

**Rooted Cosmopolitanism in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney,
Derek Walcott, and Joseph Brodsky**

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My closest friends stay on the shelf,
surnamed and posthumous,
with space for two more, Joseph
and burly-hearted Seamus.

Derek Walcott, "See Index"¹

In the summer of 1989, a BBC producer named Julian May arranged an interview with four poets who represented, to his mind, a recent tendency in English poetry that, at the time, had become known as the "new internationalism."² The poets—Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, Les Murray, and Derek Walcott—had come together in Ireland, where the interview took place, for the Dublin Writers' Conference in Dun Laoghaire. None of the writers who sat down to talk in the BBC studio that day was British or American, but all of them wrote poetry in English; three of them, in fact, speak English as their native language.³ In his introduction to the print version of the interview, May identified the four poets, paraphrasing Brodsky, as "men from the provinces" who

¹ Manuscript collection 136, box 5, folder 31, Derek Walcott Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. This excerpt includes lines 3-6 of the eighteen-line poem. If one may attempt to draw any conclusions based on the order of typescripts in the Fisher Library, then it appears that Walcott intended "See Index" to be the final poem in his 1987 collection, *The Arkansas Testament*.

² "Poets' Round Table: 'A Common Language,'" an interview by Michael Schmidt with Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, Les A. Murray, and Derek Walcott, *Poetry Nation Review* 15.4 (1989): 39-47.

³ The late Joseph Brodsky is the only one among this group who learned English as a second language; his native language was Russian. Les A. Murray, whose work I do not address in this study—although it does interest me—is an Australian poet. His ethical and aesthetic stance certainly coincides with that of Heaney, Walcott, and Brodsky. He speaks for them and as one of them when, in this very interview, he says, "...we have come from the periphery and the periphery has taken over from the centre" ("Poets' Round Table" 46). In a recent review, Boyd Tonkin explains that he "tend[s] to slot" Heaney, Murray, and Walcott into a "special category," distinct from other contemporary poets, and therefore refers to them collectively as a "triumvirate of pensionable bards" ("A Week in Books," *The Independent* [18 Jan. 2007], <<http://www.independent.co.uk/>>).

“maintain civilizations when their centres collapse.”⁴ He picked up these phrases from Brodsky’s 1983 essay on Walcott, “The Sound of the Tide,” where the Russian poet formulates his thoughts in a rather more Yeatsian way: “Because civilizations are finite, in the life of each of them comes a moment when centers cease to hold . . . The job of holding at such times is done by the men from the provinces, from the outskirts.”⁵ Indeed, in a postcolonial, post-Soviet world, it may be the case that what is worth saving in some empires ends up being saved by the poets and the artists—in Brodsky’s words, it is “not legions but languages” that keep cultures from “disintegration” in such dire times.⁶

All three of the poets toward whom I direct my attention in this dissertation exist on the “outskirts” of civilizations, at the margins—whether geographically, spiritually, or both—yet they self-consciously accept their roles as world poets, participating deliberately and enthusiastically in a global literary tradition while always maintaining their local roots. Seamus Heaney first gained international attention during the Troubles in Northern Ireland as a key poetic voice of the Catholic minority and has grown more “global” since then, although a paradoxical detachment from and attachment to the North has steadily emerged both in his biography and his poetry; Derek Walcott writes from the perspective of a person of mixed-race ancestry—African and European—in the postcolonial Caribbean, a region whose complex political and cultural history finds expression in his multivocal verse; and Joseph Brodsky, a Russian poet who was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1972 and who lived from then onward in the United States, wrote poems in two languages and maintains a simultaneous foothold in two poetic

⁴ “Poets’ Round Table” 39.

⁵ Brodsky, *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, 1986) 164.

⁶ Brodsky, *Less Than One* 164.

traditions: Russian and Anglo-American. As a group, their poetry embodies what another Russian poet, Osip Mandelstam, called “nostalgia for world culture,” which, in the case of Heaney, Walcott, and Brodsky, amounts to a reaffirmation of the Western literary canon and a forging of contemporary bonds across cultures—and not merely inter-European, but truly global bonds. Without a doubt, this simultaneously traditional and forward-looking globalism shows up in their poems, essays, and other writings, but their biographies, as well, refuse to be neatly contained by the borders of any nation, language, or culture.

