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LEARNING TO *THOLE*: THE UNCONSCIOUS CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IRELAND AND SCOTLAND IN THE THOUGHT OF SEAMUS HEANEY

EUGENE O'BRIEN

For Seamus Heaney, the role of literature is of value in itself, as an autotelic discourse, but it is also of value as an enabling lens through which to view political and ethical issues; as he puts it: 'I credit poetry, in other words, both for being itself and for being a help' (Heaney *Crediting Poetry* 11). I would suggest that what makes Heaney a valuable writer and thinker, in both poetry and prose, is that he is able to write in a way that accesses aspects of the unconscious in his epistemological and ontological deliberations. In postmodern thinking, the role of the unconscious has become increasingly more central, and for Jacques Derrida, such exploration of the unconscious is part of an Enlightenment heritage: 'the Enlightenment to come would have to enjoin us to reckon with the logic of the unconscious', because the unconscious has become central to our understanding of human motivations in the wake of what he calls the 'psychoanalytic revolution', and its exploration is necessary for a critical thinking that 'does not limit the living being to its conscious and representative form' (Derrida 157).

It is my contention that a similar level of engagement with areas of knowledge beyond 'the conscious and representative form' pervades much of Heaney's work. This work is driven by an intellectual desire to probe the interstices of politics, ethics and aesthetics in an attempt to come to a more complete understanding of what it means to be fully human in a 'world of meditated meaning', by attempting to fill 'a knowledge-need' (Heaney *The Government of the Tongue* 106). He uses this term in an essay about the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, where he is speaking about her poem 'At the Fishhouses', and noting the descriptive power of the text. He suggests that the descriptions are so accurate that they could be part of

‘a geography text book’ (Heaney *The Government of the Tongue* 106). However, he goes on to explain that these lines are ‘poetry, not geography’, and this means that they have a ‘dream truth as well as a daylight truth about them, they are as hallucinatory as they are accurate’ (Heaney *The Government of the Tongue* 106). The use of ‘hallucinatory’ here is instructive, as for Heaney, knowledge, while related to the rational, is also related to the unconscious and to the emotional: hence the phrase ‘knowledge need’ which relates the rational world of knowledge to the world of desire as outlined in the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, who see need as a precursor to desire, which for both of these thinkers is at the core of human existence. He goes on to quote Ana Swir, who sees a poet as an ‘antenna’ who captures ‘the voices of the world’; Heaney approvingly cites her view that a poem is a way of expressing the individual ‘subconscious and the collective subconscious’ (Heaney *The Government of the Tongue* 107), and I would argue that it is the analysis and exploration of this epistemological aspect of poetry that is at the core of Heaney’s project.

Frederic Jameson argues that interpretation in all its contemporary forms, always presupposes, ‘if not a conception of the unconscious itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one’ (Jameson 50). In his *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson makes the point that these underground master-narratives are always already present in our cultural matrix, and thus they are ideologically operative in much of our thinking. The task of the thinker, then, is to unearth aspects of this political unconscious through ‘the dynamics of the act of interpretation’ (Jameson 3). He sees this unconscious as an absent cause, and as something which is only available to us in textual form, and goes on to suggest that our access to ‘the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualisation, its narrativisation in the political unconscious’ (Jameson 26).

The location of this unconscious has always been a matter of some debate. The attempt to gain access to the unconscious is hindered by the opacity of the concept itself. Freud’s typology would suggest that the unconscious is internalised in the individual or the subject, but for Lacan, ‘the unconscious is outside’ (Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 123), by which he means that we repress aspects of our interaction with our environment which comes from outside ourselves. As he puts it ‘*the unconscious is the discourse of the Other*. Now, the discourse of the Other that is to be realized, that of the unconscious, is not beyond the closure, it is *outside*’ [*italics original*] (Lacan *Four*

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Fundamental Concepts 131). Similarly, Giorgio Agamben can talk about how the ‘territory of the unconscious, in its mechanisms as in its structures, wholly coincides with that of the symbolic and the improper’, and he proceeds to describe how the dissociation of ‘form from its signified, now becomes the hidden writing of the unconscious’ (Agamben *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* 145). Writing, as it was for James Joyce, becomes a sort of ‘linguistic psychoanalysis of the repressed’ (Kearney, 183), which attempts to probe and bring to light aspects of the unconscious which is, by definition: ‘serial, problematic and questioning’ (Deleuze 108). It is also a mode of connection to our bodies and to their interaction with the environment, a point again noted by Gilles Deleuze when he says that ‘every proposition of consciousness implies an unconscious of pure thought which constitutes the sphere of sense in which there is infinite regress’ (Deleuze 155).

