

## SEAMUS HEANEY INTRODUCTION

Seamus Heaney (born 1939), Nobel Prize winner in 1995, is possibly the foremost poet in the English-speaking world. He has produced thirteen collections of poetry spanning the years 1966 to 2010, all of which have been critically and commercially popular. His work is widely quoted, and there have been some fifty monographs and collections written about his poetry, with articles and reviews in the hundreds if not the thousands at this stage. He has also written five collections of prose essays which examine the role of the aesthetic in public discourse, and has given numerous lectures, opinion pieces, guided readings and interviews. He has produced award-winning translations of *Antigone* and *Philoctetes*, as well as a very well-received translation of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, which was very well received and which won the Whitbread Book of the Year in 2000 – a very rare achievement for a book of poetry.

His work has been widely quoted in the public sphere, and his lines from *The Cure at Troy*: “. . . and hope and history rhyme” (p.77), were quoted by Bill Clinton in the Irish peace process, which brought an end to thirty years of violence in Northern Ireland. In terms of his commentary on public events, he has come to fill the role of a public intellectual in Ireland, and indeed in Europe. His poetry has chronicled the personal and societal development in Ireland over the last forty years or so, and he has written about political and social problems and issues in both poetry and prose. The Nobel citation explained how he had been awarded the Nobel Prize: “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past”, and Heaney’s work is becoming increasingly important in the areas of English Literature and the broadly cognate areas of Irish studies, as he voices concerns and attitudes which resonate with the concerns of Irish people in the twenty first century, as well as forging broader connections across the Anglophone world.

His prose is also becoming an increasing object of study, and its scope and range sees it crossing the borders of literary theory into the realm of aesthetic thinking in many places. His work is both critically acclaimed and also popular, with sales that rival some novelists. He is increasingly looked to for comments on the state of Ireland and has made the practice of poetry more central to public discourse in Ireland, and by extension, in the public sphere in general.

## BOOKS BY SEAMUS HEANEY

### Primary Texts

Heaney’s first 7 collections, *Death of a Naturalist* 1966; *Door into the Dark* 1969; *Wintering Out* 1972; *North* 1975; *Field Work* 1979; *Station Island* 1984; *The Haw Lantern* 1987 have been brought together in his *Selected Poems 1966-1987*, while slightly different selections from these books, and from later volumes selections from these and the later volumes *Seeing Things* 1991 and *The Spirit*

*Level* 1996 have appeared in his *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* which he has described as being between a selected poems and a collected poems. Collections published since then include *Electric Light* 2001; *District and Circle* 2006 and *Human Chain* 2010. His prose has been published in three collections *Preoccupations* 1980; *The Government of the Tongue* 1988; and *The Redress of Poetry* 1995. Essays from each collection, as well as some others, have been collected in *Finders Keepers Selected Prose 1971-2002*. He has published two translations in dramatic form, *The Cure at Troy* 1990 and *The Burial at Thebes* 2004 as well as a translation of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* 1999.

## Poetry

Heaney's poetic career can be divided into three broad phases. The first four books that Heaney wrote *Death of a Naturalist* 1966; *Door into the Dark* 1969; *Wintering Out* 1972 and *North* 1975, trace his early involvement with Northern Ireland, and looking at the roots, literal, political and metaphorical, of aspects of the nationalist psyche. These poems also contain aspects of his own biography, as he developed as a public poet. In terms of style, he perfected a narrow quatrain style of writing which provided lyric bursts of imagery and symbol, and forms a visual metaphor for his process of digging into personal and psychic memory.

The second phase of his work comprises *Field Work* 1979; *Sweeney Astray* 1983 *Station Island* 1984; *The Haw Lantern* 1987. In these poems, he is attempting write more about his own lived life and experience, as opposed to the more mythic poems of the earlier books, so these can be seen as a transformational phase in his writing. He tells of wanting the "I" of these poems to refer to his own current lived life experience as opposed to a mythic or historical character. There is an increasing level of literary allusion in this phase of his writing, and there is a transition in imagery and symbol from root and ground to air, and from place to notions of space.

The final phase of his work to date is to be found in *Electric Light* 2001, *District and Circle* 2006, and *Human Chain* 2010. In all of these books, past themes are revisited but often through the lens of other writers, other languages and revisioned perspectives. These books have a number of elegies for different people – personal and literary connections of the poet – who have died. There are increasing influences from European and Classical writing to be found, and there is great variety of form, versification and prosody. The style is conceptually more complex, but verbally and syntactically simple. There are connections with the style of the later Yeats to be observed in this phase of Heaney's writing.

Heaney, Seamus. *Death of a Naturalist*. London: Faber, 1966.

Early poems, dealing with perspectives on rural living as well as some poems which reflect on the nature of poetry itself. The first poem of the book, "Digging" sets out his seminal artesian imaginative direction: "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it" (p.14).

Heaney, Seamus. *Door into the Dark*. London: Faber, 1969.

Very similar in style, theme and tone to the previous book. In the final poem "Bogland", he broadens his digging metaphor to become a resonant symbol of a probing of the historical, social and mythic past of his country: "Our pioneers keep striking / Inwards and downwards" (p.56).

Heaney, Seamus. *Wintering Out*. London: Faber, 1972.

This book is structurally divided into two sections, the mythic and the discursive. It includes the seminal "bog poem", where the artesian metaphor is formalised through a connection with Iron Age bogs: "Out there in Jutland / In the old man-killing parishes / I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home" (p.48).

Heaney, Seamus. *North*. London: Faber, 1975.

This book is divided into mythic and discursive sections and attempts to inhabit the mindset of those who "slaughter for the common good" (p.45). In the second section of the book he voices his own uncertain position about Northern Irish politics: "I am neither internee nor informer" (p.78).

Heaney, Seamus. *Field Work*. London: Faber, 1979.

This collection attempts to move away from the mythic into the more contemporary world. There are poems about his move to Glanmore in County Wicklow entitled "Glanmore Sonnets", which feature a focus on his relationship with his wife, Marie, in their new surroundings: "Lorenzo and Jessica in a cold climate" (p.42).

Heaney, Seamus. *Selected Poems 1965-1975*. London: Faber, 1980.

The selection is from his first four books. This book provides a good flavour of his work, though one of his strongest mythic poems, "Kinship", where the lyric "I" of the historical and mythic pasts are conflated, poems is omitted.

Heaney, Seamus. *Station Island*. London: Faber, 1984.

This is a longer collection, 121 pages, and the first to offer notes. At its centre is a sequence dealing with the pilgrimage to *Station Island* in Lough Derg, where he meets a series of remembered and imagined ghosts, and is given the advice to "fill the element / with signatures on your own frequency" (p.94).

Heaney, Seamus. *The Haw Lantern*. London: Faber, 1987.

This collection features a number of parable poems which relate to, but do not specifically originate in, difficult political situations. The style is oblique and metapoetic as a number of poems refer to the poetic craft: "I ground the same stones for fifty years / and what I undid was never the thing I had done" (p.8).

Heaney, Seamus. *New Selected Poems 1968-1987*. London: Faber, 1990.

A broader selection of poems up to *The Haw Lantern*. "Kinship" is still not included

Heaney, Seamus. *Seeing Things*. London: Faber, 1991.

Framed by translations from Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Inferno*, this book uses imagery of air (mentioned twenty times) and space (mentioned ten times) to signal a change in direction, especially in the "Squarings" sequence (pp.53-108). He speaks of "waiting until I was nearly fifty / To credit marvels" (p.50).

Heaney, Seamus. *The Spirit Level*. London: Faber, 1996.

