the violence of appropriation in the first statement - writing as the action of a fifth columnist - has been tempered to a kind of solidarity with this 'unspecified' language.

This thesis has concentrated on such decenterings, unrootings, widenings of the frame of reference in Northern Irish poetry. Northern Ireland is a small country, but, as I have tried to argue, its poetic frame of reference seems immense. All kinds of cultural material fall into the net of this type of poetry: not just the stramash of literary and historical allusions, but also art - as Edna Longley's article in her collection The Living Stream, 'No More Poems About Paintings', makes clear; Paul Klee's influence on Tom Paulin's latest collection; the comic books used in Carson's work; music (classical and contemporary); drama (Heaney, Paulin and Mahon's versions of Greek plays, Muldoon's libretto), and cinema, the grammar of which seems to have influenced certainly Muldoon (in 'Madoc' and 'Yarrow'), and Carson, and even Heaney, who has a poem in his collection The Haw Lantern called 'A Shooting Script'.

It would have been easy, though, to ascribe these poets' use of translation, intertexts and poetic influence solely to the Troubles, as a means of addressing while seemingly not addressing the situation. Things are a little more complicated than that. It's evident from my discussion that, although each of these poets is dedicated to such activity, both their procedures and their aims differ widely. Heaney and Paulin have augmented their borrowings with a panoply of criticism, which sometimes serves to make the poems act merely as footnotes to the prose material. Much of Tom Paulin's later work, in particular, seems abstruse without recourse to any of his essays; but then, one might argue that the prose and the poetry are of a piece, and Paulin himself has already indirectly tried to pre-empt such cavilling in his essay on Milton: '[R]eaders need to assemble a store of glosses in order better to appreciate Milton's verse'. Certainly, that would help with the intertextual difficulties of Muldoon and McGuckian, who rarely offer any extrapoetic light on their complex (and often furtive) implication of intertexts into their own 'texts'.

That said, one startling figure of convergence (at least for three of these poets) is the towering figure of Osip Mandelstam. But his example ripples interestingly across the different surfaces of their work. For Heaney and Paulin, Mandelstam is appropriated as a quasi-religious exemplar, not quite of the power of art ranged against the state, but of the singularly untrammelled force of 'utterance' which, by its very freed nature, often comes into conflict with rigid political doxa. As Heaney makes clear in The Government of the Tongue, 'Mandelstam's witness [was] to the necessity of what he called "breathing freely"... to the art of poetry as an unharnessed, non-didactic, non-party-dictated, inspired act'.

For Paulin, whose early work I have argued labours somewhat under the 'the English lyric' burden of Larkin and Auden, contact with Mandelstam is an important factor in opening the space of his text to a 'passionate dissidence'. 'Mandelstam's vision has a kind of passionate eagerness', he writes, 'which is altogether different from the lyric melancholy it would probably possess if it were by an English writer and set in the Cotswolds'<sup>5</sup>. Mandelstam is used here as a stick to beat, among others, his nemesis Geoffrey Hill, who, for him, espouses nothing more than a 'visionary mustiness'<sup>6</sup>.

But McGuckian's appropriation of Mandelstam seems predicated on a completely opposing basis. She tussles with, struggles with, derides, misreads, and - most contentiously - refuses to name Mandelstam in the poems she cuts and pastes from his and others' words. In a way it could be argued that McGuckian isn't as much tussling with Mandelstam (though she is), as struggling with the authority charged with elevating Mandelstam to the status of 'this century's literary martyr'<sup>7</sup>. Heaney and Paulin are as much complicit in this as anyone; and this martyrdom, in effect, silences Tsvetaeva, who died by her own hand under the same pressures. And yet there seems to be in McGuckian's appropriations of Mandelstam the same awareness of the sanctity of the 'word' - or 'Word', if we have to pinpoint the locus of divergence between the attitudes of the female and male principles towards this poet.

It's somewhat different again with Muldoon. Where Heaney, Paulin and McGuckian seem to turn east, to Europe, for their appropriations and assimilations, Muldoon's 'magpieings' are those of a more westering imagination. Muldoon takes his intertextual cues frequently from American sources, which feed back into his obsessions

with diaspora, scatterings, frag-mentings. The miscegenations in his work (for example, the Welsh Indians of Madoc, the 'neither one thing nor the other' of the mule figures) speak as much against any false notions of a 'purity' in language, as they do against ideas of racial and national purity. So much for Southey and his triads. In the breathtaking spaces of Muldoon's texts, things are continually coming together, coming apart, connecting, disconnecting, mixing, repelling; in their own fractured, bits-and-pieces structuring (seemingly arbitrarily formed, but actually anchored by deep structures), they are profoundly expressive of Edna Longley's comment about the 'creative dynamic' of Northern Irish poetry.

In the end, poets in Northern Ireland have come to address the vexed issue of 'speaking out' by engaging in a textual dialogue with precursors not just in time, stretching back centuries, but also in space. In a way, this is itself a form of 'speaking out'. The result may well have been to produce a profoundly 'permeable' or 'pervious' poetry, a poetry with cat-like sensitivity not just to the pressures of semantic nuance (Muldoon's use of the subjunctive and other non-indicative moods, for example), but that's also open to - if not unquestioningly accommodating - what's out there, what's beyond.



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## NOTES TO 'MEDBH MCGUCKIAN' CHAPTER

For ease of reference, I have pulled together the poems by McGuckian which are drawn from Osip Mandelstam's prose into one section of notes. The following list is by no means complete, but does provide, I think, a clear indication of McGuckian's reliance on Mandelstam's original texts. (Having mostly annotated 'The Theatre' in the body of the chapter, I have purposely left it out here.)

### 'THE INVALID'S ECHO'

(All citations from Hope Abandoned.)

