

Questions, Apostrophes, and the Politics of Seamus Heaney's "Field Work"

KEVIN MCGUIRK

THE POETRY OF Seamus Heaney's middle period, gathered in the volumes *North* (1975) and *Field Work* (1979), represents the encounter between a traditional, unpolitical poetic and the importunate events of history—the eruption of the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland in 1969. Similar encounters in this century have produced the varied forms of poetry we think of as modern: Pound's *Cantos*, Robert Lowell's sequences on history, Adrienne Rich's discontinuous procedures of the late 1960s—extended forms, disjunctive styles, and, in some cases, a large measure of didacticism. But Heaney, deeply committed to lyric, with its condensed thought, its reliance on the resonant image and epiphanic moments that stop time, its turn away from audience to intimate address, first produced *North*, a volume that attempts to accommodate history to lyric and ends up uncomfortably divided between a mythopoetic Part I and the bleakly ironic verse of Part II. *Field Work*, written after the poet's move from Belfast to the rural South in 1972, is primarily concerned with the good life of domesticity, nature, and song; politics is a secondary but insistent presence, tending to appear as a disruption in the lyrical texture of the poetry and its settings or occasions. Perhaps for this reason *Field Work* provides a richer site for exploring the politics of poetic form. Criticism, however, has neglected the topology of poetico-political tensions in favour of a thematics of song and trust; as a result, the dominant figures in *Field Work*, the question and the apostrophe, have received little attention.

Indeed, among Heaney's many explicators, only Blake Morrison has noted the great number of questions to be found in the volume (there are 22, excluding those in the Dante translation).

He concludes that *Field Work* is the poet's "most questioning book" and accounts for the presence of so many questions in biographical terms, citing a note written by the poet:

Those four years [writing *Field Work*] were an important growth time when I was asking myself questions about the proper function of poets and poetry and learning a new commitment to the art.

(Morrison 72; Heaney, Untitled Note 1)

At the same time, Morrison claims that what we find in *Field Work* is "trust between poet and reader, poet and subject matter, but above all between poet and language" (74). Such a comprehensive listing might make us wonder what all the questioning is about; yet Heaney himself states in a 1981 interview that the "shift from *North* to *Field Work* is a shift in trust: a learning to trust melody, to trust art as reality, to trust artfulness as affirmation and not go into the self-punishment so much" (Kinahan 12). The juxtaposition of two such seemingly contradictory readings raises numerous questions. Do questions in discourse necessarily add up to a "questioning" discourse? Do we need to distinguish between different kinds and uses of questions? How is *Field Work* at once Heaney's "most questioning book" and a book of trust?

In the opening poem, "Oysters" (11), trust is the key value term, but what generates the poem's action is the way trust is thwarted. The first three of five stanzas straightforwardly celebrate an occasion in the "good life," of which oysters are a synecdoche, and the unguilty enjoyment of its fruits: "there we were, toasting friendship,/ Laying down a perfect memory/ In the cool of thatch and crockery." A sudden widening of focus, as the poem moves across the white space to the next stanza, suggests that eating oysters associates in this poet's guilty mind with the imperial power that makes the act possible:

Over the Alps, packed deep in hay and snow,
The Romans hauled their oysters south to Rome:
I saw damp panniers disgorge
The frond-lipped, brine-stung
Glut of privilege

And was angry that my trust could not repose
In the clear light, like poetry or freedom
Leaning in from sea. I ate the day
Deliberately, that its tang
Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb.

Announcing the volume's central theme, the poem dramatizes not simply trust but the conflict between trust and guilt, and a tentative affirmation of trust. What once animated from within is now objectified, thematized. From this position of control, the poet proposes a solution: the deliberate possession of being via "the day," or poetry, or freedom, in the only pure verb, *to be*.