"Mycenae Lookout" is plosive in its depiction of violence, and is balanced by a number of particular poems, dedicated to friends. He revisits a seminal theme in "Tollund", where there are echoes of the earlier poem in the conclusion: "Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad" (p.69).

Heaney, Seamus. *Opened Ground Poems 1966-1996*. London: Faber, 1998.

This is a mid-point between a Selected Poems and a Collected Poems, including selections from his first nine books, *Sweeney Astray*, his prose poems "Stations" and his Nobel address: *Crediting Poetry*. "Kinship" is included in this book.

Heaney, Seamus. *Electric Light*. London: Faber 2001.

Poems which refer to Virgil, Dante, Beowulf, Kavanagh, Brodsky, Hughes, and Herbert stress his increasing allusive style. He recontextualises aspects of violence in a classical framework, telling how he was in Greece, at the location of "The Augean Stables", when he "heard of Sean Brown's murder in the grounds / Of Bellaghy GAA Club" (p.41).

Seamus. *District and Circle*. London: Faber, 2006.

Memory is significant in this book, the title, which is also a 5-sonnet sequence, refers to an early stay in London, along with musings of terrorist attacks, on a global basis: "Anything can happen, the tallest towers / Be overturned, those in high places daunted, / Those overlooked regarded" (p.13).

Heaney, Seamus. *Human Chain*. London: Faber, 2010.

A moving poem "Chanson d'Aventure", describes his ambulance journey with his wife after getting a stroke: "my once capable / Warm hand, hand that I could not feel you lift" (p.15). The

volume is replete with ghostly memories and number of fine poems, address aspects of the past in a simple, mature, and resonant style.

### **Prose:**

Heaney's first collection of prose, *Preoccupations* 1980 parallels his early books of poetry as he details his feelings at being caught in the early stages of the violence in Northern Ireland. He also describes the influence of writers like Hopkins and Kavanagh on his own writing, and charts the "preoccupations" that will be central to his writing in poetry and in prose, namely "how should a poet properly live and write? What is his relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world" (p.13). His next collection, *The Government of the Tongue* 1988, looked at writing from a more overtly political perspective, examining the role of the poet through the lens of different Eastern-European writers such as Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam, Zbigniew Herbert, and Czeslaw Milosz who suffered under repressive Communist regimes. He discusses the efficacy of poetry in the face of political problems: "In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil — no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited. It is like the writing in the sand in the face of which accusers and accused are left speechless and renewed" (p.107). His Noble lecture *Crediting Poetry* 1995, traces his early steps from his home in Mossbawn to the podium in Stockholm, with a resonant defence of poetry as a form of human and humane expression in a world of violence and terror "I credit poetry, in other words, both for being itself and for being a help" (p.11). In the same year he published his Oxford lectures, which he entitled *The Redress of Poetry*, where he wrote about "the vision of reality which poetry offers should be transformative, more than just a printout of the given circumstances of its time and place" (p.159). He also included essays on writers in the mainstream Anglophone tradition as well as sketching out a programmatic structure to symbolize the plural nature of Irish literary identity, which was a quincunx which would grant the plurality of what he terms an Irishness which "would not prejudice the rights of others' Britishness" (p.198). This is a "diamond shape" of five towers, with each tower representing an aspect of Irish identity. These elements are a round tower of pre-invasion Irishness, and buildings associated with Edmund Spenser, W. B. Yeats, James Joyce; Louis MacNeice (pp.198-199). *Finders Keepers* 2002 is a collection of essays from the books, with some other essays included, most notably ones on the political ceasefire in Northern Ireland and a seminal essay on the influence of Dante.

Heaney, Seamus. *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*. London: Faber, 1980.

His first collection of essays features criticism and reviews. It includes autobiographical essays from both personal and literary perspectives: "Belfast"; "Mossbawn" and "Feeling into

Words”, as well as on Yeats, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Kavanagh MacDiarmid, Lowell, Roethke and a number of other poets. There is also a review of Brian Friel’s *Volunteers*.

Heaney, Seamus. *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings*. London: Faber, 1988.

This is a more politically-aware book, dealing overtly with poetry and politics in “Poems of the Dispossessed Repossessed”; “The Impact of Translation” “Atlas of Civilization” (on Zbigniew Herbert) and “Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam.” It also looks at specific aspects of influential poets such as Kavanagh, Auden, Lowell, Larkin, and Plath.

Heaney, Seamus. *Crediting Poetry*. Oldcastle, County Meath, Ireland: Gallery Press, 1995.

His Noble lecture features his sense of the value of poetry as autotelic in that it delights in language, as well as allowing for human interconnection. He traces his journey from his childhood home of Mossbawn to the podium in Stockholm, and includes a retelling of the Kingsmill’s massacre in Northern Ireland.

Heaney, Seamus. *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*. London: Faber, 1995.

The published version of his Oxford lectures includes a programmatic essay on complex literary identity “Frontiers of Writing”, where he sketches out a diagrammatic representation of a pluralist Irish literary identity, as well as essays on Christopher Marlowe, Brian Merriman, John Clare, Dylan Thomas, MacDiarmid, Yeats, Larkin, Oscar Wilde, and Elizabeth Bishop.

Heaney, Seamus. *Finders Keepers*. London: Faber, 2002.

A selection from the previous collections, as well as some other essays which had been hitherto uncollected: “Cessation 1994”; “Earning a Rhyme”; “Something to Write Home About”; “On Poetry and Professing”; “Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet”, and “Through-Other Places, Through-Other Times: The Irish Poet and Britain.”

### **Translations:**

His major projects of translation (there are others) began with his retelling of an Old-Irish saga *Buile Shuibhne* (*The Madness of Sweeney*) which became *Sweeney Astray*. Heaney has made the point, in *Stepping Stones*, that he identifies with aspects of this character, as “‘Sweeney’ is rhymed with ‘Heaney’, autobiographically as well as phonetically” (p.154). The idea of being astray in one’s own country was attractive to a poet who had spoken of himself, in *North*, as an inner-émigré” (p.73) having moved from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland in 1972. In 1999, he translated the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* into English. He spoke of making a place for himself and his own linguistic tradition in this translation, and of how he always considered *Beowulf* to be part of his “voice-right” (p. xxiii), and this becomes clear in his translation of the initial word of the poem, “*Hwæt*,” which has been generally translated as “lo”, “hark”, “attend” or “listen.” As he looked for the *mot juste* to

translate “*Hwæt*,” he remembered another voice of his childhood, and cousins of his father who were called Scullions, in whose vernacular the word “so” operated “as an expression that obliterates all previous discourse and narrative, and at the same time functions as an exclamation calling for immediate attention. So, ‘so’ it was” (p.xxvii). In 1990, he translated Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* as *The Cure at Troy*, where the conflict between justice and loyalty, or between the givens of a tradition and the sense of individual ethics as seen in the character of Neoptolemus, was at the core of the attraction of the play for Heaney. As he explains, in *Stepping Stones*, the “crunch that comes when the political solidarity required from him by the Greeks is at odds with the conduct he requires from himself if he’s to maintain his self-respect” (p.420). His translation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* as *The Burial at Thebes* 2004, explores parallel dilemmas of loyalty to one’s group or to a higher notion of intersubjective justice. Antigone’s refusal to abandon the body of her brother, Polyneices, deemed a traitor by Creon and condemned to remain unburied, is at the core of the play. Her decision brings death to a number of characters, including herself, but her appeal is to a higher notion of justice than that of her polis:

I disobeyed the law because the law was not  
The law of Zeus nor the law ordained  
By Justice. Justice dwelling deep  
Among the gods of the dead (pp. 20-21)

Heaney, Seamus. *Sweeney Astray*. Derry: Field Day, 1983.

