

## *At the Frontier of Language: Literature, Theory, Politics*

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### **Abstract**

This essay examines the problematics of language and identity. Beginning with a deconstructive reading of Seamus Heaney's poem 'Broagh', it moves on to deconstruct the signifier of Ulster, showing how the use of this term, by both nationalists and unionists, serves to deconstruct the identitarian politics of place associated with both traditions.

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The relationship between literature, theory and politics is one that is often seen as at best, tangential, and at worst, non-existent. This paper will demonstrate how the linguistics of poetry can be successfully interrogated by the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, and will go on to show how this deconstruction becomes operative in terms of analysing the political situation in Northern Ireland.

Derrida, and deconstruction generally, has been criticised for denying the relationship between language and reality, and there is a paucity of work done on the connections between deconstruction and politics. In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida refers explicitly to this issue in a tone which makes his exasperation at various textualist misreadings of his project clear. In response to a question on language as reference, Derrida had the following points to make: 'it is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is,

in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language.' (Kearney 1984, 123)

By probing the connection between language and reference, by demonstrating the arbitrary relationships between language and a people, I would suggest that Derrida's philosophy is one of the most important tools in the critique of nationalism in all its forms. It is on such a motivated connection between poetry and place that this paper will now focus. Seamus Heaney's early poem Broagh embodies such a view of language.

### BROAGH

Riverbank, the long rigs  
ending in broad docken  
and a canopied pad  
down to the ford.

The garden mould  
bruised easily, the shower  
gathering in your heelmark  
was the black O

in Broagh,  
its low tattoo  
among the windy boortrees  
and rhubarb-blades

ended almost  
suddenly, like that last  
gh the strangers found  
difficult to manage. (Heaney 1972, 27)

Dillon Johnston sees this poem (among others) as positing some 'radical connection between the land and the language it nurtures' (Johnston 1985, 121-166), while Elmer Andrews locates

Heaney's work within the same aesthetic ideological framework when he writes: that in Heaney's place-name poems 'language is pushed towards a magical relationship with the things it is speaking about' (Andrews 1988, 55). This conflation of land and language into a synthesis in which all contraries are resolved, is typical of prevailing studies of Heaney's writing. All of these studies operate within the unstated theoretical framework that is seen by Terry Eagleton as involving: a phenomenalist reduction of the linguistic to the sensuously empirical, a confusing of mind and world, sign and thing, cognition and percept, which is consecrated in the Hegelian symbol...Such aesthetic ideology, by repressing the contingent, aporetic relation which holds between the spheres of language and the real, naturalizes or phenomenizes the former, and is thus in danger of converting the accidents of meaning to organic natural process in the characteristic manner of ideological thought. (Eagleton 1990, 10). It is this ideological mode of thought that underwrites the excesses of nationalist politics, and the relationship between such ideological positions and literary interpretations needs to be unpacked.

The above observations, by Johnston and Andrews, deal with the seemingly obvious 'point' of the poem, namely that the terminal 'gh' sound in the word Broagh is part of a specifically Irish phonetic register and, as such, is unpronounceable to 'strangers' - in this case, the English. The view of the 'last gh' as acting politically or nationalistically is based on a logocentric assumption that is endemic to nationalist politics, and to conventional, seemingly a-political modes of criticism. The seemingly motivated connection between language and land provides a warrant for actions, be they political or paramilitary, which seek to defend, or uphold, the sacral link between a people and a place. It is as if the land itself conspires against the 'strangers', as the 'shower' gathering in 'your heelmark/ was the black O/ in Broagh.' Here, land and language combine in a quasi-organic relationship which underscores the nationalist position. It is as if the land itself is endowed with an ethnicity which is politically exclusive as the 'strangers' find the last gh 'difficult to manage.' This quasi-organic relationship between a people and a place is a philosophical determinant of all forms of nationalism; it is not a very large step from using language to isolate 'strangers' from natives to

driving those same 'strangers' from the sacred land, a process given the euphemistic title of ethnic cleansing.

