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**ABSTRACT**

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Heather Hei-Tai Yeung

*Affective Mapping: Voice, Space, and Contemporary British Lyric Poetry*

This thesis investigates the manner in which an understanding of the spatial nature of the contemporary lyric poem (broadly reducible to the poem *as* and the poem *of* space) combines with voicing and affect in the act of reading poetry to create a third way in which space operates in the lyric: the ‘vocalic space’ of the voiced lyric poem. Together with the poem *as* and *of* space, the vocalic space of the contemporary lyric poem gives way to an enunciating I and eye with which we, as reader, identify and which we voice, in a process of ‘affective mapping’. Voice, and the spaces the I/eye of the contemporary lyric poem visualises and articulates, is affective, contested, and multiple. Visual and vocalic identification with the voice of the poem through this free, fragmented, or multiple, I/eye leads us to understand more fully the poem on its own terms. The chapters of this thesis offer readings of John Montague’s *The Rough Field*, Thomas Kinsella’s *A Technical Supplement*, Kathleen Jamie’s *This Weird Estate*, and Alice Oswald’s *Dart*, as well as the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Thom Gunn and Mimi Khalvati, in order to investigate the implication of this thesis on the way we read, voice, and analyse contemporary British lyric poetry. The work of each poet offers different perspectives on perception, place, and space, and different engagements with the voiced and textual spaces of poetry, from the more formal poetics of Heaney, Jamie, and Gunn, to the experiments with text and image of Montague, Kinsella, and Jamie, the use of different languages by Montague, Jamie, and Khalvati, and the manipulation of the space of the page and angle of poetic vision and voice by Montague, Khalvati, and Oswald. The chapters work almost chronologically from *The Rough Field* (1972) to *Dart* (2002) with an emphasis on the importance of space, voice, and affect to the readings of the poems and poets in question.

Affective Mapping  
Voice, Space, and Contemporary British Lyric Poetry

Heather Hei-Tai Yeung

PhD Thesis Submitted for Examination

Department of English Studies  
University of Durham

2011

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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In chapter order:

*JMCP*: John Montague, *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery Press, 2003)

*TKBU*: Thomas Kinsella, *Belief and Unbelief* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 2009)

*TKCP*: Thomas Kinsella, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001)

*TKME*: Thomas Kinsella, *Marginal Economy* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 2006)

*TKRP*: Thomas Kinsella, *Readings in Poetry* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 2006)

*KJTH*: Kathleen Jamie, *The Tree House* (London: Picador, 2004)

*KJWE*: Kathleen Jamie, *This Weird Estate* (Edinburgh: Scotland and Medicine, 2007)

*SHDC*: Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle* (London: Faber, 2006)

*SHHC*: Seamus Heaney, *Human Chain* (London: Faber, 2010)

*SHOG*: Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground: Collected Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber, 1998)

*TGBC*: Thom Gunn, *Boss Cupid* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2000)

*TGCP*: Thom Gunn, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1993)

*MKEL*: Mimi Khalvati, *Entries on Light* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997)

*MKMF*: Mimi Khalvati, *The Meanest Flower* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007)

*MKSP*: Mimi Khalvati, *Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000)

*AOD*: Alice Oswald, *Dart* (London: Faber, 2002)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*a common idiom  
carries through  
complex articulations  
call it a place*

*it was not your  
intention to bring  
all your resources  
here but you do*

Thomas A. Clark<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas A. Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2009), 69.

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*In memoriam Alan Skene*  
*Virtutis Regia Merces*

# Affective Mapping: Voice, Space, and Contemporary British Lyric Poetry

## INTRODUCTION

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*Nous n'allons plus vers un univers, mais vers des  
multiplicités de mondes possibles. Soit donc à les dessiner.*<sup>2</sup>

*Mapping is the locus of the project: the descriptive and  
generative tool that is capable of producing and  
accommodating together the many and different possible  
unfoldings of the project(s) [...]. Mapping is always an  
incomplete and insufficient description and its  
incompleteness remains open to the condensation of  
multiple possibilities.*<sup>3</sup>

The first section of this introduction will be primarily concerned to investigate the different spatial natures of the poem: broadly reducible to the poem *as* and the poem *of* space. The second section will be concerned with voicing and affect in terms of the act of reading poetry: I posit the 'vocalic space' of the voiced lyric poem as a third way in which space operates in the poem. Together with the poem *as* and *of* space, the vocalic space of the contemporary lyric poem gives way to an enunciating I (vocal utterance and implied speaker's point of view or a personal or psychological point of view) and eye (vocalic landscape and mimetic constructions of landscape, theme, and image in the space of the poem) with which we, as reader, identify and which we voice. The I/eye is at once the poem and our reading of the poem, the guiding principle by which we navigate our poetic experience. This I/eye can be stable and uncontested, but is more often than not multiple, diverse, and contested in location, visualisation, and enunciation. An increased awareness of space in and of poetry may aid us, as a reader, to voice, engage with, and to map, the poem on its own terms.

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Serres, *Atlas* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 276.

<sup>3</sup> Theresa Stoppani, 'Mapping: The Locus of the Project', *Angelaki* 9.2 (2004), 282.

*Mapping I: the Poem As and Of Space*

*L'époque actuelle serait peut-être l'époque de l'espace.*<sup>4</sup>

In a reading of Walter Ong's *The Presence of the Word*, Louis Sass discovers that 'the written word could [...] be said to freeze thought, by organising it and preserving it in a visual space; it thereby offers a new image of an independent mental universe [...]. The commitment of sound to space that is inherent in alphabetical writing had a noticeable effect on our sense of the world'.<sup>5</sup> The written, silently read, word promotes an engagement with literature that is in many ways interior, or withdrawn, where the dominant sensory modality is vision rather than noise or odour.<sup>6</sup> For Sass, this withdrawal and subsequent aesthetic sensory deprivation is related to the schizoid tendencies he perceives as an inherent part of High Modernist literature and art. However, for our purposes, it is the organisation and preservation of thought in the visual space of the page that is important. The 'commitment of sound to space' and the subsequent 'effect on our sense of world', that we observe in the writing and subsequent analysis of literary works, may be seen at its most heightened in poststructuralist literary criticism. The rise of poststructuralism was one of the major catalysts for Michel Foucault's frequently cited claim that the period from the 1960s onwards was 'l'époque de l'espace'.<sup>7</sup> In the case of poststructuralism, we encounter an experience of the poem that is textual rather than vocal. We encounter the poem *as* space.

Unlike many other forms of literature, the poem not only represents a certain space and time, but due to formal principles, is also in itself a space. The spaces between and beside words may also signify. Indeed, Jacques Derrida employs the

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 752.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 93.

<sup>6</sup> See Sass: 'Noise surrounds, and it can be difficult to locate the source of a particular sound; odor permeates, obscuring the very distinction between knower and known, and often evoking the most immediate visceral reactions, including revulsion, hunger, and lust. Vision, by contrast, is the prototypical distance-sense, embodying in every glance the separation of subject from object and of distance from emotional or instinctual response. Vision is also the most self-conscious sense, since it is most conducive to an awareness of one's own position in relation to the perceptual field' (*Madness and Modernism*, 446). In looking at the affective engagement with the poem, I will go on to explore the influence of noise, or sound, as something which is of primary importance in the development of the affective relationship with and experience of the poem.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits IV*, 752.

concept of spacing in an active way. For him, space, and spacing, generate literary force:

Spacing is a concept which [...] carries the meaning of a productive, positive, generative force. Like *dissemination*, like *differance*, it carries along with it a *genetic* motif: it is not only the interval, the space constituted between two things (which is the usual sense of spacing) but also *spacing*, the operation, or in any event, the movement, of setting aside.<sup>8</sup>

Space operates as noun and verb. It is a force that is active *within the text*. As we look at the work on the page, we see that space(s) signify. Susan Stewart links space in literature exclusively to the written word: ‘writing gives us a device for inscribing space [...]. Writing serves to caption the world, defining and commenting upon the configurations we choose to textualize’.<sup>9</sup> The poem *as* space is in many ways a soundless thing; ‘reading’ space in the poetic work in this way leads us to question the ‘commitment of sound to space’ of Sass’s silently read writing, and, indeed, the silent signification of Derrida’s textual spacings.

These theories of the poem *as* space have been generated by and have influenced, primarily, critical readings of poetries that are somehow non-standard in their spacing or appearance on the printed page. It is difficult to think of how, for instance, to read Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés*<sup>10</sup> aloud and without affectation whilst also demonstrating the importance of the spacing of the work to listeners unable to see what is going on on the page. Equally, the recitation of Bob Cobbing’s ‘Square Poem’<sup>11</sup> can never be as humorous or inventive as the thing as silently read, and the reading aloud of many of Ian Hamilton Finlay’s poems destroys completely the desired aesthetic effect.<sup>12</sup> However, the idea of space, or of spacing, provides an apparatus for many critics to discuss with comparative ease this kind of avant-garde poetic work.<sup>13</sup> Not only may the

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Continuum, 2002), 86.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1993), 31.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix III.

<sup>13</sup> Two recent examples are Ian Davidson’s *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), and Jon Clay’s *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry, and Deleuze* (London: Continuum, 2010). Davidson states ‘in an increasingly spatialized world, notions of place have to change, so too will notions of poetry [...] [and] some poetry, in the way it refuses a fixed location and shifts between places, seems closer to

disruption or re-spacing of ‘the civilized space of representation in poetry’<sup>14</sup> provide avant-garde poets with ways in which to challenge the establishment, but it also, in turn, gives their critics a chance to do the same thing. In the work of Mallarmé and Lautréamont, Julia Kristeva recognises the eruption of the semiotic *chôra* into the realm of the symbolic, which means that ‘the deep structure or at least transformational rules are disturbed and, with them, the possibility of semantic and/or grammatical categorical interpretation’.<sup>15</sup> The operation of spacing as ‘setting aside’ (Derrida) implies not only the chosen words and form, but also those words, phrases, images, and forms which have not been chosen for inclusion in the ‘final’ version of the text.<sup>16</sup> The text becomes a field of power relations between the prelinguistic and the linguistic, the written and not written, the obvious and the implied, and is no longer very much to do with poetry as lyric, or vocalic, utterance.

In the wake of the avant-garde and the British Poetry Revival,<sup>17</sup> many contemporary lyric poets can also be seen to manipulate the expected, or traditional space of the lyric poem. This is not usually accomplished in so overt or difficult a way as contemporary poets working consciously within an avant-garde tradition, whose work, in the main, overtly disrupts or attacks ‘the lyric I of the voice poem’.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the lyric poem is in many ways the quintessential voice poem. And yet many of the poets discussed in this study also disrupt in some way the expected space of the poem. Both Thomas Kinsella (Chapter 2) and Kathleen Jamie (Chapter 3) use anatomical

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[Doreen] Massey’s description of place as ‘constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales’ (*Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, 31). By ‘some poetry’, here, Davidson means that of what he calls the ‘contemporary avant-garde’ (*Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, ix). Clay, too, shares Davidson’s preference for elucidating spatial themes through ‘difficult’ (*Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*, 22) or ‘innovative’ (*Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*, 2) poetries.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin Bedient, ‘Kristeva and Poetry as Shattered Signification’ *Critical Inquiry* 16.4 (1990), 807.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 79.

<sup>16</sup> In his essay ‘The Last Night of All’ (*PMLA* 122.5 (2007)), Michael Wood extends these ideas of spacing and textual finality to the ‘endings’ of a text, and the battle of the prelinguistic, linguistic, and postlinguistic in the space of the ‘work devoted to its own unfinishability’ (‘The Last Night of All’, 1401).

<sup>17</sup> The poets which have been loosely grouped under this title include Roy Fisher, Bob Cobbing, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and later, Bill Griffiths, Allen Fisher, and Denise Riley. The British Poetry Revival, broadly speaking, has an anti-Movement approach to poetry and poetics, taking as its primary influences the High Modernist and early avant-garde poetries of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

<sup>18</sup> Bob Perelman, quoted in Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, 89.

plates alongside, or in a visual-textual dialogue with, their poems in *A Technical Supplement* and *This Weird Estate*.<sup>19</sup> These plates do not disrupt the space of the poems themselves, but, placed alongside them, they force the reader to interrogate the manner in which they read, view, or otherwise experience, the text on the page. The enunciating I/eye of Kinsella's poetry, too, is often contested, split, or multiple.<sup>20</sup> Although the version printed in the *Collected Poems* of John Montague's *The Rough Field* (Chapter 1) irons out the majority of the poet's poetic experiments, typographical and otherwise, the 1972 volume is a richly textured collage of poem(s) and images,<sup>21</sup> representing the jostling demands of the worlds the poet felt that he was 'trying, as always, to link'.<sup>22</sup> However, even the *Collected* keeps intact the lineation of the final lines of the poem:

with all my circling a failure to return  
to what is already going

going

GONE

(JMCP 81)

Even reading the poem silently, we are forced to *read* or *hear* the dissipation of the line here. Montague creates power in this line by splitting it, not by punctuation, but by the space of the page. Equally, the central section of Alice Oswald's *Dart*, a page containing only the marginal annotation 'silence' (AOD 41) leads to a disruption and subsequent questioning of the reading process. How, in the otherwise densely populated riverscape of voices, are we meant to react to and thence to voice and read this space?

But however much spacing generates aesthetic force, when the poem is solely considered *as space*, texts remain texts, and are thus only silently studied. Yet the lyric, by its very nature, denies silent reading. Spacing cannot signify on its own. When we read, or voice, a poem, we not only react to the spacing of the words on the page, but

<sup>19</sup> See Appendices V, VI, and VII.

<sup>20</sup> The centrepiece of Kinsella's Peppercanister volume *A Technical Supplement* (see the second half of Chapter 2 for analysis of this volume) is even an etching from Diderot's *Encyclopédie* of the dissection of a human eye, flanked on either side by poems concerned with vision, the self, and the writing process – the three constituent elements of the I/eye. A literal dissection of vision, here, interrupts the textual 'commitment of sound to space' (Sass) of the poetry. See Appendix VI for this illustration.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix IV.

<sup>22</sup> John Montague, *The Pear is Ripe* (Dublin: Liberties P, 2007), 209.

also to the sounds and images generated by the given combination of words.<sup>23</sup> In various recordings of readings, we hear Montague perform portions of *The Rough Field*, contextualising elements, leaving others to the intelligence and independent aesthetic pleasure of his readers.<sup>24</sup> Kathleen Jamie's *This Weird Estate* includes a CD with the volume, which contains a sketchy introduction and a reading of each poem.<sup>25</sup> Alice Oswald's *Dart* is, arguably, both an experiment with and also commentary on, poetic voice and voicing. The poem is both the original work of the poet and a bricolage of voices she recorded on a series of walks on the course of the river Dart. Oswald writes at the beginning of the volume that it is 'a soundscape, a songline, from source to sea' where 'all voices are to be read as the river's mutterings' (*AOD*, vii), and the volume goes on to express these concerns in the poetry itself.<sup>26</sup>

Where the poem *as* space, broadly speaking, concerns the play of words and spaces on the page and the relationship the manipulation of textual space has with signification and aesthetic force, the poem *of* space is concerned with the result of that signification: the image generated through language by the poem. Over time, this image, we could call it a projected world-view or theme, has become significantly complicated – not because the apparatus of poesis has changed radically in the lyric tradition, but because the manner in which we perceive the world, react to it, and chart that perception and reaction has changed. Ian Davidson states, 'as, in an increasingly spatialized world, notions of place have to change, so to will notions of poetry'.<sup>27</sup> The image generated by any one poem will necessarily have multiple layers of possible meaning, and as our perceptions and conceptions of the world have changed and expanded under the forces of internationalisation and globalisation, so too have the layers of inference and meaning created by the work of art. It is thus that we will find the monolithic 'lyric I of the voice poem',<sup>28</sup> against which many contemporary avant-

<sup>23</sup> See Ruth Campbell *et al*: 'the representations established by 'inner speech' are sensitive to the internal stress structure of the word [...]. They are probably post-lexical'. 'Stress in Silent Reading', *Language and Cognitive Processes* 6.1 (1991), 29.

<sup>24</sup> 'The Rough Field, adapted for reading and directed by Liam Miller, was presented at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, on 11 Dec. 1972 [...]. On 8 July 1973 The British Irish Association presented a performance of this reading at the Round House in London [...]. This performance was filmed by *Radio Telefís Éireann* and recorded for Claddagh records.' John Montague, *The Rough Field* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery P, 1989), 87.

<sup>25</sup> See Kathleen Jamie, narr., *This Weird Estate*, Kathleen Jamie (Edinburgh: Scotland and Medicine, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Faber & Faber have also published an audio CD of the poet reading the poem (London: Faber, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Bedient, 'Kristeva and Poetry as Shattered Signification', 807.

gardeists still rebel, does not now exist as such in the contemporary lyric.

Contemporary thought strives to make us conscious of the unstable and self-conscious nature of being; spaces of the imagination and of aesthetic experience vie with the concrete geographical and architectural spaces that make up our world. All varieties of space are generative of affect and emotion. Process is as important as end product, and so space operates as noun and verb, subject and object of our scrutiny and, indeed, our being. The idea of space has become complicated, and has in turn complicated any representation of space. What Tim Robinson calls 'topographical sensation'<sup>29</sup> forms the foundation for the manner in which we not only experience and analyse literature, but how we navigate and articulate our very being. This verges on what Peter Sloterdijk coins as 'ontotopology':<sup>30</sup> the inherently spatial nature of being. The relationship between space, being, and poetry perhaps finds an origin in the romantic late Heideggerian perspective that 'poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus bringing him into dwelling'.<sup>31</sup> The aesthetic force of poetry strengthens the bond between man and his environment.

However, let us return to the relationship between poesis and our perception and articulation of the world. A renewed awareness of topographical sensation, alongside the textual spacings of the deconstructive literary critics, is the other spatial factor that Foucault diagnosed as contributing to his *époque de l'espace*. Stephen Levinson sums up the spatial tendency of human thought well:

Human beings think spatially. Not exclusively, but it is no doubt one of the fundamental tricks of human cognition. Casting nonspatial problems into spatial thinking gives us literacy, diagrams, mandala, dream-time landscapes, measures of close and distant relatives and of high and low social groups, and much much more. Just as maps stand in abstract spatial relation to real spatial terrain, so spatial relations can give us symbolic

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<sup>29</sup> Tim Robinson, 'In Praise of Space' *Irish Pages* 3.1 (Spring/Summer 2005), 22.

<sup>30</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, trans. Olivier Mannoni, *Sphères I: Bulles* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 362. Sloterdijk's *Sphères* trilogy is written as a spatial (rather than a temporal) extension of Heideggerian thought, and is concerned to expose and extend the latent spatial argument of *Being and Time*, moving, in its 'tale of space(s)' (*Sphères III: Écumes* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 220) from an analysis of individual engagement with others and the world (in the first volume), through to potential globo-political ramifications (in the third). All translations of Sloterdijk, unless otherwise indicated, are from the French translations of his work and are my own.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), 213

‘maps’ to other domains [...] [in] the extended symbolic world that human beings inhabit.<sup>32</sup>

The existence of the poem as spatial articulation and as generative of further spatial relations gives it its two-fold presence in this drama of space and being: the poem *as* and also *of* space. This two-fold spatiality of the poem echoes the two-fold presence of space itself in human thought and existence. The text of the poem and the acts of reading and of visualising the poem present us with different examples of an ‘ontotopology’, and these ‘ontotopological’ examples are necessarily related to each other and productive of multiple different possibilities. We have looked at the poem *as* space, and now, with these multiple different possibilities, and with Robinson’s ‘extended symbolic world’ in mind, let us look at the poem *of* space.

The world of contemporary criticism has changed immeasurably since Gilbert Highet published *Poets in a Landscape* in 1957. Now, if we wish to ‘evoke the essence of [the] work’<sup>33</sup> of any poet, from any place or time, we can hop on a cheap last-minute flight, or even, with the click of a button, bring up a Google Map superimposed with the requisite information. But for his time, Highet manages the landscapes of his chosen poets admirably. By the end of the book you have a sense of the places where Catullus, Vergil, Horace, Ovid, and others lived and walked. However, in a world where fixed boundaries and barriers, even nationhoods, are increasingly blurred, place is no longer the primary consideration. We take for granted now the stable location, sense of being, and locale (or *milieu*)<sup>34</sup> from which a sense of place is constructed, and reach out into an ‘extended symbolic world’<sup>35</sup> of human existence and cognition, which ‘incorporate[s] the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers’.<sup>36</sup> Place is destabilized, the boundaries between places become porous, aided by the all-pervasive networks of global travel and communications systems. Place becomes, irremediably, a part of

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen C. Levinson, ‘Language and Space’ *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996), 358.

<sup>33</sup> Gilbert Highet, *Poets in a Landscape* (Hamish Hamilton, 1957, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959): ‘I have endeavoured to recall some of the greatest Roman poets, by describing the places where they lived, recreating their characters, and evoking the essence of their work’ (*Poets in a Landscape*, 12).

<sup>34</sup> This simple, but accurate, understanding of ‘place’ is based upon Jonathan Agnew’s definition. See ‘Representing Space: Spaces, Scale, and Culture in Social Science’, *Place / Culture / Representation*, ed. J. Duncan and D. Levy (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>35</sup> Levinson, ‘Language and Space’, 358.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001), xii.

space. And, as Doreen Massey states, ‘so long as there is multiplicity there will be space’.<sup>37</sup>

The contemporary perception of and reaction to post-Euclidian space gives primacy to process, mediation, and passage, rather than to the hierarchical interaction of a static centre with its periphery, and is reliant on a global rather than a discrete nationalist world-perspective. The stability of place now becomes a part of the on-going multi-dimensional drama of space and its ‘hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges [managed] through modulating networks of command’.<sup>38</sup> The enunciating I/eye of poetry becomes profoundly unstable, split between possible worlds in both its vision and utterance. Not only do we find this illustrated in the physical body of the text through bricolages of poem, language, and image, as in Montague’s *The Rough Field*, but we also find the play of space, or spaces, as a primary influence in the subject matter of these poems. Not for Montague the place-heavy poetics of a Patrick Kavanagh. The fabric of the poetic world in the *Rough Field* is unmistakably Ireland, but is an Ireland that is open to the ‘new order / [...] new anarchy’ (*JMCP* 73) of an increasingly globalised world (see Chapter 1).

The poetry of Seamus Heaney has a more conservative attitude to space and place, and, indeed, to literary form and textual representation. This is a poet fascinated by the fascination of place (in his case, in the main, the Ireland of his present and of his youth). He writes:

[...] there are two ways in which place is known and cherished, two ways which may be complementary but which are just as likely to be antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate, and unconscious, the other learned, literate, and conscious. In the literary sensibility, both are likely to co-exist in a conscious and unconscious tension.<sup>39</sup>

Beneath Heaney’s place-bound and self-consciously poetic evocations of Ireland, there is a tougher poetic consciousness at work. The poet has written and spoken extensively about poesis, the critical act, as well as on the act of writing poetry, and he finds the force that unites these three elements of the literary sensibility to lie in a *space between* two points of experience: ‘poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as a

<sup>37</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 91.

<sup>38</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xii.

<sup>39</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber, 1980), 131.

distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves'.<sup>40</sup> For Heaney, our relationship with poetry is reciprocal, and intimately associated with a sense of place and of being, but at the same time, the poetic experience is a liminal, or 'threshold',<sup>41</sup> experience (see Chapter 4). Whilst investigating ideas of voice, Alice Oswald's volume *Dart* (Chapter 7) also charts the trajectory of its titular river from source to sea, pausing at places (with voices) that the poet feels to be of worthwhile import. A similar involvement with specific places may be found in the poetry of Kathleen Jamie, where the importance of finding and articulating a sense of home and/or a fascination with the natural world is a recurrent preoccupation, and is more often than not based in Scotland.<sup>42</sup> Jamie's volume *This Weird Estate* investigates these things whilst also providing a poetic meta-commentary on how artist-surgeons 'were investigating mapping the body just before photography arrived'<sup>43</sup> (see Chapter 3). Thomas Kinsella, too, uses pre-photographic etchings of the body in order to facilitate his poetic investigations into the spaces of the body and of the psyche (see Chapter 2). Mapping is not only geographical and archaeological but also corporeal and psychological.

The poem *of space* can also deal thematically with the problems of globalisation, as we have seen in relation to John Montague's *The Rough Field*. Much of Thom Gunn's poetic is tacitly influenced by his transatlantic literary heritage, and oscillates in theme, form, and tone, between the United States and United Kingdom (Chapter 5). Mimi Khalvati's poems often investigate the psychological and linguistic possibilities of her dual cultural heritage, and are consequently concerned with acts of perception and memory. Khalvati's poems are constructed from the objects which have populated her lives in America, the UK, and Iran (see Chapter 6). Thus, with a turn of phrase or

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<sup>40</sup> Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber, 1988), 108.

<sup>41</sup> See Heaney: 'Poetry is more a threshold than a path, one constantly approached and constantly departed from, at which the reader and writer undergo in their different ways the experience of being at the same time summoned and released' (*The Government of the Tongue*, 108).

<sup>42</sup> This extends, too, to Jamie's prose (her travel-writing *Among Muslims*, and nature-writing *Findings*) where passages like the following are not uncommon: 'Silent as a stage, lying back northwards for a short mile, was a perfect high glen, in browns and subtle greens. A hanging valley, held, as it were, in the arms of its surrounding hills. It had been a steep climb up, but now the land relaxed, levelled. Through the middle of this high valley the river knew no urgency. It moved in wide, slow, meanders, like a rope played out. From my vantage point, on a slight rise somewhat higher than the valley floor, the whole scene looked like a painting. No, a photograph'. *Findings*, (London: Sort Of Books, 2005), 118.

<sup>43</sup> Kathleen Jamie, Personal Interview (11 Feb. 2010).

change of perspective, we span the globe, but are at the same time somehow detached,  
in a space between:

able to convey

not only sounds and tastes and smells  
but the workings of memory itself,  
short-circuiting, choosing what it will

to light on, without a thought  
for boundaries, vocabularies  
that distinguish the substances  
our world and we are made of,  
landscape from the flesh.

(MKSP 42)

This dissertation consists of readings of the work of seven contemporary British poets, readings that are guided by the poems themselves rather than an overarching theme for investigation. It is informed by an ‘ontotopological’ approach to the idea of space in poetry, acknowledging the different ways in which the I/eyes of the poems generate potential ways of reading. Throughout, it is important to recognise that the ideas of poem *as* and *of* space contribute to the inherently spatial nature of the manner in which we voice and read the poetic text. We must bear in mind what W.J.T. Mitchell calls the ‘three canonical types of spatial presentation in literature: shaped poetry, ekphrasis, and fictional description’,<sup>44</sup> but must also acknowledge the co-presence and interrelatedness of these manifestations of space. Space and knowledge are necessarily interrelated,<sup>45</sup> and are as concerned with delimitation and omission as they are with expansion and representation: the poet is an inheritor of a ‘gapped, discontinuous, polyglot tradition’.<sup>46</sup> Space is not just a geometrical construct or backdrop, but is

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<sup>44</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell ‘Space, Ideology, and Literary Representation’, *Poetics Today* 10.1 (1989), 95.

<sup>45</sup> See Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, trans. Josué V. Harari and David Bell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982): ‘Space makes an inventory of the adventures of knowledge, omitting nothing; knowledge traces a cartography of known lands, omitting nothing’ (*Hermes*, xxi).

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Kinsella, *Davis, Mangan, Ferguson? Tradition and the Irish Writer* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1970), 30.

significant, makes significance, and is subject to both itself and its perceiver in a multitude of different ways.<sup>47</sup> Perceived in this way, ‘the way we imagine space has effects’,<sup>48</sup> and is also productive of affects, where affect denotes *both* emotional response (to space), *and also* stimulus (of space). Equally the manner in which, in reading, we trace and identify with the progress and point of view of the poem’s enunciating I/eye produces an affective engagement with the text and its implied voice; we trace an affective map of the poetic terrain (the poem *as* and *of* space, and the poem as vocal utterance).

### ***Mapping II: Vocalic Space and Affective Engagement***

*L’époque actuelle serait peut-être un époque Guattarian.*<sup>49</sup>

The experience of reading a poem is an act that can only occur in our present, something that has led many critics of lyric poetry to emphasise a specifically poetic space of reading, which, due to the non-narrative nature of the lyric, occurs apart from, or in a suspension from, conventionally perceived or linear time.<sup>50</sup> The space of lyric is a space of absolute presence, where lived time is suspended in favour of the time dictated by the act of reading the poem. This readerly act of suspending, or diverting, lived time and space (what Northrop Frye calls a ‘turning away’),<sup>51</sup> is also a readerly surrender to a complicit and absolute becoming, and allows for a reading of the lyric poem which emphasises an experience of the poem dictated through a sympathetic relationship with the unfolding of the work itself. The poem, for its reader, is at once ‘mine and not mine’.<sup>52</sup> The poem is not just thought, organised, and preserved in a

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<sup>47</sup> See also Michel Foucault, *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, trans. Colin Gordon *et al.* (New York: Pantheon, 1980): ‘A new spatial analysis would abandon the notion of space as a starting point (either accepted as a determining parameter or overcome). Space would not be an origin, in this analysis, but [...] an actor in its own right’ (*Power / Knowledge*, 162-163).

<sup>48</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Eric Alliez, ‘Genosko Book Translation’, e-mail message to Heather H. Yeung. 6 Jan. 2010.

<sup>50</sup> See in particular Jonathan Culler, ‘Why Lyric’, *PMLA* 123.1 (2008), 201-206.

<sup>51</sup> Northrop Frye, ‘Approaching the Lyric’, *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hosêk and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 31.

<sup>52</sup> Helen Vendler, *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1995), 8.

visual space,<sup>53</sup> it also ‘coincides with the actualization of a speaking voice’;<sup>54</sup> the poem will only ‘come to life’ fully when imagined as voiced as well as read. The act of voicing the poem is similar, in this way, to the manner in which the musician will ‘interpret’ and play a piece of music.<sup>55</sup> The reading-act in both these cases will be a mixture of what Leo Treitler calls the ‘transcendent’ (affective, aesthetic, engagement) and the ‘formalist’ (precise communication of the writer’s notations).<sup>56</sup> It is dependent on a circular process whereby the reader, voicer, or player reads, listens, and responds to both the written (or remembered) text in question and also to their performance of that text. It is an act that is inherently sympathetic and affective. This sort of sympathetic relationship between reader/performer/viewer and artwork is explained by Gilles Deleuze thus: ‘a virtual map, traced by art, superimposes itself upon the real map, whose very contours are thus transformed’.<sup>57</sup> In reading the poem we enter into what Sass calls an ‘affect-laden space-of-action’,<sup>58</sup> where action is prescribed by the emotional response generated, in the experience of the poem, by the process of giving voice to the poem itself. The relationship between reader and poem is not only sympathetic but also reciprocal. The aesthetic experience is both transforming and transformative.

However, how do we link this spatial and affective idea of lyric space and experience to affective mapping as a viable methodology for poetics? A starting point may be Eric Alliez’s tongue-in-cheek updating of Foucault’s tentative prophetic statement. ‘L’époque actuelle serait peut-être l’époque de l’espace’<sup>59</sup> becomes

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<sup>53</sup> Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 93.

<sup>54</sup> Paul De Man, ‘Lyrical Voice in Contemporary Theory’, *Lyric Poetry*, 55.

<sup>55</sup> I extend here N. Katherine Hayles’s idea, in the light of digital poetics and performance theory, of a ‘reimagining of the literary work as in instrument to be played’ (‘Intermediation: The Pursuit of a Vision’, *New Literary History* 38.1 (2007), 121). Although Hayles’s metaphor of the work as instrument is productive of a new angle of vision on, or critical engagement with, the literary work, it limits the extent to which the reader or voicer of the poem is complicit in production of ‘music’ from (or a reading of) the (silent) work. I find in this instance the analogy between reader and musician and poem and musical text more productive, inasmuch as it is as applicable to the traditional lyric as it is to more avant-garde and electronic poetics.

<sup>56</sup> Leo Treitler, ‘Language and the Interpretation of Music’, *Music and Meaning*, ed. Jenefer Robinson (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), 25

<sup>57</sup> Gilles Deleuze, quoted in Russel West-Pavlov, *Space in Theory* (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2009), 227.

<sup>58</sup> Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 59.

<sup>59</sup> Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits IV*, 752.

‘L’époque actuelle serait peut-être un époque Guattarian’.<sup>60</sup> a Guattarian epoch now builds upon from the foundation set by Foucault’s epoch of space.<sup>61</sup> Emphasis moves from space to psychoanalysis, as the ‘contemporary spatial’ encompasses not only postmodern theory (from Foucault, through Derrida, to Deleuze), but also contemporary psychoanalytic thought (in the figure of Deleuze’s collaborator Félix Guattari). However, the relationship of psychoanalysis to literature is as muddled as the relationship of literature to ideas of space.<sup>62</sup> Too often psychoanalysis is used in literary studies to find in a text particular pathologies analogous to known incidents in the writer’s life. The process of trauma and recovery through the writing experience finds a parallel in the talking cure of psychoanalysis. The work of many prominent psychoanalysts is often used as a key to images or themes that will then be observed in or read into the literary text. Equally, the critic sees him- or herself take on the role of analyst to the text’s analysand. All of these approaches to literary studies through psychoanalysis are in some way reductive. Jonathan Culler observes:

If critics devote themselves to identifying in literary works the forces and elements described in psychoanalytic theory, if they make psychoanalysis a source of themes, they restrict the impact of potentially valuable theoretical developments [...]. This body of work provides, among other things, an account of processes of textual transference by which critics find themselves uncannily repeating a displaced version of the narrative they are supposed to be comprehending – just as the psychoanalyst, through the process of transference, finds himself caught up in the re-enactment of the analysand’s drama. *Contemporary psychoanalytic theory might have much to teach us about the logic of our interaction with texts but it is impoverished when it is treated as a repository of themes.*<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Eric Alliez, ‘Genosko Book Translation’, E-mail message to Heather H. Yeung. 6 Jan. 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Alliez is also humorously responding to Michel Foucault’s re-casting of his epoch of space as ‘peut-être [aussi] un époque Deleuzien’, in favour of Deleuze’s most famous collaborator, Félix Guattari.

<sup>62</sup> For the latter point, see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1999): ‘[in literary studies] few concepts [...] are as self-evident and yet remain so vague as the concept of space’ (*Narratology*, 132).

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (London: Routledge, 1981), 10. My italics.

Julia Kristeva's application of psychoanalytic thought to her literary theory is testament to the liberating manner in which psychoanalysis can operate in literary-critical discourse. Kristeva's analyses of Mallarmé and Lautréamont in the large sections of *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* which remain untranslated in the English edition make much of the identificatory play of subject and object of enunciation in the poetic texts by these authors, as well as treating in depth the manner in which we, as readers, approach and seek to identify (aesthetically and critically) with these difficult texts. Subtle applications of this approach influence Kristeva's books on Proust and Colette, which explore in great detail 'the experience of literature',<sup>64</sup> seamlessly integrating the production of the text (or texts) and our readerly experience generated through a deep association with these texts and the reading process. Other theoretically liberating uses of psychoanalysis in literary critical discourse are the subtle analyses of the Elegy tradition by Peter Sacks and Jahan Ramazani, both of which take into account the reader's experience of the mourning process inherent in the poems as well as an in-depth analysis of the structures that make up and delimit this readerly experience.<sup>65</sup> Kristeva's, Sacks', and Ramazani's psychoanalytically-indebted studies of poetry (and also, in the case of Kristeva, prose fiction) are able to bridge the gap between the critical idea of the poem *as* space, and the idea of the poem *of* space.

But what has this psychoanalytically indebted approach to literature to do with ideas of space in poetry? The majority of psychoanalytic readings of poetry tend towards the ways we have seen Culler enumerate above, leading to readings even of the most lyric of poems as if within a narrative framework, or as if evidence of the artistic expression of a particularly traumatic period in the writer's life. These types of criticism reduce the experience of the poem to the reader's ability to situate the poem within some sort of overall reasoned linear narrative addressed to him or her by the 'character' of the speaker, or poet. The critic finds him or herself, as Culler puts it, caught up in the analysand's (i.e. the poem's) drama, leading to a reading of the lyric poem which could be mistaken for one of a dramatic monologue.<sup>66</sup> Contemporary

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<sup>64</sup> This is how Kristeva describes all of her literary analyses. See in particular the introduction to Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia UP, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> See Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1985) and Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: the Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 10. Culler is still insistent on recuperating the lyric from such readings, calling, in 2010, for 'a capacious understanding of the lyric tradition which is not restricted either to the idea of a decontextualized expression of subjectivity

psychoanalysis, in whatever version, is concerned in the broadest way possible with interrelationships: relationships within the self, with the self, and between the self and the world. It investigates and articulates these relationships in spatial terms, indeed, many of its most productive theories are articulated through spatial language, metaphors, images, and realities, thus contributing to Foucault's *époque de l'espace* in a fundamental way – a fact that has not been fully acknowledged in studies of space in contemporary thought, which in the main concentrate on philosophical and geographical influences. The judicious use of many of the tenets of psychoanalysis in my analysis of space, voice, and the contemporary lyric poem will, I hope, lead to a manner of reading, or voicing, this non-narrative poetic form *on its own terms*.

The voice of the lyric poem occupies a strange place in critical thought, somewhere between personality and pure enunciation. But it is with this voice (or, indeed, these voices) that we unquestionably, in reading the lyric poem, identify. Helen Vendler writes, 'the voices in lyric are represented not by characters, as in a novel or drama, but by changing registers of diction, contrastive rhythms, and varieties of tone [...]. The 'plot' of a lyric represents that of a sonata'.<sup>67</sup> Yet, at the same time, these multiple voices somehow cohere and give us an overall impression of a poet's own voice (Vendler's 'aesthetic signature').<sup>68</sup> This 'voice' is the reason that we can distinguish, in reading, the work of John Montague, say, from that of his contemporary Thomas Kinsella, or the work of either of these unquestionably Irish poets from that of their compatriot, Seamus Heaney. And yet this voice is not wholly that of the poet, nor is it wholly the personality (or New Critical 'speaker') of the poem. Vendler writes of 'voice', or 'aesthetic signature', as a 'hand', which, in the act of writing or in the readerly identification with the subject of writing, 'moves in a place where memory cannot be remembered because it is part of a manifold undivided in time. The hand has no biography and no ideas; it traces a contour pliable under its touch [...]. The hand is anonymous, mine and not mine'.<sup>69</sup> Lyric voice becomes something which is at once embodied and *disembodied*, and which is, in both cases, inherently spatial.<sup>70</sup> The 'I'

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[...] nor to the model of the dramatic monologue with a speaker whose situation, attitude, and goals we should novelistically reconstruct'. 'Why Lyric?', School of Criticism and Theory, Cornell (12 Jul. 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Vendler, *Soul Says*, 6.

<sup>68</sup> Vendler, *Soul Says*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Vendler, 'The I of Writing', quoted in *Soul Says*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> It is useful to note at this point that Vendler does not agree with the spatial nature of lyric voicing *per se*: 'the lyric is the gesture of immortality and freedom; the novel is the gesture of the historical and of the spatial' (*Soul Says*, 5). However, the manner,

(vocal utterance) and ‘eye’ (vocalic landscape) of enunciation are, in the lyric poem, inextricably linked, and, in voicing the lyric poem it is with this enunciating I/eye that we identify.

Voice makes authentic and works against the material nature of poetic language (it is at once embodied and disembodied) that so much deconstructive criticism has taught us to assume to be a given. In the act of identifying with the voice of or in the act of *voicing* the lyric poem we encounter what Susan Stewart calls ‘the abstract and material nature of language’,<sup>71</sup> a point at which Julia Kristeva would identify in poetry the eruption of the semiotic into the symbolic. Both Stewart and Kristeva, too, are clear about what they consider to be the inherently spatial nature of the lyric poem. Vendler sees ‘immortality and freedom’ as the basis for lyric utterance, while Stewart sees writing as a means ‘to caption the world, defining and commenting upon the configurations [therein]’,<sup>72</sup> and Kristeva posits space and infinity jointly as the model for a new poetic language.<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Culler also places emphasis on the vocal and spatial nature of the lyric poem, stating that its main purpose is ‘to produce an apparently phenomenal world through the figure of voice’.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Theodor Adorno emphasises the (dis)embodied and vocal nature of the lyric poem: ‘the highest lyric works are those in which the subject, with no remaining trace of mere matter, sounds forth in language until language itself acquires a voice’.<sup>75</sup>

Voice, therefore, can be seen as the point at which critics of the lyric poem both converge and diverge in their ideas about the form. Voice is the vehicle by which we identify with and differentiate between lyrics, and by which the ‘apparently phenomenal world’<sup>76</sup> of the lyric poem is produced. However, lyric voice has also been interpreted, diversely, as intentional speech-act (Barbara Herrnstein Smith), description (Michel Riffaterre), prosopopeia (Northrop Frye), and pure utterance (Jonathan Culler). In the act of voicing the lyric poem a specific space opens, which is ‘away from our ordinary

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methods, and metaphors through which Vendler approaches the lyric are unquestionably spatial; it seems, here, that her criticism of the novel as opposed to the lyric poem as spatial applies more to the necessarily mimetic nature of the novel form – its reliance on place, or *mise en scène* as much as on narrative.

<sup>71</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 31.

<sup>72</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 31.

<sup>73</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, trans. Alice Jardine (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980): ‘If there is a model for poetic language, it no longer involves lines or surfaces, but rather space and infinity’ (*Desire in Language*, 88).

<sup>74</sup> Jonathan Culler, ‘Changes in the Study of Lyric’, *Lyric Poetry*, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Theodor Adorno, ‘On Lyric Poetry and Society’, *Notes to Literature I*, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 43.

<sup>76</sup> Culler, ‘Changes in the Study of Lyric’, *Lyric Poetry*, 50.

continuous experience in space and time, or rather from a verbal mimesis of it'.<sup>77</sup> In voicing the lyric poem we enter the vocalic space of the 'mine and not mine',<sup>78</sup> where an identificatory play with the enunciating I/eye of the poem takes place. This identificatory play creates a sympathetic groundwork for subsequent critical readings of the poem, and which allows the poem to be voiced and read *on its own terms* as simultaneously *in* and *as* space, in a process I call affective mapping.

The manner in which we voice the poem is dependent on the natural blurring of the poem's enunciating I and/or eye. Lyric voice and the space from which and about which enunciation occurs simultaneously demands and evades definition as the position of the first person pronoun and the angle of vision shift. All too frequently, however, these two major constituents of poetic experience – the poem read as stemming from an 'I' (the implied speaker's or a personal or psychological point of view), and the poem read as stemming from an 'eye' (the mimetic constructions of landscape, theme, and image in the space of the poem) – are separated in criticism to facilitate an apparently stable understanding of the text in question. In eliding the lyric poem's enunciating I/eye, we can move away from readings that, in their logo- or grapho-centricism, or their reliance on structures of character and plot, do not accommodate the other life of poetry, as vocal performance. The poem as Umberto Eco defines it is an open work, its reader-dependent multiplicity of possibilities stemming as much from 'aesthetic stimuli' as from the 'field of connoted meanings' provided by the text.<sup>79</sup> The 'apparently phenomenal world'<sup>80</sup> of the lyric poem can be read in multiple ways. A method of approaching the lyric that takes into account the simultaneous existence of the poem's and, therefore, the reader's, enunciating 'I' and 'eye', is also one that is predicated upon ideas of present identification and space, rather than personality or theme, and is a method built upon an originary, affective, reaction to the poem under scrutiny.

Our first encounter is with the poem's voice, and only then do we go on to understand the meaning of the poem. Affect comes before cognition, but subsequently both sorts of experience operate simultaneously. This is not to say that affective engagement with the voice of the poem is the same as the aesthetic experience of poetry whose sonorous base formed the theories of the French symbolist poets. Steven Connor emphasises the importance of voice and affect in the identification processes that

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<sup>77</sup> Northrop Frye, 'Approaching the Lyric', *Lyric Poetry*, 31.

<sup>78</sup> Vendler, *Soul Says*, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (New York: Harvard UP, 1989), 37.

<sup>80</sup> Culler, 'Changes in the Study of Lyric', *Lyric Poetry*, 50.

voicing catalyses, noting that ‘psychological inquiry into the voice has tended to focus on the cognitive rather than the affective aspects of self-recognition’.<sup>81</sup> And affective engagement, with its concern with the voice of the poem, presupposes an element of literacy on the part of the reader and sees the reader as complicit in an almost ventriloqual act of voicing. Through the mapping of this affective engagement one can begin to understand one’s aesthetic experience.

Stripped of the comfortable ordering of narrative or history, the reader of the lyric poem relies first on voice in order to gain some semblance of identification with the poem in question. From this first identification with and of voice, the reader can build a picture of the world of the poem. For the New Critics, the difficulty in pinning down the lyric voice led to an elevation of the idea of the ‘speaker’ of the poem, and often produced readings of lyric poems as if dramatic monologues. For the more historically or biographically orientated critic, this need to identify with the poem’s voice manifests itself in the association of the speaking ‘I’ of the poem with the implied or critically constructed character of the poet. Where New Criticism and Structuralism posit an eminently stable and representative text and author and build criticism from this point, post-structuralism destabilizes the very notion of text, positing instead a set of infinitely generative possibilities. The words of the text, before any narrator or speaker, let alone author, is even considered, are constantly in process, constantly under question. Symbolism situates the latent force of the text not in its language but in the unconscious effect that the sound-patterns formed by the phonemes which make up the words of the text has on the reader. However, to locate readerly identification in either the constructed speaker of structural discourse or its opposites, the deconstructed text of poststructuralism and the sound-patterns of symbolism, is to ignore completely the reciprocal nature of the experience of the poem, reduce the ethics of reading to an already polarized, already judged state, and over-complicate the concept of lyric voice.

Between the perspectives on lyric voice outlined above there lies a point of stability, a single point at which, or process within which, it is possible to locate the act of primary identification with the lyric voice; the function of reading that makes ‘us *care* about things’.<sup>82</sup> This primary (affective) process occurs within the act of voicing the poem, and continues alongside all other elements of the reading act (what Fredric

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<sup>81</sup> Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 9.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2008), 200. n.9.

Jameson would call cognitive mapping).<sup>83</sup> However, there is a distinct difference between the lyric utterance and associated reading act and a 'real world' speech-act. This difference is often ignored in Reader-Response theory and philosophies of reading, which invariably take all sorts of utterance as a form of intentional speech-act, operated by a single consciousness. The difference lies in the suspended time and non-narrative nature, or 'space', of the lyric voice as well as its dual consciousness: Sass's 'affect-laden space-of-action'.<sup>84</sup> Barbara Herrnstein Smith formulates this difference thus:

As we have seen, the basic assumption of natural verbal transactions, shared by both parties, is that the speaker means what he says and that the listener will take him to mean what he says. It is precisely the suspension of that assumption that defines fictive discourse. It is not, of course, that the poet is understood to be lying, but rather that he is understood not to be *saying* at all. The poet is not a speaker addressing a listener, but one who composes a verbal structure that *represents* a natural utterance [...]. Whatever *communication* may be taken to mean in the dynamics of art, it is not the same as what it means in regard to the dynamics of natural discourse.<sup>85</sup>

But Herrnstein Smith's formulation is still reliant on strict differences and power relationships between the poet and the poem, and the poem and its reader, on an overriding sense of subject and object relations. I contend that the difference between lyric voice and all other types of voicing, reading, and speaking, lies in the qualitative difference between the idea of speaking and the idea of voicing a poem. In the former, the reader assumes some sort of character from the words on the page, whether that character is a 'speaker', the poet, or a fictional construct. In the latter, the reader allows him or herself to voice the poem, and thus forms an initial level of engagement through identification with voice, which is apart from any sort of *a priori* assumption of character or narrative, and thus blurs subject-object relations. The former sees cognitive

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<sup>83</sup> 'Cognitive mapping involves a series of aesthetic practices, theoretical projects, and even political activities that produce the sense of orientation that a map provides. A cognitive map is a necessarily partial and incomplete rendering of the multidimensional and constantly changing totality that serves as a kind of navigational aid'. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks, Introduction, *The Jameson Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 23.

<sup>84</sup> Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 59.

<sup>85</sup> Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse* (Illinois: U Chicago P, 1978), 111.

processes already imposed on the poem, colouring experience. The latter allows the experience of the poem to take precedence, setting a firm groundwork for subsequent cognitive analysis. Both may be conceptualised as spatial, although the former is also reliant on an element of historicity in order for value-judgements to be formed.

Voicing the poem establishes, at the initial stage of the reading process, the inherently spatial nature of the lyric poem. We have already seen Steven Connor emphasise the importance of voice in self-recognition, and for him this is an inherently spatialized and spatializing process:

The voice is not merely orientated in space, it provides the dynamic grammar of orientation [...]. When I speak, my voice shows me up as a being with a perspective, for whom orientation has significance [...]. A voice also establishes me as an inside capable of recognising and being recognised by an outside. My voice comes from the inside of a body and radiates through a space which is exterior to and extends beyond that body. In moving from an interior to an exterior, and therefore marking out the relations of interior and exterior, a voice also announces and verifies the co-operation of bodies and the environments in which they have their being. The voice goes out into space, but also always, in its calling for a hearing, or the necessity of being heard, opens a space for itself to go out into, resound in, and return from. Even the unspoken voice clears an internal space equivalent to the actual differentiation of positions in space necessary to the speaker or hearer.<sup>86</sup>

This ‘complex feedback loop’<sup>87</sup> of voicing is a process that leads to orientation and individuation. This is the case whether the voicing is aloud or silent (‘the unspoken voice clears an internal space’), and recent studies in cognitive linguistics have demonstrated that the detection by a reader of syllabic stress patterns and lyric meaning is unaffected by whether the reading is aloud or silent.<sup>88</sup> In the experience of the lyric poem, the reader is doubly complicit in this process of voicing. The act of voicing the lyric poem involves a suspension of self on the part of the reader, and a subsequent

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<sup>86</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 8.

<sup>88</sup> See Campbell *et al.* ‘Stress in Silent Reading’, 29-47, and Reinier Plomp, *The Intelligent Ear: On the Nature of Sound Perception* (New Jersey: Psychology Press, 2001).

identification with and ventriloquism of the lyric voice. The autonomy of both poem and speaker is absolute, yet the process of voicing sees these autonomies become mutual. The I/eye of the poem is 'both mine and not mine'.<sup>89</sup> The reader will at once seek the voice of the poem, and voice the poem. Voicing is not an appropriation but a process of primary identification. This identificatory act is too personal to be performative, and the act of voicing is at all times profoundly spatial.<sup>90</sup> It is also primarily affective.

Didier Anzieu also links voice to primary identification. This forms an important constituent element of our affective interaction with poetry, the manner in which the enunciating I/eye is positioned within the *milieu* of the poem, and the manner in which we, in turn, voice that poem. Anzieu makes his contribution to developmental psychoanalysis with the idea of a 'sonorous envelope', and the 'sonorous envelope' in turn influences Steven Connor's formation of the idea of 'vocalic space'.<sup>91</sup> The sonorous envelope is the auditory equivalent to the highly visual Lacanian mirror-stage or Freudian fort-da game. The approach to and the playing out of this developmental stage is primarily affective, a form of what the Kleinian psychoanalyst would call 'projective identification'.<sup>92</sup> For Julia Kristeva, 'affect is the internal correlate responsible for the positioning of the I in the exterior world'.<sup>93</sup> The affective experience of poetic voicing is fundamentally concerned with the positioning of the poem's enunciating I/eye, and is simultaneously extralinguistic (inasmuch as affect as a phenomenon lies firmly outside the linguistic sphere) and inherently shaped by language (as it is language that the reader seeks to voice, and seeks identification with). The I/eye is the linguistic marker by which we navigate the verbal space of the poem. Identification of and with the I/eye provides point-of-view and trajectory for reading as well as a sense of familiarity, and these three elements ensure that the reading of a poem

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<sup>89</sup> Vendler, *Soul Says*, 8.

<sup>90</sup> See Ann Keniston, *Overheard Voices: Address and Subjectivity in Postmodern American Poetry* (London: Routledge, 2006): 'All address is motivated by the desire to unmake distance' (*Overheard Voices*, 51). But Keniston overlooks the fact that address also *creates* distance (*viz.* Connor), and mediates the reciprocal relationship between two objects.

<sup>91</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 28-32.

<sup>92</sup> See in particular Joseph Sandler, 'The Concept of Projective Identification', *Projection, Identification, Projective Identification*, ed. Joseph Sandler (London: Karnac Books, 1989), 13 – 26.

<sup>93</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'De l'affect ou «L'intense profondeur des mots»'. *Esteriorità di Dio*. Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Settentrionale, Milan. (23-24 Feb. 2010), 2.

does not degenerate into mere ‘noise’.<sup>94</sup> ‘Noise surrounds, and it can be difficult to locate the source of a particular sound’,<sup>95</sup> but when delimited, noise is ‘equivalent to the articulation of space, it indicates the limits of a territory’.<sup>96</sup> The prospect of being immersed in noise more often than not will promote increased attempts at seeking a source in the noise with which to identify, through which noise can thus be ordered.

Intersubjectivity is a primarily affective state and is a major element of lyric voicing. The voice of the poem is as important as the way in which we voice the poem, and an intersubjective space between reader and poem is created as the boundaries between reader and text blur in the act of voicing the poem, and as we locate and vetrioloquise the lyric voice. In Anzieu’s identificatory process, and initial play of I-positioning in the process of voicing, we can see the development of a process which will, in adult life, be incorporated into self-identification and knowledge-formation: ‘the bath of sounds into which the child sinks, and which, we may suggest, is recalled in later experiences in which individual identity is immersed in sound, is also a defining, limiting, shaping function’.<sup>97</sup> The double life of lyric poetry, as textual artefact and vocal performance, must return us partially to this world of sound, alongside the visual world already implicated in the reading process. ‘Word is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee’,<sup>98</sup> but the lyric word, and the lyric space or world, is created from the affective relationship of the reader or voicer with the enunciating I/eye of the poem, and the ensuing vocalic act. Affective experience does not rely on processes of logic. Rather, it is on the reaction of one person to an object or experience and the interaction that results. Although affect ‘needs objects to come into being’, it is also a shared experience which is ‘relational and transformative’.<sup>99</sup> In the interaction of viewer and object, listener and voice, or reader and text, an intersubjective relationship is established.<sup>100</sup> The poem is ‘both mine and

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<sup>94</sup> By noise here I mean unwanted sound or ‘unaesthetic signal that operates on every level’ (Bart Kosko, *Noise* (New York: Viking, 2006) 7), which, without delimitation has no relevance in works of cultural production and thus cannot signify.

<sup>95</sup> Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 446.

<sup>96</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985) 6.

<sup>97</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 29.

<sup>98</sup> Valentin Voloshinov, quoted in Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2005), 86.

<sup>99</sup> Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 12-16.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Sloterdijk illustrates the state of mutual becoming that intersubjectivity implies by using Pablo Reinoso’s artwork *La Parole* (see *Sphères III: Écumes*, 10, and Appendix VII).

not mine',<sup>101</sup> the reading experience is dependent as much on the projected subjectivity of the enunciating I/eye of the poem as it is on the subjectivity and affective engagement of the poem's enunciator.

If poetry is the putting into language of affect, a necessary constituent factor of more general affective experience of and in the world,<sup>102</sup> it is a putting into language to which we as a reader will, in turn, have an affective reaction. And we will react through the act of voicing the poem, and subsequently, by reading and analysing the poem. This multilayered affective engagement (affective mapping) is inherently bound up in the experience of the poem – an experience of poem both *as* and also *of* space – and is an engagement that is at the foundation of any reading. The experience of and with the poem (in voicing and reading the poem) is both textual and vocal, and is also multilayered and, at its foundations, both spatial and also affective. And it is through the prior and ongoing experience of affective mapping, and upon the foundations laid by the sympathetic voicing of the poem, that all subsequent 'readings' of the poem may take place. In denying this important formative element of the experience of the poem, the reader risks imposing on the space of the poem a cognitive map unrelated to the poem itself. In acknowledging the affective mechanisms at play in the process of reading and engaging with the lyric poem, the lyric voice remains uncoloured by the interventions of detrimental forces of narrative interpretation or dramatic monologue. At the same time the critic may discover, and map, the various interpretative possibilities exposed by the poem, conscious at all times of the many different types of space that are in operation, thus reaching an understanding both of the lyric voice and also the lyric poem.

The enunciating I/eye of the poem is the guiding principle by which we navigate our poetic experience, and we may consider each layer of poetic to create anew, build upon previous, and generate the possibility for other, maps of the poetic terrain with which the poem presents us. Clare Connolly writes that 'the iconography of the map takes on new meanings, as seen in contemporary cultural production in Ireland. No longer simply systems of representation, maps have become cultural objects, and Irish literary and visual culture is currently distinguished by a number of active negotiations with cultural practises'.<sup>103</sup> Whereas the map is a cultural object to be read and

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<sup>101</sup> Vendler, *Soul Says*, 8.

<sup>102</sup> See Flatley: 'The affect must come into being, must be put [somehow] into language' (*Affective Mapping*, 59).

<sup>103</sup> Clare Connolly, 'Postcolonial Ireland: Posing the Questions', *European Journal of English Studies* 3.3 (1999), 260-1.

interrogated and its representation static and non-negotiable, the process of mapping is fluid, responsive, and subject to constant change. The 'active negotiations with cultural practices' that Connolly sees in contemporary Irish cultural production may be observed in the self-conscious nature of the majority of contemporary literatures and the resultant diverse interpretative possibilities offered to the literary critic. John Montague's *The Rough Field*, for instance, interrogates the potentiality of the map, whether topographical, literary, or linguistic, to provide a full and accurate representation of the landscape in question. This volume of poetry (with which the first chapter of this thesis is concerned) revisits and rewrites impressions of the town of Garvaghey from the multiple perspectives of different enunciating I/eyes, placed at different points in cultural relation to Ireland, at different angles of vision, in different historical periods, and speaking in different languages from different traditions. The Garvaghey of this volume is most certainly not 'a measured picture of a concrete reality'.<sup>104</sup>

Kathleen Jamie's volume *This Weird Estate*, too, interrogates the notion of mapping as a 'fair and objective',<sup>105</sup> practice of cultural representation. Like Montague, Jamie adds an element of sympathy to the idea of map-making, and what emerges is an enunciating I/eye conscious of the importance of difference to the construction of the self and the navigation of the world. These poetic maps are not neutral in their approach, nor do they 'assume no perspective',<sup>106</sup> and Jamie's poetry is indebted to a world-view conscious of the fact that 'nothing is truly fixed'.<sup>107</sup> The two-dimensional spatialization of the conventional map is disrupted by the enunciating I/eye and all that it represents: vocalic utterance, selfhood and emotional perspective, point of view, and the indeterminacy of vision and representation. In the space of the poem, the closed system of the map opens out into a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities, but, as we seek to locate the I/eye, we discover a perspective from which to read: '[the] map can set me dreaming, let my imagination run. But it also offers me order; lets me get a handle on the world'.<sup>108</sup>

A consciousness of the many levels of interpretative possibility, as well as the presence of an enunciating I/eye which is unplaced or liminal, multiple, and unstable, is what links the poetic investigations, or mappings, that make up the chapters which follow. Helpful here is the close of Niran Abbas's meditative definition of the idea of mapping

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<sup>104</sup> Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, 60-61.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>107</sup> Jamie, *Findings*, 140.

<sup>108</sup> Massey, *In Praise of Space*, 107.

in intellectual and social thought and praxis: ‘in describing and visualising otherwise hidden facts, maps set the stage for future work. Mapping, like poetry, is always a project in the making’.<sup>109</sup> We must remember, in an age where space is no longer conceived of as the neutral background of Euclidian space or as a Kantian utopia, that any space, and thus the act of mapping space and our affective engagement with the poem, is subject to constant change. The enunciating I/eye of the poem, whether physically manifest in the first-person pronoun or silently present as visual and philosophical point of view, is the point with which we identify, and whose perspective we voice. In turn, we, as reader, confer on the space of the poem animation and give this I/eye voice, *reading* tone, emphasis, and image through our own affective engagement with the poem.