Translation of the Old-Irish legend of a king, Sweeney, cursed by a Saint Ronan, and changed into a bird, as he is condemned to wander all over Ireland. Aspects of the Sweeney persona, with whom Heaney identifies, reappear in a section of *Station Island*. It is written in both prose and verse.

Heaney, Seamus. *The Cure at Troy*. London: Faber, 1990.

Translation of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, where the hero, Neoptolemus is forced to steal a bow from the wounded Philoctetes, without which, Troy will not fall. He is forced to address the ethics of his actions. Resonances to contemporary Northern Ireland with references to a “hunger-striker’s father”, and a “police widow” (p.73)

Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf*. London: Faber, 1999.

Translation of the corner-stone of the English poetic tradition which is given an Irish twist by the insertion of the word “bawn” for “fort”, and by the translation of the opening “*Hwæt*” as the colloquial Northern Irish “so.” The Introduction is a well-argued account of Heaney’s views of translation as a further form of emancipatory language.

Heaney, Seamus. *The Burial at Thebes: Sophocles' Antigone*. London: Faber, 2004.

Another version of this much-translated text. The conflict between the demands of her tribe and a higher notion of justice drive Antigone to her doom. The ethical conflict is at the heart of Heaney's translation

## INTERVIEWS WITH SEAMUS HEANEY

Heaney is a poet who has been generous to interviews throughout his career. His early interviews chart his beginnings as a writer and his physical changes of location Randall 1979. He tells of his literary and cultural influences, Haffenden 1981, Deane 1982 and Corcoran 1998, as well as his aesthetic and philosophical concerns, Kearney 1995. The Corcoran interview is split in different sections of his book on Heaney, and as such is used to add to points being made in the discussion. The Kearney interview locates Heaney as a European intellectual, a role with which the thought of the poet would make him very comfortable. Two interviews in 2000 (Miller and Murphy) assume a more retrospective view, with the poet looking back over the intersection of the political with the aesthetic in his career, and at how different context influenced different texts which he writes. Miller speaks a lot about aesthetic politics and about the influence of other poets on Heaney while Murphy talks about the poems written about the death of Heaney's parents and about the role of poetry in society. O'Driscoll 2008 is as close to an autobiography as Heaney will ever come, providing insights into all his books and his aesthetic concerns, and it is a necessary resource for any serious Heaney scholar as well as a really interesting insight into Heaney's thinking. The long book (475 pages) explores each book and also looks at his seminal early background in Mossbawn, as well as at his opinions on different aspects of language, culture, and politics. The questions are involved and the answers are carefully crafted. There is a wealth of information given in this book. Sadly, O'Driscoll died in 2012.

Corcoran, Neil. "In Between: On Seamus Heaney's Life." In *Seamus Heaney*. First published in 1986, 234-262. London: Faber, 1998.

A conflation of conversation and interview, it looks at important occasions in Heaney's life which were pivotal to his development as a poet. He speaks about his connection with Robert Lowell, the Field Day project, the influence of his time in Harvard, and the influence of Eastern European poetry.

Deane, Seamus. "Unhappy and at home: Interview with Seamus Heaney." *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies*, 66-72. Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1982.



Heaney discusses the role of poetry in the expression and understanding of the problems in Northern Ireland, as well as looking at the role of the aesthetic in the political sphere. He also speaks about his debt to Patrick Kavanagh and W. B. Yeats as Irish writers who precede him.

Haffenden, John. "Meeting Seamus Heaney: An Interview." *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation*, 57-75. London: Faber, 1981.

This early interview focuses on Heaney's writing practices, and connects the early poems with the poet's life. The interview also looks at specific poems from the first four volumes and at various instances where the pursuit of the verbal icon leads to a confrontation with the mess of the actual.

Kearney, Richard. "Seamus Heaney – Between North and South: Poetic Detours." *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers on the European Mind*, 101-108. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.

This interview looks at Heaney as a poet and thinker in the European tradition, and probes issues such as the influence of European literature and culture on Heaney's work, and especially the influence of Eastern European poets on his sense of the role of poetry in the political realm.

Miller, Karl. *Seamus Heaney in Conversation with Karl Miller*. London: Between the Lines, 2000.

This 112 page interview looks at Heaney as a public poet, at how his poetry has developed in terms of expressing aspects of the violence in Northern Ireland. It traces connections between events in his life – academic posts held, and the death of his mother – and his later poetry.

Murphy, Mike. *Reading the Future: Irish Writers in Conversation with Mike Murphy*, 81-98. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000.

This interview deals with Heaney, in his sixties, as being in the "third phase of his writing" (p.82) and examines his development over the years and at his sense of the responsibility of the poet. There is a good discussion of *Seeing Things*, *Beowulf*, and Heaney's sense of his own legacy.

O'Driscoll, Dennis. *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*. London: Faber, 2008.

This is an enabling and necessary resource for any serious Heaney scholar. It comprises 475 pages of in-depth questions and answers on the poet's life, art and social context. It provides a comprehensive, in-depth and wide-ranging series of interviews on all of Heaney's writing and thinking, up to *District and Circle*.

Randall, James. "An Interview with Seamus Heaney", *Ploughshares*, 1979, 5, 3: 7-22.

This is an early interview, which looks at the literary and cultural influences on his poetry. Heaney discusses his move from Belfast to Wicklow, his trips to America, the Belfast “Group”, the influence of Yeats, Kavanagh, and Lowell, and the context of some of the elegies in *Field Work*.

## CRITICAL STUDIES ON SEAMUS HEANEY

### Collections of Essays

Bloom 2003 offers reprints of some of the most significant early criticism of Heaney including seminal essays by Edna Longley and Conor Cruise O’Brien, and is a good place to get a sense of the reception-history of Heaney’s work. Andrews 1992 has a series of strong essays on books and themes in Heaney, while Garratt 1995 collections provide some interesting essays on different earlier books and themes. Both of these collections are more advanced, as they assume a lot of knowledge of Heaney’s work and take overviews of themes across different collections. Curtis 2001 is now in its fourth edition, and has a book by book series of essays, while the special issue of *Agenda* 1989 has a number of pieces by and on Heaney in celebration of the poet’s fiftieth birthday. These two provide different but complimentary perspectives, with Curtis showing the gradual development of Heaney through the collections, while the *Agenda* special edition is a snapshot of Heaney in terms of his writing and the critical reception of that writing, at a particular point in time. All of these provide a good overall introduction to Heaney’s work and its critical reception. Malloy and Carey 1996 provide a loosely themed series of essays, connected by notions of structure. The idea here is a themed collection, but the looseness of the term means that there is not a lot of connection between the essays. Hall and Crowder 2007 offer a theoretically engaged series of essays up to *Electric Light*, which is advanced in tenor, and O’Donoghue 2009 has collected some really strong essays on Heaney’s work, and looks at his prose as well as his poetry. His prose has not been the subject of strenuous scrutiny but this is changing, and both O’Donoghue, and Hall and Crowder, give some space to analysis of his prose. The last two books provide the best contemporary perspective on Heaney criticism, and would benefit an advanced reader.

Andrews, Elmer. *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*. London: Macmillan, 1992.

Essays on Heaney up to *Seeing Things*., which includes David Lloyd’s postcolonial critique of Heaney “Pap for the Dispossessed”; James Simmons’ appraisal of Heaney’s early work “The Trouble with Seamus”; Robert Welch’s essay on “Poetic Freedom and Seamus Heaney”, and Terence Brown’s piece on poetry as witness.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Seamus Heaney*. Bloom’s Major Poets. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003.