The conflict dramatized in "Oysters" and its resolution are figured, in a number of poems that follow, by the question and the apostrophe. While theme and mood may be accounted for in biographical terms, they are as much generated by such figures as these. Indeed, as Harold Bloom suggests, *Field Work* is a richly rhetorical volume (viii), not merely in its figural abundance but, I would add, in its repeatedly suppressed and renewed encounter with what seems to threaten its own being—politics. Thus, while the poet vacillates between the proposition that art is self-sufficient and the proposition that art is rooted in a familial and communal life with the earth, the either/or structure of his thought is repeatedly disrupted by the intrusion of the political. My concern, then, is not the theme of trust¹ but a specific topology that articulates the conflict between the disruptions of politics and the lyric impulse that finds its fulfilment, as Jonathan Culler has argued (149), in the triumph of apostrophe.

When, in "The Singer's House," the poet laments the decline of poetry and asks, "What do we say any more/ to conjure the salt of our earth?/ So much comes and is gone/ that should be crystal and kept" (27), his subject is poetry as song, as lyric, as being and presence—poetry, in other words, as a form of that pure verb, *to be*. Having raised a question, having called up a challenge to its own conjuring power, the poem then responds in a deliberate manner similar to that of "Oysters." Encouraged by the recollection of an old tale, the poet insists on the survival of faith in the power of song in an apostrophe to the singer of the title:

People here used to believe
that drowned souls lived in the seals.
At spring tides they might change shape.
They loved music and swam in for a singer. . . .

When I came here first you were always singing,
 a hint of the clip of the pick
 in your winnowing climb and attack.
 Raise it again, man. We still believe what we hear. (27)

Pure assertion, the penultimate statement is a command to the poet as well as the singer. His poem must become an agent in keeping "what should be kept"—*that* is the principle function of lyric poetry; it must "conjure the salt," or essence, "of our earth." Like the singer, the poet is called to raise his voice, and does so in this very turn from recollection to apostrophe.

In "The Toome Road," questions again appear to function principally, not as references to certain events but as a challenge to the poet's powers, so that the locus of the action becomes literally the poem instead of the roadside:

One morning early I met armoured cars
 In convoy, warbling along on powerful tyres,
 All camouflaged with broken alder branches,
 And headphoned soldiers standing up in turrets.
 How long were they approaching down my roads
 As if they owned them? The whole country was sleeping.
 I had rights-of-way, fields, cattle in my keeping,
 Tractors hitched to buckrakes in open sheds,
 Silos, chill gates, wet slates, the greens and reds
 Of outhouse roofs. Whom should I run to tell
 Among all of those with their back doors on the latch
 For the bringer of bad news, that small-hours visitant
 Who, by being expected, might be kept distant?
 Sowers of seed, erectors of headstones . . .
 O charioteers, above your dormant guns,
 It stands here still, stands vibrant as you pass,
 The invisible, untoppled omphalos. (15)

The poet does not, despite his question, run to tell anyone. The narration of the event (meeting the soldiers) and the expressed concerns about duration and possible action are suspended by the concluding apostrophe, the three lines of which create a dense node of associations and a complex internal semantic doubling. A radio broadcast made by Heaney in 1978, a reminiscence of his farm childhood, provides a gloss on the central word, "omphalos": "I would begin with the Greek word *omphalos*, meaning navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of

the world, and repeat it, *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door" ("Omphalos" 17). The "omphalos" of the poem, then, is the mystical source and centre of domestic and farm life, which, the speaker asserts, stands firm against imperialist intrusion. It is "untopped," and the negative, like all negatives, registers a tension between the negated and affirmed. The omphalos is a resisting figure, as it "stands here still, stands vibrant as you pass." Probably the most exploited word with double meaning in poetry, "still" indicates that the omphalos is both "still here" in time, enduring through centuries, and motionless, rooted in this place. The soldiers, meanwhile, both pass by on the road, in space, and pass away, in time. Finally, when the poet calls the decidedly contemporary "headphoned soldiers" "charioteers," he is associating them with the forces of imperial Rome and, by extension, with any imperialist force. He is, moreover, subtly weaving himself into this tight network of associations. Apostrophe, Culler writes,

is the pure embodiment of poetic pretension; of the subject's claim that in his verse he is not merely an empirical poet, a writer of verse, but the embodiment of poetic tradition and of the spirit of poesy. . . . Devoid of semantic reference, the *O* of apostrophe refers to other apostrophes and thus to the lineage and conventions of sublime poetry. (143)

This apostrophizing poet, by turning British soldiers into Roman charioteers, turns himself into a transhistorical and transnational bard, speaking for any oppressed people against brute, impersonal intrusion by the state. When he claims that the omphalos "stands here still," he is no longer narrating past events, he is not standing on the roadway: "here" is the poem itself. Thus the poem becomes the site of omphalos, and a site of political resistance as well.