Julia Kristeva links the complicity of the reader, the writer, and the text as and of space, writing of a ‘space where words [...] contribute to the weaving of the world’s unbroken flesh, of which *I* is a part. *I* as writer, *I* as reader: *I* living, loving, and dying’.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, in reading and engaging with the poetries which comprise the ensuing chapters, and indeed with any poetry, it is impossible to avoid the points at which the readerly and writerly I/eye combine to create an animate poetic space and lyric temporality, through the process of affective mapping. The choice of poets and poetries which form the chapters of this thesis has, as much as is possible, been deliberately non-exemplary, as I have hoped to demonstrate that the process of affective mapping in contemporary lyric poetry is as important to the reading of and engagement with traditional short lyrics as with longer or more postmodern poems, poetic collages, and sequences, and with the work of poets from a diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, writing in different places at different times. To the latter end, the chapters do chart a rough chronology from Montague’s *The Rough Field* (1972) to Alice Oswald’s *Dart* (2002), but they also take in a wide spectrum of Thomas Kinsella’s poetry (1969 – 2006), Seamus Heaney’s bog poems (1966 – 2006), and Thom Gunn’s poetry (1954 – 2000), as well as analyses of specific volumes of poetry and poetic sequences by Kathleen Jamie (2004 and 2007) and Mimi Khalvati (1991, 1997, and 2007). The progression between the chapters is more thematic than chronological, attempting, from the opening reading of *The Rough Field*, to chart a

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<sup>109</sup> Niran Abbas, Introduction, *Mapping Michel Serres* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 2005), 8.

<sup>110</sup> Kristeva, *Proust and the Sense of Time*, 5.

thematic progression which paves the way theoretically for the concluding reading of *Dart*.

In spite of attempting to choose poetries that are as non-exemplary as possible in their relation to the theory of affective mapping and manifestation of the workings of space in the poem, in paying such close attention in my reading to the dynamic between reader-consciousness, the subjectivity of the poem, and the changing ways in which space is articulated in the poem, distinct lines of thematic progression do occur. It may be argued that each chapter shows a different quest for an understanding of the possibilities of space in and of poetry, that the poetries analysed in all chapters move away from the comfort of the poetic and critical evocation of a single place from a static point of view, and that all chapters chart the progression of and changes in the understanding of the spaces of the chosen poems. Thus, many of the poems written about are sequences, or form cross-volume series. Many of the poets written about, in line with the concern the thesis displays for poetic spaces of liminality and multiplicity, demonstrate in their poetry a concern with the possibilities and effects of writing from marginalised and/or multiple cultural and geographical positions. John Montague and Thom Gunn, for instance, write from a distinctly transatlantic perspective, Mimi Khalvati's cultural and poetic world-view is simultaneously British and Iranian, while the poetries of Montague, Thomas Kinsella, and Seamus Heaney all work to comprehend and bridge the divides between Northern and Southern Ireland. In line with this, from the first chapter on *The Rough Field* to the Afterword, which looks at a recent poem by Seamus Heaney and Jen Hadfield's *almanacs* and *Nigh-No-Place*, there is an ongoing concern with voice, language, inheritance, and ideas of home.

Chapter 1 is concerned with John Montague's volume *The Rough Field* and the idea of the multiple possibilities of any mapping project. The open-endedness of this volume and Montague's preoccupations within it emphasise the idea of mapping as a process that is 'always a project in the making', that no space is stable or fully quantifiable. Chapter 2 extends the idea of process and space, looking at the manner in which the other or rejected thing informs the delimitation of the world-view in Thomas Kinsella's poetry. The chapter goes on to examine in detail processes of becoming, perspective, and *milieu* in the Peppercanister volume *A Technical Supplement*. Chapter 3 takes the abstract concern with subjectivity and the space of the human form seen in *A Technical Supplement* and makes it more personal, in a reading of Kathleen Jamie's *This Weird Estate*. Rather than the neutral I/eyes of the majority of Kinsella's poetry, in Jamie we frequently find a gaze and enunciation that takes sympathy with a state or

object as its starting point for navigation of the world, and which searches for a Heideggerian sense of simultaneous opening and grounding. Seamus Heaney's enunciating I/eyes, for all the poet's preoccupation with specific *milieux*, often occupy a liminal space, and for this reason Chapter 4 examines the poet's 'bog' poems in the light of the positioning and evolution of the I/eye. Chapter 5 is also concerned with liminality and voice, but this time in relation to the poetry of Thom Gunn. Space, here, is often liminal itself, enhanced in this way by the subject matter chosen, whether that is metamorphoses, perception, interrelationships, or mourning. The construction of space in these poems is enhanced by a thematic concentration on processes of perception which are streamed through a neutral I/eye almost Elizabethan in its tone. Chapter 6 is similarly concerned with perception: Mimi Khalvati's poetry investigates the multiple possibilities of vision and memory further. The poet often employs Proustian subjective affectivity by using the sense-impression of a single object through which to stream a whole world of personal perception and remembrance. Chapter 7 is concerned with the question of voice in Alice Oswald's volume *Dart*. It is poetry here, rather than the map, that is 'always a project in the making' as *Dart* is eminently conscious of itself as a projection of the riverscape in vocalic, rather than strictly geographical, form. Voice, and the space the voices in this poem articulate, is affective, contested, and multiple. The I/eye with which Oswald presents us continually eludes us as it metamorphosises with each turn of the river:

*L'espace lui-même change et commande des autres mappemondes.*<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Michel Serres, *Atlas*, 12.

## CHAPTER 1: JOHN MONTAGUE

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### *Mapping a/new Ireland*

On hearing an early draft of *The Rough Field*, John Hewitt remarked ‘it does for the North what MacDiarmid’s *Drunk Man* did for Scotland.’<sup>112</sup> It is indeed true that both sequences have left in their wakes a divided poetic and critical heritage. This is not to suggest that *The Rough Field* or *A Drunk Man* were born out of the same poetic ambition: where MacDiarmid laid claim in his work to a Scots literary and cultural equivalent of *Ulysses*, Montague already had the influence of Joyce to contend with, and, with Patrick Kavanagh writing before him, could engage with that inheritance at a generational remove. And although *The Rough Field*, arguably John Montague’s most sustained and successful experiment in world-mapping, may have poetically liberated what Hewitt broadly calls ‘the North’, Montague by no means stood by himself on the borders of his country and aimed, like MacDiarmid, for a literary renaissance. After all, Montague had company. Thomas Kinsella was writing in and around Belfast at the same time as Montague, and he is arguably the other half of a poetic double spearhead in the mid- to late 1950s<sup>113</sup> which, with respect for their elder, was pointed firmly away from the efforts of Kavanagh to create ‘a definition of the authentic in Irish life, through an analysis of its opposite [...] a strident form of Irishness that played to the gallery’.<sup>114</sup>

Neither Thomas Kinsella nor John Montague, existing in an increasingly globalised world, could be argued to have their boots as firmly planted in the Irish soil as Kavanagh, nor were either as militantly nationalist in their approach to their art as MacDiarmid. Rather, both younger poets rely on their poetry being constructed out of ‘technical energies’,<sup>115</sup> encompassing, but not giving primacy to, the national and the political. The ‘insane nets’ (*TKCP* 177) woven out of this mustering of energy and technique were made to span not only their home country but also the world. Building

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<sup>112</sup> John Montague, *The Pear is Ripe*, 146.

<sup>113</sup> See John Montague, *Company* (London: Duckworth, 2001): ‘A literary or artistic movement is usually the conjunction of several talents into a constellation at the same time and place. And the foundation of Dolmen Press coincided with the diffident first steps of Richard Murphy... Thomas Kinsella... and myself in the mid- to late 1950s’, (*Company*, 72).

<sup>114</sup> Montague, *Company*, 37.

<sup>115</sup> Montague, *Company*, 122.

upon and sometimes breaking the traditions before them, both Montague and Kinsella could construct afresh

a net of energies  
crossing patterns  
weaving towards  
a new order  
a new anarchy

(JMCP 73)

This quotation, taken from Section IX of *The Rough Field*, 'A New Siege', effectively encapsulates the poetic worldview that Montague attempts to communicate in that volume of poems. The poem's immediate occasion is Ulster Ireland and the reactions of and to the Civil Rights Association: the outbreaks of violence in Derry, Armagh, and Belfast in the 1960s. 'Old moulds' (JMCP 4) were not just being broken in the North of Ireland, however, and, living in France and America at various points during the composition of *The Rough Field*, Montague experienced the impassioned campus riots of 'sixties California and Paris. The short, freer lines of Section IX are inherited from the contemporary American poetic tradition to which Montague was exposed during his time teaching at Berkeley, and the experiments with form and syntax in other sections of the volume illustrate how the poet was also indebted to the poetic traditions of France, England and Ireland. To add another thread to Montague's network, the poet himself acknowledges as a formal influence the music of Sean Ó Riada, as well as the symphonies of Brahms, Mahler and Bruckner.<sup>116</sup> This cross-pollination of influence is echoed in the autobiographical writing of Montague himself:

My amphibian position between North and South, my natural complicity in  
three cultures, American, Irish and French, with darts aside to Mexico,  
India, Italy or Canada, should seem natural enough in the late-twentieth  
century as man strives to reconcile local allegiances with the absolute

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<sup>116</sup> See John Montague, *The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1989), pp. 10 (influence of contemporary American poetry) and 13 (the influence of musical forms). See also Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber, 1985), where Montague, in *The Rough Field* is seen to give a 'predominantly American form to Irish experience', (*Celtic Revivals*, 151).

necessity of developing a world consciousness to save us from the abyss.

Earthed in Ireland, at ease in the world, *weave the strands you're given*.<sup>117</sup>

The metaphor of world as fabric is not only one that links Montague's prose thinking to his poetry (as can be seen when comparing the extracts from *The Figure in the Cave* and *The Rough Field* above), but is also something that links the poet to a new school of continental philosophy that was emerging at the time.<sup>118</sup> It is a lucky coincidence that the same year that saw the publication of the first complete version of *The Rough Field*, two projects in philosophical world mapping, which took as their starting points a very similar metaphor for the world, were in their early stages in France. 1972 also saw the publication of the second volume in Michael Serres's *Hermes* series (*L'intérference*), and the first volume of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's magnum opus *Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Anti-Œdipus)*. Where Montague has 'a net of energies / crossing patterns' (*JMCP* 73), Serres has a material space in flux, made up of folds or pleats where the medium is quite literally the message,<sup>119</sup> and Deleuze and Guattari have, more eclectically, *the* multiple, which is made up of a network of rhizomes, or plateaus, all of which fold into, under, and through each other. History, or histories, are all part of the fabric, and, for all these thinkers, ultimately even time is defined spatially. In this way, *The Rough Field* represents, as Hugh MacDiarmid has written, 'a poetry of total recall',<sup>120</sup> and Montague that *The Rough Field* attempts 'to express an emerging historical and personal vision'.<sup>121</sup> Space, as we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, is 'one of the fundamental tricks of human cognition',<sup>122</sup> and metaphors of space allow for difficult concepts of globalisation and changing infrastructures (both literally and of thought) to be articulated. We map space, and trace the contours of these maps in different ways, through different times and places.

Maps trace all sorts of features in the landscape, linking worlds, giving us information as various as the place and the name (or, in the case of some multi-lingual maps, the names) of footpaths, mountain ranges, newly-built settlements, ancient sites of pilgrimage, and so on. We can use this information in any way we like, but all of it

<sup>117</sup> Montague, *The Figure in the Cave*, 18-19. Italics my own.

<sup>118</sup> Montague was living in Paris at the time of the escalated rioting that took place in the May of 1968 (see *The Pear is Ripe*, 174-176).

<sup>119</sup> See especially Serres, *Atlas*, 43-46.

<sup>120</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, review of *The Rough Field*, *Agenda* 10.4 (1972).

<sup>121</sup> Montague, *Company*, 122.

<sup>122</sup> Levinson, 'Language and Space', 358.

helps us to navigate a landscape, read it, view it, afresh. We can also choose our type of map according to our needs, or refer to different maps simultaneously in order to gain depth, as well as breadth, of vision in our chosen landscape. In *The Rough Field* John Montague provides us with an apparatus ready to be mapped. His chosen landscape is Ireland, in all its shifting multiplicity and by the 1960s, internationality, in the poem's present as well as through the ages. We can use this long poem, therefore, to help us envision a literary landscape of Ireland, ever-changing as the poem's enunciating I/eye sees old things anew and revises, poetically, elements of the given vision. However, we, here, the reader-critics, are the new map-makers. We are privy to the all-encompassing vision of the poem and are privileged to pull out landmarks and placenames, characters and images, that we feel fit to prioritize in our reading, making something of the multiplicity with which we are presented. Thus multiple threads make up the fabric of Montague's rough field: poetic mappings of different places (Garvaghey, Paris, Berkeley) and times (the 1960s, 1500s, the poet's childhood), and although the volume has frequently been read with an almost exclusively Irish and historical agenda, more general ideas of space and world mapping link its constituent parts.

The metaphor of space as fabric from which *The Rough Field* is constructed seems to penetrate even the most historically orientated criticism of the volume. Using the work of Frederick Jameson to elucidate various parts of the volume, Steven Matthews sees the grand structure of the poem as a 'complex system'<sup>123</sup> similar in its variety and interwovenness to the 'fabric of the world', and traces, in his reading of the poem, a cognitive map. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews recognises the importance of place as distinct from history in the construction of identity in *The Rough Field*: 'for [Montague] identity is profoundly embedded in ancestral terrain'.<sup>124</sup> Dillon Johnson considers *The Rough Field* full of 'contrapuntal voices' linked in their ultimate 'truth' to 'silence and blank space',<sup>125</sup> and Edna Longley considers it to be 'a nexus supplied by the interpenetration of past and present [...] woven of social as well as political threads in the intersecting perspectives of rural and urban Ireland'.<sup>126</sup> Fran Brearton perhaps comes closest to a prioritization of space in her consideration of the reading of

<sup>123</sup> Steven Matthews, *Irish Poetry: Politics, History, Negotiation: The Evolving Debate, 1969 to the Present* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 109.

<sup>124</sup> Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, 'John Montague: Global Regionalist?' (*Cambridge Quarterly* 35.1, (2006), 34.

<sup>125</sup> Dillon Johnson, *Irish Poetry After Joyce* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1997), 193, 187.

<sup>126</sup> Edna Longley, 'Searching the Darkness' in Douglas Dunn (ed.) *Two Decades of Irish Writing* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1975), 124.

(specifically Northern Irish) poetry: 'to read poetry according to the imperatives of time and place (the Troubles, Northern Ireland) is also too often to miss the broader poetic context in which that work should properly find its 'place''.<sup>127</sup> In contrast to the uncomfortably Irish-centred location of the other critics mentioned above, for Brearton, this ultimate place seems to be a cultural location which sits comfortably within a 'wider European context': it is a place 'at ease in the world'.<sup>128</sup> The wider spatial context *is*, arguably, the great fabric of things in which *The Rough Field* sits, and which the volume also illustrates, admirably. The self is the medium through which the multiple spaces and places of the known world are linked, through which spaces can be envisioned and maps made. Montague's self, poetic and otherwise, presented to us in *The Rough Field*, stretches through history, traditions, and across continents. In the words of the poet: 'I was trying, as always, to link my worlds'.<sup>129</sup>

*The Rough Field* is immediately 'placed': written on one of the volume's preliminary pages is the name of Montague's home town, Garvaghey, followed by the double translation 'Garbh acaidh, a rough field'.<sup>130</sup> However, this act of placing and the corresponding landscaping which occurs, although it is retrospective (no doubt the Gaelic and its English translation existed before the Irish name), is never forced. The three possible names for this one place - old Gaelic place name, Modern Irish equivalent, literal translation of the Gaelic - neatly prefigure Montague's use of the multiple resonances (geographical, cultural, linguistic, symbolic) of various place names in *The Rough Field*. Equally, this act of place naming highlights the importance for Montague in the volume of landscapes real and imagined, current and remembered. These landscapes make up the fabric of his world, and the volume may be seen as born out of a compulsion to see them mapped.

The translation of Garvaghey and, as the volume progresses, other names (for example, Glencull is also *Gleann coill* and the vale of hazels, Clogher is also *Cloch oir* and the golden stone), from the Irish Gaelic into their variant English forms, at times even abandoning the geographical guidance the current Irish forms can give, creates instantly the paradoxical distance and nearness that the returning speaker of the volume's semi-biographical narrative thread feels for his country of birth. The distance is emphasised by the linguistic differences between the variations on a name, and the

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<sup>127</sup> Fran Brearton, 'Poetry of the 1960s: the 'Northern Ireland Renaissance''. *Two Decades of Irish Writing*, 95.

<sup>128</sup> Montague, *The Figure in the Cave*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> Montague, *The Pear Is Ripe*, 209.

<sup>130</sup> John Montague, *The Rough Field* (Dublin: Dolmen P, 1972). Also *JMCP*, 5.

nearness by the deep historical knowledge the different variations give. This I/eye seems at ease in the abstract space, ventriloquizing many languages, but not in literal Ireland, the geographical space where his roots were laid, from which he has become estranged, and by which he is haunted. There is, for the cosmopolite, an impulse to make these three names one – to smooth out the rough field – but the layering of history must not be denied. Both the patterns of history and the landscape are eternally changing, so that any attempt to create a hybrid rough field would be both foolhardy and futile, and any effort at simplification would ultimately complicate the matter. Not for Montague either is a hackneyed updating of the traditional Irish *dinnseanchas*: Garvaghey must be itself in present and past, leaving room also for *Garbh acaidh* and the rough field. Echoes of all these names move backwards and forwards, and with this fluidity of movement, the landscape of Ireland in *The Rough Field* is created three-dimensionally. The poem's enunciating I/eye is not singular but multiple, and multiply placed; the voice of the poem resonates across histories, continents, and encounters. *The Rough Field* is at once particular and universal. The comfortable, singular, idea of place is at once complicated as we, in the process of voicing *The Rough Field*, are witness to multiple places, voices, times, separately and simultaneously. Although the poem does not interrogate the idea of voice *per se* (something we will see later in our examination of Alice Oswald's *Dart*), it does interrogate the idea of space, or spaces, through the fluidity of movement of the poem's enunciating I/eye.

We meet an example of this fluidity of movement as soon as the poems proper begin. Poem 1 of Section I ('Home Again') charts a mature Montague's return to Garvaghey. However, the narrative movement of the poem is not that simple and is perhaps best elucidated using a spatial rather than temporal model. Punctuating the three sonnets that make up the poem proper are short prose excerpts from the Ulster Herald, detailing an historical visit – of Lord Mountjoy to Ulster. Although the movement between the prose and poetry sections spans years and is broadly historical, neither story bearing any literal relationship to the other, there are spatial parallels. Where the first sonnet opens in a bus, moving out of Belfast, the first prose section opens with Lord Mountjoy in a coach, also moving out of Belfast. The poem charts both characters' movements, in the same direction, through the Irish landscape. In spite of Montague's obvious knowledge of the Irish landscape of which the journey between Belfast and Garvaghey consists, it is evident that for him as well as Mountjoy 'vast changes have taken place' (*JMCP* 8) since he was last there. Perhaps for this reason the poetic journey does not start *in medias res* in Garvaghey – we must travel there, noting

on the way the changes that have been wrought in the country, and thus make space for a fresh map of the terrain. For Montague, as for Serres, 'l'espace lui-même change et commande d'autres mappemondes'.<sup>131</sup>

The sonnets here are punctuated by the Ulster Herald's prose and accentuate the changed and changing landscape they articulate. The presence of the historical document simultaneously aids and abets the reader, providing depth through historical and national context and distance through disruption creating a similar effect to the three variations of 'Garvaghey' given on the preliminary page. The discomfort in this poetic landscape is also indicated by the manner in which the lines of each sonnet teeter on the brink of full rhyme and iambic pentameter, sometimes achieving it but more often not quite falling into the full rhymes and patterns of the English tradition. The landscape of the sonnets is sparsely populated, and, mirroring the previous movement from the 'solid British towns' (*JMCP* 8) deep into the Irish countryside, the first sonnets are closer to the formal (and foreign) tradition than the last. The landscape of Belfast is made three-dimensional through its landmarks and at the end of this section a break from the 'iron bleakness' (*JMCP* 8) of unpopulated tradition is called for. The vision of Ireland changes under the gaze of the I/eye, and natural growth punctuates the man-made landscape, providing relief: 'A fringe of trees affords some ease at last / From all this dour, despoiled inheritance' (*JMCP* 8). A final lapse into full rhyme marks the exit from Belfast and the end of this sonnet: "'God is love' chalked on a grimy wall / Mocks a culture where constraint is all' (*JMCP* 8). Old moulds must be broken in the North indeed. The craft of the poet, moving between Irish and English, half and full rhymes, never seemingly comfortable with any one of them, or with what they represent, leads the discerning reader to surmise that all is not well in this model of inheritance. Opening with a distinctly Northern Irish rhyme (ran / Portadown), and closing with the comfort of 'home' in spite of the falling darkness, the second sonnet emphasises the poet-speaker's Irish roots and indicates also his increasing proximity to the place of his youth. The landscape of this poem is populated not with the cold buildings of the first sonnet, but with people who gradually elide with the tales of the past their images represent. By the end of this sonnet the poet-speaker has made a bid for independence from landscape and population, and journeys on his own further into the Ulster countryside, choosing to begin his process of refamiliarization with the place of his childhood. Tradition must be broken as well as built upon, and a new perspective is called for in order to map fully the changing world.

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<sup>131</sup> Serres, *Atlas*, 12.

The childhood place of *The Rough Field* is no pastoral dream. 'Home' is 'a gaunt farmhouse [...] bisecting slopes of plaintive moorland' (*JMCP* 9). Although the poet-speaker appears physically adapted for this return ('I assume old ways of walk and work / So easily' (*JMCP* 9)), he is not yet comfortable. For all his memories and knowledge the landscape is only strangely familiar; it 'seems still, though changing' (*JMCP* 9). Place is not so simple as to be reduced to mere symbol, and in this way avoids the habits of the proponents of the modernized *dinnseanchas*. The view is self-consciously un-Romantic, working against the trend in modern Irish poetry for the 'fetishization of childhood landscape':<sup>132</sup> 'No Wordsworthian dream enchants me here' (*JMCP* 9). The landscape in its past and present configurations haunts rather than enchants Montague's returning figure. In this final sonnet the point of view circles over Garvaghey. A complete return to the remembered landscape of childhood is impossible. This lack of a complete return is emphasised not only by the lack of human population of the landscape, but also by the fact that only the literal translation of the Gaelic, 'Rough Field' (*JMCP* 9) is given. The plaintive cry that closes the poem, 'with all my circling a failure to return' (*JMCP* 9), is echoed throughout the volume as the attempt to know and map the rough field of life's experiences, and to weave together strands of history and vignettes of the countryside gleaned from travels mental and physical through the landscape, goes on.

Following this, the scope of *The Rough Field* moves further back into the place of childhood, and there is little need for the strictures of the English poetic tradition here. The sonnet form which now faces us is further fragmented. To add to this poetic distancing from England and the influences she represents, the patterns of internal rhyme, consonance and assonance used by Montague in this poem mirror more fully those of the Gaelic poetic tradition.<sup>133</sup> The movement towards the Ireland of childhood is not as smooth as the progression of formal influence from English to Irish indicated here may suggest, however. In keeping with the self-consciously anti-Wordsworthian stance, this short poem does not represent the nostalgic regression into childhood landscape, image, and experience that the opening cock crow and intimation of 'first mornings / Fresh as Eden, with dew on the face' (*JMCP* 10) may suggest.

Interestingly, it is only in waking that childhood memories are triggered, but these memories are still encased in the bleakness of the return and present experience,

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<sup>132</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1995), 592.

<sup>133</sup> See Seán Lucy, 'Metre and Movement in Anglo-Irish Poetry', *Irish University Review* 8.2 (1978), 151-177.

which is in turn encased in the fourteen-line structure of English sonnet form. The image of an encased haunting recurs in the famous final poem of this section ‘Like Dolmens Around my Childhood’, although by this point progression has been made, and the haunting is placed firmly in the past tense and made distant between two distinct enveloping phrases. However there is no reassuring ‘permanence’ (*JMCP* 9) to mitigate the surrounding ‘dark’ (*JMCP* 13). There is no charm at all in the call of the bird, or the anaemic rising of the sun. In the now-empty farmhouse there is not even a warming hearth fire. The dirty and perhaps futile nature of the task of remembrance is now fully realised:

On the dismantled flagstones  
From ash-smooored embers  
Hands now strive to rekindle  
That once leaping fire. (*JMCP* 10)

The embers of the fire are smothered (‘smooored’ (*JMCP* 10)) in the broad Ulster Irish of the poet-speaker’s youth. As the hands which attempt the rekindling have no possessive pronoun, and, thus distanced from but acting for the speaker, the effect of a prosthetic is created. In this process of bodily dissociation it is not the poet-speaker but his prosthetized hands which mediate between his past and his present, the Ulsters of his youth and return. Hope lies at least in the image of the ‘once leaping fire’ (*JMCP* 10), which, although it exists only in the speaker’s memory, recalls a comfortable past, inspiration, and warmth.

Returning to Garvaghey for the third time in as many poems, in Poem 3 we witness the creation of a different field of vision: ‘Between small, whin-tough hills, / The first slated house in the district’ (*JMCP* 10). The protagonist of this poem, instead of the poet-speaker, is Montague’s paternal grandfather. The ‘silvered daguerrotype’ (*JMCP* 10) sets the landscape in a particular timeframe, and at the same time the landscape of the poem frames the portrait, in a manner we have already seen in Poem 1. The epigraph to this poem also recalls Poem 1 inasmuch as it is a portion of an historical document. However, unlike the previous poem, the prose serves more as an introduction than a narrative parallel, mapping, through its occupants, the Ulster countryside in relation to its inhabitants, and listing the name of the speaker’s grandfather, John Montague, the protagonist in the poem proper.

Strands of the poetic fabric are being woven and are beginning to come together more closely. It is interesting that, for the first time in the volume since the preliminary pages, 'Garvaghey', the site of return, is named directly as such. Finally giving the town its contemporary name demonstrates how the expansion and tightening of the world view has been facilitated by the circling of the past and constant recontextualisation of the present. In the light of day and memory we also witness a recontextualisation of place. No longer are we presented with 'a gaunt farmhouse on [a] busy road, / Bisecting slopes of plaintive woodland' (*JMCP* 9), nor a 'desolate farmyard' (*JMCP* 10), but are placed 'between small, whin-tough hills, / The first slated house in the district' (*JMCP* 10). Garvaghey also, endowed with a new name and new lease of life, is itself re-placed. The town no longer sits between 'merging low hills and glacial streams, / Oozy blackness of bog-banks, tough upland grass' (*JMCP* 9): the landscape is streamlined, and the town sits in a simple 'ring of firs' (*JMCP* 10). Through these variations in landscape and naming the speaker circles ever nearer to the Irelands of his childhood and his present. Spread throughout this landscape are John Montague junior's Irish roots and influences. 'Wild Irish', 'Ulster puritan', and even the conflicting 'Tague' (*JMCP* 11) combine in the mind of the poet-speaker into a heady mixture of inheritance which he must seek, in himself, to consolidate. However, it seems that even this circle of influence must be broken.

Remembrance of hearth fires has been reduced to remembrance of 'a coal fire stove' (*JMCP* 11), restricting and reducing the 'once leaping fire' (*JMCP* 10). This diminishing in size and scope of the literal and symbolic fire (the great open hearth of the farm house is confined to the stricter limits of a coal-burning stove) is echoed in the very lines of the poem, as towards the end they also diminish in size, the final line being comprised of only three syllables. The 'tiled stone' (*JMCP* 11) which closes the poem arguably also charts some sort of diminution or civilizing of the inheritance, the movement from flags (Poem 2) to tiles (Poem 3) mirroring that of the open hearth (Poem 2) to the coal burner (Poem 3). However, the solidity of the final three monosyllables, combined with the solid nature of stone, implies also a motion towards permanence. Whilst tiles, like flags, can be broken through neglect and the passage of time, they cannot be destroyed completely. Return and reparation is always possible, and return to the stone motif we most certainly will.

Poem 4 moves across the Atlantic, and underlines the importance of the progression and understanding of genealogical inheritance. Ireland and Australia, the art of the poet-speaker and that of his émigré uncle, and ideas of specifically artistic

inheritance (here we move almost exclusively in the metaphorical realms of the leaping fire), combine in this poem, which also, in its three line stanzas and free verse, indicates a total break with the sonnet tradition with which the first poems of the section were occupied. At last there is an acknowledgement, at least in part, the provenance of this poetic worldscape, but like all of the processes of inheritance we have seen, this too is broken. Straying from the ‘dismantled flagstones’ of the stone motif, and the ‘once leaping fire’ (*JMCP* 10), the symbol of artistry here, the uncle’s violin (or fiddle) is nevertheless similarly past. It is ‘rusted’ and ‘in pieces’ (*JMCP* 12).

Caught between many threads of inheritance, there is no overarching coherence. The poet-speaker’s hands, which we have seen prosthetised and which are his literal and symbolic means to receive and pass on inheritance and also his means to artistry, are still as dissociated from himself and his actions, and with the additional adjective, ‘strangest’, in this poem, made further strange. Thus, he stays disconnected – quite literally out of touch – with the physical and psychological landscapes that he is attempting to portray, understand, and map. In line with this reading, this strange hand still ‘strive[s] to rekindle’ the symbolically ‘once leaping fire’ (*JMCP* 10). Disembodied, the hand is neither that of the inexperienced speaker nor the authoritative hand of the creator, which we will meet later in the volume, and which is evident in another of Montague’s poems as explicitly related to the immediate surroundings: ‘a hand ceaselessly / combing and stroking / the landscape’ (*JMCP* 272). Creating this disembodiment is at once easy and difficult for the speaker: as we have seen in the naming structures and manipulation and interlinking of poetry and prose sections, the world with which we are presented, and particularly Ireland, is at once near and far. In order to understand and map fully these difficult landscapes, both tactile and optic experiences, proximate and distant senses, must be mastered as from a phenomenological viewpoint at least it is ‘the senses, under the aegis and direction of the mind, [which] give us a world’.<sup>134</sup> And if, as Tuan and others have suggested, this built world is analogous to the written text, without the ability to understand and articulate physical or psychological place we are lost. As we have established in the introduction to this thesis, mapping, it seems, is a human compulsion.

In the opening of Poem 5 we move away from the image of the speaker’s disembodied hand to the image of his equally remote childhood, returning to a far from sentimentalised vision. In spite of the possible reassurance of the opening simile (‘Like

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<sup>134</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature and Culture* (Washington DC: Island Press, 1993), 35.

dolmens round my childhood, the old people' (*JMCP* 12)) these characters are not viewed with the sentimental perspective or hint of solidarity that such a catalogue of retrospective memorialisation may suggest. Spatially, the simile is contradicted by the structure of the poem. The characters no longer enclose the speaker (now mature); rather, it is the mature speaker's words in the opening and closing lines envelope 'the old people' (*JMCP* 12). It may be that this conflict between the enclosure articulated by the opening of the poem and the enclosure that the poem enacts mirrors the speaker's own confusion regarding the changing form, or forms, that his increasing world-awareness and fresh methods of perception are forcing him to weave. From a purely formal point of view, this conflict is further borne out in the structure of the poem, as English verse form jostles with Gaelic patterns of rhyme, consonance, and assonance.

It is no coincidence that the content of this poem echoes most fully so far those that have been and anticipates those that are to come. The primary motifs of the volume are repeated and codified, so much so that the last three lines of the final stanza echo symbolic elements of previous poems. We will meet Jamie MacCrystal again in Sections IV and VI, and Maggie Owens in Section X. The combination of condensed images and preoccupations in the final part of this poem is also echoed in the final two stanzas of the entire volume:

For years they trespassed on my dreams,  
Until once, in a standing circle of stones,  
I felt their shadows pass

Into that dark permanence of ancient forms. (*JMCP* 13)

becomes:

A giant hand  
as we pass by, reaches down  
to grasp the fields we gazed upon

Harsh landscape that haunts me,  
well and stone, in the bleak moors of dream  
with all my circling a failure to return (*JMCP* 81)

*The Rough Field* enacts and re-enacts a circling motion: away from the plethora of world-views with which we are initially presented and towards a multiple, changeable, world-view: 'l'espace lui-même change et commande d'autres mappemondes'.<sup>135</sup> The oscillation between cohesion and fragmentation, with the corresponding retrospective and prospective views and echoings, is necessary when one's world-view is multidimensional. Even the 'ancient forms' which conclude this poem are plural in their 'dark permanence' (*JMCP* 13).

Whether these forms are plural or singular, literary or literal, they are the medium by which experience is articulated. At this point, however, with the conflict different poetic forms and the unstable structure of the dolmen metaphor, there is no steady plane of existence. Indeed, in this particular invocation of the idea of form (as things 'pass / Into the dark permanence of ancient forms' (*JMCP* 13)) we can see again the distancing effect found previously in Poems 1 and 3 as they balance prose and poetry, English and Gaelic names, historical contextualisation and contemporary reality. Although the 'ancient forms' are liberating inasmuch as they provide a ready-made structure through which poetic vision can be expressed, they are not necessarily applicable to the multinational and multidimensional method of poetic articulation sought in *The Rough Field*. Equally, these forms are literally obscured by darkness, the relationship between their form and function has been obscured by the passage of time, and, in the case of Gaelic place names and poetic structures, by language. Again, we, the reader, are led to conclude that the 'old moulds' must still 'be broken' (*JMCP* 3): the reassuring permanence of a single stone structure will not do for the multiple intersecting strands, the 'technical energies',<sup>136</sup> of perception and experience.

As the 'stone' motif concludes Section I of *The Rough Field* it is the 'fire' motif that opens Section II. We move back into a different past to that which we have previously witnessed in the volume, as the poet-speaker remembers his maternal aunt, Brigid. We finally discover the literal reason why the hearth fire of Poem I.2 is 'once leaping': this section is dedicated to Brigid *in memoriam*. We now witness a new angle of hearth-side vision, as the aunt kneels in front of the fireplace attempting to bring the fire back to life:

*Each morning, from the corner  
of the hearth, I saw a miracle*

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<sup>135</sup> Serres, *Atlas*, 12.

<sup>136</sup> Montague, *Company*, 122.

as you sifted the smoored ashes  
 to blow  
     a fire's sleeping remains  
 back to life, holding the burning brands  
 of turf, between work-hardened hands.  
 I draw on that fire...

(JMCP 15)

The position of the I/eye here is simultaneously in and as a self-consciously poetic observer of the vignette. The distance between these positions is enacted in spacing of the poem, and the aunt's action at the fireplace separates the past and present first person pronouns. Although a movement between past and present selves is inevitable in any first-person 'memory' poem, the fact that four out of the seven lines of the poem separate the two first persons, coupled with the difficult line-break in the fourth line, seems to make the division more striking than in most poems of this type. It seems, almost, that the shift in tense happens not over the line-break between the sixth and seventh lines, but that it happens over the break in the fourth line: by the end of line four the poet-speaker is already drawing on the fire, although the present-tense admission comes later. In this delay between the felt and the grammatically correct shifts in tense, further distance is created between the past and present first persons. The lyric works to mediate the space between the present and past speaking selves, and their relations, interactions, and actions. The ashes of the fire are no longer 'smoored' (JMCP 15) but 'sleeping remains' (JMCP 15), and as such are revivifiable. Stating, 'I draw on that [i.e. his aunt's hearth] fire' (JMCP 15), the poet-speaker links the hearth fire, the historical fire, and the creative fire. It is 'a miracle' (JMCP 15) indeed that the hearth fire of the past can fuel the aesthetic work of the present.<sup>137</sup>

The four poems that make up the main body of Section II chart the senescence of the aunt and the poet-speaker's coming to terms with her death. In many ways, the section, with its preoccupation with death, remembrance and inheritance could be read effectively and simply as an elegy.<sup>138</sup> However, in the context of the volume as a whole (the struggle to come to terms with the idea of a personal place in the world) this section is not specifically elegiac. Although a symbolic attempt to rekindle the fire left

<sup>137</sup> In the Dolmen Press edition of *The Rough Field* the lyric is actually entitled 'A Miracle'.

<sup>138</sup> See Guinn Batten, "'Something Mourns': Wordsworth and the Landscape of Mourning in *The Rough Field* (1972)', *Well Dreams: Essays on John Montague*. ed. Dillon Redshaw (Omaha, NA: Creighton UP, 2004), 167-193.

smouldering after the initial departure from Garvaghey and the aunt's death, the poetic act here is as much towards the creation of a world map as it is to weave commemorative wreaths for the dead. It seems unlikely that the poet-speaker is attempting to bridge the gap created by the death between himself and the dead in the manner of the conventional elegist. Rather, similarly to the memories and histories which have made up *The Rough Field* thus far, the remembrance of past in these poems is just another world image to be added to the growing, three-dimensional, world map.

The importance of different spatial experiences (proximate, distant), made up of the work of many senses (tactile, visual) has already been mentioned. As we have seen, Tuan emphasises the primacy of the senses in world-mapping, and he also states 'the further removed we are from home, the more our engagement with the environment tends to be conscious and visual rather than subconscious and multisensorial'.<sup>139</sup>

Gaston Bachelard also equates the proximate senses with the more intimate spaces: world experience and sense experiences become distant together.<sup>140</sup> Past and present worlds are recreated simultaneously through interlinked sense-impressions in the moment of the poem. Smell, touch, sight, and sound are given primacy, in this order, in one poem each, and each sense opens up a different world of experiences. The first poem concludes:

So from the pressed herbs

Of your least memory, sweetness exudes

(JMCP 16)

It is not just the memory of the aunt that is preserved in this poem (possibly the most traditionally elegiac in the section), but also the 'pressed' herbs. Indeed, specific incidents are recalled through the scent of these preserved herbs. A Proust-inflected link between scent and memory is thus created. Poem 2, although it travels further into the memory, is written in the present tense, and, through touch, establishes further the world of the section as the focus changes, in the sixth stanza, from the aunt to the poet-speaker. Touch, therefore, in the context of this poem, seems related, not to the past and the revival of old memories (as scent has been in the previous poem), but to the future and ideas of inheritance. As the dying aunt's hands gather 'the pains of a whole family'

<sup>139</sup> Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, 35.

<sup>140</sup> See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maris Jolas. (Boston: Beacon P, 1994), 13-14.

(*JMCP* 17), the schoolboy hands signal, in the act of masturbation, the possibility of the continuance of that family line.

Thus far, the section has accumulated ideas of inheritance rather than paying much attention to the memorialisation of the dead. Poem 3 sees explicitly through the poet-speaker's eyes, closing with a preoccupation with 'nothingness' (*JMCP* 19) that anticipates the end of the whole volume, but beginning with his reactions to the death of his aunt. The hearth fire image of the opening lyric is reversed, and impulses towards memorialisation and artistic creation combine to produce a poem preoccupied with inheritance and influence. Here, the inheritance relationship is reversed as the aunt, in death, takes from the poet-speaker something of himself:

it is hard to  
look into the eyes  
of the dying  
who carry away  
a part of oneself

(*JMCP* 18)

The process of influence, like any exchange system is, it seems, reciprocal.

In death, Brigid Montague becomes disembodied (she only exists in the memory), and the only sense left through which to illustrate this is sound – the most distant and least quantifiable of the senses,<sup>141</sup> and so it is with sound that Poem 4 is preoccupied. Sound also is something primal: we hear before we can see, and are likely, in dying, to hear after we have lost the faculty of sight.<sup>142</sup> It is fitting therefore for sound to be the sense which heralds the moment of death. Fittingly also, having drifted 'towards nothingness' (*JMCP* 19) in Poem 3, Brigid Montague is now framed in the past, as opposed to the present, tense. The soundscape created here is also one that corresponds with the human ability, or lack of ability, to map space solely through sound, in spite of Serres's insistence on the primacy of sound, and Tuan's statement

<sup>141</sup> See Michel Serres on the endless possibilities of 'hearing' distant space by mingling the object of the senses and the instrument of sensation: 'I can put the ear on the other side of the window, projecting it great distances, holding it a great distance from the body' (Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London: Continuum, 2008), 119).

<sup>142</sup> Serres identifies three different sorts of hearing (of the self, of language, of noise), all of which are implicated at a very basic level in the body's interaction with the world: 'At the beginning... we hear by means of the skin and feet, we hear by means of the muscles, nerves and tendons. [...] We live amid sounds and cries, amid waves' (*The Five Senses*, 180).

‘our greatest aural sensitivity is to the volume and quality of other people’s voices’.<sup>143</sup> The cacophony of different noises in the poem (Paris, Garvaghey, real, imagined, and supernatural (the banshee’s wail)) provides interference: in this world of multiple sounds, differentiation is difficult, and ‘distancing is generally more difficult in an auditory world than a visual one: sounds tend to wrap around us’.<sup>144</sup> As in so much of *The Rough Field*, this sort of melange of experience and memories must conclude with the vector of the experiences and memories itself – the enunciating I/eye. At the close of this poem, distant sensory experience triggers proximate action. The death in Ireland of the poet-speaker’s aunt triggers the writing of the poems, and similarly the ‘low, / constant crying / over the indifferent / roofs of Paris’ (*JMCP* 19) provokes the poet-speaker to draw the sign of the cross.

In working systematically from smell, by way of touch and sight, to sound, through memories of life and death, we engage with many levels, both conscious and unconscious, of the poet-speaker’s real and imagined environments, experiencing, re-experiencing, creating and articulating a new pattern in his world fabric. Tuan states ‘experience, unless it carries resonance, is shallow and transient [...] what makes resonance possible is the human capacity for metaphorical thought’.<sup>145</sup> Equally, Steven Matthews writes of *The Rough Field*, ‘rather than accepting a single perspective upon a work of art [...] the acceptance of a plurality of possible readings enables the work to re-enter the ‘ultimate reality’’.<sup>146</sup> *The Rough Field* is an open work. It follows, therefore, that multiple experience may be successfully articulated over a period of time by the rewriting and recontextualization of different key motifs, which may be read variously in their different contexts.

The sap of another generation  
fingering through a broken tree  
to push fresh branches  
towards a further light,  
a different identity.

(*JMCP* 17)

The metaphor of a tree of inheritance appears elsewhere in Montague’s poetry and prose, being alternately ‘broken’ (*JMCP* 17, 305), ‘grafted’ (*JMCP* 203, *Company* 108),

<sup>143</sup> Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, 73.

<sup>144</sup> Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, 73.

<sup>145</sup> Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, 30.

<sup>146</sup> Matthews, *Irish Poetry*, 108.

‘flowering’ (*JMCP* 80, *Company* 105), and ‘alight’ (*JMCP* 107). Set within this wider context, the image of the tree which closes Poem II.2 links with many of the volume’s previous and future preoccupations: the broken tree with the breaking of traditions, the grafted tree the ‘grafted tongue’ (*JMCP* 30), and the tree alight the fire of inheritance. At the same time as this new biological metaphor for inheritance gropes its way ‘towards a further light, / a different identity’ (*JMCP* 17), its ‘fingering’ also recalls the hand motif. Like much else of the developing world of *The Rough Field*, the tree metaphor is recycled, and resonates with previous and future parts of the volume.

This repetition of images emphasises the drive to break from tradition at the same time as building upon and questioning it.

I crossed myself  
from rusty habit  
before I realised  
why I had done it

(*JMCP* 19)

Habit, although rusty, must indicate the necessity for another break from tradition: the forms and images established in this section. Old moulds are broken indeed, as very little could be further from the ordered stanzaic form of Section II than the self-proclaimed ‘collage’ that comprises Section III.<sup>147</sup> Although dedicated to the émigré uncle and thus expanding the scope of the volume to America, this section is firmly rooted in the parish of Garvaghey. In this context, the first line of the opening lyric, ‘I break again into the lean parish of my art’ (*JMCP* 22) is not only an artistically self-conscious styling, but is also a reference to the preface to the whole volume, ‘Old moulds have been broken in the North’ (*JMCP* 3). It thus heralds yet another re-drawing of Garvaghey. In contrast with many of the previous poems, the constituent parts of this section are well populated and various. The poem’s angle of vision becomes more truly that of Montague’s twentieth-century man, who ‘strives to reconcile local allegiances with the absolute necessity of developing a world consciousness’.<sup>148</sup> In this section conflict again occurs between the depth provided by the prose passages’ historical contextualisation and the disruption, or distance, generated through the same prose passages’ interruption of the poetry.

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<sup>147</sup> See Appendix IV.

<sup>148</sup> Montague, *The Figure in the Cave*, 18-19.

However, even from the opening lyric of this section there is little hope for a full reconciliation between the poem's enunciating I/eye and the looming shadow of historical Ireland. As we break into 'the lean parish of [...] art' (*JMCP* 22), there is already distance between the I/eye and the population of the parish. The poet-speaker is left as an observer and recorder, as 'men with caps in hand kneel stiffly down / To see the many-fanged monst'rance shine' (*JMCP* 24). Within the context of the section (Ireland, worship, Christmas time) it is difficult to ignore the echoes in this lyric of Yeats's 'The Second Coming'. This echo contributes to and makes specifically artistic the preoccupation with ideas of influence that pervades the volume. The portrait of the conflict in his local Ulster community in the 1960s cannot but demonstrate a modernization of the lines which close the first stanza of Yeats's poem.<sup>149</sup> This future, anarchic, centreless world of Yeats's could also be read, in a slightly more positive manifestation, as:

crossing patterns

weaving towards

a new order

a new anarchy

(*JMCP* 73)

From the opening of the section, (particularly in the Dolmen edition, where it is called 'A Collage of Religious Misunderstandings'),<sup>150</sup> no resolution between the warring voices is anticipated. Thomas O'Grady argues that this section 'reveals that the homely parish or townland contains a universe of human drama'.<sup>151</sup> In the central part of the section, the quiet, almost ecclesiastical, tone of the poem is punctuated by the hysteria of the anti-Catholic mail of an extreme Protestant organisation. Other prose interruptions are provided by the formal political statement of the Orange order to 10 Downing Street, and the calm, detached tone of a Christmas letter from the uncle in Australia. We could therefore read the section as an attempt to articulate the dislocation from the political state of Ireland engendered by life abroad and subsequent return to the country. The heady conflation of religion and politics articulated in Section III seems to obscure the I/eye's ability to see and articulate present experience clearly. In

<sup>149</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 211.

<sup>150</sup> Montague, *The Rough Field*, 23.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas O'Grady, '“That First, Best Country”: The Literary Landscape of Montague's Tyrone', *Well Dreams*, 120.

‘Christmas Morning’ the poetic sense is obscured as the main clause is continually interrupted by description, simile, and geographical contextualisation:

Lights outline a hill  
 As silently the people,  
 Like shepherd and angel  
 On that first morning,  
 March from Altcloughfin,  
 Beltany, Rarogan,  
 Under rimed hawthorn,  
 Gothic evergreen,  
 [...]  
 To light the crib  
 Under the cross-beam's  
 Damp flaked message:  
 GLORIA IN EXCELSIS.

(*JMCP* 23)

In this new context, the ‘ring of firs’ (*JMCP* 10) that surrounds the village becomes ‘gothic evergreen’, and is now supplemented by ‘rimed hawthorn’ (*JMCP* 23). Despite the barren appearance that the Christmas frost entails, the addition of this new tree to the landscape enriches the portrait of the village. The image of the hawthorn also becomes richer as it also is re-described and re-contextualised the volume progresses, and is also re-named, as whitethorn and may. The addition of another image reinforces the fact that the poetic world fabric has become stronger, its many ‘crossing patterns’ (*JMCP* 80) more complete in their multiplicity. As the hawthorn was a plant that Montague himself felt to be intimately connected with Ireland, both ancient and modern, its addition to the fabric of *The Rough Field* at this point, although the tree is without blossom and is covered in frost, indicates the increasing strength of the world-map.<sup>152</sup> As the image of the hawthorn echoes the metaphor of the tree as inheritance established in Poem II.2, it provides a neat metaphor for both the exponentially increasing ability to map the world, and also the sense that the world portrayed is ultimately of little use. The tree here is under frost and can thus only be a visual punctuation mark in the landscape, but by the end of Section V it is a part of the

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<sup>152</sup> See David Lampe, Afterword to John Montague *An Occasion of Sin* (New York: White Pine Press, 1992), 222.

landscape well worth a look, and by the Epilogue it is blooming. The recurring image provides an olfactory as well as visual marker echoing the sensory stimulus of Proust's Combrayan hawthorn: a rich part of the landscape and is also a rich sensory reminder of past events and a sign by which the present can be constructed.

'Late-Comer' moves from a portrait of the parish to follow a single member of that parish into the church. Like the cross drawn by the unthinking poet-speaker at the end of Poem II.4, the late-comer's pious action is born not out of religious fervour but ingrained habit. In this case, the reminder to act is physical and visual (the church building and font), which contrasts greatly with that experienced by the speaker, who was reminded to draw the sign of the cross by a disembodied sound which produced a sense of external foreboding and folk-superstition. 'Religion was at a low ebb' (*JMCP* 23), the holy water from the font seems fine, and there is no genuflection. Stricter protocol is unobserved, contrasting with the regimented religious belief of Brigid Montague in Section II. Here, the 'wen-marked heads' (*JMCP* 24) of the various members of the congregation provide enough of a blemish to encourage the late-comer's mass-time study, and anticipate the poet-speaker's preoccupation in Section V with the head-scars of both himself and his father. Inheritance, initially religious, becomes personal and familial once more.

The Garvaghey congregation react 'with the same docility' (*JMCP* 25) under fire from religious or political vehemence: the views expressed in the prose passages which punctuate this section's poetry can be in no way linked to the beliefs enacted by the Catholic community of Garvaghey in the poems. The lack of engagement with, or dislocation from, empathisation or espousal of a cause seems to exempt the community from judgement. 'A terrible beauty' may be born out of the conflict in the rest of Ireland, but the nearest they get is the 'football match / Pearses vs Hibernians' (*JMCP* 25), which echoes the ancient conflict between Gall and Gael manifested in modern times in the North / South, Protestant / Catholic divides, and the 'monster carnival', a grotesque mutation of the 'many-fanged monstrosity' (*JMCP* 25) and Yeats's 'terrible beauty'. Loaded Catholic lexis closes Poem 3, whilst loaded sectarian lexis, and local knowledge, are compressed into the final lines of Poem 4.

After the fragmentary experience of reading the poems alongside the prose passages, 'PENAL ROCK: ALTAMUSKIN' is shocking in its formal coherence, presenting, at least at first glance, a single, solid poetic world. The poem's adherence to the fourteen lines and the rhyme-scheme of English sonnet form helps to create a calm sense of a world finally settling into place, in stark contrast to the exclamatory final

lines of the preceding prose passage. However, many of these rhymes are full only in an Irish pronunciation; it seems that the speaker is not going to lapse again into the conjoined formal and national battle previously witnessed in Poem I.1. That this part of the section is a moment of calm is emphasised by the following passage's tone of quite resignation: 'I sometimes wonder if anyone could have brought the two sides together. [...] you realise, of course, that all this has nothing to do with religion' (*JMCP* 26). There is only a paltry attempt in leaving Altamuskin to revivify the flowers on the altar which represent the Montague family's almost evaporated legacy in the area. The uncle's letter also trails off, after a certain amount of speculative hope, to nothing. That comfort of poetic conclusion found in an ability to *not* conclude is, perhaps paradoxically, a forward step in the greater mapping project. After all, the possibility of the simultaneously different and similar 'net of energies [...] weaving towards / a new order / a new anarchy' (*JMCP* 73), thus the multiple world of our map, denies the very act of conclusion. Michel Serres, attempting to articulate this world philosophically, states 'nous n'allons plus vers un univers, mais vers des multiplicités de mondes possibles'.<sup>153</sup> Serres's preceding command to his reader 'soit donc à les dessiner',<sup>154</sup> encapsulates the mapping impulse, thus the wider project, of *The Rough Field*.

Endowed with multiple resonances (two more, 'stone oratory' and 'altar' occur later in the poem), the 'massrock' is undeniably the primary subject matter of the sonnet, and the means by which this part of the poetic world can be remembered, viewed, and articulated. Although it is clear that the three names are related they are not as explicitly so as the variations on Garvaghey. 'Penal rock' and 'massrock' both refer to the object around which Altamuskin lies. However, any translation of altamuskin also gives the idea of a rock of judgement, thus linking the name of the village to the object. The system of translation is somewhat blurred. And yet the massrock transcends the fact of being mere symbol. It is not only energised by the intricacies between its multiple given names, but it is also endowed, in the first line of the poem, with active powers: 'To learn the massrock's lesson, leave your car' (*JMCP* 26). As the poem progresses the rock opens out under the gaze of the I/eye, and comes to possess multiple meanings and names. We will see in Chapter 6 how a similar process of unfolding, or affective subjectivity, occurs in Mimi Khalvati's poetry, and it is easy to see how a mutual process of signification adds yet another strand to the growing world-fabric of *The Rough Field*. As the open subject endows the enunciating I/eye with

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<sup>153</sup> Serres, *Atlas*, 276.

<sup>154</sup> Serres, *Atlas*, 276.

knowledge and our surroundings are enriched. We can in return re-contextualise the open subject and seek again to understand it in a different context.

It is thus the act of sight which prompts ‘the massrock’s lesson’ (*JMCP* 26) and the series of images which therefore unfold. These images are at once intimately connected to the fabric of the massrock, and the fabric of the rough field. It is unsurprising, this far on in the volume, that the resultant images echo some poems which have come before and anticipate some which are yet to come. The image of the ‘Tagues, folding the nap of their frieze / Under one knee’ (*JMCP* 26) recalls the community’s worship portrayed at the beginning of the section, as well as Brigid Montague’s bedside genuflexion. The name ‘Tague’, as loaded as that of ‘Pearse’, also reflects the conflict hinted at the close of Poem 4, and anticipates the further portrayal of this conflict in both this section and the following one. Tague is also the root for Montague, tying in with the poet-speaker’s preoccupation with family and inheritance. As an image of an individual holding up a lost language in the community, the ‘bog-latin murmur’ (*JMCP* 26) of the village priest anticipates Poem IV.2’s Gaelic schoolteacher. Equally, the fact that the Montagues have now all left the area is familiar, but here it is rewritten. Emphasis is now placed on the area in which the family had once lived and its abandonment: the ‘crude stone oratory’, although ‘carved by a cousin’, commemorates not generation of Montagues but ‘the place’ itself (*JMCP* 26). Alone in a landscape populated by image and memory, a vast contrast to the previous poems in the section, there is only so much that can be accomplished. The I/eye can only indulge in an impossible communion with the open subject for so long. The change from octave to sestet marks a move away from the massrock, while the final couplet marks a complete change: the emphasis is now firmly on the poem’s enunciating I/eye, and the figure of the poet-speaker and his immanent departure. ‘Go’ is the final word of the sonnet, and, although the final rhyme is full in both English and Irish thus adhering to poetic tradition, the indicated movement away suggests that, as always, the speaker must move away from the comfort of ‘old moulds’ and seek again to remap his poetic world, a world which is imminently ‘going / going / GONE’ (*JMCP* 81).

‘An Ulster Prophecy’ presents a strange mixture of tradition and originality as it reframes and re-contextualises an old Gaelic children’s song.<sup>155</sup> The similarity between John B. Arthurs’ 1956 translation and Montague’s adaptation of the song is striking.

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<sup>155</sup> For the poem printed in full, typeset as in the original Dolmen Press edition of *The Rough Field*, see Appendix IV.

The changes to the song are equally striking, especially when it is considered that ‘An Ulster Prophecy’ is included in the volume as a poem: no indication is made, in any of the editions of *The Rough Field*, of the existence of the original song. Having employed the trappings of tradition in previous poems with a view always to break these same moulds, the speaker is now framing this battle in a different way. Rather than rely on metaphor or form in order to provoke the reader into thoughts regarding influence and tradition, an extant rhyme is taken and adapted in order to suit the poem’s preoccupations. The title of the poem, ‘An Ulster Prophecy’ is original (the song is traditionally known as the *Amhrán na mBréag* or *Amhrán na nIontas*), and emphasises the act of reframing and re-contextualisation that the speaker effects. ‘Ulster’ immediately places the poem both geographically and culturally within the context of the conflict portrayed in previous poems, and the overall landscape of *The Rough Field*. ‘Prophecy’ not only implies the oracular, poetic function of the act itself, but also the related traditions, the mediating role of the enunciating I/eye, and the different interpretations and cultural contextualisation which give, abstracted from the original time of their making, even the most ancient of prophecies a place in the modern world.

Previously in the volume, metaphor and form have been recycled as the poet-speaker seeks to remap his world, consolidating both image and words into his matrix of reality. However, recycling on this level has not occurred before, and, as before with metaphor and form, it may be useful to look at some of the changes that have been made.<sup>156</sup> In the original song the Pope is depicted ‘carding tow on Monday’, but tying in to the volume’s preoccupation with the compulsion to break old moulds, in *The Rough Field* the Pope is depicted ‘breaking stones on Friday’ (*JMCP* 27). Although we lose the reference to the metaphor of the fabric of the world at the expense of this, the following line, completely original, brings back the link to this metaphor: the ‘blind parson’ sews ‘a patchwork quilt’ (*JMCP* 27). Emphasis on religious personalities and sectarian violence are what marks the *Rough Field* poem from the original song. However, if we are to believe the religious and political unimpressionability of the Garvaghey community and the uncle’s statement ‘all this has nothing to do with religion’ (*JMCP* 26), the context that the original rhyme offers (that of the tradition of

<sup>156</sup> It may help at this point to provide both the original Gaelic and Arthurs’ translation:

Chonnan mí an Pápa ag cardáil bharraid Dia Luin  
 Silide a’paráil sráid Lunnainn le tuagh,  
 Corcaí i mbádaí a’snámh ar mhalaidh a’tSléibhe Ruiadh  
 Ma ileann i scheanrdcha in ard na cruite ar a’chuaich,  
 A’siornach ina shuí ar fhninneóig go brionnach a’cailthean  
 tabac,  
 Cearc fhraoigh ar eiteóig a’tonhas na hÉireanna thart.

I saw the Pope carding tow on Monday  
 A snail paring London street with a hatchet,  
 Corks in boats afloat on the brae of Sliabh Ruadh,  
 A mill and a forge on the back of the cuckoo,  
 The fox sitting conceitedly at a window smoking tobacco,  
 A moorhen in flight surveying all Ireland.

the Song of Lies, or Marvels) does help situate the ridiculousness of the new images.<sup>157</sup> In line four, the image of ‘Roaring Meg firing rosary beads for cannonballs’ (*JMCP* 27) creates a direct link between this poem and the subject matter of both the current section and Section IV, also creating an obvious analogue between religion and the primarily political conflict in Ulster in 1689. Liam Ó Dochartaigh suggests that the firing of rosary beads instead of cannonballs renders harmless the apparent conflict whilst updating seventeenth-century Derry to modern-day (London)Derry, where ‘the Protestant gun now fires harmlessly over the Catholic and nationalist neighbourhood of Derry’.<sup>158</sup> However, its ammunition turned to rosary beads, the gun has also switched allegiance. A Catholic ‘roaring meg’ is an historical impossibility, and the idea of ‘firing rosary beads for cannonballs’ is simply ridiculous: the rewritten image chimes perfectly with the tradition of the Song of Lies. The image of rosary beads also harks back to Section II, and Brigid’s insistence if not on the power then on the necessity of prayer, and through this, to Montague’s own Catholic inheritance. Thus, the rewritten image, with all its paradoxes and impossibilities, ties in with the generations of Montagues who have tilled and left *The Rough Field*, and the current poetic project.