Close reading, and academic commentary on chosen poems. The critical analyses are all extracts from previously published work. Poems covered include *North*, "Singing School"; "Glanmore Sonnets"; "The Harvest Bow"; "Ugolino"; "Station Island"; and *The Haw Lantern*.

The collection offers good introductory flavour of Heaney's work, and its critical context.

Cookson, William and Peter Dale, eds. *Agenda: Seamus Heaney Fiftieth Birthday Issue*. Volume 27, Number 1. London: Agenda and Editions Charitable Trust, 1989.

This special edition of the journal features poetry and prose from Heaney as well as essays on *Station Island* by Stephen Wade and Carolyn Meyer, and a very good comparative essay on Heaney, Eliot, Joyce, and Yeats by Neil Corcoran. This issue provides a good snapshot of a period of Heaney's work and reception.

Curtis, Tony, ed. *The Art of Seamus Heaney*. (Fourth revised edition). Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2001.

A seminal introductory book, with a chapter per collection up to *The Spirit Level* in this edition. It features essays on *North* by Edna Longley; on *The Haw Lantern* by Helen Vendler; on *Sweeney Astray* by Ciaran Carson; on his early collection of prose-poems *Stations*, by Anne Stevenson and on *Seeing Things* by Douglas Dunne.

Garratt, Robert F., ed. *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney*. London: Prentice Hall, 1995.

A broad collection of essays up to *Seeing Things*. It includes work by John Wilson Foster, Helen Vendler, and Jon Stallworthy, as well as newer voices such as Carla de Petris and Carolyn Meyer. It features two strong comparative essays from Darcy O'Brien and Dillon Johnston on Heaney and Wordsworth and Kavanagh respectively.

Hall, Jason David and Ashby Bland Crowder. *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator*. London: Palgrave, 2007.

An interesting collection which is more theoretically-driven than others, and which features newer voices on Heaney. Stephen Regan writes persuasively on Heaney and the Irish elegy; Ruben Moi is excellent on *Electric Light*; Barbara Hardy writes on his literary influences, while Daniel W. Ross looks at the specific influence of T. S. Eliot.

Malloy, Catharine and Phyllis Carey. *Seamus Heaney: The Shaping Spirit*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996.

Apart from Seamus Deane's reprint, this collection offers an American perspective on Heaney's work. The concern with the shaping function of poetry is stressed, connecting Heaney with Joyce and Dante. John R. Boly's psychoanalytic reading of *Death of a Naturalist* is interesting, while Catherine Malloy's analysis of memory in *Seeing Things* is valuable.

O'Donoghue, Bernard, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

This is a standard reference which is thematically arranged and quite advanced in analysis. Rand Brandes looks at Heaney's working titles, while Justin Quinn looks at the influence of Eastern Europe on his work. Dennis O'Driscoll looks at Heaney's public role, and Neil Corcoran usefully traces the relationship between Heaney and Yeats.

### **Biographical Context and Criticism:**

There is no biography or autobiography on Heaney. Parker 1993 provides an excellent account of his poetic development which is related to his biography and anyone reading this will have a strong flavour of Heaney's writing and of the influences on that writing. An updated edition would be of benefit to the field. Foster 1989 looks at Heaney's work in the context of his life, and the readings tend to intersect the two in the context of Heaney using poetry to look at things differently from the normal perspective.

Parker, Michael. *Seamus Heaney: The Making of a Poet*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993.

This is an excellent chronological study up to *Seeing Things*. The cultural, political, and literary contexts of the work are set out in a developmental process of close reading. Strong focus on the language of the poems and the book gives an excellent sense of the relationship between text and context in Heaney's writing.

Foster, T. C. (1989) *Seamus Heaney*. Dublin: O'Brien Press.

A study of Heaney's work in the context of his life experience. This book suggests that making things strange is at the core of his thinking and writing. He offers close readings of a number of poems in support of this thesis. An interesting and oddly neglected study of Heaney's writing.

### **Bibliography:**

Brandes and Durkan 2008 have done Trojan work in collating and structuring the many articles, chapters and books which look at Heaney's writing. The annotations often bring touches of humour to the proceedings, and the quotations and comments are pithy and judicious. It is a labour of love, and it is a necessary resource for any serious student of Heaney's writing. Andrews 1998 offers a different approach, looking at themes in the critical work on Heaney and examining the work under the different headings. It offers a very good introduction to the secondary criticism and also provides excellent summaries of the different main essays and books on Heaney in its different sections. It

would be an ideal starting point for any student of Heaney's poetry who was trying to navigate the secondary literature.

Andrews, Elmer, ed. *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*. Icon Critical Guides Series. Cambridge: Icon Books, 1998.

This is well-organized book which outlines a pathway through the secondary criticism. The five sections are organised around the Anglo-American canon; notions of place and identity; poetry and politics; gender and colonialism and visions earth and air. An indispensable guide to any new readers of Heaney wishing to orient themselves in the texts, contexts, and the secondary literature.

Brandes, Rand and Michael J. Durkan. *Seamus Heaney: A Bibliography 1959- 2003*. London: Faber, 2008.

This bibliography is a necessary resource for any serious Heaney scholar. The book lists over 2000 items, with concise, informative annotation of these. Summaries are excellent and the style is engaging throughout. A very judicious use of quotations manages to give a flavour of the different pieces cited.

### **Comparative Studies:**

Heaney has been studied in the light of a number of other poets across different genres and national boundaries. Annwn 1984 looks at his use of myth in a focused study which also looks at Geoffrey Hill and George Mackay Brown. This is book for those interested in this area only. The same can be said for Finn 2004, who compares and contrasts the use of archaeology in the work of Yeats and Heaney, and traces the influence of different strands of the past on Heaney. Vendler 1995 focuses on stylistic breaks in looking at Heaney, Hopkins (a strong influence on Heaney) and Jorie Graham. It is a thought-provoking and comprehensive study of rhyme, rhythm and lineation for any serious student of poetry. Fumagalli 2001 looks at Heaney and Derek Walcott in terms of how each of the have been influenced by the work of Dante, but it is more a study of Dante on each of the poets. Interesting and informative readings of the Dantean influence on books from *Field Work* to *The Spirit Level*. Rankin Russell 2010 looks at the way in which the poetry of Heaney and Michel Longley has affected and helped to shape the Northern Irish peace process. It is an interesting and detailed discussion of the role of the aesthetic in the political and public sphere.

Annwn, David. *Inhabited Voices: Myth and History in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill, Seamus Heaney and George Mackay Brown*. Somerset: Bran's Head Books, 1984.

The three poets are discussed in terms of their use of, and interest in, issues of myth and history through a Celtic and spiritual perspective. Some good close readings of Heaney poems from the first four collections, and interesting comments on the use of the trope of darkness and the representation of the past.

Finn, Christine. *Past Poetic: Archaeology and the Poetry of W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co, 2004.

The last three chapters deal, respectively with Heaney's use of the bog bodies and P. V. Glob's book; with seeing the later poems as a movement from soil to air, and looking at the influence of Virgil and Dante, and connecting poet and archaeologist as people who see beneath the surface.

Fumagalli, Maria Cristina. *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2001.

In this study, the work of Heaney and Walcott is seen as connected to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and each poet is seen as enacting aspects of the *commedia in parvo* in their own work. Good discussions of *Field Work*, *Station Island*, *The Haw Lantern*, *Seeing Things* and *The Spirit Level*.

Rankin Russell, Richard. *Poetry and Peace: Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, and Northern Ireland*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.

This interesting and persuasive book suggests that Heaney and Longley have contributed to the Northern Irish Peace Process by creating an imaginative space in their writing which allows for a transcending of the actual. It suggests that poetry has influenced the language of politics. It strongly argues for culture as a politically ameliorative agency.