The tension Heaney addresses in these poems is very close to one that Terrence Des Pres locates in Greek literature of the classical period, a "tension between the *polis*, dedicated to war and public order, and the *oikos*, the zone of immediate life, dedicated to hearth, home, and the generative powers of earth" (15). Heaney even reaches back in history to align modern and archaic

problems. The internal conflict the poet experiences in "Oysters" is made a perennial problem of conscience. "The Toome Road" powerfully opposes not only a rural community in Ireland against British forces but any such community against the powers of the state as well: the originary *oikos* against the overarching *polis*. But "The Toome Road" is a political poem in one sense only. If, as Des Pres's definition suggests, politics is "the play of impersonal force disrupting personal [and communal] life" (xvi), then this poem engages with the *polis* (zone of *politics*) only to reject it. It is political only in the act of rejecting the *polis* as an authentic presence in the landscape.

While the identification of poetry with earth or the *oikos* is explicit and polemical in "The Toome Road," elsewhere it remains presumptive, its politics uninvestigated. Heaney, as I have suggested, vacillates between affirming his obligation to the *oikos* and insisting upon artistic freedom from it. In "Oysters" the poet rejects obligation and proposes deliberately to "eat the day," even though "the day" is made possible by imperial power. In contrast, the poet of "The Singer's House" implicitly identifies poetry with the *oikos*, indicating at the same time that to evoke and preserve earth's essences is its proper function. This conflict of allegiances is intensified in a pair of elegies for victims of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, the first a cousin of Heaney, the second an acquaintance. Both poems respond to a historical, political event that wrenches the *oikos* from its dream and makes it inescapably political; yet from each poem we abstract a different notion of art's proper response to such an event. "The Strand at Lough Beg" attempts to heal the wound made by politics through symbolic action that employs elements of earth. "Casualty" (21-24), by contrast, responds to a felt pressure from the tribe by refusing to conform to its dictates. Like "Oysters," its central image is not the earth but the sea, which seems to represent a greater freedom and scope.

"The Strand at Lough Beg" (17-18) is written in the mode of address, but its greater part is taken up in narrating past events. The poet, recalling the night of his cousin's death, tries to imagine what occurred:

What blazed ahead of you? A faked road block?
 The red lamp swung, the sudden brakes and stalling
 Engine, voices, heads hooded and the cold-nosed gun?

The cousin was far from what he knew: "The lowland clays and waters of Lough Beg,/ Church Island's spire, its soft treeline of yew." But even there, in that familiar and familial rural setting, intimations of an alien violence had been felt in the past: "You used hear guns [of hunters] fired behind the house . . . / But were still scared to find spent cartridges,/ Acrid, brassy, genital, ejected,/ On your way across the strand to fetch the cows." The "sowers of seed, erectors of headstones" of "The Toome Road" are described now as a people who

could not crack the whip or seize the day:
 Big-voiced scullions, herders, feelers round
 Haycocks and hindquarters, talkers in byres,
 Slow arbitrators of the burial ground.

These are a small people who would live, if they could, as if the *polis* did not exist.

The poem slips at this point into the present tense; the poet suddenly walking with his cousin in the countryside he has described: the cattle "turn their unbewildered gaze/ To where we work our way through squeaking sedge." The critical turn is the poet's:

I turn because the sweeping of your feet
 Has stopped behind me, to find you on your knees
 With blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes,
 Then kneel in front of you in brimming grass
 And gather up cold handfuls of the dew
 To wash you, cousin. I dab you clean with moss
 Fine as the drizzle out of a low cloud.
 I lift you under the arms and lay you flat.
 With rushes that shoot green again, I plait
 Green scapulars to wear over your shroud.