The next impossible image seems to tie in less with the tone that has been set by the poem so far. Line five reads ‘Corks in a boat afloat on the summit of the Sperrins’ (*JMCP* 27), but this line is in fact the closest, so far, to the corresponding line in the original song: ‘Corks in a boat on the brae of Sliabh Ruadh’. In altering ‘the brae of Sliabh Ruadh’ to ‘the summit of the Sperrins’, the name is changed from Gaelic to English in the same way as Arthurs has updated to Gaelic from ‘Sléibhe Ruiadh’ to ‘Sliabh Ruadh’. A similar effect is created in line seven, which, apart from the updating of ‘London Street’ (translated, literally by Arthurs from ‘sráid Lunnainn’) to ‘Royal Avenue’, is also the same as in the original song. Perhaps due to the similarity between past and present conflict in the region, the images here, although adapted for a non-Gaelic-speaking contemporary audience, are unchanged. The city of Cork has, since the middle ages, been a site of cultural and religious conflict; ‘Corks’ still carries loaded sectarian resonance, and whether named ‘London Street’ or ‘Royal Avenue’, the road name refers to the violent history between the Irish and English. Line six, in its grotesque image and implied violence, seems to fit in with the established context of the rhyme (religious themes and sectarian violence) perfectly. The tone of the line seems to

<sup>157</sup> See Ann Gilchrist, ‘The Song of Marvels (or Lies)’, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 4.3 (1942), 113.

<sup>158</sup> Liam Ó Dochartaigh, ‘Some Gaelic Themes in *The Rough Field*’, *Well Dreams*, 203.

chime with the nonsensical nature of the traditional folk-rhyme, but in spite of this, the line is an original addition to the Song of Lies. However, although the image of ‘grafted tongue’ echoes the inheritance metaphor (the tree) in Poem II.2, the ideas of a language divide touched upon in Poem III.5, and also anticipates the poem of the same name in Section IV, the words of this line are taken from another traditional Irish rhyme. This Irish riddle in full prefaces the section to come, from which it even takes its name, ‘A Severed Head’. It seems that, even with the strictures of the *Amhrán no mBréag*, there is still energy to break established tradition and to forge future links.

Line seven reinforces the poem’s Ulster-specific geography, and seems entirely in context in spite of the fact that it is also a completely original addition to the song. This contrasts strongly with the following two lines, which, although they are almost completely the same as the lines from the original song, seem, in the context of the reworked Ulster- and conflict-heavy poem, relatively incongruous. In fact, it is in the tradition of the *Amhrán no mBréag* or *na nIontas* to juxtapose impossible images, and Liam Ó Dochartaigh prioritises this in his reading of the poem, stating ‘undoubtedly the most ingenious change is Montague’s conversion of ‘all Ireland’ to ‘a United Ireland’’, as ‘the reader is given to understand that, in this catalogue of topsy-turvy impossibilities [...] the last statement [...] is as fantastically impossible as those preceding it’,<sup>159</sup> and indeed we must remember not to discount the fantastic nature of the original lines, and what it is, in the original rhyme, that Arthurs translates to ‘all Ireland’. Éire, or ‘Éireann’ was the most optimistic and far-fetched of the three Gaelic names for Ireland, encompassing not just the provinces of the country, but also the known horizons of its people.<sup>160</sup> In all cases, the final line has been a fantastic impossibility. Despite this, it seems to express a declaration of intent on the part of the requisite poets to conceive of and articulate the concept of an all-encompassing world view, obliquely also, in spite of the apparent impossibility, to map it.

Although Ó Dochartaigh situates ‘An Ulster Prophecy’ effectively within the tradition of the *Amhrán no mBréag*, somehow, the final statement of the poem holds more weight in the greater context of *The Rough Field* than he allows it. Quoting the poem, Ó Dochartaigh does not fragment the eleventh line. This lack of proper lineation perhaps detracts from the importance of the line in relation to the poem, the section, and

<sup>159</sup> Ó Dochartaigh, ‘Some Gaelic Themes in *The Rough Field*’, *Well Dreams*, 203.

<sup>160</sup> See Joep Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael* (Cork: Cork UP, 1996), 154.

the volume as a whole.<sup>161</sup> In this case, the poem *as space* is as important as the poem *of space*. Unable to break with the tradition of the *Amhrán no mBréag* by either changing or subverting its images (the new or changed lines too often appear also to be lies or marvels), finally the line itself is broken.

The epigraphs to Section IV of *The Rough Field* comprise the traditional riddle referenced in Poem III.7 and two prose accounts of two seventeenth-century attempts to map Ulster Ireland. In this way, analogues are made between past and recent Troubles and the shift of language in Ireland from Gaelic to English after Kinsale. The two primary occupations of the volume, mapmaking and language, are also treated simultaneously. Even the title of the first poem in this section, ‘The Road’s End’, implies that some sort of resolution has come out of the previously attempted syntheses of languages and world-views. For the first time in *The Rough Field* the poem opens in the present, baldly stating the time – ‘May’ (JMCP 31), indicating the growing dexterity of the I/eye’s engagement with the many threads of the multiple world of *The Rough Field*. Dexterous indeed, as the pun on this month indicates the sensory preoccupations of the poem, whilst also revisiting and renaming the Proustian hawthorn, so inherent within the growing vision of Ireland. This growing dexterity is also evident in the confident tone of the first phrase, which, in spite of having no main clause, easily juxtaposes abstract time and real and metaphorical sense-experience.

May, and the air is light

On eye, on hand. As I take

The mountain road, my former step

Doubles mine, driving cattle

To the upland fields. Between

Shelving ditches of whitethorn

They sway their burdensome

Bodies

(JMCP 31)

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<sup>161</sup> Indeed, in all published editions of *The Rough Field* this line is fragmented, and, along with the parallel stanzas of Section IX and the fragmentation of the final line of the poem, this was something upon which Montague, in all typescripts and galleys of the poem, insisted. See in particular the annotations to the c.1994 computer ts draft of *The Rough Field* and the attached note: ‘I am afraid that some of the distinctive qualities of R.F. disappear in this format [...] there has been some confusion’ (Box 24, John Montague Collection, National Library of Ireland).

Neither 'eye' nor 'hand' has a possessive pronoun. This dislocation between the physical and verbal selves of the poem is more fluid than that which we have seen before, however: as soon as the first sentence of the poem ends, the next takes it up as if it is following on from the main clause of the last. There is an easy movement from sentence to sentence, and each full-stop marks an infinitesimal change in either tone or angle of vision. The lines of the poem are marked by ever-increasing confidence in perception and articulation, and although temporality may be called into question there is no longer any ambiguity regarding the geographical position of the enunciating I/eye.

The point of view rises up through the landscape of Garvaghey and the landscape, previously barren and dominated by the village and its 'ring of firs' (*JMCP* 10), opens up under the moving gaze. Memory and scent again intermingle, dominated by grasses, clover, and the flowering hawthorn, depicted in its linguistic multiplicity as 'may', 'whitethorn', and 'thorn' (*JMCP* 31). Past and present experiences of Garvaghey are subtly juxtaposed. The 'sally switch' which the poet-speaker used to drive cattle up the hillside as a child becomes a metaphor for memory, and although the worlds of phenomenal and verbal experience intermingle, there is also a quiet acknowledgement on the part of the poet-speaker of his altered position in relation to the Garvaghey community, and of his poetic compulsion to articulate lived experience. Neither Irish nor English can do the Garveghey landscape justice, and so English, the primary language of the volume, is punctuated by untranslated Irish. However, instead of disrupting the portrait of the landscape through the rearticulation of the same name in different forms, here, a single noun is chosen and contextualised in the other language. 'Ceannbhan', bog-cotton, can be described through metaphor as 'white scut' (*JMCP* 32), and 'white head' (also a literal translation of the Gaelic); these images coexist, enriching the articulated landscape. The poetry slips into an increasingly bilingual method of description, assuming more knowledge on the part of the reader, and generating an increased breadth of articulation of the poetic landscape.

With height and distance, vision becomes at the same time more all-embracing and less intricate. Indeed, Maurice Merleau-Ponty talks about the manner in which world-perception can fluctuate '[t]he world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance'.<sup>162</sup> It is easy to see how the analogy between the act of mapping and the idea of painting the same landscape arises. The objects of vision

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<sup>162</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968), 8.

make a landscape  
 So light in wash it must be learnt  
 Day by day, in shifting detail,  
 Out to the blue Sperrins (JMCP 32)

The poet's task, like the painter's, must not only change as his field of vision changes, but it must also alter with the landscape under scrutiny. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the final lines of this poem articulate a vision of Garvaghey from above with painterly brightness and Imagistic purity:

The thatch  
 Has slumped in, white dust of nettles  
 On the flags. Only the shed remains  
 In use of calves, although fuschia  
 Bleeds by the wall, and someone has  
 Propped a yellow cartwheel  
 Against the door. (JMCP 32)

The 'yellow cartwheel' cannot but echo William Carlos Williams's red wheelbarrow; in attempting to extract images and make them fresh, exhausted by the new exhaustive landscape of the poem, reassurance is found in the subtle application of past techniques.

'A Lost Tradition' applies and breaks the moulds of tradition in a different way. We encounter again the preoccupation with tradition, specifically of the juxtaposition of old and new languages. The descent from a high-altitude vision of the landscape to a vision of the people is smoother and more logical than that enacted in Poem I.1. Resonances between sections are inevitable, as the attempt at mastery extends from the landscape of Garvaghey to more general skills of map-making. Indeed, Adorno states 'when several sentences seem like variations on the same idea, they often only represent different attempts to grasp something the author has not yet mastered. Then the best formulation should be chosen and developed further.'<sup>163</sup> Here, the poetic mapping technique does change and this change is built upon a previous articulation. What has previously been simile ('...like shards / of a lost culture' (JMCP 32)) becomes a new

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<sup>163</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 85.

methodology. Echoing the volume's opening statement 'old moulds have been broken in the North' (*JMCP* 3), this poem opens surrounded by these broken moulds: 'all around, shards of a lost tradition' (*JMCP* 33). The mapping project has taken on a new element of synthesis as we struggle towards mastery of vision, gradually drawing together the 'net of energies' (*JMCP* 73) to produce something 'tight, concentric, transparent, well-spun and firm'.<sup>164</sup> And it is evident from the beginning that the poem will attempt more explicitly than before to deal with problems of language and landscape, synthesising previous experiments, past and present existence, and 'grafted tongue'. As the poem progresses, what are clear translations or self-consciously literary place names, become muddled. It is the fourth stanza that marks the turning point, as language and landscape, the artistic act and influence, the difficulty of articulation and sense-impression, are explicitly linked:

The whole landscape a manuscript  
 We have lost the skill to read,  
 A part of our past disinherited;  
 But fumbled, like a blind man,  
 Along the fingertips of instinct

(*JMCP* 33)

What is particularly interesting here is the newfound optimism: the loss of the skill to read the landscape is in the past, and the poet-speaker, who we have previously witnessed fumbling in the dark, is neither blind nor disinherited. In fact, the work of his fingertips has been, and is, to reconstitute the 'broken tree' (*JMCP* 17), or 'shards' (*JMCP* 33), 'to push fresh branches / towards a further light' (*JMCP* 17), to rewrite the landscape's manuscript whilst at the same time discovering the layers that have previously been left behind.

Language is less lost than a palimpsest, and the final three stanzas of the poem are uncompromising in their employment only of the relevant phrase or image, regardless of the layer of the palimpsest from which it may come. The fifth stanza in particular illustrates the palimpsestic nature of language, as the Gaelic is given no less than three articulations, from within and without Ireland, and within and without the language: Gaelic, Irish, and Ghaelige. After this neat geographising of the idea of language, language collapses into history, and history unceremoniously into landscape, as the last of the O'Neills, symbols of the almost lost Irish, 'founder in a Munster bog'

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<sup>164</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 87.

(*JMCP* 33). Montague is no Heaney, however, and his excavation of the bog does not take on multiple historical resonances. Neither will he, like Thomas Kinsella, express a compulsion to dig down. Rather, the poems that ensue add to his expanding world map, with an archaeology that is more Foucauldian than literal. Poem 3, entitled 'Ulster's Pride' in the Dolmen Press edition, gives portraits of the three generations of O'Neill present during the English invasion of Ireland. Echoing the shift of language from Irish to English which was occurring at the time, the first O'Neill is given only his Irish name - 'Con Bacach', the second Irish and half English - 'Séan an diomas' and 'Shane', the third just English - 'Hugh' (no 'Aodh'). Poem 4 follows on chronologically from Poem 3 as it depicts the flight of the earls to the continent in 1607. The poem is punctuated by prose passages which provide a certain amount of historical contextualization and are less jarring than those that have come previously. Thus the poem primarily illustrates the final throes of the Gaelic clan-system in Ireland, and the corresponding destruction and loss of both language and tradition. The trauma latent in Poems 1 and 2 is explicitly and painfully articulated:

a communal loss  
and a shattered procession  
of anonymous suffering  
files through the brain

(*JMCP* 36)

We have previously only seen 'shards'. Now we witness the moment of their creation, the severance of a nation from its language and traditions as its natives, its aristocracy, its poets, and musicians, move away from the land into exile.

Poem 5, 'A Grafted Tongue', clearly illustrates the trauma of a national's exile from language and the corresponding imposition of the language of a different nation, and the resultant incompatibility of its sounds and traditions. Julia Kristeva articulates the potentiality of this linguistic severance: 'not to speak your mother tongue. To live in sounds, logics cut off from the nocturnal memory of the body, the bittersweet sleep of childhood. To carry within yourself a secret tomb, like a handicapped child, of the language of another time - treasured and useless - that fades away and leaves you'.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, the first two stanzas illustrate simultaneously the violence and the resultant silent repression which comes from this severance from the mother tongue:

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<sup>165</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 26-7. My translation.

(Dumb,  
 bloodied, the severed  
 head now chokes to  
 speak another tongue –

As in  
 a long suppressed dream,  
 some stuttering garb-  
 led ordeal of my own)

An Irish  
 child weeps at school  
 repeating its English.

(JMCP 37)

The images could not be more violent and immediate when extracted from the poem, but in the body of the poem are placed in parentheses. Julia Kristeva links the lost or abandoned language, the mother-tongue, to the body itself. Echoing this, the returning poet-speaker, articulating his ideas in the ‘second tongue’ (JMCP 37), has always illustrated his body as distinct from himself (the prosthetizing effects we have seen, repeatedly). Two languages now exist in *The Rough Field*’s fabric, but are there not by choice but by force: ‘a harsh humiliation / as twice to be born’ (JMCP 37). We have witnessed previous attempts to synthesise the two languages and their corresponding traditions, as well as spoken- and body-language. In this poem, the duality is embodied in the form of the poem itself – it is written in two columns, a form which also anticipates that of Section IX – as the poet-speaker again struggles to find words to articulate his motley inheritance. Poem 6 (‘Even English’) adopts a tone of hysterical irony as he plays with the place-names of the childhood landscape, illustrating the ridiculousness of their English translations, which could never quite ‘[spring] native / As a whitethorn bush’ (JMCP 38). The journey from Garvaghey to Cloch Oir – from childhood home to place of education – is analogous to Kristeva’s exile’s inevitable journey away from ‘the nocturnal memory of the body, the bittersweet sleep of childhood’,<sup>166</sup> where departure, severance, and loss are the only inheritances.

Departure, severance, and loss, too, are themes cast in different moulds in the sections that ensue. Section V is a series of poems investigating processes of

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<sup>166</sup> Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, 26.

inheritance in the relationship between the poet-speaker and his father. In this sequence of poems, the father figure is always enclosed somehow, in 'stifling darkness' (*JMCP* 40), 'in Brooklyn / listening to a subway / shudder the earth' (*JMCP* 43), a 'grille / in the Clark Street I.R.T.' (*JMCP* 43), and 'the bars of the small booth' (*JMCP* 44). The I/eye of these poems and the father figure are thus prevented spatial proximity, as the speaking voice struggles to figure paradoxical lack of relationship with his father, yet the facts of inheritance: 'The same fault ran through / Us both: anger, impatience, / A stress born of violence' (*JMCP* 42). Like the severance from the mother tongue, this inheritance relationship is also grounded in the landscape of Garvaghey and the body, its metaphor a 'wound' (*JMCP* 42). The 'wound' or 'fault' that links these two figures also separates them, as the geological implications of 'fault' would suggest. And indeed, it seems it is impossible for them to share space:

When he came back  
 we walked together  
 across fields of Garvaghey  
 to see hawthorn on the summer  
 hedges, as though  
 he had never left;  
 a bend of the road

which still sheltered  
 primroses. But we  
 did not smile in  
 the shared complicity  
 of a dream, for when  
 weary Odysseus returns  
 Telemachus should leave.

(*JMCP* 44)

The landscape here has blossomed, opening out in the imaginative eye of the speaking voice, but the relationship between son and father is no longer generative. Only the framework of a classical metaphor provides support for paternal inheritance, and the last lines of the poem chart a Hades-like descent for the I/eye 'into subway or underground' (*JMCP* 44) to meet the 'ghostly' spectre of his father's scarred 'bald head' (*JMCP* 44).

In the following sections of *The Rough Field*, the poet-speaker seeks his inheritance elsewhere. The effects of the folk tradition of the Garvaghey community are investigated in 'The Last Sheaf'. 'The Gaelic / Rises and recedes' (*JMCP* 46), as the folk tradition brings the community together in a manner religion, previously, has not managed, however there is no longer a bricolage of languages.

Man looks at man, the current  
Of community revived to a near-  
Ly perfect round...

Soon broken

As talk expands in drunken detail.

(*JMCP* 47)

The Gaelic folk-song only creates cohesion for a while. The poet-speaker's circling is not yet complete – the 'round' is broken in both the poem *as* and *of* space here. While the poet-speaker navigates his way through Garvaghey from different perspectives, it seems that, in ruling out various possibilities of inheritance, he is also undergoing to process of delimiting his world-map. It is only, it seems, the landscape of the place that holds true, and even that is only seen 'in shifting detail' (*JMCP* 32). 'The Source' and 'Roseland' both see the angle of vision rise up through the landscape again. The physicality of the hillwalker's movement through space catalyses a catalogue of remembrance ('Snowdrop / In March, primrose in April / Whitethorn in May, cardinal's / fingers of foxglove dangling / All summer' (*JMCP* 51)) and a mood of 'fierce elation' (*JMCP* 51) in descent from the hillside:

My seven league boots devour  
Time and space as I crash  
Through the last pools of  
Darkness. All around, my  
Neighbours sleep, but I am  
In possession of their past  
(The pattern history weaves  
From one small backward place)

(*JMCP* 51-52)

In the dark before dawn, the poet-speaker's vision of the landscape is enhanced by memory. The remembered landscape seems more familiar than that in which the I/eye

is now placed, and memory is aided by the darkness in which the speaking voice of the poem currently navigates. The poetic egotism of the lines above is soon shattered, however, by the ‘rusty ratchet’ of the corncrake’s cry and a vision of the ‘black / Liquid gleam of the main road’ and the ‘raw interior’ (*JMCP* 52) of the unfinished dancehall. The poet-speaker realises the lack of effect his world-mapping attempts will have on the Garvaghey community: the dancehall ‘could house more hopes than any / verse of mine’ (*JMCP* 53) and it is this place that bears witness to members of the community hungry ‘for novelty, for flashing / energy and change’ (*JMCP* 53). These final lines of the section anticipate the ‘process’ of the ensuing section, and the ‘lines of loss / lines of energy / always changing / always returning’ (*JMCP* 73) of Section IX.

‘No lyric memory softens the fact’ (*JMCP* 52) that the community which the returning poet-speaker is attempting to map is insensitive to the artistic nuances on which he sets great store. The lyric inheritance and subsequent artistic task of the poet, here, is an isolated one. Section VII attempts to map this lyric tradition and inheritance in relation to Ireland. An epigraph to the section quotes from Edmund Spenser’s *View of the Present State of Ireland*. Ireland and her political destiny is bleak in Spenser’s eyes – ‘no purposes whatsoever which are meant for her good will prosper’ (*JMCP* 62). Montague reacts to the imposition of the English cartographer in a similar manner to that which we will see Seamus Heaney react to Spenser in Chapter 4: Spenser’s words are countered with lyric impressions of Ireland and her literary heritage. These impressions draw on the images, phrases and verse-forms that have come before in *The Rough Field* as well as upon Ireland’s established artistic landscape:

Again that note! A weaving  
 melancholy, like a bird crossing  
 moorland;  
                   ice film on a corrie  
 opening inward, soundless harp-  
 strings of rain  
 [...]
                   the wail of tin  
 whistle climbs against fiddle and  
 the *bodhrán* begins –  
                   lost cry  
 of the yellow bittern!

(*JMCP* 62)

Again, the poetic landscape is a mixture of confused fragments. Landscape and image elide in metaphor and image: the imagined bird flying weaves an image, the rain is likened to harp strings, and the tin whistle climbs up, and sounds as if a yellow bittern. 'Lyric memory' (*JMCP* 52) now rests in a 'mythic lyre shrunk to country size' (*JMCP* 62). The idea of revolution, too, shrinks:

All revolutions are interior  
The displacement of spirit;  
By the arrival of fact  
Ceaseless as cloud across sky,  
Sudden as sun. (*JMCP* 63)

However, hope is to be found in the manner in which the metaphors of revolution are mapped onto the natural world. Revolution may be interior, but are also as open and natural in the world-fabric of *The Rough Field's* I/eye as cloud and sun. What revolution will never be is nostalgic. It cannot look back to the mysticism of Yeats nor can it find its beginning in the 'symbolic depth-charge of music' (*JMCP* 63). We have seen also that the 'messianic agitator' (*JMCP* 63) is an impossibility: religion in *The Rough Field* is less zealous than habitual. In the 1960s, the traditional Ireland rebels against the revolutions of the rest of Europe, and the poet-speaker questions the dedication of his homeland to the cause:

[...] a native music  
curlew echoing tin whistle  
to eye-swimming melancholy  
  
is that our offering?

While all Europe seeks  
new versions of old ways (*JMCP* 68)

A product of both tradition and revolution, the poet-speaker is yet unable to consolidate the two into a coherent world-map. Revolution will come, but 'the real aims [...] are always to be realised after that revolution' (*JMCP* 62).

The second epigraph to Section VIII, from Engels on the subject of revolution, is realised in the energetic lines of Section IX, 'A New Siege'. The poetic-political aims of the poet-speaker, to *revision* Garvaghey, must occur when the poetic I/eye is not bogged down in the landscape and traditions of the place. 'A New Siege' follows different 'lines' (*JMCP* 70) as they weave together across the variant images of the poet-speaker's rough field. The lines of history, power, defiance and discord (*JMCP* 70), of leaving and returning (*JMCP* 71), of suffering, defeat, protest and change (*JMCP* 72), and of action, reaction, loss and energy (*JMCP* 73) structure the poetry through repetition. Equally, the formal and metric consistency of the section provides a coherence we have not previously seen in the volume. But Montague does not make it easy for his reader. However much the repetitions of rhythm, word, and form may provide an overall coherence to the section, our readerly act is disrupted, as the poem is printed in overlapping columns on the page.

The oscillation between cohesion and fragmentation and the corresponding retrospective and prospective views and echoings is perhaps necessary when the world-view is multidimensional; it makes 'true' yet complex the map of *The Rough Field* and its many contexts. The shifting images of hawthorn are in accordance both with the seasons and also the circling motion that the I/eye frequently adopts in relation to both Garvaghey and the more general world-view. The bricolage that the volume presents, and, on a smaller scale, the adoption and breaking by the poet of different poetic forms, demonstrates the fragile nature of a changing world mapped from a single point of view. Stone, fire, evergreen and hawthorn provide *idée-fixes* throughout the poem which are as resonant as the phrases 'again that note!' (*JMCP* 19, 62, 68) and 'with all my circling a failure to return' (*JMCP* 9, 81). But to return to what? A childhood home? The original hawthorn bush? Yeats's swans, which, in *The Rough Field* we witness displaced and 'breasting the wind / Waves of the deserted grain harbour' (*JMCP* 67)? In time, return is always impossible for the child as it is for the poet. And it is by constantly re-mapping the starting-image of the volume, we can see the manner in which the impermanence of the image competes against 'memory's mortmain' (*JMCP* 73). *The Rough Field* charts the metamorphosis of this ineffable 'what' sought by the I/eye to focus vision, the very lines of the poem echoing the circling motion the volume's themes and forms enact.

The closing lines of *The Rough Field*, as the poet-speaker drives away from Garvaghey, demonstrate both this preoccupation and the final *adieu* to a traditional (possibly Kavanagh-esque) view of poetic Ireland:

Our finally lost dream of man at home  
in a rural setting! A giant hand,  
as we pass by, reaches down  
to grasp the fields we gazed upon

Harsh landscape that haunts me,  
well and stone, in the bleak moors of dream  
with all my circling a failure to return  
to what is already going  
going

GONE

(JMCP 81)

The vision of Ireland that was sought at the beginning of the volume is no longer, perhaps, where the poet-speaker thought he would find it; the place rests in his memory rather than being a permanent fixture in the landscape to which pilgrimage can be made at will. Each section marks a different part of the remembered cultural landscape, and also the I/eye's farewell to that memory. The most radical feature of Montague's *Rough Field* is that it extends from Garvaghey to the universe, and occupies a place of revision, where its present features are perpetually changing. Demonstrating a single place in multiple possible moments, we are presented with a poem where Garvaghey, and more broadly Ireland, is shown, in its shifting multiplicity, always to merit being mapped a/new.

## CHAPTER 2: THOMAS KINSELLA

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### *‘There will be no waste’: Economies of Poetic Production*

Thomas Kinsella opens his Peppercanister volume *Readings in Poetry* defiantly, quoting apparently at random from William Morris’ ‘The Defense of Guinevere’. In the selections from Morris’ poem, Kinsella finds ‘verbal excess’ which ‘dissipates in slackness’ (*TKRP* 10). Through this criticism, Kinsella implicitly questions what he calls ‘Morris’ established reputation, [... his] place in literary history’ (*TKRP* 9), also calling into question the value of the system (literary reputation, production, or history) itself. Kinsella goes on to make similar criticisms of Henry Thoreau’s poetic output, some poems from which he chooses to follow Morris’ ‘Defense of Guinevere’.

Thoreau’s poems are adjudged ‘vapid, virtually automatic utterances from a commonplace sensibility, characterized by an intellectual, sensual, imaginative and technical disorder, they disintegrate under the slightest of rational demands’ (*TKRP* 13). Kinsella accuses Thoreau’s ‘Great Friend’ of ‘a disorder or emptiness in the perception, culminating in the formal capitulation and poetic chaos of the final three stanzas, or units. A chaos and disorder not by reference to any standard or external requirements, but by reference to the order that the poem itself is trying to establish’ (*TKRP* 14). Our poet-critic-reader thus argues for an economy of writing and of reading that avoids disorder and excess in execution of either act. Reader and poem have a mutual autonomy. Reading is a reciprocal process, delimited by the power of both poem and reader: ‘the text of a poem is taken as initiating an act of communication, and the reading is offered as a completion of the act, the poem read at its own pace’ (*TKRP* 14). Through this process, a balance between poetic and critical power or acumen must be established. The boundaries of the poem and the abilities of the critic must be tested but not broken. In order to achieve this important balance, the critic must necessarily discriminate in order that the correct sort of poem is subjected to the reading process. This act of discrimination is at once subjective and affective, measured and well thought out. For his purposes here, Kinsella enlists Shakespeare’s Sonnets 29 and 30, Yeats’s ‘The Tower’, and T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’. For each of these poems, Kinsella provides a line-by-line reading of cause and effect, with meticulous attention paid to the position of the enunciating I/eye of each poem, and the question of voice. This economy of reading is a process that we may equally apply to our approach

to Kinsella's poetics, to our analysis of the process of poetic production to which Kinsella subjects poetic language, and the systems he constructs and analyses.

The demand for an economy in thought and writing, and for balance between entities, is one that persists throughout Kinsella's writing. Kinsella takes a systems approach to literature, criticism, thought, and philosophy. He seeks applicable processes of creation and analysis that are as efficient as possible, that are self-contained, and yet that also interact with their environment (whether that environment is geographical, psychological, literary, or political). Kinsella can be seen to be constantly battling against ideas of waste and excess with relation to both processes and also objects, testing and interrogating their boundaries, as well as their economy and efficiency. He observes the extent to which they will necessarily no longer be able to maintain a homeostatic balance, leaching into and polluting the environment in which they are instantiated. This process of systems discovery, testing, and rejection is a cyclical one, which can be seen in the general and particular trends in Kinsella's work. The process is also one which is inherently spatial, and connected to ideas of a lived environment, or *milieu*. The system in question and its processes represent a self-organised and mappable space, a space that is engaging and which demands engagement. Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela write of the necessary connection between system, *milieu*, and space thus:

An autopoietic system is defined as a unity by and through its autopoietic organisation. This unity is, thus, a topological unity in the space in which the components have existence as entities that may interact and have relations. For living systems such a space is a physical space. Without unity in some space an autopoietic system is not different from the background in which it is supposed to lie, and hence, can only be a system in the space of our description where its unity is conceptually stipulated. Without unity in the physical space a living system would lack the dynamics of production relations which constitute it as a concrete entity in space.<sup>167</sup>

It is through discrete control systems that (autopoietic) systems may self-regulate, and thus maintain a state of dynamic equilibrium with a minimum loss of efficiency. Biological metaphors aside, so long as the system, whether a poem, an act, an ideology,

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<sup>167</sup> Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realisation of the Living* (Boston: Springer, 1980), 94.

remains balanced within itself and within its environment, efficiency is not lost, waste does not occur, and, more often than not, we hardly notice its presence. It is at the boundaries of whatever system that we may first see this instability evolve: an engagement with the environment which is destructive rather than constructive. The system both defines and is defined by its environment, and we see Kinsella adhere to this idea throughout his poetic career. We notice error through excess and waste (inefficiency), and often it is through the recognition of error that we notice past functionality. Peripheral vision is as important as the directly perceived; what is discarded generates space quite as much as what is finally represented. *Poems from Centre City* sees beauty as a less common by-product of human systems, but, like waste, it is nevertheless still a by-product rather than an objective.

*But what is beauty.*

A jewel of process.

The fugitive held fast, exact in its accident. (TKCP 293)

Beauty, like waste, is an expected anomaly. For Kinsella, it is the system, the process, that is the thing.

The stringent take on methodologies of poetics and on critical language, creation, and reading that we see Kinsella advance in *Readings in Poetry* seems far away from a statement made by Kinsella on a similar topic 36 years previously. Then, the poet wrote of the expected priorities of poet and critic thus, in an attempt, perhaps, to dispel the readings of Irish poetry as born only out of the political and literary situation of the country under the influential shadows of the Troubles, and of Yeats:

Relationship to tradition, whether broken or not, is only part of the story.

For any writer there is also the relationship with other literatures, with the present, with the ‘human predicament’, with the self. This last may be the most important of all, for certain gaps in ourselves can swallow up all the potentiality in the world.<sup>168</sup>

However, if we map this quotation on to the systems trend in Kinsella’s thought, we can see that the ‘certain gaps in ourselves’ are similar to the ‘verbal excess’ the poet sees in Morris, and the lack of unity of Maturana and Varela’s non-functioning system. These

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<sup>168</sup> Kinsella, *Davis, Mangan, Ferguson? Tradition and the Irish Writer*, 65.

‘certain gaps’ are less aporia than anomalies – points of non-function that betray the working system of tradition, literature, the present, or the self, as less than completely stable. And indeed, the metaphor that Kinsella uses for the consequences of this instability (or, in this case lack of self-knowledge) is remarkably similar to that used by Maturana and Varela in theirs. In both cases, the boundaries between the system and its environment are transgressed, and the system can no longer exist as an independent ‘concrete entity in space’.<sup>169</sup>

From his first volume of poetry, Kinsella is concerned with exploring a means to achieve a constant stable functionality. In many of his early poems, this exploration manifests itself most obviously in an exploration of the self, or body, and its environment. Kinsella here seems to be working towards an escape from flesh, whether this is a fleshiness of prose, an overabundance of hackneyed image (the two accusations he levels at the poetry of Morris and Thoreau), or an excess of physicality (blood, flesh, bone, human proximity, and excretion). The poem *as* space and the poem *of* space are explored simultaneously. As Kinsella’s poetic progresses, we see form, language, and address increasingly pared down in order to demonstrate the development of this systematic thought. Ideas and images of dissipation or disintegration, as well as those of fleshy excess or waste, simultaneously oppose and highlight the economy of the working systems both of and on display in the poetry. *Downstream* parodies the faults that we have already read him criticise in Thoreau and Morris. The Prelude to the volume highlights the symbolic and rhythmic excesses to which the bad poet, in full consciousness of the unoriginality of his tools, but intent on engaging with Tradition, consequently resorts:

*And so my bored menagerie  
Once more emerges: Energy,  
Blinking, only half awake,  
Gives its tiny frame a shake;  
Fouling itself, a giantess,  
The bloodshot bulk of Laziness  
Obscures the vision; Discipline  
Limps after them with a jutting chin,  
Bleeding badly from the calf;  
Old Jaws-of-Death gives laugh for laugh*

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<sup>169</sup> Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, 94.

*With Error as they amble past;  
And there as usual, lying last,  
Helped along by blind Routine,  
Futility flogs a tambourine...* (TKCP 30)

Here, the ‘figures of waste and decay’<sup>170</sup> that Julia Obert sees as so important in Kinsella’s late poetry are made manifest even at this early stage. The ‘bored menagerie’ is an allegorical procession of all the systems which form important constituent parts of the process of poetic production. The poetic voice functions at an ironic level apart from the subjects of its creation. The ‘bored menagerie’ highlights the metapoetic element of Kinsella’s work: it is representative of the trappings of the kind of poet whose influence we have seen Kinsella try to escape already in his critical work, and whose hackneyed imagery and form we see Kinsella, here, have recourse to in order to break away from more fully.

The neatly rhyming iambic tetrameter moves along as expected, and at times the excesses of the rhythm and rhyme obscure the subject matter of the poem (the poetic process). We are led instead to follow blindly the procession of characters, exposing the futility of the ‘verbal excess’ (TKRP 10) in the working model of poetics which we have seen Kinsella criticise in *Readings in Poetry*. The detached tone illustrates the manner in which Kinsella approaches the notion of poetry as repository of stock themes and/or as a spontaneous outpouring of emotion. For him, poetry is a philosophical system whose aim is to function effectively in form and meaning, without excess expenditure of energy. The affective and cognitive maps generated through these poetic processes must operate efficiently and together. Kinsella extends this ideology to his subject matter: throughout the Peppercansiter series we witness examinations of politics, the self and the psyche, religious belief and dogma, relationships and inheritance, and the poetic act. It is undeniable that the use of poetry as a ground upon which to investigate these systems makes Kinsella’s poetry difficult, and at times abstract or obscure. The poet disclaims this, stating ‘I have no plans to confuse anything, to confuse the issue, or to send anyone looking somewhere else. But everything needs to earn its place: each essential particular allows something else’.<sup>171</sup> Again, we come up against the idea of economy; of poetry as a working system whose

<sup>170</sup> Julia C. Obert, ‘Place and Trace: Thomas Kinsella’s Postcolonial Placelore’ *New Hibernia Review* 13.4 (2009), 79.

<sup>171</sup> Kinsella, interview with Badin. Donatella Abbate Badin, *Thomas Kinsella* (New York: Twayne, 1996), 197.

constituent parts must be carefully engineered in order to ensure the working order of the whole. *Downstream* opens, then, with a broken system, one which lacks power or potentiality, whose internal and external environments are imbalanced. The subsequent poems seek to build from the rubble of this broken system one which is re-balanced and which will function again. Systems of ‘equilibrium of gift and threat / of speech constricted in other terms / moulded in eternal breathless appearance’ (TKCP 52) are exposed as less important than their poet-creator, who reaches ‘in slow distaste’ the humble and humbling conclusion that the body, unlike language, is ‘not young and renewable, but man’ (TKCP 53). An obsession with order and function haunts Kinsella, and the degenerating and regenerative systems are patterns that recur throughout the poetry.

Donatella Badin recognises a similar pattern of regeneration in Kinsella, stating, ‘Kinsella’s poetry is based on an unresolved cycle of pattern and formlessness, quest and appeasement’.<sup>172</sup> However, Badin relies in her analysis too much on this specific pattern, and does not attribute it to Kinsella’s obsession with economy, his need to write of and from within a system that he perceives to function adequately. Badin has rather written of Kinsella’s ‘quest for order’ in terms of abstract values projected into the language of poetry: ‘[for Kinsella] writing poetry implies denying waste and disorder’.<sup>173</sup> The opening of *Downstream*, above, demonstrates how, in spite of his obsession with order and functionality, Kinsella is far from the denial of waste and disorder that Badin identifies as a hallmark of his poetic. There is no question of the prominence of waste (or excess) in Kinsella’s poetry; along with ‘process’, ‘work’, and ‘order’, ‘waste’ may well be one of the most frequently occurring words. Indeed, waste, just as much as process and order, plays an important constitutive part in the poetic economy that Kinsella builds up in the (yet ongoing) Peppercanister series. In her exposition of Kinsella’s poetic, Badin acknowledges the prominence of waste and order and pays particular attention to images of decay in Kinsella’s early poetry in her analysis of the poet’s ‘search for a point of stability in the face of erosion’.<sup>174</sup> However, Badin misses the manner in which waste and disorder operate, overplaying the distance between poetry (or orderly, systematic thought) and waste (or disorderly, excessive, thought), a distance which exists infrequently in Kinsella’s work.

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<sup>172</sup> Badin, *Thomas Kinsella*, 145.

<sup>173</sup> Badin, *Thomas Kinsella*, 22.

<sup>174</sup> Badin, *Thomas Kinsella*, 12.

For Kinsella, disorder and order are both simultaneous constituent factors in the process of any system, and the presence of both leads to a healthy questioning, testing, and movement towards repair or reinstated efficiency. In *A Technical Supplement*, it is disorder, rather than order, that catalyses thought (and thus knowledge): ‘Vital splatterings. Excess. / Make the mind creep’ (TKCP 181). *One Fond Embrace* sees order and waste co-exist in process: ‘Discern process. You know that, / Mangled by it. We are all participants / in a process that requires waste’ (TKCP 278). *Marginal Economy* even contains a poem addressing the imbalance that is so often accorded to waste, Kinsella also setting up a dialogue with his criticism of the inadequacies of other poets:

A major element of waste  
     needed in the living process,  
 with an element of excess  
     in the constituent materials;  
 distinguishing basic features  
     performing no apparent function,  
 and playing no discernable part  
     in countering any negative forces,  
 but which are nonetheless clearly essential  
     for fulfillment of the process,  
 and which, if removed, would establish  
     an emptiness under the heart.

Accepting the waste and the excess,  
     and a fundamental inadequacy  
 in the structure as a whole  
     and in each individual part,  
 there is still an ongoing dynamic  
     in the parts as they succeed each other,  
 and in the assembling record,  
     that registers as positive. (TKME 32)

Maurice Harmon, like Badin, draws distance between Kinsella’s excess and his order, positing Kinsella’s ideological movements as systems operating within some sort of

master-slave dialectic: ‘the way to deal with destructive forces is to become their master; the answer to a world of erosion is a new world verified by the imagination and created with consummate artistry’.<sup>175</sup> However, if the patterns of regeneration that are central to Kinsella’s poetry are followed with respect to the systems of various ideologies, the accession to a master-slave dialectic is something that Kinsella does not use as a way to resolve these systems, rather, this power-dynamic is something that the poet may be seen to be seeking to dispel. In order to have a homeostatic balance of power, both within a system and also between the system and its environment, no sort of master-slave relationship may be in process. Indeed, the very idea of homeostasis works against this sort of power dynamic. Instead of seeking to become master of a disintegrating (or otherwise) system, Kinsella tests the boundaries of these systems in order to observe potential for functionality, whether they are systems of thought, biological systems, scientific systems, or those that operate in object-relations. The system must operate in relation to its environment, as we have seen Maturana and Varela state above, but too much interrelation between the system and its environment (whether this is osmotic or frictional) leads to the loss of efficiency in the system itself.

An early Peppercanister volume, *The Good Fight*, opens with an abstract exploration of Kinsella’s working methodology:

You have to  
wear them down against each other  
to get any purchase,  
and then there is this strain.

That all *unreasonable* things  
are possible. *Everything*  
that can happen will happen.

(TKCP 157)

The language of the poem is sinewy, abstract, and understated in its repressed energy. ‘Erosion’, in contrast to Harmon’s interpretation above, is a cohering force as well as a ‘strain’, and is thus positive. It is from friction, rather than from a lack of it, that a sense of communication or of the boundaries between two entities may be established and interrogated. The meaning of the pronouns in this poem are not elucidated, but at the same time they do not seem out of context. The lack of contextualization outside of the

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<sup>175</sup> Maurice Harmon, *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella* (New Jersey: Humanities P, 1975), 29.

poetry itself creates a sense of urgency of reading *towards* a definition, or at least a more specific context. Kinsella works towards a textual economy that we see Thomas Jackson identify in *Nightwalker*: ‘Kinsella is leaving behind the strategy of invoking, by meaning, entities’.<sup>176</sup> There is a pure sense of *progression towards*, and this is surely the ideal state of a complete and functional system or process. Indeed, in his study of Kinsella, Jackson also states that ‘the ideal (and reality) of wholeness lies at the core of [Kinsella’s] poetry’.<sup>177</sup> But this is not all that makes up the driving force of Kinsella’s poetry: in the quotation from *The Good Fight* above we can observe a fatalistic acknowledgement of *all* possibility, both negative (‘unreasonable’ (TKCP 157)), and otherwise. The world-mapping system encompasses both economy and excess, and gains its energy from the frictional opposition of these two forces rather than from an abstract, and unconnected, perfection.

*The Good Fight* goes on to demonstrate the manner in which excess works alongside function:

Plump and faithless;  
cut, as it were, in the sinews  
of our souls; each other’s worst company;  
it is we, letting things *be*,  
who might come to understanding.  
[...]  
one day we might knock  
our papers together, and elevate them  
(with a certain self-abasement)  
their gleaming razors  
mirroring a primary world  
where power also is a source of patience  
for a while before the just flesh  
falls back in black dissolution in its box. (TKCP 158)

Flesh implies a waste of form, whether that form is of language, of image, or poetic form. We have already seen this preoccupation in the allegorical passage from

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<sup>176</sup> Thomas H. Jackson, *The Whole Matter: The Poetic Evolution of Thomas Kinsella* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1995), 62.

<sup>177</sup> Jackson, *The Whole Matter*, xii.

*Downstream*, and it is made more explicit here. The manner in which fleshiness operates in the poems is one that implies that it exists in a constant state of being-made-waste, in constant contradistinction to the tightly knit poetic and philosophical systems which the Peppercanister poems seek to create. However, the very fact of these fleshy excesses exposes the otherwise tight working model of Kinsella's poetic system. We may seek an analogue here with Martin Heidegger's broken tool analysis, where it is the less- or non-functional opposites that are the terms by which their functional counterparts are defined:

When we concern ourselves with something, the entities which are most closely ready-to-hand may be met as something unusable, not properly adapted for the use we have decided upon. The tool turns out to be damaged, or the material unsuitable. In each of these cases *equipment* is here, ready-to-hand. We discover its unusability, however, not by looking at it and establishing its properties, but rather by the circumspection of the dealings in which we use it. *When its unusability is thus discovered, equipment becomes conspicuous.*<sup>178</sup>

Once unusable, the equipment in question becomes present-at-hand; functionless, and endowed with an historical rather than an active meaning. In this secondary state the thing is 'conspicuous', and subject to the gaze of the analyst or theorist. Things that are broken or that demonstrate or produce excess or waste thus expose the methodology by which the system itself works. In '38 Phoenix Street' (*One*), this movement between present- and ready-to-hand is played out in personal, historical terms, with a Jungian inflexion:

Look.

I was lifted up  
past rotten bricks weeds  
to look over the wall.

A mammy lifted up a baby on the other side.

Dusty smells. Cat. Flower bells  
hanging down purple red.

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<sup>178</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2008), 102.

Look.

The other. Looking.

My finger picked at a bit of dirt

on top of the wall and a quick

wiry redgolden thing

ran back down a little hole.

(TKCP 168)

A sense of life is communicated through a description of moments of sense perception and peripheral vision wholly unconnected, apart from by virtue of temporal proximity, to the matter in hand. Through the narrative and textual mirroring, the space in which the enunciating I/eye of the poem functions is blurred. The imperative command 'Look' is not followed by any directional guidance (look left, right, up, down). 'Look' at once exposes the whole situation in which the (divided) speaking subject is placed and also the failures of the basic command. If the poem is read literally, the speaker, as a baby held by his mother, looks towards another baby, similarly held, across a shared garden wall. The speaker (or speakers, if the two sections are read in dialogue with each other) does not only look at the other baby but also at his surroundings. The primary act of identification between babies is blurred by the lack of focus in the command and resultant action. There is an equal amount of blurring of function if the poem is read as a domestic parody of the mirror-stage. Adhering to the simple imperative command, 'Look', and only enacting an analytic process of self definition through differentiation is not a possibility; there are always other distracting factors that lie outside the system to take into account, and which expose the lack of totality in the system itself. The I/eyes of each stanza communicate less with each other than with the *milieu* of their peripheral vision, their sense of touch and sense of smell. Kinsella's quest for complete functionality thus takes into account the latent potentiality of the other things, which do not function in their immediate context.

There is a sense in the early Peppercanister volumes that Kinsella is searching for an overarching system to which all man, all life, can be ascribed. Kinsella investigates his local political systems, his family history, and his sense of self (personal and poetic). The functional and dysfunctional elements in each system are rigorously constructed, deconstructed and analysed, all in terms of their internal and external environments. At many points, as Kinsella is looking as if he will ascribe fully to a single system of thought (the most obvious example in the early Peppercanisters being

Jungian psychology), the system itself, as well as its poetic articulation, fails. The tentative balance between defining oneself with and against one's *milieu*, and sacrificing oneself to that external environment, is always fluctuating, it is a part of process. Kinsella's vision extends through the personal to the greater whole, from the micro- to the macro-topological. Ironic detachment is a major constituent part of this poetic process (as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter); 'exterior vision is the result of the end of a period of co-operation with the familiar, and the search for forms with which to replace it'.<sup>179</sup> By the later Peppercanister volumes, Kinsella interrogates systems as great as just citizenship, belief, and war. In these later volumes there is a growing sense that man himself is the system, and that his composite perceptions and beliefs are all equal constituent parts of a greater whole. The relationship to the self is 'the most important'<sup>180</sup> of all. The truths of each system are ultimately ephemeral but lie always in its attempts at economy of process, its attempts at a regulated homeostasis. System-consciousness lies in a simultaneous recognition of working successes and excesses, and submission to 'the rough course / of the way forward' (*TKBU* 23). Each discrete system, in its process, tests the possibilities of being. Kinsella's systems thought is ultimately ontological, his world-mapping a truly 'ontotopological' process.

### *A Technical Supplement*

As a complete volume of poems can enact a process of world-mapping, so too can single poems in that volume, and so, on an even smaller but no less important scale, can the poetic line itself. In our constructions of ideas of the world, the self, and readings of poems, it would be useful to consider Heidegger's thought: 'World is the ever non-objective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse, keep us transported into Being'.<sup>181</sup> This gives us a key to understanding the manner in which they (the poems) are constructed out of space. This 'world' of Heidegger's may also be defined as a space of lived experience; the 'known-space' that we have seen *The Rough Field* construct and deconstruct. As we navigate the world, we create about us, through the manner in which we process experience, not 'place' but a 'known-space', or, as many French theorists have termed it, *lieu* (personal, physical,

<sup>179</sup> Sloterdijk, *Bulles: Sphères I*, 285.

<sup>180</sup> Kinsella, *Davis, Mangan, Ferguson? Tradition and the Irish Writer*, 65.

<sup>181</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 43.

space) and *milieu* (the space surrounding or created by a person). I would like, in this instance, to use the French word *milieu* instead of the English, or even the French, *place*, implying as it does both a space more proximate, known, and inhabited.<sup>182</sup> *Milieu* also immediately brings to mind the space in which the (autopoietic) system functions. It is the environment in and against which the self functions and seeks definition and purpose.

The poems of Thomas Kinsella are equally submissable to this sort of close reading, creating a poetic *milieu* by ‘eliciting order from significant experience’.<sup>183</sup> What makes *A Technical Supplement* so effective is not just the way that the volume uses illustrations from Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, or the manner in which the poems segue into each other, but also how the poetic journey taken in this volume relates to what has come before (the previous Peppercanister volume *One*). The volume itself not only extends the exploration of the Jungian psyche as developed in *One* but also effects a poetic exegesis of Denis Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*. The conflation of two already difficult thinkers in Kinsella’s idiosyncratic modernist style sounds daunting. But what is key to the navigation of the volume is the flux we can observe, both in and between poems; flux which is experienced by any person conscious of being in the world, to employ what is perhaps an overused a Heideggerian term. The volume enacts a process of becoming, mapping the complicated philosophico-poetic *milieux* in a more abstract but no less perspicacious manner than Montague’s *The Rough Field*.

The Preface to the poems quotes at length from a letter from Diderot to Voltaire which emphasises the use-value of work, and the necessity to interrogate and break culturally instantiated systems of belief and dogma:

One must work, one must be useful, one owes an account of one’s gifts, etcetera, etcetera. Be useful to men! [...] They listen to one and the other with pleasure or disdain, and remain what they were [...] There is more spleen than good sense in all this, I admit – and back to the Encyclopaedia I go.

(TKCP 175)

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<sup>182</sup> It is useful to note here that in French, *milieu* means one’s surroundings, the centre of an object, place, or event, and a chemical medium, or means to the achievement of something. In my use of the word I hope to combine these three meanings; *milieu* is a surrounding place, an active experience, and the essential element in one’s understanding of the world.

<sup>183</sup> John Haffenden, *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber, 1981), 104.

We have already seen this sort of ironic detachment and systems thought to be characteristic of Kinsella's poetic. The poetic preface to the volume, printed only in the *Collected Poems*, looks, Janus like, back to *One* at the same time as to what is to come in *A Technical Supplement* (where collective shapes wriggle together in an unmapped, lightless, space). Kinsella dwells on the forthcoming poetic and psychological potentiality. The voices of this poem locate themselves, and seek individuation and process without waste:

*I felt the whole past and future pressing on me,  
the millions – even the One! –  
that might not live unless...  
I swore there would be no waste. No waste!*

*I started.*

(TKCP 176)

In the first poem of the volume, Kinsella immediately invokes the seventeenth-century economist and cartographer William 'Skullbullet' Petty.<sup>184</sup> Even at this early stage in the volume there is a consciousness of the idea of mapping (cartographical or otherwise) which works in all directions:

Blessed William Skullbullet  
glaring from the furnace of your hair  
thou whose definitions – whose insane nets –  
plunge and convulse to hold thy furious catch  
let our gaze blaze, we pray,  
let us see how the whole thing

works

(TKCP 177)

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<sup>184</sup> See also Derval Tubridy, *Thomas Kinsella: The Peppercanister Poems* (Dublin: U College Dublin P, 2001): 'The sequence begins with an entreaty to 'Blessed William Skullbullet or William Petty, the seventeenth-century cartographer of Ireland.... Through reference to [William] Petty, Kinsella situates *A Technical Supplement* within a wider contextual framework in which the body of Ireland, the corporeal body, and the poetic body become conflated as each are subjected to the anatomical gaze of the poet' (*Thomas Kinsella*, 77-78).

The 'insane nets' redefine the work of the poem, and at the same time they carry resonances of the idea of the numerous processes of mapping that make up modern consciousness, and which are so influential in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and Michel Serres, and which we have already seen applied as both reality and metaphor of spatial understanding in our analysis of *The Rough Field*.<sup>185</sup> The blazing gaze of the fifth line resonates with the fifth verse paragraph of the poetic prologue, as well as many sections of poems which are to follow. Even at this early stage, Kinsella's ever moving nets of (re)definition have been set; there is an obsession not only with ideas of the psyche, self-definition, and mapping, but with the primary means by which many of these things are done: the expenditure of physical energy and the act of visual perception.

Poem II moves straight to the immediate site of work, and the physics of work, by mapping the human body. It looks forward to the abattoir scenes in Poem VI, and back again to the poetic Prologue. Again the idea of an intertwined multiplicity occurs:

You will note firstly that there is no containing skin  
as we understand it, but 'contained' muscles  
- separate entities, interwound and overlaid

(TKCP 177)

From this mapping of the body, where the figure is passive, an intellectual object to be dissected and understood, the poem moves outwards. The desire for a working knowledge of the world and its systems sought by Diderot in his *Encyclopédie* and William Petty in his mapping of Ireland is being practiced. It is by using the body as the tool through which to achieve understanding that Kinsella forges links with both these thinkers. And these links are visual (established by the illustrated plates from the *Encyclopédie* which punctuate the Peppercanister edition), and metaphorical (much of Petty's work grew out of a Hobbesian concern with the body as a metaphor for understanding society).<sup>186</sup> The visual process of space-mapping is present in the

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<sup>185</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), where the map, which is a part of the rhizome 'is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification' (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 13). See also *Atlas*, where Michel Serres employs the fold or pleat in a similar manner, and where 'vers le petit ou dans le grand, le pli permet de passer du lieu à l'espace' (*Atlas*, 47).

<sup>186</sup> Kinsella appends a 'Note on the Illustrations' to the Peppercanister edition, quoting a passage from John Morley's *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists* that is concerned with the illustrations of the *Encyclopédie*. For Morley, viewing these plates is an overtly

frequent references to both light and vision; Poem III charts a voyage of externalization, as the separate entities of the body in Poem II are animated. Given the energy that the first poem sought, the third sees this energy go into the very act of body mapping, emphasised in the Peppercanister edition by the illustrated plate of Laocoon from Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. It is now the body that is the subject of this process. As externalization progresses the body becomes less a mass of meaningless flesh and bone. Through our growing realisation of 'how the whole thing / works' (TKCP 177) the world of *A Technical Supplement* becomes more solid, more easily understood. Key to this understanding is the channelling of energies into the articulation of physical phenomena:

the pent energy released inward.

Clarity and lightness

opened in the hollow of the head.

Articulation, *capacity*,

itched in the thumbs and fingers. (TKCP 178)

In spite of the force of articulation and definition that is at work the body is still somewhat intransient, 'a mere shell' or 'serene effigy' (TKCP 178), but there is potential in the way that things are being assembled. The body is being constructed and understood with geometric precision: 'a light architecture. / No-stress against no-stress' (TKCP 178) and is held together by some abstract opposite of friction and matter; the body is both dealing with and existing in abstract space. Adding emphasis to this abstraction, the purity of the light illuminating the world of the enunciating I/eye prevents an entire and true map of the body being made. We are confronted with a whole world to map, but it is clear that this world is a world without shadow, and the inference may therefore be drawn that no structure here can be endowed with depth or substance. The position of *A Technical Supplement*'s enunciating I/eye alters radically between these first three poems, and its relationship with its environment thus also undergoes shifts.

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topographical experience, as they 'affect one like looking down on the world of Paris from the heights of Montmartre' (Kinsella, *A Technical Supplement* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1976), n.p.).

In Poem I the address is shared, and invocatory, setting up a hierarchical, quasi-religious distance between poetic voices and implied addressee. In Poem II the quasi-religious distance becomes a pedagogical one and a platform of observation, looking down, is thus established. In Poem III the observational distance is increased – the voice of the poem does not have recourse to the use of any sort of personal pronoun at all in order to situate him or her self or selves. These fluctuating points of observation and articulation culminate in, not more text, but a plate from Diderot. This depicts a geometric sketch of the sculptural anatomy of the statue of the Laocoön from the Vatican. Laocoön here, however, is also placed at a distance from his setting: blinded and in the throes of death, he is measured, reversed, and without the two sons who flank him in the original statue.<sup>187</sup> The impact of visual perception is being related but not yet fully digested or understood. The body, although present, does not yet define itself either with or against its *milieu*, and yet seeks this understanding. As with ‘38 Phoenix Street’, it is peripheral vision, rather than directly (self)focused sight, that leads to the creation of a sense of surrounding environment. Indeed, Juhani Pallasmaa states:

In order to think clearly, the sharpness of vision has to be suppressed, for thoughts travel with an absent-minded and unfocused gaze. Homogenous bright light paralyses the imagination in the same way that homogenisation of space weakens the experience of being, and wipes away the sense of place. The human eye is most perfectly tuned for twilight rather than bright daylight.<sup>188</sup>

Poems IV and V work together, and a new process of internalisation and self-definition begins. The angle of voice and of vision changes again, yet the opening of Poem IV echoes that of Poem II: an object impales another object. Circling back in this way, the volume gives an impression of being in a state of flux, one where energy overwhelms the creative impulse. However, there has been some progress: what impales this time is a part of a body, and what it impales is also a body. It is this other body’s presence that catalyses the important shift from *lieu* to *milieu*. As it is being impaled, the new body is arguably female, and fulfils the primary function of the Jungian *anima* by guiding the

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<sup>187</sup> See Appendix V.

<sup>188</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: Wiley, 2005, 2007), 46.

male speaker through the space of his unconscious.<sup>189</sup> The enunciating I/eye now has something apart from himself against which to become objectified, and both figures grow and change in themselves and space as the volume progresses.

The imagery at this point draws comparison with the writing practice. The object impaled turns from earth to body,<sup>190</sup> the object impaling turns from body to point (or pen), the depths plumbed turn from the earth to a well (or inkwell):

The point, greatly enlarged  
 pushed against the skin  
 depressing an area of tissue.  
 Rupture occurred  
 [...]  
 Blood welled up to fill the wound  
 bathing the point as it went deeper (TKCP 179)

A blade licks out and acts  
 with one tongue.  
 Jets of blood respond  
 in diverse tongues. (TKCP 180)

This writing practice is necessary for the poetic mapping of space to occur, and as in the *Encyclopédie*, this artistic act is linked to the anatomical: the ‘point’ finds nothing visceral but a ‘buried well’, becoming, in Poem V, not point but ‘blade’, as the well yields ‘jets of blood ../.. in diverse tongues’ (TKCP 180). The body has become animate and articulate at once. The incision in Poem IV, generating ‘the stillness of a root / Quietus’ (TKCP 179) is re-visioned in Poem V, as having instead ‘no reserve / Inert’ (TKCP 180). The importance of multiple perspectives to ‘see how the whole

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<sup>189</sup> See Carl Jung: ‘The anima of man as a strongly historical character. As a personification of the unconscious she goes back into prehistory, and embodies the contents of the past. She provides the individual with those elements that he ought to know about his prehistory. To the individual, the anima is all life that has been in the past and is still alive in him. In comparison to her... [he feels] like a creature just sprung out of nothingness, with neither a past or a future.’ In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Wilson (London: Fount, 1977), 317.

<sup>190</sup> We meet the female figure later (in Poem IXX) framed by a parody of the *aisling* vision, which echoes this metamorphosis from earth to body, as the *aisling* represented at once the archetypal dream female and the land of Ireland.

thing works' (*TKCP* 177) is emphasised. Although the impaling elicits life-consciousness, the loss of blood makes the subject of the incision(s) inanimate, and we are invited to see yet again what sort of process this is: 'If you would care to enter this grove of beasts:' (*TKCP* 180).

Blood, the life force of man- and animal kind, is the primary *idée fixe* connecting the next two poems. In Poem VI, the body is again objectified and taken apart. However, this time dissection becomes art form. The visual is no less powerful here than elsewhere; although the poem takes place in Swift's Slaughterhouse, the speaker is viewing the whole scene from behind a glass, and so texture and smell, both peripheral factors that help to produce a sense of *milieu*, are not mentioned. The depiction of the abattoir is thus frighteningly scientific in its objectification. This objectification ('at a certain point it is all merely meat' (*TKCP* 181)) is made all the more obvious by the parallels between our, or the enunciating I/eye's, view of the hanging carcasses, the animals' view of the I/eye, and the reader's view of the corresponding anatomical drawings from Diderot's *Encyclopédie*:

some looking back over their shoulders

at us, in our window.

(*TKCP* 180)

The primacy of the visual here means that light and colour are still an obsession, and perception related words and actions abound. Yi-Fu Tuan endows sight with primacy over the other senses when it comes to the creation around the self of a world-space, since 'it immediately gives us a world 'out there'. Self, without a world, is reduced to mere body'.<sup>191</sup> Again, we see the importance of *milieu*, both literal and poetic, to the speaker and the self in their self-observing process of becoming. Through the visual medium of observation and the imaginative medium of poetics, as animal life becomes intellectualised meat, the execution and depiction of this process is made into art.