Vendler, Helen. *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.

This advanced book examines changes, or breaks, in Heaney's style. Focusing on the micro-level of the poems, she differentiates between the particularities of his "nounness" and the "betweenness" of an adverbial style. She makes strong connections between style and theme, especially in a bravura close reading of "Poem xxiv" from *Seeing Things*.

### **Feminist Readings:**

Heaney has come under some criticism for what has been seen as an essentialist portrayal of gender in his poetry, especially his earlier poetry. These have mainly come in article and chapter form. Coughlan 1997 was a seminal source of this critique, looking at Heaney's bog poems and some of his other earlier work, and the article is a necessary read for anyone who wished to trace this line of thinking. Green 1995 also looks at Heaney's representation of goddesses and the feminine, but she

sees this as a more positive attachment to creativity. This chapter also looks at nationalist personifications of the feminine and at Heaney's rather wary attitude to this trope, even though he has been part of its representation. Anderson 1995 takes up this theme, looking at Heaney's bog poems again, in terms of their representation of sexual tension as an allegory of the political tensions of the time, and suggests a further context of necrophilia – clearly quite a development from the earlier comments on gender. Coughlin 2007 develops her ideas on Heaney's representations of gender, focusing on an interview and extrapolating his gender-perspective from this. This is a more developed essay, and probably needs familiarity with the earlier one for a complete understanding. Brearton 2009 argues in a parallel manner, seeing Heaney as viewing poetry as feminine in a somewhat reductivist manner after the ideas of Graves. It offers some interesting readings of poems. Sullivan 2005 traces a very complex web through Heaney's work in order to demonstrate the pervasive imagery of birth and wetness which she sees as permeating his poetry. This is an especially strong essay which offers original and nuanced readings of gender aspects of Heaney's work and it is widely grounded in theoretical thought. There are two book-length studies of Heaney which can be seen to be influenced by feminist thinking. Byron 1992 is an individualistic account of a reading of Heaney's *Station Island* in the context of a visit to the place itself by the author as she makes the three day pilgrimage herself. This book offers interesting insights but very much a once-off study. Moloney 2007 offers a focused reading of *North* and *Field Work*, which relates to the earlier discussions of imagery of the pagan female mother figure, but sees these as emblems of hope for the political and cultural future. She achieves this through an advanced postfeminist and postcolonial theoretical matrix.

Anderson, Nathalie F. "Queasy Proximity: Seamus Heaney's Mythical Method." In *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney*. Edited by Robert F. Garratt, 139-150. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1995.

She compares Heaney's use of mythology with the processes of Joyce, and looks at how he uses sexual tension as a metaphor for political tensions through a sustained reading of "Bog Queen" from *North*. She suggests connections between Irish reification of past images and images of vampirism and ambivalent necrophilia.

Brearton, Fran. "Heaney and the Feminine." In *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*. Edited by Bernard O'Donoghue, 73-91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

This chapter sees Heaney following Robert Graves in conceptualising poetry as feminine in a rather dated way. A feminist critique reading of his sexual linguistics, it makes a valid case but the ideology outweighs the close readings of the poems. However, there are some acute readings of passages of the prose.

Byron, Catherine. *Out of Step: Pursuing Seamus Heaney to Purgatory*. Bristol: Loxwood Stoneleigh, 1992.

An idiosyncratic and very personal reading of the text and context of Heaney's *Station Island* sequence, and the pilgrimage motif to Saint Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg. A feminist, spiritual and semi-autobiographical interaction with the poem and its contexts, as Byron's text recounts her experiences while actually making the three-day pilgrimage.

Coughlan, Patricia. "Bog Queens': The Representation of Women in the poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney." In *Seamus Heaney*. Edited by Michael Allen, 185-205. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

This essay sees Heaney's poetry as dangerously gendered. It sees Heaney's work as masculine in persona, and as not offering any acknowledgment of the existence of an autonomous subjectivity in the feminine, a structure which she sees as common to sexism and racism. This is an influential early feminist critique of Heaney's work.

Coughlan, Patricia. "'The Whole Strange Growth': Heaney, Orpheus and Women." *The Irish Review*, No. 35, Irish Feminisms (Summer, 2007): 25-45.

Almost a sequel to 'Bog Queens', this essay looks at an interview of Heaney's in 2002 and suggests that he sees gender is constructed in nature, rather than in society. The essay goes on to offer a theoretically complex and rich reading of Heaney's *The Midnight Verdict* in terms of gender politics.

Green, Carlanda. "The Feminine Principle in Seamus Heaney's Poetry." In *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney*. Edited by Robert F. Garratt, 151-159. London: Prentice Hall, 1995.

The focus is on the earth mother (Nerthus) and the bog poems of the first four books. She sees Heaney as attracted to the creativity of the earth-mother, but as also aware of the dangers of such a cult in its manifestation as a nationalist personification of Ireland (Kathleen Ni Houlihan).

Moloney, Karen Marguerite. *Seamus Heaney and the Emblems of Hope*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007.

Focusing on *North* and *Field Work*, this study shows how ancient symbols of a sacred marriage to the earth goddess, which validate the new king's sovereignty, are revisioned into postcolonial and post-patriarchal "emblems of hope" which are attempts to offer enduring symbols of hope in the face of political fractures and sectarian violence.

Sullivan, Moynagh. "The Treachery of Wetness: Irish Studies, Seamus Heaney and the Politics of Parturition." *Irish Studies Review*. 2005, 13, 4: 453-468.



This complex and rich essay looks at Heaney in terms of blooms anxiety of Influence and oedipal notions of rebirth. The essay offers a sustained theoretical reading of his *oeuvre* through various metaphors and symbols of birth and wetness. It inaugurates a new phase of feminist critique in Heaney studies.

### **Thematic Studies**

These books all read aspects of Heaney's work through a specific theme or perspective. McCarthy 2008 offers a comprehensive and detailed account of the influence of medieval literature and thought on Heaney, and he also looks at Heaney's individualistic perspective on medieval writing. Burris 1990 looks at Heaney's very specific ideas on pastoral and traces this genre through his work. It is well argued and offers good readings of the poems and sources. Tobin 1998 locates Heaney's ongoing dialectic with his "first place" Mossbawn as a metaphorical progression and regression throughout his poetry. This is a well-argued and complex discussion of the work under this theme, while Desmond 2009 looks at Heaney's *The Spirit Level* from a quasi-religious and transcendental perspective. He looks quite specifically at Heaney's notion of the redressing function of art. Collins 2003 looks at Heaney's negotiation of what he sees as a crisis of identity, and reads his work in the light of its negotiations of the different signifiers of identity, and there is a good use of reference to other Irish writers. Xerri 2010 looks at the voicing of the political tensions in the first four books of poetry. It is tightly focused and interesting. Kay 2012 has an intriguing study of the connections between Heaney and eastern European writing. She looks at aspects of the unconscious and at problems and benefits of translation in one of the most original studies of Heaney's work to date.

Burris, Sidney. *The Poetry of Resistance: Seamus Heaney and the Pastoral Tradition*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990.

This study analyzes Heaney's work in relation to the tradition of pastoral poetry, a form outwardly concerned with nature but encompassing many other philosophical and social issues. Burris sees Heaney as adapting the pastoral a modern context where it can offer social and cultural criticism up to *Station Island*.

Collins, Floyd. *Seamus Heaney: The Crisis of Identity*. University of Delaware Press, 2003.

Collins sees Heaney's work reflects a search for personal and cultural identity, and traces a similar process in the work of Yeats, Kavanagh, and Joyce. He sees considers Heaney's translations as providing provided different voices and masks and he also looks at the reception of Heaney's work in a socio-political context.

