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WORDSWORTH'S POETRY AS A SOURCE OF TRANSMUTATION TO SEAMUS HEANEY

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ABSTRACT

Seamus Heaney's primary Romantic model is Wordsworth who, in Heaney's mind, was far more a critic than a reflector of British imperial ideology. As one reads Heaney's insightful essays on Wordsworth, it becomes clear that he sees in the Romantic poet a parallel life, an objective correlative by which he can measure his own progress. For instance, when Heaney describes Wordsworth's mid-life journey as "Dantesque", he is applying the very emblem which he used to portray his own mid-life journey in *Station Island*. And, while Heaney would not seek the same way out of his purgatory as Wordsworth--the path of glib conservatism--he does find Wordsworth to be a model for surviving the journey itself and being transformed by it.

It is largely through Wordsworth that Heaney developed his own tragic vision. Wordsworth's influence on Heaney is broad and multi-faceted, and this paper will explore the influence and figuring of Wordsworth in Heaney's Prose work as well as poetry in terms of cultural trauma, poetry of displacement and others.

Key Words: Cultural trauma, Displacement, Transmutation, Identity, Associative images

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INTRODUCTION

Seamus Heaney is widely recognized as one of the major poets of the 20th century. A native of Northern Ireland, Heaney was raised in County Derry, and later lived for many years in Dublin. He was the author of over 20 volumes of poetry and criticism, and edited several widely used anthologies. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995 "for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past." Heaney taught at Harvard University (1985-2006) and served as the Oxford Professor of Poetry (1989-1994). He died in 2013.

Heaney has attracted a readership on several continents and has won prestigious literary awards and honours, including the Nobel Prize. As Blake Morrison noted in his work *Seamus Heaney*, the author is 'that rare thing, a poet rated highly by critics and academics yet popular with the common reader'. 'Part of Heaney's popularity stems from his subject matter—modern Northern Ireland, its farms and cities beset with civil strife,

its natural culture and language overrun by English rule. The *New York Review of Books* essayist Richard Murphy described Heaney as “the poet who has shown the finest art in presenting a coherent vision of Ireland, past and present.” Heaney’s poetry is known for its aural beauty and finely-wrought textures. Often described as a regional poet, he is also a traditionalist who deliberately gestures back towards the “pre-modern” worlds of William Wordsworth and Clare.

Heaney has spoken frequently of his displacement, his sense of being caught in between being Irish and British, between the sectarian divisions of Catholic and Protestant, between the pressures of being a public and a private poet. As he told Neil Corcoran in an interview, “From the beginning I was very conscious of boundaries I seemed always to be a little displaced; being in between was a kind of condition, from the start” (236). He elaborates on this condition in the essay “Something to Write Home About.” Taking note of the difficulties of growing up in Northern Ireland, Heaney realizes that “with so much division around, people are forever encountering boundaries that bring them up short” (51).

Boundedness and displacement have been serious issues in Heaney’s lifelong struggle to come to terms with his experience. It is clear that Heaney associates these issues with Wordsworth also; since he titled the essay he presented at Dove Cottage in 1984 “Place and Displacement.” Heaney’s poems are replete with these images; one thinks, for instance, of the images of checkpoints in poems like “Singing School,” or of the desire to speed past all such boundaries and feel the freedom expressed in “From the Frontier of Writing.” As Yeats concluded in “Circus Animals,” the image itself can become confining for the poet, a boundary of its own, blocking the path to the enchanting dream. Heaney credits Wordsworth with showing him a way to transmute the image or use it for a greater purpose. In the great early poems like “Michael” and “The Ruined Cottage,” Heaney contends that for Wordsworth memory “became not just a coffer of images, but a great projector of ‘enabling light’” (“Introduction” 11-12). This is Heaney’s way of reformulating M.H. Abrams’s famous distinction between the mirror and the lamp, though it may be assumed for Heaney the implications of this metaphor run even deeper.