Poem VII sees this dissected life become excess: out of the scientific and artistic comes the grotesque. Blood, which has been articulate, is now too much and yet is the 'vital' (*TKCP* 181) matter by which the living system comes to function. Surrounded only by the system's excess, there is no longer any room for precision. Constant study of a single substance from a single angle of vision can only lead to the production of an

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<sup>191</sup> Tuan *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, 96. See also Pallasmaa: 'The very essence of the lived experience is moulded by hapticity and peripheral vision. Focused vision confronts us with the world whereas peripheral vision envelops us in the flesh of the world' (*The Eyes of the Skin*, 10).

excess of that substance. This, in turn, produces waste, a blurring of objective thought and an inability to map the world with unclouded vision. As the fastidious speaker coils back from the idea of waste, there is a renewed obsession with the head, and the externalisation of its contents, linking this poem to both Poems III and VI. The other, female, self encountered in Poem IV is more explicitly feminized and, under the pressure of the violent excess or the slaughterhouse, finally breaks down. The tears stop her ability to perceive the scene before her, and thus prevent the scene from being mapped. Characteristic of Kinsella, the breakdown of this system marks a turning point in the volume. The woman is weeping not blood but tears. As if this first mention of a bodily substance other than blood, and one whose secretion is connected more to the psychological than the physical, has washed away some of the excess of the previous poems, there is space to consider new paths of understanding. However, spurred on again by the elusive feminine ‘someone’ (*TKCP* 181) or *anima*, this process must now have to do with the ingestion (and though this, understanding) not only of others, but also of the self. This is done through a Jungian figure common in Kinsella’s writing, that of ouroboros.<sup>192</sup> The poem returns constantly to this figure, redefining its singular process of self-ingestion:

a living thing swallowing another

Again. The head inside the mouth

A tail.

Then

a leather granite face

unfulfillable.

(*TKCP* 182)

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<sup>192</sup> Influenced by the work of Jung, Kinsella employs frequently the figure of ouroboros, or the ouroboric worm. It is perhaps useful to note here that, due to the multiple original meanings of the word ‘worm’, the ‘ouroboric worm’ may also be any type of reptilian creature, making the lizard section of this poem entirely compatible with the rest. Prominent in his Peppercanister poetry, the image also appears previous to this (see particularly ‘Leaf-Eater’, in *Wormwood*, which makes this figure of a grub). See also Brian John *Reading the Ground: the Poetry of Thomas Kinsella* (Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1996), which analyses Kinsella’s poetry in the light of Jung, making much of the figure of ouroboros.

As we have already seen, return and redefinition characterises this volume, and indeed much of Kinsella's work. The process of definition is, like space, like the world, constantly changing, and this state of constant flux demands new and other maps.<sup>193</sup>

Like Poem VI, Poem IX places the enunciating I/eye behind glass, as a detached observer. Again, light is important to the speaker and the progress of observation in the poem, but here a new dimension is added:

In its deep tank, a leopard shark patrolled  
away from the window, enlarging to a shadow.  
It circled back, grew brighter, reduced  
into blunt focus – a pink down-laugh, white needles –  
and darkened away again, lengthening. (TKCP 182)

Shadow complicates, but at the same time provides texture and spatiality to the poet's world.<sup>194</sup> The poetic possibilities are enriched with this previously unexperienced depth perception: it is not only the fish but also the speaker who may now move 'outward, and down' (TKCP 183). Rather than detached witness to the process of slaughter – the annihilation of self-enclosed living systems – here we are further detached (by water as well as by glass) and bear witness to *other* living systems, operating in an environment alien to our own. Rather than the bloody Stations of The Cross, here Kinsella shows us 'The Stations of the Depths' (TKCP 182). Derval Tubridy acknowledges this poem as a turning point in the volume, but seems not to notice the importance of chiaroscuro in changing the speaker's poetic world. Rather, he concentrates on the opposition of the warm-bloodedness of previous poems with the cold-blooded lizard in Poem VIII and the fish in the tank here. However, this apparently new opposition between warm and cold blood, animal and reptile life, is undermined by the bloodless head in the illustrated plate which faces the poem in the Peppercanister edition<sup>195</sup> (which echoes the bloodless figure in the opening poems of the volume), and cannot signal progression, rather, stasis. The horizons are widened not so much by the opposition of cold and warmth but by the depth inherent in this new world of chiaroscuro. In this new space, informed by light and shadow, we can see the *milieu* expand, and the multiple possibilities of

<sup>193</sup> Serres: 'l'espace lui-même change et commande d'autres mappemondes' (*Atlas*, 12).

<sup>194</sup> See Pallasmaa: 'The shadow gives shape and life to the object in light' (*The Eyes of the Skin*, 47).

<sup>195</sup> The plate is an anatomical drawing of the system of veins and arteries in the human neck, leading to the head.

movement and being created thereby increase. As the speaker moves through space there is ever more to be mapped:

With the strength of his spiritual sight and insight the distance, and as it  
were the space, around man continually expands: his world grows deeper,  
ever new stars, ever new images and enigmas come into view.<sup>196</sup>

Tellingly, Poem X enacts the process of renewal, which has been facilitated by the introduction, in the preceding poems, of shadow, the creation of depth, and the acknowledgement of water as well as blood's vitality. The first verse paragraph sees the dozing speaker 'sinking onward into a free reverie' (*TKCP* 183). However, only rest (not renewal) can occur in this intermediate state. Here, stasis is not a process of osmotic engagement with the environment or even a state of dynamic equilibrium. It is recuperative, and is necessary in order to discover new energies and new methods which may be applied to the renewed process of navigation of the uncharted space which lies before him. The second verse paragraph achieves this longed-for renewal, a new world, and the movement is no longer downwards, but out:

into a clean brightness onto a landing  
flooded with sun and blowing gauze  
like a cool drunkenness, with every speck of dust  
filtered out of the air! (*TKCP* 183)

This halcyon state of impossible purity cannot last, however, and at the end of this verse paragraph the speaker moves, following the handrail, quietly downwards again. There are echoes of *One* in the compulsive need to scrape away surfaces, to 'dig down' (*TKCP* 184), and this may also be equated to the artistic act and the need to renew, to re-map spaces which will have changed in time. The end of this poem calls again for renewal, but the object of renewal has changed from an exploration of the psyche, to the garden, a very human, very bourgeois, *milieu*. In the next poem this *milieu* moves inside to:

A watered peace. Drop. At the heart.

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<sup>196</sup> Frederick Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Martin Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), 64.

Drop. The unlikely heart.

(TKCP 184)

These two lines look back comprehensively to all previous poems; the heart invokes memories of the previous obsession with dissection and anatomy, and water forges links with Poems VII, IX, and X. Equally, the penultimate section of this poem looks back to the Prologue, and its darkness, and forward to the darkness with which the volume ends. Again there are references to sensory experience and the act of creation, but so far only the tactile and emotional senses have been invoked. Finally, as ‘the mind flexes’ (TKCP 185) we are ready to acknowledge the idea of an artistic competitor, something that has only been acknowledged previously in the prose Prologue to the volume.

Upon first reading, Poem XII, initially a poetic description of ‘our other friend’ (TKCP 185), seems entirely incongruous with its setting. However, its position in the volume becomes clearer if we look at the poem in the context of previous poems. The potential suggested at the end of Poems XI and X is finally equated to the competitive as well as the artistic act, to the act of comparison as well as of exploration and renewal. Less immediately, comparisons may also be drawn between Poem XII and the processes of becoming and self-analysis in Poem I, the prose and poetry Prologues. Possibly a depiction of the relationship between Kinsella himself and an artistic competitor, or an extension of the Epigraph by imagining a further dialogue between Diderot and Voltaire,<sup>197</sup> the poem tracks a relationship between artists, and its final statement is articulated in a primarily spatial language:

There, at the unrewarding outer reaches,  
the integrity of the whole thing is tested.

(TKCP 185)

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<sup>197</sup> Parallels may be drawn between the utilitarian emphasis in the Epigraph, where Diderot writes ‘One must work, one must be useful, one owes an account of one’s gifts, *etcetera*’ (TKCP 175), and the last seven lines of Poem XII, where there is an emphasis on ideas of value and integrity:

Stomach that  
and you find a kind of strength not to be had  
any other way. Enforced humility,  
*with* all the faculties. Making for  
a small excellence – very valuable.

There, at the unrewarding outer reaches,  
the integrity of the whole thing is tested.

(TKCP 185)

It is at the boundaries of the system that its potentiality may be tested. Objectivity, through externalisation, as well as self-knowledge, through internalisation, must be achieved in order for totally effective space-mapping to take place. Tuan states that ‘long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside’.<sup>198</sup> The I/eye is now trying to achieve this dual perspective, comparing his work and style of life with that of others as well as taking stock of what surrounds his implied body-space: his *milieu*.

Finally, in Poem XIII, there is explicit reference to the artistic creation of *A Technical Supplement*. This reference ties in to the previous explorations of the artistic-creative act, of anatomy, and of visual perception, the creative impulse is linked to perception and introspection:

Hand over eyes. I see.

I see.

(TKCP 186)

The preoccupation with the creative act becomes an exploration of the creative impulse, and moves back to the creative act, mirroring structurally the images of ouroboros in Poem VIII:

dreamed

I pulled a sheet of brilliant colour

free from the dark.

(TKCP 186)

All of this analogy drawn between real and artistic vision (the I/eyes of the poems) is brought to a visceral conclusion in the next plate from Diderot, which shows the extraction of the iris.<sup>199</sup> Looking at this plate, we are lead to revision the speaker of Poem XIII’s dream of pulling ‘a sheet of brilliant colour / free from the dark’ (TKCP 186). We can now ‘see’ this from a strictly literal and anatomical perspective as well as a metaphorical and artistic one. By this point, the positioning of Kinsella’s enunciating I/eye is well and truly ambiguous, this is effected through the constant shifts of perspective, voice, and period, in and across the poems and plates of *A Technical Supplement*. We are lead to position the enunciating I/eye in relation to its immediate,

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<sup>198</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 18.

<sup>199</sup> See Appendix VI.

past, and future surroundings, in a process of mapping which is both comparative and accretive.

Then we move from eye to pen, from observation and mental consolidation to artistic creation – a mapping of space:

The pen writhed. It moved  
under my thumb! (TKCP 186)

We return momentarily to the idea of an artistic competitor in the deliberate echo of Seamus Heaney's poem 'Digging'. This can only contribute to the development of the volume's main *idée fixe*: what has been root, point, blade and knife finally becomes pen, tying together the themes of the various illustrated plates.<sup>200</sup> Typically, this progression is at the same time a regression, as the writhing pen may be compared to the wriggling shapes of the Prologue and *One*.<sup>201</sup> Links are not only forged between this instrument and the creative act but also with the sexual act, and the divided self, echoing Poem IV and looking forward to the final three. Finally the proximate senses are invoked, but at the same time there is a disclaimer: culturally instantiated perspectives must be interrogated rather than accepted blindly:

The penetrating senses, the intimacy,  
the detailed warmth, the touch under the shirt,  
all these things, they cling, they delight,  
they hold us back. It is a question of  
getting separated from one's habits  
and stumbling onto another way. The beginning  
must be inward. Turn inward. Divide. (TKCP 187)

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<sup>200</sup> The illustrations from Diderot can be split into two distinct categories – those concerned with writing and those with anatomy. It is the image reproduced on the front cover of the Peppercanister volume that, along with this chain of references, bridges the gap. Presumed by many critics to be a scalpel, it is in fact a eighteenth-century penknife, and it is in this way that the images of incision (anatomy) and those of penmanship (the writing act) are linked.

<sup>201</sup> It is interesting to note here how Kinsella's poetry is constructed to be infinitely self referential: this poem was originally written as a part of *One*, but discarded and reused here (see Tubridy, *Thomas Kinsella*, n.68, 240).

Inevitably, there is a call again to explore the internal workings of the self: a command to 'turn inward. Divide' (*TKCP* 187), and take yet another perspective on the workings of 'the whole thing' (*TKCP* 177).

Poem XVII appeals to the sense of smell as evocative of past experience. Through the memory stimulated by smell we are able to enter, finally, the most intimate external environment of all: the home.<sup>202</sup> However, even this *milieu* cannot escape the images of rupture which occur both in artistic and historical media. Although the musty sense of past in the recollections of the Viking remains introduces, albeit hesitantly, a proper sense of time to the poem, this is not seen as a positive element. Time, like *milieu*, has the power to preserve and define and also to dispel and corrode. Pervaded by the homely smell of baking bread, this place at once offers the comforting intimate immensity that Gaston Bachelard considers fundamental to the essence of home, and at the same time, it is this very intimacy that suffocates. Time becomes physical through aged objects, and these in turn give off a smell of decay. Similar to the excess blood in Poem VII, decay is also seen to be waste, and this inevitable part of existence obsesses Kinsella to the point that the Prologue to *A Technical Supplement* cries '*I swore there would be no waste. No waste!*' (*TKCP* 176) and now recurs. Physical and temporal decay invade the sensory present, obscuring the speaker's vision and interrupting his stream of thought:

For let me see...  
 a few years – say a lifetime –  
 (That bread smells delicious!)  
 over even a thousand years. (*TKCP* 188)

The idea of time as a corrosive force is accentuated when we consider the point or nib which is a major recurring image in the volume. By this poem the image has metamorphosed into a spearhead, but the spears' points can only remain 'unweathered for a period' (*TKCP* 187), and, depicted in 'crusty brown ink' (*TKCP* 187) on 'yellowish Victorian thick paper' (*TKCP* 187), even the translation of the original form into art cannot survive completely.

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<sup>202</sup> See Bachelard: 'the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being' (*The Poetics of Space*, xxxi); 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home' (*The Poetics of Space*, 5).

The sense of time overwhelming and corroding which so influences this poem does not occur again until Poem XX. First we must endure and redefine ingestion through an exploration of the digestive act. Poem XVIII wryly equates mental and physical digestion, while Poem IXX executes a movement from the digestion of food to that of literature, also equating necessities biological and artistic in a way that mirrors Diderot's philosophical preoccupation with *dessin / anatomie*. At the same time as the visual gains complete primacy ('eyes bridging the gap, closing a circuit' (TKCP 189)) there is a hint, again, of ouroboros. After this, the energy of flux and the symbolic life-energy in blood, internal and external, are linked to each other and with the almost Deleuzeian figure of a matrix, where 'nothing completely coincides, and everything intermingles and crosses over'.<sup>203</sup>

...stop in flux, living,  
and hold that encounter from  
the streaming away of lifeblood, timeblood,  
a nexus a nexus  
wriggling with life (TKCP 189)

At the end of Poem XIX the female figure encountered in the previous self-splittings reappears in the guise of a peculiarly Irish *anima*, in a parody of the *aisling*. Brian John implies that the appearance of the female here is destructive, as 'the *aisling* vision of the muse-woman offers a troubling darkness rather than comforting light'.<sup>204</sup> The *anima* guides the speaker further through space, showing him 'all life that has been in the past and is still alive in him'.<sup>205</sup> At the same time this image links to William Petty's project of mapping Ireland, as the *aisling* symbolises that land. Again, space must be experienced and charted in order to create a full knowledge, a sense of *milieu*. Kinsella then comments on old age:

Loneliness. An odour of soap  
To this end must we come,  
deafened with spent energy. (TKCP 190)

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<sup>203</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 532.

<sup>204</sup> John, *Reading the Ground*, 182

<sup>205</sup> Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 317.

Poem XX, on one level about human decay and death, also works as a commentary on any ageing system; the necessity to spend longer keeping clean in order to stave off dissipation into the surrounding environment. Even the final line here, ‘deafened by spent energy’ (TKCP 190), is less oxymoronic than it initially seems when Kinsella’s systems thinking is taken into consideration: the noise and waste produced by inefficiently functioning processes is more obvious than the silence of the system whose control mechanisms function efficiently, and with excess comes an inability to delimit or order space.

Redefinitions as well as fresh definitions must be made, all in the present tense and all with an increasingly full knowledge of the importance of systemisation:

...Time permits  
a certain latitude. Not much,  
but a harmless re-beginning. (TKCP 190)

Poem XXI, in its extreme self-consciousness, makes a move towards the final re-beginning. It refers to all of the previous poems in the volume, particularly the eighteenth. By this point the speaker seems conscious of the dangers of artifice obscuring artistic truth; the idea of the artist adding *ad libitum* to a map in order to make it clearer, more believable, will no longer wash, this can only ever be ‘self-serving, therefore ineffective’ (TKCP 190). There is an obsession with the exiled figure as there has not been before, linking the I/eye finally and explicitly to the musings of Diderot in the epigraph of the volume. The poet-speaker muses on the artistic act in a similar manner to the French thinker, making light of his task whilst at the same time distancing himself from the rest of the world by what he perceives to be the foolishness of the undertaking:

There is more spleen than good sense in all this, I admit – and back to the  
Encyclopedia I go.

(TKCP 175)

remember that foolishness  
though it may give access to heights of vision  
in certain gifted abnormal brains  
remains always what it is.

(TKCP 191)

Through this realisation of this (self-inflicted) exile, we can move on to complete the mapping of the volume of poems, chosen space, and *milieu*.

The final three poems return again to themes of incision and the root/point/blade/knife of the opening poems of the volume. Much as this new incision effects another turning inwards it has a fresh purpose: the splitting of the self. Now multiple, the poetic I/eye moves back into the dark at the end of *One* and in the Prologue to *A Technical Supplement*, more conscious (paradoxically) of this movement into the unconscious. *A Technical Supplement* has lead us through the matrix of the conscious and unconscious worlds, towards this state of increased self-consciousness, by the *anima* figure that we now see become the I/eye's other. Sight, for now, has been exhausted and the enunciating I/eye, although refreshed by the effective mapping of his personal space and psyche, must rest again. The work and process has reached such a point that any further fragmentation of self or image would lead to annihilation:

Another ounce of impulse and  
I might have abolished everything.  
But the starred ruins  
would only have started to divide and creep. (TKCP 192)

For this renewed enunciating I/eye turned map-maker it seems as if 'writing is upheld not by the subject of understanding, but by a divided subject, even a pluralized subject, that occupies, not a place of enunciation, but permutable, multiple, and mobile places',<sup>206</sup> and indeed, the male speaker is spurred to many of these acts by his female counterpart. Here, Kristeva's idea links to the methods of post-modern mapping encouraged by Serres and Deleuze and Guattari. At the same time we can see this modern, energised, multiple subject and space realised in Kinsella's verse. Mirroring the Jungian relationship between man and *anima*, the increasing self-knowledge and ability to map his ever-changing surroundings are directly linked to the concept of the divided self, the man and *anima*. For Kinsella, a human is always *any* human, *a* thing, *any* thing. We are witness to strange mirrorings of self and other which are not so clearly defined as a simple binary mechanism of differentiation would make possible. The parts, 'everybody', 'that face' and 'the head' (Poem XXII), of what has become the 'knifed nous' (TKCP 192) enact a movement away from the primal singular of *One* and

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<sup>206</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 111.

a reversal of Poem III's passive, sterile, architecture. The speaker becomes two, and the empty shell becomes an egg. The poetic voice and vision is still, and finally, complicated through the use of a Jungian-inflected metaphor of mitosis.

Turning slowly and more slowly  
we drifted to rest in a warmth of flesh,  
twinned, glaring and growing.

(TKCP 193)

Thus cartography is linked, through Diderot's dualism of *dessin / anatomie*, to the body as both object and subject, deconstruction, digestion and renewal, systematization, the journey inwards and the split self, and the practice of writing. All of these components are kept apart from each other (thus maintaining their own integrity) but kept together by the energy which powers in the flux inherent in the world. Ultimately, the poetic act is seen as an act akin to self-surgery: in order for it to be true it must, ultimately, belong not to the abstract world but to the *milieu* of poet and the poems' I/eyes. This *milieu*, held together in its multiplicity by the system of threads, folds, or rhizomes that allow it, in the first place, to exist as a multiple entity, is ever-changing and must forever demand to be re-mapped.

CHAPTER 3: KATHLEEN JAMIE

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*Body-space*

*The body is made up of disparate limbs and organs,  
a garment is constructed from pieces and seams.*<sup>207</sup>

*The human body defines the space of origin and of  
distribution of disease: surfaces, volumes, and  
routes are laid down, in accordance with the new  
familiar geometry, by the anatomical atlas.*<sup>208</sup>

In looking at *A Technical Supplement* and Thomas Kinsella's attempt to make a poetic map of space through the idea of the body in space, we have seen a figure, human in its potentiality, deconstruct and reconstruct itself in a continuous process of knowledge-acquisition, linking together adjacent parts, learning about their congruence, and then disassembling and tessellating anew. Kinsella's process is built upon pain and rupture, with the consciousness sporadically reaching enlightenment, then descending into darkness. In this darkness the psyche and its related body exists in a kind of Jungian embryo-stage, a state of physicality pre- (or post-) structure, or at least apart from the consciousness that construction brings. This state is what Michel Serres would call a pre-word world:

In the time before the arrival of the word, the flesh is brimming over... It sleeps during the long, wordless night, surrounded by the golden harvest, so full of the given that it leaves some behind for the gleaners, slumbers beneath the ancient, unnamed stars, daydreams... Flesh dreams of words; language – fruit – takes root in its womb.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 237.

<sup>208</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2003), 3.

<sup>209</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 205.

Once the given arrives, Serres argues, language comes, and the flesh articulates itself. Consciousness links together the ‘disparate limbs and organs’.<sup>210</sup> Serres builds upon Heidegger’s idea of the birth of (or way to) language and a passage to an articulated world:

When the word is called the mouth’s flower and its blossom, we hear the sound of language rising like the earth. From whence? From Saying in which it comes to pass that World is made to appear. The sound rings out in resounding assembly call which, open to the Open, makes World appear in all things. The sounding voice is then no longer only of the order of physical organs... its earthiness is held with the harmony that attunes the regions of the world’s structure, playing them in chorus.<sup>211</sup>

We must move into a stage of conscious being that is as well as, rather than apart from, the body, and it is only when this state is reached that we can begin to express anew and articulate the world that surrounds us. Both Heidegger and Serres argue for the immediacy of a world articulated poetically. Both also depict the way in which one comes (or is born) into this world. Arguably, the strength of Kinsella’s *Peppercanister* poetry lies in its abstraction. However, this, including the scientific plates from Diderot’s encyclopaedia upon which *A Technical Supplement* is built, adds to the difficulty both of the process of reading and of the process that is depicted in the poems. In a recent volume, *This Weird Estate*, Kathleen Jamie also uses scientific plates alongside her poetry. Although her preoccupations are centred on the body space in a theoretically informed way similar to Kinsella’s, Jamie deals with such a body space in a more advanced stage of becoming. Jamie’s becoming is less Jungian than Heideggerian, and explores the relationship between and the strange intimacies called up by the abstract body of the anatomical specimen in contrast to the living human form. Indeed, the poet has documented the preparatory stages in this poetic research, emphasising the importance of the affective as well as the literal point of view.

Unless you have a professional interest, it’s possible that the only bodies you’ve been intimate with, have scrutinised, have been the bodies of lovers

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<sup>210</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 237.

<sup>211</sup> Martin Heidegger, *On The Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York, HarperCollins, 1971), 101.

of children. The act of unhurried, unmediated examination has hitherto been an act of love. Perhaps as a consequence, or perhaps because given the opportunity we do indeed feel for all of suffering humanity, a stranger's arm with his corroding carcinoma, a diseased breast, a kidney taken from a man gassed on the Western Front, all call forth the same plain tenderness.<sup>212</sup>

In *This Weird Estate*, Jamie's poetic body-scapes chart an investigation of the 'human body [as] the space of origin and of distribution of disease',<sup>213</sup> at the same time as layering sympathy on top of the objective, neutral 'observing gaze'<sup>214</sup> of the anatomist or clinician.

Martin Gren states: 'According to the 'Modern Constitution' of scientific practice, a standard trick has been to generate representational systems of meaning that hide or obscure the subjectivity of the human body'.<sup>215</sup> Immediately, the scientific or anatomical plate may be seen to be one of these alienating 'representational systems of meaning'. How, then, to endow the body again with subject-hood after it has been thus made strange, an object of scrutiny? It seems that, alongside the representational systems of meaning necessary for scientific study, a continual consciousness of, and mapping of the self and its processes of being and becoming must exist in order that man does not move from subject- to object-hood. And indeed, *This Weird Estate*'s success lies in its avoidance of commentary (indeed, the explanations given by Jamie at the reading to launch the volume, although illuminating, perhaps explain too much), and in the reinstatement of the subjective state of the physical body which has been rendered objective through the analytical gaze of the scientist. This is much like the task that Serres set himself in writing *The Five Senses*: to escape, or at least write against, 'the scholarly avalanche': the 'derealization' by science of 'the things designated by language'.<sup>216</sup>

As well as creating an analogue with Serres and Heidegger, the poems in *This Weird Estate* recall Jamie's 1999 volume, *Jizzen* (Scots for childbirth), and take place

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<sup>212</sup> Jamie, *Findings*, 131.

<sup>213</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 3.

<sup>214</sup> Foucault: 'The observing gaze refrains from intervening: it is silent and gestureless. Observation leaves things as they are' (*The Birth of the Clinic*, 107). In this way, the gaze of Foucault's clinician can be seen to work in the same way as the gaze of Massey's and Davidson's neutral map-maker (see Introduction, 28).

<sup>215</sup> Martin Gren, 'Time-geography matters', *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, eds. J. May and N. Thrift (London: Routledge, 2001), 212.

<sup>216</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 342.

when being is in a state just before its birth into a new state of being. The investigation of being is further advanced than those explored in *Jizzen*, and builds on the groundwork offered by Jamie's 2004 volume *The Tree House*, which explores a state of being in the world rendered more obviously Heideggerian by her translations of Heidegger's beloved Hölderlin. Echoing what Serres has said of 'the long wordless night'<sup>217</sup> being a sensual limbo-state before linguistic awakening, all of the poems of *This Weird Estate* seem to end, paradoxically, with a sense of beginning, a sense of awakening into a new but strangely familiar homeland and state of being: a Weird Estate. To begin with, *This Weird Estate* spatializes and 'derealizes' the body (and self) to the extent that the front cover has the title hovering, palimpsest-like, over an enlarged detail from an etching of the human heart. The etching is on all sides of the pamphlet – enclosing the poems. It is not even clear to the non-scientist what the etching depicts through the translucent film of the tracing paper upon which the title rests, although it is clear, from the design, that what is to follow will attend to what Jamie calls 'substructure' as well as the visible structure – foundations and skeletons are as important as buildings and flesh.<sup>218</sup> And so, even on this front cover, something is already made strange ('weird'), and that thing may be our geographical surroundings, our humanity, or our *milieu*.

The first plate, accompanying Poem I, makes things slightly clearer. The vertical cross-section of the human heart that adorns the cover of the volume is shown in full, the nerves appearing as if blood vessels, coloured in red. Unnamed, this etching could as easily be a horizontal cross-section of the human brain, were it not for the reddened map of the nervous system.<sup>219</sup> That Jamie's volume is an anatomy beginning with a detail of the heart immediately distinguishes it from *A Technical Supplement*, whose heart, although present in the final pages of the volume, remains 'unlikely' (TKCP 184). Emotion and attachment are prioritized over cerebral functions and scientific, detached process. We are exploring the 'plain tenderness' called up by 'unhurried, unmediated examination'<sup>220</sup> as well as the anatomist's more temporally-bound, purpose-driven, vision. Like Kinsella's volume, however, Jamie's has an immediate geography.

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<sup>217</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 205.

<sup>218</sup> In interview Jamie has stressed the importance of John Stubbs' artistic technique in the formation of this outside-inside point of view, where 'when he paints a living horse you have all this substructure to the painting', (Kathleen Jamie, personal interview, 11 Feb. 2010).

<sup>219</sup> See Appendix VI.

<sup>220</sup> Jamie, *Findings*, 131.

Indeed, the poet herself states of the first plate ‘this image of the brain reminded me of a landscape’.<sup>221</sup>

In order to rediscover its subject-hood it seems that the speaking body of the poem must move away from the ‘derealization’ of the specifically scientific realm, into something even less related. The poem that accompanies the plate locates its enunciating I/eye very specifically, and yet at a further remove than mere visual interpretation of the plate would allow, balancing the scientific objectivity of the coloured etching of the heart with a poetic exploration of the heart’s landscape. Here, we are a part of Jamie’s Scotland, a Scotland as much mental as geographical, and, bar a romantic conception of the heart, apparently not at all related to anatomy. Speaking of the landscape of the poem, the poet recalls that ‘described by Thomas the Rhymer about his journey into fairyland’.<sup>222</sup> The poem itself plunges us further into the unreal, as the voice of the poem, at the linguistic remove created by dialect, reads the ‘map’ depicted on the plate as ‘a kingdom ye nicht gang tae / in Elfyn-ballads an dreams’ (*KJWE* 3). The ‘anatomical atlas’<sup>223</sup> becomes in turn a strange atlas of fairy-land. Foreignness, even, is at a remove from the average reader, articulated as it is by the Scots word ‘fremmit’ (*KJWE* 3) which comes from a different root from the standard English (Anglo-Saxon rather than Latin). The ‘map’, or diagram of the heart, is thus made doubly strange. In contrast to Kinsella’s poetic landscapes, the heart, not the brain, becomes a vehicle for the creation of wonder. Perhaps this is indeed the movement away from scientization and the beginning of the formation of the new ‘knowing subject [...] founded and based on the sweetness and competence of the senses, knowledge attuned to its limbs and the world’.<sup>224</sup>

The voices of Jamie’s poems revel in their dialect depictions of the imagined landscape. In this instance, the ballad-form cannot constrain the language: although, as is traditional, there is a steady b-rhyme, the lines often spill over, with more syllables than the conventional stress-patterns would allow. More an exploration of Thomas the Rhymer’s depiction of fairy-land than of the etching of the human heart, the subject matter of the poem starts a long way from the related plate. However, the relationship with the thirteenth-century poet and visionary is only a starting point for the poem; in spite of its use of the future tense, the poem depicts rather than predicts. There is no refrain, and if this is a ballad it is more a vision of being than an enclosed and

<sup>221</sup> Kathleen Jamie narr., *This Weird Estate*, Kathleen Jamie, track 1.

<sup>222</sup> Jamie narr. *This Weird Estate*, Kathleen Jamie, track 1.

<sup>223</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 3.

<sup>224</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 326.

temporally restricted narrative. Indeed, it commences with simile, and although it closes with a depiction of a landscape, this landscape yet belongs within that structure, moving towards the poetically articulated world of Heidegger and Serres, away from the thirteenth-century visionary from whose imaginings it had begun.

By the end of the poem it is apparent that the land depicted is of the heart and not the land of fairy, and that the poem charts a symbolic journey to self-knowledge in the Heideggerian mould. The weird estate, we discover, is the state of Being. It represents the self, physical and psychological. The clearing into which the traveller alights denotes the enlightenment that can only happen when a lifetime of self-navigation culminates in the combination of physical and psychological knowledge. This clearing is too similar to Heidegger's lightning-clearing, intimately connected with the self and its processes, to be a coincidence, although Jamie herself denies having read any Heidegger, only having encountered his work through that of Hannah Arendt.<sup>225</sup>

Jamie's poem reads:

... years o hart-wrocht traivelin  
maun be tholed afore ye win

intae a clearing, whaur fower  
bare trees gaird ilkane a gate –  
- at lang an last ye'll ken yersel  
laird o this weird estate

(KJWE 3)

and Heidegger states:

Being, by way of its own nature, lets the place of openness (the lighting-clearing of the there) happen, and introduces it as a place of the sort in which each being emerges or arises in its own way.<sup>226</sup>

The moderate pace given by the stress patterns of the ballad form slows down over the first and second lines of the final stanza, and a 'place of openness' indeed opens up within the very space of the poem. 'Whaur fower' reverses the iambic inclinations of the beginning of the first line, and the sense of the phrase is suspended over the line,

<sup>225</sup> Jamie, personal interview. 11 Feb. 2010.

<sup>226</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 59.

with sounds and syllables echoing (whaur / bare). After this opening-out, the poem tightens up again, the long *as* of whaur and bare shortening to *æ* ('ilkane a gate'), and finally the shortest *a* – 'at lang an last'. It is interesting here that Jamie chooses to return to the iambic, and thus that the third line of the stanza does not read 'at lang last'. Having reached the clearing, it seems that the enunciating I/eye of the poem is able to articulate neatly, and with the stress patterns accurately representing those of the implied (ballad) form, the place of Being in which she has arrived. A sense of wholeness is created. However, the poem is not end-stopped. This is the beginning, not the end, of the journey.

The following poem, 'janet', uniquely for this volume, has a title. As the poem represents a slightly disorientating exercise in the use of different speaking voices, the title offers a semblance of stability. Again, the poem is born out of the poet's reaction to the anatomical plate that accompanies it. This time, however, the interpretation is less oblique (the real subject matter of the plate is a part of rather than a starting point for the related poem) and Jamie includes some segments of the surgeon's notes following the operation. The weird estate of the volume's title is perfectly captured here; the impulse towards or wish for the conformity of all human beings, the desire to not be 'weird'.

The poem begins as the previous one has ended – with a sense of wholeness – only for this to be turned on its head. The poetic object, the tumourous growth shown 'Here, at *true size*' (*KJWE* 5), is not meant to be correct or exact, but in its accurate representation in the scientific plate. The central four stanzas of the poem invoke those who, 'born / among the beautiful / justified creatures of Earth' (*KJWE* 5), are not weird, alien. The tumour is held up as if sacrificial. As indeed it is – it is the thing that is depicted in the scientific plate, and it also the thing that has given up its parasitic existence in order for Janet to continue her life (and Lizars his research). Recalling Serres and Heidegger, it is as if this aberration of the flesh has prevented Janet from growing and giving birth to the language which signifies the human state. Rather, she has first to bear this tumour, first suffering six years of growth and a non-anaesthetized operation akin to the pre-enlightenment 'years o hard-wroct traivelin / [which] maun be tholed' (*KJWE* 3) of Poem I. It is as if this poem is a practical application of the formula established in the more oblique Poem I.

Indeed, the poem has similar developmental stages to Poem I, although it has a different stimulus and maps a different process. The 'derealization' occurs linguistically: the tumour is not instantly named – it is 'the object'. Simile then

suspends our anticipation, as it does in Poem I, the subject matter of the poem and its link to the anatomical plate is blurred or made unclear by the poet's preoccupations. Again, there is an indication of temporality, of a journey, and a description, which is the middle section of the poem. In Poem I this was an imagined landscape. However, in 'janet' it is much more 'real' – the description is of the tumour, which is in fact given physiognomic features, and, although it remains an object, it is no longer 'the object', but 'he' (*KJWE* 5). Finally, there is a sense of ending which precedes a new sense of self. In Poem I, we bear witness to both the end and also beginning of a journey in the woodland clearing and the corresponding state of self-conscious lairdship over the place (or *milieu*). In 'janet', the operation and the tumour's removal signals both an end of 'six / miserable years' (*KJWE* 5) of life, and also the beginning of a new life with a hidden scar that shows what had been.

In this poem and plate distance is created through voice rather than interpretation; this combination of word and picture is thus more immediate than Poem/Plate I. Where, in the plate we see only the tumour, its distinctive growths marked 'D', the poem's subject is the creator of this. This creator is at once Janet, who bore the thing, and Lizars, who extracted and documented it. Lizars' voice, in italics, punctuates Janet's. However, the main clause comes with Janet's voice (the italics offer contextualization only). As the poem progresses the division between Lizars' and Janet's voices becomes less clear, until, finally, tumour discarded, the two voices are combined, are a part of one single, uninterrupted, and distinct phrase. The poem ends with Janet stating, in the present continuous, and a seamless mixture between her and Lizars' voices 'I am *daily mending*' (*KJWE* 5). Although punctuated, the sense of this carries on past the end of the poem, whose titular subject's voice gives the being ('I am') to its final phrase. Apart now from the cancerous growth which presumably dominated her life (as it does the poem and plate), Janet is now able to be more and become 'again' (*KJWE* 5) human.

Plate III charts a process of becoming human: nine figures depict the development of a foetus and womb through the months of gestation. Interestingly, however, the scientific focus lies not in the foetus itself but in the ovum which encases it. It is entitled 'Observations on the Extraction of Diseased Ovaria' (*KJWE* 14), and, like Plate II, is by John Lizars. Characteristically, Jamie reverses preoccupations, interpreting rather than describing the plate, as the addressee of the poem is the body inside the 'rind' rather than the 'rind' (*KJWE* 7) that can be seen encasing the body. Jamie also emphasises, in her explanation of the poem, that it is not a baby nor is it a

foetus that she is addressing, but a ‘wee man’.<sup>227</sup> Again, the process of scientific derealization is turned upon its head; made human. The poem opens with an invocation similar in tone to that at the centre of ‘janet’. However, this is directed, not to the perceived healthy viewers of the plate and readers of the poem as in ‘janet’, but to the developing foetus depicted in the plate. Like Poems I and II, this one also enacts a process of opening out, of becoming. However, both the register and form given to this becoming is different. Where Poem I dealt with a Heideggerian sense of worlding in ballad form, and ‘janet’ with a very real de-othering operation in fluid three-line stanzas, Poem III takes sonnet form. The octet invokes and describes the foetus, the first part of the sestet opens this description and state of being out to ‘all of us’, and the final three lines open out even further - to the ‘very Earth’ (*KJWE* 7). As in the last two poems, Poem III is concerned with the journey towards birth, towards human becoming, and away from sleep in ‘the long, wordless night’,<sup>228</sup> a movement that is emphasised by the very last word of the poem, ‘born’ (*KJWE* 7).

After the first line of the poem, the addressee (‘little man, homunculus’) is placed in the centre of the line, the very poetry enacting the enfolding which, in the plate, also encases the foetus. In the octet, imagery, internal rhyme and assonance emphasise aurally the womb-enfolded state of the foetus in the plate:

Little man, homunculus, revealed  
 within your rind; your blinds and veils  
 are drawn gently aside, but you don’t see us  
 examine you in your privacy: eyes

closed fast, you’re asleep. Oblivious –  
 a nut tucked in its shell, seed in a pod,  
 you grow steadily, curled in the coracle  
 which carries you downriver to your birth.

(*KJWE* 7)

This state of enfoldedness is not, however, seen as a permanent one. Where the plate, in its series of nine drawings, charts the progression of the disease and incidentally the passage of the foetus to birth, through the octet the ‘you’ addressed (i.e. the foetus, Jamie’s ‘little man’) moves away from the comfort of the centre of the lines, from the

<sup>227</sup> Jamie narr., *This Weird Estate*, track 3.

<sup>228</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 205.

inside of its shell, pod or coracle, ‘downriver’, to be placed, outside of any other casing, as a pronoun, by the end of the line and ‘birth’ (*KJWE* 7).

The first three lines of the sestet move the subject matter away from the foetus in particular, to its state in general. The assumption that the plate documents a shared state, ‘So it must have been for each of us’ (*KJWE* 7), ignores the scientific anomaly of the ovarian disease - Lizars’ reason for documentation. In these lines, the poetic preoccupation moves away from the idea of the strange (or weird) as anomalous or other, and explores instead the ‘estate’ into which we, in a new stage of being, will, through some sort of process of change or (re)birth, move. It is interesting that Jamie, in this poem, as in many in her earlier volume *Jizzen*, sees the unborn infant as a cargo. However, this growth is less a burden than it is in ‘janet’, as we are not introduced to the bearer. Unborn, the foetus moves through a landscape, unarticulated, but akin to that of the world; perhaps in the sumptuous, pre-linguistic, ‘long, wordless night’<sup>229</sup> imagined by Serres. Again, we can link Jamie’s project in this volume to the states of becoming, or coming into language and the world, as described above by Serres and Heidegger.

It seems natural, therefore, that the final three lines of Poem III deal explicitly with the world and its becoming. As well as opening the poem out to the terrestrial, the final tercet folds this terrestrial in upon itself – what is global also becomes local – as general landmasses finally become Scotticised: ‘tundra, mountains, oceans, glens’ (*KJWE* 7). This geography, however, is a sub clause, and the main clause of the stanza deals with the Earth’s (hypothetical) birth. It is the process of becoming, being, the understanding and mapping of those states, that takes precedence over actual geography. There is a sense that, were geography proper Jamie’s concern, her concern in this poem would have been akin to Lizars’s: the enclosure (noun) of the foetus, rather than its enclosure (verb). We are steadily moving away from the idea of the ‘weird’, or other, as generated through deformity and its expression in scientific discourse, as notated by anatomists and cartographers. The pure and internal geography of the heart and mind described in Poem I that changes in order to accommodate language and a dynamic state of being is still generative. The Weird Estate of the title of the volume is becoming less an exploration of the grotesque, more an acceptance of man’s inability to fully map or understand his Being; a similar affective acceptance of multiplicity that we have seen Montague’s *The Rough Field* and Kinsella’s *A Technical Supplement* work towards.

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<sup>229</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 205.

Poem IV immediately demonstrates the shift from a preoccupation with the obvious, grotesque, or other, to an engagement with the other within ones' self. The corresponding plate is no longer concerned with pathology or disease but anatomy proper. It seems that, visually at least, the process of becoming *This Weird Estate* seems to strive for is less inhibited by the purely physical (i.e. there is nothing anomalous and preventative) here. The form of the poem echoes this sense of becoming and the corresponding solidification of world-view. The short, three-line stanzas echo the form used by Jamie in Poem II, 'janet'. However, these are neater, between four and seven syllables, implying a tightening up of perception on the part of the volume as a whole. There is a distinct progression from Poem III's womb-enclosed foetus's world. Again, this is a variation on the abstract Heideggerian becoming described in Poem I. Here, the body becomes a place to be explored, 'an animal's / lair I almost enter' (*KJWE* 9). Poetic preoccupations lie not only with what is important under the gaze of the anatomist, but also with what is important to the gaze of the layman. The tied hands of the dissected body as well as the dissection are acknowledged. The 'blinds and veils' (*KJWE* 9) of the surrounding skin are drawn aside, as in Poem III, in order to get to 'the human core' (*KJWE* 9). The central stanzas of this poem show, in Jamie's quietly condemning poetic voice, the extent to which science can make of the human something less than what they, potentially, are (Serres's 'derealization'). At this 'human core / lies not the heart // but a forked stick / - a divergence' (*KJWE* 9). Out of this divergence, it seems, can come either death or the scientific, both of which give way to the 'silence' (*KJWE* 9) with which the poem begins, and both positions are illustrated here – the first, death, by the plate; the second, the scientific, by the poetic voice.

Similarly to 'janet' the bounds between operator/observer and the subject of operation/observation are blurred. Where, in 'janet', there is a blurring of the two distinct voices of the first three stanzas in voices in the centre of the poem, which subsequently move towards the internalization by the voice operated on of the voice of her operator, here there is a sense that the illustrator and the illustrated are complicit in the act of creation depicted, although the illustrator 'draws in silence', but it is he, together with the body under observation, that 'illustrate well' (*KJWE* 9). The individuality of subject and observer is also more clearly delineated than in 'janet': the 'we' of the fourth stanza is always split into a 'you' and 'I'. Also, the final voice is given not as in 'janet' to the subject, but to the observer:

we illustrate well:

you with your hands  
bound in the poor  
ligatures of your fate,

while I look deep  
inside you, recording  
exactly what I see.

(KJWE 9)

The poem is neatly concluded, and the final words indicate a progression further than the body of the poem: 'I see' (KJWE 9) is in the present tense. This sight, coming out of silence, implies also a subjectivity and the possibility for alternative interpretations which are neither given here nor at any time before in the volume when voices of observer and observed have been collated ('janet'). The preoccupation with sight echoes but also moves on from the voyeuristic propensities of the speaker of 'janet', since it is from this sight that the plate is made. Interestingly, the plate, like the poem, is distinctly sterile – without blood, or heart. Here, vision creates distance, objectivity, 'derealization'. The true, sensual passage to becoming required by Heidegger and Serres is yet incomplete. There is still some residue of the scientific, thus the unreal, in this volume's progress towards the heady state of language and sensibility.

As with the previous plate, Plate V is taken from Richard Quain's *Anatomy of the arteries of the human body* (KJWE 14). However, here, the corresponding poem is more immediate and human than before, making up for any previous scientific derealization which may have alienated the reader. As with Poem III, which also addresses the 'human', this poem is written in a rough sonnet form. However, the stanzas are split evenly but unconventionally – seven lines apiece – implying both a balancing action and a movement away from traditional manifestations of the chosen form. There is a corresponding movement in the respective positions of I/eye and addressee. Here for the first time the object of study in the scientific plate, the strange, is given a voice. The steady movement we have seen against scientific derealization is blurred, as the poet effects a poetic derealization to counter this science. Equally, the poem moves into a more abstract realm than seen before, reminiscent of the removes of simile Jamie creates in Poem I. We do not see a discernible body in this plate, rather, a

series of drawings of variant positions of the aorta. The poet, instead of being reminded of a strange landscape, as in Plate I, is reminded of other creatures.<sup>230</sup> These creatures, or drawings of aortas, address the human, who takes on the position of the viewing artist and scientist of the previous poems.

The landscape of the heart established in Poem I, and the folly of early science in attempting to equate the emotions with the anatomy, now come to bear. An inquietude similar to Serres' regarding science's numbing 'scholarly avalanche' is expressed, as the speaking voices condemn the human's quest for empirical knowledge:

Human, when you were seized  
 with the need to know  
 what coupled your hearts  
 -- shattered one day  
 ablaze with love the next –  
 to your calculating heads,  
 you opened each other... (KJWE 11)

The humans' quest, framed explicitly here in terms of the heart, leads us back to the preoccupations of the first poem of the volume. The knowledge sought, it seems, is of and through not the brain but the heart, a (semi-metaphorical) seat of thought that science has abandoned, apart from anatomically, and which, it seems Jamie argues, is necessary for the natural process of becoming to be successful. Criticizing 'derealization' - science's ability to make the natural seem as if a machine - opening seems a state yearned for here, because by the human, correspondingly (in the second stanza) by the aortas, as they request to leave, presumably by way of the investigative incision, the mechanized body in order to become a part of an imagined world which yet remains natural.

It is one of Jamie's ongoing poetic preoccupations to explore and articulate a better version of man's relationship with the natural world. In Poem V, we move away from depictions of scientific process back to this sensual realm. Equally, the wooded landscape of the Heideggerian ideal of the first poem seems to return, as the aortas express a desire to 'live decently among animals / - as corals, perhaps, or shy deer' (KJWE 11). The rhythmic, raw sense of being, felt through the pulsing of blood

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<sup>230</sup> See Jamie narr., *This Weird Estate*, track V: 'I was quite enchanted by these shapes – they reminded me of other creatures'.

through the body, closes the poem, all the stronger for the juxtaposition between the machine and the natural that is made in the image of the final two lines. Awash with the blood, discarded, and guilty due to the processes of dissection and scientific analysis through which we have journeyed, a true return to the dreamed landscape of Poem I can never take place. Poem V closes with a verbal articulation of being, ‘pulsing, pulsing’ (*KJWE* 11), which, unpunctuated, implies the continuation of this state of conscious existence.

And so Jamie concludes her volume where Kinsella started his: with a plate depicting the human form in its entirety. This is not a mythic figure, however, nor is it so far from *This Weird Estate*’s beginning, as the X-ray image of the child shows in darkest shadow its veins and arteries, thus enacting a continuation of Plate/Poem V’s aortas and mirroring Plate I’s network of cardiac nerves. We return to a vision of a network of passages similar to the nerve system of the heart in Poem I. Here, however, there is the immediate possibility of the attunement of the entire body, not just the yearning heart, to the surrounding world. As if enacting a resolution or recapitulation, Jamie takes up ballad-form again. However, the voice taken on here is singular, in contrast to the multiple voices of the central poems, and unlike Poem I is written in the first person. This act of self-naming indicates that a progression has been made through the volume above and beyond the basic chronology of the scientific plates and the becomings enacted in separate poems. Birth into a conscious, language-bound world has occurred. The seasons change, symbolically, and Poem VI begins at a moment of seasonal rebirth: ‘at the end of my winter’ (*KJWE* 13). This season is related profoundly to the individual – unlike in ‘janet’, where ‘it’s May now’ (*KJWE* 5), here it is ‘the end of *my* winter’ (*KJWE* 13). The world has opened up to our inhabitant of the Weird Estate – the wood, half personified, gives ‘in her kindness / ... what she could’ (*KJWE* 13). Equally, this wood is now no longer a mindscape of ‘briars an thorns / an springs’ (*KJWE* 3), but real, and life-endowing. It is as if the volume of poems has moved from the clear, enclosed state of world pre-word, into the sensuality, ‘earthyness’<sup>231</sup> and messiness of language-endowed humanity. Thus, although the first and final poems of the volume act as an envelope for its contents, between them, some sort of progression has been made.

Has the volume, then, enacted the progress to the lightning-clearing depicted at the end of the first poem? It is possible: there are echoes in image and poem that cannot be denied. However, we are left questioning why it is that the volume begin with

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<sup>231</sup> Heidegger, *On The Way to Language*, 101.

discovery and end with loss. This works in almost the opposite way to Kinsella, whose enunciating I/eye in *A Technical Supplement* achieves various stages of ontological enlightenment, only to make the choice to sink back into the dark matter of becoming, to lose its sense of being again. We may find the answer to this question, not in Heidegger's text that provides an analogy for the first poem, but in Luce Irigaray's answer to Heidegger: *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. The space left for the human is, initially at least, one of loss. Irigaray reads Heidegger's space of poetic being as a space wherein one is 'always already torn from his soil, always already in mourning. Foreign to that which is most familiar. Out of his element'.<sup>232</sup> What is important here is less the mourning than the corresponding promise of re-birth into a world other than that which has been previously experienced. After all, as has been said previously, continual shifts of perspective and the corresponding re-mappings of space are necessary for a continuous sense of being, otherwise man will shift from subject-into object-hood.

The space articulated in Poem VI is one of mourning but at the same time one of construction. Like Janet before her, the speaker is 'daily mending' (*KJWE* 5). She fills the gap left through loss (a loss which may be the very real loss of a miscarriage, or the psychological one of post-natal trauma), or the derealization of a previously coveted object through scientization, with poetry, with words. The objects that she collects, the 'gifts of the world' (*KJWE* 13), are arranged and rearranged, and are named and placed within her world. In this way, by the end of the volume, the general travelling consciousness of the first poem has managed to break from the 'long wordless night',<sup>233</sup> giving birth to language, which recreates her surrounding space. This consciousness is no longer abstract but embodied and can now be more fully a part of the multiple surrounding world as 'the sounding voice is then no longer only of the order of physical organs [...] its earthiness is held with the harmony that attunes the regions of the world's structure, playing them in chorus'.<sup>234</sup> Arrangement is just a part of creation, and is articulated in a similar listing manner to Heidegger's beloved poet Hölderlin:

beard lichen, lungwort  
blueberry sprigs,  
tendrils of cold moss,

<sup>232</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (1983, Austin, TX: U Texas P, 1999), 122.

<sup>233</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 205.

<sup>234</sup> Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 101.

The volume finally reveals in its entirety Jamie's ongoing preoccupation with the connection between the human and the world, moving from the scientific to the sensual.

Moving back to Jamie's previously published work but forward, in a sense, in the poetic articulation of being, 'Hame' (from *The Tree House*) is a solid exploration and invocation of the Heideggerian idea of home after the departure from the scientific and the process of becoming that we have seen charted in *This Weird Estate*. Written, like Poem I, in Jamie's idiosyncratic poetic Scots it is in fact a translation, at two removes, of Hölderlin's poem (from David Constantine's translation).<sup>235</sup> Here we have, at first hand, an example of poetic, rather than scientific, derealization: the retranslation is based on an affective engagement with previous versions of the poem. The real is translated into dialect words digestible for the voice which articulates it and is thus made, rather than more unreal, or other, closer, more immediate. 'Hame' brings us back to ideas of belonging, quest, and to the Scotland explored in *This Weird Estate*. These ideas are all articulated in a great open space, which is at once brimful of sense impressions and invitingly empty. As with Poem I of *This Weird Estate*, 'Hame' lists objects seen and heard and felt on a vivid journey. This journey is forward looking, ending with a similar sense of well-being to the first poem of *This Weird Estate*: 'an a's weel' (KJTH 28). Jamie can be seen to mature in thought in a similar manner to Serres and Irigaray: away from but always influenced by Heidegger. The world is, for her, as for them, something even wider, airier, more sensual, than Heidegger ever expressed, although it is a world in which it is still true that 'poetically man dwells'.<sup>236</sup> The sensuality of the prose enacts the sense-impressions depicted therein:

Wha's tae ken  
if whiles Ah dauner  
yur back-braes, O Yird  
and pu wild berries  
tae slocken ma luve fur ye

<sup>235</sup> In fact, for her translations (or perhaps more accurately rewritings) of Hölderlin, Kathleen Jamie worked exclusively from other translations, using Constantine's translations as a primary source, and other English translations to provide different angles in to the original text.

<sup>236</sup> A phrase from Hölderlin, explored by Martin Heidegger in his essay of the same title, collected in *Poetry Language Thought*.

- here whaur jags o roses  
and gean trees  
pit oot thur sweet air,  
aside the birks, at noon,

when, in the yella glebe  
grouin corn reeshles,  
and the ickers nod, like at hairst,  
- but nou, ablo the aik's lift,  
wahur ah wunner an spier  
heavenward, yonner  
weel-kent bell jows  
gowden notes,  
at the oor the birds wauken  
ance mair. An a's weel.

(*KJTH* 28)

At dawn, a part of her surrounding world, the speaker, having given birth to language, is able to articulate her surroundings. The abstract 'briars and thorns' (*KJWE* 3) and life-giving 'blaeberry sprigs' (*KJWE* 13) now only manifest the enunciating I/eye's love for her surroundings. Sound and colour are vivid, all expressed in the language of immediacy, which is at once poetic language and Scottish dialect. As well as Heidegger's 'earthyness'<sup>237</sup> there is room for the necessary air of Irigary, although this comes with celebration, not mourning: this is a revelling in the sense and wealth of language celebrated by Serres. The subject matter of the poem moves from the epistemological quest articulated in *This Weird Estate* to a more expressive ontological, existential quest, which in spite of the mention of heaven and the bell ringing is not explicitly theological. The body is a part of, and the means by which we can feel and express the landscape. Like the enunciating I/eye of the poem, the 'weel-kent bell jows / gowden notes' (*KJTH* 28), and 'the sound rings out in resounding assembly call which, open to the Open, makes World appear in all things'.<sup>238</sup> The I/eye is now apart from the derealizing gaze of science, and represents a holistic being that is perpetually changing and opening up new clearings, new places to explore, where sensual

<sup>237</sup> Heidegger, *On The Way to Language*, 101.

<sup>238</sup> Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 101.

perception and articulation reigns and ‘this transformation gives rise to a new world, to new texts, to another form of thought’.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 335.

## CHAPTER 4: SEAMUS HEANEY

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### *Power and Movement*

There have been a plethora of studies on Heaney and place, and the poet himself has not been reticent on the subject. Critics have previously addressed Heaney's groundedness, his sense of place and his articulations of Ireland, and the Heideggerian sense of poetry, being, and place in which he couches most of his own poetic self-reflection is by now taken for granted.<sup>240</sup> This chapter will explore how place, being, and the poetic act are expressed in Heaney's 'bog' poems through the ideas of excavation, of tension, and of mapping. We have seen the generative, traction-producing force of friction foster forward movement in the poetry of Thomas Kinsella. In the bog, however, even in order to move across, one must first sink down. The general vertical inclination thus expressed in these poems does not seek to produce changes in this foreign landscape, rather, a cross-section of the given landscape. Heaney's exploration of the bog is no less a mapping act for the different, 'non-linear', horizontal, direction. After all, 'maps fall between the virtual and the real. Maps permit an excavation (downward) and extension (outward) to expose, reveal, and construct latent possibilities within a greater *milieu*'.<sup>241</sup> The poetry oscillates between these potential downward and outward movements, and there is a contest between the vertical/enclosed and horizontal/open, creating a sense of tension. These tensions are played out on an abstract spatial level as well as at the more microcosmic levels of syntax, diction and line. Ongoing movement between opposites also creates a sense of liminality, as an opposing movement counters anything that appears to lack direction. The enunciating I/eye of Heaney's poems inhabits an in-between space. He is between the oppositions depicted in the poem, as a bridge and a partition. He is in the space of the map.

We have seen Thomas Kinsella express a desire to 'dig down' (*TKCP* 184) at the centre of *A Technical Supplement*, and then echo (perhaps parodying), Seamus Heaney's poem 'Digging':

Between my finger and my thumb

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<sup>240</sup> For example, in his Nobel Prize speech, Heaney speaks of Yeats' 'The Tower' and the 'sheer in-placeness of the whole poem as a given form within the language.' Seamus Heaney, 'Crediting Poetry', *SHOG*, 466.

<sup>241</sup> Abbas, Introduction, *Mapping Michel Serres*, 3.

The squat pen rests.

I'll dig with it.

(*SHOG* 3)

The pen writhed. It moved

under my thumb!

(*TKCP* 186)

Kinsella treats with detached humour Heaney's earnest quest to be, as he has seen his father be, a part of the land. Kinsella's pen is made of imagined organic matter, a part of and the means to probe deeper into the psyche, whereas Heaney's is a solid, blunt instrument with which to work – a tool. At the same time, in his poetry in general, Heaney can be seen to make Kinsella's abstract downward movement ('[I] plunge downward, / fragments falling after me through space. / Down!' (*TKCP* 160)) grounded, literal; moving his reader far away from Kinsella's ego-centric world of the Jungian psyche, to the material, rich, earth of Ireland.

For Kinsella, the metaphor of pen as an instrument for digging is linked to the anatomist's tool, the medium through which the body's space can be divided, analysed, and articulated. Heaney's pen has other antecedents. It is more directly related to the act of poetic creation than Kinsella's (which is tied more closely to psychological rather than poetic introspection). Equally, it is related more directly to the land. Heaney states 'verse comes from the Latin *versus* which could mean a line of poetry but could also mean the turn that the ploughman made at the head of the field'.<sup>242</sup> The relationship between land and page and the corresponding relationship between farming and pagan ritual, as demonstrated etymologically through the Latin *pagus* and its descendants, is key to building an understanding of Heaney's bog poetry. *Pagus* must be at once page, field or patch of land, peasantry, and pagan ritual, just as *versus* must be the line of poetry and the turn that the ploughman makes at the end of a furrow. As the pen can dig, so can the plough or spade:

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods

... going down and down

For the good turf

(*SHOG* 3-4)

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<sup>242</sup> Heaney, *Preoccupations*, 65.

The space of the land is informed by all that comes from it, whether these things are interpretations of relics of the past or the fruits of the seeds of the present, and, as Moulin has stated, 'Heaney never seems to be tired of dwelling on this homely agricultural grounding of literature'.<sup>243</sup> 'Archaeological' ought to be added to 'agricultural' in this statement, as the digging motion is not just to uncover 'good turf' (*SHOG* 4), but also to discover what has made this soil, and what lies within it, in order to be able to more fully express a vision of the surrounding landscape. The notions of 'dwelling' and 'grounding' that Moulin touches on in passing are important in distinguishing Heaney's project from Kinsella's, as they illustrate the difference between the earthy and abstract approaches of these poets. Heaney uses landmarks in his poetry in a similar manner to that which he analyses in his study of Patrick Kavanagh's poetry, creating a world where 'the horizons of the little fields and hills, whether they are gloomy and constricting or radiant and enhancing, are sensed as the horizons of consciousness'.<sup>244</sup>

Heaney tills his fields of the mind whilst at the same time excavating, enacting a downward as well as a horizontal movement and thus discovering through looking at different strata of the soil he tills and digs, evidence of past practices and peoples which he can make analogous, through his poetry, to his present situation. The act of digging, whether it is for agricultural or archaeological purposes, is on both literal and metaphorical levels an inherently spatial act. In order to investigate this spatial exploration further, poetically, it makes the most sense to begin where Heaney himself considered his beginnings – in the ground of the bog.<sup>245</sup> Contrasting the vast open spaces of American pioneer fiction with the Irish equivalent (or at least the Irish equivalent according to Heaney), the poet charts a voyage of discovery:

We have no prairies  
To slice a big sun at evening –  
Everywhere the eye concedes to

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<sup>243</sup> Joanny Moulin, 'Seamus Heaney's *Versus*, or Poetry as Still Revolution', *Back to the Present, Forward to the Past: Irish Writing and History since 1798* vol.1, ed. Patricia Lynch, Joachim Fischer and Brian Coates (NY: Rodolphi, 2006), 244.

