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## Past master: Czeslaw Milosz and his impact on the poetry of Seamus Heaney

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## **Michael Richard Parker**

Past master: Czeslaw Milosz and his impact on the poetry of  
Seamus Heaney

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The essay examines the influence of Czeslaw Milosz on Seamus Heaney's writing, focusing primarily on the early 1980s, which was a period of major transition in Heaney's literary and academic career, following the success of *Field Work* (1979) in the USA and his appointment as a Visiting Lecturer at Harvard. It establishes the political and biographical contexts for Heaney's reception of Milosz's prose and poetry, and discusses the importance of Milosz's Nobel Lecture and his memoir, *Native Realm*, in fostering Heaney's feelings of affinity and sense of difference. Composed in the wake of *Solidarity's* challenge to the post-war status quo, Milosz's reflections in the Nobel Lecture on history, art, and the artist's responsibilities had a profound resonance for his fellow exile, uncertain as he was how to address the Hunger Strikes in the collection he was working on, *Station Island*. The essay thus explores the range of factors which resulted in Milosz becoming 'The Master' to Heaney, and ends offering an analysis of his poem of that title. It draws on a range of literary and historical sources, including the Heaney archives at Emory, Atlanta. Since it is the centenary of Milosz's birth, it offers a timely reminder of his importance in world literature. (Since it may not be familiar to many readers, I have included an outline of Milosz's biography at the start of the essay.)

### **Keywords**

Polish and Irish poetry; world history; art and politics; Czeslaw Milosz; Seamus Heaney

## Textual Practice

One of the strangest regularities to be taken into account by a historian of literature and art is the affinity binding people who live at the same time in countries distant from one another. (Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry*)<sup>1</sup>

One of the most enduring of Seamus Heaney's many literary exemplars over the last 30 years has been the Polish–Lithuanian poet, Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004), who rose to international prominence in 1980 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Swedish Academy's official citation lays great stress on the metaphysical and ethical dimensions of Miłosz's corpus, referring to the 'uncompromising', 'unerring perspicacity' manifested in his texts, which embody a lifetime's resistance to the forces of 'evil and havoc',<sup>2</sup> and, they might have added, 'death and nothingness'.<sup>3</sup> Though it in no way explains the scale of his artistic achievement, Miłosz's early and repeated exposure to political turbulence and to acts of appalling cruelty clearly left its impress on his moral imagination and vision. Violence loomed over much of his childhood, as his family were caught up successively in the events of World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Russian–Polish war. In his late twenties and thirties, he witnessed the carnage of World War II, and then, with the 'peace', the assimilation of Poland, the Baltic States, and most of the rest of Eastern Europe into the Soviet bloc, with the complicity of the British and American Governments.

Following the war, Miłosz worked in the Polish diplomatic service, and was given postings first in Washington and subsequently in Paris. In the late 1940s, as the Cold War intensified, Poland's Soviet-installed communist regime lurched increasingly in a Stalinist direction. In order to ensure 'Poland's reliability in the looming international conflict',<sup>4</sup> the Polish-born Soviet marshal, Konstantin Rokossovsky, was appointed Minister of Defence in November 1949; five years earlier he had been the very commander who had delayed the Soviet advance on Warsaw, thereby enabling the Nazis to crush the Warsaw Rising and subsequently raze the city to the ground.<sup>5</sup> Since the Catholic Church constituted a major challenge to their authority and ideology, the communist government introduced a range of measures designed to destroy its influence, by imprisoning over 500 clergy, amongst them Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, and by confiscating Church lands.<sup>6</sup> A purge from public positions of individuals with middle-class origins or with relatives in the West was initiated, which extended also to anyone who had seen service in the Allied forces or with the underground *Armia Krajowa*, which had been loyal to the London-based Polish Government-in-exile during the war.<sup>7</sup> Pressures were exerted on those engaged in education, journalism, and the arts. In 1950, members of the Polish Writers'

Union were informed of an edict from the Politburo which required that all future literary works subscribe to the principles of 'socialist realism'.<sup>8</sup>

The accelerating pace of repression must have appalled Miłosz, as may well have been noted by his political masters. In December 1950, during a return visit to Poland, his passport was confiscated by the authorities, thereby effectively trapping him in his adopted land. Only after appeals to President Bierut from the Foreign Minister's wife was his passport restored, enabling Miłosz to return to France, where on 1 February 1951 he formally requested political asylum.

For much of the next three decades Miłosz wrestled with exile. The period in France was extremely difficult as initially his wife and child were unable to join him and he lacked 'the resilience necessary to oppose the corroding effects of isolation'.<sup>9</sup> To the humiliation of being dependent on others and having so little money was added hostility from some in the Polish émigré community, who considered him politically suspect as he had been employed by the Communists. One of the few French intellectuals to offer friendship and support was Albert Camus; according to one of Camus' biographers, others on the left regarded Miłosz as 'something of a leper or a sinner against "the future"',<sup>10</sup> since in texts like *The Captive Mind* he punctured naive visions of what Socialist Revolution might bring. Meanwhile back in Poland the Bierut regime co-ordinated attacks on him, using former colleagues and fellow writers as their mouthpieces.<sup>11</sup> In 1960, he was appointed to a lectureship in America in the Department of Slavic Languages at the University of California, Berkeley. There too, before he was granted US citizenship in 1970, there were periods of frustration: 'I have no right to have any opinions on politics in this country', he wrote in a letter to Thomas Merton in early 1962, 'as I am not even a resident but a guest'.<sup>12</sup> Later in their correspondence, however, he alludes to the sympathy he feels for the black civil rights movement and his hostility towards the war in Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, gradually, despite an abiding feeling of being 'out of place'<sup>14</sup> in France and America, he found in each a circle of writers and admirers, whose friendship sustained him personally and artistically, and so aided a life dedicated to 'a continuous chase after answers'.<sup>15</sup>

Since his was such a protracted, anguished encounter with history, it is hardly surprising that Miłosz should often return in his writings to the horrors humankind inflicts on its own across the centuries. Crucial to any understanding of the poet's work, also however, and certainly to his appeal for Heaney, is his complex relationship to Catholicism. This is the source for the deeply spiritual strain within his work, its recurring allusions to concepts, images, forms, and figures from Judaeo-Christian tradition, its preoccupation with suffering and its meanings. Miłosz counters in his writings the dominant rational, scientific orthodoxy, that

## Textual Practice

human beings are solely products of blind historical forces and ideological conditioning, by re-asserting their status as beings possessed with a 'soul' and the potential for free will.<sup>16</sup>

His sense of the individual as a site of Manichean contradiction, as a being capable of transcendence, but equally prone to utter indifference to 'the Good',<sup>17</sup> can be glimpsed in his 1959 parable-poem, 'Mistrz' ('The Master'), composed originally in Polish and translated into English by the author himself; it appeared in *Selected Poems* published by the Ecco Press in 1980. Set in an indeterminate period of history, it is voiced by a composer, who represents the archetypal artist. Its opening stanzas convey the transfigurative power of music, and its radical effects on all levels of the social hierarchy, from the Prince to ordinary 'men and women'. Aptly the choir who perform his choral mass is named after St Cecilia, the patron saint of music:

They say that my music is angelic.  
That when the Prince listens to it  
His face, hidden from sight, *turns* gentle.  
With a beggar he would share power.  
A fan of a lady-in-waiting *is immobile*. . .

