

“EMBLEMS OF ADVERSITY”: W. B. YEATS’S POETICS OF VIOLENCE AND
CONTEMPORARY NORTHERN IRISH POETRY

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W. B. Yeats’s poetry presents an interconnected world where desire is the progenitor of both violence and artistic expression. His poetry explores the interaction of art and violence. Poets from the North of Ireland such as Seamus Heaney and Nick Laird represent the dual legacy of W. B. Yeats’s poetics in a society where violence has been the norm. Yeats’s legacy influences both Heaney’s poetry that attempts to mitigate violence with art, and Laird’s poetry that attempts to expose violence with art. Reading W. B. Yeats’s poetry through the lens of the poets that follow him allows an exploration of alternative strategies for viewing and reacting to violence.

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that after me
 My bodily heirs may find,
 To exalt a lonely mind,
 Befitting emblems of
 adversity.¹

Introduction

The above epigraph is from Yeats's second section of "Meditations in a Time of Civil War" and is often quoted by Northern Irish poets and critics. When discussing the conflict in Ireland and Northern Ireland, Seamus Heaney (using Yeats's line) said, "What we have is the tail-end of a struggle in a province between territorial piety and imperial power. . . . The question as ever is 'How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?' And my answer is, by offering 'befitting emblems of adversity.'"² Through a question provided by Shakespeare³, Heaney offers Yeats's line as a response to his own struggle with violence in poetry. In his lecture, "Yeats as Tragedian," given on the first anniversary of the Battle of the Bogside in Derry, Michael Longley also refers to Yeats's "Meditations." What Yeats conveys in the poem Longley claims is, "the poet's only line of action is to be a poet; he is saying that such a line of action can endure and encompass the worst possibilities of man and of man's situation; ... he is saying that whatever the circumstances and however grim the backcloth a poet's first and last loyalties must be to his own imagination."⁴ Longley here conveys how integral Yeats is for his own poetry as he must find

¹ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), 202.

² Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 57.

³ The question is from Shakespeare's Sonnet 65.

⁴ qtd. in Ronald Schuchard, "The Legacy of Yeats in Contemporary Irish Poetry," *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* 34, no. 2 (April 9, 1992): 292.

his own “befitting emblems” to be both a poet and a person who experienced the violence of the Bogside. As Edward Said observes in *Culture and Imperialism*, poets are torn between finding “befitting emblems” of violence and “how to reconcile the inevitable violence of the colonial conflict.”⁵ Throughout its history, Northern Ireland has been a crucible of violence but also a wellspring of poetry. There is a constant conflict in the poets of this space who are concerned with the impact of poetically depicting violence upon the actual violence that occurs. Within the history of Ireland as a whole, this concern is validated by Yeats himself who asks in the poem “Man and the Echo” the question of literature’s impact on history, specifically whether his 1902 drama led to the 1916 English executions of the participants in the Easter Rising.⁶ As Derek Mahon claims, Yeats among the contours of contemporary Irish poetry is “Mt. Everest,” and the examples he set for aesthetically depicting violence in poetry are poignantly addressed by contemporary Northern Irish poets who confront the violence of the “Troubles”.⁷ Even a poet such as Paul Muldoon who has said Yeats’s question in “Man and the Echo” is “crass, rhetorical posturing” finds himself continually returning to Yeats in both his poetry and lectures.⁸ In a time when violence and war are dominant news features around the world the issue of art and violence becomes ever more pressing, especially to those of us who choose to engage with literature rather than say armament control. Contemporary Northern Irish poetry can act as an alembic wherein the interaction of violence and the arts is distilled in order to investigate not only how one aesthetically depicts violence, the “befitting emblems,” but the impact of this “terrible beauty” on violence both psychic and societal.

⁵ Edward W Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 235.

⁶ Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 345.

⁷ Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon, eds., *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 1.

⁸ Schuchard, “The Legacy of Yeats in Contemporary Irish Poetry.” 291.

Chapter One thus explores Yeats's conception of the interactions between violence and poetry as evinced not simply in his prose statements, but in the poetry itself as the examples he leaves for the Irish poets that follow, specifically his oft quoted sequence including "Meditations" in *The Tower*. In his *Autobiographies* W. B. Yeats proclaims "All creation is from conflict, whether with our own mind or with that of others, and the historian who dreams of bloodless victory wrongs the wounded veteran."⁹ In this quote Yeats succinctly expresses a philosophy of violence that is deployed throughout his *oeuvre*. He posits violence as the progenitor of creation, and an external versus an internal conception of violence that is central to his vision of both identity and history.

Yeats explores his premise of the violent origins of creation in his early works and derives it from his esoteric endeavors. From alchemical teachings Yeats learns that the steps to self-renewal demand a process of dying or killing referred to as a blackening. Through such teachings Yeats learns creation, whether universal or psychic, derives from violence that must occur before any act of creation or renewal. This forms the basis of Yeats's cyclical theory of identity, culture, and history that he elaborates upon in *A Vision*, a theory that also draws from Vico, Hegel, and Nietzsche. Yeats recognizes that the one-sided Apollonian vision of Modernity demanding linear progress has laid the foundations for a denial of the dark side or internal psychic life of the individual, that side not involved in progressing with society toward its monetary goals. The Apollonian focus as a diagnosis of Modernity is a "totalization, normalization and domination" that concerned such philosophers as Heidegger, Foucault, and

⁹ William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies: The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume III*, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1989), 576.

Derrida.¹⁰ Modernity's focus prevents a recognition of the desire and power that drives political agendas which conceal intrinsic violence.

What most interests the philosophers of Modernity and Yeats is such concealed intrinsic violence that Slavoj Žižek terms objective violence. Just as Yeats proposes two types of violence, internal and external, Žižek proposes just such a distinction between subjective visible violence and intrinsic invisible violence, or objective violence. Objective violence is internal not only because it is apart of psychic conflict, but because as Žižek points out, violence is embodied in language and its forms, what Heidegger would call "our house of being." Žižek refers to this type of objective violence as "symbolic," and the violence it creates in our political and social systems he terms "systemic".¹¹ Symbolic violence is a violence of language as it imposes a specific universe of meaning. As a Lacanian, Žižek views the very move into language from the Imaginary to the Symbolic order as an act of sacrificial violence.¹² Andrew McKenna in "Violence and Difference" places this move in terms of Derridean difference. McKenna shows that the very move from nature to culture is the move to worship of a communal sacred, and the sacred is the designation of a sacrificial victim. As Freud perceived, the victim is both desire and taboo. Words originating from this initial sacrifice thus "differ from themselves within themselves, designating what is attractive and repulsive, holy and accursed. That is they differ in the mode of Derridean difference".¹³ Difference is therefore based upon the originary violence of culture, and extends to all difference. Žižek's theories give insight into the Yeatsian conception of originary violence, and show that Yeats's conception of internal violence refers to more than psychic struggle. Viewing Yeats's poetry through the lens of Žižek's conception of

¹⁰ Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 16.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2008), 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9-14.

¹³ Andrew J. McKenna, *Violence and Difference* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 71.

symbolic and systemic violence reveals a violent struggle within the rhetoric and construction of the poetry itself.

Yeats's poetry is produced with antinomies through the interaction of subject and object. Violence is the source of art for Yeats, because it is the fundamental chasm that exists between subject and object. Elizabeth Grosz in *Chaos, Territory, Art* describes art production in terms of the chaos of nature that is akin to Yeats's conception of violence. Grosz's theories reveal how Yeats exploits the interstice between subject and object to create the "affective intensities" of poetry. Desire, Grosz shows, in its state in nature produces a "superabundance" that often runs counter to Darwinian natural selection. Desire is thus the progenitor of performance in nature.¹⁴ Here Yeats's conception of violence and Grosz's conception of chaos depart. For Grosz, chaos is a given state for which desire as an impetus to territorialize abates chaos. Art is thus a response to violence. Yeats has also claimed in Conventry Patmore's words "The end of art is peace," but desire is both the impetus to art in nature and the impetus to violence. Although, desire abates chaos in nature, when interaction between subjects occur, or when the move from nature to culture is made because of desire, then violence is the result. Grosz's theories help reveal the poetic techniques of Yeats's poetry and their origins in natural desire, but Yeats's conception of violence extends to the cultural systemic violence.

Poets of Northern Ireland are left with a Yeatsian legacy of poetry and violence that each uses as a beacon to chart his or her own course through the violence of their own society whether Yeats be a shining example as Longley proclaims or a marker to be avoided on the subject of violence as Paul Muldoon believes. These poets deal not only with navigating Yeats's legacy but also with a society where they are criticized both for a refusal to directly comment on

¹⁴ E. A. Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 18-35.

political violence within their poetry and ironically for engaging that violence aesthetically. As the most recognized poet of Northern Ireland, Seamus Heaney is often directly criticized in this manner. As such, Chapter Two deals with the ways Yeats's poetics of violence impacts and is altered by Heaney specifically in his most violent-laden works in *North*. Heaney's concern with the impact of his poetry on social violence and his desire to present a unified mythology that concerns violence throughout his *oeuvre* bears a decided debt to W. B. Yeats's injunction for a poet to find "befitting emblems of adversity," because Heaney finds many such emblems in Yeats's own works.

Heaney consistently grapples with Yeats and his proffered symbiotic relationship between violence and creativity. Heaney resists the implications of violence's inherence to creativity and often singles out Yeatsian poems as he argues that the elder poet's "tenderness toward life and its uncompletedness is at odds with and tending to gain sway over the consolations of the artificial work."¹⁵ Heaney willfully reads a more humanist Yeats whose poetic "voice of conscience and remorse opposes itself to the artistic choice."¹⁶ For Heaney Yeats as a humanist can overcome Yeats as an artist. This reading denies the creative tension that Yeats holds between an emotional response to violence and an aesthetic depiction of it. As critic Fran Brearton notes "his [Yeats's] remorse does not allow emotion to overcome the proper freedom of poetic action."¹⁷ Heaney's reading of Yeats perhaps says more about Heaney, himself, as a poet than it does Yeats. The 1975 publication of Heaney's *North* during the Northern Irish "Troubles" is Heaney's most problematic collection regarding violence depicted aesthetically through the medium of medieval sacrificial victims buried in a bog. The violence

¹⁵ qtd. in Fran Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W.B. Yeats to Michael Longley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

of these ancient criminals and sacrificial victims helps Heaney to both distance himself from as well as focus on the Northern Irish conflict. Critic David Lloyd argues Heaney subordinates ethics to aesthetics by poetically mythologizing conflict, and therefore his poetry is unable to deal with issues of national identity and culture shaped by the violence. In other words, Lloyd accuses Heaney of dealing with only the issue of aestheticizing the violence, and not dealing with objective violence through his poetry. Both Heaney and Yeats before him aestheticize violence, but is Heaney's poetry able to engage with the systemic violence, and how do depictions of symbolic violence and potential interpretations of systemic violence engage with the actual horrors of objective visible violence? In other words, how does Heaney's poetry proffer the belief that "the end of art is peace"?

The debate within the critical world of Northern Irish poetry on aestheticizing violence has become even more intriguing with the cessation of violence in Northern Ireland. As Northern Ireland becomes globalized the pressure of violence within the crucible of Northern Ireland may no longer exist. The most recent generation of Northern Irish poets exhibit not only the influence of Yeats and Heaney, but the influence of globalization on a post-conflict Northern Ireland. Chapter Three thus investigates the poetry of this most recent generation specifically the works of Nick Laird as one of the most global Northern Irish poets who deals with the legacy of Yeats as well as Heaney's reading of him. As a poet living in a more global world the question arises: does he deal differently with symbolic and systemic violence than the previous generations of poets because of his post-conflict globalizing perspectives? Unlike Yeats or Heaney, Nick Laird does not reach for the mythic or universal to navigate the sectarian violence of his childhood, but Laird's overarching theme is violence throughout his two poetry collections even if it is not necessarily the violence of the conflict to which he was born in 1975 at the height

of the “Troubles.” Laird is concerned with violence as a systemic and symbolic part of the human condition, a part not only of a sectarian past, but of a globalized world and endemic to the language we speak and therefore to the poetry they write.

Several critics have written either legacy studies of Yeats or studies of Yeats’s theoretical conceptions and poetic depictions of violence. The legacy studies include most notably the recent publication of Ronald Schuchard’s “The Legacy of Yeats in Contemporary Irish Poetry”¹⁸ and an interesting but less applicable book length study from David Gardiner entitled “Befitting Emblems of Adversity” concerning the impact of Edmund Spenser on Yeats and the continued legacy of such on contemporary Irish poets.¹⁹ Although, both Schuchard and Gardiner address violence as a theme, they are more interested in the legacy of Yeats than in the violence that is apart of that legacy. Notable works on violence and Yeats include the aptly titled “Yeats and Violence” article by Michael Wood²⁰ and Jefferson Holdridge’s book *Those Mingled Seas*²¹ that treats Yeats’s conceptions of violence in relation to the sublime. There is also a recent book length study on violence in contemporary Northern Irish poetry entitled *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones* by Jonathan Hufstader²² that concentrates on poetry as psychological survival for Heaney and his contemporaries. In order to attempt answers to the heady questions of the relationship between art and violence in contemporary society a study must deal with both the traditional responses to violence and how successive generations respond to violence through that tradition. Discovering the poetic strategies of Yeats and more recently the poets of contemporary Northern Ireland as they deal with violence aesthetically leads to insights in how a

¹⁸ Schuchard, “The Legacy of Yeats in Contemporary Irish Poetry.”

¹⁹ David Gardiner, *Befitting Emblems of Adversity: A Modern Irish View of Edmund Spenser from W. B. Yeats to the Present*. (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 2000)

²⁰ Michael Wood, “Yeats and Violence,” *London Review of Books* 30, no. 16 (August 14, 2008): 20-25

²¹ Jefferson Holdridge, *Those Mingled Seas: The Poetry of W.B. Yeats, the Beautiful and the Sublime* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2000)

²² Jonathan Hufstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999)

contemporary world can respond to global acts of violence. Just as each of these poets both alter the legacy of dealing with violence and present new ways of poetically dealing with it, so to each individual living in our contemporary society must both know the traditional responses to the violence we inherit and seek to respond with respect to but in addition to that tradition. This thesis will thus investigate Yeats's poetics of violence as the legacy with which contemporary Northern Irish poets must contend, and seek to discover how they poetically generate strategies of aesthetically depicting violence while navigating that legacy.