Desmond, John F. *Gravity and Grace: Seamus Heaney and the Force of Light* (Studies in Christianity and Literature). Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009.

This book explores Christian and transcendent elements in Seamus Heaney's *The Spirit Level* by reading it through the thought of Czeslaw Milosz and Simone Weil. It analyzes the power of art to redress balances in culture, though it can be over-critical of some aspects of contemporary culture.

Kay, Magdalena. *In Gratitude for all the Gifts: Seamus Heaney and Eastern Europe*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

This well-written and sophisticated book examines the links between Heaney, Czeslaw Milosz, and Zbigniew Herbert. In what she terms his visionary turn, Kay offers highly sophisticated readings of the value of this intersection in Heaney's own poetry. She is alert to nuanced and subconscious influences, and to the problematics of translation, and offers some thought-provoking ideas on the value of these gifts.

McCarthy, Conor. *Seamus Heaney and Medieval Poetry*. Suffolk: D S Brewer, 2008.

This well-researched study suggests that Heaney views the past as not stable or fixed, but as open to reinterpretation. Examining *Sweeney Astray*, *Station Island*, *Beowulf*, and the *Testament of Cressid*, it presents the medieval as complex and multifaceted, a reality that is taken to be equal in complexity to our own.

Tobin, Daniel. *Passage to the Center: Imagination and the Sacred in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998.

This interesting and complex analysis traces the record of Heaney's quarrel with himself, a quarrel that begins in the poet's ambiguous and finally agonistic relationship to his home. This is his "sacred center", his omphalos to which he persistently returns and transforms. This is placed in a postmodernist context of the desacralizing of culture.

Xerri, Daniel. *Seamus Heaney's Early Work: Poetic Responsibility and the Troubles* (Irish Research Series). Palo Alto, CA: Academica Press, 2010.

This is a very specific study dealing with Heaney's poetry before he moved to the Republic of Ireland. It traces the gradual voicing of the violence in Northern Ireland in the first four books, reading the poems in terms of how they face a sense of responsibility to 'speak' the troubles.

### **Prose:**

This is an aspect of Heaney's work which is gradually getting the attention which it deserves.

Originally, critical attention centred on single books. Stevenson 1994 (but first published in 1982)

looked at *Preoccupations* as a series of essays which compare with those of Eliot. O'Donoghue 1994

looks at *The Government of the Tongue* as a book which robs the interstices of the political and the

aesthetic. It is an excellent reading of the text and it has some provoking questions to ask. Corcoran

1998 was one of the first critics to offer serious consideration to all the prose collections, and he sees Heaney's essays as offering oblique insights into his own work. It is a seminal essay on the topic. Baron 2007 studies *Finders Keepers* and the connections to writers like Arnold and to aesthetics allow for a view of Heaney as more of a thinker than a literary critic which is beneficial. Burris 2007, looking mostly at *Crediting Poetry*, sees Heaney as a syncretic thinker who probes the borderlines of various discourses, and he substantiates this argument well. Wheatley 2009, in a fluent and thoughtful essay, sees Heaney as a poet-critic whose thought attempts to go beyond binary oppositions. It is a fine piece of analysis. By far the best and most comprehensive study of the prose study is Cavanagh 2009 which is a book-length and well-structured account of Heaney's prose, as literary criticism of others and also as a gateway into his own poetry and thinking. It looks at all the prose and is worthwhile reading.

Baron, Michael. "Heaney and the Functions of Prose." In *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator*. Edited by Jason David Hall and Ashby Bland Crowder, 74-91. London: Palgrave, 2007.

This chapter looks at the *Finders Keepers* collection, and looks at the features of Heaney's literature which have attracted negative attention. It goes on to locate Heaney in the critical and aesthetic tradition of Matthew Arnold, as both writers are interested in transcendence as it can be seen in the ordinary.

Burris, Sidney. "Reading Heaney Reading." In *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator*. Edited by Jason David Hall and Ashby Bland Crowder, 59-73. London: Palgrave, 2007.

Focusing especially on *Crediting Poetry*, this chapter sees Heaney as a reader of poetry, both that of other poets and his own work. His work is seen as suggesting intersections of the immanent and transcendent in cultural and political and aesthetic terms, where he negotiates between "external reality" and "inner law."

Cavanagh, Michael. *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics*. Washington: Catholic University Press, 2009.

The only full-length study of Heaney's prose to date, it provides a clear and well-argued account of its subject. Heaney's prose is seen as literary criticism, in the mode of T.S. Eliot's prose, and also as a parallel articulation of core themes that also appear in Heaney's poetry.

Corcoran, Neil. "Heaney's Literary Criticism." In *Seamus Heaney*. First published in 1986, 209-233. London: Faber, 1998.

This essay sees Heaney's criticism as an attempt to come to terms with himself through the work of others – Eliot, Bishop, and writers whose work is celebrated. He points to a tendency

to over-admire other poets. The chapter is a searching and accurate analysis of all the prose books.

O'Donoghue, Bernard. "Heaney's *ars poetica: The Government of the Tongue*." In *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, fourth revised edition. Edited by Tony Curtis, 179-190. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1994.

Points to the complex structure of this book, with its dialectic between the government of the aesthetic by the socio-political, and artistic freedom. He sees Heaney as preoccupied with poets who oscillate between the political and the aesthetic, notably Mandelstam, Kavanagh, and Auden, and relates his own practice to that of Houseman and Coleridge.

Stevenson, Anne. "The Peace Within Understanding: Looking at *Preoccupations*." In *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, fourth revised edition. Edited by Tony Curtis, 129-138. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1994.

This chapter sees *Preoccupations* as exemplifying an impressionistic style of criticism which contrasts with that of T. S. Eliot. Heaney is seen as creating a form of understanding from the interaction of the Irish and English literary traditions. The collection exemplifies a 'wise man's liberality which, though personal, is perfectly unselfish' (p.136).

Wheatley, David. "Professing Poetry: Heaney as Critic." In *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*. Edited by Bernard O'Donoghue, 122-134. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

This fluent and comprehensive chapter looks at Heaney as a 'critic-poet', and sees his work as hinting at a 'larger animating poetics'. It sees his prose as developing in parallel with the poetry and makes the point that if Heaney's criticism is binary in nature, its preferred stance is less 'either/or' than 'both/and'.

### **Language:**

Heaney's language, at once simple and seemingly straightforward, yet on close inspection more opaque than is first thought, has been the subject of a number of interesting studies. O'Donoghue 1994, in the first book-length study of his language, stakes out the ground by looking at how Heaney's language has developed in parallel with his thematic development. So far, this is the standard work on his language. Hall 2009, takes issue with some of O'Donoghue's categorisations and sets out Heaney's prosody and demonstrates how this changes and develops over the course of his career. It is a more recent book, and addresses issues of rhythm and metre and so would benefit an advanced student of poetry. Tyler 2013 adopts a very different approach to the issue of Heaney's language. She focuses on generic aspects of language and also looks at Heaney's creative use of etymology

and at how he fuses his concerns of language, form, and content in his writing. It is an individualistic approach and well worth reading.

Hall, Jason David. *Seamus Heaney's Rhythmic Contract*. London: Palgrave, 2009.

This is an involved and well-exemplified study of Heaney's prosody, and the relationship between language and themes. It looks at the context of the mainstream prosody of the 1970s and 1980s. It is especially strong in its reading of the prosody of the first three books, and the sonnet form.

O'Donoghue, Bernard. *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994.