Everyone has heard in the cathedral my Missa Solemnis.  
I *changed* the throats of girls from the Saint Cecilia choir  
Into an instrument that *raises* us  
Above what we are. I know how *to free*  
Men and women from remembrances of their long lives  
So *they stand* in the smoke of the nave  
*Restored* (my italics)<sup>18</sup>

An immediate source of uncertainty for the reader is how to respond to this maestro. Is he justifiably proud of real achievements, or is he arrogantly over-stating his abilities? In a trope common in Romantic poetry, he pitches art's sublime, miraculous capacity to suspend time, and the artist's compulsion to impose form and structure, against the material world and its mutability. Whereas individual members of humanity diminish to mere sound and then disappear – note the Eliot-like use of the 'steps' metonym<sup>19</sup> – flute and violin as a result of the aural effects they generate endure, and so his will is done:

Over there a swallow  
Will *pass away* and *return*, *changed* in its slanting flight.  
Steps will be heard at the well but of other people.  
The ploughs will *erase* a forest. The flute and the violin  
Will always work *as I have ordered them* (my italics)

Though confident of his ability to orchestrate the future, he is at a loss when it comes to controlling perceptions in the present. Audiences lack any conception of the price an artist pays for their creative gift, he complains. Some imagine that the achievement has its origin in an act of divine grace ('pierced by a ray', like St Theresa of Avila), others, with more primitive imaginations, that it is the result of a pact made with the devil. The final stanzas intimate, rather, that his art emerges from a very human darkness, out of unspecified guilts and betrayals. A dream provides the first disconcerting glimpse into his psyche:

It comes back in the middle of the night. Who are those holding  
torches,  
So that what is long past occurs in full light?

The torch-bearers here recall those sent to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Christ. His projection of himself into that narrative conveys not only the scale of his ego, but also a deep vulnerability, and his fears of exposure. A far less dramatic scene from his waking life follows, a poignant moment of 'Regret, to no end'. Watching the elderly bless themselves as they file into church, the speaker brings to mind an absence, an unidentified 'she' who may well be his mother.<sup>20</sup> Both in the original Polish ('Zdaję mi się, że mogłaby być jedną z nich') and in translation, loss is voiced in the simplest of utterances:

When old and white-haired under their laced shawls  
They dip their fingers in a basin at the entrance  
*It seems to me she might have been one of them* (my italics)

That conditional 'might have been' gives way to the present continuous in the very next line, a line which makes present the landscape of Miłosz's childhood home: 'The same firs/Rustle and with a shallow wave sheens the lake'. In order to evoke the onomatopoeia in the Polish original ('szumią' is rendered by the English 'rustle'), Miłosz transfers the rippling sound from the trees to the water, hence the alliteration in 'shallow' and 'sheens'.

The deployment of those surface metaphors anticipates the poem's parting warning to superficial readers:

A language of angels! Before you mention Grace  
Mind that you do not deceive yourself and others.  
What comes from my evil – that only is true.

Like his predecessor in Yeats's 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', Miłosz's narrator locates the sources of his 'masterful images' in 'the foul rag and bone shop of the heart'.<sup>21</sup>

## Textual Practice

Though vast in their temporal, spiritual, intellectual, and spatial reach, Miłosz's poems maintain attachments to the local and individual, often in the form of elegies for lost family and friends and the places they shared, but also in lyric epiphanies which, in Heaney's words, make 'time stand still'.<sup>22</sup> His ultimate goal, according to Stanislaw Barańczak, was to create an Art that would attest to and celebrate a world 'Incorrigibly plural'<sup>23</sup> in its forms, features, peoples, and perspectives, one in which the poet's own 'individual voice' would be subsumed into 'an all-encompassing polyphony'.<sup>24</sup>

A decade or so before the laureateship was conferred on Miłosz, Seamus Heaney had become familiar with his name as a translator and editor, when Penguin Books brought out *Zbigniew Herbert: Selected Poems* (1968) and *Post-War Polish Poetry* (1970). While the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968<sup>25</sup> was perhaps a background factor, his initial, quickening interest in Eastern European poetry in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s can be attributed largely to his friendships with Ted Hughes and Daniel Weissbort. *Modern Poetry in Translation (MPT)*, the journal they founded in 1965 and co-edited, played a major role in promoting the work of Herbert, Miłosz, Popa, Holub, and Pilinszky, its contribution complementing that of Al Alvarez<sup>26</sup> and the Modern European Poets series editors at Penguin. Though Heaney might not have seen the first issue of *MPT*, in which Miłosz is described as 'one of the most influential of modern Polish poets',<sup>27</sup> almost certainly he would have read the Spring 1975 issue, which lauded the 'remarkable . . . range of expression' and 'breadth of experience' in Miłosz's work, and his generosity as an advocate of the poetry of others.<sup>28</sup>

It was only after the Nobel announcement that translations of much of Miłosz's poetry and prose to date suddenly became available, with the result that he quickly gained a massive stature worldwide. Within a four-year period, while working on the poems that formed *Station Island*, Heaney grew increasingly cognizant of the quality, range, and depth of Miłosz's writing, and came to regard him as 'a sage and acknowledged master',<sup>29</sup> the embodiment of artistic insight and moral integrity. He acquired the Ecco Press edition of *Selected Poems* and read translations of *The Issa Valley*, *Native Realm*, and *The Captive Mind*. In 1982, he attended some of Miłosz's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard, which were published the following year as *The Witness of Poetry*. It was not until the summer of 1983, while teaching creative writing in Belmont, California, that Heaney met the poet for the first time in the company of the Polish poet's translators, Robert Hass and Robert Pinsky. Subsequently, Heaney composed a 'transmogrified account' (*Stepping Stones*, 262) of this encounter in his own poem entitled 'The Master', which depicts

core elements of Miłosz's character in a setting redolent of Yeats. It is worth noting also that in the *Inferno*, Dante repeatedly addresses Virgil as 'maestro'.

The experience of reading the 1980 Nobel Lecture was pivotal for Heaney. Questioned by Dennis O'Driscoll, he recalled not only the journal in which he encountered the laureate's address (*The New York Review of Books*), but also where he read it – the library at Carysfort College, Dublin (*Stepping Stones*, 301). Understandably what he does not remember is the precise issue of the *The New York Review of Books*, which turns out to have been the edition of 5 March 1981. This date is highly significant, since the international community's – and Heaney's – acknowledgement of the scale of Miłosz's literary achievement coincided with a period of intense political upheaval in Ireland and Poland, which, in the latter case, would trigger the collapse of the Soviet Union and its post-war domination of large areas of central and eastern Europe.

The depth, intensity, and continuity of Heaney's engagement with Czesław Miłosz's and, one should add, Zbigniew Herbert's poetry springs directly from its inherent and enduring power, beauty, and truth. What undoubtedly quickened his admiration and aspiration to emulate them was the integrity and artistic skill with which they responded to the unfolding crisis in Poland from summer 1980 onwards.

Ever since the papal election of October 1978 when Krakow's charismatic archbishop, Karol Wojtyła, was given the highest position of authority in the Catholic Church, their 'homeland'<sup>30</sup> had been the subject of massive media coverage worldwide. In Poland itself, John Paul II's accession transformed the political situation, and gave considerable impetus to groups and institutions opposed to the Soviet-imposed, post-war status quo. Amongst the many Poles inspired and emboldened by John Paul II's triumphal visit home in June 1979 was a former shipyard worker in Gdansk, Lech Wałęsa, who had been arrested several times in the late 1970s, once for 'distributing clandestine copies of *The Captive Mind*',<sup>31</sup> Miłosz's exposé of Stalinist ideology.

When in July 1980, because of the parlous state of Poland's economy, the communist government increased food prices and pegged wages, civil unrest spread throughout the country. In mid-August, the sacking of Anna Walentynowicz, a popular trade union activist, prompted major strikes all along Poland's Baltic coast. Such was 'maturity and self-discipline'<sup>32</sup> of the strikers, their leaders' quality, and their extensive popular support, the government were compelled to concede to their demands, which included legal recognition of independent, self-governing trade unions, a thing unheard of in the Soviet bloc. When, in September, Solidarity (*Solidarność*) was officially registered as one of these unions, within the space of 15 months, it gained ten million members.