I will argue that for Heaney, Scotland serves as an example of aspects of the unconscious in his thinking. Looking at connections between Ireland and Scotland allows him to enunciate aspects of identity and experience that would otherwise lie dormant. The reasons for this are complex. Like Ireland, Scotland shares an anomalous position on the postcolonial project:

Caesar’s Britain, its *partes tres*,
United England, Scotland, Wales,
Britannia in the old tales,
Is common ground.
Hibernia is where the Gaels
Made a last stand. (Heaney *An Open Letter*, 7)

Each country could make a strong case in terms of being colonised and yet both are also complicit in the processes of colonisation as Irish and Scottish generals, politicians and administrators have been central to British imperial conquest. David Lloyd makes the point that he has become increasingly aware of the theoretical value of other ‘postcolonial locations in all their disjunctions and analogies with one another, to find ways in which to comprehend the apparent peculiarities of Irish cultural history’ (Lloyd 2). For Lloyd, the similarity between the Irish experience and that of other colonies is clear. Given the historical framework adduced earlier in this discussion, it seems obvious that, to quote Homi Bhabha, the Irish question has ‘been reposed as a *postcolonial* problem’ (Bhabha 229). Similarly, Declan Kiberd, in his *Inventing Ireland*, speaks of the colonialist crime, in an Irish context, as the ‘violation of the traditional community’ (Kiberd 292), a notion that Ania Loomba sees as

paradigmatic of the colonial process in general. As she puts it in her comprehensive *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, the process of ‘forming a community’ in a new land necessarily means the ‘*unforming* or re-forming of the communities that existed there already’ [*italics original*] (Loomba 2). Edward Said observes that Yeats, while almost completely assimilated into the canons of ‘modern English Literature’ and ‘European high modernism,’ can nevertheless also be seen as belonging to the tradition of ‘the colonial world ruled by European imperialism’ (Said 69). Said’s essay places Yeats as a postcolonial poet, and hence, through synecdoche, places Ireland within the postcolonial ambit. Finally, in his introduction to *Nationalism Colonialism and Literature*, Seamus Deane makes the point that colonialism is a process of ‘radical dispossession’ and that a colonized people is often left without a specific history and even ‘as in Ireland and other cases, without a specific language’ (Deane 1990, 10).

Language is, as Deane has rightly noted, central to issues of identity and of course to the signification of that identity. In terms of the territory of Northern Ireland, Scotland equates linguistically with the Protestant, loyalist tradition more so than with Heaney’s own nationalist background. He is able to make this distinction in the sounds of his own place, pointing out that the accents ‘at one end of the parish that reminded you of Antrim and Ayrshire and the Scottish speech I used to hear on the Fair Hill in Ballymena’, while those at the other end of the parish recalled ‘the different speech of Donegal, speech with the direct, clear ring of the Northern Irish I studied when I went to the Gaeltacht in Rannafast’ (Heaney *Finders Keepers* 50). The Scottish tradition was that of the Planters, and he has made this point in an etymological excavation of his own home placename:

Our farm was called Mossbawn. *Moss*, a Scots word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and *bawn*, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses. Mossbawn, the planter’s house on the bog. Yet in spite of this Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss bann, and *bán* is the Gaelic word for white. So might not the thing mean the white moss, the moss of bog-cotton? In the syllables of my home I see a metaphor of the split culture of Ulster. (Heaney *Preoccupations* 35)

Scotland, and its linguistic influence, is at the core of this split culture of Ulster, and it is symbolically coterminous with the colonisation by the Planters from Scotland. In an early poem ‘The Other Side’, referring to a neighbouring farmer of Protestant stock, he sees his brain as a ‘whitewashed kitchen’ which was ‘swept tidy/as the body o’ the kirk’ (Heaney *Wintering Out* 35). This metaphor, allied to the culturally and