It is through story and song that such a relationship with land is created and conserved; names of streets or townlands have become signifiers for nationalist or unionist positions, and the rite de passage of one tradition through what is perceived as the land of the other, has been a seminal cause of violence during the 'marching season' in Northern Ireland for the past fifty years. Therefore, what could be termed an epistemological critique of such songs and stories can have the effect of calling into question the essentialist notions that underpin such nationalistic ideologies, and the linguistic theories of Derrida are part of the methodology of such a critique.

In *Positions*, Derrida lucidly explains how 'the play of differences' creates a new economy of meaning in semiotic terms as the play of differences 'supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself' (Derrida 1981, 26). By subjecting Broagh to a deconstructive analysis, the linguistic and ideological contradictions of the poem can be articulated.

Writing in *Preoccupations*, Heaney had this to say about the placename poems of *Wintering Out*: 'Mossbawn was bordered by the townlands of Broagh and Anahorish, townlands that are forgotten Gaelic music in the throat, bruach and anach fhíor uisce, the riverbank and the place of clear water.' (Heaney 1980, 36). The Gaelic word 'bruach' then, is translated here as 'riverbank', and it is typical of the Gaelic nominal paradigm of 'dinnseanchas, poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology' (Heaney 1980, 131). Given the difficulty of the Gaelic phonetic system, British cartographers transliterated many such names into the British phonetic and graphological system; hence the transliteration from 'bruach' to 'broagh'. Mary Hamer makes this point in her study of the Ordinance Survey project in Ireland:

In one sense, the famous ordinance survey project in Britain could make no intervention in the cognitive mapping processes of the Irish, for the Survey officers were not themselves

creating a new environment, only recording a given one. But the very process of their record...involved some modification of that environment: ancient boundaries were not always left undisturbed, place-names were anglicized, either directly or more subtly by the attempt to arrive at spellings that looked acceptable to an English eye. So an official Ireland was produced, an English-speaking one, with its own ideology of Irish space. (Hamer 1989, 188)

'Broagh' is, then, not a Gaelic word, but rather it is a transliteration of the Gaelic word 'bruach' by the very 'strangers' who are deemed to find it so 'difficult to manage'! The 'strangers' who found the original pronunciation 'difficult' have altered it, changing the phonetic area of difficulty into another sound that, almost by definition, they will be able to manage.

In terms of a literary reading, the etymology of the word undercuts the Andrews and Tamplin readings. The guttural velar fricative /ch/ that is central to Gaelic phonology has been elided to the less guttural /gh/, and this graphematic fact deconstructs the thematic image of subtle linguistic resistance by Heaney. In fact, the 'gh' is the phonemic representation of the transformation of the original Gaelic morpheme into the phonetic and graphological register of Standard English; it is the mark of the 'strangers' on the place, rather than a mode of linguistic resistance. In the foregrounding of this phoneme, the poem is deconstructing its own position with regard to 'the exclusivity of the pronunciation of "Broagh" '.

At a political level, this deconstruction demonstrates the impossibility of a linguistic decolonization, of a recuperation of an ur-Ireland which outlasts the transient historical phase of colonization. It demonstrates the epistemological invalidity of basing a nationalist ideology on such tenuous linguistic ground. The language of the native, seen as an overt politicization of the land, turns out to be the language of the stranger; so the act of reading reverses the classic binary opposition of self/other; native/stranger.

This reversal of prevailing hierarchical binary oppositions is a necessary step in a deconstructive reading. As Derrida himself notes: 'to deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to

overturn the hierarchy at a given moment' (Derrida 1981, 41). But this reversal is only the first step in the deconstructive project. Making the point that an opposition of metaphysical concepts is never the face-to-face of two terms, but a hierarchy and an order of subordination, Derrida goes on to say that deconstruction 'does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated.'