## Textual Practice

Amongst the first tasks the union set itself was the construction of a monument to commemorate the 75 people killed during strikes in Gdansk ten years earlier. In a sign of the esteem in which Miłosz was held, lines from his poem, 'You Who Wronged', were inscribed on the monument's plinth.<sup>33</sup> Less than a year after its unveiling, General Jaruzelski, the Polish Premier, introduced martial law in an attempt to crush Solidarity and stave off a possible Soviet invasion. Despite the internment of its leaders, including its president Lech Wałęsa, the union continued functioning underground and to resist. With Susan Sontag's support and that of fellow exiles (Joseph Brodsky, Stanisław Barańczak, and Tomas Venclova), Miłosz immediately formed a committee to agitate on Solidarity's behalf in the States, which called for a boycott of all 'transactions, economic and other'<sup>34</sup> of Poland, until all internees were freed.

Throughout Europe and America, coverage of the crisis was intense. In all, martial law claimed ninety-plus victims, amongst the most mourned the pro-Solidarity priest, Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, murdered by Polish secret police on 19 October 1984. It would be surprising if in witnessing this turn of events Heaney had not experienced *déjà vu*, since he would undoubtedly have recognised similarities between Poland and Northern Ireland when it came to the fate of those aspiring to justice and civil rights by non-violent means.

The opening remark in Miłosz's Nobel Lecture about his presence in Stockholm being a sign of life's 'God-given, marvellously complex unpredictability' would have had considerable resonance for the younger poet.<sup>35</sup> Coming himself from 'a small country',<sup>36</sup> Heaney shared Miłosz's pride in his origins on the margins of Europe, a region the latter had earlier described as 'situated beyond the compass of maps. . . where time flowed more slowly than elsewhere' (*Native Realm*, 7). The terrain of their childhoods retains in the imaginations of both poets an idyllic, Wordsworthian quality; at one point in the Nobel speech Miłosz capitalises and personifies 'Nature', asserting that 'the landscapes and perhaps the spirits of his homeland have never abandoned me' (*NL*, 11). Hearing Miłosz rhapsodise about the 'fertile area' where he grew up, beside a tributary of the Neman, surrounded by 'an abundance' (*Native Realm*, 15) of lakes, hills, and forests, would have put Heaney in mind of his own upbringing in Mossbawn, 'his Eden'<sup>37</sup> beside the Moyola.

The Derry poet would have warmed to Miłosz's emphasis on the verifying role played by family, Catholicism, 'parochial attachments and loyalties' (*NL*, 11) in shaping personal and poetic identity. In both men's minds, everyday objects, if infused with familial and ancestral associations, assume the status of sacred relics. In *Native Realm*, Miłosz speaks of inherited items, like clothing, furniture, 'the handwriting on yellowed documents', as possessing a kind of afterlife. In poem two of his celebrated

sequence, 'The World', for example, the narrator focuses on the handle of a gate, 'worn smooth over time,/Polished by the touch of many hands'.<sup>38</sup> Such quotidian objects enable the writer to keep a grip on the past, and thus a means to stabilise the self. In an essay from the mid-1980s, written in the wake of his mother's death, Heaney makes an identical point, referring to the 'ghost-life that hovers over some of the furniture of our lives', providing 'a point of entry into a common emotional ground of memory and belonging'.<sup>39</sup>

As for any child, what enlarged Miłosz's and Heaney's originary sense of the world – education – also entailed a loss, a kind of exile, before they knew 'the term'.<sup>40</sup> Success in their entrance exams saw them both borne away to highly regulated, male-only, highly prized institutions, located in cities where religious divisions ran deep. Whereas in the Nobel Lecture Miłosz alludes positively to the cultural diversity of his homeland, 'where various languages and religions *cohabited* for centuries' (my italics), in *Native Realm* he depicts the ominous separation of Wilno's two most populous communities. Like their 'ghettoised',<sup>41</sup> discriminating counterparts in Belfast and Derry, Wilno's Catholics and the Jews 'lived within the same walls', and yet might as well have occupied 'separate planets':

Contact was limited to everyday business matters; at home different customs were observed, different newspapers were read... Everyone in Wilno went to his 'own' school. Only at university did we gather in the same lecture halls, and even there student organisations were divided into Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian and Byelorussian. (*Native Realm*, 92)

At Queen's University in the late 1950s, student groups were often similarly divided along religious lines. Like his contemporaries who were studying literature, Heaney drew his friends from 'all sides', but remained conscious of the 'blatant' and 'noxious' discrimination that surrounded them (*Stepping Stones*, 43). In contrast to Miłosz, whose university experiences in the early 1930s bred a deep antipathy to Polish nationalism and, before long, nationalism of every other brand, Heaney remained strongly attached to the nationalist vision of a united Ireland. Interviewed by the *Chicago Literary Review* in early March 1981, he explains that though he shares 'the cultural and political base of the Provos' vision',<sup>42</sup> he rejects the means that they deploy. Commitment to nationalist ideals did not blind him to the excesses to which nationalist rhetoric leads, and he shared wholly Miłosz's feelings of repulsion at those who sought to impose 'linguistic, cultural, religious' and 'racial unity' (*Native Realm*, 95) on heterogeneous cultures by means of the bomb and the bullet.

## Textual Practice

Characteristically, in retracing stages in his own extended evolution as an artist, Miłosz establishes general truths about how writers achieve distinctiveness of utterance, though he does not minimise their difficulties in freeing themselves from anxieties of influence.<sup>43</sup> Miłosz begins his reflections on the poet's ambivalent relationships with literary ancestors and contemporaries with what seems at first an uncontentious assertion that 'Every poet depends upon generations who wrote in his native tongue'. While this sense of a shared language and legacy may initially be enabling for the apprentice writer, in time a compulsion to break with inherited styles and forms sets in, with the realisation that 'those old means of expression are not adequate to his own experience' (*NL*, 11). In the quest for other, more current sources of verification and direction, the writer may lapse unconsciously into dependency on their contemporaries, which may also diminish their work's individuality:

Alas, it is enough for him to publish his first volume of poems to find himself trapped. For hardly has the print dried, when that work, which seemed to him the most personal, appears to be enmeshed in the style of another. The only way to counter an obscure remorse is to continue searching and to publish a new book, but then everything repeats itself, so there is no end to that chase. (*NL*, 11)

Since the escalation of violence in the North in 1969, Heaney had been engaged in an intensive 'search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament'.<sup>44</sup> An important element in his decisions in 1972 to leave Belfast for Glanmore and in 1979 Dublin for Harvard was a recognition that the growth of a poet required 'a constant escape forward',<sup>45</sup> periods of relative solitude, free from continual local scrutiny and demand. Though attuning itself to works from an increasingly diverse and international range of artists, past and contemporary, Heaney's poetry never became merely 'an echo of someone else's music',<sup>46</sup> but, like Miłosz's, continued to grow in resonance.<sup>47</sup>

An interesting point of comparison between the two poets emerges when one considers their relationship to the medium in which they worked. Since his forebears had been using Polish as their first language since the sixteenth century, Miłosz defines himself confidently as 'a Polish, not a Lithuanian poet' (*NL*, 11). Throughout his childhood years and during his twenties and thirties, he was regularly crossing borders and becoming adept in other tongues, yet from the moment he chose exile in France and then America, issues around language and identity became deeply problematic. Attempting to mitigate the disorientating effects of operating in a foreign language during his working, 'external'

hours, he conducted his inner, creative, and domestic life in Polish. In an interview from 1980, he explains that he adopted this strategy of linguistic bifurcation as a means of stabilising the self, believing that managing ‘two personalities in one’<sup>48</sup> might be preferable to having his identity fundamentally altered by the acquired language. Unlike many other migrants, Miłosz consciously sought to preserve a strong, foreign inflection in ‘his’ English, in order to accentuate his distinctness. Rather than killing his creativity as he initially feared it might,<sup>49</sup> Miłosz’s immersion in English proved salutary in the long term, as he later observed:

A writer living among people who speak a language different from his own discovers after a while that he senses his native language in a new manner. It is not true that a long stay abroad leads to withering of styles ... What is true, however, is that new aspects and tonalities of the native tongue are discovered, for they stand out against the background of the language spoken in the new milieu.<sup>50</sup>

Irena Grudzinska-Gross argues convincingly that his re-evaluation of the impact of English may have resulted from his intensive work as a translator of others’ and his own poems. Translation, she suggests, ‘enriched’ the scope of his poetry enormously, opening him up to ‘new models and traditions’,<sup>51</sup> as it would equally do for Heaney.