In fact, a close friendship and profound sense of artistic kinship developed between the three of them while they were all living as “foreigners” in and around Boston in the 1980s, when they used to hold weekly gatherings at Walcott’s apartment solely for the pleasure of discussing poetry in one another’s company.⁷ Their collective friendship and occasional collaboration continued until Brodsky’s death in 1996 and culminated in their joint authorship of *Homage to Robert Frost* (1996), a collection of essays on the modern American poet whose influence can be detected in poems written by each of them.⁸ (The three of them may have been drawn to Frost precisely because of his practiced provincialism, his traditionalism, his rootedness: other Anglo-American

⁷ For more on these gatherings at Walcott’s apartment in Boston (actually, in Brookline, an area to the southwest of the city center), see Hilton Als, “The Islander,” *The New Yorker* (9 Feb. 2004): 42-51; and Sven Birkerts, “Punch Lines,” *Poetry* (July/Aug. 2007): 337-38. In his *New Yorker* profile of Walcott, Hilton Als quotes Heaney’s reminiscence of those earlier days: “Derek’s apartment in Brookline turned into a kind of time machine . . . It was like being back in your first clique as a young poet . . . with all your original greed for the goods and the gossip of poetry instantly refreshed. Poems being quoted and poets being praised or faulted, extravagantly; anecdotes exchanged; jokes told; but underneath all the banter and hilarity there was a prospector’s appetite in each of us for the next poem we ourselves might write. We were high on each other’s company and that kept the critical standard-setter alive and well in each of us” (49).

⁸ Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Derek Walcott, *Homage to Robert Frost* (New York: Farrar, 1996). This volume contains three essays: Brodsky’s “On Grief and Reason,” Heaney’s “Above the Brim,” and Walcott’s “The Road Taken.” Each of these essays also appears in prose collections by the individual poets.

modernists, such as Eliot and Pound, also sought to forge a universalist poetics, but their poems do not typically exhibit the particularism of place—especially of the native landscape—that one sees in Frost.) Being in America probably intensified their affiliation, since their outsider status allowed each of them to see his own experience mirrored in the experience of the other two and highlighted their aesthetic affinity by distinguishing them from American poets. In an interview at the time, Walcott explained, “The three of us are outside the American experience. Seamus is Irish, Joseph is Russian, I’m West Indian. . . . We’re on the perimeter of the American literary scene. We can float out here happily not really committed to any kind of particular school or body of enthusiasm or criticism.”⁹ Yet although none of these poets is a native-born American, the United States as a cultural space figures prominently in their work—particularly Brodsky’s and Walcott’s work—so it is fitting that their friendship originated on American soil.¹⁰

Heaney once wrote that, when reading Walcott’s poetry, one encounters “a language woven out of dialect and literature, neither folksy nor condescending, a singular idiom evolved out of one man’s inherited divisions and obsessions.”¹¹ This hybridized language has arisen, Heaney claims, out of the battle between the “humanist voices of [Walcott’s] education and the voices from his home ground,” both of which “keep insisting on their full claims, pulling him in two different directions.”¹² One could say the same of any of these three Nobel laureates: the tension within each poet between their

⁹ William Baer, ed., *Conversations with Derek Walcott* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1996) 119.

¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Brodsky became a U.S. citizen in 1977 in Detroit, Michigan. Heaney and Brodsky, though their friendship really came into its own in the U.S., first met at the 1972 Poetry International in London, where Brodsky had stopped over en route from the USSR to the U.S., and Walcott and Brodsky met in 1977 at the funeral for Robert Lowell, another great American poet who influenced all three of them.

¹¹ Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: Selected Prose, 1978-1987* (New York: Farrar, 1988) 23.

¹² Heaney, *Government* 24.

home ground and the wider literary world always undergirds their poetry. But rather than conceive of their relation to this wider world in terms of any sort of “internationalism,” whether “new” or not, I propose that we think of Heaney, Walcott, and Brodsky as cosmopolitans—specifically, as rooted cosmopolitans, a phrase that retains a sense of the tension in their work between home and abroad. Happily, the word “cosmopolitan” manages to evade the troublesome modern concepts of nations and nationalism, since its ancient Greek roots *kosmos* (“universe,” or “world”) and *polites* (“citizen”) work together to describe an individual bound both to his native culture (his *polis*, or “city”) and to world culture. When speaking of poets who transcend geographical and linguistic boundaries and who seek to forge transcultural ties, we would do well to avoid thinking of their work in any specifically national context; unfortunately, terms like “internationalism” or even “transnationalism” retain in their very etymology the idea of nations—and thus national literatures—as fixed political entities, wholly unlike the amalgamated, commingling, fluid cultures of real existence.