This displacement can be located in the play of *différance* between the present English signifier 'broagh' and the trace of the absent Gaelic signifier 'bruach'. Though the latter is not present in the poem, it does exercise a force through the paradigmatic chain and through the connection between linguistic frames of reference in the opening of the poem - in short, through the logic of the 'trace', the part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the sign. Derrida's trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience. An immediate effect of this epistemology of language is the deconstruction of essentialist motivated connections between word and world; the word used to refer to a piece of land is in arbitrary relationship to that land, inasmuch as it is dependent on a particular language, and not on any Cratylus-inspired umbilical connection.

That 'bruach' is the other of 'broagh' is true on many levels: linguistic, political, semantic and ontological. The 'bruach/broagh' opposition enacts an identity that is constituted by *différance*. It can be called an economy - 'not a reconciliation of opposites, but rather a maintaining of disjunction. Identity constituted by difference is economy' (Spivak 1976, xlii). This economy enacts the economy of presence-absence (the 'black O of Broagh') that is at the core of Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics.

In terms of nationalistic identity, and in terms of the location of such an identity in terms of a privileged linguistic identity between language and place, this reading posits an economy rather

than a referent, and it is here that the political force of theory comes to the fore. It is not a question of which signifier, 'broagh' or 'bruach', should be given prominence; rather it is a question of incorporating both into a differential conceptual paradigm. Simplistic notions of presence are no longer the sole criterion of identity; as Derrida observes: 'the gram as différance, then, is a structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence....The activity or productivity connoted by the a of différance refers to the generative movement in the play of differences' (Derrida 1981, 27). Identity as difference, or as hybridity is the antithesis of much of contemporary cultural nationalism. The constructive matrices of identity usually involved shared concepts of race, history, language and place. To posit an identification based on difference is to destabilize much nationalist and cultural nationalist theory, and the use of language to undertake this redefinition brings us back to the use of literary theory in a political context. Interrogations of notions of racial or linguistic purity can demonstrate that there is no linguistic or epistemological basis for those same notions.

Indeed, carrying meaning from language to language is a paradigm of the impossibility of locating a central, closed meaning in one language, and the related impossibility of fusing language and place. The political implications argue in favour of a politics in which difference is valued rather than quelled. For Homi Bhabha, translation is a 'place of hybridity' where the final source of meaning is '*neither the one nor the other*' (original italics) (Bhabha 1994, 7)

The dissimulating and differential force of language is also to be found in Heaney's book, *North*, a work where poetry and politics are necessarily imbricated:

Perhaps, that absolute truth, defined as the adequacy of language to conscious intention, without any unconscious remains or side effects, is not a justifiable norm of political theory and practice. If intentionality in politics is governed by the same necessity as intention in communication, the necessity of the possibility of unintended side effects, deviations and missed targets, then, it too, would be questioned by the deconstructive argument. (Ryan 1982, 114)

Within the socio-political sphere, the notion of meaning is of central importance; words, within political discourse, are seen, typically, as transparent bearers of previously composed thoughts; words are, in politics, frequently used to obfuscate, rather than to clarify, political and ideological positions. As politics often deals in the future, political policies and plans often only exist linguistically - there is, as yet, no real referent with which they can be allied. To apply a deconstructive critique to the language of politics is to give the deconstructive project a relevance that it is often denied in the contemporary academic mentalité.

In terms of the signifier 'north', the poetic and the politic intersect. Heaney's juxtaposition of different spatio-temporal articulations of the signified attached to 'North', is governed by an ideologically motivated choice which has been seen as one sided by Conor Cruise O'Brien, who sees *North* as: 'the tragedy of a people in a place: the Catholics of Northern Ireland' (Cruise-O'Brien 1975, 404-405). However, the aesthetic force of such ideologically motivated choices is neither confined to the field of poetry, nor is it confined to one tradition in the Northern Irish conflict.

