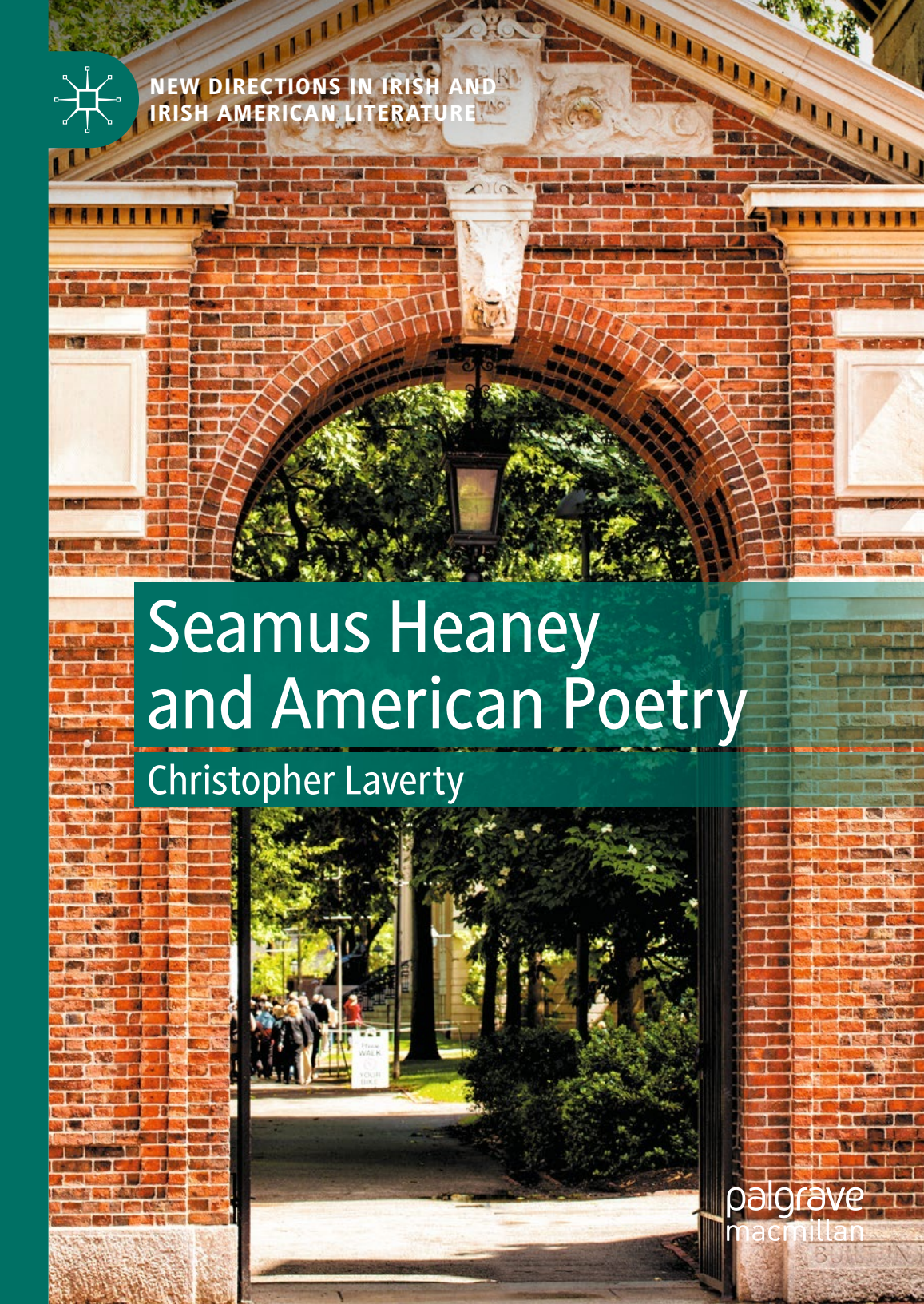
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Seamus Heaney and American Poetry

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Contents

Abbreviations

CP	'Crediting Poetry'
DC	*District and Circle*
DD	*Door into the Dark*
DN	*Death of a Naturalist*
EBP	*Elizabeth Bishop Poems*
EL	*Electric Light*
FK	*Finders Keepers*
FW	*Field Work*
GT	*Government of the Tongue*
HC	*Human Chain*
HL	*The Haw Lantern*
N	*North*
P	*Preoccupations*
R	*The Redress of Poetry*
RFCP	*Robert Frost The Collected Poems*
RLCP	*Robert Lowell Collected Poems*
SI	*Station Island*
SL	*The Spirit Level*
SS	*Stepping Stones*
ST	*Seeing Things*
WO	*Wintering Out*

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: America and Northern Ireland