The distinction is important for other reasons as well. Heaney recognizes that Wordsworth is doing something new with his images, and he self-consciously adopts the practice, while molding it to suit his own time and purpose. In his discussion of the relationship between Wordsworth and Heaney, Terry Gifford has given us a way to think about how Heaney has built on his predecessor’s example without becoming a slavish imitator:

Heaney has avoided . . . the temptation to indulge in image making which falsifies the tensions and contradiction of his experience Through his unifying development of natural images in his mode of thinking, in his drawing upon social energies deriving from a sense of place, and through his notion of art itself working through sounds and rhythms that are natural forces within poetic shapings, Heaney is the contemporary inheritor of Wordsworth’s legacy. (111)

In fact, Lloyd’s complaint against Heaney turned on this refusal to see both Heaney and Wordsworth as projectors of enabling light; in British Romanticism, he maintains, imperialist ideology is merely *reflected*. Clearly, Heaney’s reading of a Romantic poet like Wordsworth is vastly different from Lloyd’s and closer to the one presented by David Collings and Geoffrey Hartman, both of whom see Wordsworth as a poet of cultural trauma. Heaney echoes Collings’ reading of Wordsworth in “Place and Displacement,” saying that, for Wordsworth, “the trauma of individual consciousness is likely to be an aspect of forces at work in the collective life” (114). To see Wordsworth in such a way is to recognize his radical nature and thus to take a position on him that diametrically opposes Lloyd’s assumptions about his conservatism. For Heaney Wordsworth, in his examination of trauma, provides an example of how to escape displacement and boundedness. Wordsworth’s own displacement grew out of his experience in the French Revolution. Heaney recounts how Wordsworth returned from France to face twin disappointments--his own expulsion from France and separation from the woman he loved was one shock; the other was England’s declaration of war against the country he had come

to love. Hartman reads Wordsworth's epic, *The Prelude*, as a story of trauma and recovery from the effects of the Revolution ("Trauma" 264). In his 1984 essay on Wordsworth, Heaney notes how these disappointments left the poet feeling "displaced from his own affections by a vision of the good that is located somewhere else" ("Place and Displacement" (114). Here is the divided, displaced poet who would use his personal epic, *The Prelude*, to work out his complex feelings. Heaney is quick to see the analogy to his own time and place:

Like the disaffected Wordsworth . . . Northern Irish writers . . .
take the strain of being in two places at once, of needing to
accommodate two opposing conditions of truthfulness
simultaneously . . . ("Place and Displacement" 115).

DISCUSSION

For Wordsworth as for Heaney, the poetic relationship to place involves displacement, in two senses. First, place (or Nature) is, through the active engagement of the senses, displaced into the self that will both preserve and imitate her power. Indeed, the self is already imitative of Nature or 'place' precisely in being a place that swallows (in bog-like fashion) and that which, in turn, is pursued or even swallowed by the entity that has been imaginatively incorporated: see, for example, Wordsworth's 'Boy of Winander' and Heaney's 'Toome'. Through such an act of displacement the poet comes to understand that his own exilic experience of displacement is part of what he shares not only with place but also, by extension, with 'place' as it is defined as maternal.[1] Heaney in North, like Wordsworth in 'Michael', locates violence less in the historical invasion or enclosure of place than in the occupation of the body by that place that has been invaded or enclosed. Through that place's own experience, the native (whether poet or agricultural worker) who lives there cannot help but become, in some sense, connected to the intrusive or enclosing power, whether it is the English law that reaches into Michael's hearth or the Viking invader whom Heaney locates in the bog that is his own imagination. Moreover, for both poets an external source of power figured as place or 'Nature' comes to the fore in times when political crisis is experienced as personal crisis. As that power is recognised by the self, it seems not only to become one's own but to be what is most essentially one's being or selfhood, whether it is Wordsworth experiencing a crisis of alienation on home turf in 1792 or Heaney recoiling from the recursive forms of terror and counter-terror in the 1970s. This interpenetrative figuring of place, power and the body suggests that Heaney's understanding of 'imperial' violence, 'territorial piety' and the maternal entity he calls 'the goddess' is in fact more nuanced than these contentious phrases in the 1974 essay 'Feeling into Words' might suggest (P 57).