1. On “Rooted Cosmopolitanism”

The term “rooted cosmopolitanism” does not seem to have a single source, but rather sprang up separately in the work of several theorists. Each of them apparently felt a need to anchor a potentially “aery nothing” to the earth;¹³ they understood that cosmopolitanism, with its whiff of privilege, needed to be grounded. More broadly, the tendency to qualify the noun “cosmopolitanism” with an adjective like “rooted” (or “critical,” or “vernacular”) reflects a widespread recognition that the long history of cosmopolitanism has mainly been associated with the elite—those who have the money,

¹³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2005) 214.

power, and education to engage with cultures beyond their own. Mitchell Cohen, who may have been the first person to use the term, began to speak of “rooted cosmopolitanism” in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War, expressing a “fear that too many votaries of multiculturalism have become unreflective celebrants of particularism, now that the working class has not fulfilled its universalizing mission”—the mission, that is, of worldwide proletarian revolution.¹⁴ The quest for social justice, he argues, has exchanged a class-based ideology for an identity-based one. But if such a pluralist politics is to be successful, then it must both acknowledge difference and be grounded in the shared experience of humanity: “In a world of resurgent nationalisms, and in an America debating multiculturalism, what is needed is the fashioning of a dialectical concept of rooted cosmopolitanism, which accepts a multiplicity of roots and branches and which rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties, of standing in many circles, but with common ground.”¹⁵ Bruce Ackerman, writing just two years after Cohen, also invokes rooted cosmopolitanism, but he focuses his argument on U.S. politics, perhaps with an eye toward establishing a more widely applicable principle: he claims that, although democracy is often guided by the universalist values of the Enlightenment (embodied, for example, in the U.S. Constitution), we must strive to make

¹⁴ Mitchell Cohen, “Rooted Cosmopolitanism,” *Dissent* 39.4 (1992): 483.

¹⁵ Cohen, “Rooted Cosmopolitanism” 483. Cohen’s metaphor of rootedness is somewhat different from my own: he conceives of the roots and branches of the tree as particularized, and the soil in which it sits as universal, common to all humans; in my own imagining, on the other hand, both the roots *and* the ground signify individual identity, while the branches of the tree reach toward the universal.

In another, more recent article, Cohen explains, “Rooted cosmopolitanism is opposed to integral cosmopolitanism (which reifies humanity) as well as integral individualism (which reifies the ego) and integral nationalism (which reifies a particular group). It is a dialectical idea (excuse me for using this unpopular phrase). It rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties while insisting on democratic commonality” (“Auto-Emancipation and Antisemitism [Homage to Bernard-Lazare],” *Jewish Social Studies* 10.1 [2003]: 76).

those values work on the ground level, to adapt them to the actual conditions of lived experience.¹⁶

My own approach to rooted cosmopolitanism, however, was inspired by the recent work of the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah.¹⁷ “A cosmopolitanism with prospects,” he writes, “must reconcile a kind of universalism with the legitimacy of at least some forms of partiality.”¹⁸ Indeed, for Appiah, the terms “partial” and “rooted” cosmopolitanism are interchangeable. He argues that cosmopolitans must acknowledge that they are, in fact, partial to certain places—specifically, to their native countries and other places where they might have spent a considerable amount of time. Appiah believes that it is possible to retain one’s roots while cultivating a cosmopolitanism that does not efface the cultures of other places, but instead affirms our shared humanity. The two ideals that he identifies as the foundation for rooted cosmopolitanism are “universal concern” and “respect for human difference.”¹⁹ Building this sort of cosmopolitanism, as it happens, practically requires strong partiality to one or two places, since loyalty to one’s own culture—or to another culture held close to one’s heart—enables compassion for other, foreign cultures.

The model that Appiah proposes for this type of cosmopolitanism is that of the conversation: individuals, rooted in particular places, communicating with one another and weighing the good and the bad in their respective cultures, without forcing their beliefs on each other.²⁰ Essentially, this amounts to an open exchange of ideas, a

¹⁶ Bruce Ackerman, “Rooted Cosmopolitanism,” *Ethics* 104.3 (April 1994): 516-35.

¹⁷ See especially Appiah’s *Ethics of Identity*, pp. 213-72, as well as his more recent *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006) *passim*.

¹⁸ Appiah, *Ethics* 222-23.

¹⁹ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* xv.