Chapter One: “Horrible Splendour of Desire”¹: W. B. Yeats and the Poetics of Violence

Much of W. B. Yeats’s most famous poetry includes his predictions of apocalypse. Every reader of Yeats remembers such lines as “And what rough beast, its hour come round at last/ Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born,”² from “The Second Coming,” or easily remembers the “nightmare” that rides through “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen.”³ Although one can presume the historical references of war and violence that inspire these poems, Yeats’s cryptic question and the apocalyptic mare that rides through the night are obviously not intended to paint a literal picture of a single violent historical happening. Instead these rhetorical strategies force the reader into the space of uncertainty and incomprehensible foreboding located in the interstices of violence and the artistic depiction of it as an affective event rather than a subjective occurrence. Throughout his poetry, Yeats is concerned about the origins of violence and depicting violence in poetry. The most condensed example of Yeats’s rhetorical strategies that exploit the space created by the difference between violence itself as a subject and an objective depiction of it is his late work “The Gyres.” The poem highlights the interstice between subject and object through a creative matter that Yeats refers to as a “rich dark nothing.”⁴ This creative space is one of change and violence, and thus provides the space where violent subjects can be written. The source of this violence is desire, and thus the impetus to poetry is intimately linked to the sexual for Yeats. Desire is performative and is the

¹ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), 196. This phrase is in Yeats’s “The Tower” at the point where his subject is the intersection of desire, violence, and art.

² Ibid., 187.

³ Ibid., 210.

⁴ For a more contemporary example of “nothing” that is actually matter, think of the scientific theory of dark matter that appears to humans as nothing or empty space, but is currently thought to make up the vast majority of the mass in the universe.

impetus to both the violence of territorial disputes and the artistic expression resulting from the vivid displays for purpose of sexual attraction that often run counter to survival.⁵ Because art and violence derive from the same source Yeats explores the intersection of the two, and the ability of both art and violence to affect the other. Yeats derives this type of poetry creation from his alchemical background that focuses on transformations between spirit and matter in an interconnected cosmos. These transformations are often depicted through the image of sexual union. In this interstice of spirit and matter the difference resulting from the repetition of an affective subject objectively depicted through language results in a space where the affective intensities of violence creatively repeat⁶ an initial violent act not directly depicted. This repetition occurs through the poet's ability to place himself in the interstice as the alchemist that affects the depictions of transformations.

Along with the unanswerable questions⁷ and cryptic punning imagery of Yeats's earlier poetry, "The Gyres" is the most condensed example of the late Yeats's techniques that exhibits the interconnections of art and violence. Yeats writes in the second stanza,

What matter though numb nightmare ride on top

And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?

What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop.

⁵ E. A. Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Sexuality runs counter to survival in nature because artistic expression such as birdsong, plumage, etc. make the animal more conspicuous and easier prey. This display is performative and the beginning of art.

⁶ This is the process Deleuze refers to as difference from repetition. It is at the center of his theory of identity, language production, and art production. Repetition for Deleuze is not the same thing occurring again and again, but is a productive process that results in variation, or difference, with each repetition. Repetition as a producer of difference is best understood as a creative force or as Deleuze writes as a process of 'becoming.' See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004).

⁷ Yeats often includes cryptic questions like the one that ends "The Second Coming" in his poetry. Representative examples include "Leda and the Swan," and "The Mother of God."

A greater, a more gracious time has gone;
 For painted forms or boxes of make-up
 In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;
 What matter? Out of Cavern comes a voice
 And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice.'⁸

Although, Yeats provides as the norm the regularity of a lyric in iambic pentameter in the first line of the poem that stresses “gyres” in the sequence “The gyres! The gyres!,” the second stanza begins with an apocalyptic cryptic question like that from “The Second Coming,” one that includes the punning “nightmare” from “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” with the stress on the first syllable of the question word “What” in both the first and second lines. The change in meter occurs at exactly the points of Yeats’s apocalyptic questioning. Both the questions and the meter here are violent counterpoints to the beauty of Troy in the first stanza and the heroic “lovers of horses and women” in the third.⁹ The alliteration of “Things thought” clashes with the audibly uncomfortable proximity of “th” with the alliterative “n” and “m” sounds in “numb nightmare” when the sound is repeated in the second stanza. Again, lyric techniques from the first stanza are not only altered in the second but directly clash with those in the first stanza through an altered repetition that produces violence in the lyric form in order to audibly create the affective intensities. The audible affective intensities reproduce the unfathomable inexplicable questioning “What matter” that is repeated in a refrain-like manner within a single stanza. Unlike the typical lyrical refrain that repetitiously links entire works, Yeats’s refrain interjects and interrupts his stanza. Both the audible and formal

⁸ Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 293.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 293

alterations of the lyric form allow Yeats to poetically replicate the violent foreboding of the subject matter. The sibilant voice that ends the stanza calls for rejoicing in the creativity that is derived from chaos. The lyric form itself becomes a lyre upon which Yeats strikes the affective intensities of violence.

Matter is the subject Yeats explores in not only “The Gyres” but throughout his poetry as it relates to creativity and violence as its source. The “rich, dark nothing” of the final stanza of “The Gyres” answers the interstanza refrain “What matter” of the second. For Yeats writes in addition to “All creation is from conflict” that “I think all noble things are the result of warfare; great nations and classes, of warfare in the visible world, great poetry and philosophy, of invisible warfare, the division of a mind within itself, a victory, the sacrifice of a man to himself.”¹⁰ Conflict or warfare arises in the interstices, the “rich dark nothing” or “divisions” where matter is not perceptible. Yeats begins in the same place of creativity as Genesis, the first creative act, where God makes the heaven and earth out of a void. Richard Ellmann first made much ado about Yeats’s “nothing” in the *New York Review of Books*. Ellmann writes,

In May 1938 he [Yeats wrote a quatrain for Edith Shackleton Heald in which he offered, as “the explanation of it all,” that

From nowhere into nowhere nothing’s run.

The same words resound in two of his last plays: the old man in *Purgatory* says at the end, “Twice a murderer and all for nothing,” and the last speech of *The Herne’s Egg* includes the line, “All that trouble and nothing to show for it...” Yet in another late work, the poem entitled “The Gyres,” Yeats insisted that out of “any dark rich nothing” the whole

¹⁰ W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 321.

gazebo would be built up once again. He could conceive of nothing as empty and also as pregnant.¹¹

Ellmann's use of the word "pregnant" describes exactly the potentiality latent in Yeats's concept of "nothing," but goes no further to illuminate the impact of the concept on Yeats's late work.¹² "Nothing" is not a void but a potentiality, a multitudinous chaos of matter that can be framed to produce sensations which comprise a poem. The poem is the frame that makes matter perceptible in the void in both the objective material sense of the term and the subjective sensation sense of the term. "Matter" is both a "thing" and a "concern" according to the OED.¹³ More broadly "matter" is both object and subject. The question then "What matter" becomes for Yeats's poetry, how to make matter matter. Just as the question "What matter" is audibly affective in the poem, it is the key to how Yeats makes poetry through framing the space between subject and object, more explicitly the space where subject and object can become other as in the word "matter" itself. It is this space that creates the sensations that are affective in poetry. Deleuzian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz defines sensations as the result of the interactive exchange between subject and object. Writes Grosz,

¹¹ Qtd. in Heather Martin, *W.B. Yeats: Metaphysician as Dramatist* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier U. P., 1986), 29. First appeared in Richard Ellman, "At the Yeatses." *New York Review of Books*, May 17, 1979.

¹² Ibid., 30. Yeats scholar, Heather Martin also points to Yeats's use of "nothing" in the short story "Where There is Nothing" to describe God as the "nothing" that lies beyond the series of nine crystalline spheres that comprise the universe. In the play of the same title a self-sacrificial element is added, where the protagonist Paul Ruttledge must destroy "all of creation" in order to restore original chaos, to reach the nothing that is God. Martin recognizes "nothing" as a central pregnant concept that occurs throughout Yeats's work.

¹³ "Matter," in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Etymologically matter derives from the Latin *materia* which is usually explained by the words *mater* meaning mother and the suffix *ia* denoting the trunk of a tree as the mother of its offshoots. Etymologically matter is linked to the reproductive connotations of the word mother. Even etymologically sexuality is at the root of matter as Yeats's conception of the creative potentiality of matter suggests. In the esoteric societies of which Yeats words have a mystic potentiality, and etymology even false or phonetic etymologies suggest the metaphysical rather than linguistic source of a word. Occult etymologies are common in Western esoteric traditions.

Sensations are...extracted from the energetic forces generated between subjects and objects that are arrested, as it were, in flight, where they live as pure movement or transition...Sensations are subjective objectivities, or equally objective subjectivities, midway between subjects and objects, the point at which the one can convert into the other. This is why art, the composition of material elements that are always more than material, is the major—perhaps the only—way in which living beings deal with and enjoy the intensities that are contained within but are extracted from the natural world, chaos.¹⁴

When the subjective and objective interact sensations are produced. Yeats forms the interaction between the subjective and objective rhetorically through his punning “nightmare” that overlays a subjective inner reality with an external objective animal. The “nightmare” recognizes that both subject and object reciprocally affect the other. The poem generates sensations through this process of becoming other. The “nightmare” is apart of the question “What matter though numb nightmare ride on top,” a cryptic apocalyptic question that continues “And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?”¹⁵ The question again produces sensations through framing violence so that the inner world of blood and body becomes the external world of mire and stain, and reciprocally the violence of the external world of mire and stains becomes internal through being framed in the question with blood and body. As Grosz also states, the natural world provides the chaotic material to be framed from the “rich dark nothing.” Thus Yeats writes in the

¹⁴ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 75-76.

¹⁵ Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 293.

third stanza that the dark is between the “polecat and the owl,” literally within nature.¹⁶

The “polecat,” a dark brown masked animal, the most recognizable member being the North American skunk,¹⁷ was noted for its fetid smell and became a slang term referring to “a sexually promiscuous woman.”¹⁸ Paired with the owl that as Athena’s emblem commonly connotes wisdom, Yeats is directly forcing the reader into a divide between the classic Cartesian split between the mind and the body. However, Yeats does this with materials of the natural world, so that mind and body are both apart of the materials of the natural world to be shaped into the frame of poetry.

The Theoretical Poetics of Violence

As “The Gyres” exemplifies, art is produced through framing the divide between subject and object according to the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari. They write that art “does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event.”¹⁹ This is exactly Yeats’s strategy. That is, Yeats seeks to convey to the ear of his reader the “persistent sensations” or “affective intensities,”²⁰ through both the rhetorical strategies and manipulation of his favored lyrical form²¹ rather than to poetically monumentalize a single historic event. This divide between the depiction of violence and the experience of it is not problematic for Yeats as it is for many theorists, but instead is the very source of

¹⁶ Ibid., 293.

¹⁷ “Remainderman.” Polecats are from the *Mustelidae* family that includes North American skunks, but are an English animal with brown fur.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 176.

²⁰ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 124. Bogue defines “affective intensities” as “apersonal, nonrational junctures of force, at once immobile and speeding out of control.”

²¹ Yeats feels tension in the lyric form itself. He feels a debt to the English lyric form, but also says that the English line is too long for his Irish sensibilities. He writes, “Contemporary lyric poems...seemed to long,” because of his “Irish preference for a swift current.” See Jahan Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001), 45.

creativity. In her explication and extension of Deleuze's art theories, Elizabeth Grosz states that art is "the expression and exploration of the unrepresentable,"²² because art is created by framing and thus delimiting chaos in such a way that produces affects. Chaos is not an absence or void according to Deleuze, but instead a plethora of matter that must be framed in order to be perceived. Like Yeats's "conflict," Deleuze's "chaos" is the source of art. Grosz writes,

Art thus captures an element, a fragment, of chaos in the frame and creates or extracts from it not an image or a representation, but a sensation or rather a compound or multiplicity of sensations, not the repetition of sensations already experienced or available beyond or outside the work of art, but those very sensations generated and proliferated only by art.²³

Yeats's poetry seeks to create violent affects based on artistically repeating the act of violence through a framing of chaos that draws sensation from the conflict between the internal ordering affect of the frame and the external disordering affect of the subjective violent act, thus allowing aesthetic distance.

For Yeats the force that drives the creative violence he seeks to frame is desire. Grosz comes to this same conclusion in her work. Grosz uses Darwin's theories of natural selection and sexual selection. Natural selection's goal is the survival of the species, and genetic adaptations serve this purpose. When animals are choosing a mate, however, sexual selection often runs counter to survival and natural selection. The aim is not reproduction exclusively but sexual relations. Sexual appeal therefore often imperils as much as it attracts as in the case of a beautifully plumaged male bird that is less

²² Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 10. Both Deleuze and Derrida, in a moment of rare agreement, understand that the first gesture of art is the construction of a frame to delimit chaos.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

camouflaged than its female counterpart and more vulnerable to attack but more attractive to his mate. Grosz thus concludes that the origins of art are in the sexual abundance of nature. She explains,

It roots art in the natural and the animal, in the most primitive and sexualized of evolutionary residues in man's animal heritage. Art is evolutionary, in the sense that it coincides and harnesses evolutionary accomplishments into avenues of expression that no longer have anything to do with survival...Art is the sexualization of survival...²⁴

Sexuality for Grosz as for Yeats is the fundamental impulse to art found in the superabundance of nature, nature geared to attraction rather than survival.²⁵ Desire thus drives the violence that Yeats's techniques and thematics artistically employ. Although Yeats tries to philosophically understand violence in *A Vision* and other prose writings, his poetic goal is not to understand violence but to more literally stand under the violence, to affectively experience it through poetry.

Yeats's Eso-Poetics²⁶ of Matter

Deleuzian theory illuminates the mode of Yeats's poetry production, but one must turn to his esoteric studies that lead to his own mythos to find the source of that

²⁴ Ibid., 10-11.

²⁵ See Ibid., 31. Art in the form of music Darwin wrote is a sexual adaptation of nature, and thus language itself has sexual origins and is the normalized adaptation of erotic appeal. This explains the affectivity of language as its designatory capacities do not. Grosz compares this Darwinian view of language with that of E. O. Wilson and Steven Pinker for whom language is acquired because of it benefits for survival, and thus music and poetry are playful offshoots of language. For Darwin, however, music precedes language and is the direct result of sexual not natural selection. Violence in language extends not from the Giradean cultural impetus to religion, but from the natural territorial framing in nature for the purpose of sexuality. For Rene Girard language originates from the move from nature to culture as a move to worship a communal sacred, and the sacred is the designation of a sacrificial victim. Language originates from this initial sacrifice, the first cultural gathering. For Grosz, language is primarily affective rather than a tool to negotiate within communities.