In Sophocles's *Antigone*, the play Des Pres uses to establish the valence of his terms, Antigone intends to defy the ruling of the *polis* by burying the body of her brother, which Creon would defile by leaving to the birds. She calls the act she intends "the crime of piety" (161). Burial of the dead, Des Pres notes, is an ethical act and "constitutive of human community" (9). In this

passage from "The Strand at Lough Beg," where the poet shifts from recollection in the second person to present address that describes a present action, he begins to perform a symbolic preparation for burial. One of the functions of elegy, even as it "sends off" the deceased person, is to preserve the person's presence in language. Address bestows subjectivity, potential response; an object is made a subject, an "it" is made a "thou." Here, ritual action and the poetic action of apostrophe are conjoined in a performance of imaginative healing that embodies a complex of human feeling; for it is send-off *and* rhetorical suppression of the fact of finality, a ritual parting and acknowledgement of death's utter divisiveness, *and* a discursive keeping of the deceased cousin. In the last two lines, these opposing energies cross as "rushes that shoot green again," with their suggestion of life renewed, are woven into "green scapulars to wear over your shroud"—the last word connoting finality. Heaney's figurative preparation for burial stands as an act of community that would dignify the dead body degraded, not just by death but by political murder. It is not, like Antigone's, an act of defiance, but it is an act of profound piety that transforms his developing obsession with the dead, which reached its nadir in *North*, into a humane involvement with the current woes of his people.

Yet apostrophe remains radically an act of solipsism—apostrophe to the inanimate or absent, in particular—for the figure addressed is effectively made over in the image of the speaker who bestows subjectivity upon it. The notion that apostrophe, by creating a "potentially responding subject," puts the poet in a dialogic rather than a monologic situation, is belied by the fact that the subject addressed does not, by definition, respond. Indeed, an apostrophized object is defined and, therefore, limited by the poet's act. What apostrophe serves to do first of all is to establish poetic presence and voice in an immediate fashion. Secondly, it removes the discourse from the constraints of referential time, as it works against causality, sequence, teleological meaning (Culler), and, therefore, against history. But what if the poet fully and consciously believes in the otherness of the "subject" he addresses—that, in other words, he is not bestowing

subjectivity but merely presupposing it? Clearly, apostrophe depends upon a certain suspension of disbelief, perhaps of the sort that Coleridge suggested constitutes poetic faith. Recall Heaney's assertion, "[w]e still believe what we hear."

Each of the apostrophes in these poems seeks to redress a sense of loss and breakdown, to stop time, to induct us into a fictional but whole presence in poetry; each works to resolve the fear and uncertainty expressed in the urgent questions posed by the poet. But the resolutions they offer, after all, render those questions redundant: they are not genuine answers to the problems raised. It does not matter how long armoured cars in convoy approached along country roads, nor does it matter whom the poet tells, for the "invisible, untoppled omphalos," spirit of the *oikos*, "stands here still." Heaney seems fully to assume the definition of politics as, in Des Pres's terms, "the play of impersonal force disrupting personal life; politics, therefore, as a primary ground of misfortune" (xvi). Poetry and the *oikos* are opposed to such a force; they are not *in themselves* political. But politics is also, as Des Pres points out, "the art of the possible," and "[p]olitical situations . . . are political to the degree that possibilities stay open" (5). In these terms, the poems aim to eliminate politics in so far as they posit, in a figure that suppresses history, an originary, timeless life of the earth remote from the concerns of the *polis*; or, as in "Oysters" and "Casualty," a freedom from social concern in art.