From an early stage of his career, Seamus Heaney was curious about American poetry and the professional opportunities available to him in the United States. In 1995, the year that Heaney won the Nobel Prize for literature, Michael Allen wrote that 'from his second book to his seventh […] America's intermittent presence in Heaney's poetry alongside England and Ireland suggests that the verse is searching out some empathy and support there.'[1] At the time of Allen's comments, Heaney held the position of Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard University, a post he was in from 1984 to 1996 (though he took his first role there in 1979). In 1996, he became Emerson Poet in Residence, a non-teaching position that he held until 2007. Prior to his long relationship with Harvard, Heaney had been a visiting lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, 1970–71, where he read and met with contemporary American poets at a time when he himself had only two volumes of poetry published.[2] Given this extensive history and Heaney's enduring popularity there, it is little wonder that his critics frequently speculated—and

[1] Michael Allen, 'The Parish and the Dream: Heaney and America, 1969–1987', *Michael Allen Close Readings: Essays on Irish Poetry*, edited by Fran Brearton (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2015), p.123. The chapter originally appeared as an article in *The Southern Review* (Summer Issue, 1995).

[2] Heaney first visited America in 1969 when he was invited to a reading in Richmond, Virginia; Heaney returned to the University of California as visiting lecturer in 1976.

C. Laverty, *Seamus Heaney and American Poetry*, New Directions in Irish and Irish American Literature,
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continue to speculate—at what the nature of his relationship with American poetry might be.

Heaney was certainly not alone in feeling what has been described as 'the long, strong gravitational pull of the great American planet'.[3] Oscar Wilde famously went to America in 1882 and, like Walt Whitman, embraced the US press culture to promote his image. Yeats, who also admired Whitman, went to America in the winter of 1903–04, and described the US as 'the best educated country'[4] he had seen. In January 1939 (the year Heaney was born) W. H. Auden visited America and eventually became a US citizen in 1946, while John Montague, born in Brooklyn and raised in Ireland, won a Fulbright Scholarship in 1953 to study at Yale. With such precedents in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that several prominent Irish writers were residing in American universities by the end of the twentieth century. Interviewing Heaney in his university rooms in 1997, Henri Cole observed: 'if you look at a handful of American universities, you find Paul Muldoon, Derek Mahon, Eamon Grennan, Eavan Boland and Seamus Heaney.' This 'Anglo-American matrix', as Cole puts it, is more than simply the result of a collective 'shrug at the English models',[5] in Heaney's phrase.

During the 1990s, Ireland was transforming into a modern, economically powerful European state in what became known as the Celtic Tiger era. Despite its rapid growth and modernisation, to 'the world', Matthew Campbell notes, 'Ireland still had the glamour of its ancient traditions, music and poetry'; Irish writing was 'widely represented in the bookshops and campuses of the anglophone world, and Irish poetry shared in that world's appetite for Irish music, cinema and art.'[6] The Northern Irish peace process also brought renewed media interest and a sense of optimism to the reporting of affairs on the island. Heaney began to be quoted by President Bill Clinton, who even hung a copy of *The Cure at Troy*

[3] Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011), p.165.

[4] W. B. Yeats, 'America and the Arts', *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats. Vol. II: Reviews, Articles and Other Miscellaneous Prose, 1897–1939*, edited by John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p.338.

[5] Henri Cole, 'Seamus Heaney the Art of Poetry No. 75', *Paris Review*, 1997, web.

[6] Campbell, 'Ireland in Poetry: 1999, 1949, 1969', *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, edited by Matthew Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.1.

(1990) on the wall of his study in the White House.[7] More recently, President Joe Biden—who often stresses his Irish heritage—quoted lines from the chorus of *The Cure at Troy* during his Democratic Party nomination acceptance speech.[8] It is not just because of these lines, and not just by American presidents, that Heaney's work continues to be quoted. It was reported in 2016 that Heaney's 'When the Others were Away at Mass' was voted the Irish nation's best-loved poem; in 2020, *The Irish Times* announced that Heaney replaced Yeats as the most quoted Irish poet, helped in part by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, who quoted Heaney in a high-profile TV address to the nation.[9] Heaney's canonical status, at home and abroad, derives in large part from his enduring popularity in America. It was the US poet Robert Lowell, after all, who first christened Heaney 'the best Irish poet since W. B. Yeats',[10] a title that stuck to Heaney all the way to his obituaries in 2013.

American universities continue to play a considerable role in bolstering Heaney's academic reputation. At Harvard, where Heaney is remembered as 'a revered member of the Harvard family',[11] his former rooms in Adams house have been renamed in his honour, with items of furniture chosen by his friend and critic Helen Vendler, while, in 2016, Emory University opened their archive of Heaney papers to the public.[12] Heaney's 1970–71 year at Berkeley still attracts critical attention, due in part to the Bancroft notebook, a notebook of Heaney's, now archived at the University of California, which contains drafts of poems he composed during his time as visiting lecturer there.[13] In Ireland, an exhibit dedicated to Heaney's work, organised by Geraldine Higgins, of Emory University, was opened in 2018 by President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins, with plans to

[7] *Ibid*, p.1 In his *Stepping Stones* interviews, Heaney recalls Clinton visiting him in hospital after his stroke in 2006. *SS*, p.462.

[8] August 20th, 2020.