On seeing a volume entitled *North*, the horizon of expectations at the time, given that the poet himself came from County Derry, would have anticipated a book about the contemporary situation in Northern Ireland in 1975. Blake Morrison makes the point that there was a certain demand for 'war poets' (Morrison 1982, 55) at that time. Hence, the Saussurean structure of signification would be represented by signifier/signified: North/contemporary violence. However, the broad spatial and temporal scope of the first part of the book deconstructed such expectations, and liberated the reductive associations of the signifier 'north' by allowing it to refer to multiple signifieds - Northern Ireland; northern Europe of the Iron Age; Ireland and England as part of contemporary northern Europe.

The relationship of a post-structuralist theory of language as *différance* to the real world is often seen as tenuous. However, if theory is to have any force, then the logical conclusion of a theory of language which sees all language as constructed by *différance* must be that political language is



also susceptible to deconstructive critique. The language of politics, as Ryan has mentioned, has no more rights over the property of intentional meaning than has the language of poetry. While the relationship between language, intention and reality has been challenged by post-structuralism, and particularly by Derrida's project, there is, as Norris says:

clearly no question of Derrida's falling into that facile strain of postmodernist rhetoric that cheerfully pronounces an end to the regime of reality, truth and enlightenment critique. (Norris 1992, 18).

It has already been noted above that for Derrida, the connection between language and reality is in no way denied; what is denied is that the connection is a motivated one. That language has an influence on the real is clear; that the connection between the two is highly problematic is, at this stage of the discussion, also clear.

In political and historical terms, 'north' is also a signifier which denotes plural signifieds, and which connotes plural ideological definitions of place and identity. A deconstructive critique would make the point that the signifieds which are attached to this signifier are neither ideologically nor politically disinterested. Indeed, in September 1994, the chances of peace in Northern Ireland were seen to revolve around the exact 'meaning' of the I.R.A.'s 'complete cessation' of hostilities, and whether this cessation was 'permanent'. Those who spoke about this as a merely semantic point clearly misrecognized the ideologically driven nature of language, and of its effect on the 'real'. Northern Ireland, from its inception in 1922, has been a place where the ideological nature of linguistic choice is all-pervasive.

There are two possible directions which such a deconstructive critique could take. One would be to interrogate the aporetic relationships that exist within the linguistic discourses of the different sections involved in the conflict, and to problematize the seemingly naturalized connections between the Symbolic and the Real (in terms of language and the subject position) that are taken up by each section of the community. The second direction would lead towards a possible post-structuralist or

deconstructive politics: a politics which would be decentred, and hence would offer a possible solution to the post-colonial impasse which has arisen from the attempt to seek a solution based on a conflation of the notion of a binary opposition (Protestant/Catholic - Unionist/Nationalist), with its inbuilt hierarchical structure, with the notion of a centre (Unionist dominated government - Stormont) which, by definition, would control the play of forces in the resultant political structure.

To take the language issue first, Unionist politicians in Northern Ireland generally refer to 'Ulster' when speaking about the place wherein they live. This signification is common, so common that the adequation between this signifier and Northern Ireland is seen as 'natural'. However, this equation of Ulster with Northern Ireland is a geographical and historical absurdity. Ulster, or 'Ulaid', is one of the five traditional political divisions of the island of Ireland, the others being Munster, Leinster, Connacht and Mide. These divisions can be traced back to the eighth century (Byrne 1967, in Moody and Martin (eds) 1984, 58), and are based on the geographical, political and territorial premise of the unified nature of Ireland. Traditionally, Ulster comprises of nine counties: Derry, Antrim, Down, Armagh, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan. When 'Ulster' is referred to, these are the counties that make up the province. Northern Ireland, as created in 1922, is comprised of the first six of the above-named counties of Ulster; the other three, which were demographically hugely Catholic in population, remained a part of the Irish Free State (McCracken 1967, in Moody and Martin (eds) 1984, 314-315). Hence, while the political entity of Northern Ireland is part of 'Ulster', it is not the totality of Ulster.