In "Casualty" the conflict between the *oikos* and the *polis* is displaced by a conflict between the *oikos* and the demands of art as conceived by the poet. In the movement from question to apostrophe—again the rhetorical peaks of the poem—we see realized the solipsistic potential in apostrophe. Part I evokes the character of the victim, an acquaintance who died in the bombing of a pub in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday (1972), when 13 civil rights marchers were shot by British troops, and recalls the poet's relationship with him, with its peculiar mingling of casual intimacy and embarrassed distance. The poet "loved his whole manner, / Sure-footed but too sly," but whenever the fisherman mentioned poetry, "shy of condescension, / [he] would manage by some trick / To switch the talk to eels / Or lore of the horse

and cart / Or Provisionals." This man "was blown to bits / Out drinking in a curfew/ Others obeyed." Part II contrasts the "common funeral," the mourners "braced and bound / Like brothers in a ring," with the individualist fisherman who "would not be held / At home by his own crowd / Whatever threats were phoned," and it concludes at a rhetorical climax, pausing in its narration of events to pose a question about them:

How culpable was he
 That last night when he broke
 Our tribe's complicity?
 "Now you're supposed to be
 An educated man,"
 I hear him say. "Puzzle me
 The right answer to that one."

More pointed than the questions in the other two politically related poems I have discussed, this is clearly the poet's question to himself, even if he fantasizes the fisherman exhorting him to discover an answer. The poet's ambivalence towards the political demands, implicit even in posing such a question, is registered in the word "complicity," whose ambiguity in this context insinuates that tribal loyalty may be no more than partnership in wrongdoing.

In Part III the poet tells us he missed the funeral with "Those quiet walkers/ And sideways talkers." The sound of the funeral cars' motors becomes the sound of the fisherman's boat as the scene dissolves and becomes a remembered occasion shared on the water:

 that morning
 I was taken in his boat,
 The screw purling, turning
 Indolent fathoms white,
 I tasted freedom with him.
 To get out early, haul
 Steadily off the bottom,
 Dispraise the catch, and smile
 As you find a rhythm
 Working you, slow mile by mile,
 Into your proper haunt
 Somewhere, well out, beyond . . .

The activity of fishing, as the poet depicts it, makes this fisherman one of a number of exemplary figures more common in

Heaney's first collections. The thatcher, diviner, and blacksmith of *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969) are independent operators in a subverbal realm, who work with an intimate knowledge and almost physical intelligence that, in its "beyondness," is analogous to the activity of the poet as Heaney conceives of it. "Your proper haunt"—the ambiguously referring second person lends itself to this emblem-making—is the realm of the poet.

The line of exemplary victims inaugurated in Heaney's third collection, *Wintering Out*, with the neglected children of "Limbo" and "Bye-Child" and reaching its apotheosis in the bog people of *North*, also figures here. The fisherman, a late example, becomes the locus of competing poetic anxieties. As the cinematic dissolve takes us out to open sea, the elegy (which embodies the poet's bond to the tribe) is transformed into an apology for an idea about art (which embodies his desire for freedom and trust). Elegized victim metamorphoses into exemplary artist. This emblem, this true moment, miles from "those sideways talkers," becomes the "answer" to the sharp question of Part II. The fisherman, we infer, was not culpable, nor is the poet who breaks his tribe's "complicity." The question becomes, in effect, a throwaway question, redundant, and simply a function in the poem's rhetorical structure. Specifically, it becomes in the end no more than a pre-text² for the apostrophe that concludes the poem:

Dawn-sniffing revenant,
Plodder through midnight rain,
Question me again.

This fisherman, however, does not need to ask such questions, for he knows already, unreflexively, what the poem gradually discovers, that to go one's own way, "to get out early" and "find a rhythm," is the important thing, and his emblemization is the means by which the poem discovers it.

In apostrophizing the dead man, the poet turns away from his listening audience, closing the circuit of poet and imagined fisherman. The shuttling between them is clearly solipsistic: the poet apostrophizes a figure he wants to respond to him, but the question that figure might pose will be the poet's own, which, as

the poet "answers" by making it redundant, serves merely as pretext for apostrophe. The apostrophe then invokes the pretext again. Moreover, in calling up this "revenant" and invoking the old relationship, the poet seeks to erase time and consequences, politics and history. At the same time that he excludes his audience, he excludes from consideration the political content of the question, and, indeed, the political context and nature of the event that is the occasion of the poem. As it rejects the strictures of the *oikos* and moves "beyond" the violence of the *polis*, "Casualty" erects a Romantic image of the artist as solitary and sufficient to himself, miles out on the sea instead of rooted in the earth.