²⁶ By Eso-Poetics I mean Esoteric Poetics-- poetry based on esoteric philosophy.

production. Yeats's poetry and the "The Gyres" specifically is drawn from the thematic frame Yeats builds in *A Vision* of historical gyres. Just as the poem itself worked microcosmically by framing the chaotic space where subjects and objects can transform, the gyres are a macrocosmic framework that reveals Yeats's socio-political thematics which furthers his theories of violence as the creative source of both poetry and politics. From his early esoteric studies, Yeats garnered a fundamental belief of the connection between man and universe.²⁷ Both a man's mind and the cosmos are interconnected, and thus history has the same movement as a man's mind. That movement can be expressed as a gyre. Yeats is influenced here by his esoteric studies of thinkers such as Robert Fludd who represents the relationship between the macrocosmic world of the divine and the microcosmic world of humans. In a note to the most famous use of the gyre, "The Second Coming," Yeats makes this connection between macrocosm and microcosm explicit. Although, the poem foregrounds the historical shift where the sphinx slouches to Bethlehem to replace the Christ child, Yeats writes this note about the gyre as an image of man's mind that links history and the individual:

The mind, whether expressed in history or in the individual life, has a precise movement, which can be quickened or slackened but cannot be fundamentally altered, and this movement can be expressed by a mathematical form.²⁸

²⁷ In the Hermetic philosophy popular with Yeats's esoteric group The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn there is a adherence to the principles of the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus on which is written "As above, so below." This statement is interpreted as a link between macrocosm and microcosm.

²⁸ Note to "The Second Coming," *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1922).

Whether on the historical plane or the individual plane, all is subject to a cycle of changes that can be represented by a circular phases of the moon illustration or by the gyres.²⁹ These changes pass from an objective state³⁰ to a subjective³¹ one throughout each cycle. As intense and time consuming as Yeats's gyre system is, he writes in an early introduction to "A Vision" that the purpose of the system is to give him metaphors for poetry.³² Many of the images upon which Yeats founds his system in *A Vision* and that are throughout his poetry are derived from his esoteric studies. Just as a main premise of those studies is a link between macrocosm and microcosm, in *A Vision* he links the gyres to definite alchemical symbols including the two most prominent images of alchemical transformation: the alchemical wedding, and the transmutation of gold as psychic images of the mental and historical processes. The first of these two images uses the king and queen or man and woman to depict the process of transfiguration—matter to spirit. The second symbolizes the process of transmutation of base metals into gold representing the rhythm of incarnation—or spirit into matter. Alchemy as apart of the foundation of Yeats's occult studies and that influence on his poetry has been well documented,³³ so it suffices to say that these alchemical images with their emphasis on antitheses, union/disunion, solution/dissolution, provides Yeats with a pattern that he builds upon in *A Vision* and one which extends not only into his poetry but to the very antithetical way

²⁹ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats Volume XIII: A Vision*, ed. Catherine E. Paul and Margaret Mills Harper (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).

³⁰ By objective Yeats is referring to the collective and unifying, and to an individual being absorbed in something greater than himself. Yeats often refers to this as "primary" rather than objective.

³¹ By subjective Yeats is referring to the individualizing and separating functions. Yeats often refers to this as "antithetical" rather than subjective.

³² W. B. Yeats, "Introduction to *A Vision* from 'A Packet for Ezra Pound.'" (1937) London: Macmillan: 1962, 8.

³³ See William T Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy*, SUNY series in Western esoteric traditions (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); George Mills Harper, ed., *Yeats and the Occult* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975); Graham Goulden Hough, *The Mystery Religion of W.B. Yeats* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984); Virginia Moore, *The Unicorn; William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1954).

in which he creates poetry³⁴ whether it be called the interstice of spirit and matter, primary and antithetical, or that of subject and object.³⁵

Framing Transfigurations and Transmutations in *The Tower*

The theory of gyres that Yeats lays in *A Vision* directly impacts the poetry he publishes immediately³⁶ afterword or as an after-word to the prose theories in *A Vision*. Entitled *The Tower* and published in 1928, the volume begins with a inverted dating sequence of four poems: “Sailing to Byzantium,” “The Tower,” “Meditations,” and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen.” Yeats biographer Terence Brown notes that these four poems were written in reverse order of their appearance in the volume.³⁷ By resequencing these poems Brown writes,

Yeats highlights how the first four poems, all of which are dated by the poet (with what must be deliberate inaccuracy), are a sequence which from 1927 dreams back as it were a passage of years which took Europe, Ireland, and the poet from before the Great War, through revolution and the civil war to the present moment of horrified uncertainty about the future.³⁸

In order to poetically depict the extensive violence of the historical era Brown lists, Yeats inverts a sequence that in order of written dates began directly dealing with the historical events of and leading to 1919 and ended with a man sailing toward an ethereal reality.

³⁴ George Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). See Bornstein for a discussion of the antithetical approach to poetry which Bornstein describes as use of both spirit and body or matter. Bornstein traces the spirit strand of Yeats’s poetry to Shelley and the concept of Intellectual Beauty.

³⁵ These hermetic images were available to Yeats in his esoteric studies, but became more widely available with A. E. Waite’s 1893 publication of *Museum hermeticum* originally published in Frankfurt in 1678.

³⁶ *A Vision* was first published by T. Werner Laurie in 1926. *The Tower* was first available in London on Valentine’s Day of 1928.

³⁷ Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats: Blackwell Critical Biographies*, 1st ed., Blackwell Critical Biographies (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 317.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 317.

Thus, “Sailing to Byzantium” would seem to be a poem about an escape from violence into a realm of art where craftsmen hammer gold mosaics.³⁹ Instead of an escape, the poet’s perch on the golden bough in the poem becomes the place where he sings “Of what is past, or passing, or to come”.⁴⁰ The chronologically reversed order creates the perspective from which the artist is able to convey the violence in the following sequence rather than a sense of escape into an imaginative world. The perspective from which the poet writes determines the perceptions conveyed in the poetry. As noted earlier, Grosz states that sensation is the product of art. She also writes, “Sensation has two dimensions, two types of energy: it is composed of affects and percepts.”⁴¹ Percepts are the result of an artist according to Deleuze wresting the percept “from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject”.⁴² In order for the affects of the following poems to produce sensations Yeats establishes what can be called a golden percept in this poem. Gold is both the object of desire in alchemy and representative of the subject in transformation. It represents the process of transmutation of spirit into matter, and thus the poet must sit on the golden bough to control this process of transmutation where subjects and objects meet. The artist places himself between object and subject to alter perception. In the fourth and final stanza of “Sailing to Byzantium” the artist is himself the perceiving objectified subject that can then produce sensation through the subjectification of perceived objects. Yeats writes,

Once out of nature I shall never take

My bodily form from any natural thing,

³⁹See Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy* for a discussion of the alchemical motifs in “Sailing to Byzantium.”

⁴⁰ Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 193.

⁴¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 76.

⁴² qtd. in Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 76.

But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake:
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come.⁴³

The poet begins as always with the natural world as the source of chaos which is the source of creativity. However, the artist must wrest himself from the natural cycles of creativity in order to create his own percepts. He creates his own form from gold instead of the natural materials of a body, but as the last stanza states he recognizes the “artifice of eternity.”⁴⁴ This is the artifice of the artist who creates perceptions through his framing of chaos in order to make perceptible the affects of the violence he depicts in the next three poems. The artist must remove himself from the history he depicts in order to write of past, present, and future, what is “past, or passing, or to come.” As in the process of alchemical dissolution, the artist’s ego must be dissolved by fire. Yeats writes that “holy-fire” must “consume my heart away” so that all that is “fastened to a dying animal” will be gone, and his soul will be purified in order to sing the very violence of “those dying generations.”⁴⁵ This is the very perspective Slavoj Žižek demands when trying to discover the violence inherent in language, art, and politics. Žižek writes about this inherent or “objective violence...may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be irrational explosions of subjective

⁴³ Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 194.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

violence,” the visible acts of violence perpetrated in societies.⁴⁶ Yeats is trying to make sense of the violence and account for it as Žižek is, and thus must through the artifice of art frame the objective violence that drives the warring violence in societies to which he has been a witness.

Yeats sings such violence in the following poems that first deal with the objective violence of philosophy and art in order to address the violence impacting his society directly in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen.” Just as his home Thoor Ballylee was Yeats’s monument that stands tall in the western countryside of Ireland, Yeats’ poem “The Tower” in the eponymous collection is a personal struggle with the thinkers that stand tall in the western tradition. The speaker passes the top of the tower as if a soldier passing the battlements as he struggles with the abstractions of Plotinus and Plato that clash with the concrete reality of the wounded countryside filled with foundations of houses and burnt trees. These types of abstractions occur in art and is the “music” that “had driven their wits astray.”⁴⁷ Here Yeats deals with the type of objective violence latent in his art, the violence Slavoj Žižek writes imposes “a certain universe of meaning” and that he calls “symbolic” violence. This is the type of violence that motivates the “systemic” violence of social and political systems that results in subjective visible acts of violence. The speaker-poet of the poem sees himself directly in the line of the Western tradition that romanticizes the political violence of societies. Yeats writes,

Strange, but the man who made the song was blind;

Yet, now I have considered it, I find

That nothing strange; the tragedy began

⁴⁶ Žižek, *Violence*, 1-2.

⁴⁷ Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 195.

With Homer that was a blind man,
And Helen has all living hearts betrayed.⁴⁸

The poet struggles with the notion that he may be blind to the implications of his art. The poem harkens back to what it deems is the beginning of a Western tradition where romantic love was a justification for war and countless loss of lives. In Yeats's society, Ireland has become the Helen for which many are willing to die as he makes explicit in the next stanza with an allusion to his work on Red Hanrahan and his "horrible splendour of desire."⁴⁹ Yeats struggles with the implications of this concern when in the poem "Man and the Echo" he questions specifically whether his art led to the impassioned violence of rebellion and the English executions of the participants in the Easter Rising. Yeats is concerned both with the visible acts of violence such as the Easter Rising and the invisible violence that may be latent in the desire his poetry enflames. Yeats does not want to be blind to the symbolic violence latent in his work, because he questions whether it has already and will lead again to the destruction of society and culture through political violence. He does not want the abstractions of art or philosophy to lead to more burnt homes and landscapes. By framing this potentiality in "The Tower" and placing it before "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," the former poem addresses these concerns so that the latter poem can address the desire complicit in the production of violence but also art.

"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" follows the oft quoted "Meditations in a Time of Civil War" that continues the explorations in symbolic violence but in the very

⁴⁸ Ibid., 195-196.

⁴⁹ Red Hanrahan is a character in W. B. Yeats's short stories where he appears as a romantic poet and hedge schoolmaster. Yeats includes in *In the Seven Woods*, "Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland" where Red sings to Ireland in the image of Cathleen ni Houlihan.

personal realm of the poet's house and family. Thus, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" begins with the personal and artistic items, the "Many ingenious lovely things" such as Sato's sword⁵⁰ from "Meditations" that are now gone, and goes directly into the politics of "public opinion" that "thought/ That the worst rogues and rascals had died out."⁵¹ After the end of World War One society thought itself purged of the most violent aspects of political violence, but Ireland itself had begun the revolution that lead to independence from Britain in 1921. The last images of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" capture the nightmare quality of war with horses "running round and round," breaking, and vanishing as "evil gathers head."⁵² Adding to the nightmare quality, the poet describes warring violence as a return of Herodias' daughters. Salome, the woman who danced for the pleasure of revenge and John the Baptist's head on a platter, has multiplied here and become an image that links violence and sexuality as the cause for war.⁵³ Throughout Yeats's poetry sexuality is a powerful force of either inspiration or destruction, and herein it inspires war. In *The Wind Among the Reeds*, Yeats writes of "thy great wind of love and hate," "thy" being the eponymous Secret Rose that "Men have named beauty."⁵⁴ For Yeats, the feminine as an image of sexuality connotes violence that can be both creative and destructive, that can both love and hate. With the image of Herodias' daughters, Yeats combines religion with the heady mix of sexuality, violence, and poetry. Is Yeats presenting a view of culture that is inherently violent, or implying that man's

⁵⁰ See Ibid., 202. Yeats uses the image of Sato's sword to combine images of the soul, art, and violence. He concludes the stanza with an image of desire when Juno's peacock screams.

⁵¹ Ibid. 206-207.

⁵² Ibid., 210.

⁵³ The image of dancers occurs throughout Yeats's poetry including the famous example in "Among School Children," "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," and "Sweet Dancer." The dancer is prominent in his drama as well including *The Death of Cuchulain* (1938) where Emer dances the violent images of Cuchulain's death. The dancer is an image of Yeats's concept of Unity of Being, but dancing as an aesthetic depiction is intimately intertwined with desire and violence as evinced by Emer's dance.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 69-70.

natural sexual state of being is the source of violence? If viewed from the perspective of warring civilizations, the Anglo-Irish war, Yeats's poetic of violence seems to correspond to the origins of violence envisioned by Žižek who as stated earlier views the move into language from the Imaginary to the Symbolic order as an act of sacrificial violence.⁵⁵ A reading of the last stanza of Yeats's "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," however, unframes the assumptions about cultural violence, and frames instead the position between nature and culture. Although, Yeats's image of Herodias' daughters includes the cultural regalia of religion and politics when Salome dances for the head of John the Baptist in front of Herod Antipas, the image also evokes a more fundamental source of human violence in desire. In the image of Herodias' daughters, feminine sexuality provides the impetus to violence when it comes into contact with religion and nations.⁵⁶ Thus critics conclude that Yeats relegates females to the position of nature, and

⁵⁵ Žižek, *Violence*, 9-14. See "Introduction" of this paper for a discussion of the origins of Žižek's theory in terms of "difference." Difference is based upon the originary violence of culture. What is problematic, however, is the scientific desire of proponents of cultural violence including Girard, Lacan, and Žižek after him to scientifically frame art as a product of originary, meaning cultural, violence. Derrida's intent with the concept of difference is to allow literature to unframe scientific assumptions. The scientific assumption here is that originary violence is not inherent in nature, or in man's state within nature, but in man's state within culture. Culture is formed by the victimization Girard presents, and the move into the Symbolic that Lacan views as a move into culture. If this is so, man's culture is inherently violent, but each of these philosophers argue that man must live within culture. Žižek attempts to overcome this irony by dichotomizing culture into a public and private realm wherein the private realm "covers both the safe haven of family and the non-state public sphere of civil society."⁵⁵ Public culture is problematic and the "ultimate source of barbarism" that causes one to be intolerant to other cultures because of one's identification with a particular public culture. Private culture for Žižek is the Kantian-Cartesian private "universal liberal subject" who can overcome his particular social and cultural roots and be a multicultural universal individual. For Žižek, the nation-state becomes the problematic form of culture, and he is able to salvage religion as a private non-state positive force of private culture rather than the Girardian impetus to cultural violence.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Lee of Brown University succinctly describes the story of Herod and Salome: "In Christian mythology, Salome was the daughter of Herodias and stepdaughter of Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee in Palestine. Her infamy comes from causing St. John the Baptist's execution. The saint had condemned the marriage of Herodias and Herod Antipas, as Herodias was the divorced wife of Antipas's half brother Philip. Incensed, Herod imprisoned John, but feared to have the well-known prophet killed. Herodias, however, was not mollified by John's incarceration and pressed her daughter Salome to "seduce" her stepfather Herod with a dance, making him promise to give her whatever she wished. At her mother's behest, Salome thus asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Unwillingly, Herod did her bidding, and Salome brought the platter to her mother." <http://www.victorianweb.org/gender/salome.html>.

conversely males to the ordered realm of culture as is so often the case in both art and especially psychological criticism.