However, this ideologically motivated adequation of 'Ulster' with 'Northern Ireland' permeates both official and unofficial discourses within cultural and political realms. For example, the television service that is produced in, and for, Northern Ireland by ITV in Britain is called UTV - Ulster Television. The full title of the main Unionist party is the Ulster Unionist party, while the police force is called the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The part-time military unit which serves in Northern Ireland, and whose composition is largely local volunteers, is called the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The equation of the traditional political unit of Ulster with the more recent political division of Northern Ireland is ideologically motivated. If Ulster can be equated with Northern Ireland, then the seemingly arbitrary nature of the border between the six counties and the twenty six counties is validated and valorized by historical precedent. The six counties become synecdochic of a time-honoured spatial division. Hence, the official Unionist position can invoke Irish history to underline the permanent nature of their political entity, and to provide an historically and geographically legitimated subject position which naturalizes the politically motivated origins of the state of Northern Ireland.

The influence of linguistic choices on the 'real' is also to be found in a similarly motivated nomenclature that is to be found in the sphere of unofficial Unionist para-military activity. These groupings are called, variously, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence Association, the Ulster Freedom Fighters and the Red Hand Commandos. The latter refers to the traditional iconic heraldic symbol for Ulster, a red hand against a white background. All of these groups (which have been declared illegal by the British government), invoke the validity of history and of ancient provincial political divisions in their attempt to achieve legitimation for their actions. At both a political and a subversive level then, various Unionist interests in Northern Ireland, while strenuously opposing any political or territorial connection with the rest of Ireland, and while seeing any form of a united Ireland as political, religious and social anathema, nevertheless aporetically invoke the ancient political divisions of a unitary Ireland to legitimate their own stance. This deconstructive irony demonstrates the usefulness of post-structuralism in the deconstruction of seemingly fixed (naturalized) political and ideological positions.

The collective subject position of Unionism seeks validation in terms of an entity which it has seen as 'other' in every sense. This section of a community which proclaims its 'Britishness' and its 'loyalism' does so in a language and a nomenclature which is valorized by a view of the island of Ireland as an integral political unit, divided into four provinces: Munster, Leinster, Connacht and

Ulster. The deconstructive irony, already noted, where the 'last gh' in Broagh turned out to deconstruct the intentional cultural reclamation of the land by the native Irish language, has its analogue here, where the political philosophy of the Unionist position is deconstructed by the adjective which is prefixed to so many of its political and security institutions. From a Republican perspective, the signifier 'Ulster' serves both as a reminder of the lack of territorial integrity that is due to the political division of the country, as well as underlining the lack of power wielded by the Northern Irish Republican, Nationalist tradition over the systems of signification that are used to define them.

The play of signification involving the nomenclature of 'north' demonstrates comprehensively the constitutive nature of systems of signification in defining and delimiting the 'real' world. To extrapolate this point further: the 'north' of an Ulster unionist is not the 'north' of an Ulster nationalist. Indeed, as has been shown, the signifier 'Ulster', as used in the previous sentence, has plural significations, significations that are ideologically determined. Both of these examples, as well as reinforcing the Derridean and Lacanian notions of a sliding of the signifier under the signified, and of ongoing referral and displacement of meaning along the signifying chain, also reinforce the assessment offered by this discussion of aesthetic ideology.

Politics, as a discourse, is valorized by aesthetic modes of being. Holistic totalities are the stuff of politics. Language is used performatively, in an effort to point towards a future where division will be annealed, and where ideology will triumph. Given the post-structuralist view that language shapes our perception of reality, then a critique of language, and of the ideological drives and swerves that are operative within a particular discourse, will provide a clearer perspective of the motivating interests which invite us to misrecognize ourselves in the mirror of language, and to look for possible alternatives to political relationships dominated by the concept of 'centrality'.