If Heaney can be called a political poet, the term needs qualification. According to Heaney, "[w]e still expect the poetic imagination to be sympathetic rather than analytic. 'Intellect' still seems to summon its rhyme from Wordsworth's pejorative 'dissect'" ("Fully Exposed" 45). The type of the sympathetic political poem is the elegy, for it unites community in sympathy for the victim of violence; it is a way of dealing with loss, of "keeping what should be crystal and kept" against the diminutions of time. Furthermore, elegy is an extension into the public sphere of an already principally sympathetic mode, the lyric. In the apostrophe to the dead, the overheard character of lyric persists:³ the reader, looking over the shoulder of the poet, as it were, need only identify, see with, the poet, and thereby sympathize. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine Heaney transgressing the fourth wall of dramatic utterance by addressing us; that would break the magical circuit of sympathy that runs among poet, reader, and addressed subject. In assuming the power of sympathy and trust, the poet of apostrophe must suppress the difference and division that produces, and is in turn produced by, questioning.⁴

For Milan Kundera, questioning has a positive potential in itself (McGann 312). Like Heaney, a writer compelled into political subjects by the situation of his own country and an exile as well, he suggests that literature is not meant to answer questions but to pose them. Such a view would seem to proffer the question—with its capacity to penetrate and divide, its kinetic quality—as a political tool for poetry that might have replaced the static

modes of *North*. Furthermore, the question can introduce a dialogic element into lyric poetry (Jauss 91); but this potential is suppressed by Heaney, most notably, as we have seen, in "Casualty." Therefore the "shift in trust" that Heaney sees as the mark of *Field Work*'s distinction from *North* entails a displacement of the questions that are asked.

If apostrophes displace questions, one question displaces all others, summarizing the anxiety at the heart of this book of trust: "What is my apology for poetry?" (41). "The Harvest Bow" (*Field Work* 58) and the essays of *The Government of the Tongue* (1988) aim to name answers, but they do no more than reinscribe the powerfully conservative rhetoric of the apostrophe in different terms. "The Harvest Bow" (58) celebrates the virtues of the *oikos*: the bow, a decorative device common in rural Irish homes, is made of wheat-straw; it is associated with the harvest; anyone can make one (the poet's father, addressed here, is the particular maker in the poem); it is a preserver—a keeper of what should be kept—as the poet in "reading" it with his hands ("I tell and finger it like braille,/ Gleaning the unsaid off the palpable") "sees" in "its golden loops" an evening in his childhood. The poem concludes:

The end of art is peace
 Could be the motto of this frail device
 That I have pinned up on our deal dresser—
 Like a drawn snare
 Slipped lately by the spirit of the corn
 Yet burnished by its passage, and still warm.

Like the apostrophe, which gains power in alluding to other apostrophes, this "motto," taken from Yeats, who took it from the nineteenth-century poet Coventry Patmore, gains power as the statement not just of Seamus Heaney but of three generations of poets. In a more recent interview (1988), Heaney connects the motto with the ability of art to "outface" horror and violence. He argues that

no matter how turbulent, apocalyptic, vehement or destructive art's subject is or that which is contained with art, no matter how unpeaceful the thing previous to art is—once it has been addressed and brought into a condition called art, it is, if not pacified, brought into equilibrium. For a moment the parallelogram of forces is just held. . . . Art is an image. It is not a solution to reality . . . (Brandes 21)

This view is further elaborated in the essays in *The Government of the Tongue*. Indeed, Heaney frames the volume as an apology for a lyric poetry that survives in the context of forces that would "govern the tongue." Summing up his introductory argument, he writes that

[t]he achievement of a poem, after all, is an experience of release. In that liberated moment, when the lyric discovers its buoyant completion and the timeless formal pleasure comes to fullness and exhaustion, something occurs which is equidistant from self-justification and self-obliteration. A plane is—fleeting—established where the poet is intensified in his being and freed from his predicaments.