²⁰ Anticipating objections that cosmopolitanism is a Western liberal creation and thus runs the risk of homogenizing the globe in Europe’s image, Appiah asserts that its Enlightenment foundations make it

dialogue, through which a given culture—or even a given individual—has the freedom to choose whether to adopt a particular “foreign” idea. In literature, such dialogue often takes place on the page: the text becomes a cosmopolitan space where the author puts the multiple voices inside of him- or herself into conversation with one another. And some of those voices will certainly have sprung to life in the author’s mind during a previous textual encounter with another writer outside of his or her native culture. In fact, Appiah even uses the reading of literature as an example of “the sort of imaginative engagement” that cross-cultural conversation requires.²¹ Moreover, a person needn’t only be partial to a single place. One might even argue that our cosmopolitanism becomes stronger when we are rooted in multiple places, since the scope of our empathy is widened.

2. From Blake to Heaney: A Chain of Elegies

We might begin to understand the unique strain of cosmopolitanism that shows up in the work of Brodsky, Heaney, and Walcott by examining a group of linked elegies—one written by each poet—which reveal some of their affinities and allegiances. In January of 1965, when Brodsky was living in internal exile in the Russian Far North, where he was serving out his sentence for “social parasitism” (*tuneiadstvo*), he received news that T. S. Eliot had passed away. Immediately, Brodsky sat down and composed an elegy, in Russian, for the Anglo-American modernist poet (whose poems Brodsky had

“responsive to liberalism’s insistence on human dignity [...] without losing sight of the values of personal autonomy” (*Ethics* 267-68). Rooted cosmopolitanism is based in dialogue, and through dialogue our differences are not eliminated—they are maintained: “Cosmopolitans do not ask other people to maintain the diversity of the species at the price of their individual autonomy. ... The options we need in order for our choices to be substantial must be freely sustained, as must the human variety whose existence is, for the cosmopolitan, an endless source of insight and pleasure. In theory, ... a whole society could come to be centered on a single set of values without coercion. ... But ... there is no ground for thinking that people are rushing toward homogeneity; and, in fact, in a world more respectful of human dignity and personal autonomy such movement toward homogeneity as there is would probably slow down” (*Ethics* 268-69).

²¹ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* 85.

just recently encountered for the first time). Most curiously, the prosodic model that he used for his elegy was Auden's famous "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," composed some twenty-six years earlier, shortly after the great Irishman's death. Brodsky's decision to use Auden's elegy as a model for his own did not come about by chance: Auden was one of Brodsky's major literary influences, and, over the years, the Russian poet wrote numerous essays and poems in Auden's honor.²² In choosing to emulate "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," Brodsky ensured that his own 1965 elegy, entitled "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot," would become one of the final links in a chain of poems that ran from William Blake to Heaney, moving from one language into another and back again, and passing through the hands of two modernists—Yeats and Auden—along the way.

Like Auden, Brodsky divides his poem into three sections, and it is the final section of each poem that remains consistent, in terms of rhyme, meter, and stanzaic structure, within each link of the chain. Each quatrain in the third section of Auden's and Brodsky's elegies consists of two rhymed couplets, and the section's distinctive trochaic tetrameter (with masculine line endings) cannot be mistaken for any other metric pattern. In his English translation of Brodsky's "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot," George L. Kline tries—and, on the whole, succeeds—to retain these formal features, as is clear from the final two stanzas of the poem, where Brodsky addresses the recently deceased Eliot in the second person:

You have gone where others are.

²² These include two essays in Brodsky's prose collection *Less Than One* (1986), entitled "On 'September 1, 1939' by W. H. Auden" (304-56) and "To Please a Shadow" (357-83), as well as the section called "York: In Memoriam W. H. Auden" in the poem "In England" (*CPE* 137-39). Brodsky also wrote an elegy for Auden shortly after his death, entitled simply "Elegy," but, because Brodsky did not deem the poem successful (it was one of the first that he wrote in English), it never appeared in any of his collections. See Joseph Brodsky, "Elegy," in *W. H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (New York: Macmillan, 1975). (This volume has no pagination.)

We, in envy of your star,
call that vast and hidden room,
thoughtlessly, ‘the realm of gloom’.

Wood and field will not forget.
All that lives will know you yet—
as the body holds in mind
lost caress of lips and arms.²³

All of this prosodic structure, which produces a metronomic, songlike sound (perhaps, given the subject matter, an ironically lighthearted sound), was lifted piece for piece from Auden’s poem. Here is the initial stanza from the third section of “In Memory of W. B. Yeats”:

Earth, receive an honoured guest;
William Yeats is laid to rest:
Let the Irish vessel lie
Emptied of its poetry.²⁴

Besides the structural elements of his poem, Brodsky seems also to have borrowed from Auden the secular metaphysics of “In Memory of W. B. Yeats.” In both cases, the work of the elegized poet lives on in the pastoralized world (“Thomas Stearns, don’t dread the sheep,” writes Brodsky),²⁵ although Auden’s poem is clearly superior to Brodsky’s in its original use of the pastoral mode:

²³ *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*, trans. George L. Kline (New Yorker: Harper & Row, 1973) 101-02.