Here, the second direction of a post-structuralist politics can be articulated. Having explored the linguistic decentring that is constitutive of the Northern Irish situation, the political decentring

that is paradigmatic of the post-colonial situation remains to be analyzed. Both Unionists and nationalists are attempting to find a 'centre' that accords with their own political beliefs. One section looks towards Britain and the union that has existed since 1801, while the other section looks towards Dublin, and the constitutional claim which cites the territorial integrity of the island of Ireland.

A post-structuralist interrogation of these problems would focus on the problematization of the whole notion of centrality. It would point to the aporetic relationship between Unionist denial of any form of a united Ireland and their consistent use of the signifier 'Ulster' to legitimize their position in terms of a unity which they insist on denying. It would also point to the fallacious position of the Nationalists, whose invocation of historical notions of unity have been challenged by a number of historical studies which have pointed out that Ireland has never been, politically or culturally, 'unified' as a nation-state in the accepted sense of the word. Indeed, in the classical Irish law tracts, the notion of 'high king' or 'king of Ireland' did not exist (Ó Corráin 1972, 28). Such logocentric political theories of centralized power, located in the presence of a king or queen, were brought to Ireland by the Normans. The Nationalist notion of originary presence proves to be as illusory as the notion of 'Broagh' as an originary, Gaelic signifier.

However, the dissemination and deferral of meaning that has been pointed out here opens a liminal space where notions of identity are open to question, and where any attempt at finding a transcendental signified is deconstructed by the language used in the search. It is precisely such an 'interstitial passage' between 'fixed identifications' that, in the words of Homi Bhabha, 'opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (Bhabha 1994, 4). Such a politics would attempt to think beyond such originary notions, and instead would attempt to:

think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the

act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha 1994, 1-2)

This notion of cultural hybridity, which is based on difference rather than on similarity or some form of oppositional hierarchy, would seem to posit some hope of a political discourse which would be relevant to Northern Ireland.

A post-structuralist politics would take on board the deconstructive interrogations of centrality and presence, and instead, would valorize 'difference'. Catholics and Protestants, to give a religious terminology, or Nationalist and Unionists, to use the coinage of political discourse, define themselves in terms of a classical binary opposition. In *Whatever You Say Say Nothing* (Heaney 1975, 57-60), Heaney captures this binary differential definition in terms of self and other in a stanza which delineates how even the choice of Christian name is seen as pointing to one's politico-religious identity:

Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,  
Subtle discrimination by addresses  
With hardly an exception to the rule

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod  
And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape. (Heaney 1975, 59)

This binary pattern of definition by opposition is similar to that analyzed by the Cardiff Textual Analysis Group in their previously noted study of political speeches. In the following quotation, the referents are the USA and the USSR; however, the referents could just as well be the traditions of Catholic-Nationalism and Protestant-Unionism.

Writing about political issues (specifically nuclear issues in the original), the point is made that such issues are not independent of cultural practices but are produced by the power relations indissociable from the values and assumptions which sustain them. Moreover, the binary pattern of...confrontation takes the oppositional form that language seems to prescribe: one position defines itself by opposing the other, by fixing difference as

opposition, and thus each [tradition]...unifies its subjects in a relation of antithesis which appears as a condition of meaning. The unity of one position - its power and meaning - depends on its polar relationship to the other: position becomes an effect of opposition. (Cardiff Textual Analysis Group 1988, 381).

However, the seeming rigidities of each position have been deconstructed through the aporetic relation between language and reality. In this discussion alone, nationalist originary myths have been shown to deconstruct themselves, from

...that last  
gh the strangers found  
difficult to manage (Heaney: 1972; 27),

which turned out to be a phoneme which existed within the linguistic register of those very strangers, to the signifiers/non-signifiers that were 'anahorish/anach fhíor uisce' and 'broagh/bruach'. In terms of the Unionist political ideology, the etymology and historical baggage carried by the adjective 'Ulster' serves to deconstruct a large amount of the seeming rigidity of their position on, and opposition to, a united Ireland.