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colloquially significant title, encapsulates the binary oppositional culture of Northern Ireland where an individual was either on one side or the other. Heaney felt a pressure to write for his own tribe, to see 'his gift like a slingstone/Whirled for the desperate' (Heaney *North* 72), but interestingly, he also resisted this strongly. In his late poem, *The Flight Path*, he dramatised this sense of obligation and resistance. On a 'May morning, nineteen-seventy-nine' he is confronted by 'this one I'd last met in a dream'. He describes the dream where he had been asked by this school friend, presumably a member of the Provisional IRA, to 'drive a van', presumably loaded with explosives 'to the next customs post/At Pettigo' (Heaney *The Spirit Level* 24), and then leave it and get driven home 'in a Ford' (Heaney *The Spirit Level* 25). Now, in a railway carriage, their encounter is more real, and it encapsulates the antinomy that we have been tracing in his work between the political and the aesthetic:

"When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write
Something for us?" "If I do write something,
Whatever it is, I'll be writing for myself." (Heaney *The Spirit Level* 25)

Heaney has told Denis O'Driscoll that this was Danny Morrison, a Sinn Féin activist (Heaney and O'Driscoll 257-58). And for Heaney, this 'self' is shot through by the language and traces of Scotland and of Scottish literature. In his description of the etymology of Mossbawn, there was no prioritisation of the Gaelic, nationalist meaning of the name: both significations 'the white moss, the moss of bog-cotton 'and the 'planter's house on the bog' coexisted in the linguistic structure of the paragraph and this is very much how Heaney sees the Scottish linguistic inheritance in his life and work. He does not subscribe to the notion of a destruction of an existing community, but rather to a gradual change in the mode of expression of that community. The 'other side' is part of the truth of his inheritance, and it is a truth that is linguistically expressed: 'it is because language exists that truth exists' (Lacan *My Teaching* 28-29).

For Heaney, a core truth of poetry, and of poetic thinking, is the search for truth and fullness of expression. I equate poetry and thinking here in the sense used by Martin Heidegger when he argued that 'thinking as poetizing'. Heidegger was keen to stress connections between thinking and what he termed the poetic. He was anxious to critique the Platonic view that poetry was not of value in philosophical thinking, as it was a distraction from rationality. For Heidegger:

Thinking is primordial poetry, prior to all poesy, but also prior to the poetics of art, since art shapes its work within the realm of language. All

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poetizing, in this broader sense, and also in the narrower sense of the poetic, is in its ground a thinking. (Heidegger *Early Greek Thinking* 19)

In Heidegger's thinking: 'human expression is always a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal' (Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 190), and this translates into the conscious and the unconscious. This sense that truth is somehow fictional or almost accidental, that it needs such strategies to reach the aspect of the unconscious that would make it fuller, is echoed by Heaney himself who makes the point that 'there's such a thing as truth and it can be told — slant' (Heaney and O'Driscoll 467). Heaney like Lacan realises that there can be no overt access for language to any sense of full truth or knowledge; instead this has to come by way of the connection between language and the unconscious, a connection that is far from direct or rationally-driven.

The issue of language is central as both Ireland and Scotland have seen their disparate versions of Gaelic gradually superseded by Standard English. Both countries share a fractured relationship with that language, seeing it as both oppressive and expressive. For Heaney, Scotland forms part of this territory, in both a real and unreal way, to refer back to Heidegger. It is real as it is grounded in the accents and placename etymology of his own place; it is unreal in that it forms a submerged facet of the political unconscious of both nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland. He tells, in his translator's preface to *Beowulf*, how Professor John Braidwood explained that the 'word "whiskey" is the same word as the Irish and Scots Gaelic word *uisce*, meaning water, and that the River Usk in Britain is therefore to some extent the River Uisce (or Whiskey)' (Heaney *Beowulf* xxiv). This led him on to a sense of ownership over a language of colonisation, achieved through this sense of unconscious connection. He describes the effect of this in an image of rivers flowing into each other: 'a kind of linguistic river of rivers issuing from a pristine Celto-British Land of Cockaigne, a riverrun of Finnegans Wakespeak pouring out of the cleft rock of some prepolitical, prelapsarian, urphilological Big Rock Candy Mountain' (Heaney *Beowulf* xxiv). The final reference is to a song recorded by Harry McClintock in 1928, referring to a utopian idea of paradise, and for Heaney, such a paradisaical strain is found when the unifying force of poetry allows differences to be subsumed into a new structure which enables them all to interact and intersect, and to do this he must locate submerged aspects of language and tradition. Heaney actively embraces segments of tradition from literatures 'almost too numerous to count (including English, Irish, Polish, Latin, Italian, American, Ancient Greek, and Scots) and yet his choice within