The closing image however refutes such easy assumptions while framing the interstice of nature and culture. The closing lines read,

There lurches past, his great eyes without thought
Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks,
That insolent fiend Robert Artisson
To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought
Bronzed peacock feather, red combs of her cocks.⁵⁷

Dame Alice Kyteler was one of the first women to be tried by the Catholic Church for sorcery in 1324. Robert Artisson, known in the official church documents as Robin Artisson or Robin, Son of Art, was allegedly her demon familiar who came to her in the form of a cat or dog and with whom she had sexual relations. Lady Alice supposedly sacrificed peacock feathers and cockcombs to Artisson and in return received an ungent that allowed her to inspire feelings of both love and hate.⁵⁸ The image thus echoes the “great wind of love and hate” of the Secret Rose. Here, however, the sexual creature that inspires this wind is in male form, and one known at that as a Son of Art. Thus, the image includes Yeats’s concerns about the role of art and its power to inspire, as well as the fundamental nature of sexuality.⁵⁹ Sexuality for Yeats is a source of art and he frames sexuality as located within the natural world. As the closing image of the poem in the series most closely associated with historical violence, the poetic image of Artisson

⁵⁷ Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 210.

⁵⁸ Thomas Wright, *Narratives of Sorcery and Magic, from the Most Authentic Sources* (Clinton Hall, NY: Redfield, 1852), 23-32.

⁵⁹ Herein lies the solution to the irony of culture with which Žižek deals. Desire does not reside in culture, but in nature. The need for a split of culture would no longer apply. See note 58.

and Kyteler is a fundamental conclusion of violence as Yeats perceives it as being rooted in the sexual desire of nature. Note it is the superabundance of nature that Yeats highlights in the last lines with the “bronzed peacock feathers” and “red combs” from roosters both of which are sexual adaptations and which are used by Kyteler for the purpose of attracting her mate Robin, or Robert, Artisson. Artisson, labeled as a devil or fiend by the Catholic Church, Yeats merely describes as “without thought” because his purposes are sexual rather than devious. Yeats, however, does not merely frame natural sexuality, but sexuality as it is in between nature and culture in humanity. Thus, the Kyteler image evokes the story of the first witch trial, the beginning of the great witch hunts perpetrated on women as a way for religion to repress sexuality, the classic battle between nature and culture as it was lived by Lady Kyteler.⁶⁰ Yeats presents in his closing image not only the source of the interplay of art, sexuality, and religion but also the historical motivations of violence once sexuality becomes a cultural issue that objectifies a woman by labeling her a witch in order to punish sexuality that occurs outside culturally and religiously inscribed norms.

The poem and its closing image aligns with Grosz’s theories of nature and art, but also deals directly with the cultural origins of violence in religious sacrifice. By, however, showing the natural origins of art and language, violence becomes a part of the natural “chaos” and can be value neutral as both a positive impetus to art and a negative impetus to violence rather than only a negative impetus to violence as the cultural origins of language assume. The violence of nature deriving from the impetus to sexual mating is the progenitor of art and language that creates the violent split between subject and

⁶⁰ There are also interesting class issues in this story. Lady Kyteler leaves for England and escapes punishment while her maid is executed.

object through territorial framing, and thus desire is the progenitor of poetry. Yeats's poetry is created from a subject and his object reversing wherein the subject objectifies himself in order to subjectify his territory. In *The Tower* sequence, the poet objectifies himself in order to sing his now subjectified territory, Western Civilization in violent decline. The desiring subject is the root of violence for Yeats.

Chapter Two: Acts of Union: Seamus Heaney and the Goddess of Love and Terror

Seamus Heaney was born in 1939, the year of W. B. Yeats's passing. Since Louis MacNeice who published the first critical book on Yeats in 1941, no Irish poet has engaged more extensively and critically with Yeats than Seamus Heaney.¹ Heaney has published seven critical pieces on Yeats from 1978 to 1995—spanning much of Heaney's own poetic career.² Yeats along with Wordsworth are the two most influential formative poets in Heaney's work exemplifying for Heaney in his 1978 essay "The Makings of a Music: Reflections on Wordsworth and Yeats,"³ his literary position between two cultures, British and Irish, and two models of composing poetry. Heaney, following Yeats, genders these two models. From Wordsworth, Heaney learns the "effeminate" quality of "composition as listening, as a wise passiveness, a surrender to energies that spring within the centre of the mind, not composition as an active pursuit by the mind's circumference of something already at the centre."⁴ Heaney views Wordsworth's poetry as an "act of complaisance," or rather an active complaisance, one of consciously stilling the poetic ear to listen to a music within.⁵ From Yeats, he learns the "masculine" quality of composition not "as complaisance but of control."⁶ Heaney writes,

¹ Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats: Blackwell Critical Biographies*, 1st ed., Blackwell Critical Biographies (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 381.

² Neil Corcoran, "Heaney and Yeats," in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, ed. Bernard O'Donoghue (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 165-166. Heaney's publications on Yeats include "The Makings of a Music: Reflections on Wordsworth and Yeats" (1978), "Yeats as an Example?" (1978), "A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on the Irish Literary Revival" (1980), "The Place of Writing: W. B. Yeats and Thoor Ballylee." (1988), "Joy or Night" (1990), "Crediting Poetry" (1995), and the Introduction to the Faber selection of Yeats (2000).

³ Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 61-78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Yeats does not listen in but acts out. The origin of the poetry is not a matter of sinking in but of coming up against, the mature music is not a lulling but an alerting strain.⁷

For Wordsworth, poetry is a “recollection in tranquility,” but Heaney views Yeats’s poetry as mastery of the struggle for “maximum articulation.”⁸ Heaney recognizes the violent connotations of “mastery” and “struggle” and also the violent underpinnings of Yeats’s own ambitions for poetry and drama. Heaney writes,

Padraic Colum once spoke of Yeats’s poems having to be handled carefully as a blade, and the image reminds us of Yeats’s own ambitions for the work, poems “the poet sings them with such airs/ That one believes he has a sword upstairs”; poems “cold and passionate as the dawn”; plays where he hopes “the passion of the verse comes from the fact that the speakers are holding down violence or madness—down *hysterica passio*. All depends on the completeness of the holding down, on the stirring of the beast underneath.”⁹

Yeats’s poetry is for Heaney a lesson in controlling violence with form, and Heaney points to the poems of *The Tower* as those that exemplify the Yeatsian style.¹⁰ Whereas Yeats often looks outward to the historical impact of his internal thoughts, Heaney often looks inward to the internal impact of the historical and in this looking inward is Wordsworthian in fashion. However, Heaney forms his subject matter in Yeatsian style. Yeats’s poetics of violence is evident from the images of union such as the alchemical

⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁸ Ibid., 75.

⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰ Heaney discusses directly “The Tower” and “Leda and the Swan” following his quotation of Yeats.

wedding that Heaney reads as a redress of violence. In his essay “The Redress of Poetry” Heaney quotes Wallace Stevens who describes poetry as “a violence from within that protects us from a violence without.”¹¹ Because Yeats links art and violence through desire, Heaney’s poetry uses this interconnection to proclaim, to paraphrase Heaney, the potential of the imagination to press back against the pressure of reality.

Comparing the two poets Conor Cruise O’Brien writes, “Yeats was free to try, and did splendidly try, or try on, different relationships to the tragedy: Heaney’s relationship to a deeper tragedy is pre-ordained; the poet is on intimate terms with doom, and speaks its language wryly and succinctly.”¹² Whether one poet’s tragedy can be deemed “deeper” than the other is open for debate, but O’Brien’s statement points to a range in Yeats’s poetry regarding violence that is not in Heaney’s, because Heaney’s poetry is intimately tied to the violence of Northern Ireland, to a specific territory. Yeats’s assessments of violence ranged from the Irish Rebellion in Easter 1916 to an apocalyptic vision of Modern culture in “The Second Coming.” Even though Heaney’s most recent volume of poetry, *District and Circle* was impacted by the events of September 11th, 2001¹³ and following terrorist attacks, as the title proclaims he is circling back to his home district. Much of the violence therein is still rooted to the territory of Northern Ireland.¹⁴ Although, Heaney’s perspective can be global, he remains rooted to his territory in a way Yeats does not. By territory, I’m referring not simply to a geopolitical space, but the territory required for art to embody sensation. In the previous

¹¹ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 1.

¹² Conor Cruise O’Brien, “A Slow North-East Wind,” *Listener*, September 25, 1975, 404-405.

¹³ The eponymous poem “District and Circle” with its hellish underground is especially influenced by the terrorist attacks.

¹⁴ See especially “The Turnip-Snedder,” “Midnight Anvil,” “The Tollund Man in Springtime,” and “The Blackbird of Glanmore,” the last two of which are reworkings of not only older themes but older poems “The Tollund Man,” and “Midterm Break” respectively. Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

chapter, sensation is defined as the affective force of art. For sensation to occur, a frame must delimit a territory. A territory is a space created inside the frame through a congealing of space-time, the environment, and a rhythm that is the particular temporal form of a region. In a poem such as Yeats's "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" the territory is Western Civilization as a whole. Yeats conjectures about the violent decline of Western Civilization and mourns past artistic achievements. Even when Heaney frames the history of the English language, his territory is never as esoteric as Yeats's. For instance, in Heaney's "Alphabets" he captures both the history of his own linguistic education and the history of language in Western Civilization. Heaney's territory begins in the barn rafters of his father's farm where a boy learns the letter "A" and ends in seeing his name inscribed in plaster in the roof of a home. Heaney consistently views the world through his geo-political territory, and it is that territory that informs his artistic territory. And, this territory as Conor Cruise O'Brien noted is already defined for Heaney by the experience of violence along a religious divide as a Catholic child in Northern Ireland in a way that Yeats did not experience as a member of the Anglo-Protestant class that existed between Irish and English cultures, however problematically.¹⁵

However, dissimilar their relationship of territory, Heaney like Yeats is essentially a poet of antitheses.¹⁶ For Yeats, the violent split between subject and object is the progenitor of poetry. His poetry is created from a subject and his object-territory reversing wherein the subject is objectified and the territory is subjectified. In *The Tower* sequence, the poet objectifies himself in order to sing his now subjectified territory,

¹⁵ Yeats lived in England as much as Ireland during his publishing career as was expected by the society of his time. Heaney moved from the North of Ireland to Dublin and even this move was seen as a betrayal of his Catholic heritage in Northern Ireland and the violence of the Troubles by the poet.

¹⁶ Corcoran, "Heaney and Yeats," 167.

Western Civilization in violent decline. The desiring subject is the root of the violence for Yeats. In nature the subject creates a territory for the purpose of mating, objectifies himself, puts himself on display as a potential mate, and his territory becomes a subjectified expression of his individuality also for the purposes of attraction. Natural desire is the root of both violence and artistic expression. Yeats exploits this primary subject-object split between the subject and an inscribed territory that was always malleable for Yeats. Heaney's territory always originates from his geo-political territory, and thus Heaney exploits the secondary subject-object split between the unchanging subjectified territory and the external objectified space outside that territory. Both however produce art by the framing of chaos in order to extract a territory and subject that can embody sensation.¹⁷

Yeats's influential poetics of violence, of shaping violence into the form of poetry is evident even in Heaney's earliest collection "Death of a Naturalist" specifically in the much discussed first poem of the volume "Digging." In this early poetry the split between nature and culture becomes increasingly evident as a split between the world of his father and the world the boy desires. The young man-poet sits at his window watching his father farm. Heaney writes,

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
 When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
 My father, digging. I look down

 Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
 Bends low, comes up twenty years away

¹⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 61.