("Interesting Case" xxii)

In celebrating the "ungoverned tongue," however, the very real context of the *government* of the tongue, of political constraint, is implied. Such freedom as Heaney desires for poetry is an illusion produced by a negation that has no meaning without its positive term. He, for one, is a poet inexorably shaped by a political reality. His suppression, in the poems I've discussed, of the question's "active power of dislocation" (Wolfson 19), and his late stress upon the refuge form affords belie his determined character and, indeed, the way politics, rather than being disabling, has continuously constituted one of the terms by which his art has its being.

NOTES

- ¹ For a fuller treatment of the theme of trust, see Ricks and Hart.
- ² Kneale argues that apostrophe properly depends upon "a prior discourse or rhetorical pre-text" (6). In "Casualty," the pre-text functions as pretext as well.
- ³ Frye writes: the lyric is "preeminently the utterance that is overheard. . . . The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners, though he may speak for them, and though they may repeat some of his words after him" (249-50).
- ⁴ Hart's suggestion that Heaney follows Blake's assertion "[w]ithout contraries is no progression," (87) actually serves to highlight the difference between Heaney and Blake, and, for that matter, Yeats, a modern Irish poet who did follow the assertion. Blake and Yeats are not only dialectical but poets of radical will. Heaney is, of course, like any writer, subject to the truth the aphorism asserts, and his poetic development may demonstrate its validity; but he does not follow it as a precept. He certainly does not embrace contrariety, and his avoidance of conflict is evident in his suppression of the question instead of using it as a dialectical tool.

WORKS CITED

- Bloom, Harold. Editor's Note. *Seamus Heaney*. Modern Critical Views. Ed. Harold Bloom. New Haven: Chelsea House, 1986. vii-viii.
- Brandes, Randy. "Seamus Heaney: An Interview." *Salmagundi* 80 (1988): 4-21.
- Culler, Jonathan. "Apostrophe." *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981. 135-54.
- Des Pres, Terrence. *Praises and Dispraises: Poetry and Politics in the 20th Century*. New York: Viking, 1988.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.
- Hart, Henry. "Seamus Heaney's Anxiety of Trust in *Field Work*." *Chicago Review* 36.3-4 (1989): 87-108.
- Heaney, Seamus. *Field Work*. New York: Farrar, 1979.
- . "The Fully Exposed Poem." Rev. of *Sagittal Section: Poems New and Selected*, by Miroslav Holub. *The Government of the Tongue*. 45-53.
- . *The Government of the Tongue: The T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings*. London: Faber, 1988.
- . "The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov's Cognac, and a Knocker." *The Government of the Tongue*. xi-xxiii.
- . *North*. 1975. New York: Farrar, 1980. 159-228.
- . "Omphalos." *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*. New York: Farrar, 1980. 17-21.
- . Untitled note. *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*. 102 (1979): 1.
- Jauss, Hans Robert. *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*. 1982. Trans. Michael Hays. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1989.
- Kinahan, Frank. "Artists on Art: An Interview with Seamus Heaney." *Critical Inquiry* 8.3 (1982): 405-14.
- Kneale, J. Douglas. "Romantic Aversions: Apostrophe Reconsidered." *ELH* 58 (1991): 141-65.
- McGann, Jerome J. "Response to Charles Altieri." *Politics and Poetic Value*. Ed. Robert Von Hallberg. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1987. 309-13.
- Morrison, Blake. *Seamus Heaney*. London: Methuen, 1982.
- Ricks, Christopher. "The Mouth, the Meal and the Book." Rev. of *Field Work*, by Seamus Heaney. *London Review of Books* 8 Nov. 1979: 4-5.
- Sophocles. *Antigone*. *Sophocles I*. Trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff. Chicago, U Chicago P, 1954. 157-206.
- Wolfson, Susan J. *The Questioning Presence: Worksworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986.