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these traditions is selective' (Tyler, 7), and it is selective because it is guided by the shaping imperative of his aesthetic which is to be as inclusive as possible in terms of all of the resources of the linguistic unconscious through which he expresses both himself and his sense of identity

We have already seen how *Beowulf* was one such example of a tradition which he found salubrious to his own situation, and later in that translator's preface, he found another unconscious connection between Ireland and Scotland and the English literary tradition, a connection which would diminish another sense of language as oppressive and build another layer of language as emancipatory. He tells of how, as he learned the history of English as part of his studying of *Beowulf*, he came across the word '*Polian*', meaning 'to suffer which looked strange with 'its *thorn* symbol instead of the familiar *th*', but which he then realised was actually not strange at all as it was 'the word that older and less educated people would have used in the country where I grew up', and he remembers his aunt using the term:

And now suddenly here was '*thole*' in the official textual world, mediated through the apparatus of a scholarly edition, a little bleeper to remind me that my aunt's language was not just a self-enclosed family possession but an historical heritage, one that involved the journey *Polian* had made north into Scotland and then across into Ulster with the planters, and then across from the planters to the locals who had originally spoken Irish, and then farther across again when the Scots Irish emigrated to the American South in the eighteenth century. (Heaney *Beowulf* xxv)

He goes on to cite the *frisson* that reading this term in a poem by John Crowe Ransom gave him, and to explain how his 'heart lifted again, the world widened, something was furthered', and interestingly goes on to describe the 'phenomenological pleasure of finding it variously transformed by Ransom's modernity and *Beowulf's* venerability' (Heaney *Beowulf* xxv). 'Phenomenological' here harks back to his earlier reference to 'prepolitical, prelapsarian, urphilological', and all of these terms refer to the unconscious of language, an unconscious for him that is deeply rooted in the connection with Scotland.

This connection works across a number of levels because the Scottish relationship with the English language and culture is paradoxical. The planters who colonised Northern Ireland were in the main Scottish and as such a settler culture associated with hegemonic English imperial power. However, in terms of language, Scottish writers faced the same complex relationship between seeing English as either an oppressive or an

expressive mode of expression. But it is a connection that is intrinsic to Heaney's experience of Northern Ireland. In a poem based on the Sweeney myth, he makes this clear at the level of territory when he speaks of a country road which is running 'straight across North Antrim bog' and which is lined by old fir trees and then in a separate clause which is has the grammatical structure of a sentence he expands on the description of the trees: 'Scotch firs, that is. Calligraphic shocks/Bushed and tufted in prevailing winds' (Heaney *Seeing Things* 89). Here the presence of Scotland is written into the actual shape of the landscape itself, just as it is written into the placename of Heaney's own home. These trees are both Irish and English and serve as prelinguistic, calligraphic signifiers of their migration. In a way they parallel the journey of thole as they move from Scotland to Ireland and they become part of the prevailing winds of the place, though of course such winds can also scatter the seeds beyond their local rootedness. In this way they embody Heidegger's sense of thinking as grounded in the place and in language; in the real and in the unreal.

So when, speaking of Edwin Muir, Heaney can pose the question "Why all this about the English tradition? Is Edwin Muir's place not in Scotland?" (Heaney *Finders Keepers* 225), and can go on to answer in the affirmative but with an interesting disclaimer 'in spite of objections lodged long ago by Hugh MacDiarmid' (Heaney *Finders Keepers* 225-26). And there is also a further *caveat* because it is an expansive and syncretic form of Scottishness which is best appreciated in 'the light of a much older alliance between Scotland and Europe'. This form of writing, which opened 'a path where there is free coming and going between the local conditions and the broader historical realities of the age' allowed Muir to rob 'the English/Scottish dichotomy of much of its determining power' by accepting and availing of the resources it made available and then walking a little dreamily off to one side and into Europe'. For Heaney, this is a lightning rod as it allowed Muir to orient 'himself towards the future' (Heaney *Finders Keepers* 256). It is this expansive view of the postcolonial use of language, a view where the territory of the unconscious allows the territory of the local to become the territory of a more universal country of the mind that is one of the achievements of his Scottish connection. It encouraged him to look for such opportunities as the one found in 'meeting up with *thole* on its multi-cultural odyssey was the feeling that Osip Mandelstam once defined as a "nostalgia for world culture"' (Heaney *Beowulf* xxvi).