<sup>244</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'The Placeless Heaven: another look at Kavanagh', *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry*, ed. Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1988), 182.

<sup>245</sup> 'I had a tentative unrealized need to make a congruence between memory and bogland, and, for want of a better word, our national consciousness. And it all realized itself after 'We have no prairies' – but we have bogs' (Heaney, *Preoccupations*, 54-55).

Encroaching horizon,

Is wooed into the cyclops' eye  
Of a tarn...

[...]

Our pioneers keep striking  
Inwards and downwards,

Every layer they strip  
Seems camped on before.  
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.  
The wet centre is bottomless.

(*SHOG* 41-2)

There is definitely a sense of cross-comparison, of 'them and us', about this poem. It is almost as if the Bog- of the title is an easy and obvious synonym for Eire; Ireland *is* Bogland, and thus comparable to America, the land of the prairie. Eugene O'Brien speaks of 'a fluid dialectical interaction of perspectives' in Heaney, which is the driving motion in the poet's 'desire to create a space where notions of Irishness are pluralized and opened to different influences', a space 'within notions of identity which will always leave room for alterity'.<sup>246</sup> The poem indeed charts a movement into space. The I/eye indeed stands in a space between, apart from both the Irish and the American landscape (perhaps naturally inclined toward the Irish side of things), and charts a comparison. He does not indicate the pros or contras of either landscape, nor the potential for change in either direction. The sense of immediacy, of the impulse to dig into the past and to map the land poetically expressed in 'Digging' is not here. Rather, it seems that 'Bogland' is not a map *per se*; rather, it is a mould which can be used to cast all maps of Heaney's Ireland.

An in-and-out movement can be seen from the very first line of 'Bogland', as the positive idea of owning ('we have') is immediately followed by a negation ('no prairies'). In the following line, there is a sense of incision, emphasised by the

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<sup>246</sup> Eugene O'Brien, *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing* (UP of Florida, 2002), 163, 2, 63.

onomatopoeic ‘slice’, followed by the expansive roundness implied by ‘the big sun’. The sense of the expansive, of something that the speaker feels that Ireland is not, is carried across the following stanza break, as ‘horizon’ extends at the end of the line. This is not without its corresponding inward movement, however, as ‘encroaching’ creates a sense of claustrophobia. As the next stanza begins there is a shift in sense that echoes these smaller pulsing movements: what has seemed to be a description of the horizontal expanse of the prairie changes to one of the vertical bog, and the horizons, through the speaker’s abstract gaze, are sucked downwards to a single point. It is almost as if the idea of sight is reversed here, as vision is ‘wooded into’ not created through (and out of) the ‘cyclops eye / Of a tarn’ (*SHOG* 41).

This movement inwards is not, however, as paradoxical as it may seem, and may, in fact, be a defining feature of the literature surrounding bogs. Diane Meredith states: ‘Bogs are profoundly ambiguous landscapes. Lacking exactness in definition they take on a veneer of imagination. [...] Moving outward and upward without clear borders and without solid substance below’.<sup>247</sup> That the mass of the bog seems capable of reaching up to meet its occupant implies that the occupant is, correspondingly, drawn to the bog. This perhaps explains why Heaney’s poem, influenced by the nature of its landscape, does not see a corresponding movement of poetic preoccupation and spatial impulse inwards in the same manner as Kinsella. We are still mapping Ireland here, not the human psyche. The view ‘in’ therefore creates a movement, not backwards nor into the depths of the psyche, but physically down, into the land. Any progression made is immediately countered by a corresponding opposite movement, and this creates at the same time a sense of stasis and of potentiality. This stasis in movement is maintained over the central stanzas of the poem: the skeleton of the elk comes out of its peat cocoon to be described as ‘an astounding crate full of air’ (*SHOG* 41). Balancing this, butter is taken out from the peat in the same condition it was left there. Time is lost in the bog:

Melting and opening underfoot

Missing its last definition

By millions of years

(*SHOG* 41)

In fact, time here is spatialized utterly, creating a sense of stasis in movement. Equally, in the final stanza of the poem, the peaty layers of the bog are stripped back, only to be

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<sup>247</sup> Diane Meredith, ‘Hazards in the Bog: Real and Imaginary’ *Geographical Review* 92.3 (2002), 319.

found populated, ‘camped on before’ (*SHOG* 42). The indefinite expanses and the corresponding sense of emptiness are countered by settlement, fullness.

The penultimate line of the poem creates, through assonance, an echoing, vertical, empty, sense of openness (‘bogholes’ (*SHOG* 42)) followed by a corresponding, and contrasting, sense of flat, horizontal, contained movement: ‘Atlantic seepage’ (*SHOG* 42). This movement out and in is reversed in the final line, which comes with a squelch (in) and an echo (out), the ‘wet centre’ creating a dull sound which contrasts with the hollow sibilance of ‘bottomless’ (*SHOG* 42). In spite of potentiality in this movement, there has been no great movement here, or indeed, through the whole poem: the landscape is still as impossible to know as it is impossible to have a bottomless centre. Heaney’s vision of Ireland as a bog must be substantiated with an exploration of the previous encampments, finding ‘the good turf’ (*SHOG* 3), both literally and metaphorically. The poetic mould created in ‘Bogland’ must be used through explorations of the bog’s contents in order for the preoccupations aired in that poem to become less general, more particular.

‘The Tollund Man’ explores the contents of a bog. As in ‘Digging’ there is a tension between outside and inside, real and imagined movements: the speaker imagines a journey to Aarhus to see the bog man there, and then describes this bog man as vividly as if seen in the flesh already. The poem’s ballad form, and the appearance of adherence to that convention in the first line (‘Some day I will go to Aarhus’ (*SHOG* 64)), is straight away contradicted by a lack of any rhyme. The lack of rhyme and the idiosyncratic stanza structure (four line stanzas with a slightly shorter second and final line) are adhered to throughout the poem, making a constant fluctuation between an expected rhyme (and for that matter an expected rhythm) and then that expectation not being realised. Heaney places himself both inside and outside the ballad tradition in the same manner as he regards any tradition, or indeed, place.

In the flat country nearby  
Where they dug him out,  
His last gruel of winter seeds  
Caked in his stomach

Naked except for  
The cap, noose, and girdle,  
I will stand a long time.

(*SHOG* 64)

The out and in movement in the description of the bog man, and the corresponding sense of movement and stasis, mirrors the poet-speaker's own feelings of displacement. Even if this is only a journey of the mind, he is able to rest awhile next to this equally displaced being. As the poem closes, the description of the Tollund man mirrors the I/eye's lack of place, or *milieu*. The displacement is made all the more poignant by the apparent expectation that it is possible to become placed, and, through an articulation of place name, to know a place and a moment of the past more fully:

Something of his sad freedom

[...]

Should come to me, driving,

Saying the names

Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard

(*SHOG* 65)

According to Michael Parker, Heaney's poetic technique places 're-emphasis on place-names as loci of cultural history, and [the] perception of the residual and potential poetry locked in etymology'.<sup>248</sup> This technique is, according to Parker, inherited by Heaney from John Montague, whose poetic placings, displacings, and replacings enacted through the variant names of a place always eventually leave the over-articulate speaker in a space between. The position of Heaney's I/eye in bog land, a landscape traditionally lacking any empirical means of definition,<sup>249</sup> only accentuates this sense of displacement, or plurality of place. The paradoxical sense of displacement of the I/eye is more often than not projected onto the situation at hand: rather than the bog itself he concentrates attention on his journey of the mind through the settled areas around the bog and his poetic description and exploration of the bog man:

Out there in Jutland

In the man-killing parishes

I will feel lost,

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<sup>248</sup> Michael Parker, 'Woven Figure: Seamus Heaney and Nationalist Fiction', *Back to the Present Forward to the Past*, 39.

<sup>249</sup> 'Mire, muck, morass, moor [...] there are raised bogs, level bogs, string bogs, blanket bogs, quaking bogs, eccentric bogs, and many others' (Meredith, 'Hazards in the Bog', 319).

Unhappy and at home.

(*SHOG* 65)

There is a constant oscillation between images from the present and the past, and between movements on the vertical and the horizontal axes, leading to a sense of stasis, which, in its amount of contained energy, verges on the abstract. Both Heaney, his projected speaker, and his poetic eye, live in the multiply populated poetic (dis)place constructed by the poem. At the same time as they need this generalized dwelling place to be made real, displaced from the real dwelling place of any land, they cannot afford to effect the creation of this concrete reality. The bog landscape is the perfect locus, being as it is untillable, uncontrollable, not easy to define, at the same time as supporting a rich and diverse ecosystem, and a level of acidity that preserves rather than corrodes.

Illustrating one of man's previous attempts to give meaning to this changeable landscape is the Germanic pagan goddess Nerthus, who, according to Tacitus, was the earth goddess, and correspondingly associated with fertility.<sup>250</sup> Also a place name, Nerthus is considered to have been located in the bog land of Zealand in Denmark. Combining the page, the land, and the pagan ritual that comes from it, the short lyric 'Nerthus' illustrates in four lines the grounded oscillating movement that we have seen so far to be typical of Heaney, and equally the poet's own thought that 'poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as a distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves'.<sup>251</sup>

For beauty, say an ash-fork staked in peat,  
Its long grains gathering to the gouged split;

A seasoned, unsleeved taker of the weather  
Where kesh and loaning finger out to heather.

(*SHOG* 66)

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<sup>250</sup> Heaney himself speaks of the bog, the parallels between Germanic and Irish pagan myth, and of the similarities between land-goddesses Nerthus and Erin: 'It turns out that the bogs in Northern Europe in the first and second centuries AD contained the shrines of the god or goddess of the time [...] you have a religion centring on the territory, on a goddess of the ground and of the land, and associated with sacrifice. Now in many ways [Ireland] is associated with a religion like this, with a female goddess who has appeared in various guises'. 'Mother Ireland' in *The Listener* (7 Dec. 1972), 790.

<sup>251</sup> Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue*, 108.

Invoke the bog and she will reach back out to you. The expansive sibilance at the centre of the first line of 'Nerthus' is enclosed in the blunt assonance of 'beauty' and 'peat', words which in themselves and the imagery that they create, would not otherwise correspond. A similar thing happens in the second line, but this time it is the hard assonance of 'grains gathering' that is enclosed by an interesting sibilance ('its' / 'split') which both echoes and reverses itself, a trend of reversal continues in the third line with 'seasoned unsleeved' (*SHOG* 66). At this stanza break, the landscape of the poem opens out. In the first stanza, the only real movement has happened on the vertical axis, with the ash-fork 'staked' in the ground. In the second stanza this movement becomes horizontal, as bridge and by-road 'finger out' (*SHOG* 66) across the landscape. In other words, the second stanza effects the corresponding counter-movement to the first, echoing, on a greater geographical scale the pro/regressive movements in the poem. The vertical landscape is made to seem the more familiar, the hand reaching from the bog, 'unsleeved' (*SHOG* 66), bare to the eye. The 'fingers' of that hand, the kesh and the loaning, are man's attempts to master the landscape, which, in spite of them, remains bog and heather. This type of mastery does not figure in the poetic landscape that is at work here. Dialect sets these bog traversing bridges and tracks at a remove both from the reader (whose primary language is presumed to be standard English) and the assumed (English) voice of the poem. The paradoxical impulse to map downwards is not swayed by the easy tracks that punctuate and map the bog land.

As the angle of vision moves down in order to discover, there is a corresponding movement in the vision of the surrounding landscape. The horizons collapse into the bog, as we have seen in 'Bogland', and at the same time these horizons also collapse into the point of enunciation in the poem, as exemplified by the final three stanzas of 'The Tollund Man'. The I/eye becomes a point of articulation as particular in its geographical co-ordinates as 'Nerthus's' 'ash-fork' (*SHOG* 66). In this way the short poem demonstrates an experience of the world through absorbing and rearticulating the landscape, paying attention to all related sensory experiences. *Pagus* is both the land and the page upon which the poetry rests. The I/eye and the bog are as if one. This is nowhere better expressed than in 'Bog Queen', the only one of Heaney's bog poems where he gives to the bog body the speaking voice of the poem. The implied female figure or earth goddess of 'Nerthus' is made more real. The cocoon of the bog is equally actualized in this poem as the imaginings of one of Heaney's bog bodies are articulated, again as unconscious of the passage of time as the fruits of the bog in 'Bogland', which miss their 'last definition / By millions of years' (*SHOG* 41).

However, as in the poems that we have looked at above, the poem's energy is generated less by a forward movement than by an oscillation in meaning, image, sound, and form. Rather than between an abstract then and us, as in 'Bogland', in 'The Bog Queen' oppositions are constructed between an equally abstract then and now. However, past is sunk into the sumptuous preserver of bog, and articulated through the body of the bog queen, emphasised by the repeated 'I lay waiting' (*SHOG* 112) (all the more poignant because of its tense, the past continuous) and the lists of her surrounding items.

The bog queen's world – the dark world of the bog – is a rich sensory concentration of elements. Existing below, on Heaney's vertical axis, she is a part of the bog, and yet, with the things that surround her she dreams also of the horizontal: she is also a part of the outer world. The *milieu* created here is rich and diverse: from the Baltic, to Phoenicia, to the fjords. But in the end, the bog is a part of the land (*pagus*) and thus a part of the page, the poetry. The bog-queen's body is 'Braille for creeping influences' (*SHOG* 112), and the open, the land, the page, sinks into the bog, making that its subject matter. Queen and landscape, voice and image, exist in a symbiotic relationship. The horizontal collapses into the vertical, and the bog queen states

I lay waiting

On the gravel bottom,  
my brain darkening,  
a jar of spawn  
fermenting underground

(*SHOG* 112)

The bog contains this rich repository. With the light (and, analogously, the present) all that has been built up in the poem, the queen's *milieu*, is shattered. She becomes 'hacked bone, skull-ware, / frayed stitches, tufts, / small gleams on the bank' (*SHOG* 114). The motley mixture of textures which comprise her and her surroundings are no longer rich in meaning; now they are not contained and preserved by the bog but are seen as waste. Where the closed vertical landscape has preserved, the open horizontal dissipates. Heaney's preferred *milieu* and movement, therefore, is still of and in the bog.

The following five poems in *North*, 'The Grauballe Man', 'Punishment', 'Strange Fruit', 'Kinship', and 'Act of Union', all explore bog landscapes. All end with a sense of openness similar to 'Bog Queen', the final lines of the poem articulating an emotion

or action which seems incongruous in image and tone with the dark, enveloping, bog land with which the main body of the poem is concerned. 'The Grauballe Man' closes with a violent movement ('slashed and dumped' (*SHOG* 116)) that opposes both the bog man's original comfortable cocoon and the image of the man which 'lies / perfected in my memory' (*SHOG* 116) earlier in the poem. A miniature version of this movement from peace to violence can be seen in 'Punishment'. The strength of the oppositions in the poem intensify and finally the bog body is addressed, and its relations and its fate questioned:

who would connive  
in civilized outrage  
yet understand the exact  
and tribal, intimate revenge. (*SHOG* 118)

The fate of this bog person has been at once diffuse and exact, as the descriptions combine and collide. There is an oxymoron, 'civilized outrage', and the expanse 'tribal' evokes is held between and contradicted by the precise 'exact' and 'intimate', both words evoking a vertical, enclosed, intimacy similar to that of the bog queen, and the spirit of the bog evoked in 'Nerthus'. This intimacy has been enclosed in the general pagan description 'tribal' and emotive impulse 'revenge'. These words, however general they may be in contrast to the precision of 'exact' and 'intimate', are concentrated towards a single end: the punishment of the girl's infidelity. Thus, in spite of increasing self-consciousness, the poet's impulse towards the horizontal is still held within the confines of the vertical. His poetic consciousness thus remains constricted by a single point, an 'ash fork staked in peat' (*SHOG* 66).

As the explorations of the bog continue, poetic self-consciousness increases, and the poetic mould supplied by 'Bogland', and its success begins to wear thin. Relatively early in the series of bog poems, however, 'Bog Oak's' excavation leaves the enunciating I/eye conscious of poetic influences:

Perhaps I just make out  
Edmund Spenser,  
dreaming sunlight,  
encroached upon by

geniuses who creep  
 'out of every corner  
 of the woodes and glennes'  
 towards watercress and carrion.

(*SHOG* 44-5)

Here we can see ideas of inheritance being carefully balanced; a poet-speaker stuck between the English poetic tradition and the land of Ireland. As in Montague's *The Rough Field*, the position of the I/eye is doubly estranged. The sense of strangeness and of displacement is emphasised by the appearance of the same give and take, the same pulsing movement, as we have seen power so many of Heaney's poems; here, between the ephemeral and the solid. The lines of the first stanza run from tentative perception, to fact, to abstract impression, and finally to solid movement. The general image, with its embedded quotation from Spenser, in the final stanza's first three lines is subtly juxtaposed with the sensual immediacy of 'watercress and carrion' (*SHOG* 45).

The sense of displacement or search to be placed in this poem is also articulated through tone and choice of subject matter. Edmund Spenser is only tentatively distinguished from the rest of the illuminated – only 'perhaps' (*SHOG* 44). The light seems to disturb the speaker's view of the surrounding landscape, and the tentative view of Spenser becomes more fully articulated as the poem quotes from his *View of the Present State of Ireland*. However, nothing politically charged is taken from this document (which was overwhelmingly biased towards a view of the Irish as backward and pagan: 'it is the Fatal Destiny of that land that no purposes whatsoever which are meant for her good will suffer' (*JMCP* 62)). The avoidance of politics implies that here at least we must remain content with the in-between position, and peacefully seek to take what we like from both perspectives. Like Spenser before, this poem will make a map of Ireland. However, unlike Spenser, 'dreaming sunlight' (*SHOG* 44), this map will be more substantial, more connected to the actual land. There is no space here for the generality of 'woods and glennes', and certainly none of Spenser's anglicised 'oak groves' (*SHOG* 44). Rather, we look down and use all the senses, perceiving 'watercress and carrion' (*SHOG* 45); the juxtaposition of bog and nature here is representative of 'the organic (growing and decaying at once)' power that Helen Vendler sees characterize Heaney's bog poems.<sup>252</sup> Even these final lines, however, hover between the position of the I/eye (the rest of the poem has defined the surrounding land through negatives) and that of the incomer, personified here as

<sup>252</sup> Vendler, *Soul Says*, 190.

Spenser. However, the poem could well have spiralled into a lyric celebration of abstract openness, or poetic licence. Ending with 'watercress and carrion', we can be sure that the poet's main preoccupation still lies with the land, rather than the creation of a self-conscious poem produced through the metaphorization of that land.

'Punishment' illustrates a movement further towards the poetic self-consciousness and potential openness that Heaney's speaker seems to seek. Half way through the poem the I/eye positions himself directly in relation to the perceived bog body:

I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed

and darkened combs,

your muscles' webbing

and all your numbered bones

(*SHOG* 118)

Although these five lines enact some sort of inventory or dissection of the bog body, the poetic practice of excavation (what Jon Stallworthy has called Heaney's archaeology)<sup>253</sup> is still more an act of digging down than it is one of opening up. We look on, delving into the brain, muscle and bones of this body, preserved by the bog, and creating from them a poem. The poem's I/eye is truly, and without coyness or deceit, the 'artful voyeur' (*SHOG* 118).

Following on from this, the sonnet 'Strange Fruit' enacts in its very form the containment of the bog. Beheaded, the bog person in this sonnet quite literally falls into the category of Heaney's displaced. The beheadedness is depicted in both the subject matter and the form of the poem: it is only the octet that describes this bog person, and after the octet, grounded in the bog, the sestet opens up to abstract feeling and conjecture. The head is described as much as a part of the bog as it is a part of a (preserved) human body. Whilst the bog reaches out to the passer-by in 'Nerthus', here, the body can be seen to be a microcosm of the bog: 'Her broken nose is dark as a turf clod, / Her eyeholes black as pools in the old workings' (*SHOG* 119). With time, the poet implies, each person becomes a part of the land from whence they come. However, the fact that it is only the head of this girl that is described (her body, it

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<sup>253</sup> See Jon Stallworthy, 'The Poet as Archaeologist: W.B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney' *The Review of English Studies* 33 (1982), 158-174.

seems, was inhumed elsewhere) illustrates that the poet has not forgotten his ongoing exploration of the idea of place and displacement.

Although the sonnet form encloses, the corresponding engagement with tradition opens up a realm of poetic possibilities and a new frame of reference. Like the glancing references we will see to Tacitus in 'Kinship' and that we have seen to Spenser in 'Bog Oak', the frame of reference in 'Strange Fruit' opens out to include other writers. The sestet mentions Diodorus Siculus, an ancient Greek chronicler, but does not lay emphasis on Diodorus Sicilius' historical scholarship, but rather on his affinity with the people of the bog, mirroring that expressed by the speaker at the end of 'The Tollund Man'. Again, a relationship is established between the act of chronicling (or mapping) the land, the bodies buried in that land, and the poetic act of investigation. 'Kinship' explores further the strange affinity with the bog bodies first expressed in the final stanza of 'The Tollund Man'. The poem opens by equating the writing act, the land, and the bog body:

Kinned by hieroglyphic  
peat on a spreadfield  
to the strangled victim,  
the love-nest in the bracken,

I step through origins

(*SHOG* 120)

Progression towards a greater sense of the potential of poetic space is made: we 'step through origins'. However, in spite of the sense of travelling on the horizontal plane created by the first three stanzas, it is not long before the vertical gains primacy: 'I walk down / rushes and heather' (*SHOG* 120). The matter growing out of the bog catalyses a state of thematic introspection that the angle of vision of the poem then follows. As in 'Nerthus', the bog land is mapped onto the body, with echoes of pagan images:

each open pool

the unstopped mouth  
of an urn, a moon-drinker,  
not to be sounded  
by the naked eye

(*SHOG* 120-1)

Bog land is to be penetrated, not crossed. It is the bog that reaches out to the human, not *vice versa*. The sound world of this section of the poem mimics the dropping motion of water into these seemingly unplumbable bog-pools. Continuing this vocal and verbal method of discovering the landscape, the second section of the poem moves on to name and rename the landscape, and, in a similar manner to the cataloguing of names in 'The Tollund Man', seeks to understand it further:

Quagmire, swampland, morass:  
the slime kingdoms,  
domains of the cold-blooded,  
of mud pads and dirtied eggs.

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

(*SHOG* 121)

Perhaps surprisingly, it is the bog rather than the I/eye that is given a primacy and tutelage of vision here: a 'pupil of amber'. It is softer, simpler, than any other similar landscape – compare the first to the second stanza of the poem. The bog is not easier to define than any other landscape, but is nonetheless easy to sink into. Personified in the previous section of the poem, here the bog is given human functions as well as features. These human functions lie alongside descriptions of the bog, and the bog, instead of being a manifestation of human life, has the power to ingest and insume, taking life away at the same time as preserving its remnants. 'Insatiable bride' (*SHOG* 121), the bog is equated with Nerthus, the pagan earth goddess after whom the earlier poem was named. It is equally a part of the physical psychological landscapes that surround this I/eye. 'Outback of my mind' (*SHOG* 122), the bog landscape has all the potential to open up, drawing our angle of vision out to a vast expanse of horizon, as well as plumbing deeper down into a single point.

The third section of the poem sees the love for the bog that was expressed in the first section become less lyrical and general, more physical, sexual. Where, in 'Digging' for want of a spade the enunciating I/eye of the poem finds between his finger and thumb a pen, and vows to 'dig with it' (*SHOG* 4), here he comes across a turf

spade. The natural impulse to free the spade from its place of hiding in its 'green fog' (*SHOG* 122) of non-work, to upend it, and to 'dig with it' is too much. The vegetation is split back, exposing the bog as 'a tawny rut' (*SHOG* 122) in the landscape, and the turf-spade is planted in the ground:

the shaft wettish  
as I sank it upright

and beginning to steam  
in the sun.

(*SHOG* 122)

After the concentrated action of sinking the spade into the bog, there is a corresponding relief, an exhalation, as there is a hint of airy openness as steam from the shaft is visible in the rays of the sun. This is not the only set of opposing movements in this part of the poem however. The first four stanzas comprise a past narrative: the act of sinking the spade into the bog. In middle of the fourth stanza the poem moves into the present tense.

And now they have twinned  
that obelisk:

among the stones,  
under a bearded cairn  
a love-nest is disturbed,  
catkin and bog-cotton tremble

as they raise up  
the cloven oak-limb

(*SHOG* 122)

This twinning is also an opposing movement, balancing the poem's narrative. Where the acquired stake is plunged into the bog in the first section by the enunciating I/eye, here, an anonymous 'they' raises from the bog an 'oak limb'. Like the ash twig in 'Nerthus', the oak limb is similarly forked, or 'cloven'. Our I/eye is again displaced, at a crossroads between past and present, personal and abstract actions, plunging down and raising up.

At this crossroads, a place where in folklore encounters are likely to happen, there is finally an encounter with the Nerthus, who has been implied so often in Heaney's bog poetry but never before directly stated. The crossroads is not only at a break in place and movement but also at a break in temporality:

I stand at the edge of centuries  
facing a goddess.

(*SHOG* 123)

Time is spatialized. For the first time in the poem, the I/eye looks across rather than downwards. Nerthus is at once a bog and any bog, representative of and represented by this strange landscape. The closing lines of this third section (above) articulate the possibility of a different sort of existence. This existence would involve a departure from the oscillation between opposites and the concentration on a single point or marker, and would be catalysed by an opening out of perception.

This centre holds  
and spreads,  
sump and seedbed,  
a bag of waters

and a melting grave.

(*SHOG* 123)

The sibilance in the lines above accentuate the seeping movement, and are held in place by the firmer consonantal sounds which begin and end the phrase, in turn these sounds accentuate the holding of the centre. 'This centre' is abstract. It is the point of the turf-spade's penetration into the ground and the point from which the other 'obelisk' (*SHOG* 122), the oak-limb, was raised. It is the raised goddess, and is thus the entire bog distilled in a single person or symbol. It is then directly equated with language and (poetic) composition: it 'is the vowel of the earth', 'a windfall composing / the floor it rots into' (*SHOG* 123). Being a part of bog land, the centre is also a sump, a place into which living material sinks and is destroyed at the same time as being preserved, and the bog is indeed 'the vowel of the earth' (*SHOG* 123), an expansive and expanding space in between the glottal stops, or place markers, that consonants provide. From this transient place where landscape and language combine, *pagus* at once gives birth to page and land and ritual, and origins are discovered:

I grew out of all this  
 like a weeping willow  
 inclined to  
 the appetites of gravity.

(*SHOG* 123)

Of course, the weeping willow is not indigenous to bog land. The I/eye, however, is now rooted in the bog, and instead of being a part of the bog, grows from it, the very place that this sort of rooting is impossible. Like the upended turf-spade and ash fork, the I/eye attempts to become a point of focus, a locus in the surrounding landscape, and acknowledges the inclination to move downwards into the bog. This downward inclination is now countered by the natural movement of growth - up and out of the bog. This growth, because unstable, not to say impossible (the weeping willow grows nowhere near bog land, and the bog willow grows horizontally), means that the exploration of origins is typical of that in landscape of the bog. The idea of a stable origin is still something that must be explored. The fifth section of 'Kinship' extends this idea of origins. In this section the poem takes on the voice of an original inhabitant of the bog landscape, a voice which is a part of the past. Apart from the first person pronoun, there is no concentrated point of focus in this section, and although it explores origins, contrary to expectation, the section does not dig down. Rather, the speaker, an attendant of a cart driver, moves across the landscape, no doubt over 'kesh and loaning' (*SHOG* 66) similar to those of 'Nerthus'.

Section VI of 'Kinship' opens with an address to Tacitus. Tacitus, in his ethnographical work *Germania*, documented the existence of the goddess of bog land and fertility, Nerthus. There is a natural movement in the sequence: having witnessed the I/eye locate its (or an) origin, we now see the origin of the goddess. Having previously stood 'at the edge of centuries', and facing 'a goddess' (*SHOG* 123), we now look out over the bog land, on the very edge of the history that is buried layer upon layer in this land, and make in those surroundings a home. This home is less than homely, however. Similar in its combination of oppositions to the close of 'The Tollund Man', whose speaker feels 'lost / Unhappy and at home' (*SHOG* 65), here, 'a desolate peace' is found in a 'grove / on an old crannog' (*SHOG* 125). The enunciating I/eye of this poem, then, is still at the crossroads between movements, places, and impulses. As in 'Nerthus', the movement that complements this displacement is downwards. The poem plumbs the bloody history of those inhumed in the bog, and,

after this catalogue, it is the bog which closes the poem, swallowing ‘love and terror’ (*SHOG* 126). The bog, a surrounding landscape and a goddess, ultimately neutralises everything within her reach, making it all a part of or indistinguishable from her vertical landscape. The male speaker’s colonising downward impulse at the start of the poem is turned on its head, made feminine, as the bog is finally seen to be the controlling power in the landscape.

In ‘Kinship’ the sexual act is mapped onto the bog landscape, and, although feminized, the bog is ultimately still land, not woman. ‘Act of Union’ reverses this. The bog landscape here is mapped onto the female body. The poem depicts not the sexual act but its aftermath: the moment before birth. Interestingly, the poem begins with an indication, not of spatiality but of temporality (‘tonight’ (*SHOG* 127)). However, this beginning is followed by movement, and the energy and the female body that inhabit this time and create this energy are spatialized. The woman’s waters break:

As if the rain in bogland gathered head  
To slip and flood: a bog-burst,  
A gash breaking open the ferny bed.  
Your back is a firm line of eastern coast  
And arms and legs are thrown  
Beyond your gradual hills... (*SHOG* 127)

The violence of the moment seems beyond the control of the poem’s enunciating I/eye. But still he seeks to lay his claim on this land, being ‘the tall kingdom on your shoulder’ (*SHOG* 127), and ‘still imperially / male’ (*SHOG* 127). The tension in this possession lies, not in the decision of the female but in the body that is forcing itself out of her. Indeed, the woman (or land) is as if foreign to the voice of the poem, at the same time as being in his possession, and, steeped in the language of the coloniser, he states ‘I grow older / conceding your half-independent shore’ (*SHOG* 127). Although the time of birth ‘culminates inexorably’ (*SHOG* 127) the foetus is still contained within the woman. A ‘legacy’ is ‘inexorably’ arriving, but is contained in the moment of action which is not yet there.

Thus the poem exists, after conception and before birth, in a limbo stage, a transient place. As in ‘Nerthus’ and ‘Kinship’ the sense of displacement is out of immediate control. The viewer of the scene is never a part of it: he is ‘lost, / Unhappy and at home’ (*SHOG* 65). Unlike in the beginning of ‘Kinship’, he is unable to act

with, or upon, the land; he can only describe the events taking place. Beginning 'And...' (*SHOG* 127), the second sonnet is both an afterthought and a continuation, and is established in the same state of temporal and physical in-betweenness as the first. A reaction to the original (implied) penetration inwards, the foetus moves in the opposite direction, an inverse relationship with the woman (or land) to that we have previously seen.

Unlike the bog in 'Kinship', here the woman cannot absorb all that surrounds her, making it a part of the greater whole. There is an irreversible movement outwards. The poem concludes:

...No treaty  
 I forsee will salve completely your tracked  
 And stretchmarked body, the big pain  
 That leaves you raw, like opened ground, again. (*SHOG* 127-8)

The penultimate line of the poem is iambic, but the fifth foot needed for the traditional iambic pentameter of the sonnet form is missing. There is an opening in the space of the poem, and the 'big pain' echoes across the line. As this 'pain' rhymes with 'again', which in turn refers the reader back to the very beginning of the poem, there is a vague sense of cyclic time as the poem ends, but equally, a sense that all will not be the same. Progression in perception has been made. Angle of vision moves upwards and outwards as well as concentrating on the vertical being in the plunging movement that has characterised so many of the bog poems. Finally, the land (although here land is just a simile) has been opened up without a corresponding inward movement. The eye is no longer drawn in but across, with the tracks and stretch marks on the woman's body echoing the 'kesh and loaning' (*SHOG* 66) of Nerthus.

Throughout Heaney's bog poems we have seen the collective I/eyes move towards the open through various stages of perception and knowledge in relation to the land, whether that 'open' is a patch of ground or an existential space. Interestingly, the poet also considers this 'open' can be articulated in the space of the poetic line. Heaney equates the open, empty, or excavated ground with the vowel sounds: 'Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground' (*SHOG* 163). Now that the bog has been explored poetically, openness becomes not the result of a violation but something to be sought. The horizon is reinstated to its conventional place in the distance. There is less a collapse of the axis of movement than an expansion, a vowel-heavy exhalation. Unlike

in *The Rough Field*, in Heaney's poetry old moulds do not need to be broken in order for a purer or more relevant poetic space to be reached. Revision recycles rather than revolutionalises. Indeed, *District and Circle* sees Heaney return again to the site of one of his first poetic explorations in bog land. The six sonnets that make up 'The Tollund Man in Springtime' explore the idea of poetic inheritance and the bog motif, and their final lines, with a quiet nod to the turf-cutting figure of Heaney's father, are almost valedictory. The I/eye acknowledges the spectral in-between position of his vision and voice, and moves away from the dust of a now desiccated 'bunch of Tollund rushes' (SHDC 57):

Dust in my palm  
 And in my nostrils dust, should I shake it off  
 Or mix it with spit in pollen's name  
 And my own? As a man would, cutting turf,  
 I straightened, spat on my hands, felt benefit  
 And spirited myself into the street. (SHDC 57)

As the rushes, symbolic of the cultural poetic relationship to bogland, become dust, we are faced with biblical and alchemical images which imply the possibility of a future return to the mould of bog land. Out of the act of bog-excavation, space is created in order to build anew, and our 'horizons of consciousness'<sup>254</sup> expand.

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<sup>254</sup> Heaney, 'The Placeless Heaven: another look at Kavanagh', *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry*, 182.

## CHAPTER 5: THOM GUNN

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### *Gendered space, poetic (dis)place*

In reading the bog poems of Seamus Heaney, we have seen power created from the contest between oppositions of image, language, or sound. Looking at the displacement of Heaney's I/eye, we have seen what Eugene O'Brien has called an "opening" [...] [which] is an important ethical strand in Heaney's writings; it is the creation of a space within notions of identity which will always leave room for alterity'.<sup>255</sup> These same tensions, this same sense of opening out, of alterity, are characteristic of the poetry of Thom Gunn. Paul Giles has identified in Gunn's poetry an 'inherent dialectic' or 'crosscurrent' that results in 'scenes of perpetual destabilization and radical ambiguity', and 'an in-between world that is not positively one thing or the other'.<sup>256</sup> Thom Gunn has called this trend in his poetry 'the play of constant give and change' (*TGCP* 483). The space of this play is inhabited or visualised and thence articulated by an enunciating I/eye, who, in Gunn's poetry, is almost anonymous, dwelling in a space distant from subject matter and readership. Gunn himself stated: 'People [...] [have] difficulties in locating the central voice or central personality. I'm not aiming for central personality'.<sup>257</sup> Gunn's poetic enunciating I/eye thus can be seen to inhabit intentionally an in-between space.

Without the definite centre that a solid, placed, speaking 'I' gives, it is initially difficult to pin down the space of the poem itself. In Gunn's poetry we are confronted with a poetic voice that inhabits a liminal space, somewhere before or between becoming(s), where both the I/eye and his surroundings remain conflicted and unexplored. According to Catherine Stimpson, this place is 'unsettled',<sup>258</sup> and for P.R. King it is 'embattled'.<sup>259</sup> It is the exploration of this in-between space of embattlement, and the resultant transformation of both self and the perceived world that, more often than not, the poem will chart. These explorations may be of literal, physical metamorphoses as in 'Moly', of another body, as in 'Touch', due to a change in

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<sup>255</sup> O'Brien, *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing*, 163, 63.

<sup>256</sup> Paul Giles, *Virtual Americas: Transnational Fictions and the Transatlantic Imaginary* (Durham: Duke UP, 1992), 201-207.

<sup>257</sup> Thom Gunn, *The Occasions of Poetry* (San Francisco: North Point P, 1985)

<sup>258</sup> Catherine Stimpson 'Thom Gunn: The Redefinition of Place' *Contemporary Literature* 18.3 (1977), 392.

<sup>259</sup> P.R. King *Nine Contemporary Poets: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1979), 78.

surrounding environment, as in 'Waking in a Newly Built House', or a change in the population of that environment, as in 'The Gas Poker'. The alterity of the space that the I/eyes of these poems occupies is reinforced by the gendered nature of the poetry. In *The Man with Night Sweats* and *Boss Cupid* the impact of AIDS on Gunn's life and world, alongside the constant need to rework the given traditions of poetry to include poetic equality for the homosexual, produces a feeling of becoming, a groping towards a balanced sense of the world, which could only come out of an in-between space. The (un)place of the in-between is thus a familiar one in Gunn's poetry.

Speaking of the constant, yet egocentric, indeterminacy of the local perceptual realm, Jean-Luc Nancy states, 'the material, local presence [is] here or there, selfsame with somewhere [...]. All presence is that of a body'.<sup>260</sup> In 'Waking in a Newly Built House' the horizons of consciousness open out with the waking act, and the space explored in the poem is catalysed by the effect of light on the speaker, and commences with the source of that light: 'The window, a wide pane in the bare / modern wall' (*TGCP* 115). The space must be articulated in terms of the implied visualiser's position, but there is no self-observation here, and the voice remains that of the distant, neutral, 'I' characteristic of Gunn. The *milieu* of the poem is a *tabula rasa*. Indeed, the title of the poem suggests as much – the house is newly built, in occupying it, the I/eye occupies a new space, and through this new position is observing his surroundings from a new angle. The first stanza describes what is seen. The surrounding landscape could be anywhere, 'selfsame with somewhere', and can only be anchored with the introduction of the speaker at the beginning of the second stanza: 'it wakes *me*, and *my* eyes rest on it' (*TGCP* 115, *my* italics). In figure of the I/eye we are introduced to the point from which perception emanates, the 'body' that, for Jean-Luc Nancy, designates presence. However, the 'it' that commences and closes the first line of the second stanza is not grammatically related to any previous thing. 'It' could be the window, the eucalyptus, or even the 'raw sky colour' (*TGCP* 115), all of the first stanza. All we know is that 'it' is somehow related to 'me' through the medium of visual perception. Whatever space there is, is mediated by and centred on the I/eye, but this implied presence is not the solid foundation that we would perhaps wish for. Consequently, the surrounding environment is less solid than may be expected, or at least it is not all there is to the world. This increases the sense of the space of this poem as a space, above all else, of alterity.

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<sup>260</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. P. Connor (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1991), 146.

Initially the subject matter of the second stanza – the world of physical objects – seems to contrast with the undesignated ‘it’ which awakens at the start of the poem. In the third stanza, ‘it’ becomes ‘them’, and ‘them’ relates to the objects of the physical world depicted in the second stanza, a world ‘where the things themselves are adequate’ (*TGCP* 115). The enunciating I/eye is set apart from this world, projecting some of this neutrality of stance upon the perceived surroundings:

So I observe them, able to see  
 them as they are, the neutral sections  
 of trunk, spare, solid, lacking at once  
 disconnectedness and unity. (*TGCP* 115)

The creation of this liminal space, a space of ‘tangible remoteness’ (*TGCP* 115), occurs as much in the space of the poem as it does in the poem’s sense or subject matter. Sight extends across the space at the end of the ninth line, meeting nothing, but at the same time sight echoes and is echoed by the envelope rhyme between ‘see’ and ‘unity’. The act of perception and the perceived objects are not completely linked. The things which are perceived are ‘neutral’. They are only defined by almost-opposites (‘spare’ and ‘solid’, ‘disconnectedness and unity’) which they also lack. In the space of these oppositions, the sense of energy generated by ‘internal tensions’<sup>261</sup> that Paul Giles has identified in relation to ‘A Plan of Self Subjection’ is palpable. The poem is characterised by a subdued mastery and a ‘fluency with abstraction’.<sup>262</sup> Syllabic verse and envelope rhyme create a closed poetic system that is contradicted by the expansiveness of the speaker’s surroundings, which in turn ‘convok[e] absences’ (*TGCP* 115). The I/eye exists and operates between oppositions, observing ‘things’, but is too detached from the objects, which ‘lack [...] even potential meaning’ (*TGCP* 115). The *milieu* of the poem has not yet been inhabited. The perceived objects cannot be invoked with anything less than calm unfamiliarity. It is perception, in this poem, that is the familiar thing, and, through the lack of familiar surroundings, is doubled back upon itself, and is in turn made strange.

Ivan Illich calls the surroundings that are familiar to us, and which we, in turn, interpret and construct, ‘vernacular space’. He connects this space to our immediate

<sup>261</sup> Giles, *Virtual Americas*, 192.

<sup>262</sup> Neil Powell, *Carpenters of Light: A Critical Study of Contemporary British Poetry* (Manchester, Carcanet, 1979), 22.

*milieu*, the space we see made so strange in ‘Waking in a Newly Built House’, and, like Nancy, to the body space. Illich’s connection is not as simple as Nancy’s, however, it is complicated by gender: ‘vernacular space not only shapes the landscape and the house, not only reaches into the past and beyond, it extends into the body itself, quite differently for women than for men’.<sup>263</sup> ‘Touch’ creates a landscape of and from the body as its implied speaker lowers himself into bed next to his partner, and charts his changing states of consciousness and sense perception. Although the space is not designated male or female (we will see a more distinctly gendered body-space created in ‘The Man With Night Sweats’), Illich’s definition of ‘vernacular space’ has some bearing here, where Gunn constructs a *milieu* for the enunciating I/eye of his poem that is intimately associated with re-entry into a known, lived space and the resultant change in the body’s perception and construction of space.

‘Touch’ maintains the sense of detachment from *milieu* as we have seen in ‘Waking in a Newly Built House’, but the I/eye is more receptive to his surroundings, as they contain the ‘potential meanings’ (*TGCP* 115) the earlier poem lacks: the space is created from the ‘past and beyond’<sup>264</sup> as well as through present perception. The world we enter in this poem, that of the bed and sleep, is immediately distinguished from the world which that has been left behind, that of quotidian ‘outside’ life, of the ‘landscape and the house’ (*TGCP* 168):

I lower  
myself in next to  
you, my skin slightly  
numb with the restraint  
of habits, the patina of  
self, the black frost  
of outsideness

(*TGCP* 168)

The enunciating I/eye of the poem is ‘coming in from the cold’ both literally and figuratively here. The realm from whence he has come is distinguishable from that which he is entering by its lack, made manifest in the ‘black frost’ on his skin, the result of his daily life and its habits. The shortness of the poetic line used mirrors the speaker’s tentative sensual search to give shape to his surroundings. In contrast to this

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<sup>263</sup> Ivan Illich, *Gender* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 123.

<sup>264</sup> Illich, *Gender*, 123.

detached state, with the skin's 'superficially / malleable, dead / rubbery texture' (*TGCP* 168), his partner is at one with his surroundings. He *is* 'a mound / of bedclothes' (*TGCP* 168), and the bedclothes, not the skin, mediate his (subconscious) perception of the cat. The I/eye, on the other hand can see (but not feel) the cat, and the initial metaphor (partner as bedclothes) only increases his outside stance. However, the following verse paragraph begins 'Meanwhile...' (*TGCP* 168), seemingly articulating a parallel observation to the second. It is in this third verse paragraph that the spatial and physical consequences of the speaking voice's will to change states and join his partner in sleep begin to manifest themselves. The speaker's goal is to reach a realm of intersubjective, shared, experience and knowledge. To do so he must break (or melt) the boundaries of the self established in the first verse paragraph of the poem, between his 'patina / of self', and his partner's 'already' (*TGCP* 168) sleeping state. He seeks to destroy these boundaries first through shared body heat and then by touch itself.

Where the first two verse paragraphs have started with the object of perception: 'you', the third begins with the first person pronoun. Presence is created through and endowed by the consciousness of the body's existence in space. As we see this I/eye grow more confident in the *milieu* there is a corresponding increase in body heat (signifying presence). At the same time as the 'black frost' thaws and the poem relinquishes the world of visual perception, the surroundings lose the distinctness endowed by visual perception. In the 'darkness beneath the cover' (*TGCP* 168) the speaker is not sure of the provenance of the thawing heat. The blurring of image in the poem is stated, in all its lack of clarity, at the opening of this third verse paragraph, '... slowly / I feel a is it / my own warmth' (*TGCP* 168). In the centre of this line the stringent bounds of grammar collapse. The thing ('a' what?) is as indefinable as the 'it' of 'Waking in a Newly Built House'. Its definite shape does not seem important: unlike 'it', 'a-' is never an object, its objecthood is only implied. Still on the boundary between the visual and sensory realms, the speaking voice of the poem hesitatingly gropes towards a suitable means of articulation.

The fourth verse paragraph establishes a landscape of warmth and tentative movement at the boundaries of the self. The sensual experience of this part of the poem is akin to Emmanuel Levinas's description of love: '[love] consists in an extreme fragility, a vulnerability. It manifests itself at the limit of being and non-being, as a soft warmth where being dissipates into radiance'.<sup>265</sup> In the heat-imbued play between the

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<sup>265</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne UP, 1969), 256.

‘you’ and the ‘I’ at the beginning of the fourth verse paragraph the I/eye of the poem finds his bearings:

You turn and  
hold me tightly, do  
you know who  
I am or am I  
your mother...

(*TGCP* 169)

Finally, there is touch, not just heat. However, with touch boundaries are further blurred. The enunciating I/eye charts his surroundings in terms of himself, his sleeping partner, and the cat, and where in the second verse paragraph the speaker’s perception of his partner was tangled up with the bedclothes, here, his partner’s perception of him is entangled with imagined memories and projections. The palindromic phrase ‘I am or am I’ (*TGCP* 169) echoes the enunciating I/eye’s opening out to the possibilities of perception. Between the quotidian realm of visual perception and the unconscious sensory and dreaming realm of sleep, what relationship the speaker and his partner have is cemented by touch. The two questions that comprise the main part of this stanza are not punctuated. The apparatus of grammatical distinction seems unnecessary in a world where the boundaries between distinct entities are blurred. The body-space created though blind touch and the proximity of bodies is presence endowing enough.

Eventually the dominant conscious state becomes closer to sleep. The open space into which the speaking I/eye of the poem is ‘loosened’ (*TGCP* 169) is a very different space from that which he had left:

... it is  
there already, for  
you are already  
there, and the cat  
got there before you, yet  
it is hard to locate.  
What is more, the place is  
not found but seeps  
from our touch in  
continuous creation

(*TGCP* 169)

What surrounds the I/eye now seems to be a blurred space of intersubjectivity where I is not I, nor you, you, but ‘we’ (*TGCP* 169), and ‘everyone’ (*TGCP* 169). The new space is also both present and previous – ‘an old / big place’ (*TGCP* 169), and all temporal distinctions are dissolved. The space is ‘continuous’, yet ‘hard to locate’, ‘not found’ (*TGCP* 169). It is not discovered *under* or *by* but ‘seeps / *from*’ (*TGCP* 169, my italics) touch, echoing the movement of heat in the third verse paragraph. This space is not the *tabula rasa* of ‘Waking in a Newly Built House’: its contents have, if not immediate form or proximity, an established meaning. However, the speaker also recognises the impossibility of true intersubjectivity: the open space is at the same time a ‘dark / enclosing cocoon round / ourselves alone’ (*TGCP* 169). It is the visual that ultimately creates a sense of distance in perception: there are objects in the world outside the radius of the arms’ reach. Space, with sleep and thus a diminishment of body-consciousness, extends past the speaker (and the poem), but is at the same time bounded by him. With a knowledge of the world outside this proximate space, however, the speaker can oppose the image of the cocoon, and imagine a ‘dark / wide realm where we / walk with everyone’ (*TGCP* 169). The world of the poem is now indeed at the ‘limit of being and non-being’.<sup>266</sup> It is in this space between limits that we are led to find comfort in what Bachelard calls ‘the intimate values of inside space’.<sup>267</sup>

If what Levinas says is true, then ‘Touch’ has indeed demonstrated a way in which ‘the construction of love’<sup>268</sup> may take place. In the shift away from the physical at the end of the poem, for the speaker at least, ‘being dissipates into radiance’,<sup>269</sup> although this ‘radiance’ is one of heat rather than light. Reminiscent of the ‘closed cocoon’ (*TGCP* 169) of the lovers in ‘Touch’, Luce Irigaray questions the single gendered space in terms that may leave out that of the homosexual lovers depicted in that poem:

Is it not the case that the two sexes are coupled unless the one or the other  
claims to be whole? And constructs his world into a closed circle. Total?  
Closed to the other. And convinced that there is no access to outside except

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<sup>266</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256.

<sup>267</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 47.

<sup>268</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. C. Burke and G.C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), 55.

<sup>269</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256.

by opening up a wound. Having no part in the construction of love, or of beauty, or the world.<sup>270</sup>

In spite of the heterosexual bias of her words, Irigaray seems to be extolling a similar philosophical point to Gunn (in 'Touch'), and also to Nancy: that it is only with the body-consciousness created in a coupling between the self and its other, in the realisation that 'all presence is that of a body',<sup>271</sup> that a holistic world space can be constructed. Unless in coitus, the I/eye of Gunn's early poems stands alone, occupying the closed system Irigaray associates with this state. This is state of setting apart is most apparent in 'The Wound', a poem whose enunciating I/eyes indeed seem to 'access [the] outside [...] by opening up a wound'.<sup>272</sup> This process of access happens twice, as there are two voices in the poem: the first a nameless fictionalized warrior in the Iliad, the second, Achilles. The intricate envelope rhyme of the stanzas (*ababa*) serves only to emphasise the self-enclosure of Gunn's voices in their own world. The world opens up to the first speaker through his wound, and, in the first stanza, the wound itself is spatialized. It seems to contain, when open, a whole world that darkens with the healing (or closing) process: 'Its valleys darkened, its villages became still' (*TGCP* 3). The second and third stanzas reveal an open consciousness on the part of the speaking voice – he knows that he inhabits a world apart from his own and revels in his distance from it. The healing of the wound, and corresponding move towards neutrality and ego-centricism is emphasised by the changes in the rhyme scheme in the first three stanzas. Where the envelope in the first stanza does not consist of two full rhymes ('heal', 'still' and 'skill' (*TGCP* 3)), all rhymes in the following two stanzas are full. The speaking voice of the poem is at once himself, Greek and Trojan, Helen and Neoptolemus. The description of the world in these stanzas is articulated with an oddly empathetic neutrality.

In the fourth stanza a different I/eye is introduced, who is at once more impassioned, less neutral, than the first. Here, until the end of the poem, Achilles speaks. Unlike the first voice in the poem, which, in character, prided himself for fighting on both sides, this new voice does not associate himself with any side in the war, and immediately places himself apart from the rest: 'I was myself: subject to no man's breath / My own commander was my enemy' (*TGCP* 3). This militant neutrality

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<sup>270</sup> Irigaray, *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 54-55.

<sup>271</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 146.

<sup>272</sup> Irigaray, *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 55.

on Achilles's part is shattered by news of Patroclus's death. Avenging anger forces Achilles's wound to reopen:

...rage at his noble pain  
 Flew to my head, and turning I could feel  
 My wound break open wide. Over again  
 I had to let those storm-lit valleys heal. (TGCP 3)

The closed system of self has again been shattered. Without an empathetic other, the world outside the I/eye of the poem and its implied body-space is accessible only through the spatialized open wound, which is painful but at times, necessary, an open manifestation also of lack. Frequently the idea of a wound has been read as a metaphor for homosexuality.<sup>273</sup> It may well be this (the very neutrality of the speaking voices in Gunn's poetry leave some room for opposition), but can also be representative of any state of emotional rawness or intimacy. If we are to adopt Irigaray's and Nancy's distinctions between the self's negotiation of the world through their own or through another's body, the wound itself may be seen as other – as the medium through which the 'cocooned' self's negotiations with the outside may take place. In operating within this seemingly closed system, the wounded extract themselves from the world, becoming as other to it as it, un-wounded, is to them. And, especially in the narrative of Achilles, the lover (Patroclus may be cast as such in the context), the only other means to access a world apart from the 'closed circle'<sup>274</sup> of the self, is dead. Achilles must take on the role of the mourner, and, for self-preservation's sake, his wound must close.

'The Man With Night Sweats' recapitulates the sentiment of these earlier poems. The poem establishes the place of the I/eye as a similarly body-centric space to that of 'Touch', and problems relating the self's communication with and participation in the

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<sup>273</sup> In *Aids and its Metaphors*, Susan Sontag links the word 'wound' to both homosexuality and AIDS, tracing this back etymologically: "plague, from the Latin *plaga* (stroke, wound), has long been used metaphorically as the highest standard of collective calamity, evil, scourge" (*Aids and its Metaphors*, 44). Alfred Corn links this directly to Gunn's poetry, suggesting that "the wound is itself a metaphor for homosexuality [...] Using the metaphor of an unhealable wound for homosexuality is of course offensive today, but at a period when vagrant sexuality was regarded as a sin, a crime, or an illness, the metaphor wouldn't have seemed unwarranted. Applying it, we can understand ['The Wound'] as making a connection between poetry, homosexuality, and the 'theory of poses'. 'Existentialism and Humanism in Gunn's Early Poetry' *Kenyon Review* (2007) <[www.kenyonreviewonline.org/kro/corn.php](http://www.kenyonreviewonline.org/kro/corn.php)> n.p.

<sup>274</sup> Irigaray, *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 55.

world are similar to 'The Wound'. As in 'Waking in a Newly Built House', the I/eye occupies a liminal, between-space. This space is, however, different from those established in these earlier poems. AIDS, creating a physical debilitation worse than a mere wound, takes its toll on the ease with which the poetic landscape is negotiated. Alternate stanzas of four lines in alternate rhyme and two lines in rhyming couplets, provide 'The Man With Night Sweats' with a distinct, but solid, formal base for its unnameable subject matter. The speaking voice immediately displays a consciousness of the new difference in himself caused by the disease and positions himself apart, not only from the world, but also from his past self:

I wake up cold, I who  
 Prospered through dreams of heat  
 Wake to their residue,  
 Sweat, and a clinging sheet. (TGCP 461)

The 'dreams of heat' are not only those just suffered which have brought on the night sweats, but also the impassioned encounters in the implied speaker's past. Here, the sweat clinging to the implied speaker's body and his sheets is a world away from the growing warmth of 'Touch', and yet, this new world has been created from that world. Wracked by illness, the speaking voice of the poem marginalises himself, creating again an egocentric universe that the speaker of 'Touch' in the act of meeting his lover in bed attempted to melt down and make intersubjective. In 'The Man With Night Sweats', the universe again extends from and cocoons the I/eye. However, it is in this case his own body, not that of a lover, that is deemed worthy of 'trust' (TGCP 461). All that is external from this body presents 'a world of wonders' (TGCP 461) which is at once distinctly apart from him, 'risk' (TGCP 461), and 'a challenge to the skin' (TGCP 461). The intrigue of the outside no longer creates a 'black frost' on the skin, but has a penetrating and debilitating effect. His 'flesh reduced and wrecked' (TGCP 461) with disease, the enunciating I/eye of the poem positions himself as distant from the rest of the world. The self-enclosing cocoon of 'Touch' is no longer voluntary but a matter of course, and the healing that Hector anticipates in 'The Wound' is not possible. Personal bodily pain is now the challenge to existence. However, this pain is not completely personal. The pain goes 'through' (TGCP 461) as well as wracking the body, and, like the 'wound' (TGCP 3), is other. It is a part of the *milieu*.

The new universe established in the poem hints at an open past, but remains egocentric, and self-enclosed. Finally, it is the implied body of the enunciating I/eye himself that creates the subject matter of the poem: the body both pains and supports him. He cannot heal: his 'closed circle'<sup>275</sup> is fractured. At the same time, the 'closed circle' of the subjective body space is the only space that the I/eye can inhabit: he can no longer afford to encounter the outside world, and, indeed, the pain stops him from acting as if a part of this world (he cannot change the bed). There is a wry humour for all this pain nevertheless, as an usually figurative turn of phrase is made literal, 'I have to change the bed / but catch myself instead' (*TGCP* 461). The wry, detached humour that characterises this line extends to the closing couplet of the poem, providing, it seems, a momentary release from the enclosed world of pain. The final couplet, its half rhyme (the only one in the poem) perhaps echoing the breaking of the speaking voice, states with painful objectivity and self-reflexivity,

As if hands were enough

To hold an avalanche off

(*TGCP* 462)

The AIDS sufferer is, as articulated in another of the AIDS poems in *The Man with Night Sweats*, 'Unwhimpering, but not at peace with it' (*TGCP* 475). 'It' is not just the speaking voice's 'pain' or 'wound'. 'It' is the root of that pain, AIDS, and unmentionable.<sup>276</sup> And indeed, both in this poem and throughout *The Man with Night Sweats* the disease is not mentioned by name.

Writing seven years before the publication of *The Man with Night Sweats*, Gunn heralded the opening up of modern American poetry to homosexual subject matter, aligning this opening up with the progression of Robert Duncan's personal and poetic projects:

It is due more to Duncan than to any other single poet that modern American poetry, in all its inclusiveness, can deal with overtly homosexual material so much as a matter of course – not as something perverse or

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<sup>275</sup> Irigaray, *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 55.

<sup>276</sup> See Susan Sontag: 'Like other diseases that arouse feelings of shame, AIDS is often a secret, but not from the patient [...] an AIDS diagnosis is often concealed', *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*, (New York: Picador, 1989), 124.

eccentric or morbid, but as evidence of the many available ways in which people love or fail to love.<sup>277</sup>

However, in the majority of Gunn's poems (at least those before *Boss Cupid*), homosexuality, like AIDS, remains unnamed. It is left to the critics to find euphemism after euphemism in order to posit a distinctly gay subject matter. However, the manner in which Gunn's poetic speakers deal with any homosexuality is, arguably, akin to that which he finds so distinguishing in Duncan's poetry. 'Gay' is not 'something perverse or eccentric or morbid' but a matter of course. In the poems written around and after this statement in *The Occasions of Poetry* was published, we can only assume that the poet's lack of overtly gay subject matter is not linked to an abiding fear on Gunn's part, after all, the man, even in the early seventies on a visit to England, was 'openly gay, known to dress like a biker'.<sup>278</sup> Rather, this lack of mentioning can be seen as a stylistic move on Gunn's part, linked to the detachment and the liminal position with regard to the everyday world that are distinguishing traits of the speaking voices of Gunn's poetry. The freedom that Duncan's poetic projects allowed Gunn exhibited itself not in a change of tone or of subject matter, rather, in his poetic style.

In 'Duncan', which opens Gunn's final volume *Boss Cupid*, Gunn addresses the older poet in lines of alternately rhymed iambic pentameter that are free enough to allow for slight fluctuations in syllables per line to pass unnoticed, adding to the poem's overall texture. This texture alters in the second section of the poem, where two of the lines (which keep to a rough iambic pentameter throughout) are broken. A change in perspective characterises the shift between sections. The first part of the poem deals with Duncan's poetic from a happily enclosed, new critical, perspective. Duncan is left to himself, guarding 'poetry's full strength' (*TGBC* 3): there is no interruption of the second person by the enunciating I of the poem. The subject matter, which is the overflowing of Duncan's free flowing poetics into the world, is echoed in the poem's form, as each stanza is neatly end-stopped, and moves toward this end in a series of smooth enjambments and unobtrusive rhymes. It is not all that simple, however, and the final lines of the first section change and expand Duncan's freedom of movement, which in the first stanza has just been 'From San Francisco, back from Berkeley too, / And back again, and back again' (*TGBC* 3). This expansion is further complicated by

<sup>277</sup> Thom Gunn, *The Occasions of Poetry*, 134.