We witness such swallowing of the source by that which it has generated in those examples in Heaney of the rhetorical paradox that Christopher Ricks terms the self-in woven or reflexive simile, a device that 'describes something both as itself and as something external to it which it could not possibly be'.[2] 'The Grauballe Man' offers perhaps the clearest example of such a paradox: 'As if he had been poured / in tar, he lies / on a pillow of turf / and seems to weep // the black river of himself' (N 35). It is a characteristic trope, Ricks writes, of the 'gifted group of Ulster poets' who 'write out of an imagination of civil war'.[3]

In Heaney's poetry, arguably the most extended and purposeful of those examples are found in North, where the subject-poet's relationship to objects that have been buried in the Irish landscape or, more particularly, the bog, is either interiorised or doubled (made redundant) by the presence of those objects in the self. This is sometimes expressed in images that strikingly involve, in relation to place or source, both its internalisation and its redundancy. In 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces' the speaker describes the writing on a piece of Viking bone as the generation of an interior space: 'a small outline // was incised, a cage / or trellis to conjure in' (N 21). We might note that this line, in diction and intention, echoes Keats's poem about an interiorisation that is also a doubling of place, 'Ode to Psyche': 'the wreath'd trellis of a working brain'.[4]

Turning one's own writing into the source of one's writing, the following description also makes the tongue double the work of the hand, engendering thereby a self-in woven simile at its centre: 'Like a child's tongue, / following the toils // of his calligraphy, / like an eel swallowed / in a basket of eels, / the line amazes itself // eluding the hand / that fed it' (N 21). Later the speaker figuratively uses his own hand to reach into 'mother-wet caches' in the museum display for a 'trial piece' of Nordic art 'incised' by a child, beginning a

process whereby that object, 'a longship, a buoyant / migrant line', becomes a source that 'enters my longhand, / turns cursive, unscarfing / a zoomorphic wake, / a worm of thought // I follow into the mud' (N 23). He follows the source, in other words, back to a maternal source that is now personal and bodily. Like the poet in crisis whom Wordsworth describes in Book X of the 1805 Prelude, this speaker – describing himself as Hamlet, the melancholy Dane, 'skull-handler, parablister, / smeller of rot // in the state' – is himself 'infused' with the state's (his source's) 'poisons' (N 23). The muddy bog into which this speaker follows his own thought is a 'zoomorphic wake' – the residual and bodily trace of the longship but also the memorial, funereal sign of its absence. That bog's relationship to the bodies buried there, like the self-in woven simile, is exemplary of the place that swallows and preserves its subjects only, in turn, to be swallowed and preserved by them, each digesting and hoarding the other. Confusing those processes with thought itself – as Heaney himself does deliberately in finding for poetic and cultural memory in 'Feeling into Words' the objective correlative of 'Bogland' – the 'seeps' of Nature that digest the body in 'Bog Queen' become in turn the 'illiterate roots' that die and are internalised in the stomach's 'cavings' and 'hoards' (N 32).

Wordsworth's 'The Thorn' features not one but two such muddy, boggy sites, both of which are associated with an infant murdered by its mother. Now, in death, the 'moss' it has become threatens to drag her into the burial bog. In 'Feeling into Words', Heaney cites in full the most interesting of the poem's stanzas representing these strange spots. In the first citation, 'to the left' of the thorn, 'three yards beyond, / you see a little muddy pond / Of water never dry' (P 49). The other objective correlative of the infant grave, 'the beauteous hill of moss', appears in the second Heaney citation, where that arresting spot suddenly and forcefully comes alive in response to a show of public and institutional authority that would bring to justice the mysterious, nocturnal 'Woman in a scarlet cloak' (a figure both seductive and deadly who bears, as mentioned earlier, comparison with the Irish Kathleen Ni Houlihan). That woman haunts both the tree and the bog, in a stanza Heaney cites in full, concluding with the observation that 'The Thorn' is a nicely documented example of feeling getting into words, in ways that paralleled much in my own experience' (P 51), an assertion he follows with a reflexive statement not unlike the self-inwoven simile – or like the bog poem in its reference to the 'posthumous': 'although it must be said that it is hard to discriminate between feeling getting into words and words turning into feeling, and it is only on posthumous occasions like this that the distinction arises' (P 52). Heaney even suggests that perhaps it is best to leave the graves of the self unopened, their secrets intact, lest the 'inquest' of naming them 'have the effect of confining them to what is named' (P 52).