Stooping in rhythm through his potato drills

Where he was digging.¹⁸

The rhythm of the father's digging is a measurement of time. The young poet sees his father move farther away from him as he digs, and this is presented as the "twenty years away" generational gap that becomes a recognition of the discontinuity of the young man's profession with that of his fathers. The young man points to his father's digging as a continuity with his own father. He writes, "By God, the old man could handle a spade./ Just like his old man."¹⁹ The cyclical rhythm of the harvest is mirrored by the continuity of each generation farming the land of his father. Although, the young man seeks to force a continuity with the rhythmical digging of his father in the closing lines, "Between my finger and thumb/ The squat pen rests./ I'll dig with it," the mirroring opening lines that read "Between my finger and thumb/ The squat pen rests; snug as a gun" sees the pen not as a spade but a gun connoting the violent discontinuity of his chosen profession and that of his fathers.²⁰ The spade makes a "rasping" sound that grates below his window as his pen is trying to capture the poetry of the sounds of the earth. The spade thus seems an antiquated less eloquent tool than the pen. The young man must break with the rhythm of his family in order to proceed with his poetry, but a break with continuity is not what this young man seeks. He seeks to equate the pen and the spade—to dig into the territory of his family with his pen instead of the farm equipment. The soil in this early poem is the source of his poetry—the fertile ground from which his poetry will grow. Deleuze's theory of art production requires an environment to come into contact with the

¹⁸ Seamus Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 13.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

regions particular temporal form inside a frame to produce an artistic territory. Deleuze writes,

This is, precisely, the task of all art and, from colors and sounds, both music and painting similarly extract new harmonies, new plastic or melodic landscapes, and new rhythmic characters that raise them to the height of the earth's sound and the cry of humanity.²¹

Along with the visual and aural arts, poetry uses form and content to combine a landscape and a rhythm to form a territory. After this territory is objectively framed, as we see in Yeats's poetry, the affects and percepts of sensation are produced by the subjectification of the territory. Following Deleuze Grosz writes, "Territory is artistically inscribed, the consequence not of a naturally selected 'territorial imperative' but of an artistic movement: the creation of a marker."²² Heaney's poem uses the window of the young poet as a literal frame through which to view the rhythmical workings of his father in nature. In "Digging" the landscape and father become one through the sounds of the rhythm of digging becoming time itself and the rhythm of seasons. Heaney presents the aural onomonopoetic vocabulary of the earth, the "squelch and slap of soggy peat," with the visual image of the father's movement away from the window as a movement into the past. The metonymy of finger and thumb partakes of the metonymic "hand" that objectifies the farm worker. However, it is not the farm worker being objectified, but the hand of the writing poet. The objectification of the subject combines with the subjectification of the objective territory when the father and landscape become rhythmically connected making the music of the earth. The window frames the split

²¹ qtd. in Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 18-19.

²² *Ibid.*, 48.

between the subject and object reversing the two to produce sensation through a rhythmic territory. Heaney, however, can never fully objectify himself the way Yeats does in “Sailing to Byzantium” for example. Instead of fully exploiting the violent split between subject and object as Yeats does to reproduce a violent sensation, the poetic frame becomes a bridge in Heaney’s work trying to span the violent chasm. Whereas Yeats would emphasize the violent discontinuity between generations as he does in his late drama *Purgatory*, Heaney instead sees the violence and seeks to use the frame of his poem as a bridge to connect him to his father—a bridge that connects the pen and the spade. The window through which he sees his father is the poem itself that both separates him from the familial cycle but also allows him to see that world and in Yeatsian style frames the violence of discontinuity into a poem that seeks to bridge that discontinuity.

Theoretically Imagining Territorial Union

Heaney frequently tries to bridge this discontinuity through the image of marriage between male and female as an image of union. This type of alchemical marriage is one of the central motifs in Yeats’s poetry as I discussed earlier. In Heaney’s poetry this trope is apparent from the early stages of his poetry. From “Bogland” to “Gifts of Rain,” Heaney imagines his art tied to sexual desire and land, and this image culminates in his union with the earth goddess Nerthus in the volume dealing most directly with political violence and sacrifice, *North*. Heaney says in an interview about violent sacrifice in the bog poems, “This is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern.”²³

Heaney’s reference to Jungian archetypal patterns provides insight into the use of the

²³ qtd. in Dillon Johnston, “Violence in Seamus Heaney’s Poetry,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Matthew Campbell, Cambridge Companions to Literature (CCtL) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 117.

alchemical wedding image and the way in which Heaney tries to bridge the gap between the subjectification of the territory and the victims that are the objects of sacrifice in the poem.²⁴ For Jung the eternal and material meet in the function of psychic imaging which is a creative process. Jung writes,

The psyche creates reality every day. The only expression I can use for this activity is *fantasy*...Fantasy, therefore, seems to me the clearest expression of the specific activity of the psyche. It is, pre-eminently..[a] creative activity.²⁵

In his collected work, *Psychological Types*, Jung points to psychic imaging as the source of creativity.²⁶ Heaney's extensive interest in Jung and analytical psychology provides him with the example of imaging as a bridge between subject and object. Jung explicitly describes this bridging capacity when he writes, "Fantasy it was and ever is which fashions the bridge between the irreconcilable claims of subject and object."²⁷ Jung's own consideration of the split between subject and object led him to the concept of psychic imaging which is the process that mediates between the subject, the ego, and objects, the external world. Writes Jung,

A third, mediating standpoint is needed. *Esse in intellectu* lacks tangible reality, *esse in re* lacks mind. Idea and thing come together, however, in the human psyche, which holds the balance between them. What would

²⁴ Jung himself was very interested in the images of alchemy as his autobiography attests. He also has three works dealing with alchemy including *Alchemical Studies*, *Psychology and Alchemy*, and *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. The image of the alchemical wedding is central to Jung's conception of psychic individuation where the self must "marry" its interior opposite. This opposite Jung says we imagine as the opposite sex. See Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

²⁵ Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types*, trans. Richard Francis Carrington Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1971), 52.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

the idea amount to if the psyche did not provide its living value? What would the thing be worth if the psyche withheld from it the determining force of the sense-impression? What indeed is reality if it is not a reality in ourselves, *esse in anima*? Living reality is the product neither of the actual, objective behaviour of things nor of the formulated idea exclusively, but rather of the combination of both in the living psychological process, through *esse in anima*.²⁸

Between the nominalist position of objective universals existing in the thing that Jung termed *esse in re* (essence in the thing) and the realist position where universals exist only in the mind that Jung terms *esse in intellectu* (essence in the mind), he uses the logical axiom of the excluded third (*exclusi tertii principium*) to propose *esse in anima* (essence in the psyche). As opposed to Freud's conception of psychic images as mental copies of instincts, Jung proposes that psychic images are the very essence of psychic reality. This places Jung as a mediator between Derridian deconstruction and modern day universalism as psychic imaging is a production of nominal rather than real essence. A "real" essence refers to the irreducible nature of a thing, and "nominal" denotes a linguistic fiction used to categorize and label.²⁹ By positing imaging as the mediator between subject and object, Jung makes psychic images the bridge between the historical world around humans and the universals of the mind.³⁰ Psychic images reveal the

²⁸ Ibid., 51-52.

²⁹ Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 80.

³⁰ This places Jung in line with the Deleuzian critique of signification and subjectification that is the foundation for much feminist and post-colonial theory and an essential critique of post-modern theory. Deleuze and Guattari propose a "pragmatics" in which language is one aspect of a semiotic regime. Deleuze writes, "linguistics is nothing without a pragmatics (semiotic or political) to define the effectuation of the *condition of possibility* of language and the *usage* of linguistic elements." Language alone cannot constitute an abstract machine whether structural or generative. Like Foucault who urges one to seek the

negotiation that occurs between individual and society, nature and culture, subject and object. This negotiation is consciousness and is Jung's ethical imperative. This is Heaney's strategy of poetry composition that acts as a bridge between subject and object through an image of union. Desire as it was for Yeats is fundamentally violent, but desire can be channeled into art. Many see this artistic imagery of union as an attempt to be an apologist for violence. In the case of Heaney's poem "Kinship" in *North* for example, however, the poet is not attempting to be an apologist for the violence of Northern Ireland. Rather the poem ends with a plea for history "to report us fairly" and explicitly report "slaughter" and the shaved heads of innocents instead of requesting history to remember only a romantic image as did many of the Celtic Revivalists.

In a post-structuralist literary environment, both Jung and Heaney have been critically charged with reductionistic essentialism. The critique of Jung plays a large part in the critique of Heaney's poetry who relies heavily on the concept of Jung's psychic imaging as it relates to archetypes. Jung's archetypes are critiqued as essentialist and unchanging rather than existentialist and imaginal.³¹ Archetypes are seen as image molds rather than image forms. However, archetypes do not reproduce in their own image but are instead forms used to nominally categorize images and thus helps to reveal a multiplicity of images relating to each archetype rather than mold an image into a reproduction of itself. These image forms thus constitute a metaphorical model towards

rules of discursive formation in discourse itself without reducing everything to discourse, Deleuze distinguishes between statements, which do not relate an outward expression of something and non-discursive "visibilities."

³¹ See Ibid., 17. Kugler defines imaginal as "the realm of the psychic imagos that is referred to by Lacan as the imaginary. He writes, "The critical difference between the two is that the imaginal is constituted by productive and reproductive imagining (Einbildungskraft), while the imaginary is constituted by reproductive imaging."

relational definitions of self.³² For Heaney this critique often surfaces in charges of mythic reductionism and at worse of facilitating violence by giving it historical legitimacy. Blake Morrison says Heaney's *North* "poetry grants sectarian killing in Northern Ireland a historical respectability which it is not usually granted in day-to-day journalism."³³ For Morrison, Heaney's archetypal mythologizing apologizes for subjective violence by relating it to a quasi-historical past of sacrificial violence. Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson reject the ritualizing and mythologizing of murder which they think risk making Heaney "the laureate of violence."³⁴ These critiques of Heaney view his use of archetypes as essentialist attempts to explain ordinary violence. If, however, the archetypes are viewed with the Jungian existentialist intent, then the process of producing psychic images is important and not the archetype itself. For Jung the process of psychic imaging is the process of consciousness, because our experience of reality is a function of this process. Because imaging is an aesthetic act and the act of coming to consciousness is Jung's ethical imperative,³⁵ then taken to its logical conclusion ethics are aesthetics for Jung and Heaney following him. Heaney's poetry with its intent to bridge subject and object with images is then an ethical aesthetic. As Slavoj Žižek explains in his work on violence, the greatest threat to both individuals and society is the objective violence in our language and our political systems, and art can function in society to make this invisible violence visible. Heaney's poetry seeks to imaginistically bridge the divide between the subject and objective violence to bring to consciousness

³² See Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 1993), 155.

³³ qtd. in Johnston, "Violence in Seamus Heaney's Poetry," 113.

³⁴ Ibid., 114.

³⁵ Kugler, *The Alchemy of Discourse*, 79.

that violence. This bridging mechanism, however, immediately mitigates the violence by bringing it to consciousness where it is no longer unseen.

The Poetic Bridge Spanning Northern Violence

Heaney's volume dealing most directly with violence and politics like Yeats's *The Tower* is *North*. This volume is both Heaney's most celebrated and his most criticized. After Yeats developed his own mythology in *A Vision* he was able to apply that mythology in the poetry of *The Tower*. Just before writing the poems in *North*, Heaney read the now famous P.V. Glob's *The Bog People*³⁶ and therein found a mythology that he could apply to the violent politics of the Troubles of 1970's Belfast. The tension between the violence that Heaney frames into poetry and the desire to mitigate that violence is no where more evident than in *North*, and Yeats's impact is felt specifically in the poem "Kinship" that presents the wetland bog as a response to Yeats's "The Second Coming" with the phrase "This centre holds."³⁷ The poem also ends with a ground goddess of "love and terror" much like Yeats's air goddess of "love and hate" in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen."³⁸ "Kinship" is one of Heaney's critically termed "bog poems" that employs the mythos from *The Bog People* of the sacrificial victims to the earth goddess Nerthus. Heaney stated in a 1974 interview that his profound response to the work of Glob arose from the parallel between the sacrificial victims in its photographs and "the tradition of Irish political martyrdom...whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan." The most prominent example of Kathleen Ni Houlihan comes from Yeats's drama by that title³⁹ wherein Ireland is staged as an old woman, the traditional Sean Van

³⁶ P. V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004).

³⁷ Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber, 1992), 33.

³⁸ Ibid., 39.

³⁹ Yeats often spells the name differently— Cathleen Ni Houlihan.

Vocht⁴⁰ that by way of self-sacrifice of the young men of Ireland transforms into a young woman “with the walk of a queen.”⁴¹ In Yeatsian biographer Terence Brown’s words,

Lady Gregory and Yeats had mixed a dangerous cocktail indeed. For combining as it did Lady Gregory’s fascination as a nationalist for tales of martyrdom in the cause, with Yeats’s longing for and belief in magical transformations of reality, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* made of the idea of sacrifice a religious imperative. To give one’s life for Ireland was a redemptive act, Christ-like in its transformative potentiality, an act far superior to anything the merely mundane could offer.⁴²

Yeats has cast the spell of transforming Ireland into a beautiful woman who conveys rousing nationalist sentiments. This mix of politics and art is a trap with which Heaney has long struggled, and one that cannot be overcome in the context of one poem concerned with gendering Ireland especially considering Heaney’s own proclivity to gender concepts. In order to affectively make art from the subject-object interstice wherein a territory has been subjectified, one would assume the response to be a reversal that again objectifies the land that has already subjectively demanded so much sacrifice and to reinsert the subjective “I” within an objective territory. Heaney’s approach, however, is never to illuminate the violent subject-object interstice as does Yeats, but instead to try to bridge it. In “Kinship” to combat the subjectification of a politically torn geopolitical and artistic territory, rather than combating the entire history of subjectification in one poem, Heaney instead tries to bridge the subject-object interstice

⁴⁰ Sean Van Vocht is the poor old woman that appears in traditional Irish folklore, and one of the many references to Ireland embodied as a woman.

⁴¹ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume II: The Plays*, ed. David R. Clark and Rosalind E. Clark (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 93.

⁴² Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats*, 135.

through the image of an alchemical marriage where the first person “I” narrator is united with the earth goddess. The speaker proclaims his love to the “this turf-face” in section one.⁴³ The ambiguous demonstrative determiner⁴⁴ “this” can point both to the ground itself and the victim of sacrifice that it holds. The poet then refers in section two to the earth as an “insatiable bride.”⁴⁵ In section one, the speaker is identified as the lover of both turf and victim, and in section two the bride is identified as the earth goddess that demands sacrifice. In section three, the sexual union occurs between lover and bride.⁴⁶ Heaney writes,

As I raised it
the soft lips of the growth
muttered and split,
a tawny rut

opening at my feet
like a shed skin,
the shaft wettish
as I sank it upright...⁴⁷

Literally the speaker is digging into the ground with a spade, but from the earthen spade to the tawny wet split to the shed skin to the wettish shaft, this section is rife with sexual overtones, and the union of the speaker and the earth ends with him “facing a goddess.”⁴⁸

This union produces the response to Yeats’s proclamation that “the centre cannot

⁴³ Heaney, *North*, 33.

⁴⁴ I prefer the term demonstrative determiner for “this” rather than demonstrative adjective as it is not exactly descriptive as “adjective” connotes.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁶ Similar to baptism in bog in early poetry....

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

hold.”⁴⁹ “This centre holds” and even “spreads” for Heaney when the object of the subject’s desire is completely subjectified.⁵⁰ The earth goddess and the original subject becomes one with the objectified victims as he enters the earth himself. The speaker himself becomes both victim and earth—both subject and object—the bridge between the two.