[9] See Dan Griffin, 'When All The Others Were Away at Mass tops favourite poem poll', *The Irish Times*, March 11, 2015, web; See Elizabeth Birdthistle, 'Seamus Heaney's healing words a sound investment', *The Irish Times*, September 5, 2020, web.

[10] Lowell, 'Books of the Year', *Observer*, 14 December 1975, p.19. Discussed later in text.

[11] Quoted in Corydon Ireland, 'Heaney's death caught "the heart off guard"', in *Harvard Gazette*, August 30, 2013, web.

[12] Emory stated these papers represent 'the largest research holdings of Heaney material in the world'. Quoted in Elaine Justice, 'Emory opens Seamus Heaney's papers to the public', *Emory Report*, February 29, 2016, web.

[13] See Edward O'Shea, 'Seamus Heaney at Berkeley, 1970–71', *Southern California Quarterly* (2016) Vol. 98, No. 2, pp.157–193.

move the display to the National Library of Ireland. In Heaney's hometown of Bellaghy, a £4.25 million arts and literary centre named the Seamus Heaney Homeplace was opened in 2016, while events continue to be held in Heaney's honour around Queen's University Belfast and the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry.[14] In print, the posthumous publications *Aeneid Book VI* (2016) and *100 Poems* (2018) have ensured Heaney's presence in the high street book market. With new poems and letters discovered in 2020 and a commissioned biography by Fintan O'Toole in development,[15] it seems highly probable that Heaney will become even more institutionalised and taught in the years ahead, and even more part of the fabric of Irish and American culture.

Heaney's transatlantic status seems to emblematise a wider relationship between Irish and American cultures and literary traditions. Indeed, studies on the American associations of the Irish writers Wilde, Yeats, and Joyce have been completed (despite Joyce never visiting America). Unsurprisingly, the multiple connections between Heaney and America have proved to be irresistible and yet curiously challenging subject matter for his critics. From the earliest reviews of his poetry in the 1960s, Heaney has been compared to Robert Frost, while reviewers of *Field Work* (1979) were quick to note the significance of 'Elegy', a poem in tribute to Lowell. Later, several of the prominent book-length Heaney studies published in the 1980s and '90s argued that Heaney's 1970–71 Berkeley residency was a critical period in his development of a political form.[16] Henry Hart's 1992 study, for instance, gives sustained attention to Heaney's Berkeley residency and the influence of contemporary US poetry on his prose form in *Stations* (1975). Rachel Buxton has examined the Frost-Heaney relationship in considerable detail in *Robert Frost and Northern Irish Poetry* (2004) while Michael Cavanagh's study *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics* (2009) contains a chapter on Lowell's influence on Heaney in the 1970s. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews examines Heaney and America in his wide-ranging study of transatlantic poetics, while Rosie Lavan's study *Seamus Heaney and Society* (2020) provides an overview of Heaney's time

[14] See Deirdre Falvey, 'How Seamus Heaney wrote: First look at a new exhibition', *The Irish Times*, July 4, 2018, web; 'Seamus Heaney centre opens in poet's home village of Bellaghy', *Belfast Telegraph*, September 29, 2016, web.

[15] See Alison Flood, '"Treasure trove" of unseen Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney writing found', *The Guardian*, November 14, 2020, web; Martin Doyle, 'Fintan O'Toole to write Seamus Heaney's official biography', *The Irish Times,* November 14, 2017, web.

[16] Relevant criticism discussed in main chapters.

in Harvard. Most recently, Sarah Bennett and Justin Quinn have written about Heaney's American connections and the critical lens through which he was viewed in the United States in *Seamus Heaney in Context* (2021), a volume of critical essays edited by Higgins. The range of these illuminating publications and their different focuses (some emphasise American residencies, others examine American influence) indicates both the value and the difficulty of exploring the topic as one continuous commentary.

Though much existing criticism provides an excellent starting point for further study of Heaney and America, some of the earlier research on Heaney's residencies in the US has created narratives around the topic that have been called into question by more recent commentary. Magdalena Kay offers this critical summary of the landscape:

Heaney's critics insist on the American influence […] with a tenacity that is surprising given the lack of evidence for many such claims. The search for echoes of Gary Snyder and Robert Bly does not yield much fruit; the mention of Louis Simpson in 'Making Strange' hardly invites one to an influence study; Heaney's great admiration for William Carlos Williams is certainly worth mentioning, yet Williams's short lines sound nothing like Heaney's drill-like stanzas of the 1970s.[17]

That these valid comments appear in a study of Heaney's Eastern European influences further highlights the need for an equivalent study on Heaney in relation to America, one which examines both Heaney's time there and the US poets that were important to him, from his first encounters with American writing up to his final collection, where they continue to make their presence felt in his poetry. One of Heaney's most sensitive critics, Neil Corcoran, has recently commented that Heaney's achievement is remarkable for its continuity rather than any sense of stylistic breakage.[18] This is particularly well-evidenced by Heaney's American influences, who he first read in Belfast in the 1950s and '60s, and returned to for strength throughout his entire career, often in response to difficulty.