#### FIRST STANZA

'It was as if he put a thermometer / Back in its holder without shaking it'

( 'Every time I took my temperature I put the thermometer back in its holder without shaking it, hoping that M. ... might look and see what it said' (p.210) )

'snatched a cigarette out of my mouth'

( 'I meekly put up with his ... despotism (he was always snatching cigarettes out of my mouth)' (p.239) )

'he put / His finger on the rest and we were disconnected'

( 'I snatched the receiver from [M.] and heard Olga weeping at the end of the line, but he put his finger on the rest and we were disconnected' (p.212) )

### SECOND STANZA

'The thinnest paper'

( 'The director of the sovkhos...was a real robot, carrying out with indifference all the orders and instructions, written on the thinnest of paper' (p.286) )

'an unbidden blue'

( 'I found myself sitting opposite the door through which, out of the blue and unbidden, she had made her entry' (p.213) )

'That had summoned him (it took five calls)'

( '[There were] frequent visits from Akhmatova, whom M. had learned how to lure down from Leningrad by summoning her on the telephone (it took five calls)' (p.415)

'sitting behind a desk'

( ' "How could I doubt her word", [Pasternak] replied, "when she was sitting at a desk!" We stood in mortal awe of anybody who sat a desk.' (p.417) )

'waking him / Prematurely'

( 'In my view, however, the main change is that the era has mellowed a little and no longer destroys everybody who "wakens prematurely".' (p.366) )

'unfrightened'

( 'At the same time, these grandchildren belong to the "unfrightened" generation, and I have no great faith in them' (p.366) )

'ten-year stretch'

( 'What a pity [all you nice long-haired boys in the West] can't do a ten-year stretch in China' (p.538) )

'twenty minutes by an open window'

( 'Dostoyevski achieved nothing but a tragic and passionate "twenty minutes" by an open window' (p.267) )

### **THIRD STANZA**

'His sound was like nothing else, my ears / Were never rested'

( 'In either case, the sound was like nothing else, and there was something inhuman about it. One's ears were never rested, straining to catch the slightest night sound' (p.353) )

### **FOURTH STANZA**

'He practises at death'

( 'There are cases in which a poet prepares for a future experience and ... grasps its essence. This happens ... when he "practices [sic] at death", that is: "dies" by arresting the flow of time, and then, after dwelling in the protracted moment wrested from it, returns to life' (p.320) )

'own free will'

( '...Surkov's explanation was: "They say you left Moscow of your own free will"...  
The formula about leaving "of one's own free will"...served to mask the continued  
refusal of a permit to reside in the capital' (p.589) )

'endearments ... deepest reds'

( 'Of the deeper reds, "crimson" has the best associations in Russian...[and] it was  
pure chance which eventually gave me the clue as to why, in M.'s mind, the  
endearments of the "Chief of the Jews" should be tinged with a warm shade of red'  
(p.550-1))

'execute the house's '

( '[An] armed detachment of forty men lined up on the pavement in front of the four-  
storey house and began to blaze away at the bourgeoisie... Having thus "executed" the  
house, the detachment marched on its way' (p.515) )

#### **FIFTH STANZA**

'A house heals easily'

( 'It is easier for a house to heal its wounds than for a human being' (p.515) )

'blood shed / In the past loses its hue'

( 'Facts pale after a certain passage of time, and blood shed in the past loses its red  
hue' (p.519) )

'I would wish my grave / Untended too, like everybody else's'

( 'The graves of my parents, as well as those of my brother and sister, are also abandoned. I would like my grave to be untended too, like everybody else's' (p.509)

)

'the bulb that has not been washed / Since the revolution'

( 'As M. told me later, [Tsvetaeva's entrance hall] had previously been a dining room, with a light in the ceiling, but the bulb had not been washed since the Revolution and let through ...only a dim glow' (p.460) )

'the hole / In the ceiling that has left / A little pile of plaster on the floor'

( 'What reason was there to envy Akhmatova, who did not dare to utter a word in the privacy of her own room, and used to point to the hole in the ceiling from which a little pile of plaster had fallen on the floor?' (p.250) )

### SIXTH STANZA

'I think his family is so ancient / His heart must still be over on the right'

( '[Zvenigorodski] really did have blue blood; as he explained to us, the Zvenigorodskis were a very much older family than the Romanovs, so ancient, in fact, that he, its last scion, had his heart on the right instead of the left side' (p.332) )

'Merging with my name'

( 'M. himself never for one moment entertained the idea of taking another name... With Akhmatova, on the other hand, he felt it was different: she had merged with her

name and it was inseparable from her' (p.450) )

'that comes from nowhere'

( 'Akmatova was indeed unhappy about her pen name (it was "Tartar, backwoods, coming from nowhere, cleaving to every disaster, itself a disaster")' (p.448) )

### SIXTH STANZA

'I lie with my back to him'

( 'I knew one unsuccessful woman painter who used to lie down with her back to people when they came to see her husband...just to show she had her own life' (p.463)

'the entrance to the house / But not the house'

( 'Sometimes [in a memory], I see the entrance to a house, but not the house itself - as in a photograph taken from some peculiar angle' (p.600) )

'The long autumn'

( [In Tashkent] 'The long autumn was over and the suntan was fading from people's emaciated faces' (p.602) )

'scattered its poisonous seeds'

( 'I have heard such assurances [that things will be different] from many a simple soul who was reared in our hot-houses ...and transplanted at the right moment to his native fields with the task of scattering his poisonous seeds over them' (p.617) )

'October child'

( 'The man ... was a so-called 'child of October', a representative of the new post-revolutionary breed' (p.558) )

### SEVENTH STANZA

'he will seek the word / With his fingers'

( 'In his poem about the word he has lost, M. seeks it with his fingers, described as "seeing"' (p.543) )

### EIGHTH STANZA

'I will be freezing in my short jacket'

( [From N.M.'s 'last letter' to Mandelstam] 'I remember the time we were coming back from the baths... It was still cold and I was freezing in my short jacket' (p.620)

'In my last dream... / I was buying food for him'

( [From 'last letter'] 'In my last dream I was buying food for you in a filthy hotel restaurant' (p.620) )

'I have lost track of'

( [From 'last letter'] '...from the time of that dream, I have lost track of you. I do not know where you are' (p.621) )

'A truck... / Came rattling into the... courtyard'

( 'At the beginning of the sixties, in Pskov, I dreamed I heard a truck come rattling



into the courtyard, and then M.'s voice saying "Get up, they've come for you this time" (p.617-18))

### VISITING RAINER MARIA

(All citations from Brown unless otherwise indicated.)