In "Place and Displacement" Heaney had used Wordsworth as a model for poets from contemporary Northern Ireland. Signalling another image of displacement, Heaney states that "the poet is stretched between politics and transcendence" (119). Citing poems by Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, and Michael Longley, Heaney proceeds to show how poets of his generation have worked to bridge the gap between politics and transcendence in order to effect the kind of self-healing, or redress, that Heaney associates with Wordsworth. While "Seeing Things" is, on the surface, hardly the most obvious example of Heaney responding to cultural trauma, it would be a mistake not to see it as an outgrowth of Heaney's more direct meditations on violence. Self-healing is also a critical aspect of "Seeing Things," a poem in which Heaney does not turn his back on the earlier poems that dealt with violence so directly; rather, he restores the emphasis on transcendence as he insists on our human capacity for seeing experience in a new light.^[5]

While "Seeing Things" is a more overtly religious poem than the "Immortality Ode," it does begin by recalling childhood experience. Indeed, many of the poems in the volume *Seeing Things*, to include "Man and Boy" and "Markings," show Heaney's desire to return to childhood as a way of measuring his progress at this point in his life. It is widely known that Heaney followed Kavanagh's dictum that the parochial is the true universal, but it is less widely accepted that he also adopted Wordsworth's example of seeing the child as the model of the universal. Wordsworth's own childhood was irrevocably shaped by the loss of both parents and the subsequent feeling of isolation and abandonment. The losses that Wordsworth would come to associate with the French Revolution, which necessitated his own abandonment of his child and his beloved Annette Vallon, thus strangely repeat the trauma of the earlier losses he suffered as a child. Wordsworth is a good example of the paradigm described by David Aberbach (20) of the creative artist who uses his work to

overcome and assuage his grief. In the poem "Seeing Things" Heaney examines his own childhood memories and confronts the prospect of losing his father, offering a fresh perspective on early experience from the vantage point of his 50th year. By imagining a loss that almost but did not really occur, Heaney achieves a rare form of mastery over the potentially depressive effects of abandonment.

Light is as much the pervasive symbol of "Seeing Things" as of the "Immortality Ode." Like Wordsworth, Heaney is trying to record how different types of light can alter our seeing. He begins the second section of the poem with the Joycean word "claritas." As Stephen Dedalus' dissertation on this word in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* reminds us, the word calls to mind the role of light in separating reality from shadow. Stephen gives the word the following history:

It would lead you to believe that [Aquinas] had in mind symbolism or idealism, the supreme quality of beauty being a light from some other world, the idea of which the matter is but the shadow, the reality of which it is but the symbol. I thought he might mean that *claritas* is the artistic discovery and representation of the divine purpose in anything for a force of generalisation which would make the esthetic image a universal one, make it outshine its proper conditions. (185)

In this section of the poem Heaney draws attention to the role of light in manipulating the way we see an image carved in stone:

laritas. The dry-eyed Latin word
Is perfect for the carved stone of the water
Where Jesus stands up to his unwet knees
And John the Baptist pours out more water
Over his head: all this in bright sunlight
On the façade of the cathedral.