This is an excellent probing study of the specific use of language in Heaney's work up to *Seeing Things*. Examining rhyme, rhythm, intertextual associations, influences, and the oscillation between the literary and vernacular, it is a valuable resource to readers who want to look at the technical aspects of Heaney's use of language.

Tyler, Meg. *A Singing Contest: Conventions of Sound in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (Studies in Major Literary Authors). London: Routledge, 2013.

Meg Tyler here presents a formal analysis which comprises close readings of the different genres – sonnet, elegy, and eclogue. She focuses on the prosody and the etymology of language and makes interesting connections between form, content, and context. She develops a very strong argument, and offers unusual and interesting readings.

### **Northern Ireland/Politics:**

As a Northern Irish poet, the issue of politics is one which has long been at the centre of criticism on Heaney's writing. Such is the complexity of that writing that he has been, at different times, accused of voicing almost atavistic nationalist sentiments and of being unwilling to take a strong political stand in his writing. Early reviews of Heaney's collection *North*, 1975, set the tone for this type of criticism. Carson, 1975, wrote that the book was in some way voicing the atavisms that are at the core of the violence from the Nationalist side of the political and sectarian divide. Cruise O'Brien 1975, made a similar point. Cruise O'Brien suggests that Heaney's *North* is voicing the pain and resentment of the Northern Irish Catholic psyche, and all considerations of the book are subsumed under this political reading. Longley 2001 (originally published in 1982) offers a sustained 30-page close reading of the poems of *North*, especially the opening section, to underline her view that Heaney is writing from inside the consciousness of the Catholic, nationalist psyche. Lloyd 1994 similarly accuses Heaney of aestheticizing violence and of taking an almost irredentist political stance, especially in *North*. Fennel

1991 is in the opposite camp, accusing Heaney of being unwilling to take any real stands politically and for evading his role as a voice of catholic nationalism. Molino 1994 offers a middle ground perspective, locating Heaney as part of the political turmoil, but seeing his as someone who wishes to heal as opposed to exacerbate these tensions. In studies which also look at other poets, Mathews 1997 and McDonald 1997 provide differing views on Heaney's politics. Mathews sees Heaney's work as attempting to transcend the divisions of his political context, and he uses the thought of Adorno as a critical lens. His points are well made. McDonald, on the other hand, sees poetic language as inevitably constrained by political contexts and his readings of Heaney's work attempt to prove this thesis.

Carson, Ciarán. "Escaped from the Massacre?" *The Honest Ulsterman*, 50 (Winter1975): 183-186.

This review sees the poems as in some way valorizing the violence by placing it in a broad temporal and spatial patten. For Carson: it is as if Heaney is saying that "suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened; they happened then, they happen now" (pp.184-185).

Fennell, Desmond. *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing*. Dublin: ELO Publications, 1991.

This polemic takes Heaney to task for his political quietism in the face of the violence in Northern Ireland, and for his ability to avoid social controversy. He sees Heaney as almost an archetype of the poet/academic who has been lauded for his avoidance of political issues in his work.

Lloyd, David. "'Pap for the Dispossessed': Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of Identity." In *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment*, 13-40. Dublin: Lilliput, 1993.

Seminal essay in Heaney Studies, which criticises Heaney's poetic stance on politics as it sees Heaney as positing a tribalist aestheticization of identity, and it speaks about 'the elevation of a minor Irish poet to a touchstone of contemporary taste.'

Longley, Edna (2001) "*North*: 'Inner Emigré' or 'Artful Voyeur'." In *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, fourth revised edition. Edited by Tony Curtis, 65-95. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 200.

This essay sees Heaney as avoiding the intersectorian issue, the "warfare *between* tribes", by concentrating on the Catholic psyche as "bound to immolation." She singles out the poem "Kinship" as defining the conflict in "astonishingly introverted Catholic and Nationalist terms" (p.78). The chapter offers detailed close-reading of the poems in *North*.

Mathews, Steven. *Irish Poetry: Politics, History, Negotiation: The Evolving Debate 1969 to the Present*. London: Macmillan, 1997.

This book offers a critique of history and ideology in an Irish context, and is influenced by the thought of Adorno. He speaks of Heaney's "quietism", and reads his poetry as suggestion that this is the only possible reaction to a history as split and antagonistic as is that of Northern Ireland.

McDonald, Peter. *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

This book examines the relationship between political and poetic language in the work of Northern Irish poets. It looks at the fragmentation of old identities and the uncertainty of their replacements and reads some Heaney poems (like 'The Toome Road'), as examples of how poetic language can be overwhelmed by rhetoric.

Molino, Michael. *Questioning Tradition, Language and Myth: The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*. Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 1994.

A well-informed discussion of the nuanced and plural sense of tradition as a key to understanding the cultural role of Heaney's work. This book looks at the politics of Heaney's poetry in the context of Irish history and Irish literary history, and contains an interesting analysis of Heaney's role in The Field Day project.

O'Brien, Conor Cruise. "A Slow North-East Wind." *The Listener* (September 25, 1975): 404-405.

This influential review saw *North* sees Heaney as speaking in the voice of his tribe in this book, of voicing "the actual substance of historical agony and dissolution, the tragedy of a people in a place: the Catholics of Northern Ireland" (p.404). This review had lasting effect on the critical reception of Heaney's politics.

### **Nobel Prize:**

Two publications appeared directly in the wake of Heaney's receipt of the Noble prize for literature in 1995. Haviaras 1996 edited a special edition of the *Harvard Review* has over 100 pages on Heaney, and it offers an overview of the responses to his award. It is full of good feeling towards the poet, and is a good snapshot of some of his work, and its reception, at this time. Wilson Foster 1995 offers an overview of Heaney's writing up to *The Haw Lantern*. It is a brief but coherent account of aspects of Heaney's development.

Wilson Foster, John. *The Achievement of Seamus Heaney*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995.

This book was published after the Nobel Prize, and offers an overview of Heaney's work from being a poetry of the soil, to becoming a poetry of engagement with issues, and developing into to a poetry of light and air. He also sees poetry as feminine in much of Heaney's writing.

Haviaras, Stratis, ed. *Seamus Heaney: A Celebration. A Harvard Review Monograph*. Cambridge, Mass.: The President and fellows of Harvard College, 1996.

This is a smorgasbord of reflections, poems, images, responses, prose pieces, and reactions to Seamus Heaney's Nobel Prize in 1995. It provides a snapshot of the effect that Heaney's work has had on Irish, American, and European academics and artists. All brief extracts except for Helen Vendler's 10 page essay.

### **Literary Theory:**

The depth and complexity of Heaney's work make it particularly suited to theoretical analysis, and there has been a significant increase in theoretical readings of Heaney's work in recent years. Hart 1992 has written persuasively about Heaney's work from a deconstructionist perspective, and his work shows the value of theoretical readings in liberating new meanings from Heaney's texts. Ramazani 1994 also offer a comparative theoretical reading of Heaney, focusing on his use and development of the genre of the elegy. Docherty 1997 offers a strong postmodern reading of Heaney's landscapes and it is a refreshing change from the usual adequations between land and language in Heaney criticism, while Brewster 1998 uses Derrida's ideas of poetry as being like a hedgehog to offer an original reading of Heaney's poetry. Allen 1997 has assembled a collection of broadly theoretical readings of Heaney's work in his new casebook, and there are a number of significant developments to be found in this book. Gilsean Nordin 1999 has a book-length study of *Seeing Things* from a phenomenological perspective, which is a fascinating engagement between the text and the theory. O'Brien 2003 has examined Heaney's developing ideas on the relationships between place and space using a matrix of Derrida and de Man and, while O'Brien 2004, looks at Heaney's notions of ideology, politics and language through a theoretical lens consisting of Derrida, Blanchot, and Lacan.