The last poem in Heaney’s *North* ends with “Singing School,” and the last section of that sequence is entitled “Exposure” and deals directly with Heaney’s use of nature, territory, and imaging to expose and potentially counteract violence. As was the case with Yeats, however, Heaney wonders about the affects of his poetry on violence. The title of the poem itself implies both the perspective of the poet as a camera man behind his camera and the violence he seeks to expose through the images he creates through interaction with his environment. The poet opens by pointing to the framing nature of the poem by explicitly framing a time and location. He writes,

It is December in Wicklow:

Alders dripping, birches

Inheriting the last light,

The ash tree cold to look at.⁵¹

This opening in the natural environment with the direct attention to frame in the first line and perspective with the last line creates both a territory through condensing an environment into a specific space and time with the context of a frame and provides the “cold” perspective that within the territory will produce sensations. This “cold”

⁴⁹ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), 187.

⁵⁰ Heaney, *North*, 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

perspective is also reminiscent of Yeats's "gold" perspective in "Sailing to Byzantium" and Yeats's later epitaph-like injunction to "Cast a cold eye/ On life, on death" in "Under Ben Bulbin."⁵² Heaney's perspective is always, however, firmly in his territory, as the poet here feels the temperature of his environment that synaesthetically makes the tree appear cold. Yeats, however, seeks to remove himself from the environment that created the violence of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" in order to write from a "golden" universal perspective about the violence of the past, present, and future. Whereas, Yeats begins in "The Tower" with his own battered aging body or in "Meditations" on his ancestral lawn, he quickly moves to view violence from an ahistorical perspective. From an aging man's memories before the first section is over in "The Tower" the reader is in the realm of Plato and Plotinus, and in "Meditations," Homer is immediately invoked in the first section and Plotinus in the second section even though it is entitled "My House." Heaney, himself, points to his rooted perspective when the poem continues with,

A comet that was lost
Should be visible at sunset,
Those million tons of light
Like a glimmer of haws and rose-hips,

And I sometimes see a falling star.
If I could come on meteorite!
Instead I walk through damp leaves,
Husks, the spent flukes of autumn,

⁵² Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 328.

Imagining a hero
 On some muddy compound,
 His gift like a slingstone
 Whirled for the desperate.⁵³

Here one can imagine the poet thinking of Yeats and his cosmic perspective in *A Vision* composing poetry from the perspective of a meteorite and making poetry like “The Second Coming” with the impact of a meteorite. Here the poet shows that his feet, however, are firmly planted on his territory, and his poetry is composed as he walks that ground.⁵⁴ As he walks, the rhythm of the walk in his environment becomes the territory that produces the poetic images.⁵⁵ The poet imagines this image as a David-like hero with a slingshot whose stone can combat the fierce Goliath size violence. However, he also hears the voices that question whether aesthetically capturing these images is ethically responding to the violence. Here we are in the realm of Yeats’s questions in “Man and Echo.” Yeats questions his poetry’s impact on subjective violence, and Heaney “sits “weighing and weighing/ My responsible *tristia*.”⁵⁶ In its lowercase form, “tristia” denotes “sadness,” but capitalized it is the name of Ovid’s work in which he contemplates all of his poetic works, including *Metamorphoses*, impact upon Rome.⁵⁷ *Tristia* is written while Ovid is in exile which reflects upon many critic’s accusations that Heaney abandoned the North of Ireland for Dublin and thus abandoned the Catholic

⁵³ Heaney, *North*, 67.

⁵⁴ This type of poetry composition, the rhythm of walking relating to the rhythm of poetry, is the type of composition that Heaney in his essay “The Makings of a Music” relates to Wordsworth. In this poem, Heaney also sees himself between the composition styles of Yeats and Wordsworth.

⁵⁵ Here I am referring specifically to Grosz’ definition of a territory as a combination of environment and rhythm.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁷ “Tristia,” in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

cause there. Thus, Heaney's "responsible *tristia*" is both the sadness he feels as a responsible member of the Catholic community of Northern Ireland, but more so the sadness he feels from the responsible burden his poetry must bear to the violence of Northern Ireland rather than being artistically free. It is his territory that demands a responsible poetry or poetry in response to violence. The poem continues by directly locating these voices in his territory. He writes,

Rain comes down through the alders,
Its low conducive voices
Mutter about let-downs and erosions
And yet each drop recalls

The diamond absolutes.
I am neither internee nor informer;
An inner emigre, grown long-haired
And thoughtful...⁵⁸

The rain drop's coming through the alder trees now have the voices of his critics, but more fundamentally the "diamond absolutes" of a natural territories borders give rise to the either/or proposition of his critics. Heaney is locating the dichotomizing of his critics, he either is or is not directly responsible or responsive to the violence of Northern Ireland, to the proscribing of territories in nature wherein an animal delineates an inner territory and an outer world—a line that must not be crossed. Heaney's art, however states that he is "neither internee nor informer." His poem is an artistic territory, and Grosz states that every artistic territory employs a refrain. A refrain Grosz writes "is a kind of rhythmic

⁵⁸ Heaney, *North*, 68.

regularity that brings a minimum of livable order to a situation in which chaos beckons.”

For example, a child tapping its fingers or a person’s humming are examples of a rhythm used for comforting purposes to keep the chaos of the next moments at bay.⁵⁹ These are

the raw materials of music according to Grosz, and subsequently of language and poetry.

Deleuze and Guattari point out three aspects to every refrain: a point of order or an inside,

a circle of control or malleable outside, and finally, a line of flight, a way out. In other

words, a refrain makes a home, a yard, and a way out of both. Heaney’s poem is his

refrain. He sets up his artistic territory and his influence of control on the subject it

frames, but always from the perspective of a way out that has already been taken.

Heaney says that as a poet he is

a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,

Taking protective colouring

From bole and bark, feeling

Every wind that blows...⁶⁰

The poet here is a creature whose territorial rhythm has become a protective refrain that

through the camouflage of the trees protects him from the violence surrounding his

territory. What the poet instead seeks to accomplish is one of Yeats’s “befitting emblems

of adversity”—a psychic image that can express the violence and from Heaney’s

perspective—mitigate it. Rather than being blown about by the violence of the wind

because of his rootedness to the earth, in other words having his poetry directly affected

by the violence because of his inability to escape his territory, the poet seeks the Yeatsian

⁵⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 51-52.

⁶⁰ Heaney, *North*, 68.

wind of love and hate. Heaney fears the inspiration—the wind from his territory, will in the words of the concluding lines of the poem “have missed/ The once-in-a-lifetime portent,/ The comet’s pulsing rose.”⁶¹ The final lines solidify the impression of Yeats’s “meteoric” poetry from the opening of the poem, because the result of a meteor’s impact with the earth’s atmosphere is a flash of light Heaney describes as a “pulsing rose.” The living rose is, of course, one of Yeats’s early and important alchemical symbols whose “wind of love and hate” appears in the poem “The Secret Rose” and whose important alchemical associations are illuminated in Yeats’s prose work of the same name. It is Yeats’s psychic imaging, his alchemical symbols, that act as a gateway between subject and object that Heaney admires for their ability to capture the importance, the “once-in-a-lifetime portent,” of the violent subject matter Heaney seeks to frame.

Just as Heaney sought an alchemical wedding in “Kinship,” the rose of cosmological import, another symbol of such a wedding, along with the title of the last poem of the volume, “Exposure,” with its connotations of nakedness and sexuality vividly implies the exposure of violence Heaney has accomplished throughout the volume and that violence’s intimate links to desire. As with Yeats, desire is violence in nature, and when in contact with culture can be either creative or destructive. Heaney’s role as a poet is always to present desire as a unification of opposites that mitigate violence instead of focusing on the destructive nature of desire. His psychic images seek to bridge the gap between subject and object rather than highlight that gap as the source of creativity, and that gap is always bridged through a return to territory. This process remains true even in his later poetry such as *District and Circle* that exists beside the

⁶¹ Ibid.

poetry of the following generations whose territory is increasingly global. Heaney, however, circles back to the district that has proved such a fecund source of poetry.

Chapter Three: The Generation of Globalization: Nick Laird and *The New North*

Nick Laird, born in 1975 in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland rarely discusses Yeats in his articles for *The Guardian* or his radio show interviews but does call Heaney one of his primary influences. Laird sites Heaney's early poetry as fostering his childhood love of literature, because Heaney's work Laird claims "seems to be written out of the same place that you live."¹ Laird has also stated,

Heaney's *Death of A Naturalist* changed everything around for me. He makes internal music; the words all fit together with vowel sounds and consonant sounds. It inspires you to write and validates your own subject matter. It makes clear your own life is a worthy subject to write about, which is quite hard to do because you become convinced that you have nothing worth saying.²

However, in the same interview, Laird says that his travels out of Northern Ireland to reside in such places as Warsaw, Boston, and currently London allowed him the "freedom in a way to reinvent."³ In this one interview are the tensions expressed in his poetry from being reared in a post-Trouble Northern Irish society and his intimate experience of a broader world. This tension is evident in the landscapes of his two poetry collections, the first *To a Fault*⁴ published by Faber in 2005 and his second *On Purpose*⁵ published in 2007, as well as his novel, *Utterly Monkey*⁶ that move between rural Northern Ireland and contemporary urban cities. Unlike Seamus Heaney, Laird does not

¹ "The Leonard Lopate Show" (WNYC, January 25, 2006), www.wnyc.org/shows/lopatate.

² "It's nothing to do with me.," *The Guardian*, May 3, 2005, www.guardian.co.uk.

³ "The Leonard Lopate Show."

⁴ Nick Laird, *To a Fault* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2006).

⁵ Nick Laird, *On Purpose* (London: Faber, 2007).

⁶ Nick Laird, *Utterly Monkey* (New York: Harper, 2006).

usually reach for the mythic to navigate the sectarian violence of his childhood landscapes, but is reminiscent of Paul Muldoon in his forthright dealings with it. In “Cuttings” he writes,

Methodical dust shades the combs and pomade
while the wielded goodwill of the sunlight picks out
a patch of paisley wallpaper to expand leisurely on it.

The cape comes off with a matador’s flourish
and the scalp’s washed to get rid of the chaff.

This is the closeness casual once in the trenches
and is deft as remembering when not to mention
the troubles or women or prison.

They talk of the parking or calving or missing.⁷

Here Laird reminds his reader of the casual awareness of violence constantly in the minds of those living in Northern Ireland even in such mundane settings as getting one’s haircut in a barber shop. American poet and critic Stephen Burt sees this depiction of violence in Laird’s entire first volume as resembling Muldoon’s.⁸ Burt writes, “Like Paul Muldoon, whose syntax he can emulate, Laird dramatizes problems for which his poems discover no origins and propose no solutions...He may even (as Muldoon does) enjoy telling us

⁷ Nick Laird, “Cuttings,” *The Guardian*, July 8, 2006, www.guardian.co.uk.

⁸ John Redmond, “John Redmond Reviews _To A Fault_,” *Tower Poetry*, February 2005, www.towerpoetry.org.uk. Although John Redmond’s review of *To A Fault* faults Laird for being “depressing” and chides “Laird’s entire vocabulary” for being “shot through with negativity,” Redmond also provides further insights into Laird’s poetry as it resembles Paul Muldoon’s. He sites Laird’s “whole manner of narration, form the stop-start pacing, the how-serious-should-you-take-me tone, the slightly elevated phrasing and the use of parallelistic, elliptical, colloquial clauses with feminine line-endings.” Redmond’s project here seems to mark Laird’s early work as a copy of the voice of Muldoon and question whether Laird presents his own poetic voice here.

that he offers no great truths.”⁹ Seamus Heaney is, however, in Laird’s poetry as well in what Burt calls being “loquacious, voluble” and London poet Tom Chivers calls his “rich, measured descriptiveness” and “his sonorous vowel-play” in poems such as “Hunting is a Holy Occupation.”¹⁰ Laird writes,

“In the strict fulfillment of my vows,
I learned to couch alone, un-housed,
On river-grit or thorns or flints
And ten unblinking moons I squatted,
Moving only a-squat like a toad.”¹¹

Here Laird comes closest to the type of ritualized violence depicted in Heaney’s *North* in his description of a medieval hunt that is a catharsis for human aggression. In these two poems, and in the two poetry collections as a whole, Laird’s theme is violence, but not necessarily the conflict to which he was born in 1975 at the height of the Troubles. If as Burt suggests Laird offers no truths, he does offer insights into violence. Whether in the matter-of-fact depiction of violence in “Cuttings” or in its medieval ritualized counterpart in “Hunting is a Holy Occupation” Laird depicts violence as a systemic and symbolic part of the human condition, a part not only of a sectarian past, but of a globalized world and endemic to the language we speak.

For W. B. Yeats, there was always a tension between violence as a destructive social force and violence as the progenitor of poetry. This tension takes on a new dimension in Northern Irish poetry as the region and its citizens become increasingly

⁹ Stephen Burt, “On the Borderline: Poetry Books by Robin Robertson and Nick Laird,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 2006, www.nytimes.com

¹⁰ Burt, “On the Borderline: Poetry Books by Robin Robertson and Nick Laird”; Tom Chivers, “Wordlessly Came Death,” *Poetry London*, no. 60 (Summer 2008).

¹¹ Laird, *On Purpose*, 18.

globalized, because many critics link the violence of the region to the flourishing of poetry there.¹² The link between poetry and violence is the overarching concern of editor Chris Agee in the 2008 publication of the anthology of Northern Irish poetry entitled *The New North*.¹³ Therein Agee states that the fifteen young poets, including Nick Laird, in the anthology “are much more likely to be interested in new technology, ecology, Eastern Europe or bilingualism, than in any expected manifestation of ‘the Northern issue’...It is indeed the poetry of a new North.”¹⁴ Agee’s contention and the title of the anthology is based upon the premise that the new North is both physical and mental space of “diaspora, bilingualism, cultural interchange” in other words, globalization.¹⁵ Globalization is depicted as a counterforce for remaining sectarianism in the North, but a force that also counters the violence that was the impetus for poetry that “proved exemplary for its moments of consciousness of the terrible pressure of history concentrated into powerful metaphor.”¹⁶ Globalization is thus presented as a two-edged sword by Agee, one that renders old binaries of Catholic/Protestant, Irish/English less powerful. Globalization is evident in both the influx of immigrants from Hong Kong, Poland, the Baltics,¹⁷ and Africa as well as emigration of poets such as Sinéad Morrissey who has spent time in Japan and, of course, Nick Laird. These movements of the populace and its poets disrupt and even deconstruct traditional categories of Northern Irish identity. This is the image

¹² At the end of the 1960’s the Troubles had broken out in Northern Ireland, and simultaneously a group of poets and critics were becoming recognized. Heaney published his *Death of a Naturalist* in 1966. This group met at the home of a professor of the school of English at Queens University Belfast, Philip Hobsbaum. The “Group” as they were first called included in addition to Heaney, Michael and Edna Longley, Derek Mahon, and Michael Allen. This amazing convergence of poetic and critical talent led what is now referred to as the “Northern Irish Renaissance” that was occurring simultaneous to the increasing violence in that region.