This is an example of what Shane Murphy has called Heaney's "scopic gaze," a way of looking that allows Heaney to peer "beyond the material world into the eternal" (94). Heaney's speaker is aware of the artistry and the artificiality behind the scene. The water is an illusion, the knees of Jesus remaining unwet, and the effect of illusion is enhanced by the bright sunlight reflected on the cathedral. Here, as in Wordsworth's Ode, common light threatens the imagination, making the viewer too aware of the artifice behind the creation. The problem of substance and shadow, of reality and unreality, is brought to the forefront in the following lines:

And yet in that utter invisibility
The stone's alive with what's invisible:
Waterweed, stirred sand-grains hurrying off,
The shadowy, unshadowed stream itself.

The image shows Heaney's displacement of the theological into the aesthetic (Corcoran 170). The lines also recall Wordsworth's saying in "Tintern Abbey" that with a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, we see into the life of things. Clearly Heaney is calling our attention to a higher plane of vision, one which allows us to see beyond and through surfaces. Heaney's use of the stone and stream as symbols here may also indicate a self-conscious reference to Yeats's "Easter, 1916" a poem which, with its emphasis on the poet's renewed dedication to political activism, would be an appropriate paradigm for Heaney in his commitment to reimagining his own political stance as an Irish poet. As such, the poem is his own response to having had his vision dominated by "the light of common day." "Seeing Things" is Heaney's most provocative reassurance that the transcendent is present in our own lives, if we learn to look with dry eyes.

The mature work of both poets should be read in the context of their early concerns with the political issues of their times. Those politics events led each poet to focus on violence. David Collings describes Wordsworth's response to the tyranny of his times, and the way it destroyed livelihoods and uprooted families, as follows: "This sort of culture, Wordsworth writes, is the same as its apparently barbaric opposite, human sacrifice" (7). Heaney makes the metaphor of human sacrifice manifest in his poems that deal most

directly with the Troubles of Northern Ireland; Collings' comment invites us to consider the possibility that Heaney's close reading of Wordsworth made him sensitive to this provocative comparison.

Heaney understands that Wordsworth once invested *all* his hopes in the French Revolution. He describes the poet's enthusiasm as a great expectation, which he calls a fulfillment of Wordsworth's "sexuality, his politics, his predisposition in the reliability of people and the general summeriness of reality" ("Introduction" 10). Both Heaney and Wordsworth grew up in rural areas away from the hotbeds of political debate. For both, however, their eventual engagement in the issues of their time and place would quickly become a consuming passion. That passion quickly led to a disappointment so severe that it threatened each poet's sense of who he was. This is the real crisis of identity that Heaney found mirrored in Wordsworth. And this brings us to the second point--Wordsworth's role in helping Heaney learn how to transmute such experience into a powerful tragic poetry.

Heaney links Wordsworth's capacity to project "enabling light" to his development in mid-career of "wise passiveness." Heaney himself knows something of the kind of despair Wordsworth felt when the Reign of Terror set in. Yet, as Heaney describes it, Wordsworth "schooled himself in the discipline of maintaining equanimity in the face of loss, and the ultimate rewards of this habit of patience are to be found in masterpieces like the 'Immortality Ode' and 'Elegiac Stanzas'" ("Introduction" 12). Indeed, the kind of "enabling light" that Heaney associates with Wordsworth may be taken as the primary metaphor of the "Immortality Ode." The difficulty Wordsworth endured in achieving this enabling light is evident in the poem's composition, for it took the prolific Wordsworth two years to return to the poem and resolve his conflicted emotions. In the Ode Wordsworth strives to understand how he can be content with the loss of celestial light--and the youthful energies and powers that go with it--as it fades into "the light of common day." We can take that celestial light as an emblem of all the things Wordsworth felt he had lost with the collapse of the Revolution, and while the Ode is not typically read as a poem about the revolution, it does implicitly record Wordsworth's efforts both to mourn his losses from that experience and to transmute those losses into a higher consciousness, a wise passiveness. In the critical passage, when Wordsworth speaks of the movement from primal sympathy to the philosophic mind, he demonstrates his ability not simply to leave the past behind, but to transmute it and give it new meaning. It will be discussed in a moment but for now suffice to say that the Ode is ultimately a poem of self-healing, an insistence on restoring hope where despair had set in. And, as his comments about Michael Longley's poem "Self-Heal" demonstrates, Heaney is himself keenly aware of the importance of self-healing in his, and in Northern Ireland's, development.