The poet to whom Muir is compared in this essay is Hugh MacDiarmid, who is seen as 'far more influential in the literary and political history of Scotland' than Muir (Heaney *Finders Keepers* 256),

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and Heaney has written about him elsewhere in the emblematically entitled 'Tradition and an Individual Talent'. There is a strong influential connection between Eliot and Heaney so the title of this essay is far from random or accidental. Intertextually referencing T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Heaney pluralises the discussion form 'the' individual talent to 'an' individual talent, thereby suggesting that such talents can be plural, and by extension, so can their constituting traditions. Eliot, adducing what he termed the historical sense, set out a very contemporary idea of how art affects the audience by noting that each new work modified the perception of the existing ones and that essentially this is the relationship between tradition and the individual talent who ascribes to a position within that tradition: 'the existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them' (Eliot 44). Eliot here is speaking of a European and English high cultural canon, 'the mind of Europe' (Eliot 46). Eliot is writing about European mainstream culture from an aesthetic perspective and the politics of the text are not really a feature of his discourse. The somatic, ideological and situated condition of those in whose minds the order of tradition is modified by the genuinely new text is not a matter of concern.

Given the pan-European perspective, with its examples from Dante and Homer, it might seem odd that Heaney would refer to this essay in a consideration of Hugh MacDiarmid who wrote in a very culture-specific discourse. I would suggest that it is typical of Heaney's poetizing logic that he places a writer who is immersed in dialect: 'whiles applicable, whiles areird,/The polysemous poem's planned' (Heaney *Preoccupations* 196), in the shadow of Eliot, and in comparison with Wordsworth in the opening lines of the essay in a form of *litotes*. Heaney says that while MacDiarmid would have been the last to 'admit any comparison of himself with an Englishman', nevertheless his poetic career reminds Heaney of that of Wordsworth (Heaney *Preoccupations* 195). Heaney is deliberately placing MacDiarmid in contradistinction to these canonical figures of Wordsworth and Eliot in order to open the frontiers of that canon and of Eliot's notion of tradition by examining the modality of expression used by MacDiarmid, a modality that is not part of a received pan-European sense of tradition.

For Heaney, the medium is very much part of the message. The conscious and unconscious dimensions of language are at the core of his own sense of epistemology, and so, the specific dialect of MacDiarmid is reminiscent of the *thole* which has earned its own rite of passage into the English literary tradition, and which unites, at the level of a cultural

unconscious, his aunt, John Crowe Ransom and the Beowulf poet. He sees MacDiarmid's project as a reactive one, where he wrote from an 'enervating cultural situation' in which he saw 'Scottish civilization as damned and doomed by influences from south of the Border'. His use of 'Lallans, his poetic Scots language', as exemplified above, would seem to place him in the role of a minor poet, as someone outside of any formal canonical tradition, but interestingly, Heaney sees this choice of language as 'based on the language of men, specifically on the dialect of his home district around Langholm in Dumfriesshire' (Heaney *Preoccupations* 195).

Heaney sees this as indicating a sense of 'an uncertainty about language' in MacDiarmid's work which is peculiar not just to MacDiarmid, but also to others who write generally in English:

but particularly out of a region where the culture and language are at variance with standard English utterance and attitudes. It can be a problem of style for Americans, West Indians, Indians, Scots and Irish. Joyce made a myth and a mode out of this self-consciousness, but he did so by taking on the English language itself and wrestling its genius with his bare hands, making it lie down where all its ladders start, in the rag-and-bone shop of Indo-European origins and relationships. (Heaney *Preoccupations* 196)

As Heaney puts it, such self-consciousness is a necessary part of poetic thinking as it is this self-consciousness that delves into a broader cultural unconscious which is referred to in the submerged Yeatsian quotation of 'the foul rag and bone shop of the heart'. This quotation comes from the late poem 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' (Yeats 357), and a further node is set up in the intertextual constellation within which the work of MacDiarmid is being discussed. His work is now being read through the hauntological framework of Eliot, Joyce and Yeats, probably the three most important figures in the literary modernist movement, and writers who are seen as metonyms of high culture.