In *Native Realm*, Miłosz invokes the image of whirling particles in a kaleidoscope to evoke his inchoate feelings in his youth, whose origins he could clearly not define at the time. Amongst the many sources for this inner turmoil was ‘an overabundance of impressions’, an awareness that the cultural space he occupied lay somewhere between ‘contradictory traditions’, that the land he was born into ‘belonged’ to another country.<sup>52</sup> That sense of being in between cultures was one which Heaney knew all about, particularly once he became conscious of the presence of a tongue which might have an equal claim to his loyalty. Brought up in an English-speaking household, his first extended encounters with the Irish language began at St Columb’s, where it was treated more as a ‘heritage’ subject, rather than explored for its ‘counter-cultural implications’ (*Stepping Stones*, 314). When in 1969, Thomas Kinsella published his acclaimed translation of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, Heaney was quick to recognise the political and cultural ramifications of the endeavour.<sup>53</sup> Unconvinced of the feasibility of the lost linguistic legacy ever being restored, Heaney adopted a position taken by John Montague in ‘A Primal Gaeltacht’ (1970) and *The Rough Field* (1972) that much might be gained from tapping back into Gaelic tradition as a means of asserting cultural difference, if not resistance. By getting into contact with ‘whatever of it is still alive in our own area’,<sup>54</sup> such as place names, local dialect words, songs,

## Textual Practice

and poems, Montague argued the poet might keep faith with pre-colonial, cultural ancestors, and so gain ‘fortification’ and ‘enrichment’.<sup>55</sup> Elegiac, Gaelic-inflected lyrics like ‘Anahorish’, ‘Broagh’, and ‘The Backward Look’ from *Wintering Out*, like his early efforts at Glanmore to render the medieval Irish epic, *Buile Suibhne*, into English, exemplify Heaney’s increasingly politicised take on the language question between 1970 and 1972.

When, in the mid-1970s, protesting republican paramilitary prisoners in Long Kesh started *en masse* to study Irish, debate in Northern Ireland around language and identity rose in the cultural–political agenda, and retained a significance throughout the period of the Hunger Strikes and on until the mid-1980s.<sup>56</sup> ‘Learning and speaking the Irish language’ became ‘a political and subversive pursuit’, providing ‘a means through which to communicate to comrades’ and ‘to exclude enemies’.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, it was at this very juncture, with the North accelerating towards another phase of acute political crisis, that Heaney resumed work on the Sweeney poem, and, in April 1981, began a translation of ‘Fill Aris’ (‘Return Again’), a popular poem by a modern master of Irish, the late Seán Ó Ríordáin. Its speaker urges his listeners to decolonise their minds and discard the alien literary legacy:

Close your mind to all that happened  
Since the battle of Kinsale was fought  
. . . Unshackle your mind  
Of its civil English tackling,  
Shelley, Keats and Shakespeare. . .  
Wash your mind and wash your tongue  
That was spancelled in a syntax  
Putting you out of step with yourself.<sup>58</sup>

Commenting on Ó Ríordáin’s stance two years later in his *Among School-children* lecture, Heaney confesses that while responsive to the ‘curve of feeling’ and ‘inner division’ in ‘Fill Aris’, he rejected wholly its monoculturalist polemic. Initially, in a calmly insistent tone, he asserts that it would be ‘impossible’ for him ‘to ditch’ his English *poetic* masters or accept that their tongue or the forms they used were foreign. The idea that almost four centuries of colonial history, post-Kinsale, might simply be wiped from the Irish cultural memory is similarly given short shrift, on grounds that Miłosz would have fully endorsed, that it is that very ‘history that has made us all what we are’.<sup>59</sup> The paragraph that follows, however, exhibits a marked shift into a higher rhetorical register, as Heaney widens his critique and offers a part-defiant, part-defensive justification of his conduct to date: ‘*I do not yield* to the notion that my identity is

disabled and falsified and *somehow slightly traitorous* if I conduct my casual and imaginative transactions in *the speech I was born to* (my emphases).<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, Heaney makes a connection between ÓRíordáin's advocacy of exclusivity in cultural self-definition and the coercive practices of republican and loyalist ideologues.

What Heaney most prized in Miłosz was the exemplary manner in which he acquitted himself as an artist in the face of contradictory imperatives. For Miłosz, the poet's vocation demands solitariness, contemplation, and dedication to the *haecceitas* and *esse* of the created world. Circumstances occur, however, when History breaks in on the poet's meditations, compelling him or her to make some form of intervention in the public domain, to demonstrate political and moral 'solidarity' (*NL*, 11).<sup>61</sup> *Native Realm* provides instances of the extent of Miłosz's own culturo-political activism during the war years, his involvement in clandestine literary activities, including the editing of an anti-Nazi anthology, *Invincible Song*, and his translation of Jacques Maritain's attack on Vichy rule, *A Travers le Désastre* (236–237). He contrasts his own war work with that of an enterprising former fellow student, W, who shipped weapons to the partisans and saved many Jewish lives by supplying them with false documents (238–240).

'All art proves to be nothing compared with action' (*NL*, 12), Miłosz asserts, reflecting particularly on that savage period in human history when the Nazi and Stalinist regimes were carrying out their genocidal crimes. In such circumstances, the artist is silenced or struggles to 'embrace reality'. To create an aesthetically effective response to such times of bloody crisis requires, in his view, objectivity and distance. And yet to display these very qualities can expose the artist to charges of 'moral treason' (*NL*, 12). This was the very accusation levelled at Heaney by Sinn Féin in 1979. En route to or from Belfast, one of their spokesmen, Danny Morrison, entered the train carriage Heaney was in and confronted him about his failure to condemn the treatment of republican prisoners in Long Kesh. Heaney's reply was that if he wrote something it would not be at someone else's bidding, and that he was already engaged on his own 'campaign'.<sup>62</sup> He recalled this incident in his interview with the *Chicago Literary Review*, just three days after the *The New York Review of Books* publication of Miłosz's Nobel Lecture.<sup>63</sup> Earlier in that same interview, after commending Robert Lowell's conduct in the political sphere, Heaney argues that poets should always avoid aligning themselves with one single political position, since 'The artist, once he surrenders his authority to a doctrine or a side or to propaganda, has lost something he can never regain'.<sup>64</sup>

For Miłosz, the Nobel Award and Lecture provided a unique platform from which to voice matters of intense personal and global concern, to say