[17] Magdalena Kay, *In Gratitude for all Gifts: Seamus Heaney and Eastern Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2012) p.131.

[18] Neil Corcoran, 'Happening Once Forever: Heaney's Late Style', in *"The Soul Exceeds its Circumstances": The Later Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, edited by Eugene O'Brien (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), p.119.

II

The wider connections between the Irish, British, and American poetic traditions go far beyond what can be examined by this study, yet it is necessary to give some synthesis of the relevant context to understand the manner in which Heaney came to view American poetry as a young writer in Belfast, and to distinguish the kinds of American writing that were attractive to him from those he elided. As Kennedy-Andrews notes, certain caveats should be brought to bear on discussions of this kind, since the very critical frame employed risks undermining the 'mixed and plural composition'[19] of both American and Irish writing. Indeed, Edna Longley defines Northern Irish poetry as a unique phenomenon within the Irish-British scene and 'the product of multi-ethnic fertilisation', which draws 'on all the available literary traditions'[20] to express its inheritance and complex affiliations. However, it is possible to determine some of the trends in Heaney's thinking about America and to situate his American influences within the wider picture of transatlantic literary alliances.

Quoting Edwin Fussell's definition of the American poet as 'a non-Englishman (frequently an anti-Englishman) writing in the English language', Buxton highlights one of the key parallels of Irish and American writing. She argues that, for Heaney, 'the fact that Frost was not English, and more specifically not writing in Standard English, was a part of his attraction.'[21] While the level of independence from the English tradition achieved by American and Irish poetry has been contested (particularly in the anthologies of the mid-twentieth century), the undeniable success of the American writers hoping to 'decolonize'[22] themselves in the nineteenth century have provided useful models for Irish poets, most notably for Yeats. In response to the question 'What is Anglo-Irish Poetry?', the Irish poet Seán Lucy answers that it is:

[19] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Northern Irish Poetry: The American Connection* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.5.

[20] Edna Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994), p.62.

[21] Rachel Buxton, *Robert Frost and Northern Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.50–51.

[22] Declan Kiberd argues: 'Nineteenth-century American literature was such a clear instance of a decolonizing culture that it would have been amazing if its writers did not exert a tremendous influence on the Irish revival.' Quoted by Kennedy-Andrews, *Northern Irish Poetry*, p.19.

the story of a search: it is part of the quest of the English-speaking Irish for an identity, the reshaping of English to express the Irish experience.[23]

Reflecting on this definition of Lucy's, Mark Storey argues that this particular search for an identity 'characterises the poetry of Ireland since Yeats.'[24] Nineteenth century American writers were engaged in a corresponding search; in Walt Whitman's phrase, they were asking 'the terrible query: American National Literature—is there distinctively any such thing, or can there ever be?'[25] In the writing of Henry David Thoreau and Whitman, Yeats saw an example of how a 'reshaping' of English could be begun and how writers could build a foundation on which a national literature might flourish.[26]

However, Yeats's approval of American literature was seldom unequivocal. In *Yeats and American Poetry: The Tradition of the Self* (1983), Terence Diggory argues that American poets 'had succeeded in declaring aesthetic independence from England' and that, initially, 'Yeats wanted the Irish to follow the American lead'.[27] In the 1905 article 'America and the Arts' Yeats does compare the US favourably to England, commenting that 'the lack of a hereditary order has brought fire and vigour',[28] but he adds that '[e]verything had been a delight […] except American poetry', which, he laments, has followed the 'modern way of [James Russell] Lowell' rather than 'that ancient way Whitman, Thoreau and Poe had lit upon.'[29] Diggory claims that, in Yeats's view, this 'ancient way' involved the celebration of nature and turning the self into a subject for poetry. These features come together dramatically in 'Song of Myself', the poem where Whitman—the American poet most important to Yeats—boldly elevates his biography into the story of the nation and sounds his 'barbaric

[23] Seán Lucy, 'What is Anglo-Irish Poetry?', *Irish Poets in English*, edited by Seán Lucy (Cork: Mercier Press, 1973), p.15.

[24] Storey, *Poetry and Ireland Since 1800: A Source Book*, edited by Mark Storey (London: Routledge, 1988), p.5.

[25] Walt Whitman, *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892), p.490.

[26] Terence Diggory notes 'Yeats acknowledged that "Innisfree" was written particularly with Thoreau in mind" and quotes Yeats expressing his desire to live 'in imitation of Thoreau.' *Yeats & American Poetry: The Tradition of the Self* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.17.

[27] Ibid., p.4.

[28] Yeats, 'America and the Arts', p.340.