Allen, Michael, ed. *Seamus Heaney*. New Casebook Series. London: Macmillan, 1997.

A Collection which takes some account of recent literary theory, and where readings are not just broadly new critical. Strong essays from Stan Smith, David Lloyd, and a particularly interesting reading of Heaney as a postmodern poet by Thomas Docherty. Conor Cruise O'Brien's seminal review of *North*. 'A Slow North-east Wind' is also included.

Brewster, Scott. "A Residual Poetry: Heaney, Mahon and Hedgehog History." *Irish University Review*, 28, 1 (Spring – Summer, 1998): 56-67.

A sophisticated theoretical reading of Heaney's earlier work. It uses two Derridean terms 'poematic', which describes the relation between a poem and the outside, and hedgehog (*herrison*) where a poem turns in on itself for protection, to describe the specific type of dialectical knowledge that is contained in poetry.



Docherty, Thomas. "Ana- or Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney." In *Seamus Heaney*. New Casebook Series. Edited by Michael Allen, 206-222. London: Macmillan, 1997.

Strong theoretical reading of "The Grauballe Man" as a form of cinematic postmodern imagery, using Lyotard, Deleuze, and Virilio as a theoretical framework. He sees Heaney as a late modernist poet, and the "ana" in the title cleverly refers to his use of anamnesis, anagogy, anamorphosis, and analysis in the essay.

Gilsenan Nordin, Irene, *Crediting Marvels in Seamus Heaney's "Seeing Things."* Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1999.

A very detailed, phenomenologically-influenced, close reading of the *Seeing Things* collection as a Dantean journey which is redemptive and transforming for the self. The thought of Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are used as revealing lenses through which to read the work. Advanced and stimulating study.

Hart, Henry. *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992.

This is a sophisticated and theoretically informed reading of Heaney's work, up to *The Haw Lantern*; it sees Heaney as a deconstructive writer who whittles away at the givens and certainties of his culture, language, and tradition. Linguistically and stylistically aware, this is an advanced and interesting analysis which examines his movement from place to space.

O'Brien, Eugene. *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.

A complex study of Heaney's polysemic ideas on place, space and identity and the role of the aesthetic up to *Electric Light*. Specific places – Broagh, Anahorish, Mossbawn – are seen as metaphors of a more transcendent perspective which gradually develops in Heaney's work. The study is influenced by Derrida and deconstruction.

O'Brien, Eugene. *Seamus Heaney Searches for Answers*. London, Pluto Press, 2004.

A theoretically-driven, advanced analysis of significant themes in Heaney's poetry, prose, and translations, up to *Electric Light*. Heaney's work is seen as deconstructing notions of place, politics, language, and ideology. His prose is examined as is his connection with Yeats. His work is critiqued through the theoretical writing of Derrida, Blanchot, and Lacan.

Ramazani, Jahan. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

A complex and satisfying reading of the place of the elegy in literature. Poems from *North*, *Field Work*, *Seeing Things*, and *Station Island* are given theoretical close readings in this

interesting and complex book. His readings draw on genre theory and psychoanalysis as well as other theoretical approaches to literature.

### Overviews:

These are some of the most read studies of Heaney as they offer a broadly chronological and developmental outline of the poet's work. Buttel 1975 is the first book-length study of Heaney and he stakes out the ground in the first three books, seeing Heaney as a poet grounded in the actual. Morrison 1982 is a more sophisticated reading of Heaney as a postmodern poet and though only dealing with the early books, it is still one of the best readings which do justice to the complexity of Heaney's work. Corcoran 1998 (first published in 1986) provides a very good overall reading of Heaney's work up to *The Spirit Level*. He includes an interview sporadically through the book and the readings of the poems are incisive and thought-provoking, and it is far more than the "introduction" that is its label on the initial printing. Andrews 1988 offers a strong reading of Heaney's ability to access aspects of the unconscious in his writing through attention being given to inwardness. It is a holistic account of the development of his work. Wade 1993 provides a broad discussion, looking at Heaney as an Irish and a Romantic poet as well as looking at the influence of Dante. This is an idiosyncratic account of his work. Murphy 2000 offers a solid overview of Heaney's work, looking at it on a book by book basis, and provides a good general introduction. Vendler 1998 has some really deep close-readings of Heaney's poetry and she is excellent on the formal construction and allusiveness of the poems. It is an advanced level study, as much about the value of poetry as it is about the value of Heaney, and well worth reading at an advanced level. O'Brien 2007 provides a book by book account of his work up to *District and Circle*, which looks at how different aspects of Ireland and Irishness have been imagined and reimagined in Heaney's writing.

Andrews, Elmer. *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: All the Realms of Whisper*. London: Macmillan, 1988.

This provides a focused study up to *Station Island* which sees Heaney as a complex writer who grounds the general in the particular, and whose focus is on inwardness. There is strong focus on the unconscious aspects of language in Heaney's work, and on the subtlety of the poems in their dealing with reality.

Buttel, Robert. *Seamus Heaney*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975.

This early book looks at the first three collections chronologically, focusing on the poetic language and the use of rhyme and rhythm, on the literary influences, and on close readings

of poems. He also traces themes which connect the local with the universal and those of art and the local.

Corcoran, Neil. *Seamus Heaney*. First published in 1986. London: Faber, 1998.

The revised edition of a seminal book looks at Heaney's work up to *The Spirit Level*, with a chapter on each book, as well as a chapter on his prose. It focuses on theme, style, and development of language in strong close readings, and explains references and contextual issues very capably.

Morrison, Blake. *Seamus Heaney*. London: Methuen, 1982.

This is an enlightened early study of his poetry up to *Field Work*, which sees Heaney as a postmodern poet, challenging a consensus which admired Heaney's poetry 'for not being modern'. Heaney is seen through the lens of writers such as Barthes and in terms of mediating silence and speech.

Murphy, Andrew. *Seamus Heaney*. First published 1996. Writers and Their Work Series. Plymouth: Northcote House in association with the British Council, 2000.

This offers a solid introduction to Heaney's work which situates the volumes, up to *The Spirit Level*, in a chronological and developmental context. Connections are made to the political context and to the development of Heaney's approach to this. Readings are broad and largely thematic. Interesting extended biographical reading of the poem 'Terminus'.

O'Brien, Eugene. *Seamus Heaney: Creating Irelands of the Mind. Studies on Contemporary Ireland Series*. Second enlarged and revised edition, first published 2002. Dublin: Liffey Press, 2007.

A broadly thematic overview of all the books, up to *District and Circle*, which looks at Heaney's work as paralleling socio-cultural issues in Ireland over the past fifty years. The structure is chronological, with a chapter per collection, and the close-readings are influenced by Derrida and Adorno. An advanced introduction.

Vendler, Helen. *Seamus Heaney*. London: Harper Collins, 1998.

Encompassing 10 collections (up to *Seeing Things*), the alliterative and indicative chapter titles examine specific themes throughout: "Anonymities"; "Archaeologies"; "Anthropologies"; "Allegories", and "Airiness." Close-readings of the poems liberate complex meanings. This is an advanced and satisfying reading of the work, looking at linguistic and stylistic, as well as thematic, aspects.

Wade, Stephen. *More on the Word-Hoard: The Work of Seamus Heaney*. Nottingham: Pauper's Press, 1993.

An eclectic reading of different aspects of Heaney's work, up to *Seeing Things*, it is a largely thematic overview with connections being made to the Anglo-Irish and Romantic poetic

traditions, to Dante and to themes of sacrifice. The methodology is traditional and allusive and the discussion is quite broad.