## Textual Practice

‘something which was on my heart and speak not only of my own problems, but the problems of other peoples and countries’.<sup>65</sup> A source of great alarm to him was the degree of ignorance about the recent history he regularly encountered, especially among ‘the young generations’, a group whom he refers to twice (*NL*, 12, 14). With a passionate urgency, and with them particularly in mind, he addresses the crucial importance of historical memory and historical truth for humanity’s future. The fact that by 1980 over 100 books existed which dismissed the Holocaust as pure fiction and a product of ‘Jewish propaganda’ (*NL*, 12) he condemns as ‘an insanity’. He then proceeds to make a controversial but timely observation about what he views as a worrying example of historical elision and linguistic slippage, when he voices his anxiety about the exclusive application of the term ‘Holocaust’ to the Jewish victims of Nazism; it is ‘as if among the victims there were not also millions of Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and prisoners of other nationalities’ (*NL*, 12). To illustrate further the gaps in historical memory within the world community, Miłosz draws attention to a date – 23 August 1939 – which he feels ought to be ‘invoked every year as a day of mourning’ (*NL*, 12). That was the day on which Hitler and Stalin’s foreign ministers, von Ribbentrop and Molotov, signed the German–Soviet non-aggression pact which led directly to the outbreak of World War II. With the stroke of a pen, the nations of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were consigned to an ignominious subjection, and their peoples’ rights to self-determination cancelled for the next forty-plus years. This state of affairs, Miłosz points out, was in direct contravention of undertakings made by the Americans and the British in the Atlantic Charter (August 1941). In this document, Roosevelt and Churchill had declared that there should be ‘no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned’ and that ‘sovereign rights and self-government’ should be ‘restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them’.<sup>66</sup>

One of many individual crimes committed as a result of the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact was a massacre of over 4000 unarmed Polish officers in the Katyn Forest in April 1940, carried out on Stalin’s orders. Amongst the victims who ‘now repose in a mass grave’, Miłosz informs his audience, were two of his friends and fellow poets, Władysław Sebyła and Lech Piwowar. This moment in the lecture illustrates something Heaney admires in Miłosz, the skilful way he unites ‘personal’ witness to ‘historical theme’.<sup>67</sup> Conscious too how ‘history is built out of individual lives’,<sup>68</sup> Heaney after *North* (1975) addresses the continuing violence in Northern Ireland primarily by means of elegies, depicting, often in graphic detail, the personal characters, circumstances, and fates of victims, sometimes naming them, but sometimes not.<sup>69</sup> In adopting this means of allowing the dead ‘to return for a brief moment among the

living',<sup>70</sup> Heaney was following in the steps also of another great master, who features twice in the *New York Review of Books*' publication of Miłosz's Nobel Lecture, first in a reference to him as 'the patron saint of all poets in exile' (*NL*, 12), second in the form of a Gustav Doré print, 'Dante in a Dusky Wood', two pages later: Dante. Though it would be Dante's presence that would pervade Heaney's next volume, *Station Island* (1984), the high esteem in which he now held the Polish poet is also evident. Over the course of the next three decades, Miłosz grew to be a constant literary and ethical point of reference in Heaney's writings, fulfilling the verifying role Simone Weil and Oscar Miłosz performed for him as sources of spiritual insights and as custodians of 'true values' (*NL*, 15).

Heaney's encounter with Miłosz's writings occurred at a critical turning point in his literary career, and, most significantly, as we shall see, during a political crisis in Northern Ireland of comparable severity to that which followed Bloody Sunday. The critical acclaim *Field Work* (1979) garnered greatly enhanced his reputation and created a surge in book sales and invitations to read, significantly in America.<sup>71</sup> A sign of this growing esteem was his appointment as a visiting lecturer at Harvard in the Spring semester of 1979. His success led to an offer in September 1980 of a longer contract, working for one semester each year for the next five years.<sup>72</sup> In November, in order to take up the Harvard post, Heaney took the momentous decision to quit his Head of English post at Carysfort College, Dublin. Writing to Michael Longley in February 1981, he explained that the Harvard move was prompted by a desire for more creative time and freedom. He confessed to a fear that he might be settling 'too firmly or comfortably' into a routine in Dublin, and so in order to re-energise himself creatively and avoid 'atrophying', he felt it was crucial to put himself again 'at risk'.<sup>73</sup>

Greater international recognition brought with it greater expectations, as he would soon discover when the burgeoning conflict within Northern Ireland's prison system came to head. The seeds of the crisis dated back to March 1976 which saw a significant change in British Government's penal policy. Keen to counter perceptions of republicans as prisoners-of-war and/or anti-colonial freedom fighters, the authorities determined to treat all paramilitary prisoners as ordinary criminals. 'Special category' status was withdrawn and regulations introduced that all prisoners should wear prison clothing. In response, republican prisoners in the H-blocks at Long Kesh/the Maze began their 'blanket protest', which then segued into the 'dirty' protest and, ultimately, the Hunger Strikes of October–December 1980 and March–October 1981.<sup>74</sup>

Miłosz's Nobel Lecture, with its meditations on the poet's political and ethical responsibilities, appeared in print five days into the second

## Textual Practice

wave of hunger strikes. In his definitive analysis of the strikes, Pádraig O'Malley<sup>75</sup> informs us that this particular form of protest 'fuses elements of the legal code of ancient Ireland, of the self-denial that is the central characteristic of Irish Catholicism, and of the propensity for endurance and sacrifice that is the hallmark of militant Irish nationalism'.<sup>76</sup> Attempting to force concessions from the prison authorities, including the freedom to wear their own clothes,<sup>77</sup> on 1 March 1981, the Provisional Irish Republican Army's Commanding Officer in Long Kesh, Bobby Sands, refused prison food. Like the penitents in *Station Island*, carrying out their fast and religious exercises on Lough Derg, Sands was fully aware of the performative, sacrificial nature of his act. Unlike theirs, his motives were political: 'I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land'.<sup>78</sup>

Questioned about the latest hunger strike on 8 March 1981, Heaney expressed sympathy for H-Block prisoners and mentions that, because of the 'undoubted maltreatment that takes place there',<sup>79</sup> he had half-considered dedicating 'Ugolino', *Field Work's* closing poem, to them. These remarks, however, are framed by criticisms of their 'exploitation' as 'propaganda material'<sup>80</sup> by the Provisional Irish Republican Army. No one in those early stages could have anticipated the outcome, intensity, and impact of the struggle about to be acted out. To maximise its dramatic impact, the cast of ten selected to take part did not begin their strike simultaneously. After a two-week interval, Sands was joined by another prisoner, Francis Hughes, and then, a week later, on 22 March, by two others. The fact that Hughes' parents were neighbours of the Heaneys in Bellaghy placed him in a 'bewildering' dilemma, as years later he confided to Dennis O'Driscoll:

Francis Hughes was a neighbour's child, yes, but he was also a hit-man and his Protestant neighbours would have considered him involved in something like a war of genocide against them rather than a war of liberation. At that stage the IRA's self-image as liberators didn't work much magic with me. But neither did the too-brutal simplicity of Margaret Thatcher's 'A crime is a crime is a crime. . .'. My own mantra in those days was the remark by Miłosz that I quote in 'Away From it All': 'I was stretched between contemplation of a motionless point and the command to participate actively in history'.<sup>81</sup>

What transformed the protest and ensured that it gained international coverage was Sands' decision to stand as a parliamentary candidate in the Fermanagh/South Tyrone by-election, and his subsequent victory in the poll on 9 April,<sup>82</sup> Neither the election result, nor Sands' declining health, nor mounting international criticism, affected the British Prime Minister's

resolve to make no concessions. Her Secretary of State, Humphrey Atkins, commented that 'If Mr Sands persists in his wish to commit suicide, that is his choice'.<sup>83</sup> Sands remained equally unwavering, and 66 days into his strike, on 5 May, he died. His funeral was attended by an estimated 100,000 people from the nationalist community, many to express a collective solidarity in the face of what they regarded as British intransigence.