It has been a great struggle for Heaney to achieve his own version of this transmutation, and yet I would argue that he has achieved it more effectively than his predecessor Wordsworth, whose effectiveness as a poet declined quickly after the Ode was finished. In his effort to come to grips with his own political disappointments, Heaney has tuned to many poets, including Dante, Yeats, and Joyce. And yet the shadow of Wordsworth remains the longest and most evident one behind Heaney's development of a tragic voice. We can easily see Wordsworth's influence on Heaney in many of his poems about nature and rural life, especially in early poems like "Death of a Naturalist" or "Blackberry Picking." And, of course, Heaney himself has written on the Wordsworthian aspect of his fine short lyric, "Diviner."

But it will be better to conclude by discussing a poem that is not usually thought of as exemplifying the influence of Wordsworth. That poem is "Seeing Things," which is regarded as the masterpiece of Heaney's mature vision. And just as it is suggested that we regard the "Ode" in the afterglow of Wordsworth's experience with the French Revolution, so too it would be better to politicize the context of "Seeing Things" more than usual, asking us to see things in the light of Heaney's long struggle to understand and describe the effects of Northern Ireland's troubles.

In "Place and Displacement" Heaney had used Wordsworth as a model for poets from contemporary Northern Ireland. Signaling another image of displacement, Heaney states that "the poet is stretched between politics and transcendence" (119). Citing poems by Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, and Michael Longley, Heaney proceeds to show how poets of his generation have worked to bridge the gap between politics and transcendence in order to affect the kind of self-healing, or redress, that Heaney associates with Wordsworth.

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While "Seeing Things" is a more overtly religious poem than the "Immortality Ode," it does begin by recalling childhood experience. Indeed, many of the poems in the volume *Seeing Things*, to include "Man and Boy" and "Markings," show Heaney's desire to return to childhood as a way of measuring his progress at this point in his life. It is widely known that Heaney followed Kavanagh's dictum that the parochial is the true universal, but it is less widely accepted that he also adopted Wordsworth's example of seeing the child as the model of the universal. Wordsworth's own childhood was irrevocably shaped by the loss of both parents and the subsequent feeling of isolation and abandonment. The losses that Wordsworth would come to associate with the French Revolution, which necessitated his own abandonment of his child and his beloved Annette Vallon, thus strangely repeat the trauma of the earlier losses he suffered as a child. Wordsworth is a good example of the paradigm described by David Aberbach of the creative artist who uses his work to overcome and assuage his grief. In the poem "Seeing Things" Heaney examines his own childhood memories and confronts the prospect of losing his father, offering a fresh perspective on early experience from the vantage point of his 50th year. By imagining a loss that almost but did not really occur, Heaney achieves a rare form of mastery over the potentially depressive effects of abandonment.