#### STANZA ONE

'he was just leaving / As I was just arriving'

( 'Tsvetaeva and her husband... had met Mandelstam in Koktebel in the summer of 1915... Their encounter was brief: Mandelstam was just leaving the Crimea and they were just arriving' (p.64))

'in my blue smock'

( [Letter to N.M. from M.] 'Your little paw, like a baby's, all black from the charcoal, your blue smock - it's all memorable to me' (p.78) )

'yesterday, without meaning to'

( [Letter to N.M. from M.] 'Yesterday, without meaning to, I thought to myself "I must find it"...' (p.78) )

'Though this first sentence would / Have been equally suitable / For the last'

( 'Mandelstam had already been in Feodosia for five weeks when he wrote to N.M. ... the first of his extant letters to her. It tells something of their life together that the

first sentence would have been equally suitable for the last letter in 1938'

( p.77 )

### STANZA TWO

'The air was the way it always / Is in a room'

( [From M.'s article on the city of Batum] 'You run around in [Batum] as you might run around in a room, and what is more the air is always sort of steamy, the way it is in a room' (p.94) )

'books lay in ruins'

( [From M.'s The Noise of Time about his childhood] 'I always remember the lower shelf [of his parents' bookcase] as chaotic: the books were not standing upright side by side but lay like ruins' (p.21) )

'on the snow-cold bed'

( '[Mandelstam's] childhood comes to life with great vividness [in The Noise of Time]. The sense impressions give pleasure: snow-cold, blindingly white bed-linen...' (p.22) )

'He must have been / Scrubbing the floor with his toothbrush'

( [From M.'s account of his Civil War experiences] 'People were lying on the floor. It was crowded as a hen-house... [A] demented young Turk ... kept scrubbing the floor with his toothbrush' (p.82) )

'using his shoulder as an ashtray'

( [A schoolfriend on M.] 'Mandelstam...was very taciturn, smoked a lot and had the habit of using his shoulder as an ashtray' (p.48) )

'the kind of insanity running / Through ... furnishings'

( [Of the marriage-chamber in Poe's Ligeia] 'The walls are hung with sumptuous draperies, the fabric and designs of which are found also on the bed and in the carpet. There is a kind of insanity running through all the furnishings of this fantastic apartment' (p.242) )

### STANZA THREE

'So was my shape dictated by / The curved outer wall, the eccentricities / Of the corridor'

( [Of the 'strangely crooked hall' in the Yeliseev mansion that led to M's room] 'The shape [of it], dictated by the curved outer wall and the eccentricities of the corridor, consisted mostly of angles, none of the walls being perpendicular with any other' (p.86) )

'if he touches / My sleeve even softly'

( [Nadezhda Pavolvich's reaction to M. reading] 'Then [Mandelstam] began to read... Blok and I were sitting side by side. Suddenly he touched my sleeve softly and with his eyes pointed to [M.] ... I have never seen a face so transformed by inspiration and self-forgetfulness' (p.88) )

'whole streets / Of shops near the sea will be extinguished / In ...darkness'

( [M.'s memoir of Batum] 'At that hour entire blocks of the city are dead as a desert. There are the special blocks of shops near the sea. Whole streets of them, in darkness, with shutters locked tight by heavy iron padlocks' (p.95) )

'the most intentional'

( '[Petersburg], Peter's city, 'the most intentional city in the world', in Dostoevsky's memorable phrase, [stands] for what is new and modern' (p.223) )

#### **STANZA FOUR**

'If he mentions a river it will be'

( [On the classical references in Tristia] 'If a river is mentioned, it will be Lethe or the Styx...' (p.256) )

'Renouncing the moon'

( '[In Mandelstam's essay on Villon] there is ... a fore-stalling of certain phrases of Gumilyov's manifesto [concerning the Acmeist movement] ... and of that passage in his review of M.'s first book where he praises him for having become an Acmeist by renouncing the moon for more mundane affairs' (p.152) )

'stirring into animal storm'

( [Perhaps a conjunction of the following two quotations]

'The first voice of the poem [poem 119] is that of one who waits alone for the dawn, the slow day that is stirring into its grey, animal life' (p.247)

'The principal image of the poem ['The Horseshoe Finder', poem 136], the horseshoe itself, is what is left of the stormy animal...' (p.293) )

'Adding a feminine ending'

( [Of characters mentioned in The Noise of Time] 'The artist Mazesa, who himself added a feminine ending to his name, is portrayed a sort of Renaissance genius manqué...' (p.79) )

'Whatever parts are dream'

( [On a memoir by Georgi Ivanov] 'There follows a page of lyrical impressionism on the general topic of transitoriness and irreality, but nowhere is it said that the account of Komarovskiy [involving Mandelstam] ...is a dream. Or, to be more exact, we are not told which parts are dream...' (p.15) )

'Of the place, / It was godforsaken; of the season, dead;'

( [Of Mandelstam's word-repetitions] 'The commonest meaning of the word [glukhoi] is 'deaf', but it vaguely means many other things... Said of a place, it is "solitary", "godforsaken"...; of a wall, "blank"; of a rumour, "vague", of a season, "dead" (p.175) )

#### **STANZA FIVE**

'But whether it was sea or flesh'

( 'Useless to seek to pin Mandelstam's picture of the language like some butterfly in a case; it will not hold still... Is it a sea? It is flesh, sounding and speaking flesh...'