<sup>278</sup> Andrew Motion, 'A Memorable, Bracing, and Tender Voice', *Observer* (2 May 2004).

the fact that it does not occur in the strictly geographical and ideological realms of Duncan's inter-campus commute, but is complicated by his poetic:

The energy that rose from their confusion  
Became the changing passage lived within,  
While the pen wrote, and looked beyond conclusion. (TGBC 3)

The poetic Duncan lives, it seems, in a similar between-space to the many liminal speaking voices in Gunn's other poetry. This space reflects Eugene O'Brien's analysis of Heaney's poetics as creating 'a space within notions of identity which will always leave room for alterity',<sup>279</sup> and resonates with Peter Sacks's idea that the space of elegy is both constructed from absence and is also 'a virtual presence in the space of absence'.<sup>280</sup> This space between, or 'within' is not without movement or change, however. Neither is it without a sense of progression, as Duncan's 'energy' looks, existentially, 'beyond conclusion' (TGBC 3).

The second section sees the inclusion of personal relationships to Duncan's 'changing passage' (TGBC 3), as Gunn's poet-speaker refers to his own relationship with Duncan, as well as to Duncan's with H.D. These personal relationships, as we have seen in 'The Man with Night Sweats', 'challenge' and break the individual's self-composition. Correspondingly, the lines in this section break twice, and there are two different voices (the speaker's and Duncan's) in the section. Here, it is the speaker, not Duncan, who inhabits a liminal space, a space not 'within' but of suspended action and apologia. In Duncan's reminiscence he stands, not actually ready, but 'as if ... ready' (TGBC 3), and in his own words he hedges even more. He speaks of Duncan's reminiscence, 'as I might have known' (TGBC 4), and seeks to rewrite it, placing the encounter doubly in the past: 'I hadn't caught him, hadn't seen in time' (TGBC 4), allowing for a double layer of fabrication. The final first person in the poem supplies an almost scholarly detachment, as the poet-speaker acknowledges his sources (himself), at the same time fluctuating between present and past tenses: 'He was now a posthumous poet, I have said' (TGBC 4). Again, the speaking voice of the poem lies between things: his current and previous interpretations of Duncan, and the spectral presence of Duncan himself.

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<sup>279</sup> O'Brien, *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing*, 63.

<sup>280</sup> Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 312.

As the young Duncan of the first section composes his poetry, 'Between the notebook-margins' (*TGBC* 3), the ageing Duncan in the second section turns 'things round to myth' (*TGBC* 4). The poem remembers and rewrites the past, explicitly in relation to Duncan's memory of the 'Wheeler steps' incident. The rewriting of the past also alludes to Duncan's crusade for the inclusion of 'overtly homosexual material' in 'modern American poetry' and his marginalia to Gunn's *Moly*, which '[tend] to project sexual content onto Gunn's poems':<sup>281</sup> another case of rewriting. But again, where sexual orientation is concerned, Gunn is not explicit. This is the elegy of one homosexual poet for another, both of whom acknowledged each others' contribution to freeing up gay writing in American poetry. For this reason, perhaps, Gunn's elegy here, and indeed the other elegies that comprise his final two volumes of poetry, may be seen as exemplary of the fact that 'Gunn is much further on in his responses, often specifically challenging the elegy through rewriting. He overturns the certainty and the security of its tropes, swerving away from artifice'.<sup>282</sup> 'You add to, you don't cancel what you do' (*TGBC* 3), and indeed the flowing enjambments of the poem mirror Gunn's identification of Duncan's 'great dread' (*TGBC* 4) as 'closure' (*TGBC* 4). And at this point the line itself breaks, arguably allowing Duncan space between the lines, a final battle against the spectre of closure. It is plain also that Gunn sees Duncan's death not as closure in a purely reductive way but as something 'enclosed' (*TGBC* 4) both by and from the world.

The almost paradoxical between-space in which Duncan is placed in this poem recalls the final lines of 'Words', one of the poems from *Moly* that Duncan left unannotated in his own rewriting of Gunn's verse. Here, as in the body of 'Duncan' we get the sense of the 'generation of circular, internal, tensions'<sup>283</sup> that Paul Giles identifies as characteristic of Gunn's poetry. It is within the space of death that these circular tensions can begin to unravel. 'Words' depicts the poet's search for the correct frame for experience and time, and the speaker concludes that they, 'charged with growth, [were] being altered / Composing uncomposed' (*TGCP* 197). In 'Duncan', the

<sup>281</sup> Michel Davidson, 'Marginality in the Margins: Robert Duncan's Textual Politics' *Contemporary Literature* (33.2, 1992), 291. Indeed, a small comparison of the two corresponding 'Circe' poems shows the different tendencies of the two poets. Gunn's metamorphosed shipmates are 'shut up in / Circe's sties, like wild boars in their lairs', whilst Duncan's are 'ensnared / closed round in Circe's circles / grunting, rooting, snuffling, fucking' (Robert Duncan, *Ground Work: Before the War | In the Dark* (New York: New Directions, 2006), 69).

<sup>282</sup> Stefan Hawlin, 'Epistemes and Imitations: Thom Gunn on Ben Jonson', *PMLA* 122.5 (2007), 1527.

<sup>283</sup> Giles, *Virtual Americas*, 192.

titular poet's compositions carry him 'To ports in which past purposes unravelled' (*TGBC* 3), and, blurring clauses and tenses, the poet-speaker states:

He was now a posthumous poet, I have said  
 (For since his illness he had not composed),  
 In sight of a conclusion, whose great dread  
 Was closure,

his life soon to be enclosed (*TGBC* 4)

Tellingly, 'enclosed' does not end the poem, but, without punctuation, expands across the end of the line, until its empiricism is met, not by more empiricism, but simile. The poem concludes like Levinas' lover, at 'the limit of being and non-being', and 'Duncan' ends with a sense of openness, which is immediately followed by the imposition of constricting margins, as the 'sparrow's flight' is 'Briefly revealed... / Beneath the long roof, between open ends, / Themselves the margins of unchanging night' (*TGBC* 4). The poem concludes with a paradox that echoes the sentiment of the poetic relationship portrayed in 'Duncan', and situates its visualised and vocalised subject and its speaking I/eye firmly in a space that is not mappable in conventional ways, a space where the open ends themselves are the margins, where, in turn, 'margins signify'.<sup>284</sup>

The tendency of his subject matter towards the existential, coupled with the liminality and/or neutrality of the speaking voices of his poems means that Gunn could never be accused of being a confessional poet. In the early seventies, Gunn's poems were accused of suffering from a lack of distinctly confessional, biographical material, a lack of underlying trauma.<sup>285</sup> 'The Gas Poker' fills this biographical void. Gunn approaches his subject matter with characteristic cool. Although the poem deals with the poet's mother's suicide it is written in the third person. Gunn thus immediately detaches his reader from the trauma. The long apostrophes or stanzas of self-blame that characterise most personal elegies are absent. The event occurred, after all, 'Forty-eight years ago' (*TGBC* 10). It is apparent, however, that the memories of the event are still fresh, as the poem immediately questions 'Can it be forty-eight / Since then?' (*TGBC* 10): in this second iteration of the time-period elapsed since the suicide there is no

<sup>284</sup> Duncan, *Ground Work*, 4.

<sup>285</sup> This attitude to Gunn was fostered by the poet himself, as he wrote in a letter to Alan Bold, 'I am not 'confessional' by nature, and I think too much biography is going to distort a poem rather than otherwise', Letter, 21 Jan. 1973, quoted in Alan Bold, *Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1976), 6.

temporal measurement. 'Forty-eight', alone, could be years, but equally be minutes, days, or months. There is a sense that this is a question that has been asked, not once, but repeatedly. The enunciating I/eye of this poem, although detached from the event, is not unsympathetic, subtly still undergoing the phases of repetition and testing that Sacks identifies as characteristic of the Elegy.<sup>286</sup>

As in 'Duncan', Gunn gives up the first part of the poem to the figure of the mourned alone. A ghostly 'they' force open the barricaded door. The door is barricaded against 'the children', who, ungendered and unnamed, are only mentioned once at this point. In the second stanza the mother is presented as occupying a (self inflicted) liminal space. Despite the manner in which she marginalizes herself, the mother is yet the dominating and active figure in the poem; as she collects herself in order to make the passage from life to death, her actions mirror the shuttling to and fro of her thoughts:

In her red dressing-gown  
 She wrote notes, all night busy  
 Pushing the things about (TGBC 10)

The mourned figure decreases in solidity after the second stanza. The children, correspondingly, increase in solidity. In the third stanza it is they, not the mother, who create action. Typically of Gunn, this fresh action, although new to the poem, is a recognizable one. With a movement and a purpose similar to that of the poet in the first stanza of 'Duncan' and the mother in her study, the children go

to and fro  
 On the harsh winter lawn  
 Repeating their lament,  
 [...]
 Elder and younger brother,  
 Till they knew what it meant. (TGBC 10)

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<sup>286</sup> See Sacks: 'the repetition of words and refrains and the creation of a certain rhythm of lament have the effect of controlling the expression of grief while also keeping that expression in motion. It is as if the grief might be gradually conjured forth and exorcised [...] the mind must be repeatedly confronted with the fact [of loss] until the recognition has been achieved. Only once the loss is recognized can the griever continue the work of mourning by withdrawing his attachment from the dead', (*The English Elegy*, 23-24).

The final line of the third stanza is rewritten in the first line of the fourth stanza: ‘Knew all there was to know’ (*TGBC* 10). The poem quietly continues the repetition established at the beginning of the poem, in this way ‘controlling the expression of grief while also keeping that expression in motion’.<sup>287</sup> In the final stanza there is still no confession on the part of the speaking voice (in this case, the poet-speaker). If anything he distances himself even further from the poem and its subject matter, exerting increased control of his subject matter through distance. This final stanza relates the ‘one image from the flow’ (*TGBC* 11) that is the most memorable, and the metaphor of flow (of gas and of memory) bridges past and present feeling. However, the image sticks in ‘*the stubborn mind*’ (*TGBC* 11, italics mine): the lack of a personal pronoun for the mind here depersonalizes the image. We must not associate it entirely with the I/eye of this poem. Finally, in what is perhaps in a Duncanesque act of ‘generosity’ the image of the mourned closes the poem. And this image, however haunting and resonant, is an image only. Tellingly, the medium of death (the ‘sort of backwards flute’ (*TGBC* 11)) is made to rhyme with the death itself, as, in the final line of the poem, the figure is remembered in the very moment of death. By this instrument, she is made ‘mute’ (*TGBC* 11). In the final stanza the noise of the mother’s business in the second stanza, where she ‘wrote notes, all night busy / Pushing the things about’ (*TGBC* 10) is conferred upon the gas itself, which has ‘its music’ (*TGBC* 11). The voice of the poem remains neutral throughout, and does not give voice to the dead. Gunn thus preserves the memory of the dead clearly, uncluttered by personal emotion, at the same time acknowledging the fact of their departure from life and their inability to speak. In spite of his self-imposed liminality, the I/eye of ‘The Gas-poker’ exerts a strong tonal presence on the poem, a powerful neutrality.

The lack of emotional clutter in ‘The Gas Poker’ characterises most of Gunn’s poetry, also representing the poet’s personal perspective on the role of the dead in his poems. He writes against posthumous biographical engagement by critics, biographers, and other mourners, perhaps hoping for the same lack of posthumous treatment himself. In his postscript to ‘The Panel’, Gunn explains his relationship with the dead. This strange relationship ends up being articulated in terms of the dead’s spatial relationship with himself:

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<sup>287</sup> Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 23.

The dead have no sense of tact, no manners, they enter doors without knocking, but I continue to deal with them [...]. They pack their bodies into my dreams, they eat my feelings, and shit in my mind. They are no good to me, of no value to me, but I cannot shake them and do not want to. Their story, being part of mine, refuses to reach an end. They present me with problems, surprise me, contradict me, my dear, my everpresent dead.

(*TGBC* 16-17)

‘The dead’ here are typically abstract. ‘They’ could be any- and everyone that the poet has known. The balanced manner in which Gunn articulates his relationship with ‘them’ follows in the vein of the elegy tradition: it is a ‘highly mediated relation’ from which the speaker is ‘irrevocably torn’.<sup>288</sup> There is a neatness, as well as a neutrality, in this finely balanced mode of articulating thought. And so, Gunn continues to elegise.

‘The Dump’, like much of Gunn’s previous poetry, derives power from the oscillation between speaking voice and subject matter. The poem also voices concerns about the modern ‘biography trade’ hinted at in the spare lines of ‘Duncan’ and addressed explicitly in Gunn’s letter to Alan Bold. The poem is a plea for a minimalisation of posthumous violation of the artist’s life. In order to move toward this end, the subject of this elegy is never named, it is his death and posthumousness, not his living actions, with which the poem is concerned. Again, as in Kinsella’s landscapes, the poetic vision of the enunciating I/eye is defined as much by the peripheral and excessive as it is the nominal matter in hand:

He died, and I admired  
the crisp vehemence  
of a lifetime reduced to  
half a foot of shelf space

(*TGBC* 39)

Again the enunciating I/eye excludes himself from the material world, preferring his own interpretation of the subject’s life: the admirable ‘crisp vehemence’ (*TGBC* 39) contrasts with ‘everything, everything’ (*TGBC* 39). The dump of the title is created by an anonymous ‘they’ who include ‘archivists with shovels’ (*TGBC* 40), and perhaps also ‘fans’ and ‘scholars’ (*TGBC* 40). The excessive descriptions of the imagined landfill site cannot fail to disgust the reader. This space conflicts with the neat ideas of

<sup>288</sup> Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 315.

detached process articulated elsewhere in the poem, a process described in ‘Misanthropos’, as ‘bare within limits’ (*TGCP* 137). The *milieu* of ‘The Dump’ is hypersensory, messy, and full of waste or excess. There is a distinct parallel here with Gunn’s description of his own relationship with the dead, who ‘pack [their] bodies into my dreams, they eat my feelings, and shit in my mind’ (*TGBC* 16). ‘The Dump’ may be seen as an experiment in detaching his poetic self from the excess that comes in the wake of a death, to rediscover the neatness of life ‘within limits’.

Indeed, the landscape in ‘The Dump’ is, like waste, an unstable phenomenon, half imagined and mythologized out of the sensory overload that the landfill (or the act of mourning) presents. This landscape is also seemingly boundless, constructed from the ephemera of the dead figure, and becomes grotesque and hilarious. Even from a vantage point there is no purchase to be gained on the dead:

I clambered up the highest  
pile and found myself  
looking across not history  
but the vistas of a steaming  
range of garbage  
reaching to the coast itself. Then  
I lost my footing!

(*TGBC* 40)

We plunge back down from the heights of observation in a physical and philosophical movement reminiscent of many poems of the Romantic period, and of what Sacks calls ‘the ritual elegiac descent’.<sup>289</sup> However, the heights in this poem have almost been the inverse of the sublime heights of artistic inspiration, and the depths are not the same as those of Dantean elegiac discovery. The fall here is an escape from the imagined landscape of excess, characterised by ‘a soft / avalanche’ (*TGBC* 40) of ephemera, back into a neatly ordered space of mourning, a ‘half a foot of shelf space’ representative of the dead:

In nightmare I slid  
no ground to stop me,  
  
until I woke at last

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<sup>289</sup> Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 322.

where I had napped beside  
 the precious half-foot. Beyond that,  
 nothing, nothing at all.

(*TGBC* 40)

Finally, what has been ‘nightmare’, and uncontrollable, becomes ‘nap’, thus forgettable. The poem concludes with a firm negation of the others’ reminiscence in a move towards the existential: beyond the half-foot of shelving lies ‘nothing, nothing at all’ (*TGBC* 40). The carefully constructed universe begins and ends on terms set by the enunciating I/eye rather than the subject matter of the poem. The *milieu* is ultimately constructed by and around the I/eye, beyond which lie experiences he can only reach in ‘nightmare’, or through the navigation of ‘nothing’ (*TGBC* 40).

‘Aubade’ seems to be a meditation in the aftermath of a sensory experience akin to that depicted in ‘Touch’. Again distance is created between speaking voice and subject matter, as the I/eye finds solace in the neatness of a self-enclosed system. This distancing effect is extended to the very words of the poem, as the first person pronoun is not mentioned in relation to the second person until the end of the third line. From this distance a one-sided dialectic is created, as the interpretations of the other’s words and actions are no more than projective:

Kinder than you will own,  
 pleasing yourself you say  
 through pleasing me

(*TGBC* 75)

These opening lines blur syntax (and thus sense) in a manner akin to the opening of the third verse paragraph of ‘Touch’. However, ‘Aubade’’s syntactic indeterminacy is to do with sense, rather than the sensory. The colloquial tone of the poem is emphasised by the blurring of syntax here, emphasising the familiarity between speaking voice and his implied partner. However, thoughts and wishes collide, and the I/eye is unable to find any reassurance in his lover’s words. Scepticism is joined by a morbid sense of self-reflexivity, similar to that which catalysed the morbid attention to source material in ‘Duncan’.

The hierarchy between speaking voice and subject matter that we have seen in ‘Duncan’ is also established in ‘Aubade’, but is reversed here. The speaker here is the older, addressing a younger lover (whereas in Duncan the speaker was younger, addressing an older poet). Unlike in ‘Touch’, it is as if age and the corresponding

infirmity that age brings do make a difference in a relationship. The sensual journey that began with the evening of 'Touch' concludes here, with 'Aubade's' morning. And it is indeed it light that marks the movement from the sensual world of pleasure implied in the first verse paragraph, to the beginning of the lament and thus the aubade proper in the second verse paragraph:

...a desolating  
change of light  
steals into the room  
rosyfingered orderly  
thinning out  
our packed intensities  
of night

(*TGBC* 75)

Here, the 'you' and 'me' of the first verse paragraph are neatly altered and combined into the collective pronoun 'our'. However, 'our' is related to the recollections of the night. Rosyfingered dawn does not illuminate a new day of intense battle here, but rather it diffuses the lingering 'intensities' (*TGBC* 75) of the previous night in a mixture of lyrical Homeric reference and prosaic domesticity. It seems that true domain of togetherness is the dark world of sensory experience.

Organised now by light, the poetic universe seems again constructed around differentiation, whether this differentiation is between the implied speaker and his partner, or is reflected in the choice of subject matter and description. These turns in subject matter are mirrored in the breaks between verse paragraphs of the poem. In the break between the first and second verse paragraphs, the verbal universe changes, with dawn, into a world of light apart from the sensual acts of the previous night. The turn between second and third verse paragraphs is mirrored, not in a change of *milieu*, but in the physical movement of the lover. This turn articulates the 'desolating change' (*TGBC* 75) typical of the aubade form – the dawn-catalysed moment of parting of the lovers. Interestingly, though, the departure at the end of the poem is one projected upon the subject by the speaker: 'Already / you turn away' (*TGBC* 75). The distance between the partners has, however, been incipient since the opening of the poem, when the lovers were not combined in the use of a collective pronoun. In contrast to the first verse paragraph, the final one contains no personal pronoun at all. There is no question that this section effects a movement from the now further into an unarticulated and

inarticulable 'future' (*TGBC* 75). So, although the space in this section, and indeed in the whole poem, is articulated in terms of the position of the I/eye, he does not feature in the subject's 'future'. 'You' and 'me' becomes 'us', to become 'you' only.

Although the I/eye is the perceptual centre around which the poem revolves, Gunn does not allow this focal point to be a part of the world beyond the subject matter. In order to participate actively in a future, it seems that he also would have to 'turn away' from this meditation, and participate in a world of process, which naturally included 'the dangerous pitting of oneself against life's chances and choices, and the free acceptance of consequences',<sup>290</sup> a constantly illuminated world of 'desolating change' (*TGBC* 75).

'A Wood near Athens' opens with a universe organised by light:

The traveller struggles through a wood. He is lost.

The traveller is at home. He never left.

He seeks his way on the conflicting trails,

Scribbled with light.

I have been this way before. (*TGBC* 102)

In contrast to the 'tone, / Pure and rarified' (*TGCP* 124) of 'Lights Among Redwood', here, light scribbles patterns in chiaroscuro in the path of the traveller, mirroring his conflicted state. Gunn's traveller is simultaneously 'lost' and 'at home' (*SHOG* 64), like the traveller-speaker of Heaney's 'The Tollund Man'. Life itself, its plethora of choices, is not illuminated, but scribbled upon by light, or clarity, and ultimately, it plays its way in passages between the poles of ignorance and knowledge, the senses of loss and of familiarity, the states of movement and stasis. Through the introduction of the first person in the fifth line of 'A Wood near Athens' we are extracted from the confusion and the conflict of the traveller by the bold statement of familiarity in the first person, 'I have been this way before' (*TGBC* 102), with its implication that the state is not uncommon. This new voice not only comments on the action imparted in the first four lines of the poem, but places himself firmly apart from that action. Again, a hierarchy is established between an experienced speaking voice and a still moving, still young, subject. The poetic landscape here is characterised by quest, movement through space, and chiaroscuro. The effect is not dissimilar to that of an earlier sequence, 'Misanthropos':

<sup>290</sup> Neil Corcoran, *English Poetry since 1940* (London: Longman, 1993), 106.

The path branches, branches still,  
 returning to itself, like  
 a discovering system,  
 or process made visible.

[...] Nothing moves  
 at the edges of the mind. (TGCP 137)

The traveller struggles through a wood. He is lost.  
 The traveller is at home. He never left.  
 He seeks his way on the conflicting trails,  
 Scribbled with light.

I have been this way before.

Think! the land here is wooded all over. (TGBC 102)

Initially, 'A Wood near Athens' seems to be a similar poetic experiment in quest and becoming as those which we see pepper *Moly*. Absalom, to whom we are introduced in the seventh line, and who is our previously anonymous traveller, does not seem out of place in this context as his story (recounted in the main in 2 *Samuel* 13-18) is characterised by quest, becoming, vision, and confusion, and the misinterpretation of all these things. Like David, Absalom's father and king, the strength of the enunciating I/eye of this poem lies in the power to not cast judgement. Events are, simply and neutrally, described. This position, again, places him apart from the subject matter of the poem; he is both by and between 'the edges of the mind' (TGCP 137). No mention is made of Absalom's revenge through fratricide, his exile, or his rebellion. Absalom's life is neatly condensed, and its meanings are placed in the framework of the poem's main image: the wood, also the locus of Absalom's death:

An oak snatched Absalom by his bright hair.  
 The various trails of love had led him there,  
 The people's love, his father's and self-love. (TGBC 102)

Finally, Gunn's main subject matter is mentioned. The 'conflicting trails' of the wood are the 'various trails of love', and are almost completely alien to the speaker's exclamatory exhortation to 'Think!' (*TGBC* 102). 'Love', Absalom's as an example, is multiple, and is as much catalysed by outside forces as it is by the singular lover. However, it is Absalom who is punished for these loves; he is an example 'of the many available ways in which people love or fail to love'<sup>291</sup> that Gunn speaks of in relation to Duncan's poetry, but which could equally be applied to Gunn's own. Tellingly, also, no mention is made of the love that catalysed the story of Absalom, his revenge, and his death: the violation by his brother Amnon of their sister Tamar, Absalom's love of his sister and subsequent vengeful act of fratricide. The landscape of love sketched here is more multiple in its frame of reference than Gunn, even, would have us think.

Clive Wilmer speaks of this poem, amongst others in *Boss Cupid*, as being 'summative'<sup>292</sup> on Gunn's part, and John Peck, perhaps echoing Wilmer, calls 'A Wood Near Athens' a 'summational poem on erotic suffering',<sup>293</sup> and, indeed, the second half of the poem will go on to investigate the 'many available ways' of love at length. Before this happens, however, the detached voice of the first person again intervenes, questioning the provenance of passion ('What if it does indeed come down to juices' (*TGBC* 102)), and reframing the wood and its various paths as symbolic not of love but of 'obsession' (*TGBC* 102). The drive of the poem is less to do with *eros*, as Peck would have us believe, than it is to do with the very idea of the drive itself, whether that manifests itself in the relative attachments of *eros*, *agape*, *philia*, or indeed *storge*. What matters is the destructive nature of the drives, the fact that submission to the power of a single drive is itself a world-enclosing, or universe confining, act. The final lines of the section, neatly echoing this enclosure, explain the origin of the wood metaphor in the symbolic universe of the poem:

We thought we lived in a garden, and looked around

To see that trees had risen on all sides (TGBC 102)

The singular traveller, Absalom, and the enunciating I/eye have become a 'we' that represents humanity, 'lost' and at 'home' in the wood of 'love' or 'obsession', namely, life. It follows, therefore, that the second section of 'A Wood near Athens' is not as

<sup>291</sup> Gunn, *The Occasions of Poetry*, 134.

<sup>292</sup> Clive Wilmer, 'Thom Gunn, Shakespeare, and Elizabethan Poetry' *PN Review* 34.6 (2008), 64.

<sup>293</sup> John Peck, 'Summation and Chthonic Power' *PN Review* 35.1 (2008), 52.

sparsely populated as the first, also that it addresses in some way not the present, but the origins of the present. The detached, prosaic, voice continues ‘It is ridiculous, ridiculous, / And it is our main meaning’ (*TGBC* 102). ‘It’ mirrors ‘What if *it* does indeed come down to juices / And organs’ (*TGBC* 102), and, as in many previous poems of Gunn’s, ‘it’ is unspecified. ‘It’ could be the wood or garden, the way or light, love or obsession, life, many or all seven of these things. Continuing to reduce everything to an abstract originary motive centred around an individual love, Gunn rewrites Genesis’s creation story as a ‘concept’ (*TGBC* 102) from ‘the human mind’ (*TGBC* 102)

...of a creator  
Who made up matter, an imperfect world,  
Solely to have an object for his love. (*TGBC* 102)

This world, this love, and correspondingly all loves, are seen as ‘biological necessity’ (*TGBC* 102), and ‘Beautiful and ridiculous’ (*TGBC* 103). The tone here is similar to that in the final verse paragraph of the first section, quietly yet prosaically aware of the blasphemy inherent in the words. The section also opens out the singular speaking voice to something more multiple, akin to the shift at the end of Donne’s ‘The Canonization’, where the masses invoke the lovers. Addressing all loves, it is difficult to forget, especially given our titular *milieu*, the Renaissance poetic experiments in framing the phenomenon of love. Clive Wilmer has mentioned of ‘A Wood near Athens’ that ‘the movement of the verse is in the Shakespearean spirit’,<sup>294</sup> and the following section indeed is reminiscent of that poet’s sonnets. Yet, even in an address by the masses, the tone of the poem retains its underlying scepticism:

We say:  
Love makes the shoots leap from the blunted branches  
Love makes birds call, and maybe we are right.  
Love then makes craning saplings crowd for light,  
The weak being jostled off to shade and death. (*TGBC* 103)

In spite of the neat rhyming couplet in the eighth and ninth lines, Gunn does not go so far as to mimic the rhyme scheme of the sonnet. Before the full stop, which splits the

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<sup>294</sup> Wilmer, ‘Thom Gunn, Shakespeare, and Elizabethan Poetry’, 64.

couplet in two, the imagery has been pastoral and calm. But nature is also cruel, and may 'indeed come down to juices / and organs' (*TGBC* 102). Following this turn of thought in the first section the imagery that surrounds and seeks to define love becomes crueller. Love is a competitive 'biological necessity' (*TGBC* 102). The opening of the eleventh line, 'Love then...' (*TGBC* 103) indicates that, for the speaker at least, this turn in imagery from the romantic to the cruel aspects of nature is reasonable. Typically, love is seen as something that stems from the natural condition of living creatures irrespective of their relationship, and can lead to violent as well as peaceable things. As can be seen in the case of the cuckoo, for whom '...love has gouged a temporary hollow / Out of its baby-back, to help it kill' (*TGBC* 103).

Thus far we have been presented with various variant representations of love and the developments and interpretations which may evolve. The question is then posed 'But who did get it right?' (*TGBC* 103), as if the representations are enough for us to question their various merits. The next section of 'A Wood near Athens' proffers various answers to this question. We have now left behind the abstract variations on a theme of love to find illustrations of these variations. Absalom and his loves, deeds, and death is not the only example. There are more biblical references, to Ruth and Naomi, then literary, to *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Wuthering Heights*. All of these stories deal with a protagonist, or protagonists, that are propelled in many ways by love. More often than not, there is also a certain element of this love being at odds with the views or the constraints of the society in which this protagonist lives. Love, therefore, can be more than one thing. It 'makes shoots leap' and yet 'makes the cuckoo heave its foster-siblings / Out of the nest' (*TGBC* 103), motivating the most heinous of real crimes. The catalogue of different loves is concluded by the serial killer, cannibal, and necrophiliac Jeffrey Dahmer. This odd evolution in images mirrors the progressions in description that have happened so far in the poem, from the morally acceptable, to the aberrant. Whatever the love may be, it is always a part of human existence, and can always be slotted into the speaker's opening metaphor of the wood. Neatly rhyming with the subject of that metaphor, the catalogue concludes 'They struggled through the thickets as they could' (*TGBC* 103).

With the beginning of the verse paragraph, Shakespearian themes and references are extended and combined with the metaphor that opened the poem. There is finally, in the body of the poem itself, reference made to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with particular attention paid to the elements of artifice in its production, mirroring in turn the interjection in the first section and the interpretation of Genesis in

the second. Typically, then, after this promise of pastoral peace the enunciating I/eye once more brings us down to earth. Courtly entertainments and foreign settings are not for the twenty-first century. A description of the work of the controversial painter Attila Richard Lukacs follows. Even here, however, we do not leave Shakespeare wholly behind, as the speaker's vision of the condensed passion of Lukacs's figures goes on to echo and expand the first line of Sonnet 94. Gunn's version of Shakespeare's sonnet leaves out the second part of the line '...and do none',<sup>295</sup> and thus ties in better with the dual nature of 'love' (the peaceable and the violent) that has been established so far in 'A Wood near Athens':

... They that have power, or seem to,  
 They that have power to hurt, they are constructs  
 Of their own longing, born on the edge of sleep,  
 Imperfectly understood. (TGBC 103)

The revision of the Shakespearian line is halting. There are two possible definitions of 'they': the seemingly powerful, and those who inflict pain. Recalling the indeterminate realm of 'Waking in a Newly Built House' and 'Touch', the people in each version of this Shakespearian line are 'born at the edge of sleep' (TGCP 103). Unlike the enunciating I/eyes of the two earlier poems, however, these people are also 'constructs / Of their own longing' (TGBC 103): their universe, not driven by love, must be constructed out of drives, from desire. Not fitting into the framework established in the poem so far, their compulsions are 'Imperfectly understood' (TGBC 103). The idea of differing interpretations and misunderstandings born out of the conflict between different moral universes is expanded in the next verse paragraph of the poem, where, finally, the enunciating I/eye introduces himself as a part of the schema he has constructed. He sits beside a 'young man' (TGBC 103) almost interviewing him regarding his reminiscences. It is clear from the questions posed that the I/eye has not relinquished the detached role and tone with which he first introduced himself in the first section of the poem. The young man's seeming moral ambivalence is questioned, but no judgement is cast.

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<sup>295</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 762.

Detaching us further from the earthy preoccupations of the last verse paragraphs of the poem the final verse paragraph charts a movement to an almost existential realm of thought similar to the close of ‘Lights among Redwood’:

tone is forgotten: we stand  
and stare – mindless, diminished –  
at their rosy immanence. (TGCP 124)

‘A Wood near Athens’ also concludes with an exhortation to ‘look upward’ (TGCP 124), implying that one look beyond the preoccupations that the poem has established. But love is the subject matter of this later poem, in spite of the projected arboreal *milieu*, and the act of looking upward is situated in the past. Staring upwards, the I/eye recalls not the chiaroscuro produced by light on leaf, but a Renaissance universe, the music of the spheres. Finally the early exclamation ‘Think!’ (TGCP 102) makes sense. The perfect love always stems from and is a part of process:

And once, one looked above the wood and saw  
A thousand angels making festival,  
Each one distinct in brightness and function  
[...]  
Together, wings outstretched, they sang and played  
The intellect as powerhouse of love. (TGBC 104)

The music of the spheres, the existence of the angels who ‘choreograph’ (TGBC 104) and ‘perform’ (TGBC 104), is in the past, adding to the underlying religious scepticism, and the examples of different types of earthly love that populate the second section. It chimes with the Renaissance digressions that have peppered the poem up to this point. If the Genesis story’s origin as a concept from ‘the human mind’ (TGBC 102) is followed through, then it follows that this past universe also sits within interpretative margins. Again, ‘the material, local presence [is] here or there, selfsame with somewhere’.<sup>296</sup> Each man’s experience of the world is, at its root, a solipsistic one, its passage dictated by the drives, overlappings, and misunderstandings of the self in

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<sup>296</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 146.

relation to others. As the angels have ‘played / The intellect as powerhouse of love’ (*TGBC* 104), the poet, in the present, may also do so, illuminating sameness and otherness. Indeed, this poem may be seen to embody this effort. Ultimately, and again, the enunciating I/eye of Gunn’s poetry remains on the margins, free between ideologies, operating within and always recreating his own, self-propelled, system.

CHAPTER 6: MIMI KHALVATI

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*Intimate perception*

*The spy is stood motionless to draw his diagrams, a debauchee to keep a look-out for a woman, the most earnest men stop to observe progress on a new building or a major demolition. But the poet remains halted before any object which does not merit the earnest man's attention, so that people ask themselves whether he is spy or lover and what he has been looking at in reality in all the time he seems to have been looking at that tree.*<sup>297</sup>

'The central phenomenon at the root of both my subjectivity and my transcendence towards others, consists in my being given to myself', writes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, '*I am given*, that is, I find myself already situated and involved in a physical and social world – *I am given to myself*, which means that this situation is never hidden from me, it is never around me as an alien necessity, and I am never in effect enclosed in it like an object in a box.'<sup>298</sup> The 'physical and social world' which Merleau-Ponty's philosopher considers a given and as the site of the self's natural instantiation in this world, is reducible to 'mere arrangements of colour and light'<sup>299</sup> which manifest themselves always as consubstantial with all bodily experience. Of course, in the self's self-enfolding there is not room for light, but, as we saw in Thom Gunn's poem 'Touch', this lightless, tactile, world, however truthful, can never be permanent. 'Mere arrangements of colour and light' will concern us always, and, as in 'Waking in a Newly Built House', or 'Lights Among Redwood', it is in them that most perceptual beauty can be found. Whilst Merleau-Ponty's self is not constrained by the boundaries of a 'box' or by the otherness of a world of 'alien necessity', it is without a doubt constrained by language, and by the horizons of the self's perceptual possibilities. The self's state of self-givenness precedes a state where the self is defamiliarised, thus

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<sup>297</sup> Marcel Proust, 'Poetry, or the Mysterious Laws' in *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, trans. John Sturrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 147.

<sup>298</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 322.

<sup>299</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 322.

brought back into the world and language, a process which is constant in its ebb and flow.<sup>300</sup> Like Proust's poet who becomes marginalised by his ability to 'remain halted before any object which does not merit the earnest man's attention',<sup>301</sup> Michel Serres links the self's search for balance with the quotidian, and through this the beautiful, stating, 'by a slow act of re-equilibrium, the rarest novelties are anchored on the thousands of day-to-day habits that we don't even notice'.<sup>302</sup> The self, alert to its own otherness, may exist in an open world of perception akin to that which Gaston Bachelard would call a state of 'intimate immensity'.<sup>303</sup>

Mimi Khalvati's poetry is, above all, a poetry of intimate perception. The strength of her poetic world rests upon these 'thousands of day-to-day habits we don't even notice',<sup>304</sup> and creates novelty from the very moment that these habits *are* noticed. More often than not, the perception of the quotidian will trigger a moment of Proustian remembrance, but, contrary to Proust's narrator in *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, the poetic remembrances in Khalvati's poetry are usually catalysed by the illumination of a particular object or action. The moment of perception will trigger a series of self-conscious episodes in which the enunciating I/eye recognises and comes to terms with the difference that lies within herself. Therefore, contrary to the final lines of an aubade, Khalvati does not just '[make] do with light' (*MKEL* 15). The outside world, treated with wonder, need not be thought of as other, and this avoidance of the other in respect of things extends in Khalvati's poetry to the poetic *milieu*. What is othered instead is the act of perception itself. Equally, whereas Gunn's poetry seems to have emphasised that the true domain of 'togetherness' lies in a proximate sensory world where the visual is neither present nor a distraction, Khalvati's poetry investigates this distracting force. The content of the poems demonstrates that the poet is acute to the manner in which the play of light constructs the perceived world. Light and colour are therefore to be celebrated, and the act of perception, the otherness of language, and the self are thus investigated.

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<sup>300</sup> For both Julia Kristeva and Michel Serres, this is the case. Consistent throughout Kristeva's *oeuvre* is the articulation (and re-articulation) of the necessity of the speaking body's rebirth into the primal force of language, where being is facilitated by the self's realisation of its own otherness. Similarly, Michel Serres's *The Five Senses* is concerned to re-write Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to take into account these recurrent instances of birth and re-birth, which naturally occur as the self seeks equilibrium in the flux of the world.

<sup>301</sup> Proust, 'Poetry or the Mysterious Laws', *Against Sainte Beuve*, 147.

<sup>302</sup> Serres, *Atlas*, 4. My trans.

<sup>303</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 184.

<sup>304</sup> Serres, *Atlas*, 4.

Language itself tends to be both the personal and also the dominant othering force in Khalvati's poetry. It at once complicates the expression of meaning creates a space where the world is simultaneously articulated and retreated from. The poetry dwells both on and in the moment of perception, and Khalvati's enunciating I/eye is the means by which the perceived object and perception itself articulate and communicate. The concentration on intimate perception (a single object in a single place) will open out a world of space to the perceiver.<sup>305</sup> The moment of perception, for Khalvati, is also generative: it provokes memories of past moments as well as wonder at the beauty of the single, present, moment of perception. Julia Kristeva speaks of Proust's great project in terms that may equally be applied to Khalvati's poetic: '[*À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is concerned with] the exploration of memory, with the I/eye unfolding ideas and images, recalling flavours, smells, touches, resonances, sensations, jealousies, exasperations, griefs and joys'.<sup>306</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that the poet herself speaks of her primary literary influences as Proust and Woolf, two twentieth century writers who are frequently analysed in terms of language, perception, memory and embodiment:

Both Proust and Woolf had this way of looking at everything through a huge magnifying glass. Catching every little nuance. I'm really not interested in subject matter, but I'm interested in ways of perceiving, and ways of remembering, ways of thinking [...] tracking what goes on inside your mind, your perceptions. And I love the kind of textural [*sic.*], pinpoint accuracy that I find in those two writers.<sup>307</sup>

The 'textural, pinpoint accuracy' that Khalvati finds in Proust and Woolf is one expressed best through poetically articulated experience of things rather than mere description of the things themselves, producing an effect in a writerly world where 'it is best [...] to rub along with humble facts until the mind at last is all of a glow and sees

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<sup>305</sup> See Edward Casey on Bachelard's notion of intimate immensity: 'Thanks to intimate immensity, I connect place with space. The beguiling and bedeviling dichotomy [...] is overcome [...]. *I enter space from place itself*'. *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: U California P, 1997), 294.

<sup>306</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Proust and the Sense of Time*, trans. Stephen Bann (London: Faber, 1993), 6.

<sup>307</sup> Mimi Khalvati interview with Vicki Bertram, *PN Review* 26.2 (1999), *Khalvati Online*, n.p.

the sunset without its being described'.<sup>308</sup> Khalvati's early poem, 'The Bowl', demonstrates a mixture of Woolfian and Proustian perception. The poem is exemplary in its use of a single object as a vehicle through which the moment's perception is streamed and blurred, whilst it is at the same time the vehicle through which the poem's enunciating I/eye is fleshed out and transposed. Tellingly, the first person pronoun does not appear in the poem until the fourth stanza. The subject of the immediate vision is initially given primacy:

The bowl is big and blue. A flash of leaf  
 along its rim is green, spring-green, lime  
 and herringbone. Across the glaze where fish swim,  
 over the loose-knit waves in hopscotch-black,  
 borders of fish-eye and cross-stitch, chestnut trees  
 throw shadows: candles, catafalques and barques  
 and lord knows what, what ghost of ancient seacraft,  
 what river-going name we give to shadows. (MKSP 16-7)

The bowl, the object of perception and the canvas onto which the enunciating I/eye originally projects herself, is more complex than the simple opening sentence suggests. It is both the hill-confined Persian lake-basin implied in the poem's preface and also a blue Persian finger bowl that the writer owns in England and whose touch elicits a remembered landscape in the mind's eye. The 'flash of leaf' (MKSP 16) may be an inscribed pattern in the fingerbowl and also the trees lining the imagined lake-basin. Equally, 'glaze' (MKSP 16) is both the literal glaze of the ceramic bowl and the water in the lake, 'where fish swim' (MKSP 16). Thus, literal descriptions of both the ceramic and the geographical bowl are interchangeable as each can also represent a metaphorical description of the other. The bowl is not fully the ceramic hand-basin, nor lake-basin. Through the blurred visual and remembered perception, the images of each bowl blur. Like Kristeva's reading of Proust's madeline, 'The Bowl' (sometimes referred to without the definite article as simply 'bowl') is 'both elsewhere *and* here at hand, past *and* also present, a sensation *and* an image at the same time, just as it is both a name *and* a meaning'.<sup>309</sup> It is not long before the objects of literal and remembered

<sup>308</sup> Woolf, 'Past and Present at the English Lakes' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Volume II 1912-1918*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1987), 32.

<sup>309</sup> Kristeva, *Proust and the Sense of Time*, 49.

perception fuse, through metaphor, with the overtly imaginary and the artistic.

‘Chestnut trees / throw shadows’ (*MKSP* 17), making the world of bright colour that opens the poem also one that has the three-dimensional qualities associated with chiaroscuro. The floral ‘candles’ of the chestnut are also, the speaker implies, light- (and shadow-) giving, and the wood of the tree produces vessels for both life (‘barques’) and death (‘catafalques’). There is nothing empirical about the vision at work here, and Khalvati is eminently conscious of the poem’s status as a literary object as well as an articulation of perception and memory.

By the second stanza the opening green ‘flash of leaf’ (*MKSP* 16) is fossilised and is thus without illumination and colouration. These fossilized leaves now lie at the bottom of the bowl and are at once literal and textual; they are related to the vision and memory, poetic articulation, and the written inscription of the poem:

[The leaves] are named: cuneiform and ensiform,  
 spathulate and saggitate and their margins  
 are serrated, lapidary, lobed (*MKSP* 17)

The language that describes (or names) the fossil leaves implies their remembered living embodiment and the act of inscription in a less explicit manner than that which we observed in Heaney. Unlike in Heaney, the act of inscription is related less to a sense of groundedness in the surrounding *milieu*, but is rather related to the speaking voice’s sense of groundedness in her self. We will see the relationship between the bowl, inscription, and embodiment develop as the poem progresses. The opening of the following stanza sees use of the first person possessive for the first time, and the green of the ‘flash of leaf’ (*MKSP* 16) leaches into a new image: ‘my book of Botany is green’ (*MKSP* 17). It is pertinent to note here that the first use of the first person possessive is in relation not to the bowl, nor to the past, but to a textual object, and it is not long before textuality and becomes self-conscious on the part of the enunciating I/eye, and the bounds between poem *as* and poem *of* space are blurred. Light illuminates the bowl and catalyses the meditation on the real and imagined space of the bowl, and so too light illuminates the book. The bowl as well as the book is soon possessed: ‘inside my bowl a womb of air revolves’ (*MKSP* 17). That the bowl is something that is organic in its appearance and is something that elicits interpretation (or reading) is emphasised by the conflation of book- and bowl- related metaphor, as the speaker asks ‘What tadpole of the margins, holly-spine / of seahorse [...] be cobbled in its hoop?’ (*MKSP* 17).

The final stanza of Section ii of 'The Bowl' introduces the first person pronoun for the first time. As the bowl encloses in upon itself and presents an open universe, folding over or eliminating horizons, and the I/eye takes a position squatting outside and enveloping the bowl, perhaps in an attempt to control its wriggling organicity:

I squat, I stoop. My knees are either side  
 of bowl. My hands are eyes around its crescent.  
 The surface of its stories feathers me (MKSP 17)

Lacking any article, however, the bowl escapes complete grammatical possession. Rather it is the bowl, and its cascades of projected potential historical meaning that disturb the stability of the enunciating I/eye. The story catalysed by the object is now unstable, creates new spaces and textures and an affective reaction by 'feather[ing]' (MKSP 17) the projected speaker as if the water held in the lake-basin were disturbed by wind, and then wringing her ears, thus immediately divesting her of her new, fluid, identity. We have lost sight of the initial catalyst of this string of perceptions, the vision of a bowl that is simply 'big and blue' (MKSP 16), and suffer from a loss of focus as there no longer seem to be any clearly delineated spatial and temporal boundaries. Juhani Pallasmaa links the state of blurred vision to a proliferation of images and a new sort of gaze: 'the loss of focus brought about by the stream of images may emancipate the eye [...] and give rise to a participatory and empathetic gaze'.<sup>310</sup> Feathered and wrung out with empathy, the enunciating I/eye of the poem is made strange to her surroundings through the search for meaning, and acknowledges the disruption of specific perception in a state of imagistic panic:

On a skyline

I cannot see a silhouette carves vase-shapes  
 into sky: baby, belly, breast, thigh;  
 an aeroplane I cannot hear has shark fins  
 and three black camels sleep in a blue, blue desert. (MKSP 17)

Experience of space is now as overwhelming as sensory experience, and neither sense nor space are regulated by the single object of perception (the bowl) but rather they are complicated by it. The I/eye is a participant not only in her own histories and

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<sup>310</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 35-36.

landscapes, but also in those of others. The I/eye, as well as the bowl, is a receptacle through which both personal and national histories are streamed.

It is logical now that the speaking voice of the poem, as well as the bowl which both represents and complicates her presence in the poem, exist in a space of liminality, beyond empirical meaning or definition, eschewing conventional methods of perception and articulation. Overwhelmed by the stream of history that has emanated from the single moment of perception, the I/eye is engulfed in different perceptions, histories, and moments. The I/eye must find again a stable centre from whence to perceive and articulate the world, and extract herself from the mess of history, make sense of the waste of her past and the past of others. The possessive pronoun that opens the second section of the poem is the coordinate through which the speaker seeks to re-place herself in relation to the seen and unseen landscapes before her. Kristeva links this search for location in chaos and literature explicitly to the enunciating I/eye and the spatialization of memory, and calls it (in relation to Proust) the ‘search for an embodied imagination’.<sup>311</sup> Mieke Bal also links sense to the subject’s self-creation of their position in space: ‘the issue is feeling: how the subject *feels* his position in space. What we call ‘feeling’ is the threshold of body and subjectivity’.<sup>312</sup> Indeed, in ‘The Bowl’, time, memory, and vision become spatialized, and the embodiment of the I/eye in the poem goes so far as to mimic the shape of the bowl, now representative of memory, over and over again. The space of the bowl is mapped onto the imagined body of the speaking voice: her eyelids are indented by the hoofprints of ‘Ali’s horse’, her skin is imprinted with ‘caves where tribal women stooped to place tin sconces’, her gums ‘scooped’ by ‘limpet pools’ (*MKSP* 17). Each phrase in this stanza begins with a bowl-shaped word (hoofprints, caves, limpet-pools) and ends with the relevant part of the speaker’s anatomy (eyelids, skin, limbs). Her embodiment alongside the bowl is one engendered by language, and it is language that bridges (linking and separating) the speaking voice of the poem and her vision.

As the first stanza of this section began with the acquisition of simultaneous birth, vitality, and death through the bowl (‘My bowl has cauled my memories. My bowl /

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<sup>311</sup> ‘Proustian time, which brings together the sensations imprinted in signs, is a *metamorphosis* [...] in the search (*À la recherche*) for an embodied imagination: that is to say, a space where words and their dark, unconscious manifestations contribute to the weaving of the world’s unbroken flesh, of which I is a part. I as writer; I as reader; I living, loving and dying.’ (Kristeva, *Proust and the Sense of Time*, 5).

<sup>312</sup> Mieke Bal, *Quoting Carravagio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1999), 151.

has buried me' (*MKSP* 17)), the second articulates this removal of boundaries and the resultant onslaught of perceptions:

My bowl has smashed my boundaries: harebell  
 and hawthorn mingling in my thickened waist  
 of jasmine; catkin and *chenar*, dwarf-oak  
 and hazel hanging over torrents, deltas,  
 my season's arteries... *Lahaf-Doozee!*...  
 My retina is scarred with shadow-dances  
 and echoes run like hessian blinds across  
 my sleep; my ears are niches, prayer-rug arches. (*MKSP* 18)

The landscapes of the present (England), childhood (Iran), and the body conflate. With the boundaries between these places 'smashed', the I/eye is open to the world, a state that is articulated not only in image but also in voice, her mother tongue (Farsi) punctuates English. The cauled, buried I/eye is now open to all affect, and lies between all places, eventually becoming embodied as her surroundings without the bowl as intermediary. Interestingly it is the nervous system rather than her lost mother tongue that is equated with the place of birth: 'my backbone is an alley / a one-way runnelled alley, cobblestoned / with hawker's cries' (*MKSP* 18). Indeed, this use of the spine rather than the voice to embody the lost Persian childhood corresponds with Kristeva's idea about the trauma of severance from the mother tongue and the resultant confusion of inheritance that we have seen worked out in terms of Ireland in *The Rough Field*.<sup>313</sup> As the section closes, the means by which vision can be streamed is discovered – through the idea of maternal inheritance as represented by the bowl. By way of corresponding cross-generational images, the bowl is once again possessed and the poetic vision is controlled:

Lizards have kept their watch on lamplight, citrus-  
 peel in my mother's hand becoming baskets.

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<sup>313</sup> As we have seen in the chapter on Montague, Kristeva equates loss of maternal language to a resultant inarticulable physical memory: 'Not to speak your mother tongue. To live in sounds, arguments cut off from the body's nocturnal memory, from the bittersweet sleep of childhood. To carry within yourself a something like a secret tomb, [...] the language of another time – treasured and useless – that fades away and leaves' (*Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, 26-7). My trans.

My bowl beneath the tap is scoured with leaves.

(MKSP 18)

The leaves that scour the bowl both imprint and divest the bowl of inscription, leaving it open again to the projection of the vision of the enunciating I/eye. The scoured bowl represents the ordering of her vision. At the same time as mirroring the leaf green embellishments of the opening section, and the fossilized leaves, leached of colour, the leaf-scoured bowl anticipates the change of *milieu* and colour at the beginning of the final section of the poem.

There is an immediate sense of distance and separation in the final section of the poem. The past is now no longer oppressive or strangely embodied but is firmly placed in a symbolic space of memory: 'The white rooms of the house we glimpsed through pine / quince and pomegranate are derelict' (MKSP 18). 'White' implies a *tabula rasa* that is both old (formed clean through erasure) and new. In the context of *In White Ink* as a whole, the use of this colour at this point also accentuates the relationship of inheritance between mother and daughter, as the epigraph to the volume quotes from Hélène Cixous: 'A woman is never far from her 'mother' [...] There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink' (MKSP 9). To return in this way to Kristeva, the 'white' of the house, alongside the implied sense of calm and space also relates to the process of the poem. The excess of the previous section gives way to separation in the same way as the Kristevan being is born into separation through emancipation from the excess of the maternal.<sup>314</sup> Thus, the speaking voice develops a sense of separateness from the accumulated visions of history at the same time as acknowledging her debt to this inheritance. She situates herself as both a part of and apart from the noise of her ancestors, stating 'I too will take my bowl and leave these wheatfields' (MKSP 19), and takes up a position of dominance over landscapes real and imagined – on a prayer rug '*above* the eyrie' (MKSP 19, my *itals*).

A rug is unrolled from a vantage point and 'in shade' (MKSP 19), and the landscape below absorbs the illumination and colours of the sunset. Ideas of maternal inheritance and *tabula rasa* conflate in the image of the mountain, '*Sineh Sefid*' (in Khalvati's own translation, 'Mount White Breast'), which is illuminated and upon which the light of the sun is projected and reflects under the now calm gaze of the enunciating I/eye. From this image we return to the main vehicle in the poem that represents all these things: the bowl. The convexity of the sky and the concavity of the

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<sup>314</sup> See Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 10.

bowl, also representative of illumination and the vision observed, come together to create a whole, as illumination and control of the landscape combine:

...My bowl will hold the bowl of sky  
 and as twilight falls I will stand and fling  
 its spool and watch it land as lake: a ring  
 where *rood* and *river* meet in peacock-blue  
 and peacock-green and a hundred rills cascade. (MKSP 19)

The bowl now represents a composite vision that implies inheritance but may be read to be as simple as the bowl that opens the poem. The confluence of ‘Rood’ and ‘river’ could be a simple geographical phenomenon, where the river spills into the lake-basin, which is a quarter of an acre big. However, ‘rood’ and ‘river’ also represent a neat symbolic conflation of Khalvati’s inheritances: paternal and maternal, English and Perisan. The renewed confidence in and control over the multiple resonances that the bowl has elicited is emphasised in the confident resonance of sound across the line, the only full rhyme in the poem combines action (‘fling’) and articulation (‘ring’), separation and resonance. Equally, neither colour nor history are overwhelming, as the speaker is able to descend ‘to / bowl’ (MKSP 19), and the green-blue of the bowl can now be read easily as the meeting-place between the present I/eye and ‘old reflections’ (MKSP 19). The end of the poem sees a return from the geographical bowl to the ceramic bowl clasped between two hands. The final lines emphasise the poem’s (and volume’s) preoccupation with cultural and familial inheritances, remembrance, and sense-impression, spilling at times into myth:

And from its lap a scent will rise like Mer  
 from mother-love and waters; scent whose name  
 I owe to *Talat*, *gold* for grandmother:  
*Maryam*, *tuberoise*, for bowl, for daughter. (MKSP 19)

As the poem closes the object and speaking voice (bowl and daughter) are receptacles of inheritance both together and apart. They eventually represent each other, given and holding the scent of marjoram and agave, creating a new receptive space.

In ‘The Bowl’ we have seen the I/eye and its object of vision and articulation represent a ‘point of equilibrium [that] generates a chain of memories which is at the

same time a cascade of spatial metaphors'.<sup>315</sup> This is not an unfamiliar theme in Khalvati. The titular sequence from *Mirrorwork* again demonstrates the poet's use of an object through which a multiplicity of visions and impressions can be channeled, seeking to resolve problems of belonging through association through poetic vision and voice. 'Mirrorwork' investigates a personal relationship with an exploration of the difficulty of familiarity and strangeness, both interpersonally and cross-culturally. Rather than engender memories, as in 'The Bowl', the mosaic tree and the willow and cherry trees of 'Mirrorwork' are conflated and comprise a single canvas upon which a disparate sense of self is projected, an imagistic kaleidoscope through which the I/eye attempts to investigate a relationship that has only exacerbated her own sense of difference and separation. The mirror tree that is the *idée fixe* of the sequence also becomes an ikon, representative of 'somewhere to / come home to on my own terms' (MKSP 29). In 'Mirrorwork', the speaking voice and the angles of vision are as inseparable and simultaneously other as the bowl and the enunciating I/eye of 'The Bowl', and the streaming object (the tree) is just as conflicted as the bowl: where the bowl was both ceramic and geographical, the tree is a mosaic, a symbol of national identity, and a real tree. Through the central image, a diverse and multiple poetic world is created from many different quotidian things, the 'mere arrangements of colour and light'<sup>316</sup> that refract from the mirror-work mosaic.

Although most of the momentum between sections of 'Mirrorwork' is gained through the unifying image of the tree, the speaking voice of each poem seems keen to construct a relationship between herself, the tree, and the addressee that is defined by perceived and articulated difference:

I refuse the natural detail to tell you how  
 things look, how sky would look without a  
 tree to blot my view of an avenue through  
 cloudbanks like the genie from the bonfire  
 growing longer, quieter, skyward. (MKSP 30)

Although the definite articles here endow the passage with a sense of familiarity, it is this very assumption of familiarity that emphasises the speaking voice's sense of difference. At this point the vehicle of tree is used in order to imagine a visual space

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<sup>315</sup> Kristeva, *Proust and the Sense of Time*, 48.

<sup>316</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 322.

without it, admitting the tree's quotidian state through negation and hypotheses. The tree is present in this image through the speaking voice's tacit acknowledgement of its absent necessity to her spatial imaginings. This negation may be seen as an experiment in perception and otherness as legitimate as the act of describing the seen. And indeed, often in this sequence the tree is defined through negation, which in turn creates a sense of otherness that can not only be projected upon any relationship with the world, but upon the self's own sense of otherness in relation to itself:

My tree is nothing but the thought of something  
not itself: a bare land that throws its  
own desire for shadow, orchard, rain (MKSP 31)

The tree becomes representative of and a mirror for the relationship and the speaking voice's sense of self. Light illuminates the object of perception and also creates visual disturbances that could lead to a momentary absence of the original perception: 'Standing in its plot, its absence of a / paving stone, my cherry tree disassembles / intimacy in echoes' (MKSP 30). In the terms of David Grandy, it is light that is responsible for one's recognition of otherness: 'light presents otherness to our view [...] the inscrutability of light informs the inscrutability or otherness of the outside world'.<sup>317</sup> To return to Khalvati's mirrortree, like any reflective object, the tree fragments light and impressions; it breaks up a sense of the real and lies between the enunciating I and visualising eye, Khalvati's home in England and her birth-place in Iran. The effect is to create an overwhelming sense of displacement, multiplying the perceived otherness. Again, through the mirrortree, Iran and England conflate, but, conflicting at the same time they create an underlying sense of estrangement. The poetry is not so much scathing about England and nostalgic about Iran as keen to work through a sense of being between, to align these disparate parts of self successfully. However, success tends only to come through the acknowledgement of the otherness in one's self rather than the projection of that otherness upon the world.

As we have seen in relation to 'The Bowl', the Kristevan realisation of self is dependent upon the recognition of a space *between* things that designates otherness. In the main, this space is created at the point of separation from the mother and exacerbated during the mirror stage of development. After this, for Kristeva at least,

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<sup>317</sup> David Grandy, 'The Otherness of Light: Einstein and Levinas', *Postmodern Culture* 12.1 (2001), 3.

difference (strangeness or alterity) becomes something inherent in ourselves, almost quotidian, and is something that must be recognised and accepted. She states: ‘strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself’.<sup>318</sup> ‘Mirrorwork’ charts a self-becoming in a manner altogether different from ‘The Bowl’. The sequence is not only concerned with split geographical inheritance, but also with a sense of physical and emotional place that is as diffracted as the reflection that comes off the mosaic, ‘each fragment whole, each unit split’ (*MKSP* 33). Finally, it is in the recognition of difference’s roots in the everyday that the I/eye can withdraw her vision from the complicating image of the tree and her mind from the spatially imposing idea of the failing relationship and her problems with self-identification:

I glance as I pass. Not with indifference  
 but an incipient sense of the customary.  
*Seeing things as they are. You, me.*  
*Accommodating difference. On its own terms.* (MKSP 35)

The dullness implied by ‘the customary’ here is negated by the fact that the customary is ‘incipient’ and not indifferent. The speaking voice, as the poem closes, is no longer dazzled by the refraction of light that the tree produces. The gaze is led rather than distracted by light. Merleau-Ponty speaks very strongly of the two characteristics of light as distractive and as facilitating to perception: ‘lighting and reflection, then, play their part only if they remain in the background as discrete intermediaries, and *lead* our gaze instead of arresting it’.<sup>319</sup> However, the phenomenologist does not seem to acknowledge the tacit *normality* of light; light allows the I/eye to prioritize the object of immediate perception, to ‘[see] *things as they are*’, and to do this in a space to which she has ‘come home to on [her] own terms’, albeit mitigated by having to accept and work with difference ‘*on its own terms*’ (my emphasis). The terms projected by difference and refracted by the speaker are also those created from the play of light. They are terms that not only include facilitation of vision and the resultant empirical space-creation, but also the refraction or disturbance of vision and the resultant

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<sup>318</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Léon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 310.

<sup>319</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 310.

impressionistic space-creation. They are terms that are dictated by light and by the ability to perceive that light. The gaze itself is distractive enough, allowing the I/eye to realise, thus accommodate, difference. More often than not, the I/eye's idiosyncratic and changeable perceptions of her surroundings lead to fluctuations in perception, and a stylistic impressionism akin to Khalvati's assessment of Woolf's and Proust's 'way of looking at everything through a huge magnifying glass'<sup>320</sup> – an observational act dependent, above all else, upon light.