To read the idiosyncratic language of MacDiarmid in this light is to attempt to deconstruct the certainties that pervade Eliot's writings about the evolving of the European tradition. For Heaney, looking at this from the perspective of someone who is linguistically situated outside of this tradition, these certainties are far from certain, and the function of poetic thinking is to render this uncertainty real in the world of ideas, a mode of thought which has strong affinities with the writings of Heidegger. As we have seen, for Heidegger, all poetizing 'is in its ground a thinking. The poetizing essence of thinking preserves the sway of the truth of Being' (Heidegger *Early Greek Thinking* 19). MacDiarmid's twisting of the English language so that it could take the shape and dialect of 'his home

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district around Langholm in Dumfriesshire' (Heaney *Preoccupations* 195) is part of a process whereby the literary refuses to be cowed by the political. Just as English power colonised Scotland as it did Ireland, so Scottish poetry will not change its voice to attune itself to an English language discourse of colonisation. No matter what cultural and educational ideologies are operative in a society, literature, and specifically poetry is still able to enunciate emancipatory voices of counter-hegemonic resistance, but the process does not stop there.

Instead, Heaney, through his use of *thole*, which mirrors MacDiarmid's use of Lallans, and specifically, through his reading of this in the context of the high culture of modernism, is inserting the wedge of home, as embodied by the dialect pronunciation of the spoken word in the language of the self, of the colonised, into the hegemonic world-language of the standard English of the colonising other; instead of allowing himself to be culturally disenfranchised, he is instead becoming culturally creative and setting up his own views on how home can be enunciated in the language of the self that is also the language of the other at the same time. And in a manner that is specific to this discourse, poetry is capable of infiltrating and transforming the language of the other in order to make it eat the messy, local enunciations of the language of the self, and not completely digest them, but instead alter itself to accommodate them. The nobility of poetry, says Wallace Stevens, 'is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality' (Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* 1), and this pressing can change the shape of that reality and this is precisely what Heaney is doing by inserting MacDiarmid into this very unusual version of a modernist canon. Just as MacDiarmid is 'an' individual talent, which suggests that there can be many more, so by implication, there can be other versions of 'tradition' and this is at the core of Heaney's own thinking on the notion of the frontier. Thus cultural debilitations become cultural invigorations and ultimately cultural transformations as the unconscious pieties of home find some measure of expression in the language of the other – the *Unheimlich* invades the *Heimlich*.

The confidence that Heaney found in his realisation of the world-travelling history of the word *thole* is what gave him the voice-right (Heaney *Beowulf* xxiv) to translate *Beowulf* by using the Northern Irish expression 'So' as a translation for '*Hwaet*' (Heaney *Beowulf* 2-3). And MacDiarmid was a factor in this increased sense of confidence, both personally, and in terms of the Irish literary landscape, as his 'linguistic overweening was hugely encouraged by the example of Joyce, whilst Yeats and other post-Revival writers continued to be highly influential in

his programme of cultural nationalism' (Heaney *Redress of Poetry* 103). Heaney sees part of the value of his Doric Scots as being able to enunciate some 'unconscious elements of a distinctive Scottish psychology, and he has gone on to undertake a parallel project in the case of enunciating aspects of an unconscious Irish psychology himself (Heaney *Redress of Poetry* 104). And of course, the creative imagination to which MacDiarmid gave voice also gave voice to him, as in 1922, he emerged like a new and fiery form out of the agitated element of Christopher Grieve's imagination, or it could be said with 'equal justification that he emerged from the awakened energies of the Scots language itself' (Heaney *Redress of Poetry* 106). In his case, in particular, Heidegger's notion that 'poetically man dwells' (Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought* xiv) is all the more true.

For Grieve, the MacDiarmid *persona* was necessary to act as a signifier for a very particular use of language, a language like the arboreal calligraphy which we referred to earlier, one which resembled what Frost termed 'the sound of sense', which was a 'phonetic patterning which preceded speech and authenticated it, a kind of pre-verbal register to which the poetic voice had to be tuned' (Heaney *Redress of Poetry* 111-112). In this sense, Heaney's view of language is very close to that of Heidegger who sees art, and poetry especially, as one such form of knowing, in which the essence of things is released (Beistegui 120). This access to the prelinguistic, mentioned again by Heaney in his comments on *thole*, reminds us of the calligraphic firs. One of the lessons he learns from MacDiarmid is the ability to access the phonetic, sonic aspects of the unconscious. Through this musical element, 'poetic language commemorates its own inaccessible originary place and it says the unspeakability of the event of language (*it attains*, that is, *the unattainable*)' (Agamben *Language and Death* 78). One aspect of this attaining is found in MacDiarmid's masterpiece 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle', and what Heaney admires about this is the ability to see the thistle as both 'part and parcel of Scottish kitsch' but at the same time as a form of 'the *yggdrasil*, the world-tree, a cosmic symbol that allows for poetry that is more visionary than satiric' (Heaney *Redress of Poetry* 112) and this vision is a revision of the colonial language of English as an expressive as opposed to an oppressive mode – it is an act of imaginative ownership and one which Heaney will repeat in *Beowulf*.