(p.155) )

'short capsules'

( 'All the word's belligerent virtue is in its root. Russian is a language of roots, short capsules of meaning...' (p.280)) 'Cooling wax...laid... / ...over partings of quite a different/ Cast'

( [Formed from the following quotations]

'The method [of divination in Pushkin's Eugene Onegin] was to melt a candle into a shallow dish of water, where the suddenly cooled wax would assume odd shapes like Rorschach blots...' (p.274)

'Ovid's parting from his loved ones as he goes into exile is a paradigm of all partings. It may be laid over other partings, as it is in this poem [poem 104 - 'Tristia']...' (p.274)

'Only minds of quite a different cast will be gladdened by the doctrine of the twenty-third line, or of the poem' (p.275))

'I must find it, / Using the feminine form of must'

( [From M's letter to his wife] 'Yesterday, without meaning to, I thought to myself 'I must find it' - using the feminine form of must - for you, that is, you said it through me' (p.78))

'What you want, what I want, what can be done'

( [From M's letter to Ivanov] 'P.S. I am sending you some poems. Do with them what you want - what I want - what can be done with them' (p.38) )

### STANZA SIX

'Not his, not his, not his, his'

( [From Tsvetaeva's memoir of M.] 'I run, leaving behind M., the train and [M's] parting sentence. End of the platform. A post. I also turn to a post. The cars go past: not his, not his, not his ... his. I wave, as only the day before I had waved at the soldiers' (p.63) )

'sea-kitten'

( 'Harbour Master Sarandinaki [in M's autobiography] combines in his person both the powerful "civic god of the sea" and the gentle soul of a "sea-kitten"' (p.79)

'English shirt'

( 'The students ... dressed in what Mandelstam imagined to be the "Cambridge fashion" - short trousers, English shirts and wool stockings' (p.23) )

'a tray of Persian tea'

( [From M's account of his Civil War experiences] 'The door would be opened to admit a sturdy, ruddy-faced tavern keeper with a tray of Persian tea' (p.82) )

'Because / The it of his translation may mean silence / But the she of mine means Aphrodite'

( [Of M's poem 'Silentium'] 'The first word [of the poem] is something of a problem... The word is a Russian pronoun that can mean "it" or "she" depending on

the antecedent, which is of course the problem. The "it" of my translation means "silence"; the "she" of [another translator's] meant "Aphrodite" (p.166)

### **THE FINDER HAS BECOME THE SEEKER**

(All citations are from Collected Critical Prose, unless otherwise stated.)

#### **STANZA ONE**

'resembling a flowerbed'

( 'Journey to Armenia', p.344 - 'I spent a month enjoying the lake waters ... and teaching myself to contemplate the two or three dozen tombs scattered so as to resemble a flowerbed' )

'extract you here and now / from the soil'

( 'Villon', p.58 - 'You need only know how to extract that "here and now" from the soil of Time without harming its roots, or it will wither and die' )

'I like to breathe what ought to be'

( 'JTA', p.374 - 'I want to live in the imperative of the future passive participle - in the "what ought to be". I like to breathe that way. That's what I like' )

#### **STANZA TWO**

'We are things squeezed out ... / not that which serves as coverings'



( 'Conversation about Dante', p.408 - '... [Dante] considers form as the thing which is squeezed out, not as that which serves as a covering' )

### STANZA THREE

'Night furs you, winter clothes you'

( 'Introduction', p.17 - 'A beast must not be ashamed of his furry hide. Night furred him. Winter clothed him. Literature is a beast. His furriers are night and winter' )

'Homerically studded'

( 'JTA', p.345 - 'The entire island is Homerically studded with yellow bones, leavings from the pious picnics of the local populace' )

'You jangle the keys...'

( 'JTA', p.349 - 'I acquired the habit of looking upon every Armenian as a philologist... However, this is partly correct, for these people jangle the keys of their language even when they are not unlocking any treasures' )

'Your outcast sounds'

( 'JTA', p.372 - 'I experienced such joy in pronouncing sounds forbidden to Russian lips, mysterious sounds, outcast sounds...' )

'their fluid carpet'

( 'Introduction', p.42 - '[Poetic discourse] is an extremely durable carpet woven

out of fluid...' )

#### STANZA FOUR

'Your mouth works'

( 'CAD', p.399 - 'The mouth works, the smile nudges the line of verse, cleverly and gaily the lips redden...' )

'desolation and glass'

( 'Introduction', p.23 - 'It is terrifying to think that our life is a tale without a plot or hero, made up of desolation and glass...' )

'Your mask draws nearer to the other mask'

( 'Mikhoels', p.261 - 'Mikhoels's face takes on the expression of world-weariness and mournful ecstasy in the course of his dance as if the mask of the Jewish people were drawing nearer to the mask of Classical antiquity...' )

'layered with air'

( 'JTA', p.372 - 'The Armenian language cannot be worn down; its boots are of stone. Naturally its word is thickwalled, its semi-vowels layered with air' )

'a triple breath'

( 'Kiev', p.256 - 'This Ukrainian-Jewish-Russian city breathes a deep triple breath' )

'Your thinking fingers'

( 'Mikhoels', p.261/2 - '[All the power of Judaism] extends into the trembling of the hands, into the vibration of the thinking fingers which are animated like articulated speech' )

'Oh do not heal'

( 'JTA', p.363 - '[Matisse's] mighty brush does not heal the vision, but offers it the strength of an ox' )

'dip your travelling eye'

( 'JTA', pp.363/365 - 'That is how you dip your eye into a goblet brimful so that a mote will come out'

'Now the travelling eye presents its ambassadorial credentials to the consciousness' )

### 'ELEGY FOR AN IRISH SPEAKER'

(All citations from Collected Critical Prose, unless otherwise stated.)