[29] Ibid., p.339.

yawp over the roofs of the world'.[30] Whatever his disagreements with certain poets, it is clear from Yeats's key role in the Celtic Revival that he shared significant values with nineteenth century American writers and identified with their determination to formulate a distinct literary identity. It is easy to imagine Yeats's statement '[t]here is no great literature without nationality, no great nationality without literature'[31] resonating with Whitman, who in a similar vein remarked '[t]o have great poets, there must be great audiences, too.'[32]

Yeats's opinion of Whitman's example, however, became less favourable over time. In the preface to a 1937 edition of poems Yeats writes:

I thought when I was young—Walt Whitman had something to do with it—that the poet, painter, and musician should do nothing but express themselves. When the laboritories, pulpits, and newspapers had imposed themselves in the place of tradition the thought was our protection.[33]

Though this does not represent a total rejection of Whitman (*pace* Diggory), it is difficult not to read these terms ('do nothing but express themselves') as a criticism of the overflow effect of Whitman's free verse. Yeats's objection to this characteristic of Whitman's achievement is germinal in a comment he makes about Emerson in the earlier article 'America and the Arts', where he describes Emerson as being 'of a lesser order' because 'he loved the formless infinite too well to delight in form'.[34] Emerson's conceptions of form are best illustrated by remarks made in 'The Poet' where he argues that America is too various and expansive to be treated in standard forms ('it will not wait long for metres'), and that 'Chalmers's collection of five centuries of English poets' lacks any example of a poet who contains 'that excellent combination of gifts in my countrymen which I seek'.[35] Whitman echoed this statement in his prose, contending that 'the spirit of English literature is not great, at least is not

[30] Whitman, 'Song of Myself', *Leaves of Grass*, edited with an introduction by Jerome Loving (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.78.

[31] Yeats, 'Browning', *Letter to the New Island*, edited by George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p.30.

[32] Whitman, *Complete Prose Works*, p.324.

[33] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1961), p.x.

[34] Yeats, 'America and the Arts', p.341.

[35] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Poet', *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Seventh Edition, Volume B. 1820–1865*, edited by Nina Baym (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), p.1193.

greatest—and its products are no models for us.'[36] Whitman goes further than Emerson in his criticisms of English writing, describing it as 'sluggish and stately' and impeded by the 'dread of saying or doing something not at all improper in itself, but unconventional'.[37] In Whitman and Emerson's view, American writing needed to be new and tailored to the unique American experience.

In Ireland, no American-scale break with traditional forms occurred; rather, Irish poetry is noted for its tight lyric structures. A difference in stance toward the act of poetic making is detectable in Yeats and Whitman's advice to younger poets in verse: in 'Poets to Come' Whitman pledges he is 'Leaving it to' the next generation 'to prove and define' the 'main things'[38] for themselves, whereas Yeats tells Irish poets to learn their 'trade and sing whatever is well-made'.[39] This emphasis on the well-wrought poem has persisted in Irish poetry in both the North and South. Indeed, Heaney recalls that he, Michael Longley, and Derek Mahon were once referred to as the 'tight-arsed trio'[40] for their formal compression. While all three draw on many influences, their shared preference for lyric concentration over expansiveness is representative of the broader trend noted by Campbell, who observes that '[o]nly a small number of Irish poets have followed Kinsella into open form'.[41] In contrast to the Emersonian notions of bespoke forms able to capture America's vastness, in Campbell's view Irish poets desired to 'create a place in which the imagination may suggest alternatives to the broken object of a society always keenly aware of local trauma'.[42]

These diverging approaches to form in Northern Ireland and America are remarkably well-compressed in Heaney's 'Bogland', where he uses a series of quatrains to oppose flat American landscapes with the narrower Irish 'horizon', and contrasts America's westerly movement with Ireland's

[36] Whitman, *Complete Prose Works*, p.325.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Whitman, 'Poets to Come', *Leaves of Grass*, p.18.

[39] 'Under Ben Bulben', *W. B. Yeats Selected Poems*, edited by Timothy Webb (London: Penguin, 1991), p.211.

[40] Frank Kinahan, 'An Interview with Seamus Heaney', *Critical Inquiry*, Spring, 1982, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Spring, 1982), p.408; the phrase originates from Michael Foley, 'Review of *Energy to Burn* by James Simmons', *Honest Ulsterman* 29, 1971, pp. 40–41.

[41] Campbell, 'Figuring Irish Poetry', *Ireland and Transatlantic Poetics: Essays in Honor of Denis Donoghue*, edited by Brian G. Caraher and Robert Mahony (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), p.120.

[42] Ibid.

'pioneers' who strike 'Inwards and downwards'[43] into a national psyche represented by the bog itself. Written before Heaney's first professional appointment in America and collected in what was only his second book of poems, 'Bogland' shows a sophisticated engagement with American literature and Heaney's awareness of the fact that often, in Van Wyck Brooks's phrase, American texts operate as 'a sublimation of the frontier spirit'.[44] More significantly, however, in its preference for the tighter structure, 'Bogland' suggests that, from an early stage of his career, Heaney shared Yeats's ambivalence for what the latter calls the 'formless'[45] streak of much US poetry.