One by one, between 12 May and 20 August 1981, nine other hunger strikers died.<sup>84</sup> Attempts by nationalist politicians in the North, ministers and senior Catholic churchmen in the Republic to broker a compromise that might end the crisis, were to no avail.<sup>85</sup> Following the strikers' deaths the upturn in violence everyone had predicted did occur, though not on the scale that many feared. In the period between Sands' death and that of the tenth hunger striker, 52 people were killed. It was not until 3 October that the fatal campaign was formally ended after strikers' families announced their determination to intervene. Three days later, James Prior, recently appointed as Northern Ireland Secretary, granted many of the inmates' original demands, allowing prisoners to wear their own clothes, restoring remission, visits, and the right to free association.

Published three years after these events, Heaney's *Station Island* contains only one overt reference to the fast; section IX of the title sequence includes a 14-line 'speech' by a hunger striker. There are, however, countless allusions throughout the collection to prisons, cells, compounds, policemen, punishment, informers, betrayals, and acts of violence.<sup>86</sup> Undoubtedly, the anguish, guilt, and anger generated by the strikes lies behind the rigorous, sustained self-appraisal at the heart of one of his most lyrically intense and accomplished volumes.

Miłosz's presence can be clearly discerned in the collection. The imaginative energy in many of its poems arises from the 'contradictory awarenesses'<sup>87</sup> they articulate and dramatise, as Heaney attempts to extricate himself from the nets of political and religious obligation – like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus – while at the same time sensing that the 'integrity' in his art might depend on remaining 'faithful to the collective historical experience'.<sup>88</sup> These strains surface as early as the fourth poem in the collection, 'Away from it All', which depicts a convivial late night supper. A heated debate develops, during which the poet is forced to scrutinise his conduct. Towards the close, Heaney employs a quotation from Miłosz's recently re-published *Native Realm*, the one quoted above. Since it sheds light on shared anxieties about poetry, language, ethics, and politics, it is useful to consider the passage that precedes the lines Heaney cites:

My reasoning went like this: thought and word should not submit to the pressure of matter since, incapable of competing with it, they would have to transform themselves into deed, which would mean

## Textual Practice

overreaching their lawful limits. On the other hand I quite justifiably feared dematerialization, the delusiveness of words and thoughts. This could only be prevented by keeping a firm hold on tangible things undergoing constant change; that is, control over the motor that moves them in a society – namely, politics. . . *I was stretched, therefore, between two poles: the contemplation of a motionless point and the command to participate actively in history*; in other words between transcendence and becoming. (*Native Realm*, 124–125)

When a different speaker in the poem asks for a definition of that ambiguous adverb, ‘actively’, an action is the narrator’s response. The turning of his attention to ‘light at the rim of the sea’ might be viewed as an evasion or a conscious embrace of the sublime transcendent.

Miłosz’s second, more extended appearance comes in the collection’s final sequence, ‘Sweeney Redivivus’, where he appears as ‘The Master’; in form he resembles the exiled King Sweeney, being part-human part-bird.<sup>89</sup> In contrast to Miłosz’s monologue, voiced by the master himself, the narrative viewpoint in Heaney’s lyric is that of an awed, self-effacing acolyte; it is worth noting that throughout the *Inferno*, Dante addresses his guide, Virgil, as ‘maestro’. Underneath its uncanny, gothic façade lies an accurate portrayal of key facets of Miłosz’s history and personality:

He dwelt in himself  
like a rook in an unroofed tower.  
To get close I had to maintain  
a climb up deserted ramparts  
and not flinch, not raise an eye  
to search for an eye on the watch  
from his coign of seclusion.  
Each character blocked on the parchment secure  
in its volume and measure.

Each maxim given its space.  
Like quarrymen’s hammers and wedges proofed  
by intransigent service.  
Like coping stones where you rest  
in the balm of the wellspring.

How flimsy I felt climbing down  
the unrailed stairs on the wall,  
hearing the purpose and venture  
in a wingflap above me.

The poet's solitariness is established from the outset, though the use of the preposition 'in' rather than 'by' conveys his self-sufficiency, and hints at his considerable inner resources. The three references to military architecture in lines 2, 4, and 7 carry a range of connotations. The tower is a symbol of strength and endurance, as it was for Yeats,<sup>90</sup> a fitting emblem for the poet himself.<sup>91</sup> The fact that it is 'unroofed' suggests its exposure to the elements, and alludes perhaps to the 'disintegration'<sup>92</sup> of European civilisation in World War II, the subject of Miłosz's fifth Norton Lecture. The fact that the tower's ramparts are 'deserted' might imply that its owner is unconcerned about possible attack, though from his 'coign of vantage'<sup>93</sup> he maintains a wary eye. That focus on watchfulness takes us back to the opening simile comparing the master to a rook, a *rara avis* endowed with panoramic vision. The bird motif features in Miłosz's own depiction of the poet as seer, 'the one who flies above the earth and looks it *from* above but at the same time sees every detail' (*NL*, 11), but also linked, of course, to Heaney's Sweeney persona.

The accumulation of self-reflexive references in the middle stanza points to the poem's subject being a literary master, one whose compositions are both *writerly* ('his book of withholding') and accessible since they draw on Christian humanist tradition ('the old rules/we all had inscribed on our slates'). Like the master depicted in Miłosz's masked self-portrait, Heaney's text maker is utterly in command of his instruments, words. But if uplift is the dominant quality associated with the former's creation, then weightiness and solidity are the hallmarks of the latter's 'blocked', 'secure' artefacts:

Towards the close seemingly contrary attributes of the art and artist are juxtaposed; on the one hand, there is rugged strength and unyielding commitment, on the other, in the image of a stone seat beside 'the balm of wellspring', a sense of originary serenity and refreshment. So overwhelming is the encounter that the narrator, as he descends the tower's 'unrailed stairs', is left feeling tremulous and fragile. The distance between the two is underscored in the final lines which stress the master's resolve and enterprise, his 'wingflap' a sign of his immediate departure on a new imaginative flight.

Je ne cherche pas chez vous un maître, mais quelqu'un qui rende  
mon existence un peu légitime. (Czesław Miłosz to Albert Camus)<sup>94</sup>

Intuitively, then, from his earliest readings of the work, Heaney sensed Miłosz's potential as a verifying, validating presence as his own artistic journey entered a new phase. Within a recent, valuable analysis of his broader relationship with Polish poetry, Jerzy Jarniewicz argues that Heaney detected in Miłosz's work a paradigm he might emulate, the

## Textual Practice

possibility of a 'creative project that would encapsulate collective history in one's biography without transcending the individual'.<sup>95</sup> This idea is supported by observations made by Heaney in his first Oxford lecture, where he refers to how 'in emergent cultures the struggle of an individual consciousness towards affirmation . . . may be analogous, if not co-terminous with a collective straining towards self-definition';<sup>96</sup> he was thinking here not just about Irish poetry since the late nineteenth century, but also, one suspects, the radically shifting worlds Miłosz, Joseph Brodsky, Derek Walcott, and Les Murray all experienced as they came to maturity.