### FIRST STANZA

'be born very slowly'

( From 'Morning of Acmeism' (p.62): ' "The word as such" was born very slowly' )

'stay with me'

( From 'Storm and Stress' (p.172): 'In [Balmont's] best poems, such as 'O Night, Stay With Me'... he extracted new sounds from Russian poetry, never-to-be-repeated sounds having a kind of foreign... phonetics' )

### SECOND STANZA

'Miss Death'

( From 'Storm and Stress' (p.178): '[Khlebnikov] wrote comic dramas... and tragic buffonades, such as Miss Death' )

'the seraphim are as cold / to each other in Paradise'

( From 'On Contemporary Poetry' (p.107): a poem by Kuzmin that 'float[s] up to the surface as if out of oblivion: "the seraphim are as cold / To each other in Paradise"' )

'the room of a dying man / is open to everyone'

( From 'Word and Culture' (p.116): 'In sacred frenzy poets speak the language of all times, all cultures. Nothing is impossible. As the room of a dying man is open to everyone, so the door of the old world is flung wide open before the crowd')

'The knitting together of your two spines'

( From 'Storm and Stress' (p.170): 'This shift [to Modernism in Russian poetry] is the result of what may be called the knitting-together of the spines of two poetic systems...' )

'his life / surrounds you as a sun, / consumes your light'

( From 'Pushkin and Scriabin' (p.90): 'If one removes the shroud from around this creative life, that life will flow freely from its cause, from death and it will surround death as it surrounds its own sun and consumes its own light' )

### THIRD STANZA

'waiting to be fertilized'

( From 'Villon' (p.55): 'Villon became a murderer. The passivity of his fate is remarkable. It was as if his fate were waiting to be fertilized by chance, indifferent to good or evil' )

'dynamic death'

( From 'Villon' (p.58): '[Villon] also endowed death with dynamic qualities...'  
)

'his dark company'

( From 'Villon' (p.57): 'The dark company with whom he so quickly and intimately made friends captivated his feminine nature...' )

'wretched / overnight lodgings'

( From 'Literary Moscow' (p.145): 'In Moscow, Khlebnikov could..., completely unnoticed, exchange his wretched Moscow overnight lodgings for a green Novgorod grave' )

'small talk'

( From 'Storm and Stress' (p.178): 'A large part of what Khlebnikov wrote was no more than poetic small talk, as he understood it' )

'he breaks away from your womb'

( From 'Badger Hole' (p.134): 'Disassociation from the great European interests ... a breaking away from the great womb in a manner that some regarded as heretical, was already an accomplished fact' )

'he speaks so with my consciousness / and not with words'

( From 'Morning of Acmeism' (p.61): 'Right now ... I am essentially speaking with my consciousness, not with the word' )

'he's in danger of becoming a poetess'

( From 'Literary Moscow' (p.147): 'Mayakovsky impoverishes his poetry in vain. He is in danger of becoming a poetess' )

#### **FOURTH STANZA**

'Roaming root of multiple meanings'

( From 'Notes on Poetry' (p.166): 'A roaming root of multiple meanings animates poetic speech' )

'he shouts himself out'

( From 'Nature of the Word' (p.132): 'The age will shout itself out, culture will

fall asleep, and the people will be reborn...' )

'narrow amphora'

( From 'A Word or Two about Georgian Art' (p.161): 'It is precisely this spirit of intoxication, this product of a mysterious internal fermentation (the long, narrow amphora of wine buried under the earth)' )

'tasteless, because immortal'

( From 'Notes on Poetry' (p.168): 'Pasternak's magnificent, domestic poetry is already old-fashioned. It is tasteless because immortal...' )

'The instant of recognition / is unsweet to him'

( From 'Word and Culture' (p.116): 'This is the sound of the inner image, this is the poet's ear touching it - "Only the instant of recognition is sweet to us!"' )

'scarecrow word sealed up'

( From 'Nature of the Word' (p.129): '... [O]nce removed from circulation, the sealed-up language becomes inimical to man, for in its own way it becomes a kind of scarecrow, or effigy' )

'second half / of a poetic simile lost somewhere'

( From 'Literary Moscow' (p.146): 'The majority of Moscow poetesses have been injured by metaphor. These are the poor Irises, doomed to the eternal quest after the second half of a poetic simile that was lost somewhere...' )

### FIFTH STANZA

'Most foreign and cherished reader'

( From 'Nature of the Word' (p.132): 'How can one equip [the ship of the word] for its distant voyage, without furnishing it with all the necessities for so foreign and cherished a reader?')

'I cannot live without / your trans-sense language'

( From 'Nature of the Word' (p.123): '...[T]here is only one thing I cannot do: I cannot live without language, I cannot survive excommunication from the word'

AND from 'Storm and Stress' (p.171): '...the inexperienced eye, for instance in Khlebnikov's compositions, will see only the pure device of the naked language of trans-sense' )

'the living furrow of your spoken words'

( From 'A Word or Two about Georgian Art' (p.162): '...every spoken word leaves a living furrow in the language' )

'that plough up time'

( From 'The Word and Culture' (p.113): 'Poetry is the plough that turns up time in such a way that the abyssal strata of time ... appear on the surface' )

'Instead of the past / with its deep roots, / I have yesterday'

( From 'Storm and Stress' (p.176): 'Whoever fails to comprehend the new has no sense of the old, while whoever understands the old is bound to understand the new.'