A post-structuralist politics would apply the lessons of textuality to the real. The Cardiff Textual Analysis Group make the point that the 'alternative to binary opposition in textual terms, as deconstruction proposes, is the acknowledgement of difference' (Cardiff Textual Analysis Group 1988, 393). This acknowledgement of difference can be advanced more easily when the deconstructive aporias of each position are interrogated. As Michael Ryan says:

Such a politics would not have a center in the sense of a consciousness in command of its intentions, a singular subject (the urban industrial proletariat) which excludes all other possible subjective centers, or a Party office, the ultimate arbiter of truth and the source of decreed political intentionality. (Ryan 1982, 115).

In other words, there would be no centre, no transcendental signified. Structures (post-structures) of such a politics would be characterized by their 'resistance to axiomatic foundationalism' (Ryan 1982,

115). In a Europe which seems to be moving towards some form of unity, the concept of a 'center' that is outside the play of the structure is fast becoming redundant. A narrow line of centre-seeking vision, whose focal length cannot move beyond Dublin or Belfast is in danger of missing the point that in a European Community, the centre is transient, changing every six months, from member state to member state.

Given that aporetic anomalies already inhabit the binary opposition (Ireland has a common agricultural policy and is seen as a single entity in some sporting events, such as rugby, cricket, gaelic football and hurling), a decentred political structure, or structures, which would grant the differences of each tradition, and which would be critical of any tendency towards aesthetic ideology (which has, both nationally and internationally, given rise 'to a whole bad history of mystified national-aestheticist themes' (Norris 1992, 167) ), could go some way to providing a meeting ground for both traditions.

Perhaps the final word on the notion of a post-structuralist politics should be left to Michael Ryan. His proposals for such a politics, while globally oriented, would seem to have a particular relevance for Ireland. The diaspora that has given rise to the huge 'Irish' populations in America, Australia, Canada, Britain and most of the member states of the EU has become part of the mentalité of the Irish mindset; this diaspora has seen the creation, in these countries, of huge differences in terms of national identity, but of an underlying sense of being, in some way, 'Irish' while at the same time being a citizen of one's country of birth. The application of such a cultural politics in the Northern Irish context is surely the best possible hope for the future. As Ryan says, speaking of centralist dominated political structures:

All such teleological-archaeological isomorphism would be abandoned in favor of multiple, situationally defined, complexly mediated, differentiated strategies. In other words, the "decentering" of the metaphysical assumption implies a decentering of the political project. This decentering....would leave open the possibility of additional situational centers forming...that normally would be marginalized by a more centered approach. (Ryan 1982,



115-116).

This prioritization and acceptance of difference, which is central to the post-structuralist paradigm, implies the seemingly 'remarkable possibility that deconstruction is in the end a material practice' (Cardiff Textual Analysis Group 1988, 393). It is this possibility that is addressed by the conclusion of this discussion. Just as the earlier readings were theoretically driven, so a politics which recognized the 'decentering of the metaphysical assumption' (Ryan 1982, 115) of a self-knowing subject, pre-existing a language which is seen as transparent, must be, by definition, decentred itself. It is to such a decentred, post-structuralist politics that this discussion points.

As Anthony Easthope has indicated, in a defence of theory conducted in the pages of *The Sunday Times*: 'discourses always have effects' (Easthope: 1994; 9); one of the possible effects of post-structuralist discourse could well be in the political sphere. As Easthope has pointed out:

Theory provokes us to criticise the institutions which govern and legitimize interpretation. It unfixes the solidity of the old hierarchies wherever they turn up....Infuriating, radical, seductive, theory has something new to say about almost everything. (Easthope 1994, 9)

This discussion has already utilized a post-structuralist poetics which pointed to some 'new' ways of 'say[ing] something' about the writings of Seamus Heaney; it has also pointed towards a post-structuralist politics which has 'something new to say' about the political situation in Northern Ireland, itself the locus of the poetry and prose of Seamus Heaney.

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