Perhaps Miłosz's most lasting influence in Heaney's work can be seen in the weight and attention it gives to memory. Now past the age when Miłosz received the Nobel Prize, Heaney similarly seems to feel that 'everyone who survives in his memory has a claim on his pen'.<sup>97</sup> Thus, in his latest volume, commingling with glimpses of intimate family history, there are lyrics like 'Poem IX' in the 'Route 110' sequence which, like Miłosz's remembrance of Władysław Sebyla and Lech Piwowar in his Nobel Lecture, names two victims of past violence and present injustice, John Lavery and Louis O'Neill. Whereas these civilian casualties of the Troubles go largely unremembered, the fallen paramilitaries responsible for so many deaths are beneficiaries of yearly memorialisation, 'full honours', and plots which separate them from the 'ordinary' dead.<sup>98</sup> Heaney continues to follow the moral injunctions he places in Miłosz's mouth in the revised 1990 version of 'The Master', 'Tell the truth. Do not be afraid'.<sup>99</sup>

When invited by Radio Telefis Éireann in 1999 to contribute to a radio series in which 'prominent Irish people talked about the public figure who has had a major influence on their lives',<sup>100</sup> Heaney bestowed on Miłosz a new soubriquet. Though he had not chosen, by the programme's title, *A Giant at my Shoulder*, is indicative their changing relationship. Firmly fixed as one of his most important 'approval-granting father-figures',<sup>101</sup> Heaney regarded him still with awe, though the pair had become closer over the years. What he continued to prize in this poet whom he described as 'my hero amongst the living',<sup>102</sup> is reflected in a commencement address given at Colgate University in May 1994. For Heaney Miłosz's life and work was the embodiment of a

loyalty to the ancient dream that human beings are on earth to transcend their worst selves, to create civilisation, to build the new Jerusalem in spite of all... [His poems] fortify something in what might be called our spiritual immunity system'.<sup>103</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry; The Charles Norton Eliot Lectures 1981–82* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 10.
- 2 Nobel Prize in Literature 1980, Press Release, Swedish Academy. Nobelprize.org. [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1980/press.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1980/press.html) (accessed 26 Jan 2011).
- 3 Seamus Heaney, 'In Gratitude for all the Gifts', *The Guardian*, Saturday 11 September 2004. In an interview with Dennis Manning and Robert Hedin, in *The Southern Review*, 21 January 1983, p. 103, Miłosz comments that 'every poetry is directed against death – against death of the individual, against the power of death'.
- 4 Norman Davies, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (London: Macmillan, 2004), p. 516.
- 5 Miłosz gives an account of his memories of the Rising in *Native Realm*, pp. 248–255, and refers to its 200,000 casualties and the city's annihilation in 'The Nobel Lecture', delivered 8 December 1980, published in *New York Review of Books*, XVIII: 5 March 1981, p. 14. (Future references to this lecture will be denoted by the letters *NL* in the text.)
- 6 In addition the regime banned religious parades, ordered the removal of religious symbols from schools and other public buildings, and forced Catholic newspapers 'out of print'. In state-run enterprises Sunday working was introduced, and activities organised to discourage young people from going to mass. See Mary Craig, *The Crystal Spirit: Lech Walesa And His Poland* (London: Coronet, 1986), p. 87.
- 7 See Neal Ascherson, *The Polish August* (London: Penguin, 1981), pp. 57–62.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- 9 Czesław Miłosz, 'Notes on Exile', in Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline Levine (eds), *To Begin Where I am: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001), p. 15.
- 10 Herbert Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography* (London: Picador, 1981), p. 718, n. 16.
- 11 See Irena Grudzinska Gross, *Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky: Fellowship of Poets* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 63–69.
- 12 See Robert Faggen (ed.), *Striving Towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czesław Miłosz* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), p. 139.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 174.
- 14 The title of Edward Said's memoir, published in 1999.
- 15 Faggen, *Striving Towards Being*, p. 126.
- 16 In an interview with Ayyappa K. Paniker. 'Dialogue with Czesław Miłosz', in Cynthia L. Haven (ed.), *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p. 33, the poet avers that 'there is free will and there is no free will'. For a valuable recent discussion of Miłosz, Heaney and their relationship to Catholicism, see John F. Desmond, *Gravity and Grace: Seamus Heaney and the Force of Light* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009).

## Textual Practice

- 17 Czesław Miłosz, 'Speaking of a Mammal', in *To Begin Where I am*, p. 216. Qtd in Desmond, p. 6.
- 18 Czesław Miłosz, *Selected Poems* (New York: Ecco Press, 1980), p. 115.
- 19 'Footfalls echo in the memory': T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', from *Four Quartets*, in *The Collected Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969), p. 171.
- 20 Miłosz's mother died from typhus in 1945. In *Native Realm*, p. 65. Miłosz pays tribute to his mother, as a woman of depth: 'Under the surface was stubbornness, gravity, and the strong conviction that suffering is sent by God and that it should be borne cheerfully'.
- 21 W.B. Yeats, *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 472.
- 22 Seamus Heaney, *A Giant at My Shoulder*, RTÉ Radio, 25 August 1999.
- 23 Louis MacNeice, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1988), p. 23.
- 24 Stanisław Barańczak, 'Searching for the Real', in *his Breathing Under Water and Other East European Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 177.
- 25 The Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968 – like the suppression of Solidarity 13 years later – generated massive outrage in the West. Alongside the closing paragraphs of 'Old Derry Walls' in *The Listener* of 24 October 1968, 523, where Heaney writes on the violent conclusion of the Civil Rights March earlier that month, is the beginning of an essay by Adam Roberts on the Czech media entitled 'The Face of Censorship'.
- 26 A highly influential poetry critic on *The Observer*, and friend of Hughes and Plath, Alvarez was the author of *Under Pressure* (1965), a pioneering study of the position of writers in Eastern European writers.
- 27 *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 1 (1965), p. 8.
- 28 *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 23–24 (Spring 1975), p. 11.
- 29 Seamus Heaney, *A Giant at My Shoulder*, RTÉ Radio, 25 August 1999.
- 30 Like Miłosz's Lithuania, Herbert's homeland in the Ukraine had been seized by the Soviet Union.
- 31 Mary Craig, p. 181. Since his defection in 1951, all of Miłosz's books were banned in Poland.
- 32 Czesław Miłosz, 'Poet of Exile', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 October 1980, rptd in *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations*, p. 5.
- 33 In the Nobel Lecture, p. 14, Miłosz refers to the poet's 'mandate' to speak for those made 'silent forever'.
- 34 Joseph Brodsky, Czesław Miłosz, Susan Sontag, Stanisław Barańczak, Tomas Venclova et al. 'The Polish Crisis: Three Statements', *New York Review of Books*. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1982/jan/21/the-polish-crisis-three-statements/> (accessed 21 January 1982).
- 35 cf. Heaney's comments in 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry LXXV', an interview with Henri Cole, in *The Paris Review*, 144 (Fall 1997): 'The fact of the matter is that the most unexpected and miraculous thing in my life was the arrival of poetry itself – as a vocation and an elevation almost' (p. 92).
- 36 'The Nobel Lecture', p. 11.

- 37 Marie Heaney, qtd in Robert McCrum's 'A Life of Rhyme', an interview with Heaney, *The Observer*, 19 July 2009. Mossbawn is her husband's Eden, she says, then adds, 'All he's ever wanted to do is go back'.
- 38 Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems 1931–2001* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 37.
- 39 Seamus Heaney, 'Place, Pastness, Poems', *Salmagundi* 68–69 (Fall/Winter 1985–1986), p. 30.
- 40 Seamus Heaney, 'Uncoupled', *Human Chain* (London: Faber, 2010), p. 11.
- 41 Seamus Heaney, in Maurice Fitzpatrick's *The Boys of St Columb's* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2010), p. 58.
- 42 Seamus Heaney, *Chicago Literary Review*, 13 March 1981, p. 15.
- 43 Harold Bloom observes in *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) that 'Poetic Influence is gain and loss'. In exemplifying the loss, he subsequently maintains that when 'one poet influences another, or more precisely one poet's poems influence the poems of the other, through a generosity of spirit', this signifies weakness on the part of the writer influenced. He goes on to argue that fruitful exchanges can occur between 'two strong, authentic poets', but that generally the outcome of this dialogue is a 'misreading', 'distortion' and 'wilful' revision of 'the prior poet' (pp. 29–30).
- 44 Seamus Heaney, 'Feeling into Words', *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968–78* (London: Faber, 1980), p. 56.
- 45 Miłosz, 'The Nobel Lecture', p. 11.
- 46 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, qtd in Bloom, p. 6.
- 47 William Logan, in 'Ply the Pen', *New York Times*, Sunday Book Review of 24 September 2010, makes an insubstantiated, inaccurate claim that few of Heaney's poems from 'the past 10 or 20 years' are likely 'to be remembered'.
- 48 Mona Simpson, 'A Talk with Czesław Miłosz', in *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations*, p. 9.
- 49 At different times, Miłosz compares exile with suicide and 'incurable illness'. See Grudzinska-Gross, pp. 243, 244. In 'Poetry with a Foreign Accent', Chapter Eight of her book, she gives a very full and informative account of Miłosz's changing attitude to his hosts' languages. See particularly pp. 241–258.
- 50 Czesław Miłosz, 'Language', in *To Begin Where I am*, p. 19.
- 51 Grudzinska-Gross, p. 246.
- 52 *Native Realm*, p. 67.
- 53 See my discussion of Kinsella's and Montague's influence on Heaney, in 'Gleanings, Leavings: Irish and American Influences on Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out*', *New Hibernia Review*, 2.3 (Autumn 1998), pp. 26–35.
- 54 John Montague, *The Figure in the Cave* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1989), p. 45.
- 55 Seamus Heaney, *Among Schoolchildren: A John Malone Memorial Lecture*, 9 June 1983, p. 12.
- 56 Richard English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA* (London: Macmillan, 2003), pp. 235–236.