III

Heaney's self-commentary concerning his experiences in America has, without question, over-influenced much critical discussion. However, remarks made during a 1988 interview with Randy Brandes about contemporary American poetry are particularly candid and pertinent. There, Heaney describes reading Charles Olson's 'Projective Verse', an influential essay collected in Carlos Williams's autobiography, as the experience of seeing what he 'ought to feel' without being able to feel it; he explains what he wants is 'perfect cadence', not just 'expectoration or self-regard or a semaphore for self's sake.' Pushed on this subject by Brandes, Heaney explains that he finds the American ear 'fluid and spread', whereas he admires poetry that 'contains and practices force within a confined area.'[46] Heaney replies to Brandes's comment, '[a] lot of what you're describing is the Whitmanian inheritance', that American poetry is in 'danger' of 'using the robust Whitmanian uplift as a roller-coaster', adding 'I am suspicious, I suppose, of the large gestures which are expected of American poets.'[47] These same feelings are at work in 'Bogland', where American vastness is set in contrast to an Irish experience, which, for Heaney, is one of inwardness and of recovering history rather than boldly making it, as Whitman and Emerson aim to do in the American context.

[43] *DD*, p.55.

[44] Quoted in Richard Gray, *American Poetry of the Twentieth Century* (London: Longman, 1990), p.8.

[45] Yeats, 'America and the Arts', p.341.

[46] Randy Brandes, 'Seamus Heaney: An Interview', *Salmagundi*, No. 80, 1988, p.17.

[47] Ibid., p.18.

For the first set of critics who argued for the significance of America to Heaney's verse, these interview comments may have appeared like a trapdoor to be avoided. This may be why much commentary has overemphasised the influence of more experimental (and therefore arguably more 'American') poets Gary Snyder and Robert Bly to Heaney, as if to doubt their importance would somehow be to question the wider argument for American poetry's significance. But Heaney's statement of ambivalence actually serves as a convenient starting point for a study of his poetry in relation to America, because his interview comments neatly encapsulate the major fault line running beneath all his experiences of contemporary US poetry in different phases while he was residing there, where his preference for poems that 'practice force within a confined area'[48] actually grew, and where his desire to strip 'layer after layer'[49] of history took on new manifestations. Ironically, much of Heaney's sense of form is derived from the American writers he read in the 1960s, particularly Frost, whose description of the poem as a 'stay against confusion'[50] became a key aesthetic principle. Though Heaney's American exemplars, considered in the chapters that follow, may be fewer in number and less diverse than some earlier critics have suggested, the intensity of their influence is substantially greater than existing criticism has recognised. And while it is impossible to determine the true extent to which Heaney's American influences contributed to his positive reception there, through sustained analysis of his work a clear picture emerges: American poets were central to the formation of Heaney's poetics in the 1960s and helped him consolidate later aesthetic developments. Longley's comment that Heaney's years as an undergraduate in Belfast and poet-apprentice in The Group laid 'the ground for reciprocities'[51] with America, therefore, contains more truth than has yet been fully recognised.

Arguably, this 'ground' for connections with American writers was already taking shape in Northern Ireland thanks to those writers who had directly proceeded Heaney's generation. Aside from Montague, John Hewitt had looked to American poetry for sustenance as he tried to envisage what kind of Ulster literary milieu might form in the years ahead.

[48] Ibid., p.17.

[49] 'Bogland', *DD*, p.55.

[50] Robert Frost, 'The Figure a Poem Makes', *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*, edited by Mark Richardson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p.132.

[51] Longley, *Poetry and Posterity* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2000), p.249.

Writing from a Protestant perspective in 'The Bitter Gourd: Some Problems of the Ulster Writer', an influential essay Heaney would have read,[52] Hewitt laments the lack of 'creative genius' among the 'uneven and lumpy mixture' of 'Scotsmen, Englishmen, and Welshmen' in Ulster.[53] Drawing parallels to New England where a comparable 'Puritan nonconformity'[54] flourished, Hewitt emphasises Frost's value for Northern Irish writers, arguing that his 'rural portraits' and 'avoidance of ornament and rhetoric' make him an ideal model for local poets trying to uncover 'what Ulster was and is'.[55] However, Hewitt concludes his essay not with one of Frost's *North of Boston* (1914) pastorals but by quoting the controversial late poem 'The Gift Outright', before surmising: 'His finger has found our wound.'[56]

As Buxton notes, Heaney gives special attention to this passage of Hewitt's essay in 'Frontiers of Writing', a lecture whose title may be a reference to Hewitt's image of Donegal as 'a frontier.'[57] Heaney notes that Hewitt, when quoting from 'The Gift Outright', 'dropped the line' where Frost admits, in parenthesis, '(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)', but 'kept the line about the land being "unstoried, artless, unenhanced"'.[58] For Heaney, Hewitt thereby participates 'in Frost's unconscious erasure of native American stories and arts and enhancements, and made a similar colonial erasure of the original native culture of *Uladh*.'[59] Heaney's analysis may have been influenced by Tom Paulin, who had earlier critiqued Frost's 'version of manifest destiny' in 'The Gift Outright' because it virtually 'wipes out Indian culture'.[60] In his broad study of Frost's politics,

[52] Buxton writes 'Heaney first encountered Hewitt's "The Bitter Gourd" when he was reading for his masters' in 'regionalist poets of the 1930s through to the 1950s'. Buxton, *Robert Frost and Northern Irish Poetry*, p.34.