Such acts are not easy and they resist postcolonial distrust of the language of the coloniser. Heaney's thinking is more expansive and is very much in tune with the Heideggerian idea that poetizing is thinking because it takes account of the materiality and the differences inherent in

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language and in the performing of language: ‘poetically man dwells’ and his view that that the ‘thinker of first rank must accomplish, a thinking which has all the purity and thickness and solidity of poetry’ (Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought*, xi-xii). Certainly the changes to grammatology and orthography that are produced by a spoken dialect or accent thicken the language in terms of grounding it in a locality and for Heaney, as for Heidegger, this has a strong philosophical charge in terms of any serious thinking about poetry and its role as a constituting or as an emancipatory discourse.

Heaney writes about his own early poem ‘Follower’ which appeared in *Death of a Naturalist*, and he quotes the first line: ‘My father worked with a horse-plough’, and goes on to note that while this line may seem ‘unremarkable’, it was the result of some revision as his original line was: ‘My father *wrought* with a horse-plough’ (Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* 63). This verb was in common use in Heaney’s South-Derry parlance; it denoted working with tools and connoted a sense of wholehearted commitment to the task. As Heaney observes, the word ‘implied solidarity with speakers of the South Derry vernacular and a readiness to stand one’s linguistic ground’ (Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* 63); in short, it is a version of the ‘synthetic Scots’ (Heaney *Redress of Poetry* 104), and the Lallans dialect of MacDiarmid. Heaney goes on to rhetorically wonder why he made that revision; to ask why he used the ‘more pallid and expected “worked”’, and he provides the answer that it was because he ‘thought twice’, and he notes that thinking twice about a local usage means that:

you have been displaced from it, and your right to it has been contested by the official linguistic censor with whom another part of you is secretly in league. You have been translated from the land of unselfconsciousness to the suburbs of the *mot juste*. This is, of course, a very distinguished neighbourhood and contains important citizens like Mr Joyce, persons who sound equally at home in their hearth speech and their acquired language, persons who see to have obliterated altogether the line between self-conscious and unselfconscious usage, and to have established uncensored access to every coffer of the word-hoard. But this spontaneous multivocal proficiency is as far beyond most writers as unbroken residence within the first idiom of a hermetically sealed, univocal home place. (Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* 63-64)

The use of rational thought is interesting here as it would seem to enact the very process of the Althusserian ISAs which we spoke of earlier. To think within the cognitive and conscious norms of the voices of education and culture is to desire to be in league with, and commended by, that

linguistic censor of which Heaney speaks and which Althusser sees as an ideological apparatus. This censor is both educational and cultural, for as Althusser notes, culture ‘is the ordinary name for the Marxist concept of the *ideological*, (Althusser 242), while he sees education as the apparatus which has ‘replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological State apparatus, the Church’ (Althusser 154). The power of this censor is strong, but a deep or thickened version of language that is to be found in poetry will allow the frontiers of the ‘suburbs of the *mot juste*’ to be extended and broadened so as to include the local pieties of home. The intersection and dialectical interaction of hearth-speech and acquired language is at the core of Heaney’s thinking and of his epistemology of poetry. The skill of his writing can make it seem an easy process but the prog, the gain or profit in this bargain between self-conscious and unselfconscious usage, is not an easy one, but it is worthwhile, and it definitely is at the core of Heaney’s poetizing. Heidegger repeats Herder’s idea that: ‘a breath of our mouth becomes the portrait of the world, the type of our thoughts and feelings in the other’s soul’ (Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought, 136*), and Heaney would agree with the power and transformative notions of the spoken word, especially in terms of taking possession of the language. It is surely with this in mind that he quotes Gerard Manley Hopkins’ adjuration to his readers to ‘take breath and read it with the ears, as I always wish to be read, and my verse becomes all right’ (Heaney *Preoccupations* 88). The act of saying the language of the other in one’s own voice conveys a power of personal ownership which can deconstruct the colonial hegemonic overtones of the English language. We have seen evidence of this need to inhabit the language of the coloniser on an individual basis but now we turn to a more overt collective example of this process of redefining the frontiers of language.