No one has yet acknowledged the extent of Wordsworth's influence on this strategy of recursiveness in Heaney's poetry. "Tintern Abbey" is only the most obvious example of Wordsworth's emphasis on returns—to places, to experiences, to mental states—in his poetry.^[6] *The Prelude* attests to Wordsworth's commitment to re-examining almost every aspect of his life, and it has been written previously about the importance of returns, doubling and the uncanny in the *Immortality Ode* (Ross), a poem in which Wordsworth returns to a sense of loss that has haunted him since childhood. This recursive tendency, this harkening to uncanny experiences, is one of the primary things which connects the poetry of both Wordsworth and Heaney to trauma and gives the poetry of each its healing power. In this way, Geoffrey Hartman contends, literature puts us in touch with the reality of trauma and transforms our response to it, creating "a new, communalized self, much wiser about its relation to symbols" (Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge" 543). Hartman notes that Wordsworth's poetry—with its flashbacks and spots of time—is grounded in trauma. For both poets places and the sense of displacement in familiar surroundings play critical roles in the reshaping of traumatic experience.^[7] Heaney's own emphasis on returns can contain a deeper element of self-criticism than we find in Wordsworth. One notable example is his reinvocation of his cousin, Colum McCartney, in *Station Island*, to criticize Heaney's earlier elegiac treatment of him in "The Strand at Lough Beg." Such an example demonstrates that Heaney is constantly reassessing his critique of violence and of the situation in Northern Ireland, a practice inconsistent with the facile charge that he is simply reflecting an imperialist perspective. The final section of "Seeing Things" works through an early childhood trauma as it gives us the full picture of Heaney's revitalized imagination. Here again we see Heaney's recursive strategy, for he opens the section with an uncanny memory of a return to a family visit to Inishbofin. The poem ends with a vision of the "undrowned father," miraculously brought back to life by not just being seen again, but being seen as never before:

That afternoon
I saw him face to face, he came to me
With his damp footprints out of the river,
And there was nothing between us there
That might not be happily ever after.

This is a perfect instance of what Michael Parker sees as occurring throughout the volume *Seeing Things*: "awe of the living Father [gives] way to an affectionate acceptance of a fellow man, flawed and mortal like himself" (217). Collings suggests that Wordsworth often "unburies the dead father, makes him uncanny, deprives him of his official status" (16). Heaney, on the other hand, unburies the father to elevate his status. That elevation

is in many respects ironic: as Catherine Malloy says, the accident alters the relationship of father and son, making the father appear more vulnerable than he does in earlier poems like "Digging" (163). The father's vulnerability to death only makes him more important in the eyes of his son, who recalls the experience of having his trauma lifted by the sudden reappearance of the father.

Thus, far from seeing Wordsworth as one who reflects British imperialist ideology, Heaney looks beyond that simplistic formulation and regards Wordsworth as a fellow traveler. It is no wonder, then, that Stan Smith has recently noted that Heaney looks to Wordsworth as an example of one who feels like a traitor in his own country (45). It is this kind of recognition of Wordsworth's divided and displaced condition that constitutes Heaney's most important contribution to Wordsworth criticism.

Notes

- [1]. Nicholas Roe in "'Wordsworth at the Flax-Dam': An Early Poem by Seamus Heaney" recapitulates the Romantic poet's relationship to Nature as one of transgression, guilt and personal redemption (*Critical Approaches to Anglo-Irish Literature*, ed. Michael Allen and Angela Wilcox [Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1989]).
- [2]. Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 34.
- [3]. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- [4]. 'To Psyche', *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allott (New York: Longman, 1970), p. 520.
- [5]. The political content of *Seeing Things* is significantly underestimated. Douglas Dunn opens some ground for debate about the political nature of this book when he says that while it seems to be Heaney's least political volume of poems, in some respects "it could be his most political—a rejection of topical pressures on the poet and a farewell to the enemies of poetry." (216). While I would dispute the notion that the volume represents Heaney's rejection of any aspect of his past, I do believe Dunn's sense of the underlying political content of the volume is astute.
- [6]. The influence of the French Revolution on "Tintern Abbey" is most adeptly explored by Bromwich. Noting that Wordsworth took his famous walk on the eve of the fall of the Bastille, Bromwich argues that the poem does all it can "to put the subject of France out of mind, [yet] by this choice of a date brings it back once again" (82). Bromwich also makes a case for the Revolution's having drawn Wordsworth to the subject of violence.
- [7]. As a great critic of Wordsworth, Hartman is sensitive to the importance of sacred places in Wordsworth's poetry, which, as he says, suggest that for Wordsworth "the earth had omphaloi, specific locations that could restore poetic strength and lead to a future as strong as the past" (552). This comment has remarkable resonances for Heaney's discussion of his early enchantment with the word "omphalos" in his essay "Mossbawn."

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