Nevertheless, it is our great misfortune when, instead of the real past with its deep roots, we understand the past merely as "yesterday" ... easily assimilated poetry' )

'you burn up the past / with your ... farewell'

( From 'For the Anniversary of F.K. Sologub' (p.207): '...if you cannot [do something new], then bid farewell to the past, but bid farewe!l in such a way that you burn up the past with your farewell' )

'raspberry-coloured'

( From 'Cold Summer' (p.242): '...the Red Army man's raspberry-coloured ribs shine through his translucent chest like an X-ray' )

'frozen body'

( From 'Nature of the Word' (p.127): '[Annensky] tenderly placed an animal's pelt over Ovid's still frozen body' )

'with your full death'

( From 'Pushkin and Scriabin' (p.90): 'Pushkin and Scriabin ... served as an example of a collective Russian death, they died a full death ... for, in dying, their individuality expanded to the dimensions of a national symbol' )

'the no-road-back'

( From 'Chaadaev' (p.88): '[Young Russians] did not return for the simple reason that there is no road back from being to non-being' )

'your speaking flesh'

( From 'Nature of the Word' (p.120): 'Russian is a Hellenistic language. As a result of a number of historical conditions, the vital forces of Hellenic culture ... [imparted to Russian] the mystery of free incarnation. That is why Russian became the resonant, speaking flesh it is today' )

### 'THE AISLING HAT'

(All citations are from Collected Critical Prose and Letters, unless otherwise indicated).

#### FIRST STANZA

'October - you took away my biography - / I am grateful to you, you offer me gifts  
/ for which I have still no need'

( From 'A Poet About Himself' (p.275): 'The October Revolution could not but influence my work since it took away my "biography"... I am grateful to it, however... I feel indebted to the Revolution, but I offer it gifts for which it still has no need'. )

#### SECOND STANZA

'I search for a lost, unknown song'

( From 'A Statement about "The Bassoonist"' (p.276): 'The second part of the Bassoonist - the search for a lost, unknown Schubert song - will allow the presentation of the musical theme on the historical plane'. )

'stamped with my own surname'

( From 'Fourth Prose' (p.323-24): 'It's as if I have been punched full of holes...and stamped with my own surname' )

### **THIRD STANZA**

'A spy-glass at the end of it, / a cool tunnel... / into your grandfather's house'

( From 'JTA' (p.356): '...It was a long cool tunnel cut into your grandfather's house, and at the end of it, as into a spy-glass, a little door covered with greenery glimmered...' )

'...crushed by binoculars'

( From 'JTA' (p.365): 'The end of the street, as if crushed by binoculars, bunched into a squinting lump' )

### **FOURTH STANZA**

'The elegant structure of the heart'

( From 'Addenda to "On the Naturalists"' (p.337): 'The elegant structure of the heart...is the sole cause of the circulation of the blood [Linnaeus]' )

'its lace design of perforations, truancy'

( From 'Fourth Prose' (p.324): 'Making Brussels lace involves real work, but its major components...are air, perforations and truancy' )

### **FIFTH STANZA**

'Over your face a cognac eagleskin / was tightly stretched'

( From 'JTA' (p.345): 'Professor Khachaturian, over whose face an eagleskin was so tightly stretched that his muscles and ligatures stuck out...' )

### SEVENTH STANZA

'his clock of coal, clock of limestone / shale or schist'

( From 'CAD' (p.422): 'Paleontological clocks were unknown to [Dante and his contemporaries]: the clock of coal, the clock of infusorial limestone, the clocks of sand, shale and schist' )

'his warm pitcher'

( From 'CAD' (p.423): 'To the sensitive palm placed on the neck of a warm pitcher, the pitcher gains form precisely because of its warmth' )

### NINTH STANZA

'Your Promethean head radiated / ash-blue quartz, your blue-black hair / some feathered...'

( From 'JTA' (p.350): 'His Promethean head radiated a smoky ash-blue light like the most powerful quartz lamp... The blue-black locks of his wiry hair...contained something of the root strength of an enchanted feather' )

'Paleolithic arrowhead'

( From 'JTA' (p.358): '[The embryonic leaf of a nasturtium] ...resembles some

Paleolithic arrowhead' )

#### **TENTH STANZA**

'...your ungainly / arms, created for handshakes'

( From 'JTA' (p.357): 'I studied the living language of your long, ungainly arms, created for a handshake in some moment of danger' )

'sliding / like the knight's move, to the side'

( From 'JTA' (p.354): 'The subject of the conversation kept merrily sliding about like a ring passed around the back, and the knight's move, always to the side, reigned over the table talk' )

#### **ELEVENTH STANZA**

'caressed with the lips alone'

( From 'JTA' (p.346): '[The chemist Gambarian] is a chivalrous Mazeppa with women, caressing Maria with his lips alone' )

#### **TWELFTH STANZA**

'You felt nauseated, like a pregnant / woman ... / unread newspapers clattered in your hands'

( From 'JTA' (p.347): 'People rushed about the island, taking pride in their knowledge of the irremediable accident. Unread newspapers clattered in their hands like tin. The island felt nauseated, like a pregnant woman' )

'a rose inscribed in stone'

( From 'JTA' (p.349): '...I found myself among a people... who... know how to live not according to the clock, but according to the sundial like the one I glimpsed ... in the form of ... a rose inscribed in stone' )

### **THIRTEENTH STANZA**

'Your horse-sweat'

( From 'JTA' (p.348): 'In my heart I drank to the health of young Armenia ... to its horse-sweat...' )

'your urine-colour'

( From 'CAD' (p.435): 'Dante ascertains the origin, fate and character of a man according to his voice, just as the medicine of his day diagnosed a man's health according to the colour of his urine' )

'the sense of a start of a race'

( From 'JTA' (p.363): 'Only then did I begin ... to realize that colour is no more than the sense of the start of a race, tinged by distance and circumscribed in its space' )

### **FOURTEENTH STANZA**

'Your eyebrows arched like a composer's'

( From 'Goethe's Youth' (p.462): 'There is another man with such a gentle expression on his face, such a plump mouth, and with eyebrows that arch like a

composer's...')