[53] John Hewitt, 'The Bitter Gourd: Some Problems of the Ulster Writer', *Ancestral Voices: The Selected Prose of John Hewitt*, edited by Tom Clyde (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1987), p.109.

[54] Ibid., p110.

[55] Ibid., p.121.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid. Buxton argues: 'That "our" of Hewitt's – when he declares that Frost's "finger has found our wound" – is, of course, Protestant'. Buxton, *Robert Frost and Northern Irish Poetry*, p.34.

[58] Heaney, 'Frontiers of Writing', *R*, p.197.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Tom Paulin, *Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p.172.

however, Tyler Hoffman notes the irony that Frost, despite his depictions of violence against American natives,[61] has remained a source of inspiration for several notable poets writing in a postcolonial context, including Heaney. Considering this ability of Frost's to influence poets of disparate political impulses, Hoffman suggests: 'if [..] Frost in his old age stands for the colonial violence of the U. S., Frost at the beginning of his career appears in the guise of the postcolonial poet.'[62] Heaney's quarrel with Hewitt about his particular appropriation of Frost—Heaney's 'favorite poet'[63] according to Vendler—exemplifies Hoffman's argument, but it also highlights the fact that Frost's appeal in Ulster is particularly noteworthy, in that it can extend to both nationalists and unionists, even while seeming to divide them.

Several of the other American writers who were important to Heaney first came to prominence in the literary magazines of the early-mid twentieth century, where new kinds of poetry and criticism were promoted and the debate around American writing's relationship to the English tradition was extended and complicated. *The Dial*, originally established in 1840 by Emerson and Margaret Fuller, is generally seen as 'the father of the American little magazine.'[64] Though it ceased publication in 1844, *The Dial* was revived multiple times and, from 1920–1929, published writers such as D. H. Lawrence, Yeats, E. E. Cummings, and Marianne Moore[65] (who famously rejected the work of Hart Crane when she was the magazine's editor). *The Dial* also featured contributions from Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot who, as the editors of one authoritative bibliography argue, 'introduced a new criticism to America—a criticism of learning and insight, and a criticism that kept a close eye on the organization of the work under discussion.'[66] Other important periodicals included *Rogue*, established in 1915 and edited with the help of Lawrence, which published the poetry of Wallace Stevens, and *Blast*, dating from 1933, which published some of Carlos Williams's stories. No history of this time in American literature

[61] See 'The Vanishing Red', *CPRF*, p.142.

[62] Tyler Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001), p.218.

[63] Helen Vendler, "Second Thoughts & Coda: Tell the truth. Do not be afraid', Irish Pages Vol. 8, No. 2, Heaney, 2014, p.15.

[64] Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1946), p.196.

[65] Ibid., p.259.

[66] Ibid., p.197.

would be complete without mention of Eliot's *The Criterion*, a quarterly review that was published in London and ran from 1922–1939. It may have neglected 'many important Americans',[67] but by publishing 'The Waste Land' and including reviews of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Eliot's magazine helped define Modernism and enriched the debate around literary tradition.

Surveying this landscape in the introductory essay to *The Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*, Vendler argues '[a]lthough the victories won by American modernists were indisputable, they were won chiefly by Americans who had Europeanized themselves with a vengeance.'[68] Emphasising this point, Vendler adds:

> Pound and Eliot became expatriates; Frost went deliberately to England for three years and published his first book there; Stevens said that French and English constitute a single language. And Williams made himself so pointedly American only because he was by birth and education so European[.][69]

While Vendler is right to stress the importance of Europe to the American writers of this era (particularly to Eliot and Pound), other critics have been keen to highlight the sometimes-overlooked ways in which other modern American poets retained their 'Americanness', despite their alliances with Europe. For instance, in his introduction to his 1962 anthology, Donald Hall argues that 'there were the expatriates and there were the poets who remained'. While 'Pound, Aiken, and Eliot congregated in London', notable 'things were also going on in New York […] Alfred Kreymbourg, Mina Loy, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, E. E. Cummings, and Hart Crane mingled and established a domestic literary milieu.'[70] Despite sharing little, in Hall's view these writers were united insofar as they all 'experimented with the use of common American speech, an indigenous language increasingly distinguishable from English.'[71] Moore encodes these issues in her poem 'England', where she

[67] Ibid., p.380.

[68] Helen Vendler, *The Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*, edited by Helen Vendler (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2003), pp.9–10.

[69] Ibid., p.10.

[70] Donald Hall, *Contemporary American Poetry*, selected and introduced by Donald Hall (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1962), p.18.