## Textual Practice

- 57 Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972–2000* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001), pp. 68–69. Qtd in English.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 59 Seamus Heaney, *Among Schoolchildren: A John Malone Memorial Lecture* (Belfast: John Malone Memorial Committee, 1983), p. 12.
- 60 *ibid.*
- 61 Following events in Poland in August 1980 and the emergence of the Solidarity trade union, the term began to feature frequently in international political discourse.
- 62 What he precisely meant by his use of the word is a matter of speculation. Had the exchange occurred two years later, one might connect the term with the Field Day project with its stated aim of ‘producing analyses of established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation’, *Ireland’s Field Day* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), p. viii.
- 63 Heaney, *Chicago Literary Review*, 13 March 1981, p. 15. The incident is cited also in ‘The Flight Path’ from *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber, 1995), where Heaney’s narrator is asked, ‘When, for fuck’s sake, are you going to write/ Something for us?’ (p. 25), and also in *The Paris Review* interview (p. 111), and *Stepping Stones* (pp. 257–258).
- 64 Heaney, *Chicago Literary Review*, p. 14.
- 65 ‘An Interview with Czesław Miłosz’, Paul, W. Rea, in *Salmagundi*, 80 (Fall 1988), rpted in *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations*, p. 92.
- 66 *Atlantic Charter*, 14 August 1941, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp> (accessed 22 February 2011).
- 67 Heaney, from an unpublished interview with Patrick Sheerin, 18 December 1985, in Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1:1.
- 68 Grudzinska-Gross, p. 32.
- 69 Whereas ‘The Strand at Lough Beg’ and ‘A Postcard from North Antrim’ (*Field Work*, 1979, pp. 17–18, 19–20) are respectively written ‘In Memory of Colum McCartney’ and ‘In Memory of Sean Armstrong’, Louis O’Neill’s name does not appear in ‘Casualty’ (*Field Work*, pp. 21–24) nor William Strathearn’s in ‘Station Island VII’ (*Station Island*, 1984, pp. 77–80).
- 70 Czesław Miłosz, *Miłosz’s ABC*, qtd in Grudzinska-Gross, p. 62.
- 71 *Stepping Stones*, p. 277.
- 72 In mid-September 1980, Heaney had received an enquiry from the Chair of English and American Language and Literature at Harvard as to whether he might be interested in an appointment for three to five years ‘teaching one semester per year’ (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 2).
- 73 Heaney to Longley, February 1981 (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, MSS 744 Box 15a).

- 74 For a detailed account of the republican paramilitaries H-Block campaigns, see Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990).
- 75 Co-founder of *Ploughshares* magazine along with his brother, Peter, Padraig O'Malley is a leading academic at the University of Massachusetts, and an important contact of Heaney's during his years at Harvard.
- 76 O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave*, p. 25.
- 77 English, *Armed Struggle*, p. 194.
- 78 *The Diary of Bobby Sands*, qtd in English, p. 198.
- 79 Seamus Heaney, interviewed by Lisa Dickler, Jay McKenzie, and Molly McQuade, *Chicago Literary Review*, published 13 March 1981, p. 15.
- 80 *Ibid.*
- 81 *Stepping Stones*, p. 260.
- 82 In the longer term, Sands' success had a massive, transformative effect on republican strategy and the future of the province, since it demonstrated to Provisional Sinn Fein that they could advance their cause through the ballot box. It also shocked the Irish and UK governments into a change of direction, and was a factor in the negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. See Michael Parker, *Northern Irish Literature 1976–2006: The Imprint of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 46–52.
- 83 Bew and Gillespie, pp. 148–149. Mrs Thatcher took an identical line when she informed the Commons of the death of the member for Fermanagh/South Tyrone: 'He chose to take his own life. It was a choice his organisation did not allow to many of its victims' (qtd in McKittrick and McVea, p. 144).
- 84 Heaney attended the wake of the eighth hunger striker, Thomas McElwee, a cousin of Francis Hughes, and another neighbour. See *Stepping Stones*, pp. 260–261.
- 85 White, p. 223. John Hume, for example, warned Margaret Thatcher of the grim consequences for constitutional nationalism in Ireland if the strike continued and that Irish-American money would again pour in to the IRA's coffers.
- 86 See, for example, 'Away from it All', 'Chekhov on Sakhalin', 'Sandstone Keepsake', 'Granite Chip', 'An Ulster Twilight', 'The Loaning', 'Station Island' II, IV, VII, VIII, 'The First Flight', and 'The Old Icons'.
- 87 Seamus Heaney, 'Pilgrim's Journey', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 123 (Winter 1984). In *Native Realm*, p. 90, Miłosz observes that 'Contradictions can be fruitful' in facing up to 'controversy' in one's 'own soul'.
- 88 Seamus Heaney, 'Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet', *Irish University Review*, 15.1 (Spring 1985), pp. 6, 19.
- 89 Colin Middleton's illustration of a bird complete with human hand in the Field Day Press edition of *Sweeney Astray* (1983), p. xi, underlines Sweeney's dual nature.
- 90 Neil Corcoran, in his early study, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber 1986), p. 174–175, understandably misidentified its subject as Yeats.

## Textual Practice

- 91 The tower image Heaney uses in 'The Master' may well be in part derived from his reading of *Native Realm*, where Miłosz refers at one point to his 'inner castle, a castle of prayer' (p. 280).
- 92 See, for example, 'Ruins and Poetry', in Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, pp. 81–97. On p. 81, he cites 'disintegration' as the defining word 'for what had happened'.
- 93 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, p. I, vi, l.7.
- 94 Letter from c. 24 October 1954, qtd in Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: Une Vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 522.
- 95 Jerzy Jarniewicz, 'Seamus Heaney and Post-War Polish Poets', in Ashby Bland Crowder and Jason David Hall (eds), *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), p. 110.
- 96 Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber, 1995), p.
- 97 Bogdana Carpenter and Madeleine G. Levine, introduction to *To Begin Where I am*, p. ix.
- 98 Seamus Heaney, Poem IX, 'Route 110', in *Human Chain* (London: Faber, 2010), p. 56.
- 99 This new line appears in the *New Selected Poems 1966–1987* (London: Faber, 1990), p. 202.
- 100 Seamus Heaney, *A Giant At My Shoulder*, broadcast on RTÉ Radio, 25 August 1999.
- 101 Interview with Sven Birkerts by the author, Boston, 15 October 2010.
- 102 Seamus Heaney Papers, 12 August 1997 (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 49).
- 103 Seamus Heaney Papers, 22 May 1994 (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 18).