¹³ Chris Agee, ed., *The New North: Contemporary Poetry From Northern Ireland* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxix.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxi.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xxx.

that Agee presents of globalization as a panacea that will end remaining sectarianism.

This argument is not new in the world of Northern Irish poetry. Edna Longley has long chided Northern Ireland's obsession with the past for which she diagnoses cultural amnesia.¹⁸ Globalization is depicted in this anthology as the remedy that will provide the "amnesia" that will release the North from what Seamus Heaney referred to as its set of "anachronistic passions."¹⁹ Seamus Deane, however, has argued that such a form of forgetting "supplants the search for a legitimating mode of nomination and origin, [it] is surely to pass from one kind of colonizing experience into another."²⁰ This is the second edge of Agee's sword of globalization, the anxiety that the poetry of the new North will not retain intensity, because the violence that shaped it dissipated. This very argument occurs in the larger field of post-colonial discourse with Homi Bhabha who stresses imagining a space as "international" to deconstruct boundaries that limit difference.²¹ Terry Eagleton, however, argues that such an overt celebration of difference ignores a colonial past.²² Instead, Eagleton calls for preserving regional identities to alter the effects of imperialism.²³ Seamus Deane, following Eagleton, calls for a Northern Irish identity that remembers the sectarian conflict. He wrote that Seamus Heaney's work

¹⁸ Ian McBride, ed., *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 94. McBride's quote comes from Longley's statement in the *Belfast Telegraph* of 17 February 1998. Edna Longley called for Northern Irelanders to raise a monument to Amnesia and forget where they put it.

¹⁹ Patricia A Lynch, Joachim Fischer, and Brian Coates, eds., *Back to the Present, Forward to the Past: Irish Writing and History Since 1798*, vol. 161, Costerus (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 94. Heaney's phrase "anachronistic passions" implies a culture trapped in a cycle of violence. The quote first appeared in his essay "Delirium of the Brave" in *The Listener* of 27 November 1969.

²⁰ Seamus Deane, "Introduction," in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, A Field Day Company Book (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P), 18-19.

²¹ Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 291-322

²² Terry Eagleton, "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment," in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1990), 23-39

²³ Christopher T. Malone, "Writing Home: Spatial Allegories in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon," *ELH* 67 (2000): 1094. Malone makes the connection between the critical dialogue occurring in Northern Ireland and the critical dialogue occurring in post-colonial discourse.

faces “up to what writing, to remain authentic, must always face—the confrontation with the ineffable, the unspeakable thing for which ‘violence’ is our helplessly inadequate word.”²⁴ The crux of Agee’s concerns and the concerns in the critical world of Northern Irish poetry is then this: globalization is the necessary remedy for sectarian violence, but the end of sectarian violence may well be the end of an identifiable Northern Irish poetry. As a prominent member of the Northern Irish generation of globalization who readily attests to Heaney’s poetic influence, Nick Laird’s poetry provides the dual landscapes of rural Northern Ireland and contemporary urban cities through which one can explore the interrelationship between Yeats’s creative and destructive tensions in violence and that legacy in the poetry of the new global North.

Yeats, Heaney, and the Territorial Poetics of Violence

W. B. Yeats’s poetry reveals the origins of violence in nature and the origins of language in that violence. Both Yeats’s rhetorical and formal techniques as well as the poetic strategy of subjectification of objects and vice versa exploit the interspace between subject and object to convey the affective intensities of poetry rather than commemorate or celebrate an event. This strategy depends upon the violence of desire inherent in nature as the source of creativity in general and poetry specifically. Thus, Yeats is free to subjectify his object-territories as Seamus Heaney is not. Heaney is rooted to the geopolitical territory of Northern Ireland and the violence of that society when he creates poetry. As did Yeats, Heaney creates poetry through manipulation of the subject/object divide. However, his artistic territory is always his geographic territory, and thus rather than a reversal of subject/object status, Heaney seeks a unification of subject and object through the process of psychic imaging rather than a Yeatsian focus on affective

²⁴ Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest University Press, 1985), 186.

intensities. Whether the unification is possible, Heaney often doubts, but the process of bridging the divide between subject and object and thus becoming conscious of the violent divide is Heaney's ethical imperative in poetry. In a globalizing world riddled with violence, Laird's focus is on the cultural manifestations of violence in language as a destructive cultural force regardless of its origins in nature. Laird seeks not to redress violence merely to recognize it, and does not subscribe to Heaney's proposition that bringing this violence to consciousness will mitigate it. As an itinerant poet, Laird makes language his territory rather than a geographic space, and he seeks to reveal the violence inherent in his word-territories. Word-territories refers to the idea that signs manifest the qualities of a Deleuzian territory. Deleuze explains language in regards to difference, as he does identity formation, as a continual rhizomatic project of becoming. As in the case of rhizomatic blades of grass, it is the comparison of the repeated blades that is the foundation of difference, and difference is the new, the becoming of identity.²⁵ Repetition produces difference and is creative through this production. This system also suggests that words are not ahistorical entities, but affectively connote through a specific time and place. Laird's poetry fully exploits the territorial function in language and the symbolic violence of that functioning.

Word-Territories and Symbolic Violence

Just as Yeats's impetus to poetry is violence, Laird exploits the originary violence inherent in language. He does not resort to overarching nationalist metaphors to depict the violence of sectarianism, but instead highlights the violence lurking in words that reveals the violent origins of language itself. The move from nationalist metaphor to a

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 164-213.

deconstructive²⁶ emphasis on language is apparent in Laird's "Remaindermen" that places the reader in the realm of Northern Ireland through the Hiberno-English spoken there.²⁷ The term "remainderman" is a bit of legalese that refers to a person who inherits property upon the death of the former owner and the end of the estate.²⁸

"Remainderman" highlights the anxiety of Protestant Ulster regarding their ownership of land that is questioned by nationalist ideologies, but also the very violence inherent in land ownership. Someone must die in order for another to own the land. Legalese tries to depersonalize a transaction that depends upon death to occur. The term also implies the concept of legacy and transferring from one generation to the next the ideology of the landowner. "Remaindermen" captures the territorial influence of language as it interacts with politics and culture. The violence is, however, inherent in language as suggested in the first verse of the poem with the word "thole."

Laird writes,

Because what I like about them best
Was their ability to thole,
That weathered silence and reluctance,
Forenst the whole damn lot.²⁹

²⁶ By the term deconstruction, I am thinking of the concept of difference as it is in the work of Deleuze as opposed to Derrida. The two philosophers are in agreement on the need for the concept of a non-dialectical difference that counteracts previous philosophers' desire for unity, closure, and homogeneity and proposes instead diversity, openness, and heterogeneity. The distinction between the Deleuze and Derrida results from the former's starting point of Nietzschean materialism and the latter from a post-phenomenological Heideggerian ethics. Deleuze's concept of difference is rooted in nature and sexual desire and is immanent whereas Derrida's concept of difference is culturally rooted in mimetic desire. For a broader discussion of difference in the philosophies of Deleuze and Derrida see Paul Patton and John Protevi, eds., *Between Deleuze and Derrida* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003).

²⁷ Agee, *The New North*, 283.

²⁸ "Remainderman," in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Agee, *The New North*, 283.

What Laird and any other reader of Heaney recognizes in this first stanza, is Laird's use of the word that Heaney credits with his "illumination by philology," the word that allowed him to break his translator's block and begin his work on *Beowulf*.³⁰ Heaney describes the etymological journey of the word in his introduction to *Beowulf*. He writes,

And now suddenly here was "thole" in the official textual world, mediated through the apparatus of a scholarly edition, a little bleeper to remind me that my aunt's language was not just a self-enclosed family possession but an historical heritage, one that involved the journey tholian had made north into Scotland and then across into Ulster with the planters, and then across from the planters to the locals who had originally spoken Irish, and then farther across again when the Scots Irish emigrated to the American South in the eighteenth century. When I read in John Crowe Ransom the line, "Sweet ladies, long may ye bloom, and thoughly I hope ye may thole," my heart lifted again, the world widened, something was furthered. The far-flungedness of the word, the phenomenological pleasure of finding it variously transformed by Ransom's modernity and *Beowulf*'s venerability made me feel vaguely something for which again I only found the words years later. What I was experiencing as I kept meeting up with thole on its multicultural odyssey was the feeling that Osip Mandelstam once defined as a "nostalgia for world culture."³¹

This rather long passage of Heaney's captures exactly the difference between Heaney's and Laird's view of language. For Heaney, the word itself represents a type of linguistic

³⁰ Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, A Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2002), xxxv.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xxxv.

globalization that creates what he calls an “etymological eddy” that momentarily collapses old antitheses.³² Heaney sees the word as a connective global thread that makes the North’s “anachronistic passions” momentarily abate. Critic David Lloyd notes that Heaney is consistently concerned with the violence of colonization, but also notes that “his poetic offers constantly a premature compensation, enacted through linguistic and metaphorical usages which promise a healing of division simply by returning the subject to place.”³³ As a product of a globalized world and a traveler of the globe, Laird is much less rooted to place and does not find the idea of place healing in a world where place is essentially globalized. The use of “thole” in Laird’s poetry acknowledges the globalization inherent in the word “thole,” but highlights the violence rather than the supposed abatement of it as the word encounters new territories. For Laird, there is no authentic place for subject to return. For Heaney, the word is a bridge between cultures, but for Laird it merely propogates violence in a new form specific to the territory in which it is used. This difference in the two poet’s view of language extends to their view of poetry as well. In an interview for the London *Telegraph*, Laird describes his view of poetry. He states, “The way it works for me is that I don’t want to use the word therapy because I don’t think writing is therapy, although it is a way of clarifying things.” Laird does not try to expel or expunge violence therapeutically in his poetry, but does posit poetry as a means of revealing violence.³⁴ Heaney’s poetry is by no means therapeutic, but it does crave a center as Seamus Deane argues in “Powers of Earth Visions of Air.”

³² Ibid., xxxv.

³³ David Lloyd, “‘Pap for the Dispossessed’: Heaney and the Postcolonial Moment,” in *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney* (New York: G. K. Hall, 2003), 122.

³⁴ “Mr. and Mrs. Smith,” *Telegraph*, July 25, 2005, www.telegraph.co.uk.

Deane notes the violence Heaney depicts in *North* for instance is originary as well,³⁵ but through the trope of the Viking dead Heaney seeks to redress violence while Laird's poetry seeks to recognize it.³⁶ The opening of "Remainderman" with the conjunction opens a dialogue with Heaney's use of the word.³⁷ "Thole" then becomes the antagonistic characteristic that Laird admires, "the weathered silence, the reluctance." "Thole" denotes the act of suffering, or "putting up" with something.³⁸ In Laird's view, people inherit with the word "thole" not global connectedness, but the violence inherent in the suffering the word connotes. The word conveys the very Deleuzian difference at the origins of language and the ideological position of people who in the third stanza Laird writes,

³⁵ Seamus Deane, "Powers of Earth and Visions of Air," in *Seamus Heaney: The Shaping Spirit* (Newark, Delaware: U of Delaware P, 1996), 28.

³⁶ Heaney's connection is always to Ireland and the North throughout the volume *North*, but by depicting violence through Viking dead Heaney draws criticism from post-modern critics. David Lloyd credits Heaney with widening "the mythological and historical context of contemporary sectarian conflict, make the private public, and the personal political." Christopher Malone also questions whether Heaney's poetry conveys "a postmodern awareness of the way discourse inscribes subjectivity," because of the poet's continual "desire to center himself in relation to a more stable view of the past in order to imagine national identity conditionally." See David Lloyd, "Fusions in Heaney's *North*," in *Seamus Heaney: The Shaping Spirit* (Newark, Delaware: U of Delaware P, 1996). See also Malone, "Writing Home: Spatial Allegories in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon."

³⁷ Moya Cannon's poem "Thole-pin" highlights the word "thole" in an early form that denotes "A vertical pin or peg in the side of a boat against which in rowing the oar presses as the fulcrum of its action; esp. one of a pair between which the oar works; hence, a rowlock" (OED). In Cannon's epigraph to the poem she quotes Rilke's statement that "Endurance is all," and within the poem she acknowledges the violence inherent in the word's original meaning in the phrase "a pivot seared between elements." It seems Cannon finds comfort in the very fact that the word that can connote "to endure," has itself endured. Linguistic continuity for Cannon provides comfort regardless of the violence that is contiguous with it. Peggy O'Brien in the introduction to *The Wake Forest Book of Irish Women's Poetry*, notes that the choice of "thole" that has "no ultimately identifiable origin" and seemed completely out of use in Middle English "is appropriate given the poet's affiliation with a culture where searching for linguistic purity can seem pure folly, counter to the power of survival." Cannon, therefore, reveals linguistic connections as does Heaney and takes solace in this positive force, but is also aware of the violence that is implicit in a culture and statement that suggests that "Endurance is all" one can expect. See Peggy O'Brien, ed., *The Wake Forest Book of Irish Women's Poetry: 1967-2000* (Winston-Salem, N.C: Wake Forest University Press, 1999). Another contemporary poetry, Sean Lysaught, similarly uses "thole pin" in a poem entitled "Declensions" that also foregrounds the continuity of language and story. See *The Wake Forest Series of Irish Poetry, Volume 2* forthcoming from Wake Forest University Press in 2009.

³⁸ Terrence Patrick Dolan, *A Dictionary of Hiberno English*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2006), 239.