'an accordion of wrinkles... / ...drew apart'

( From 'JTA' (p.357): 'I liked to watch the accordion of your Infidel wrinkles on your forehead as they came together then drew apart' )

'the fluids of your forehead'

( From 'JTA' (p.368): '...inner feelings, born of anger, direct "fluids" to the forehead...' )

#### **FIFTEENTH STANZA**

'powerful thorax'

( From 'JTA' (p.367): [Of a butterfly] 'Its powerful thorax is shaped like a small boat' )

'gave velvet-throated orders'

( From 'JTA' (p.377): '[A certain Darmastat] had been governor of the province of Andekh in the days when Arshak gave velvet-throated orders' )

'nuptial animation'

( From 'JTA' (p.354): 'For those who respect the rationale of fate, there is a kind of malicious nuptial animation connected with the ritual of seeing someone off')

### SIXTEENTH STANZA

'the arid frontier atmosphere'

( From 'JTA' (p.356): 'Father Ararat is clearly visible and in the arid frontier atmosphere you can't help feeling like a smuggler' )

'Your skin changed / to an absolute courtesy'

( From 'JTA' (p.351): 'It must appear extremely impertinent to speak about the present with the reader in that tone of absolute courtesy ... It seems to come from the impatience with which I live and change my skin' )

### SEVENTEENTH STANZA

'never ceased dreaming'

( From 'JTA' (p.351): '...my long-desired journey to Armenia, of which I never ceased dreaming...' )

'ensconced in the velvet'

( From 'JTA' (p.360): 'Sukhum is situated below like a compass in a case of draftsmen's instruments, which having just described the bay ... now lies, closed up, ensconced in the velvet' )

### EIGHTEENTH STANZA

'Broken sign of the unbroken continuum'

( From 'JTA' (p.394): '... a prose tale is nothing more than a broken sign of the unbroken continuum' )



'you fused into a single thread'

( From 'JTA' (p.351): 'The thought never dawned on [the salamander] that [its] spots ... may fuse into a single continuous thread' )

'time fed you with lightnings and downpours'

( From 'JTA' (p.352): 'Time fed [two barren linden trees] with flashes of lightning and watered them with downpours' )

#### **NINETEENTH STANZA**

'river air hovered over the room'

( From 'JTA' (p.364): 'Each room [in the gallery] has its own climate. River air hovered over the Claude Monet room' )

#### **TWENTIETH STANZA**

'in the tender ... of your shell / in your geometric giddiness'

( From 'JTA' (p.355): 'I would stroke the pine cones. They would bristle. They were beautiful... In the tenderness of their shells, in their geometric giddiness, I sensed the rudiments of architecture...' )

#### **TWENTY-FIRST STANZA**

'like hills / of tired rags stirred up the dust'

( From 'JTA' (p.375): 'Like hills of tired rags, [the peasant women] stirred up the dust with their hems' )

'flushed horseman'

( From 'JTA' (p.362): 'Relatives scattered over miles of the ellipse extended wet cloths on long poles to the flushed horsemen as they galloped past' )

'streaked feldspar'

( From 'JTA' (p.393): 'A book is ... a crack in the reader's biography; while not yet a find, it is already an extraction. A piece of streaked feldspar...' )

#### TWENTY-SECOND STANZA

'There was fire in your hands'

( From 'JTA' (p.355): '...there was fire in my hands, as if a blacksmith had lent me some coals' )

'blisters / on your palms as if you had been rowing'

( From 'JTA' (p.364): 'Gazing at Renoir's water you feel blisters on your palm as if you had been rowing' )

#### TWENTY-THIRD STANZA

'furious, yellowish glitter'

( From 'JTA' (p.387): 'His eyes mesmerized you in their nakedness, with their furious glitter, they were somewhat coloured, yellowish...' )

'the shining points'

( From 'JTA' (p.368): ' "Still" and "already" are the two shining points of Lamarckian thought...' )

'your equine eyes'

( From 'JTA' (p.370): '...a beautiful woman's impassioned, equine eyes fall obliquely but graciously on the reader' )

#### TWENTY-FOURTH STANZA

'Twin ... unseverable'

( From 'Goethe's Youth' (p.463): 'Herder smiles and says: thought and word, feeling and expression, are ... unseverable like twins' )

'legs of the heron'

( From 'JTA' (p.368): 'The beasts of the fables appear in Lamarck's work. They adapt themselves to the conditions of life... The legs of the heron...' )

'reconciled to their uselessness'

( From 'JTA' (p.368): 'The marsupial, according to Lamarck's description, consists of weak forelimbs ( i.e. legs which have been reconciled to their own uselessness' )

#### TWENTY-FIFTH STANZA

'Neck of the swan'

( From 'JTA' (p.368): 'The legs of the heron, the neck of the duck and the

swan, the tongue of the anteater...') )

'theatrically open'

( From 'JTA' (p.373): 'A toiler in a black shirt, theatrically open at the neck...')