In the volume *Entries on Light* Khalvati revisits many of the subjects of previous volumes. Here, however, there is less of a tendency to stream perceptual experiments through a single, solid, but differentiating object. Rather, Khalvati uses the idea of light itself to give focus to a sequence of fragments or impressions, at times prosaic and at other times impressionistic. The conflation of literal and the figurative images in the poems more often than not give the sequence a depth of vision, creating resonances where multiplicities are always 'shining from behind'.<sup>321</sup> *Entries on Light* furthers Khalvati's interest in and her experimentation with 'the infinitesimal, in tiny perceptions',<sup>322</sup> and the volume must, above all, be seen as an experiment in perception, perception that because of its heavily visual nature is also inherently spatial and perpetually developing and changing. Indeed, the first poem in the volume opens with a sense of flux, as the implied speaker and her mother occupy different and changing positions in relation to each other: 'our grounds and elevations / realign themselves' (*MKEL* 13). Interestingly, the spaces that they both inhabit are drawn together by ideas of the threshold and of passage (the poem opens as the speaker knocks on the door her mother opens). As with the poems we have looked at above, this poem also enacts a process of investigation and subsequent acceptance of the terms of difference.

The work of differentiation here is articulated in terms of the re-visualisation of the mother, once an everyday figure, who is now constituted as 'shock'. This 'shock' is one of the shifting fields of inheritance, and the non-transitive nature of parental relationships, and is spatialised explicitly at the beginning of the poem. The speaking voice returns, 'stricken / by how small [her mother] is' (*MKEL* 13), and stands at the front door as her mother stands 'one step below' her, and her children 'above' (*MKEL* 13). The gulf between her mother and her children is almost incomprehensible, yet it is the I/eye that comprises that gulf. However, the poem does not elaborate upon this

<sup>320</sup> Khalvati, Interview with Vicki Pertram, n.p.

<sup>321</sup> Mimi Khalvati, 'A Certain Kind of Energy' interview with Mary Macrae, *Magma Poetry* 18 (2000), n.p.

<sup>322</sup> Khalvati, 'A Certain Kind of Energy', n.p.

underlying problem. Rather, the problem is implicit, and the poem pays attention mainly to the moment's perception, as the speaker crosses the threshold, and from thence maps the play of light and shade in space:

...it's more  
with a sense of vastness, height  
that I see you shrink;  
of radiance, like your candle  
lit in the daytime, that I notice  
how pale your hair and skin seem  
beside ours.

Dwindling, as hollows  
deepen, brighten and what is  
nearest catches light  
in the circle you inhabit and I  
inherit, knowing my reach is smaller  
much too small to lift  
and shawl you in my arms, fading  
you intensify, like candlelight  
on scalloped lace, in the pink  
the very fabric of our lives.

(MKEL 13-14)

Again, Khalvati demonstrates her ability to work through the series of impressions that go to make up a single moment, and it is through the metaphor of light, or visual disturbance, that she addresses the equally rupturing and confusing problem of maternal inheritance, death, and value. The mother cannot be 'only / a kernel blown to husk' (MKEL 13), and yet that same mother is shrunk and paled in comparison to her daughter (the implied speaker of the poem). The close of the third stanza (above) articulates clearly the problem the poem seeks to investigate: the tension between how a daughter expects to see her mother, and how, in this moment, she really sees her. The resolution of these tensions is not the question here; rather, the poem is concerned with the true articulation of the perceptual problem of the moment. This problem manifests itself in a certain visual and syntactic obscurity, an implicitness that is emphasised as 'it seems' does not repeat across phrases in the third stanza, and, equally, the simile of the play of

natural on artificial light confuses the syntax. The final stanza becomes yet more tortuous. Again, phrases seem stilted and are interrupted by sub-clauses which obscure rather than clarify sense (in particular, another simile, ‘like candlelight / on scalloped lace’ (*MKEL* 14), punctuates an already difficult phrase) and conflicting movements are placed in close proximity to each other (for example ‘deepen, brighten’ (*MKEL* 14)), creating a verbal as well as an imagistic impressionism. The perceptual blurring as the I/eye moves into the house, and her ideological blurring as she reassesses familial relationships, are played out in the poem and, tellingly, the poem itself is inconclusive. The enunciating I/eye, confused and on a threshold between generations at the beginning of the poem, is no less a part of this obscuring system of inheritance – the mother remains less to do with her than with her family, a part which she cannot quite conceive but knows comprises ‘the very fabric of [their] lives’ (*MKEL* 14).

The opening of the second poem in the sequence is situated in a place of temporal determinacy: ‘Sunday’ (*MKEL* 15). However, as the poem continues, the I/eye is again between spaces of inheritance, a liminal position which is accentuated by the geographical position of the I/eye (presumably in the garden of a house by the shore). The relationship between voice, vision, and other is again explored, but here the other space has, for a while, a voice. The given time and place of the poem (Sunday, awakening, England) as well as the interlinked positions of vision and enunciation are questioned twice by the voice of the landscape (‘*Do you long to go back to that childhood in a grown up body?*’). This landscape is rewritten four times in the poem: as sky, sea and land, metaphor and metonym, ‘the angels’, ‘the everlasting blue’, ‘the waters’ and ‘the everlasting shore’ (*MKEL* 15). Tellingly, the I/eye does not answer the landscape’s questions. Rather, she allows the other voice to punctuate her waking musings, and eventually assimilates it as a part of her own:

with a cockerel  
 to wake me in the morning  
 a dog to guard us  
 through the night, one window  
  
 pink with sunset, one blue  
 with dusk? I could go on and on.  
 But I am moving into the morning.  
 I am making do with light.

(*MKEL* 15)

In these closing lines, the I/eye takes a position contrary to that we have seen in 'The Bowl'. Here, the inheritance is literary and English, rather than object-bound and Persian: the cockerel and dog are a reference to Charleston farmhouse and the Bells' occupation there, the dusky temporality (in contrast to the speaker's temporal position) a reference to Virginia Woolf's self-avowedly chiaroscuric, impressionistic prose style, where her narrator's surroundings are 'all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist'.<sup>323</sup> In addition to the landscape's question, and explicitly related to the 'old bazaars' of the speaker's childhood in Iran, the poem posits a question that is placed distinctly in the English tradition and yet which implies others. Regressive temporal passage is not possible, however. She must keep moving, alert to the changing light and the consequent change of perception and sentiment, in tandem with the present moment.

The light of dawn has been the emergent phenomenon which comes to represent the distance between the present of the enunciating I/eye and the various constitutive places of personal and literary inheritance (represented by dusk). We have seen in 'The Bowl' and 'Mirrorwork' as well as in the earlier poem in *Entries on Light*, that mere 'daylight' will not do. 'The shadow gives shape and life to the object in light',<sup>324</sup> and thus, in order to 'see things as they are' in reality, shadow must be navigated, and a balance must be drawn between dawn and dusk. The maintenance of this balance also implies that the I/eye, unless retrospectively dwelling in a single moment of perception, must also be acute to chiaroscuric changes and her resultant perpetually shifting perceptual balance. And indeed, in much of Khalvati's poetry the I/eye is placed either at dawn or dusk, both of these times representing perceptual places of temporal order and spatial change from which the moment may be observed and catalogued. The third poem in *Entries on Light* is placed exactly at this point of balance, very conscious of the position between:

Scales are evenly  
weighted, inside  
outside. Light is  
evenly poised

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<sup>323</sup> Virginia Woolf, on the composition of *Jacob's Room*, in *A Moment's Liberty: The Shorter Diary* ed. Anne Oliver Bell (London: Hogarth, 1990, Random House, 1997), 100.

<sup>324</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 47.

- blur to the gold  
 glare to the blue –  
 it's twilight.  
 In two minds

Who can read by  
 a lamp, focus  
 land's outline?  
 But blue soon  
 sinks and gold  
 rises. Who  
 can stay the balance  
 if light can't?

(MKEL 17)

Each stanza interrogates balance, dawn, and dusk in turn. Balance, it seems, only comes in the acceptance of change. As in many of Khalvati's poems, the moment over all else is invested with primacy, and becomes the factor through which thought is streamed. Here, there are echoes of Woolf rather than Proust: perception does not give way to history, rather to a consciousness about the moment and methods of perception itself. Woolf writes of the sensitive, liminal, position of the observer in 'The Moment' thus:

Then the sky loses its colour perceptibly and a star here and there makes a point of light. Then changes, unseen in the day, coming in succession seem to make an order evident. One becomes aware that we are spectators and also passive participants in a pageant. And as nothing can interfere with the order, we have nothing to do but accept, and watch.<sup>325</sup>

Sensitive to change but apart from it, the enunciating I/eye of Khalvati's poem, who also occupies the position that Mieke Bal calls that of the 'focalizer',<sup>326</sup> is able to

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<sup>325</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'The Moment: Summer's Night' in *The Moment and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1952), 9-10.

<sup>326</sup> See Mieke Bal: 'Because focalization refers to a relationship, each pole of that relationship – the subject and the object of the focalization – must be studied both separately and together. The subject of focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie within a character [...] or outside it.'

construct a poem from the idea of the changing balance of light in the world, which is also a lyric to the instability of perception and to human frailty, where the point of poetic situation, the first person pronoun, is entirely absent.

A later poem in the sequence investigates this liminal speaking position further. The first person pronoun is established as the vehicle of perception in the first two words of the poem – ‘Through me’ (*MKEL* 20). This is an affective subjectivity that can be found in Woolf’s pageant participant whose moment ‘is largely composed of visual and of sense impressions’,<sup>327</sup> in Bal’s focalizer who is ‘the point from which the elements are viewed’,<sup>328</sup> and in Kristeva’s interpretation of the textual position of Proust’s narrator, where ‘subjectivity, as represented by the *I* of the narrator, is the boundary – if not the means of interchange – between two structures’.<sup>329</sup> The enunciating I/eye of this poem is, literally, the subject through which the object of the poem, light, is streamed:

Through me light drives  
on seawall, fencepost, brittle  
spears of lavender. A light  
at its most inexplicable. (*MKEL* 20)

Perception occurs before there is time to interrogate the act, and it is ‘through’ the I/eye that the constituent parts of her surroundings are illuminated. The first person pronoun is a point of perception and of geographical situation. Echoing the temporal point of departure of Woolf’s ‘The Moment’, this poem investigates the point at which natural light gives over to the combination of darkness and artificial illumination. The I/eye is in a truly liminal position – between sea and land, day and night, natural and artificial light, and only select objects that comprise this world are illuminated. At this point of turning, the speaker cannot ‘stay the [perceptual] balance’ (*MKEL* 17) – even light is unfamiliar, ‘inexplicable’, and the world is now perceived ‘in reversals, shadows, replications’ (*MKEL* 20). Lighthouses are ‘table lamp // amber stars that now signal / now don’t, across water’ (*MKEL* 20). Rather than signifying specific places, here, the lighthouses are displaced; the ‘table lamp amber stars’ (*MKEL* 20) are the lighthouses of

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[...] narrator and focalizer are not to be conflated’, *Looking In: the Art of Viewing*, (Amsterdam: OPA, 2001), 47.

<sup>327</sup> Woolf, ‘The Moment’, *The Moment*, 9

<sup>328</sup> Bal, *Looking In*, 47.

<sup>329</sup> Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 320.

the Dorset and Hampshire coast and the Needles (off the Isle of Wight). Like the speaker, the implied lighthouses are at once domestic and familiar, and separated and strange. Light turns from the vast natural expanse to light upon more commonplace, proximate things and is no longer controlled by the 'natural arbiters of light, sea and sky' (*MKEL* 20). As in *Entries on Light*, there is an all-pervasive sense of the self-other relationship of the I/eye and her *milieu*, which, in turn, becomes strange:

Even our image in glass, like knowledge  
forgotten, startles us. How bright

the lamp is in the garden!

(*MKEL* 20)

The use of the first person plural possessive in place of the singular in relation to the reflected image distances the speaker from the image of herself. The idea of a moment which startles is followed by one such moment. As in the first poem of *Entries on Light*, the speaker experiences a moment of shock as the familiar is re-perceived. The punctuating exclamation ('How bright // the lamp is in the garden!' (*MKEL* 20)) emphasises the manner of strangeness that is being investigated in the poem. The artificial light is now irremediably other, something that can break the train of perception and of thought. The exclamation, broken between two stanzas, also emphasises the fragmentary process of perception. The phrase moves from the shock of the initial perception ('how bright'), to that perception being endowed with meaning and being ('the lamp is'), and the knowledge of the perception allowing the I/eye to see beyond it, and to contextualise it geographically ('in the garden'). Indeed, the final stanza gives some sort of existential context to these perceptual investigations. The liminal position of the I/eye is replaced by that of a 'white rail' that runs 'between this world and the next' in order 'to impede / our fall, illuminate / our light-world's edge' (*MKEL* 20). Like the speaking voices's or the focalizer's position in relation to their surroundings, this 'white rail' preserves: it is a 'selvage' (*MKEL* 20). Typically of Khalvati, the rail exists simultaneously in the abstract and the particular; at once on the brink of the existential void and of familiar surroundings – at the end of 'our small front gardens' (*MKEL* 20). The rail is the point at which the articulable world of perception is controlled (where it starts and stops), the facilitator through which this world can be handled, and the provider of new context, illumination, or decoration for the space that it borders and protects.

As if to emphasise the liminal position of Khalvati's enunciating I/eyes, and their frequent situation as the boundary or passage between elements and means of cross-communication, a later poem in the sequence begins explicitly *in media res*:

: that sky and light and colour  
cloud clearings

should raise me, strip me down  
to the bare bones

of vocabulary – rise fall sea sky  
a tree and not a sycamore

flower and not a bluebell  
till the agony of daily life

falls away, like the ground from a tilting  
plane, drops far below me.

(MKEL 32)

The poem which comes before this one concludes 'how should I have the heart to tell you, *show* you / that it's not the scream / in my throat, nor the thought / in my head, nor the light of beliefs / I steer by?' (MKEL 31). That this next poem should begin with a colon suggests (although Khalvati emphasises in her foreword to the volume that all poems bar the first and last are self contained and a single page long) both a break from and a continuation of this line of questioning. Again there is an emphasis on the fluid differences between the abstract and the particular which arises from the poetic interest in self-positioning. There is also, again, an immediate emphasis on the primacy of light in the construction of the *milieu* of the poem and the processes by which the I/eye locates herself in these surroundings. As in many of Khalvati's other poems, the confluence of these 'sky and light and colour' (MKEL 32) hold the attention as much by their constant fluctuation as by their immediately arresting qualities. However, as the visualising eye of the poem is open to the effects of 'sky and light and colour' she seems to lose her roots in the quotidian world of precisely named and ordered objects; 'sky and light and colour' now 'raise [her]' away from 'the agony of daily life' (MKEL

32) which is analogous to the world of objects that is explicitly encountered and expressed in 'The Bowl'.

As the I/eye is thus open to affect, verbal precision and sense of groundedness initially seem absent from the space of the poem. Indeed, the simile in the final two lines aligns the I/eye's division from the world of objects to the spatial division between the flying aeroplane and the ground; the enjambment between the final couplets enacts and emphasises the dropping of the ground away from the point of perception in the poem. Although it seems to register a movement away from Khalvati's constantly articulated interest in 'the infinitesimal, in tiny perceptions'<sup>330</sup> that are grounded in the solid perceptual realm, what the poem does articulate is a move away from language and towards the bare fact of focalization. The entrance into the world of 'sky and light and colour' is marked also by a '[stripping] down / to the bare bones / of vocabulary' (*MKEL* 21). Where the poem before this has been concerned with phenomenon of focalization and the ensuing cognitive processes, here, the I/eye seems only interested in the phenomenon of initial focalization. The poem now accepts into its landscape archetypes rather than particulars in the I/eye's quest to articulate this fleeting moment of wonder, previously only used as a catalyst for Proustian remembrance – 'My tree is nothing but the thought of something / not itself' (*MKSP* 31) or Woolfian perception – 'How bright // the lamp is in the garden!' (*MKEL* 20). This does not mean that the perceptions in this poem are less clear than in previous poems. Rather, Khalvati's enunciating I/eye articulates with clarity the single moment that the phenomenologist rejects as non-self-constitutive; the moment when the gaze is arrested by and concentrates upon light itself, and when the self dwells upon the phenomenon of light rather than be led by anything that light illuminates. A hallmark of Khalvati's poetic, the present moment of the poem is acknowledged to be ephemeral, and, in seeking to reconstruct it in its entirety, the poet must in turn be conscious of her extraction from that originary moment and the eventual necessity to move on.

The following poem in the sequence extends the sense of undulation expressed in the previous 'rise fall sea sky' (*MKEL* 32), from universal to particular, into which Khalvati positions her enunciating I/eye. However, in this poem the focus of vision has changed: primacy is given to the idea of the miniature rather than the fact of focalization. Khalvati's interest in 'the infinitesimal, in tiny perceptions'<sup>331</sup> moves from the articulation of a fleeting moment of perception to the articulation of the smallest,

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<sup>330</sup> Khalvati, 'A Certain Kind of Energy', n.p.

<sup>331</sup> Khalvati, 'A Certain Kind of Energy', n.p.

fleeting, object of perception. The I/eye, as focalizer, remains in the same space-between, it is simply the object of her study that has been transposed:

I love all things in miniature  
     - the blue tree whose sprigs  
 like the lilac's in miniature –  
     and small things too since they  
 recollect a child's eye view  
     of a small world inside a large  
 in which small things might represent  
     the large (MKEL 33)

Whereas 'The Bowl' used the singular object of perception through which to stream a rich series of Proustian recollections, here interest lies much more in the idea of the thing itself. For instance, the focus of the gaze falls on the flowers, rather than the entirety, of the buckthorn tree in order to provide the first illustration of 'all things in miniature' (MKEL 33).<sup>332</sup> Again there is a concern with the representation and projection of different objects whose parts may represent and be independent of the whole, and the possibilities of their definition and redefinition. The poem charts a moment from the world of representative objects, a world 'in which small things might represent / the large' (MKEL 33), to investigate the I/eye's different projections and articulations of that world.

After the first stanza, where the field of vision of the poem is reduced to one akin to that of a child (lower down, closer to the smaller objects populating the field of vision), the second stanza sees this field of vision expanded at the same time as being reflected and reduced. Vision becomes subjective and differentiating, as the I/eye, 'level / with a sparrow's eye' notices how the bird 'engages without seeing us' (MKEL 33); the sparrow's eye is attuned to the general environment rather than its particulars, and the focalizing I/eye of the poem to the 'miniatures' rather than the general prospect. It is at this point of confluence that the point of perception, and thus the I/eye's position as sole focalizer, is blurred. The real sparrow becomes a metaphor, symbolic of poetic

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<sup>332</sup> See also Susan Stewart: 'That the world of things can open itself to reveal a secret life – indeed, to reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception – is a constant daydream that the miniature presents. This is the daydream of the microscope: the daydream of life inside life, of significance multiplied infinitely *within* significance' (*On Longing*, 54).

inheritance as well as representative of the child's-eye-view, and this image is in turn conflated with the poet-speaker's own mind and imagination. It is through this process, from perception to self-conscious poetic articulation, that the poem also effects a movement from particular to abstract space, catalysed by the acknowledgement of the transience of the moment of perception and recollection '[I] felt it for a moment and have lost it' (*MKEL* 33).<sup>333</sup> Here, 'it' may be the recollected 'tenderness' of the perceiving child, or a sense of relation to the differently seeing gaze of the sparrow. Interestingly, the poem does not seek to investigate this moment, rather, is concerned to articulate the sense of the moment passing and the subsequent investment of memory in related things. The object of the I/eye's focus is now 'it', and changes again in definition. The poem represents both another investigation of perception and also a Wordsworthian moment of reflection upon and mourning of the childhood state. Space opens up between the voice and the vision, eradicating the remembered place of childhood observation and the miniature into 'a birdless stretch of grass / so much larger than itself' (*MKEL* 33). 'It' now signifies both bird (the miniature) and mind (the point of focus that makes the miniature representative of more than one thing), the removal of which have opened up space, as both bird and mind have 'taken flight' (*MKEL* 33) away from the moment that the poem sought to represent. The space, in turn, becomes akin to the act of mourning, which in turn, represents separation.

Echoing Kristeva's space of mourning which is representative of the individual's separation from the mother-figure, Karl Figlio equates the different roles of place and space in the representation of experience: 'the idea of place is charged with the search for love objects, in the form of an experience of absence. Geometrical space is a representation of absence'.<sup>334</sup> As we have seen above, the representation of absence can occur in the blurring of image and the consequent loss of initial impression. In a later poem in *Entries on Light*, the presence of unadulterated homogenous light is celebrated as an emancipating force, dissipating mourning and creating a now-familiar sense of difference:

Light comes between us and our grief:  
flushes it out with gold.

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<sup>333</sup> Recall here Edward Casey: 'Thanks to intimate immensity, I connect place with space. *I enter space from place itself* (*The Fate of Place*, 294).

<sup>334</sup> Karl Figlio, 'Thinking psychoanalytically in the university' in D. Reason and M. Stanton (eds) *Teaching Transference: on the Foundations of Psychoanalytic Studies* (London: Rebus, 1996), 75.

And when skies are overcast, still  
 we collude with clouds, building  
 grey to a spur for light that will  
 drive us to stand at a distance  
 from ourselves

(*MKEL* 66)

The ambivalent use of the pronoun 'us' creates a similar sense of imbalance with regard to the position of the I/eye as we have observed in the opening of 'Mirrorwork'. The enunciating I/eye is embattled both in her relationship to the outer world and also in her relationship with herself. Difference is doubled. As the poem fluctuates in perspective between self- and communal- relationships and recognitions, the immediate subject matter of the poem, the play of light and cloud, become more symbolic than literal. Cloud is representative of grief, and light of the lack of grief; the I/eye is driven to create doubling and thus difference, to 'collude with clouds' in order to 'stand at a distance / from ourselves' (*MKEL* 66). Indeed, the creation of difference, represented by the imposition of light, is equated with value, as grief is replaced by 'gold' (*MKEL* 66). What is important is the act of mirroring, and the consequent space between, represented not only by the breaking of clouds by light but by the gradual accruing of metaphorical layers as the poem continues. The final three lines of the poem layer real upon implied metaphor, the ambivalent 'us', representative of loss, disappears, and the first person pronoun occurs for the first time:

There's something I can't hold  
 in the presence of light, great light, or feel  
 as a river might feel for its stones.

(*MKEL* 66)

Intangible as the root of metaphor, the space created out of mourning or differentiation is rooted in the projection of the self upon the world, the permanently changing and reflexive state of that self, and is intrinsically conditional. Kristeva states of Proustian metaphor that it is 'a way to reproduce the perpetual connections made within a living and creative reality'.<sup>335</sup> In the case of the poem above, metaphor is the last recourse for an enunciating I/eye placed between reality and symbolism.

A later poem provides a further experiment in loss. The I/eye 'bleed[s] out grief' (*MKEL* 66) through the eradication of the figure of the mourned. This poem does not

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<sup>335</sup> Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 213.

follow the conventional elegiac trope of embodiment followed by acceptance of absence. The I/eye is positioned in the conditional (a space as liminal as that of metaphor), as a part of the mourned figure:

And suppose I left behind  
     a portrait inadvertently  
 like a showercap on a peg  
     of this seaview that is hers  
 and insinuated between its clouds  
     strange glimpses of myself (MKEL 97)

In this scene of hypothetical mourning, the I/eye is as much an object as it is a part of the peripheral vision of the owner of the sea view. The voice of this poem has become completely strange to herself. The mourned figure is ‘No longer what we are / what we were we love but cannot claim’ (MKEL 97), and the first person no longer plays a part in the poem. Without this defining characteristic, the space of the poem becomes general as well as hypothetical and the subject matter turns to the act of inscription, which in turn carries resonances with the speaker’s ‘portrait’ of the ‘seaview that is hers’ (MKEL 97). In this way, the poem is remarkably self-referential. As the second stanza ends ‘erasing / each time, each time a change’ (MKEL 97), the third begins with a change in perspective that is as subtle as it is unIntroduced.

And where is the singular moment  
     unwritten, that’s free of pain?  
 As if by magic, silver lines  
     of the horizon have disappeared.  
 A black ship rides on grey.  
     Between everything is a distance  
 by which we know ourselves, ever  
     smarting in the gaps, between  
 clouds, ships, a child and his unseen  
     parents walking on ahead. (MKEL 97)

Tellingly, the I/eye and ‘her’, the mourned, have now conflated completely; they have *both* become the focalizer. Treated prosaically, by figuring distance and change in terms

of personal inheritance and the generational gaps in a family, Khalvati maintains a calm sense of the normality of loss. And again, it is the act of knowledge or inscription that creates rupture or that can cause pain ‘smarting in the gaps’ (*MKEL* 97) between self and other; it is in the passage between, in the moment of perception, that ‘we know ourselves’ (*MKEL* 97); and it is by the ‘unseen’ (*MKEL* 97) that we are defined.

As *Entries on Light* moves towards the abstract expression of the moment of perception, *The Meanest Flower* charts a renewal of the poet’s interest in distinct, frequently unobserved, objects. The title of the volume invests Khalvati’s poetic again with an interest in the quotidian and is taken from the closing lines of Wordsworth’s Ode ‘Intimations of Immortality’:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,  
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.<sup>336</sup>

Through the closing sentiment of Wordsworth’s poem we can return to the opening passage of this chapter. It is through the articulation of both faculties of observation and interest that Wordsworth’s speaker finds, through himself (in ‘the human heart’), the possibility of a renewed interest in the ‘mere arrangements of colour and light’<sup>337</sup> by which our world is constructed in our perception. And the observation of the insignificant or quotidian, the meanest flower, that can trigger remembered as well as current perceptions. We must not forget, either, that it is from her position as a mediator of sense-impression and memory that Khalvati’s enunciating I/eye is able to construct the poetic *milieu* and also communicate an emerging sense of self. We witness her emerging poetic change in priority, from attention paid to an object which triggers cascades of memories, to the methods of perception behind the relationship between speaker and object.

In the final poem of *Entries on Light* we see the culmination of Khalvati’s interest in the specifics of the moment. ‘Tintinnabuli’ builds a poem around Arvo Pärt’s distinctive compositional technique, paying particular attention to the composer’s ability ‘to enter / a single sound’ (*MKMF* 77), and to create resonance from that sound. In

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<sup>336</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Major Works Including The Prelude*, ed. Stephen Gill, World’s Classics (Oxford: OUP, 1984, 2000), 302.

<sup>337</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 322.

Khalvati's poem, Pärt's use of the sound becomes representative of the Proustian object or Woolfian moment. The poet-speaker empathises artistically with Pärt's composer. The final three stanzas of the poem quote Pärt, and end with Khalvati's variations of the theme set by the composer:

*This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence,  
comforts me. I build with primitive materials –  
with the triad, with one specific tonality.*

*The three notes of a triad are like bells  
and that is why I call it tintinnabulation.  
Tintinnabuli – itself the sound of grass,*

blades moving like bells, harebells say,  
though there are no flowers but stems alone  
and a breath of wind to give the grass direction. (MKMF 77)

In Pärt, Khalvati has found a fellow appreciator of the infinitesimal, able, with a single sound or image, to create resonances and layer representative levels of sound or image. As with Proust and Woolf, Khalvati finds in Pärt a resonant interest in 'the infinitesimal, in tiny perceptions', where the singular is a part of a greater system, or process, but is equally a self-contained entity.<sup>338</sup> In his study of Arvo Pärt, Paul Hillier invokes what he calls a 'sound image' to explain the manner in which Pärt deals with the triad in his tintinnabuli compositions: 'when a bell is struck it continues to sound indefinitely: the ear cannot detect the point at which it ceases to vibrate', and it is in spatialising the point of striking thus that 'what we might hear might be described as a single moment spread out in time'.<sup>339</sup> For the enunciating I/eye of 'Tintinnabuli', the resonating notes in Pärt's tintinnabuli compositions extend Wordsworth's image of 'the meanest flower that blows', and a single image again creates significant resonance.

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<sup>338</sup> Paul Hillier emphasises that tintinnabuli is a process, a part of a larger process which is also completely self-contained (see Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford: OUP, 1997) 87-88). In her interview with Mary McRae, Khalvati states 'I have no feel for narrative. I'm much more interested in process. I'm not interested in the anecdotal, and my subject matter is painfully limited, but if you have just one subject and one theme, it is an inexhaustible vein. I'm interested in the hows rather than the whats or the whos, in the various questions we address.'

<sup>339</sup> Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 86, 90.

Khalvati's enunciating I/eye remains her focalizer, able to pay particular attention to the flower, the blades of grass, the tree; things that Proust's 'earnest man' would not observe but which his poet is able to take time to see and to absorb himself in, extolling the virtues of a poetry of intimate perception.

## CHAPTER 7: ALICE OSWALD

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### *Of Passage and Process*

In the poetry of Kathleen Jamie, Thom Gunn and Seamus Heaney we have seen poetic space created out of the play of notions of alterity. Often, also, mediation has been the key to understanding and poetic resolution. In all cases, effective communication of experience lies in the state of dwelling of the I/eye of each poem: it is ‘both mine and not mine’,<sup>340</sup> a part of and also apart from the world, in a space within the open bounds of the mediatory experience. Thom Gunn sees the act of poetic creation as a ‘reaching out’,<sup>341</sup> Seamus Heaney as a constant looking-towards the horizon,<sup>342</sup> and Kathleen Jamie as a never-ending state of ‘process’.<sup>343</sup> For Alice Oswald, the act of poetic creation, and the status of the finished product, is a ‘working account’.<sup>344</sup> It is this sense of self-conscious, affective, and continual experience, which creates and defines its own passage in relation to itself, and finds coherence in the scattered nature of its *milieu*, that we can see articulated powerfully in Alice Oswald’s river-poem *Dart*.

*Dart* revels in displaying a consciousness of its own process, in a vocalic, poetic becoming that ‘wants to realise itself, regardless of surrounding material’.<sup>345</sup> The poet defines the poem as an interlinked series of ‘life-models’, a ‘sound-map’, ‘a songline’, where ‘all voices should be read as the river’s mutterings’ (*AOD* vii) irrespective of the neat apparatus that is in place to distinguish between the different voices. The enunciating I/eye of the poem is notable in its vocal absence. The enunciating I/eye functions as the mediator through which we may know the multiple voices that make up ‘the river’s mutterings’ (*AOD* vii), and use these mutterings as co-ordinates by which to chart the extension of the *Dart* from its source to the sea. Although akin to the other poets above in the importance of mediation to the speaking voice, the speaking voices of *Dart* are more open in their sense of becoming: experience of things is communicated by the different voices, but overall the effect is of the articulation or creation of a

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<sup>340</sup> Vendler, *Soul Says*, 8.

<sup>341</sup> Thom Gunn, ‘Writing a Poem’, *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2000), 144.

<sup>342</sup> See Heaney, ‘The Placeless Heaven: another look at Kavanagh’, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry*, 182.

<sup>343</sup> Kathleen Jamie, ‘Holding Fast – Truth and Change in Poetry’, *Strong Words*, 278.

<sup>344</sup> Kate Kellaway, ‘Into the Woods: Interview with Alice Oswald’, *Observer* (19 June 2005), n.p.

<sup>345</sup> Theodor Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos: The Creation of Flowing Forms in Water and Air*, trans. Olive Whicher and Johanna Wrigley (Sussex: Steiner P, 1996), 19.

singular state of being-towards, rather than the reception and articulation of specific, temporally distinct, sensations or experiences. Charles Bennett criticises the poem due to this lack of narratorial presence, stating ‘the voice which is absent is the voice we most need to hear: Oswald’s own’.<sup>346</sup> However, *Dart*’s strength lies in this streaming of multiple voices. Theodor Schwenk, whose book on flow patterns in nature, *Sensitive Chaos*, heavily influences the poem, perhaps sums up this apparent problem of voice best. *Dart* may be considered an attempt to articulate a living form, and ‘a multitude of sources, sinks and currents work together to create the living form. This interplay is like the diversity of an orchestra with its instruments, that have their entries and their rests and are moulded into a *single* ‘body of sound’ by an invisible conductor’.<sup>347</sup> Oswald’s voice in the poem then is akin to that of the conductor, who necessarily remains silent. And so it is that the map that *Dart* traces moves away from the more conventional ideas of excavation and extension that Abbas invokes in relation to Michel Serres<sup>348</sup> and yet preserves the idea of the existence *between* that characterises Serresian mapping.

Like the opening of *The Rough Field*, *Dart* begins not in the introduction of a distinctive subject but with a general sense of movement; a set of questions posed and a dialogue:

Who’s this moving alive over the moor?

An old man seeking and finding a difficulty

Has he remembered his compass his spare socks  
does he fully intend going over his knees off the military track from  
Okehampton?

keeping his course through the swamp spaces  
and pulling the distance around his shoulders (AOD 1)

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<sup>346</sup> Charles Bennett, ‘Current Literature 2002: New Writing: Poetry’ *English Studies* 85.3 (2002), 231.

<sup>347</sup> Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos*, 62.

<sup>348</sup> As I quote in the chapter on Heaney: ‘maps fall between the virtual and the real. Maps permit an excavation (downward) and extension (outward) to expose, reveal, and construct latent possibilities within a greater milieu’, (Abbas, Introduction, *Mapping Michel Serres*, 3).

Where Montague has used multiple mappings of multiple places superimposed on a single *milieu* in order to ‘link his worlds’<sup>349</sup>, Oswald uses one *milieu* through which to stream multiple mappings of shifting perspectives. Like Montague, the idea of travel is key in the opening of Oswald’s poem. However, this travel is not simply human, historical, or geographical. In the opening lines of *Dart* the trajectory of the river is as much a part of the sense of movement created as the direction of the walker. Perhaps the most telling difference between the poems is the quality of the voices at play.

Where Montague’s are clearly delineated on the page and always human, Oswald’s are human and landscape and blend into each other – visually, the poem appears to be made up of a single voice, and the question and answer format that opens it only becomes apparent on reading (or performance). Equally, the first person pronoun is not the cardinal point at whose intervention understanding or stability is gained. Rather, it seems to be the designated point at which objects, characters, and events blur, where questions about identity can be posed. Indeed, Michel Serres equates the becoming of a river to that of a wanderer or nomad, who constantly questions ‘Who am I? No-one. Who am I, again? A hybrid...’.<sup>350</sup> It is in Oswald’s use of the first person pronoun that the reader is most clearly placed, with the I/eye, at the interstices of voice and event, and is asked to attempt definition. It is the poem’s voices that simultaneously demand and evade definition as the position of the first person pronoun shifts. In *Dart* we are witness to the development of a hybrid or multiple state of being. It is interesting that, at the opening of the poem, the un-placed voices occur at the indeterminate source of the Dart, on Dartmoor. Like the speakers of Heaney’s bog poems, who stand ‘within notions of identity which will always leave room for alterity’,<sup>351</sup> Oswald’s voices also find themselves in the ‘profoundly ambiguous landscape’<sup>352</sup> of ‘tussocks, minute flies / wind, wings, roots’ (*AOD* 1) of the bog. Instead of creating rupture in the landscape through a search for self-articulation, the ‘old man’, who is the focus point of this part of the poem, calmly accepts his quest for ‘a difficulty’, and the bog-land is a covering rather than a challenge as he traverses it, ‘pulling the distance around his shoulders’ (*AOD* 1).

After the initial *milieu* has been established, the voices of the walker and the bog-land use the first person pronoun, and the bounds between their speech is blurred. Engaged in a reciprocal conversation, they also become entwined in the space that the

<sup>349</sup> Montague, *The Pear Is Ripe*, 209.

<sup>350</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 258.

<sup>351</sup> O’Brien, *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing*, 63.

<sup>352</sup> Meredith, ‘Hazards in the Bog: Real and Imaginary’, 319.

poem is mapping. Not only does the walker ‘[pull] the distance’ of the moor around his shoulders as if a cape, but he also keeps the Dart ‘folded in [his] mack pocket’ (*AOD* 1). As the bog, or the boggy source of the river, passively becomes a constituent part of the walker’s being it also is endowed voice and action. The walker will not let go of the Dart, and neither will the source of the Dart let go of the walker’s physical presence of emotional involvement in the landscape: ‘I won’t let go of man [...] wanting his heart’ (*AOD* 1). At the same time as the walker and the Dart become entwined in thought and action, a space of difference is created between them. This difference is the sources of the river, a ‘secret buried in the reeds at the beginning of sound’ (*AOD* 1), ‘trying to summon itself by speaking’ (*AOD* 1), and answers to the later question that mirrors the one that opens the poem: ‘Who’s this issuing from the earth?’ (*AOD* 1). This question and its answer marks the establishment of a feeling of maintenance of width and progression in the poem, which is perpetuated by the prose conversation between river and walker about walking. While the river is haunted by man’s ‘horrible keep-time’, walking for the walker is less metronomic, ‘all I know... what I love’ (*AOD* 2).

The fluid prose of the ‘walking’ passages build in rhythm to echo the hypnotic nature of the walking act, which ‘creates rhythm, accompanies the voice with cymbals, drums.. [and] also gives rhythm to silence’.<sup>353</sup> But balance, especially in bog land, cannot last forever. The river-poem is a geography that is at once stable and contested, and which must articulate ‘the experience of being-*within* and *outside*’,<sup>354</sup> it is not a simple matter of establishing difference. The established *milieu* cannot be held together by a single voice, regardless of its feeling for the land, and Oswald does not let a single voice hold precedence for long. The land must be allowed voice as well. Thus, a voice, possibly the river, or the walker himself, breaks the walker’s stride and the flow of the poem, commanding the listener to ‘listen’:

a  
lark  
spinning  
around  
one  
note

<sup>353</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 318.

<sup>354</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P., 1993), 80.

splitting  
and  
mending  
it

(AOD 2)

This new voice, combined with the lark song that it celebrates, lifts the concentration of the poem from the horizontal axis (the ‘one foot in front of the other’ of the walker) to the vertical. This change of trajectory is imagistic and visual as the one-word lines of the lark song illustrate physically the spiralling flight of the bird and the nature of its song. At the same time, the articulation and description of the birdsong, where the mediator of that song spins ‘around / one / note / splitting / and / mending it’ (AOD 2), mirrors the trajectory of *Dart* itself, where multiple voices and characters channel, construct, and disrupt the river. It is telling that focus redescends at this point to the embryonic river, where the voice (the multiple enunciating I/eyes) of the poem discovers it(self) ‘in the reeds, a trickle coming out of a bank, a foal of a river’ (AOD 2). This discovery is as self-reflexive on the part of the river voice as it is exploratory on the part of the walker, since we must remember the poet’s injunction that ‘all voices are to be read as the river’s mutterings’ (AOD vii).

At this early stage of the poem the Dart is no less a river for its small size. Part of the water cycle, no river has a determinate source of definitive point of conception, and so although the Dart is ‘issuing from the earth’ (AOD 1), it is always-already ‘a foal of a river’ (AOD 2), existing *in medias res*.<sup>355</sup> There is a sense that the poetic river is a constant stream, it is always-already, and self-aware, as the compressed yet song-like lines that describe again the source also imply the growth and trajectory of the river and the poem to come:

one step-width water  
of linked stones  
trills in the stones  
glides in the trills

<sup>355</sup> See in particular Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, where the manner in which the signifier and its double expresses itself through the writing (and concomitant reading) act as ‘always already’: writing “already presupposes an identity, therefore an ideality, of its form”, also representing “the *passage* of the one [the signifier] to the other [the trace]”. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 9-10.

eels in the glides  
in each eel a fingerwidth of sea

(AOD 2)

The idea of river becomes detached from the bog at Dartmoor; the Dart is now more distinctly in itself and self-reflexive, a part of the things that compose it. Like the lark song, the lyric interjection above charts a fresh becoming of the river whilst referring us to its constant state of being towards. The river space charted in the poem moves towards becoming more quantifiable, something hinted at previously in the walker's map, but refuted in the manner of his way markings: 'peat passes and good sheep tracks / cow-bones, tin-stones, turf-cuts' (AOD 1, 2). Alongside the walker's imagined self-coordination, where 'he thinks up a figure far away on the tors / waving, so [...] somebody knows where we are' (AOD 3), the articulated landscape becomes simultaneously more and less precise, as the voice of the poem goes through a self-conscious process of naming akin to those in Montague's *The Rough Field*:

falling back on appropriate words

turning loneliness in all directions...

through Broadmarsh,                      under Cut Hill

Sandyhole, Sittaford, Hartyland, Postbridge,

Belever, Mewtake, Dartmeet, the whole  
unfolding emptiness branching and reaching  
and bending over itself.

(AOD 3)

The enunciating I/eye of the poem is 'lost unhappy and at home' (SHOG 65) in a manner reminiscent of Heaney's 'The Tollund Man'. However, here, the names create a sense of distance rather than of affirmation. Oswald creates a sense of abstract space and the compensatory structures of understanding that surround it, articulating the fact that she sees poetry as 'framing silence' and 'surrounded by chaos'.<sup>356</sup> But again we are jolted from the hypnotic freewheeling of the abstract and chaotic, as the voice, now

<sup>356</sup> Kellaway, 'Into the Woods', n.p.

prosaic, states ‘I met a man sevenish by the river’ (*AOD* 3). Initially a question of space, the trajectory of *Dart* also becomes a question of time. As with the walker’s map, which was defined by out-of-the-way way-markers, ‘morning’ here is defined by nature, ‘rain’ (*AOD* 3). The time that *Dart* creates is not conventionally linear, it is ruptured by the actions of the river water and the Dart’s inhabitants and workers, ‘in a perilous relationship with time’ (*AOD* 15) which are in turn tempered and mediated by the river’s process. Schwenk links the idea of time to the flow of water, stating, ‘water flows and streams on the earth as ceaselessly as the stream of time itself. It is the fundamental melody that forever accompanies life in all its variations’.<sup>357</sup> This state of temporal, fluvial, being is perhaps best described by Michel Serres:

Far from flowing in laminar and continuous lines, like a well-behaved river under a bridge, upstream to downstream, time descends, turns back on itself, stops, starts, bifurcates ten times, divides, and blends, caught up in whirlpools and counter-currents, hesitant, aleatory, uncertain and fluctuating, multiplied into a thousand beds like the Yukon River.<sup>358</sup>

The freewheeling spirit-life of the river is personified in the next of the poem’s voices – Jan Coö, whose ‘name means so-and-so of he Woods, [and who] haunts the Dart’ (*AOD* 4). The sound of Jan Coö’s name haunts the rest of the poem: ‘ooo’, symbolising everything and nothing, repeats throughout in different guises, emphasising the preoccupation of *Dart* with voice and expression, chaos and silence:

...he could hear voices wooco  
we know what voices means, Jan Coö Jan Coö.  
[...]  
...he’s the groom of the Dart – I’ve seen him  
taking the shape of the sky, a bird, a blade,  
a fallen leaf, a stone – may he lie long  
in the inexplicable knot of the river’s body (*AOD* 4)

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<sup>357</sup> Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos*, 78.

<sup>358</sup> Michel Serres, Catherine Brown, William Paulson, ‘Science and the Humanities: The Case of Turner’ *SubStance* 26.2, 83 (1997), 15.

Jan Coo, like the lark's song and the early descriptions of the river, is mutable, is at once distinguishable from and an inherent part of the landscape. It is at this point that the idea of active camouflage within the surroundings of the Dart is incorporated into the structure of the poem, as each voice that comprises the Dart also seeks to resemble it. The emphasis laid on camouflage (natural and man-made) emphasises *Dart's* occupation with a new space of extension defined by flux, where 'resemblance is a beginning masking the advent of whole new vital dimension'.<sup>359</sup> Not only is Jan Coo active in maintaining the Dart he can also disguise himself as various of its constituent parts, and is a part of its riddle. Later, the Dart itself takes on all its aspects, mirroring the metamorphoses of Jan Coo and the tone of the naturalist, demonstrating the fluidity of Oswald's poem:

I'm soft, I'm an otter streaking from the headwaters, I run overland at night,  
I watch badgers, I trespass, don't say anything

(AOD 7)

As riddle and 'inexplicable' (AOD 4) it follows that the Dart is not easily mappable, and with the introduction of the naturalist, location is found by its defining natural characteristics rather than its precise geographical locus. It is not only the ghostly Jan Coo that blends into the way of the Dart. The main occupation of the ensuing characters (naturalist, eel watcher, fisherman, bailiff) seems to be to blend into their surroundings, becoming a part of the multiply singular voice of the Dart. But again this project of camouflage is reciprocal: the naturalist camouflages herself, becoming a part of the trajectory of the river, and the river penetrates her work as well ('this is the naturalist [...] dripping in her waterproof notebook' (5 *Dart*)). The two voices blend and echo each other, also reflecting images that have come previously, and as always, the first person pronoun is not the cardinal or defining coordinate of the poem:

I know two secret places, call them x and y [...] it's lovely, the male chasing  
the female, frogs singing lovesongs

she loves songs, she belongs to the soundmarks of larks

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<sup>359</sup> Brian Massumi, On Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari, and Simulacra:  
<[www.anu.edu.au/HRC/first\\_and\\_last/works/realer.htm](http://www.anu.edu.au/HRC/first_and_last/works/realer.htm)>

Again the ‘o’ sound, a truncated ‘Jan Co’, resonates. The Dart is mediated by the voices that comprise it and make up its course. The states of camouflage and/or metamorphosis that characterise this section, where the voices seek transparency and ‘depend upon not being noticed’ (AOD 7), are extended in the ‘eel watcher’ section. Here, the poem’s poetic consciousness increases as the eel-watcher’s voice is written in rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter. The new stricter form allows a formal fluidity and compression of voice to enter the poem, and descriptions are as easily expressed through kenning (‘road-judder’ for bridge) or compound adjectives (‘an eye-quiet world’). Most importantly, however, the river-voice is also a river-eye, and the perceptual blurring in sight that is a result of observing camouflage is acknowledged explicitly:

when like a streamer from your own eye’s iris  
 a kingfisher spurts through the bridge whose axis  
 is endlessly in motion as each wave  
 photos its flowing to the bridge’s curve

(AOD 7)

The eel-watcher seeks, through visual deception, to become more fluidly a part of the riverscape. The reciprocal act of camouflage becomes something that is characteristic of all the river’s mediatory voices and fits into Oswald’s poetic model of chaos and silence. That voice itself is the mediator in the poetic articulation of the river is emphasised as the poem progresses. The river drifts in and out of the consciousness of the voices that articulate and occupy it, and in fact balances the eel-watcher’s primacy of vision with a reciprocal primacy of voice and mediation: ‘whose voice is this who’s talking in my larynx’ (AOD 6).

In a poem preoccupied with voice, its trajectory set by the course that the river Dart carves through Devon, the question of inscription inevitably also arises. In keeping with the fluid nature of the river voice, inscription is allied to the course of the salmon, which runs against the current:

and he climbs it

up the trickiest line, maybe  
 maybe down-flowing water has an upcurrent nobody knows

it takes your breath away,  
generations of them inscribed into this river (AOD 8-9)

Art, the creative act of inscription, is not explicitly mentioned. Neither is Oswald's act of inscription similar to Heaney's, which is explicitly linked to the artistic act, the act of poetic self-discovery, and the question of identity. Oswald's I/eye is not on a voyage of discovery, rather, it is articulating its constantly evolving multiple self. All questions of art, of inscription, and of technique are left to the different voices that comprise the Dart. And so the salmon can leave their mark on the river whilst the fisherman and bailiff can concentrate his 'qualified faculties on these fish', 'know all the articles' and be 'technically effective', whilst choosing to not mention names and '[wearing] green for the sake of the kingfishers' (AOD 8-9). The Dart is a palimpsestic structure that, in spite of flow change, can have defining characteristics and that can influence as well as being inscribed upon. The voices of the river continue to echo and reflect each other: the salmon, 'shining like tin' (AOD 9) anticipate voices to come as, in the following section of the poem, the voices are of 'dead tinnners' (AOD 9). Generations of salmon are 'inscribed in the river' (AOD 9), and the same goes for the tinnners, although their presence in the river model is connected less to the physical act of inscription than to the idea of naming. As entities more singular in their humanity than the salmon the tinnners are endowed some singularity and yet are dissipated into the river. Phrases that chart this progression 'Some are photos, others dust', 'Till rain gets into the stone, / which washes them down to the valley bottoms', 'their strength dismantled and holding only names' (AOD 10), are punctuated by the names of the dead. In this way the river model holds up as the poem itself enacts the progression described therein.

As river becomes something more receptive of inscription, its physicality is emphasised:

Dartmeet – a mob of waters  
where East Dart smashes into West Dart  
  
two wills gnarling and recoiling  
and finally knuckling into balance (AOD 10)

Again there is a sense of echoing between differences held together by the idea of the Dart, accentuated by the confluence of two rivers, which is described in terms of arboreal and human conflict. But beyond conflict there is still the question of voice, as East and West Dart speak of different things along their course, and the reader is encouraged to ‘put your ear to it, you can hear water / cooped up in moss and moving / slowly uphill through lean-to trees’ (*AOD* 10). Dart, again, is both inside and outside, in a state as multiple and contradictory as the model of time described above by Serres, and exemplary of the river system as described by Theodor Schwenk. The two Dart voices mirror each other in a manner that mimics and builds upon the question and answer sequence that opens the poem. The sheer amount of tree-related description anticipates what is to happen in the next section of the poem. In this next section the definitions of ‘Dart’ are expanded from the obvious (river and movement): the apparatus reads ‘Dart is old Devonian for oak’ (*AOD* 11). Also here new voices are introduced to the poem: a forester and a water nymph. In this way, Oswald expands the voices that comprise the river’s mutterings not just through added frames of geographical, biological and historical reference, but also through positing the possibility of myth upon the river.

The idea of myth as yet another composite part of the river’s mutterings is extended in the dialogue between nymph and forester, and what follows. Here the position of the ‘I’ shifts so that it is to a certain extent a third person commentator, in the traditional mediatory perspective of the lyric poetic voice. The poem’s frame of folkloric reference expands to include the nymph, a river goddess, an ancient King of the Oakwoods, Zeus, and the ‘Flamen Dialis’ (*AOD* 13). In all of this there are echoes of traditional mediation, as ideas of pagan myth, sacrifice and priesthood conjure up the mediatory qualities of soothsayers or oracles (the apparatus chants ‘Dart Dart / Every year thou / claimest a heart’ (*AOD* 13)). Typically of Oswald, however, this aspect of the Dart is not allowed to stand apart from the other threads that weave together to create the riverscape. River and time collapse into the same model as language conflates characters and the elements, the apparatus conflates the Roman and Greek civilizations, and the whole conflates pagan and Christian belief: Flamen Dialis (the priest of Jupiter, related to the Sky) becomes ‘Flumen Dialis’, and ‘the priest of Zeus’ (*AOD* 13). The priest or god(ess) is invoked with the apostrophe that also signals the silent centre of Oswald’s chaotic universe, the river, and Jan Coö, but this invocation ends with a Judaeo-Christian affirmation of truth:

O Flumen Dialis  
 let him be  
 the magical flame

come spring that  
 lights one oak  
 off the next

and the fields  
 and workers bursting  
 into light amen

(AOD 13-14)

What has previously been metamorphosis in the poem becomes commingling. Boundaries between established forms are blurred or completely destroyed. Light and renewal in the invocatory passage are conflated with incineration and death, with no overarching moral framework, rather, an idea of beauty and dissipation (the workers burst ‘into light’) as truth (‘amen’). The river is indeed a fluid entity that ‘carries the moon carries the sun but keeps nothing’.<sup>360</sup> Each thing is related but only inasmuch as it is a part of the model that is ‘the experience of the limit itself’ and which ‘stops, starts, bifurcates ten times, divides, and blends, caught up in whirlpools and counter-currents, hesitant, aleatory, uncertain and fluctuating, multiplied’.<sup>361</sup> Following this, it is logical that the perceptual faculties are blurred, and that the senses are displaced into the river model:

We can’t hear except the booming of our thinking in the cockpit hollow and  
 the river’s been so beautiful we can’t concentrate.

[...]

In the water it’s another matter, we’re just shells and arms, keeping  
 ourselves in a fluid relation with danger.

(AOD 13-14)

A part of this ‘fluid relation’, it seems, are the other voices of the river. As the canoeist struggles against the flow, ‘a tattered shape in a perilous relationship with time’ (AOD

<sup>360</sup> Alice Oswald, *Woods etc* (London: Faber, 2005) 41.

<sup>361</sup> Serres *et al*, ‘Science and the Humanities: The Case of Turner’, 15.

15), his voice is punctuated by another one, which echoes the previous taunting dialogue of the wood nymph and forester. Eventually, the new voice blurs into one that is more wholly representative of the river, at once more self-conscious and more changeably disjointed. Speaking of the mediatory act, or the space of communication, Serres states that it is a space where ‘meaning is totally plunged into noise, the space of communication is granular, dialogue is condemned to cacophony, the transmission of communication is chronic transformation’.<sup>362</sup> The mediation of the voice(s), it seems, is something that is active and requires constant chaos and change (although, due to the fluidity of the chaos, no physical metamorphosis). ‘River’ is a language and a space of creation on its own terms, as well as a geographical, mythic, historical, and vocal entities. It is a distinctly physical entity (a ‘foundry’) which mirrors the vocations of the workers that populate its course and comprise its voices:

will you swim down and attend to this foundry for sounds  
  
this jabber of pidgin-river  
drilling these rhythmic cells and trails of scales,  
will you translate for me blunt blink glint. (AOD 15)

The idea of translation emphasises the mediatory force of the poem, and ‘blunt blink glint’ echoes and parodies the aural and physical transformations and metamorphoses that the poem has embodied thus far. An apparent *non sequitur*, these three syllables may be seen as noises rather than words, indicative of the ‘rhythmic cells and trails of scales’ (AOD 15) that comprise the Dart. Their sense as well as their sound translated back into the body of the poem, these words also echo moments of the river’s past; the ‘trails of scales’ (AOD 15) imply the salmon’s inscription upon the river and the river’s own musical patterns, ‘blunt blink glint’ (AOD 15) resonates with the vocation of the forester, the idea of blurred visual perception, and the play of light on the river’s surface and the use of light for deception and camouflage by its inhabitants.

Thus the river and its inhabitants become a part of the same ‘chronic transformation’<sup>363</sup> which circles around the mediatory I/eye, or the silent centre that Oswald builds around, and the levels of voice-consciousness in the poem increase:

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<sup>362</sup> Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, 70.

<sup>363</sup> Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, 70.

the way I talk in my many-headed turbulence  
 among these modulations, this nimbus of words kept in motion  
 sing-calling something definitely human

will someone sing this riffle perfectly as the invisible river  
 sings it, quite different...

(AOD 19)

Here, the voice of the poem echoes the 'Flumen Dialis' passage, inasmuch as it attempts to invoke, or call into being, 'something'. However, in keeping with the fluid model of Oswald's poem, the 'something' is not an empirical form, and this invocation is a request for mediation rather than inspiration. As in the 'pidgin river' section, linguistic elements conflate in order to articulate more readily the multiple texture of the river's voice. Here, the river, its flow, its music and its voice combine in 'riffle', the apotheosis of the modulations of words that conjure up and form around 'something' (AOD 19). This something is 'the invisible river' (AOD 19), the process of inspiration, the mediatory I/eye, and the silent space that Oswald sees chaos construct itself around, and it is only seen or articulated in a perfection of being towards articulated through difference and song.

Soon, the geographical aspect of the river's self-consciousness adds another strand to the literary (or articulatory) self-consciousness we see displayed above. In a similar manner to Montague's speaker in *The Rough Field*, the river voice, seeking definition, calls up 'the named varieties of water' (AOD 17), creating a 'nimbus of words' (AOD 19). However, this act of naming is not strictly scientific or empirical. The technical efficiency of the fisherman, tinsmith or wool worker is not present in this act, instead, the naming gains authority through history, myth, and voice. In this way, 'Glico of the Running Streams', Cymene, and Syrinx can be simply other articulations of water 'such as Loops and Swirls in their specific dialects / clucking and clapping [...] and calling prrrrooo prrrrooo' (AOD 17-18). Each thing that is a part of the river (stones, silt, and rain), or that informs the idea of River (characters from mythology or apparent folk renderings of names), is a smaller part of this greater fluid whole that is the Dart, each of these strands are a part of the river's mutterings, to which our attention is constantly drawn by the idea and the sound of the perpetually haunting Jan Coö. Schwenk envisages the river as "'strands' of water' which are 'not really single strands

but whole surfaces, interweaving spatially and flowing past each other',<sup>364</sup> and it is to his idiosyncratic theories of water and flow that Oswald turns to articulate in particular the more mechanical properties of the river that she has been investigating poetically. Punctuating the work of the worker at the woollen mill, whose actions working the wool mirror the movements of the river, Oswald quotes from Schwenk's book as if in full, but takes many of his phrases and remakes them, splitting his prose into long free verse lines, thus incorporating his theories of flow, river models, philosophical system, and his voice into the matrix of *Dart*. The poem thus exerts its full mediatory function, operating between reality and expression, its voice articulated through the murmurings of these different 'whole surfaces' which comprise and create turbulence within it.

John Edmunds, who, according to the apparatus was washed away 'at Staverton Ford... [in] 1840' (*AOD* 20), is represented in the poem as in a continual process of being washed away. In this moment, Edmunds is simultaneously being within and outside himself, and his figure is also the most explicit example of mediation yet. Linear time is suspended and voice is dissociated from the physical body of Edmunds, and is mentioned explicitly in terms of water:

all day my voice is being washed away  
out of a lapse in my throat

like after rain  
little trails of soil-creep  
loosen into streams

if I shout out,  
if I shout in,  
I am only as wide  
as a word's aperture

but listen! if you listen  
I will move you a few known sounds  
in a constant irregular pattern

(*AOD* 20-21)

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<sup>364</sup> Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos*, 16-17.

Where voice is initially something that is washed away from the body and physicality, but as the passage progresses it becomes something that defines the body (or person) that it has left. The space, or aperture, that signals and is a means to articulation is no longer the throat (which is passive, lapsed) but a word, the idea of whose width is reminiscent of the ‘one step-width river’ (*AOD* 2) that opens the volume, ‘trying to summon itself by speaking’ (*AOD* 1). Voice here, then, becomes more than a means of distinction, it is the means through which, in this case Edmunds, articulates (its/him)self – it *is* a medium at the same time as being one of Schwenk’s strands of water, a single voice in the multiple murmurings of the Dart. Equally, it is a means by which Oswald can further communicate her universal model of chaos and silence. As the substance of the voice can be seen as originating from yet ‘rolling [Edmunds] round, like a container / upturned and sounded through’ (*AOD* 21) we can see a microcosm of Oswald’s chaos model at work.