Heidegger sees language as that which ‘first brings man about, brings him into existence’, an as that which is always ‘a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal’ (Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought, 190*), and there is evidence of this crossing of the frontier in Heaney’s eponymous essay in *The Redress of Poetry*, where he looks at the frontier between poetry as art and poetry as some form of political act with a force in the real world. Heaney as ever is patrolling the frontier between poetry as being full of ‘self-delighting inventiveness’ but also of being part of a socio-cultural context of ‘politically approved themes, post-colonial backlash and “silence-breaking” writing of all kinds’. He is keen to stress the integrity of both positions and uses the term redress as a syncretic vehicle with which to express this duality, a duality that parallels Heidegger’s real and unreal. He stresses that care needs to be taken while

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using poetry as an ‘agent for proclaiming and correcting injustices’ (Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* 5) that we do not in any way neglect the other frontier which he sees as redressing ‘poetry as poetry’ which sets up its own category (Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* 6). For Heaney, the frontiers between aesthetic and aesthetic-political teleology of poetry is one in constant need of patrolling and also one where the relationship the tradition and the individual needs to be monitored. If, as Lyotard has suggested, the meta-narratives of culture are now working at a societally-unconscious level, then any individual writer needs to engage with the hegemonic meta-narratives of colonisation and language if he or she is to achieve any form of emancipation from these:

Obviously, patriotic or propagandist intent is far from being a guarantee of poetic success, but in emergent cultures the struggle of an individual consciousness towards affirmation and distinctness may be analogous, if not coterminous, with a collective straining towards self-definition; there is a mutual susceptibility between the formation of a new tradition and the self-fashioning of individual talent. (Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* 6)

Once again we see the interaction of the individual with tradition, and as ever with Heaney, there is an interrogative dimension to this assertion as the new writing will be part of a new form of tradition. The individual writer has the power to shape and change that tradition by looking to a new unconscious meta-narrative, as embodied by the terms ‘*bis-cake*’, the messy stuff of the North, and Lallans.

But in terms of individual talents who are attempting to alter the traditions from which they are constituted, the situation becomes more fraught and the frontiers become more difficult to define and demarcate. The unconscious meta-narrative of tradition has already achieved its influence: even the most disaffected writers, whether they are post-colonial or feminist or nationalistically-driven, ‘will have internalized the norms and forms of the tradition from which they wish to secede’ (Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* 6). This is precisely what Heaney does in his translation of *Beowulf*. He opens his translation with the colloquial ‘So’ replacing the rhetorically declarative ‘*Hwaet*’, and explains how this word has been taken from its local usage, that of relations of his from Northern Ireland who had a kind of ‘Native American solemnity’, and that it functioned as both an expression which ‘obliterates all previous discourse and narrative, and at the same time functions as an exclamation calling for immediate attention utterance’ (Heaney *Beowulf* xxvii).

He also put the word ‘bawn’ in *Beowulf*, something which also placed the local as the voice of the universal, and I would argue, his reading of

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Scottish poets such as Muir and MacDiarmid was a seminal factor in this process. Both poets' faith in the local as a means towards enunciating an imaginative universal contributed to Heaney's own sense of this voice-right. In terms of tradition and an individual talent, Heaney deliberately inserted a postcolonial, South Derry, version of English into the beginning of that tradition:

Putting a bawn into *Beowulf* seems one way for an Irish poet to come to terms with that complex history of conquest and colony, absorption and resistance, integrity and antagonism, a history which has to be clearly acknowledged by all concerned in order to render it ever more 'willable forward/Again and again and again.' (Heaney *Beowulf* xxx)

The confidence and the openness that allowed Heaney to begin one of the canonical works of the English language with a word taken from 'Hiberno-English Scullionspeak,' (Heaney *Beowulf* xxvii) comes, I would contend, from the realization and the enunciation of the Scottish strain that is part of his literary and cultural unconscious. The sense that local words, such as 'graith' for 'harness', and 'hoked' for 'rooted about' can have 'special body and force' (Heaney *Beowulf* xxx) is rooted in his use of the unconscious connections with Muir and MacDiarmid, themselves standing in metonymy for the language and culture of Scotland. Through learning to *thole*, Heaney has come through the postcolonial sense of language as oppressive and instead has created a corpus of work which is predicated on an ownership of language which now becomes expressive of its different constituents

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