'expressing your allegiance'

( From 'JTA' (p.376): 'From time to time my horse would bend down to much the grass, and its neck expressed allegiance to the Stubborns, a people older than the Romans' )

#### **TWENTY-SIXTH STANZA**

'mineral-water cheeriness'

( From 'JTA' (p.362): 'An inexhaustible operatic repertory gurgled in [Bezymensky's] throat. His open-air-concert, mineral-water cheeriness never left him')

#### **TWENTY-SEVENTH STANZA**

'The earth like some great brown / ceiling came rushing at your head'

( From 'JTA' (p.354): '...there was talk about flying, about performing loops in the air, when you fail to notice that you are upside down and the earth, like some huge brown ceiling, comes rushing at your head' )

#### **TWENTY-EIGHTH STANZA**

'Roses which must have been cut / in the morning'

( From 'JTA' (p.363): 'I was enchanted by the old man's still-life. Roses which

must have been cut in the morning - firm and tightly-rolled, extraordinary young tea roses' )

'stood exchanging lights'

( From 'JTA' (p.383): 'Flowers stood exchanging lights like old acquaintances' )

'your phonetic light turned off'

( From 'CAD' (p.407): 'In other words [Dante's line's] phonetic light is turned off. The grey shadows have blended' )

#### TWENTY-NINTH STANZA

'the lips of your...eye'

( From 'CAD' (p.408): 'Dante, when he feels the need, calls eyelids "the lips of the eye"' )

'fireproof... / burned like poppies'

( From 'JTA' (p.355): 'I was captivated by the shameless burning of the poppies... fireproof, ravenous moths, they grew on disgusting hairy stalks'

From 'The Return' (p.221): 'Turkish flags burn like poppies in the sun' )

'firmly reminding / everyone that speech is work'

( From 'JTA' (p.350): 'The broad mouth of this sorcerer did not smile, firmly reminding everyone that speech is work' )

### THIRTIETH STANZA

'we remembered that to speak / is to be forever on the road'

( From 'CAD' (p.407): '...it turns out the word is much longer than we thought, and we remember that to speak is to be forever on the road' )

### THIRTY-FIRST STANZA

'I felt a shiver of novelty / as if someone had summoned you by name'

( From 'JTA' (p.351): 'At the very first sounds... my nerves grew taut. I felt a shiver of novelty, as if someone had summoned me by name' )

'to the most beautiful applause'

( From 'JTA' (p.348): 'That was the most beautiful applause I had ever heard in my life: a man was being congratulated for not yet being a corpse' )

### THIRTY-SECOND STANZA

'your eye raised the picture / to its own level'

( From 'JTA' (p.365): 'With its extremely subtle acid reactions, the eye ... raises the picture to its own level, for painting is much more a phenomenon of internal secretion than of apperception' )

### THIRTY-THIRD STANZA

'before my eyes // like hello or goodbye'

( From 'JTA' (p.374): 'In Erevan, Algaez stuck up before my eyes like "hello" or "goodbye"' )

### THIRTY-FOURTH STANZA

'a soft L and a short aspiration'

( From 'JTA' (p.350): "'Head" in Armenian is "glukh'e" with a soft l and a short aspiration after the kh' )

'the most recent barbaric layer'

( From 'JTA' (p.365): 'Only when you have achieved the proper equilibrium... begin the second stage of restoring the picture, its cleaning, the removal ... of the external and most recent barbaric layer' )

### THIRTY-FIFTH STANZA

'absorptive / and resorptive'

( From 'CAD' (p.425): '[The role of music] is both absorptive and resorptive: it is a purely chemical role' )

### THIRTY-SIXTH STANZA

'You burst the frontier at some / undefended silk crack'

( From 'JTA' (p.377): '[The Kushan people] burst the frontier at some undefended place, like a silk thread' )

'shreds / of splashed brain on the chestnut trees'

( From 'JTA' (p.364): '...Pisarro's raspberry-grey boulevards, flowing like the wheels of an enormous lottery with ... shreds of splashed brain on kiosks and chestnut trees' )

### THIRTY-SEVENTH STANZA

'Now I begin / the second stage of restoring the picture'

( From 'JTA' (p.365): 'Once you have achieved the proper equilibrium, and only then, begin the second stage of restoring the picture' )

### THIRTY-EIGHTH STANZA

'The helix of my ear takes on new whorls'

( From 'JTA' (p.346): 'The helix of the ear is more delicately formed and takes on new whorls' )

### THIRTY-NINTH STANZA

'speech-preparatory moves'

( From 'CAD' (P.435): 'I devised this composite quotation, merging various passages from the Commedia, in order to best exhibit the characteristics of the speech-preparatory moves of Dante's poetry' )

### FORTY-SECOND STANZA

'His body is unwashed, his beard / wild, his fingernails broken, / his ears deaf from the silence'

( From 'JTA' (p.377): 'The body of King Arshak is unwashed and his beard is wild... The King's fingernails are broken... His ears have grown deaf from the silence, but they once appreciated Greek music' )



**FORTY-THIRD STANZA**

'Carefree skater on air'

( From 'JTA' (p.354): '...students from Soviet schools of aviation, carefree skaters on air...' )

**FORTY-FOURTH STANZA**

'He controls my hair, my fingernails, / he swallows my saliva, so accustomed / is he to the thought that I am here'

( From 'JTA' (p.357): '[The Assyrian] controls my hair and my fingernails. He grows my beard and swallows my saliva, so accustomed is he to the thought that I am here in the fortress of Anyush' )

**FORTY-FIFTH STANZA**

'I need to get to know his bones'

( From 'JTA' (p.395): 'I want to get know my bones, my lava, the very depths of my grave' )

**FORTY-SIXTH STANZA**

'how life below starts to play / with phosphorous and magnesium'

( From 'JTA' (p.395): '...(how life below begins to play with magnesium and phosphorus, how life below will smile at me: arthropoidal, reproachful and droning life)' )

'cancelled benevolence'

( From 'JTA' (p.367): '[The environment's] functions are expressed in a certain benevolence which is gradually and continually cancelled by the severity binding the living body together and rewarding it finally with death' )

**FORTY-SEVENTH STANZA**

'his denial / of history's death, by the birth of his storm'

( From 'Notes, Jottings and Fragments' (p.470): 'Just as history may be said to have been born, so it may also die; and what, really, is progress, that creation of the twentieth century, if not the denial of history's death in which the spirit of the event disappears... Let us intently heed Tyutchev, that connoisseur of life, in the birth of his storm' )

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