At the beginning of the passage it is the voice of the drowning man that is ‘washed away / out of’ his throat. As the passage ends neither water nor sound but ‘silence’ pours ‘into what’s left’ (*AOD* 21) of Edmunds, followed by a blank space, glossed as ‘silence’ (*AOD* 22). The silence occurs at the end of the poem, thus signalling the poem’s impulse to turn back upon itself at the same time as moving forwards, and its simultaneous enactment of the in- and outside. The gap of ‘silence’ (*AOD* 22) also emphasises the performative aspect of the poem, at the same time as it makes substantial the haunting ‘O’ of Jan Coö, which, in its states as sound and silence negates the possibility of a stable first person pronoun or a localizing cardinal number. The poem thus enacts two opposing geometric forms: Oswald’s enclosed model of the universe (chaos around a centre of silence), and the linear course of the river, flowing from source to sea. The two forms are united in the poet’s emphasis on the poem as a single multiple articulation, one that is identified by and constant in its becoming, a becoming that is in turn identified by its watery provenance. Each voice that articulates one part of the river model is balanced by a corresponding voice that articulates another part, or strand, of that model. In this way, a poetic pattern of flow, of progression and regression, of turbulence, is created. The form that Michel Serres applies to Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* is perhaps also applicable to *Dart*: ‘the text of the poem is nature itself... It comes back on itself... But not in a perfect circle. [...] Space and time are

thrown here and there. The circle does not complete. But, stochastically in space and time, turbulences appear. And the whole text creates turbulence'.<sup>365</sup>

As Oswald has balanced the actions of the voice in the previous section, it follows that this whole section will be balanced in the following section of the poem. And indeed the voice of nineteenth century Edmunds is met, on the other side of the silence, by contemporary swimmers. Again, voice is a concern, but here it is a scream of *jouissance* rather than a whisper of death: 'Menyahari' (*AOD* 22) punctuates the silent centre of the poem. Voice is explicitly associated with a state between, as the swimmers scream out 'in mid-air', and the river voices again are site of metamorphosis, as the swimmers 'change [themselves] / into the fish dimension' (*AOD* 22). Again, metamorphosis is accompanied by camouflage, which consists of perceptual blurring, as colour and physicality (visual perception and being) conflate in the adulterated phrase 'Then I jumped in a rush of gold to the head / through black and cold, red and cold, brown and warm' (*AOD* 22). Water (the river) becomes a palette of colour or possibility, and produces semi-religious sensations as the swimmer's words take on a liturgical note:

giving water the weight and size of myself in order to imagine it,  
water with my bones, water with my mouth and my understanding  
when my body was in some way a wave to swim in,  
one continuous fin from head to tail  
I steered through rapids like a canoe

(*AOD* 22-23)

At the same time as the swimmer strives to become a part of the river, his body 'a wave', he is also apart from the river: he can 'swim in' the wave that is also his body, and navigate 'through rapids'. Body is already associated with flow and voice, and it now becomes a tool for inscription, as the swimmer swims 'spelling the shapes of the letters with legs and arms' (*AOD* 23):

S SSS                  W

Slooshing the Water open and

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<sup>365</sup> Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics*, trans. Jack Hawkes (Manchester: Clinamen P, 2000), 108.

MMM

for it Meeting shut behind me

(AOD 23)

The swimmer describes his actions, and capital letters emphasise the cardinal points of these actions in relation to the river, 'S[looshing] / W[ater] / M[eeeting]': 'M' defines the confluence or 'Meeting' of the waters in the swimmer's wake rather than the creator of this confluence ('me'). It is action rather than the person that creates the action that is important. This is further (albeit tenuously) emphasised as the three capital letters spell the action itself ('swim'), without the first person pronoun. The missing 'I' becomes a point of contention rather than a defining co-ordinate. The 'I', or the swimmer's ego, is lost in the passage between action and inscription. The swimmer's position in relation to the river is then redefined in a shift from the horizontal to the vertical, and from the first- to the third-person: 'He lifts / the lid and shuts and lifts the lid and shuts and the sky / jumps in and out of the world he loafs in' (AOD 23). The sky becomes a part of the watery world that 'he loafs in' in a manner as impermanent as Oswald's other river which 'carries the moon carries then sun but keeps nothing'. Like nacre (the swimmer's world is 'all nectarine, nacreous' (AOD 23)), the river illustrates through reflection and distortion, seeking but failing to enact a solid centre amidst the turbulence. The notes following this section rewrite the invocatory 'Dart Dart / Every year thou / Claimest a heart' (AOD 13) of the 'Flumen Dialis' section: 'Dart Dart wants a / heart' (AOD 24). Although the river, like Heaney's Nerthus, or the allegorical Time, takes 'her tythe' (AOD 24) of the lives of the swimmer's accompanying 'knights at arms' (AOD 23), it is neither through this action, nor through the invocations of Christ that follow, that a heart can be gained. Rather, these additional disturbances add to the chaos or turbulence that surrounds the silence at the heart of Oswald's poetic universe.

For the water abstractor, water is not only the substance of the river, the producer of flow and turbulence, but it is also composed of multiple microscopic chemical and bacterial parts. The many strands, or surfaces, that make up the river are now complicated in their multiplicity. The water abstractor states: 'You don't know what goes into water. Tiny particles of acids and salts. Cryptosporidion smaller than a fleck of talcum powder which squashes and elongates and bursts in the warmth of the gut' (AOD 25). It is the work of the water extractor and his plant to mediate the (bacterial and biological) life-taking and -giving qualities of the river. The plant's mechanised purification process rather than the substance of water 'is what keeps you

and me alive, this is the real work of the river' (*AOD* 25). Affirming and negating the purely biological function of water, what follows is a sonnet to the properties of water, partly streamed through the voice of the water extractor. The sonnet sees water in peculiarly human terms, and as the key to a spiritual compulsion that is at its root biological, as the human tends towards and seeks to consume water as water is the major constituent part of the human body: 'This is the thirst that draws the soul [...] this draws his eyehole to this space among / two thirds weight water and still swallowing' (*AOD* 25).

Jan Coe (representative of the now chemically self-conscious river water), the water extractor and the requisite technology work together in conversation and process. But this conversation soon dissipates into another stream of voices, actively and consciously moving away from 'the pressure of self-repetition' (*AOD* 25) that characterises the purification process. The voice of the river speaks, taking on human characteristics. As the water in the sonnet becomes a constituent part of the human physic, so now the river is characterised by having physical properties:

Exhausted almost to a sitstill,  
 letting the watergnats gather, for I am no longer  
 able to walk except on a slope

[...]

my head is about to slide – furl up my eyes,  
 give in to the crash of  
 surrendering riverfleshfalling, I

come to in the sea I dream  
 at the foot of the weir

(*AOD* 26)

Before the metamorphosis of the river into human form is complete, the Dart, reaching the foot of Totnes Weir, becomes tidal and thus technically it is no longer a river. The personal pronoun again marks a point of dissipation rather than of definition. The sea is something well within the river's mindscape (the river dreams it), and something out of its control (it revivifies the river; it is in its space that the river 'comes to'). As with the voice of the 'Edwards' passage, the river voice here is in the state that Agamben

characterises as a 'twilight of consciousness' that becomes 'the matrix of a specific experience'.<sup>366</sup> In the case of *Dart*, this 'specific experience' is that, self-reflexively, of the whole river's workings:

the stones go down, the little mounds of sand  
and sticks go down, the slatted walkway  
sways in the flood, canoes glide among trees,

trees wade, bangles of brash on branches,  
it fills, it rains, the moon  
spreads out floating above its sediment

and a child sleepwalks

(AOD 26-27)

Instead of dissipating into silence the poem then moves into a dream state. The dream, or the dreamer, is, like Oswald's heart of silence, enclosed from the world of chaos 'in an egg of water' (AOD 27). The dreamer's discourse is in turn enclosed from the body of the poem by parentheses. This dream state, it seems, is eminently self-reflexive, placed apart from the rest of the poem, whilst echoing the whole river's course in its own movements. The river voice has seen this voice '[sleepwalking] under the frisky sound of the current / out all night, closed in an egg of water' (AOD 27), and the sleepwalker sees

the river's dream-self walk  
down to the ringmesh netting by the bridge  
to feel the edge of shingle brush the edge  
of sleep and float a world up like a cork  
out of its body's liquid dark.

(AOD 28)

Everything occurs as if in sleep, but mirrors the river's course in an ebb and flow of image, metre and half-rhyme. The final lines of each stanza comprise a modulating refrain, and in this way each stanza of the dreamer's speech falls back to the original

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<sup>366</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 46.

one at the same time as building upon it: ‘it comes back on itself... But not in a perfect circle’.<sup>367</sup>

I saw all things catch and reticulate  
 into this dreaming of the Dart  
 that sinks like a feather falls, not quite  
 in full possession of its weight) (AOD 28)

It is the first person pronoun rather than the dreamer who awakes, and the first person pronoun again presents a site of indeterminacy. The voices of dreamer, dairy worker and dairy plant blend into each other and in and out of the river’s voices and the fully self-relevant dream state is shattered by a waking vision of excess – chaotic noise, waste, and action:

I wake wide in a swim of  
 seagulls, scavengers, monomaniac, mad  
 rubbish pickers, mating blatantly, screaming  
  
 and slouch off scumming and flashing and hatching flies  
 to the milk factory, staring at routine things:

looking down the glass lines (AOD 28-29)

At first ‘wide’, anticipating the sea, the now tidal river becomes subjected to another factory process. However, the milk-bottling factory does not enact a microscopic invasion of the water’s substance. Here, water is purified incidentally by centrifuge and used only to cool the milk. Although the river (or at least the river water) is nominally ‘in a rationalised set-up’ (AOD 29), taking part in the dairy worker’s vocation and streaming his voice, this does not prevent turbulence or vocal interchange. The river yet works both inside and outside of events, and is self-sufficient:

have you forgotten the force that orders the world’s fields  
 and sets all cities in their sites, this nomad  
 pulling the sun and moon, placeless in all places,

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<sup>367</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics* 108.

born with her stones, with her circular bird-voice,  
 carrying everywhere her quarters?

(AOD 29)

The Dart is a law (a ‘force’) unto herself: self-ordered and all-encompassing on her own terms, and without a specific locus or any cardinal defining point. It seems that Oswald, in opening out her river-poem to the possibilities of voice and tidal power, allows the river a truly nomadic status: open to the world outside its course, without the bounds of categorization that define. Indeed, Kenneth White states of the nomad that he (or she) opens his (or her) intellect out to the world and undergoes a process of intellectual decompartmentalisation, after which he is able to ‘[join] a whole stream of continental drift and world-change, but without losing... local mind’.<sup>368</sup> White’s nomad dwells, simultaneously conscious of the local and global, in a space between similarity and difference, inscription and enunciation, within and outside.<sup>369</sup> One characteristic of this model of experience is that its subject is diffuse at the same time as being liminal, another that it is constantly moving or shifting, without a common ground. Fittingly, Oswald’s poem shifts from the very contemporary, earthy, prose dialogue of the sewage worker, upriver (into the estuary of the Dart) and back into Roman history, where, homeless after Troy, wandering warriors are commanded by a goddess to

sail

till the sea meets the Dart

[...]

then steer your ships into its pull

when the tide’s on the rise

at full moon then the river

grazes the skirts of the trees

and row as far as Totnes

and there get out and stand,

outcasts of the earth

(AOD 31)

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<sup>368</sup> Kenneth White, *The Wanderer and His Charts: Essays on Cultural Renewal* (London: Polygon, 2004), 6.

<sup>369</sup> See Kenneth White, *Dialogue avec Deleuze: Politique, Philosophie, Géopoétique* (Paris: Isolato, 2007), 20-27.

Follow the tidal flow to the mouth of the river proper, the wanderers (incidentally ‘wanderer’ is White’s alternative word for nomad) follow the word-map of the goddess and the narrative repeats itself in greater detail, perhaps mimicking the tidal flow from the estuary of the Dart to Totnes, which moves, as the wanderers do, against the flow of the river’s current. That the second telling of the ‘wanderer’ narrative is longer than the first shows a return to the philosophy of the walker (and thus the beginning of *Dart*), as no map can show as much detail as the reality. These wanderers are truly nomadic – stuck between the sea, where they are ‘homeless’, and land, where they are ‘outcasts’ (*AOD* 31).

At Totnes the historic Romans are met by the present figure of the stonewaller, ‘A giant walking towards them, / a flat stone in each hand’ (*AOD* 33). The stonewaller section represents Oswald’s final investigation of the three things that make up the river (trees, water, stones). The stones are as representative of the make-up of the river, symbolised by the stonewaller almost semiotically: ‘each beach has its own species, I can read them, volcanic, sedimentary, red sandstone, they all nest in the Dart’ (*AOD* 33). Like the walker, the stonewaller is comfortable in his vocation, seeing it as something permanent, although not linear: a quest (‘the recognition that the absence of a road [...] is the only experience possible for man’).<sup>370</sup> He is the symbol that the Romans recognise and ‘a gatherer, an amateur, a scavenger, a comber’, whose ‘whole style’ is defined by his quest, as ‘a stone wall’ (*AOD* 33). In spite of the solidity that the stones or the boundaries of the wall represent, the ‘stonewaller’ section is defined by a return to an idea of fluidity as distinct from narrative. This flux is a part of the fatalistic quest of the stonewaller, as he states ‘I love this concept of drift, meaning driven, deposited by a current of air or water. Like how I came by the boat’ (*AOD* 33). The boat is the stonewaller’s means to self understanding and expression: ‘the boat’s my aerial, my instrument, connects me into the texture of things, as I keep saying, the grain, the drift of water which I couldn’t otherwise get a hold on’ (*AOD* 34). The boat is a medium by which the stonewaller can realise the difference of the almost microscopic locality that comprises his vocation, and the open, global possibilities of flow that comprise his working *milieu*, achieving a nomadic prospect upon the world:

A tree-line, a slip line, a sight-line, an eye-hole, whatever it is [...]. You get this light different from anything on land, as if you’re keeping a different

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<sup>370</sup> Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 33.

space, you're in a more wobbly element like a wheelbarrow, you can feel  
the whole earth tipping, the hills shifting up and down, shedding stones as if  
everything's a kind of water

(*AOD* 34)

The boat provides the passage for the stonewaller between the local and global, and brings him into a space defined by flux, which is 'different' and 'wobbly', and at the same time a part of something comprehensible, 'the whole earth'. The next section of the poem is glossed as 'boat voices' (*AOD* 35). The 'boat voices' mediate between man and water (and have done for the canoeist and stonewaller), providing man with a shell against water's 'risk' and a means to understand and experience flow. The boats themselves sit stable within the flow of time and the river, watching each other's course, a course whose places are described in a similar manner to the walker's map – by natural, sometimes ephemeral, defining characteristics rather than specific geographical location:

there goes a line of leaves, there goes winter there goes the river at the speed  
of the woods coming into flower a little slower than the heron a little slower  
than a make-do boat running to heel with only a few galvanised bits and a  
baler between you and your watery soul

(*AOD* 35)

The names of the boats go on to punctuate the boat builder's dialogue as he articulates the purpose of his life. He is between the beginning of his vocation and his aspiration to be 'in the Med, soaking up the sun' (*AOD* 36), thinking a 'way out' by building one boat amongst all the others 'for twenty years now' (*AOD* 36); this 'way out' is in the thinking or acting towards the end rather than in the end itself.

The following section, seemingly incongruous as regards voice, represents a riddle without a definite answer. The subjects of the riddle's self-definition chart a voyage back up the Dart, from the 'lofting of a mast' in the estuary, by the swimmer's 'phases of a splash', to the naturalist's 'inkling of a fish' (*AOD* 36):

such am I that flits and flows  
and seeks and serves and swiftly goes –  
the wave slides in, the sand lifts,

the fish fades, the splash drifts,  
 the eye blinks, the bone shatters,  
 the sandflea jumps and so does water (AOD 37)

The answer to the riddle is not water *per se* but is to be found in the various fluctuating voices that make up water, or the many strands of water that make up the river. It is clear that it is not the answer, but the means towards this answer that is most important. The voices of the river are, after all, bound to change, and, changing, will alter the sounds of the river but not the overall soundmap. Every action is held together by echoes of other actions, and by the turbulence of the water. The riddle represents a permanent, self-reflexive, question (or quest) that is defined by the act of quest and its properties rather than the (re)solution.

The next section of the poem also looks back to the start. Charles Bennett states that ‘the momentum of the poem seems to be ever pressing forwards as we turn the page, [however] the accrual of meaning occurs through a reverse momentum – the reader’s mind is forever looking back, upstream, conscious of what has gone before’.<sup>371</sup> Here, Bennett considers the idea of *Dart* as a poem that ‘illustrates the paradox of reading’ as it, too, follows the prescribed geography of the river Dart. But as Serres states, ‘the circle does not complete’.<sup>372</sup> Indeed, by this point in the poem, the echoing sound of Jan Coö’s voice, which represents what is echoing or cyclical about the poem, conflates to become intimately connected to the action of departure and that of greeting: the dying poacher’s final vocalization is ‘oo oo ooooo...’ (AOD 39), and the drunk man’s greeting to the poachers’s boat is ‘hellooooooooooooo’ (AOD 41). The poem is not simply a vehicle to explore the effect of its finished (inscribed) product on its (self-conscious) reader. Rather, it charts or investigates the acts of inscription and enunciation, being and consciousness, using a fluid model that can both contain and exteriorize these difficult philosophical problems. It is a poem about reading in as far as ‘to think is always to interpret – to explicate, to develop, to decipher, to translate... [and these actions] are the form of pure creation’,<sup>373</sup> and Oswald’s overarching project in the poem is to produce a ‘sound-map’ or ‘songline’ of the ‘river’s mutterings’. *Dart* is not concerned with beginning or end (however much these reflect upon each other), neither is it concerned with a definitive meaning found. Rather the subject of the poem is the

<sup>371</sup> Bennett, ‘Current Literature 2002: New Writing: Poetry’, 230.

<sup>372</sup> Serres, *The Birth of Physics*, 108

<sup>373</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Continuum, 2008), 62.

process or actions that lie between, the simultaneous act of interpretation and creation. And so the river's voice in the poem can move on from the riddle-like quest, to question:

why is this jostling procession of waters,  
 its many strands overclambering one another,  
 so many word-marks, momentary traces  
 in wind-script of the world's voices,  
 why is it so bragging and surrendering  
 [...]  
 as two sisters, so entwined, so dividing  
 so caught in this dialogue that keeps  
 washing into the cracks of their lips  
 and spinning in the small hollows  
 of their ears and egos  
 this huge vascular structure  
 why is this flickering water  
 with its blinks and side-long looks  
 with its language of oaks  
 and clicking of its slatey brooks  
 why is this river not ever  
 able to leave until it's over? (AOD 42-43)

The 'jostling procession of waters' makes up the river, but at the same time it is defined by being between things, 'caught in [a] dialogue' that is at once invasive and exteriorizing. There is no longer any surety about eventual outcome implied in the riddle section by the imperative locutions 'such am I' (AOD 37). The first person pronoun is replaced by the passage between any two things, be they beginning and end, synthesis and division, or the 'ears and egos' of the two sisters. The thing that marks this passage, or this lack of an 'I', is the repeated 'why'. The river is *just so*, defined by 'the experience of being-*within* and *outside*'.<sup>374</sup> Thus it is the question, or the quest, particular to each different voice, that creates the overarching permanence of the poem – the river Dart. But the question, as we have seen, has no definite conclusion, and is realised at its best in moments of perceptual blurring, of attention paid to the ephemeral,

<sup>374</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 80.

of metamorphosis. The question occurs in the passage between a subject's definition in relation to itself (the passage between being and articulation), and is manifest in the experience of the world. The ferryman, embodying every element of the idea of passage, or of mediation, can thus inhabit the world of chaos, manifest in the 'certain sliding feeling / that loosens the solidity of the earth' (43 *Dart*), and that of the centre, or ' Silence' (*AOD* 43). *Dart* is thus less a question of reading than feeling, in a world of

Swift fragmentary happenings

that ferry him between where things are now  
and why, disengaging his eyes from the question (AOD 44)

There is not a question of time, or 'when', appended to the ferryman's question of space 'where things are now' (*AOD* 44). 'Why' draws our attention to the quest that seems analogous now to the course of the river and its manner. It is difficult to forget Michel Serres's badly behaved river of time, which 'descends, turns back on itself, stops, starts, bifurcates ten times, divides, and blends, caught up in whirlpools and counter-currents'.<sup>375</sup> So, in contradistinction to the turbulent voice patterns of the river so far, which reach backwards and forwards irrespective of temporality, we now meet the voice of the 'rememberer' (*AOD* 45). However, in keeping with the poem's primary occupations, the rememberer's reminiscences serve as a means to articulate ideas of sound, silence, and inscription: 'you get this pause superimposed on water I remember' (*AOD* 45). It is through this voice that we discover, again, that it is not the answer to the question that marks the quest, and that it is not the object under scrutiny but the act of perception itself that is important: 'when you consider / your eyes are made mostly of movement' (*AOD* 45). Getting closer to the wide expanse of sea at the end of the estuary, the voices of the poem become increasingly reminiscent and conscious of the end of the *Dart* but not of the end of the process, or the quest. Perceptual blurring is apparent in relation to the river still, and the *Dart* becomes more explicitly a wanderer, as the voice narrating the story of Humphrey Gilbert states: 'I saw a whole flock of water migrating' (*AOD* 46).

'Former pilots on the *Dart*' find that the fluid model of the river's mutterings provides a matrix onto which to 'cross-fix' 'tiny spasms of time' (*AOD* 46). These 'tiny

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<sup>375</sup> Serres *et al*, 'Science and the Humanities: The Case of Turner', 15.

spasms' are nevertheless perpetually interlinked, and thus we find that multiply-voiced self-reflexive nature of the Dart is very similar to Serres's universal model, where 'every point is a center in the multiple intersections of the network; every site is in real or virtual communication with all other sites. Each local point implies the global network, and the latter is nothing without the multiplicity of the individual sites'.<sup>376</sup> And so each voice of the Dart is a multiplicity, defined by a passage between, and is limitless. And it is this sense of limitless passage that the crabbers see as the great benefit of their vocation: 'you can see the whole sunrise every morning. No clocking in, no time bell. In summer you can dive in... You don't know what you are till you've seen that' (*AOD* 47). With this expanse, the River Dart finally becomes sea, a linear movement effected by the crabbers:

they start the boat, they climb  
as if over the river's vertebrae  
out of its body into the wings of the sea  
rounding the Mew stone, the last bone of the Dart  
[...]  
and the seal-watcher in his wave-ski  
shouts and waves and slowly paddles out of sight. (*AOD* 47)

Tellingly, this is not the end of the poem. The broken circle of river-consciousness has occurred, from the eel- to the seal- watchers. The final section sees a return to unclassifiable, unnameable anonymity whilst the sense of becoming, of constant and continuous movement, is preserved. For the seal-watcher, the sea is a 'Self-maker, speaking its meaning over mine' (*AOD* 48), just as the Dart has defined and taken over the voices that have made it. Finally we return to the riddle of identity, as the voice responds to the question that mirrors that which opens the poem:

who's this moving in the dark? Me.

all names, all voices, Slip-Shape, this is Proteus,  
whoever that is, the shepherd of the seals,  
driving my many selves from cave to cave... (*AOD* 48)

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<sup>376</sup> Marcel Hénaff, 'Of Stones, Angels, and Humans: Michel Serres and the Global City', *Mapping Michel Serres*, 181.

The poem ends with a sense of movement, a sense of multiplicity, a sense that the question, if there was one, has been answered at the same time as it has been left open to further change and process. The river space here is that of Serres's river-nomad, who is at once no-one and everything, questioner and questioned, 'adapting to and travelling across all manner of waters, with so little identity that he recognises that his name is no-one, accumulates in his body passages, landscapes, customs, languages, and mixes them'.<sup>377</sup> The end of the poem does not represent the end of the Dart's becoming, as that, restricted to the river's course yet made perennial through the water cycle, is always-already. However, it is the beginning of the sea, and, emphasised by the ellipses that conclude the poem, water's becoming, or its being-*such* continues; for Oswald, as for Serres, 'l'espace lui-même change et commande d'autres mappemondes'.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Serres, *The Five Senses*, 258.

<sup>378</sup> Serres, *Atlas*, 12.

## AFTERWORD

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### *D'autres mappemondes*

Resonant throughout this thesis has been Michel Serres's exhortation, made now twenty years ago, that space itself changes and commands other mappings.<sup>379</sup> During the writing of this thesis, a number of new critical studies of space and literature have been published. Some, including Ian Davidson's *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, Jon Clay's *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*, and Michael Flatley's *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, I have referred to. Others, including Bertrand Westphal's excellent *La Géocritique*, Paul Giles's *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*, and Michael Davidson's forthcoming *Outskirts of Form: Practising Cultural Poetics*, I have not as yet. The general trend of thinking in all of these books emphasises not only the Serresian maxim mentioned above, but also the importance of affect to the reading experience (whether of prose or poetry). Each study is indebted to the spatialization of thought that Foucault's *époque de l'espace* brought to the fore, and is, in some way, trying to build a criticism sufficient to encompass the broad and multiple world-maps traced by contemporary poetics. However, recognition of the importance of space to all forms of discourse and analysis is not sufficient, and critical elevation of this kind too often leads to the thematization of space and thence to a limitation of the ways in which space operates and can be written, read, and voiced in the poem. Attention, too, must be paid to the importance of affectivity and voice on the manner in which we engage with the poem through vocalic identification with its enunciating I/eye.

As the poetry read in this thesis has become steadily more 'contemporary' (tracing a path through Montague, Gunn, Heaney, and Kinsella to Jamie, Oswald, and Khalvati) the enunciating I/eye of the poem has developed into something less reliable and more unstable, familiar with the unfamiliar realm of the multiple, dispersed, diffuse, and dispossessed. The poetry encompasses different points of view, voices, frames of cultural reference, and even different languages in the multiple-singular voice and vision of its (and our) enunciating I/eye but does not pander to its reader by explanation

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<sup>379</sup> Serres: 'L'espace lui-même change et commande d'autres mappemondes' (*Atlas*, 12); 'Nous n'allons plus vers un univers mais vers des multiplicités de mondes possibles. Soit donc à les dessiner' (*Atlas*, 276).

(the older Montague and Heaney gloss or explain points, the younger Oswald and Khalvati do so less). Language is foregrounded, and the enunciating I/eye of the contemporary lyric has different angles of vision and types of enunciation from which to choose. For these reasons, the I/eye with which we seek identification in the contemporary lyric is linguistically and textually unstable (*Dart* is a good example of this) and is interrupted and interrupting of itself, open to the kaleidoscopic possibilities and processes to which different competing voices and visions give rise.

The criticism that now accounts for this I/eye must also be, as Bertrand Westphal writes, ‘a dynamic relationship, undergoing an incessant evolution’ and must be conscious of a ‘mobile perspective’ through which space in literature is now written. The space of and in literature is now composed of ‘multiple points of view which are mutually corrective, productive, and enriching’.<sup>380</sup> Mirroring the development of the global citizen-subject, Michael Davidson sees the enunciating I/eye of the contemporary poetic work become ‘a kind of collective subject whose juridical and political identity does not yet exist but must be imagined into reality’,<sup>381</sup> the force of whose ‘flexible cultural citizenship’ comes from a ‘poetics of interruption’,<sup>382</sup> which questions, challenges, and re-voices nationalist paradigms and traditionally received spaces and forms. Julia Kristeva, too, sees the subjecthood of the now-global poetic I/eye undergo a shift, becoming representative of the ‘kaleidoscopic individual’; the affectively engaging enunciating first person pronoun of the literary work is ‘simultaneously itself and infinitely open to otherness: *ego affectus est*’.<sup>383</sup> Lyric utterance, whilst maintaining its hallmark characteristic of ‘the production of an apparently phenomenal world through the figure of voice’,<sup>384</sup> now has a different sort of world to render phenomenal through its figured and figuring voice(s). This different sort of world is articulated with an increased consciousness of the different kinds of space and ideas of space from which it is constructed, and also of the processes of affective engagement that render it phenomenal. The lyric now conjures up a figure of voice that makes vocal

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<sup>380</sup> Bertrand Westphal, *La Géocritique: Réel, Fiction, Espace* (Paris: Minuit, 2007), 186-187.

<sup>381</sup> Michael Davidson, *Outskirts of Form: Practising Cultural Poetics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2011), 73.

<sup>382</sup> Michael Davidson, ‘Living In The Same Place... And Different Places’: Cosmopoetics After Modernism’, *Cosmopoetics: New Essays in World Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Marc Botha and Heather Yeung, (in preparation).

<sup>383</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Is there such a thing as European Culture?’, British Academy, London. (24 May 2010).

<sup>384</sup> Culler, ‘Changes in the Study of Lyric’, *Lyric Poetry*, 50.

its previously invisible spatial framework:<sup>385</sup> space is now thought and represented in its multiplicity. Jonathan Culler builds on his 1985 definition of the lyric, above, adding affective engagement with the poem *as* and *of* space as well as the more general writerly manipulation of the poem's textual space to the vocalic and phenomenal layers previously established as fundamental to this verse form: 'lyric is about what happens now – in the reader's engagement with each line', 'lyric is the foregrounding of language, in its material dimensions, and thus both embodies and attracts interest in language and languages – in the forms, shapes, and rhythms of discourse'.<sup>386</sup> The self-consciously spatiality and vocalicity of the contemporary lyric, and our affective and cognitive engagement with that space, gives rise to and commands a new process of affective mapping, a new poetic world map.

In his most recent volume, *Human Chain*, Seamus Heaney makes a poetic move towards the discovery of a new template, a new world-map predicated not on the final product, the map, but rather on the engagement of the vocaliser and visualiser with his or her surrounding environment:

I had my existence. I was there  
Me in place and the place in me.

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Where can it be found again,  
An elsewhere world, beyond

Maps and atlases,  
Where all is woven into

And of itself, like a nest  
Of crosshatched grassblades?

(*SHHC* 43)

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<sup>385</sup> Russell West-Pavlov writes: 'space remains unthought within traditional meta-literature because it is the invisible framework which makes literature possible in the first place' (*Space in Theory*, 119). West-Pavlov is writing primarily about metafictional prose fiction here, and its temporal and narrative, rather than overtly spatial, play. I would like to think that the work of *avant-garde* poetry, and, latterly as demonstrated in this thesis, the contemporary lyric poem, have done much to dispel space's invisibility in literary discourse.

<sup>386</sup> Culler, 'Why Lyric', (2008), 202, 205.

The Heideggerian musings of the lines above discount the fact that the ‘maps and atlases’ which are broadly seen as an impediment to the longed-for ‘elsewhere world’ may in fact represent the liberating process the poem seeks. What this ‘elsewhere world’ is, apart from the trite natural simile given, is not expanded, only alluded to, as the poet seeks instead and again the comfort of known place. The intimate and particular simile, ‘a nest / Of crosshatched grassblades’, will not endure the season, unlike the more abstract metaphors of production, self-knowledge, change, and world-making that we have seen in this thesis (Montague’s ‘network of energies / crossing patterns’ (*JMCP* 72), Alice Oswald’s ‘nimbus of words kept in motion’ (*AOD* 19)). Heaney is almost ventriloquising his former poetic selves here, in an elegy to the uncomplicated poetry of a non-global age where an ‘elsewhere world’ can be found in the intricacies of a known place, rather than existing in the spaces between, and in process.

Indeed, the work of a poet of place becomes increasingly difficult, it seems, when poetry now so often demands a more expansive global vision and voice. Exploiting the conventions of the poem *as* and *of* space, Jen Hadfield’s ‘Burra Grace’ uses landscape, language, voice, and vision, to figure a lyric I/eye that is multiple and is at once placed and dis-placed, content to use whatever language suits the moment of perception and articulation. The poem is short, but its final lines are spread over two pages. The literal space of the page and the extended breathing space or silence that it brings to our experience of the poem, signifies.<sup>387</sup> The lyric voice and vision of Hadfield’s poem already occupies the ‘elsewhere world’ Heaney’s poem, above, longs for but cannot reach let alone inhabit or define. There is confidence in the placing of the first-person pronoun; it is split between two mirroring sections, which, in its presence, it also joins. The sections also imply the geographical landscape from which the title of the poem is taken: Burra, in Shetland, is two islands which have had a collective name at least since the time the *Orkneyinga* saga was written (some time between 1192 and 1206).

‘Burra Grace’ is at once an invocation and a state of being. Immediately, we vocalise the poem’s I/eye:

I bide on this bit  
of broken biscuit –

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<sup>387</sup> See Appendix IX.

sodden junket  
of peathag, daffodil;

a cramp of basalt  
and rosy granite.<sup>388</sup>

Although the poem contains the constituent elements of a grace (first person, catalogue of things, thanks given) the world that it conjures is not the stable religious ('grace') and literal ('burra') geography that the title of the poem implies. 'I bide': I inhabit/live and/or wait/endure, at once living and giving voice both to myself and also to a time and a world. It is not the biscuit but the first person pronoun that is our host: we 'bide' with and through the I/eye of the poem in a world whose geography and distinguishing features are not given but which are being imagined into being; waiting, we voice, here, Davidson's 'collective subject' through the mould of the lyric poem. This is a poetry that is eminently conscious of its dual role as text and voice and which works with this consciousness, weaving it into the groundwork of the poem itself. It is a poem that is so consciously about poetry's life on the page and in voice that it need not mention it.

I bide on this bit  
of broken biscuit

and all its frumpy gods  
be thankit:

sobbing wimbrel,  
shalder, rabbit,

peew-t,

peew-t<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Jen Hadfield, *Nigh-No-Place* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2008), 52.

<sup>389</sup> Hadfield, *Nigh-No-Place*, 52.

The *genius loci* is a catalogue of ‘frumpy gods’; there is no nostalgia for place here, rather, the force or power within the poem resides in the carefully chosen words written down (after all, why else in this final part would the curlew be invoked two times with different names?) and their subsequent voicing. The ‘peew-t, / peew-t || peew-t, / peew-t’ that closes Hadfield’s poem is a representation of the call of the curlew, but it is also its name (peewit is the most common Orkney and Shetland name for the curlew, wimbrel is curlew in the Shetland Norn). Peewit, written in the space of Hadfield’s poem, is the bird and its call, signified and signification. In voicing this part of the poem we call into being both the name and the sound of the curlew, ‘a speech-act with no known real-world counterpart’.<sup>390</sup> ‘Peew-t’ represents without representing the first person pronoun: the I/eye of this poem quite literally lies ‘in the no-man’s-land between sound and signification’.<sup>391</sup> The ‘I’ is absent, desubjectivized, and yet as the poem is voiced it becomes suddenly present, rising out of the significant space in the word, and is momentarily made subject again. Unlike the telling absence of ‘I’ in the swimmer section *Dart* (AOD 23, see page 124), here, Hadfield’s ‘I’, although as significantly absent as Oswald’s, is pronounced in the act of voicing the poem. The close of the poem also bears textual comparison with the swimmer section from *Dart*, and demonstrates Hadfield’s poetic self-consciousness at play: the final four lines and their significant spacing are not only an experiment in the poem *as* and *of* space, but are also eminently conscious of the vocalic space of the poem, and the importance of affective engagement with voice (through the figure of the enunciating I/eye) to our understanding of the lyric poem. We rise, with the call of the curlew and the absent-present enunciating I/eye of the poem, which is both our voice and not our voice, up through the vocalised landscape not of Shetland but of the page.

Often, in Hadfield, consciousness of the vocality of the poem and its representation is brought about through analogues with birdsong and flight. However, there is no Romantically existential lyricism in these parallels. The second half of ‘Song of Parts’ extends this concern with birdsong, flight, and lyric voice to questions of notation and metaphor that we have also seen brought to the fore in Oswald’s *Dart*:

her smile’s like the flight  
of a siskin – dash dot dash dot

<sup>390</sup> Culler, ‘Why Lyric’ (2008), 202.

<sup>391</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazan (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), 64.

grips her mouth with tiny claws  
teetering<sup>392</sup>

As with the final lines of ‘Burra Grace’, this part of the poem exists on a page of its own and is typographically distinctive. As it is unconventionally aligned to the right hand side of the page, immediate attention is drawn to the space between the first and second halves of the poem, and the order in which we read them (we have seen a similar manipulation of the space of the page in the parallel stanzas of Section IX of *The Rough Field*, and, indeed, Hadfield often uses a similar parallel stanza in her poetry). The simile here (for that is all this second part of the poem is) is set apart from the originary image – that of the gutted mackerel. The second part of the poem may be a ‘coda’, but it is not the ‘bloodless old song’ that the enunciating I/eye of the first part of the poem sees in the mackerel’s ‘gut-end’.<sup>393</sup>

The main matter of this short verse paragraph is the siskin simile. Our attention is immediately drawn to methods of representation, as the third line draws out the bird's distinctive flight pattern in a dot-dash notation as familiar to ornithologists as it is to experts in Morse code and metrical notation. Hadfield presents us with a puzzle which is intimately concerned with the lyric embodiment of 'the forms, shapes, and rhythms of discourse':<sup>394</sup> are we to enunciate the 'dash dash dash, dash dot dot' of line 3, and if so, how? Or are we to follow the flight pattern across the page without sound until a written word calls us to speak again, or look at the dashes and dots as a singular representation of the tooth-patterns of the mackerel? This is a puzzle that Jacques Rancière sees fundamental to the study of poetry today: as critical readers, we must voice the lines of the poem with a concern to 'first, discover in words the animating force that drives their articulation; second, discover in the visible the sign of the invisible'.<sup>395</sup> In the case of 'Burra Grace', the answer to this puzzle is to be found in the figure of voice: speaking, we make a vocal presence of the absent 'I' of the poem's final lines. However, in 'Song of Parts' the puzzle is left unanswered, and is further complicated as the final lines of the poem blur the boundaries between subject matter

<sup>392</sup> Hadfield, *almanacs* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2005), 55.

<sup>393</sup> Hadfield: With tugsome bravery you yank  
the gut-end, coda of a bloodless old song (*almanacs*, 54)

<sup>394</sup> Culler, 'Why Lyric' (2008), 205.

<sup>395</sup> Jacques Rancière, *La parole muette*, quoted in Jonathan Culler, 'Critical Paradigms', *PMLA* 125.4 (2010), 906.

and simile: the mackerel's smile, the 'dash dot dash dot', and the siskin '[grip] her mouth with tiny claws'. The simile, and our understanding and our voicing of the poem all teeter, like the 'tiny claws', on the brink of understanding.

'Burra Grace' is a lyric poem unburdened by sentimentality. So, too, is 'Song of Parts', whose 'parts' are the split verse paragraphs of the poem and the internal organs of the gutted mackerel. This lack of overt nostalgia may be one of the means through which the contemporary lyric and the manner in which we approach, voice, and understand it attains some sort of difference from its predecessors. Humour, too, is rare in the conventional lyric, as very little humour seems to arise in the heightened moment of poetic self-consciousness that the lyric will often represent. However, in the case of 'Burra Grace', the opening lines generate a humourous tone even as they look back to past lyric tradition in the emphasis laid upon the space of lyric utterance through their subsequent refrain.<sup>396</sup> The 'broken biscuit', a metaphor for the islands of Burra which is at the same time the just-split communion host of the catholic mass and thus also a metaphor for grace, generates humour through impossibility. This is an image escaped from an *Amhrán no mBréag* without the underlying political seriousness that characterises Montague's lyric. It is possible for a broken biscuit to represent two islands as it is possible for a broken biscuit to call up ideas of grace, but it cannot do these things simultaneously, so we return to the literal biscuit, and thus to the 'I' that bides there. However, it is impossible for the 'I' to live or wait on a biscuit and yet the divergence of the simultaneous metaphorical shift (biscuit = island || biscuit = grace) brings us back to this 'I', which must be, in spite of its humorous inhabitation of a biscuit, the point by which we vocalise and navigate the poem. We must trust the 'I' in spite of its multiple and impossible spaces of living and waiting and in spite of the fact that the poem challenges this trust by repeating these two impossible lines; our trust is repaid not only in the surreal humour of the two repeated lines but also by the sublimely absent-presence of the 'I' in the final four lines of the poem.

Even the title of the volume from which 'Burra Grace' is taken is indicative of the sort of space Hadfield invites the reader-voicer of the volume to be affected by: *Nigh-No-Place*. The title of her earlier volume, *almanacs*, also displays a concern with space and acts of mapping. The enunciating I/eye of the poems is not concretely placed, and Hadfield often uses vocal and textual play around the figure of the enunciating I/eye

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<sup>396</sup> Jonathan Culler expands on this importance of refrain to the establishment of lyric space: 'refrain is an important construction of lyric [...] which disrupts narrative and brings [the lyric] back to an atemporal space of discourse' ('Why Lyric', 2009).

to invite her reader to inhabit places that are contested, liminal, or unreal. The ‘me in my place and my place in me’ of Heaney’s ‘A Herbal’ is no longer an instantiated truth. The place (or space) inhabited by the poem’s enunciating I/eye is not a stable, Heideggerian grounding. But this is not to say that Hadfield’s poetry is not grounded. Indeed, the earthiness of the humour in ‘Burra Grace’ demonstrates a movement away from the elevated seriousness of the Hölderlinesque (the inspiration here comes from the less than Eutерpean ‘frumpy gods’) or the revolutionary (the split lines in Hadfield do not represent a political / textual intervention, as in *The Rough Field*). Humour is an everyday occurrence, which Hadfield uses to disrupt the possibility of the poem’s displaying an existential lyricism found in ‘a nest / of crosshatched grassblades’ (*SHHC* 43). As with the biscuit metaphor of ‘Burra Grace’, in ‘Snuskit’, too, we derive a humorous pleasure in the act of voicing a poem and ‘matching apparently incongruous conceptual frameworks to make an implicative sense’.<sup>397</sup>

The shore is just not nice. Good. The hashed basalt is black  
and all the rubberduckery of the Atlantic is blown up here – a  
bloated seal and sometimes skull, fishboxes and buoys, a cummer-  
bund of rotting kelp. The wind topples me, punches me gently  
into a pool. Beyond, strafed with hail, the sea teems like TV, with  
frayed aerial. I step back onto my tuffet, boots pooled in buttery  
light. The wind punches me gently into a pool. I’m doing my best  
impression of a gull – pesky, pitied, lonely, greedy, hopping up  
and down on my tuffet. The wind punches me gently into a pool.<sup>398</sup>

Snuskit is a Shetland verbal noun denoting sulkiness, and Hadfield plays with the childishness of the mood evoked here through language and tone. The prose form suits the moody solidity and yet the manipulation of the line-endings is as deft as in any verse. The enunciating I/eye of the poem lies between two sides of an untidy (‘not nice’) yet appropriate (‘good’) landscape, a landscape comprised of the silted flotsam of the North Sea, the other the television static of the sea itself. The refrain here adds to the oscillation of the I/eye between the changing landscapes of tide-line and sea, and the I/eye is a part of the landscape just as the landscape is as anthropomorphised as the

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<sup>397</sup> Christopher Butler, *Pleasure and the Arts: Enjoying Literature, Painting, and Music* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 6.

<sup>398</sup> Hadfield, *Nigh-No-Place*, 39.

I/eye. The refrain is both literally a punch line and a bringing down to earth. Hadfield addresses, with irreverence and humour, the paradoxes of the speaking voice: its liminality in, yet centrality to, the poem, and the fact that it ‘gives us a world’<sup>399</sup> and yet, voiced, only has a single direction. ‘The wind punches me gently into a pool’ and punches from *behind*. The enunciating I/eye does not have eyes in the back of its head. In ‘Snuskit’, Hadfield explores the fact that although the vocalic space of the voiced lyric poem creates a new spatial dimension which sits alongside the poem *as* and *of* space, it delimits horizons of the poem: ‘when I speak, my voice shows me up as a being with a perspective, for whom orientation has significance, who has an unprotected rear, who has two sides’.<sup>400</sup> Present or absent from the textual representation of the spoken poem, the vocally projected enunciating I/eye is embodied in the act of strange ventriloquism as we voice the poem and seek to identify with the voice of the poem.

Paul Giles writes of American literature that it is ‘not a natural phenomenon based on national affiliation, nor a narrative whole teleology is directed inexorably toward emancipation, but a field whose perimeters expand and contract in accordance with the maps it projects and the particular atlas it is enclosed by’.<sup>401</sup> The same may be written of British literature, or indeed of any literature when it is organised in some way by geographical space or provenance. Wai Chee Dimock extends this field metaphor to the idea of world literature, which she calls ‘a percolating field, full of upheavals and reversals’,<sup>402</sup> thus opening up the possible spaces of literature from national paradigm to a more abstract idea of space. Jonathan Culler, too, recurs to the metaphor of the field of literature, recasting it again, this time in terms of the lyric poem and of criticism and genre more generally: ‘[a] shift in the concept of literature ultimately informs literary criticism [...]; [now] a much broader field is open to it’.<sup>403</sup> Through the metaphor of the opening field, we return to ideas of space and the poem. Changes in this field, and the manner in which the field is perceived, are productive of, in the case of poetry, a different context in which we encounter and voice the poem’s enunciating I/eye. As we have seen throughout this thesis, however contested, multiple, ‘not nice’, or absent it is, we will continue to seek to engage with this enunciating I/eye in the act

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<sup>399</sup> Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, 96

<sup>400</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 5.

<sup>401</sup> Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011), 267.

<sup>402</sup> Dimock, Wai Chee, ‘War in Several Tongues: Nations, Languages, Genres’, *Globalizing American Studies*, ed. Brian T. Edwards (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2010), 277.

<sup>403</sup> Culler, ‘Critical Paradigms’, 906.

of reading, or voicing, the poem. So in spite of the changeability of the spaces of the poem and the now multiple 'lyric I of the voice poem',<sup>404</sup> there is a constant here: the affective engagement with the voice of the poem through the acts of voicing the poem and of affective mapping. And as long as poetry is concerned with man's relationship with the world and to him- or herself, and however long we continue to engage affectively with and voice the poem, the different layers of the mapping process (the poem *as* and *of* space, and the vocalic space of the voiced poem) will affect the way we voice and analyse poetry. As the ways in which we engage with the world change, so, too, will poetry adapt to that change, and so, too must our criticism of that poetry.

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<sup>404</sup> Bob Perelman, quoted in Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, 89.

## **APPENDICES**

# APPENDIX I



From *Un Coup de Dés*  
Stéphane Mallarmé<sup>405</sup>

<sup>405</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Igitur, Divigations, Un Coup de Dés* (Paris : Gallimard, 2003), 424-425.

## APPENDIX II

This is a square poem.  
 This poem is a square.  
 Is this square a poem?  
 This square is a poem,  
 This square is. A poem  
 Is a poem - this square.  
 This is a poem-square.  
 A poem-square is this  
 Poem. This is a square.  
 A square poem is this  
 Square. This is a poem,  
 This is. A poem-square.

'Square Poem'  
 Bob Cobbing<sup>406</sup>

<sup>406</sup> Bob Cobbing, 'Square Poem', *High On the Walls: An Anthology Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of Poetry Readings at Morden Tower*, ed. Gordon Brown (Bloodaxe, 1991), 44.

### APPENDIX III

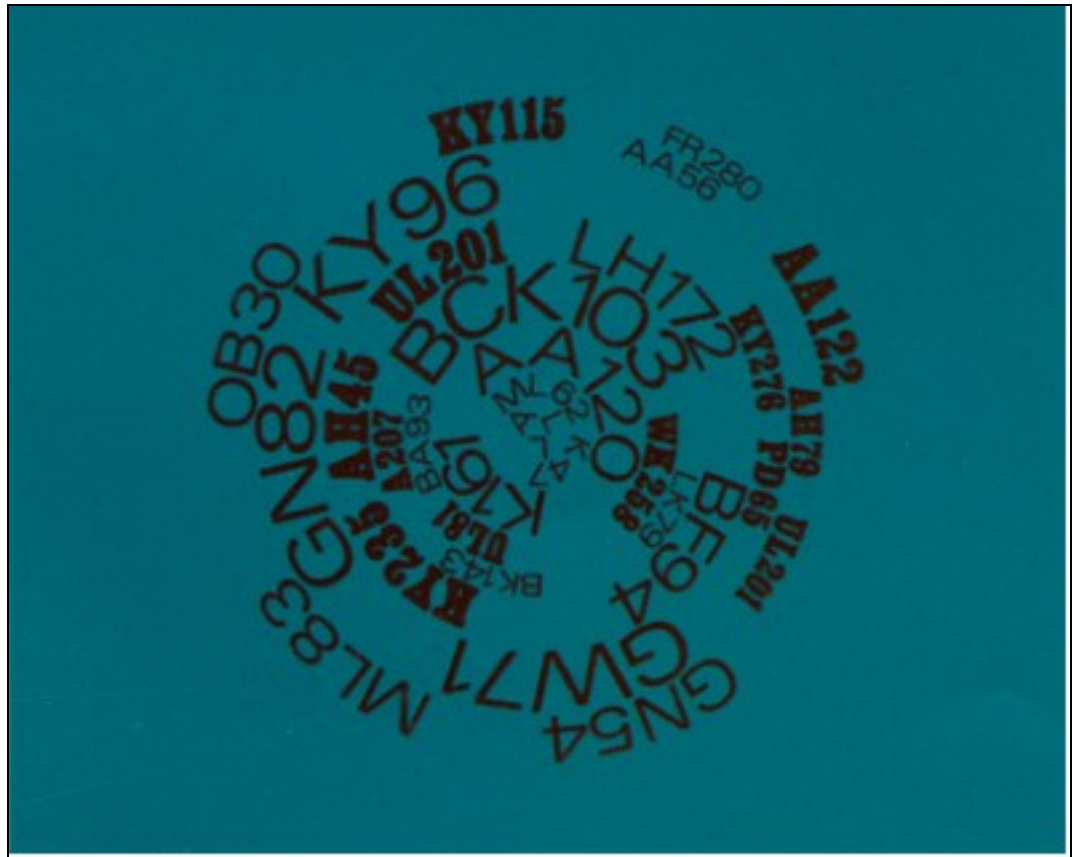
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‘Lochan Eck Garden’, *Little Sparta*  
Ian Hamilton Finlay<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Jessie Sheeler and Andrew Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2003).



‘Sea Poppy II’  
Ian Hamilton Finlay<sup>408</sup>

<sup>408</sup> I.C.A. *Roland* 2 (Jun.-Aug. 2009), 38.

# APPENDIX IV

<p style="text-align: center;"> LOYALISTS REMEMBER!  MILLIONS have been MURDERED for refusing to GROVEL  Before Rome's Mass-Idol: THE HOST!  King Charles I and his Frog Queen Henrietta GLOAT in their letters  that they have almost EXTERMINATED THE PROTESTANTS OF IRELAND  The PRIESTS in every PARISH were told to record HOW MANY KILLED!  Under ROGER MOORE and SIR PHELM O'NEIL  Instruments of ROME  40,000 loyal protestants were MASSACRED like game-fowl  IN ONE NIGHT  Cromwell went to Ireland  TO STOP  The Catholics murdering Protestants! </p> <p> Penal Rock: Altamuskin </p> <p> To learn the massrock's lesson, leave your car,  Descend frost gripped steps to where  A humid moss overlaps the valley floor.  Crisp as a pistol-shot, the winter air  Recalls poor Tagues, folding the nap of their frieze  Under one knee, long suffering as beasts,  But parched for that surviving sign of grace,  The bog-latin murmur of their priest.  A crude stone oratory, carved by a cousin,  Commemorates the place. For two hundred years  People of our name have sheltered in this glen  But now all have left. A few flowers  Wither on the altar, so I melt a ball of snow  From the hedge into their rusty tin before I go. </p> <p style="text-align: center;">[28]</p>	<p> I sometimes wonder if anyone could have brought the two sides  together. Your father, I know, was very bitter about having to leave  but when I visited home before leaving for the Australian mission,  I found our protestant neighbours friendly, and yet we had lost  any position we had in the neighbourhood. You realise of course,  that all this has nothing to do with religion; perhaps this new man  will find a way to resolve the old hatreds. . . . </p> <p style="text-align: right;"> An Ulster Prophecy </p> <p> I saw the Pope breaking stones on Friday,  A blind parson sewing a patchwork quilt,  Two bishops cutting rushes with their croziers,  Roaring Meg firing rosary beads for cannonballs,  Corks in boats afloat on the summit of the Sperrins,  A severed head speaking with a grafted tongue,  A snail paring Royal Avenue with a hatchet,  British troops firing on the Shankill,  A mill and a forge on the back of a cuckoo,  The fox sitting conceitedly at a window chewing tobacco,  And a curlew in flight  surveying  a United Ireland </p>  <p style="text-align: center;">[29]</p>
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From *The Rough Field*  
John Montague<sup>409</sup>

<sup>409</sup> John Montague, *The Rough Field* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1972), 28-29.

In five years, showbands have become the most important part of the Irish entertainment industry. About 10,000 ball-rooms, small halls, clubs giving full or part-time employment to about 100,000 people, while between six and seven thousand musicians play with 700 professional and semi-professional bands.

## 5

Dancehall

And there, on a ravaged hillock  
overlooking the road,  
the raw inheritor of this place,  
an unfinished hall.  
Stung to soberness in the dawn  
I sway and stare.  
Its blank eyes — gaps in concrete —  
stare blindly back.

*Seemsh no escape. Poet and object  
must consummate.*  
No lyric memory softens the fact —  
this stone idol  
could house more hopes than any  
verse of mine.  
I eye its girdled skeleton  
with brute respect.

Three miles away, a gutted castle  
stands; Sir John's  
which my father helped to burn.  
Its elegant remains  
still dominate the district, as  
now this Roseland  
shall, a concrete prow cargoed  
with vague dreams.

[54]

The shiny roofs of cars, shoals  
of minnows, may  
swim around it, pairs stumble from  
the wide light  
of the door to the narrow privacy  
of plastic seats.  
A sigh, a kiss, hands wander  
near thin skirts

as music shakes & pounds.  
An industry built  
on loneliness, setting the young  
to clamber over  
each other, brief as mayflies  
in their hunger  
for novelty, for flashing  
energy & change . . .



Both *Bard* and *Harper* is prepaide, which by their cunning art,  
Doe strike and cheure up all the gestes with comfort at the hart.  
John Derrick, 1581.

[55]

From *The Rough Field*  
John Montague<sup>410</sup>

<sup>410</sup> Montague, *The Rough Field*, 54-55.

APPENDIX V

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Le Laocoön<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Image courtesy of Hamish Yeung.

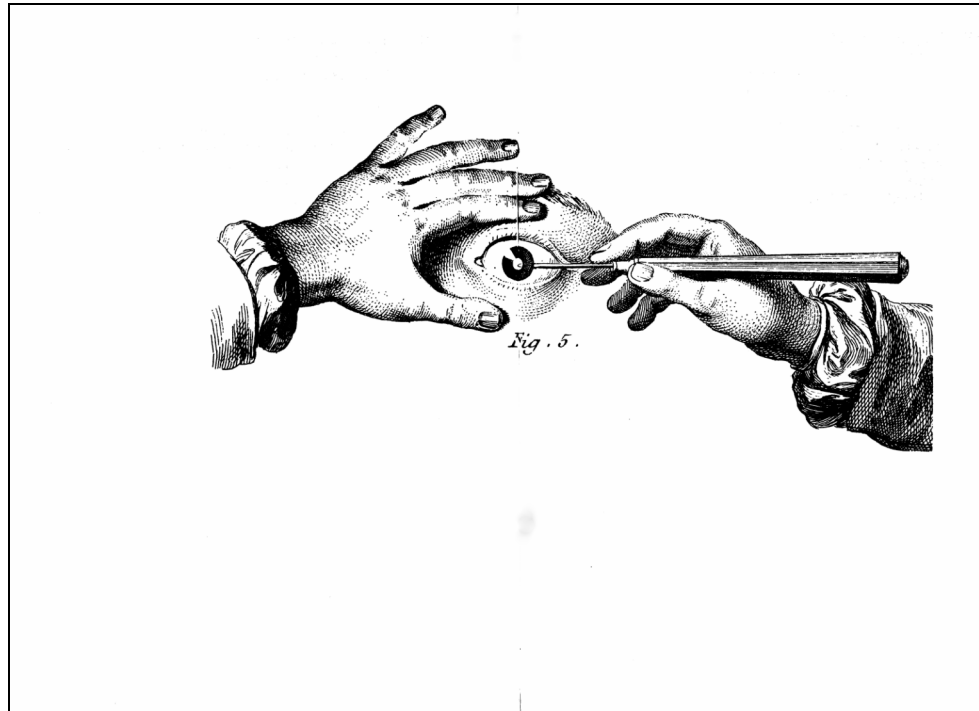


Laocoön  
Diderot / Kinsella, *A Technical Supplement*<sup>412</sup>

<sup>412</sup> Thomas Kinsella, *A Technical Supplement* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1976), 7.

APPENDIX VI

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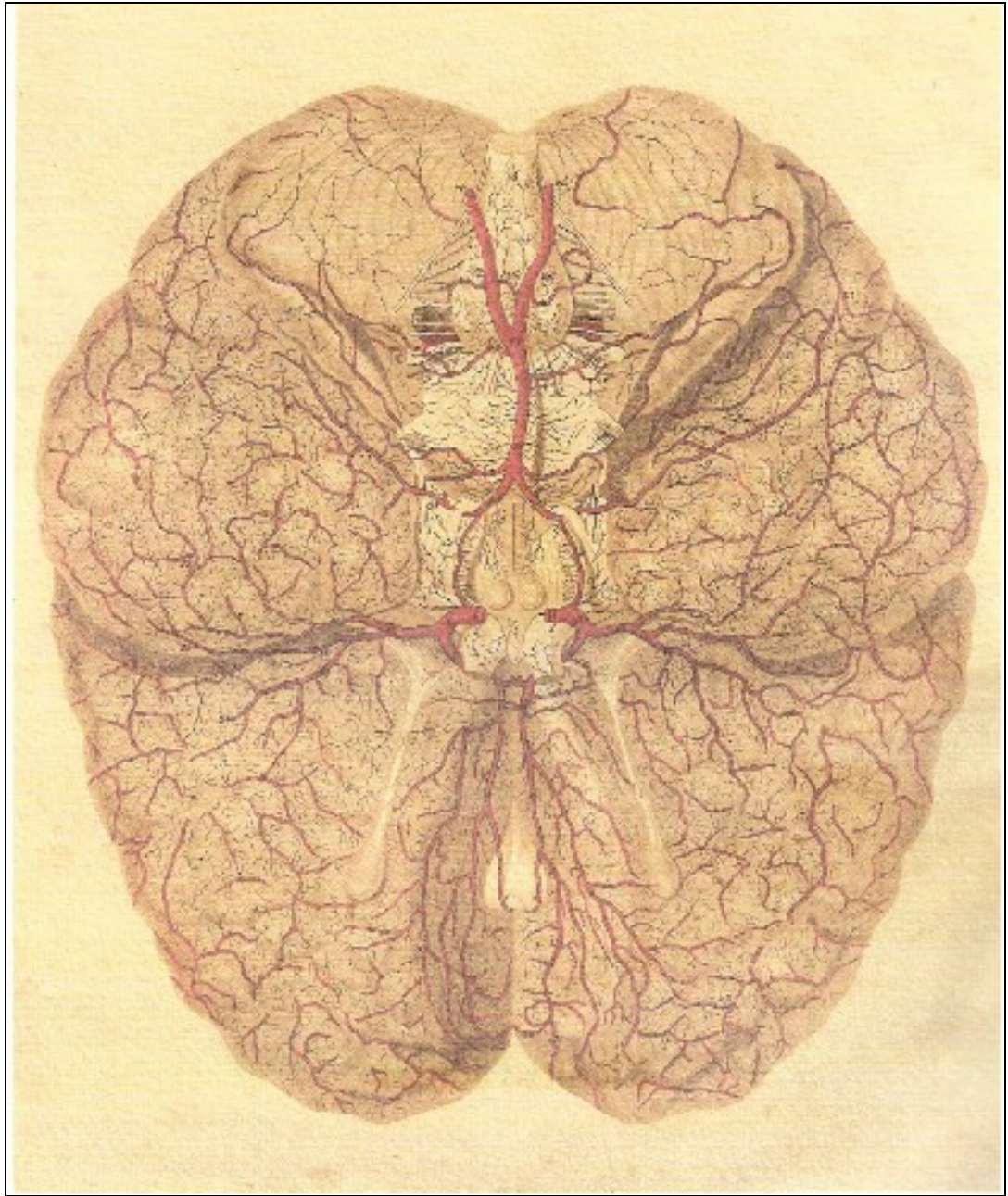
Kinsella / Diderot, *A Technical Supplement*<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Kinsella, *A Technical Supplement*, 22-23.

APPENDIX VII

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Engravings of the Cardiac Nerves  
Antonio Scarpa / Jamie, *This Weird Estate*<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Jamie, *This Weird Estate*, 2.

APPENDIX VIII

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*La Parole*  
Pablo Reinoso<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Sloterdijk, *Sphères III: Écumes*, 10.

APPENDIX IX

<p><b>Burra Grace</b></p> <p>I bide on this bit of broken biscuit –</p> <p>sodden junket of peathag, daffodil;</p> <p>a cramp of basalt and rosy granite.</p> <p>I bide on this bit of broken biscuit</p> <p>and all its frumpy gods be thankit:</p> <p>sobbing wimbrel, shalder, rabbit,</p> <p>                    peeew–t,</p> <p>                    peeew–t</p> <p>52</p>	<p>                    peeew–t,</p> <p>                    peeew–t</p> <p>53</p>
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‘Burra Grace’  
Jen Hadfield<sup>416</sup>

<sup>416</sup> Hadfield, *Nigh-No-Place*, 52-53.

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