Hold ideas of north
 So singularly brutal that the world
 Might be ice-bound for good.³⁹

“Thole” indicates an ideological inheritance of antagonism, of violence as a global connection rather than the utopian globalization that Heaney imagines the word conveys. Critic Matt McGuire compares “Remaindermen” to Yeats’s “Easter 1916” as both depict a space where “agreements have been signed, history has moved on, but for some the word ‘progress’ remains anathema.”⁴⁰ McGuire recognizes the note of lament in both poems for violence inherent in language and the systemic political violence that symbolic violence can cause. However, for Yeats natural sexual desire is the impetus to violence as his “moor-hens” and “moor-cocks” mating call reveals.⁴¹ Desire can lead to the political violence that Yeats compares to a stone that disrupts the flow of the “living stream.”⁴² For Laird, the “living stream” is full of stones, and thus there is no recourse to nature to explain cultural violence. Laird’s focus is not on desire, but on the resulting violence in language from which he sees no recourse.

Laird conveys this unremitting violence through an inability to use the word “sorry.” He writes,

Someone has almost transcribed
 The last fifty years of our speech,
 And has not once had the chance

³⁹ Agee, *The New North*, 283.

⁴⁰ Matt McGuire, “Shaking the Hand of History: Literary Perspective, Northern Ireland,” June 21, 2007, www.eurozine.com.

⁴¹ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), 180.

⁴² *Ibid.*

To employ the word sorry

Or press the shift to make the mark

That indicates the putting of a question.⁴³

The inability of a person to use the word sorry indicates the same antagonistic outlook implied in the word “thole.” Laird depicts what Slavoj Žižek calls language as “a violent medium of immediate and raw confrontation” rather than the opposing, let us call it Heaney perspective through recourse to nature, that Žižek calls the “idea of language and the symbolic order as the medium of reconciliation and mediation, of peaceful coexistence.”⁴⁴ Many see the entry into language and the renunciation of violence as two aspects of the same event. Language instead of direct assault becomes the means by which we resolve confrontations. Žižek asks “What if, however, humans exceed animals in their capacity for violence precisely because they speak.”⁴⁵ What Laird in this poem and Žižek propose is recognition of the symbolic violence, the ideological stance, inherent in a word such as “thole” or the antithetical ideological stance conveyed by the word “sorry” as it comes into contact with different cultures.

Laird continues the depiction of humans and human language as inherently violent in the poem “Appraisal” where he writes,

⁴³ Agee, *The New North*, 283.

⁴⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2008), 60.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 61. Whether or not language results from natural desire as Yeats’s poetry implies or a cultural impetus as Žižek’s theories presuppose, humans use language within culture and that use implies an ideological stance dependent upon a historical and cultural moment. Žižek explains with the example of gold. By naming a thing such as “gold” we violently impose on a natural object “our dreams of wealth, power, spiritual purity, and so on, which have nothing whatsoever to do with the immediate reality of gold.”⁴⁵ Whereas Žižek sees the ideological stance inherent in a word the result of Giradean mimetic desire, Deleuze and Yeats in his poetry view the violence in language as a product of desire in nature. For Girard, mimetic desire is desire of an object not because of intrinsic desire but because my neighbor desires it. Deleuze, however, would say that mimetic desire is a cultural expression of a more fundamental sexual territorializing in nature through which a competition for mating results in mimetic desire in culture.

So instinctively aggressive is the genus
 That they herd in such a way to leave the weakest
 Prey to what might find it easiest to eat.

 Still, wide-eyed in the darkness they fear it.
 Part-rational, part-mammal, part-bastard,
 Yanked along perpetually on leashes by their genes.

 Their minds may shine with language, fine,
 But what good's that? Words are just pieces like they are
 Poor fuckers, who sit on their own in the small hours,

 Warming a grievance, talking aloud, articulating
 Tiny myths of struggle and deliverance.
 I think they're appealing. I don't mean as in pleasing.⁴⁶

Here Laird offers an appraisal of humanity, a bleak assessment that highlights the violent nature of humans, because of their ability to use and articulate violent myths. He depicts humans as only part-rational, part-animal in order to emphasize a violent nature. He then illustrates, as does Žižek, that a human's ability to communicate imparts an added level of violence beyond the capability of animals. Language for Laird allows propagation of violence throughout entire cultures in a systematic way that is not found in violence in nature.

Laird's other poems in the selection use the inherent symbolic violence of language to reveal the systemic violence inherent in economies and politics. Laird writes

⁴⁶ Agee, *The New North*, 293-294.

of “brand awareness on the site of the Great Synagogue with a massive Sony mark” in “A Guide to Modern Warsaw” where the Sony mark itself is “countersigned at pavement level by twenty-six graffiti tags, eleven printed pamphlets advertising prostitutes or lessons in the martial arts.”⁴⁷ Herein the originary sacrifice depicted in religion is juxtaposed with capitalism and an entrepreneurship that demands the sacrifice of bodies. This juxtaposition of the sacred and thus the originary sacrifice it entails occurs again in “The Last Saturday in Ulster” where a woman’s hand are “priestly cool” when they hold a coin that literally and metaphorically becomes an “old denomination” that connects the violence inherent in economies to the originary violence inherent in religion and its denominations.⁴⁸ Cultural religious violence leads to the systemic ideological violence of capitalism. Žižek makes this same connection between symbolic and systemic violence through the idea of the Lacanian Real. He writes, “Here we encounter the Lacanian difference between reality and the Real: “reality” is the social reality of actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes, while the Real is the inexorable ‘abstract,’ spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social reality.”⁴⁹ Laird succinctly portrays this spectre of capitalism with its layers of insignia plastered on the Great Synagogue of Warsaw that was itself destroyed by Nazi forces in 1943 in an attempted act of forced ideological globalization.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., 286-287.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 285. Rene Girard’s conception of violence as a result of religious sacrifice relates directly to the religious violence between Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland and between Christian and Jew in Warsaw.

⁴⁹ Žižek, *Violence*, 13.

⁵⁰ Laird consistently uses WWII and Nazism as a way to explore violence outside of Northern Ireland and in the world as a whole as the name of the war implies. In his second volume, *On Purpose*, Laird’s poem “Lipstick” uses language of the liberators through their reconstructed diary entries to depict humanity’s attempt to deny or aestheticize violence. Among the aid supplies were boxes of lipstick, and the soldiers notice “how those women lay with no nightdress or sheets/ but still that redness on their lips.” Tom Chivers writes in his review of the volume “The proximity here of overt sexuality, death and the absurd” is

Laird's poetry provides interesting insights into the questions about globalization and Northern Irish poetry. To return to Chris Agee's view of globalization as a double edged sword, Laird's poetry reveals that the violence Agee sees as central to the identity of Northern Ireland, although terribly destructive and unfathomable to those of us who have not experienced it, is a part of the symbolic violence of the human condition as we exist within language. Laird does not resort to nationalist metaphors such as a rape of Ireland by England as does Heaney in "Acts of Union," but shows that the very language humans speak both reveals and provides the framework for violent acts. Laird sees globalization not as a panacea that deconstructs binaries and thus ends violence, but shows that it does allow us to become aware of subjective and systemic violence within the universal human capacity for communication rather than viewing violence as a localized systemic phenomenon. Laird is within Yeats's influence so far as agreeing that violence is the substance of poetry, and within Heaney's influence in that an awareness of rather than a forgetting of the propensity for violence is an aspect of poetry. For Laird, however, violence is never abated by a resolution of subject and territory. The historical pressure that Agee saw compressed into metaphor in Northern Irish poetry are pressures that persist in a globalized world. Rather than the collective amnesia called for by Edna Longley, Žižek proposes alienation as a remedy for "anachronistic passions" in a global world. Žižek writes,

Those who understand globalization as an opportunity for the entire earth
to be a unified space of communication, one which brings together all

"uncomfortable reading, but strangely uplifting. The red smear of lipstick, like the collection itself, is a macabre affirmation of existence despite it all." As does Burt with Laird's first collection, Chivers views Laird's second collection as depicting inherent violence but not reducing humanity to that violence. See Laird, *On Purpose*, 38-39. See also Chivers, "Wordlessly Came Death."

humanity, often fail to notice this dark side of their proposition...Even if I live side by side with others, in my normal state, I ignore them. I move in a social space where I interact with others obeying certain external “mechanical” rules, without sharing their inner world. Perhaps the lesson to be learned is that sometimes a dose of alienation is indispensable for peaceful coexistence. Sometimes alienation is not a problem but a solution.⁵¹

Humans as Laird sees them are not primarily diplomatic creatures, and a bit of Žižek’s alienation, ritual barriers that prevent aspects of social communication, are the necessary remedy for the globalized North and the globalized world. Globalization as Homi Bhabha views it as a deconstruction of borders that limit difference, does not prevent violence, but it does make us more aware of that essential aspect of our characters by showing us that all stories not just our stories convey the symbolic violence that is apart of the human condition.

⁵¹ Žižek, *Violence*, 59.

Conclusion

W. B. Yeats creates poetry in the antinomial way that Elizabeth Grosz describes occurring in art production through the violent interstice of subject and object beginning in sexual desire in nature. Although the natural root of violence and desire are impetuses to creativity, Yeats never overlooks the ramifications of violence on society as humanity's natural desirous inclinations come into contact with the propensity of cultures for division—religious, societal, and political. However, by showing the natural origins of art and language, Yeats for some like Seamus Heaney has left a poetics of violence wherein language through art can be a positive symbolic force counteracting negative systemic violence. For others such as Nick Laird, Yeats's poetics of violence highlights the origins of violence in natural desire, and thus the symbolic violence inherent in the language and therefore being of humanity. For those poets who like Heaney follow Yeats through the images of personal and cultural unity, a post-colonial world that deconstructs boundaries is possible as Homi Bhabha proposes not by limiting difference as opponents claim, but by bridging difference through psychic imagining of self through art in the interstice of subject and object as does Heaney—and between two cultures as did Yeats. This process produces images that neither negate nor blend two cultures, but instead bridges them or rather makes the space between them less interminable. For those poets who like Laird follow Yeats through illuminating the violent origins of language and the negative impact of words on politics and cultures, "The act of poetry/ is a rebel act."¹ As Žižek points out, the only ethical act in a society that supposedly abhors violence yet perpetuates systemic violence internally and externally through the very means of negotiation, language, is to expose the violence that sustains the status quo that

¹ Michael Hartnett, *A Farewell to English* (Loughcrew, Ireland: Gallery Press, 1975).

absent-mindedly perpetuates such violence. For Heaney in his poem “Exposure,” the term connotes bringing to consciousness personal poetic motivations that perpetuates violence. Thus, Heaney follows Yeats in “Meditations in A Time of Civil War” concerning the impact of poetry on society. For Laird “exposure” is to reveal the essence of language in violence, and the inability of man to escape the violent house of language. Thus, Laird follows Yeats in “Easter 1916” where history may want to progress, but man is trapped in “polite meaningless words” that perpetuate the status quo.

Heaney and Laird typify the split in reaction to Yeats’s poetics of violence in the world of contemporary Northern Irish poetry, but both perspectives deal intensely with the impact of Yeats’s poetry. Derek Mahon has called Yeats the “Everest” of modern Irish poetry.² Eavan Boland and Michael Longley both acknowledge their debt to Yeats’s poetics.³ Even those poets such as Paul Muldoon and Ciaran Carson that openly berate Yeats’s poetic legacy as it deals with violence, still struggle with that legacy. In a poetic response to Yeats’s “Man and Echo” about the impact of poetry on history, Muldoon in “7, Middagh Street” writes, “For history’s a twisted root/ with art its small translucent fruit/ and never the other way round.” However Muldoon later speaks of Yeats’s work as “a massive subject in itself, one to which I hope to return.” Ciaran Carson likewise poetically responds to Yeats by ironically writing of Yeats’s golden birds of Byzantium as “squawk-box parrots.”⁴ Carson has also warned Heaney of following

² Ronald Schuchard, “The Legacy of Yeats in Contemporary Irish Poetry,” *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* 34, no. 2 (April 9, 1992): 291-307.

³ In an unpublished letter of 25 March 1966 contained in the Longley papers, Special Collections, Emory University, Boland and Longley exchange letters regarding their admiration of Yeats’s “Meditations in A Time of Civil War.” See *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Yeats and becoming the “laureate of violence.”⁵ The point at which Carson engages Yeats, however, is the contentious issue faced by all poets of Northern Ireland regarding the creative freedom of the art and the burden of historical violence. These poets reveal the extensive nature of Yeats’s legacy for which this thesis is able to provide only the representative examples of Heaney and Laird from succeeding generations. As these reactions and interactions suggest, however, the subject of Yeats, violence, and art is an extensive one in Northern Irish poetry.

The women poets of Northern Ireland have an especially interesting engagement with Yeats’s poetics of violence that views desire as the root of violence and most often imagines desire embodied in feminine form whether it be sexual desire, desire to create art, or desire for one’s homeland. Medbh McGuckian began her poetic career by immersing herself in Yeats’s work, and has said, “I feel I exist somewhere on the Tree of Poetry on the same limb as Blake and Yeats, but many phone calls below them.” In dealing with issues of violence and desire McGuckian also said “Yeats set an absurdly rhetorical example which I don’t feel able to follow.”⁶ McGuckian navigates Yeats’s archetypal nationalist Kathleen Ni Houlihan figures that express political conflict. McGuckian often turns these public images that connect women and violence into discussions about her own personal body. She directly associates the maternal image with violence and then uses these images to navigate the overlay of creating bodies in motherhood to the poet creating a body of work. McGuckian and female poets of Ireland following W. B. Yeats must deal directly with the problematic depictions of females in

⁵ Dillon Johnston, “Violence in Seamus Heaney’s Poetry,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Matthew Campbell, Cambridge Companions to Literature (CCtL) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 114.

⁶ Schuchard, “The Legacy of Yeats in Contemporary Irish Poetry.”

relation to desire and violence presented through the Yeatsian legacy. Although, the scope of this thesis is to navigate the legacy of W. B. Yeats's poetics in contemporary Northern Irish poetry, as McGuckian's poetry suggests, there is much to be said about the impact of that poetics on the female poets in the context of Irish poetry as a whole.

Heaney following Yeats suggests in Conventry Patmore's words that "The end of art is peace." However, Yeats's poetic legacy is not as clear as Heaney or Yeats's own words suggest. Yeats's poetry and its interaction with violence and history remain problematic for many Northern Irish poets, but even where it is problematic it is influential. Yeats's insights into the root of violence in desire and nature are insights into the psychology of humanity that impact all poets and thinkers following him. Yeats's poetry is the pinnacle or as Mahon suggests the "Everest" that Northern Irish poets must contend as they struggle with the demands of art as it both portrays and potentially propagates violence.

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