[71] Ibid.

ironically compares the 'baby rivers and little towns'[72] of England with America, a 'languageless country'[73] that seems poor next to the cultural riches of Europe. In contrast to the sophistication of the Old World, in the United States 'letters are written' in 'plain American which cats and dogs can read'; yet, in the very act of articulating these thoughts, Moore demonstrates that poetry lives here too and that literature 'has never been confined to one locality'.[74]

Moore's complex syllabic patterns—her 'own rules', as Elizabeth Bishop once wrote of her, the 'reverse of "freedom"'—[75] exemplify the fact that the historical tendency to equate formlessness with 'Americanness' and restriction with 'Englishness' does little to further our understanding of either tradition. One could argue, for instance, that poems such as 'Desert Places' or 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' by Frost, who famously declared that free verse was like playing tennis without a net,[76] depict the quintessentially American notion of man alone in vast wilderness. Similarly, Lowell's multiple sonnet volumes, despite their reliance on the fourteen-line frame that is itself so emblematic of European literary tradition, constitute a Whitmanian mosaic for their treatment of personal and communal history.[77] Vendler herself argues that Lowell, through his translation-versions in *Imitations* (1961) and *Near the Ocean* (1964), 'announced that American poetry henceforth would possess the past in a commanding, not subordinate manner.'[78] This subversive quality is precisely what attracts Heaney to Lowell, and to the American formalists generally. In a later essay, Heaney wrote of Frost, John Crowe Ransom, and Lowell that he admired 'their Joycean relish at being able to run a few rings around what had been done already',[79] a phrase that underscores an important symmetry between Irish and American writing in his eyes. To adapt another phrase of Heaney's, he identifies with formal American

[72] Marianne Moore, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p.53.

[73] Ibid., p.54.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Elizabeth Bishop, 'Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore', *Prose*, edited by Lloyd Schwartz (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), p.133.

[76] Frost remarked 'For my pleasure I had as soon write free verse as play tennis with the net down' in 'Poetry and School', *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*, edited by Mark Richardson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p.168.

[77] Richard Gray describes Lowell's sonnets as 'proof of his Americanness; for, taken together, they constitute an epic of the self.' *American Poetry of the Twentieth Century*, p.255.

[78] Vendler, *The Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*, p.10.

[79] Heaney, 'Threshold and Floor', *Metre*, Vol. 7, No. 8, Spring-Summer 2000, p.266.

writing because he senses in it a shared desire to 'take the English lyric and make it eat stuff it had never eaten before […] and make it still an English lyric.'[80] For the young Heaney the appeal of American writing was not in its eccentric reinvention of forms and styles, but in its masterful appropriation of them, in its exciting *mixture* of continuity and disjuncture with the English tradition that, by the time of his undergraduate years, had been deemed jaded and in need of renovation.

Heaney first encountered contemporary American poetry as an undergraduate in the anthologies that were in circulation in the 1950s and '60s,[81] in which different versions of what constituted American poetry (and what its relationship with the English tradition might be) were propounded and contested. In *The Penguin Book of Modern American Verse* (1954)—an anthology Heaney appears to have owned—editor Geoffrey Moore argues that contemporary American poets were now engaging in a process of responding to 'the power and diversity' of America itself and, unlike their elders, they 'no longer fly to Europe for refuge.'[82] At this time Auden's *Faber Book of American Poetry* (1956) was also highly influential in shaping perceptions of the American tradition. Auden famously contrasted American and British poetry by deploying a number of distinguishing terms ('English', 'European', 'Old World'),[83] arguing that American writing is defined by its radical diversity.[84] For Auden, the very sounds of American writing (its 'pitch') are evidence of its alterity. Other anthologies

[80] Harriet Cooke, 'Harriet Cooke talked to the Poet Seamus Heaney', *The Irish Times*, Friday, December 28, 1973, p.8.

[81] Buxton notes that there were two anthologies at St Columb's while Heaney attended school there: *A Pageant of English Verse*, edited by E. W. Parker (London: Longman's, 1949) and *Choose Again*, edited by J. A. Stone (London: Harrap, 1949), p.43.

[82] Geoffrey Moore, *The Penguin Book of Modern American Verse*, selected with an introduction and notes by Geoffrey Moore (London: Penguin, 1954), p.30. Heaney tells Henri Cole he first read Lowell's 'The Quaker Graveyard' as an undergraduate in 'The Penguin Book of Contemporary American Poetry'—Heaney is probably referring to *The Penguin Book of Modern American Verse*, where 'Quaker' is one of two Lowell poems collected, not Donald Hall's *Contemporary American Poetry* anthology, which was published one year after Heaney had graduated and where 'Quaker' is not one of the Lowell poems collected.

[83] Kennedy-Andrews argues 'Auden's contrastive element shifts between "English", "European" and "Old World" in the course of his introduction.' *Northern Irish Poetry: The American Connection*, p.3.

[84] W. H. Auden declared that '[f]rom Byrant on, there is scarcely one American poet whose work, if unsigned, could be mistaken for that of an Englishman', adding 'no two poets could be more unlike each other than Longfellow and Whitman'. W. H. Auden, 'Introduction', *Faber book of Modern American Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p.9.