²⁴ W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems*, new edition, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1989) 82.

²⁵ *Selected Poems* (trans. Kline) 101. Instead of “sheep,” the Russian original has Brodsky imploring Eliot not to dread, unfortunately, the “goats” (“...*ne boisia koz!*”).

With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.²⁶

Auden does not, as Brodsky does (“Wood and field will not forget”), merely express the comforting cliché that the poet continues to exist in the world he or she wrote about, but rather reapplies its pastoral imagery to the darker aspects of humanity.

After Brodsky’s death in 1996, Heaney wrote an upbeat elegy for him, called “Audenesque,” that carries on the prosodic trend begun by Auden. Heaney, however, makes his own stylistic contribution to the series—a shift in tone—which takes the genre of the elegy to a new, postmodern place. He embraces the tick-tock meter of the third section of the two earlier poems, playfully memorializing Brodsky:

Joseph, yes, you know the beat.
Wystan Auden’s metric feet
Marched to it, unstressed and stressed,
Laying William Yeats to rest.
...
Trochee, trochee, falling: thus

²⁶ Auden, *Selected Poems* 83.

Grief and metre order us.
Repetition is the rule,
Spins on lines we learnt at school.²⁷

Heaney has said that when he began to write this poem, he was overcome with sadness over Brodsky's death and sought to honor Brodsky's customary optimism by composing an elegy that did not take itself too seriously.²⁸ As Heaney notes within the poem, Brodsky and Yeats died on the same day ("Double-crossed and death-marched date, / January twenty-eight"),²⁹ a numerological coincidence that uncannily mirrors the connections between the two poets in this chain of poems. As Heaney has pointed out, Auden's own prosodic model for the third section of "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" was the penultimate section of Yeats's "Under Ben Bulbin":³⁰

Irish poets learn your trade
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top,
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds.³¹

But the chain of poems extends even further back into English literary history—all the way to Blake's "Tyger," according to Heaney:³²

Tyger, tyger, burning bright,

²⁷ Heaney, *Electric Light* (New York: Farrar, 2001) 77.

²⁸ Heaney, poetry reading, Rackham Auditorium, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 17 Nov. 1999.

²⁹ Heaney, *Electric Light* 77.

³⁰ Heaney, University of Michigan poetry reading.

³¹ *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, revised second edition, ed. Richard Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1996) 327.

³² Heaney, University of Michigan poetry reading.

In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?³³

Another link in the chain that has not yet been addressed, however, is situated after Blake, Yeats, and Auden. Walcott wrote an Audenesque elegy (at the request of Brodsky, as it happens), which, though the West Indian poet did not apparently intend for it to do so, enters into conversation with all of the other poems in this series.³⁴ Unlike Heaney, Walcott shies away from the rigidly rhythmic quality of Auden's prosodic model (inherited from Blake via Yeats); instead, he frees up the meter—though he still mainly keeps four beats to a line—and changes the rhyme scheme from couplets (AABB) to alternating line-rhymes (ABAB). The poem, which Brodsky had asked Walcott to compose for a memorial service honoring Auden,³⁵ is entitled "Eulogy to W. H. Auden," and it closes with an especially Audenesque "prayer." The poet prays:

that the City may be Just,
and humankind be kind.
A barge moves, caked with rust
in the East River wind,

³³ *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, fourth edition, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970) 24.

³⁴ When asked in an interview about the origination of his elegy for Auden, Walcott seemed to have been completely unaware of Brodsky's earlier elegy for Eliot that used Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" as a literary model: "...it was quite difficult in terms of finding the appropriate structure—as well as the responsibility of actually doing it. I decided to use a model—Auden's tribute to Yeats—and I think that's what happens in all eulogies or tributes to poets who are master poets and whom one admires. ... So the design of my poem is obviously Audenesque. And the less one's presence is there in the poem, the better. You must accept it as a sort of acknowledged debt, especially with a master like Auden." (Baer [ed.], *Conversations with Derek Walcott* 195). That Walcott was unaware of Brodsky's "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot" is not surprising, since it has only appeared in *Selected Poems* (trans. Kline, 1973), a volume that has never been widely available.

³⁵ The memorial service for Auden took place at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, in New York, on October 17, 1983.

and the mouths of all the rivers
are still, and the estuaries
shine with the wake that gives the
craftsman the gift of peace.³⁶

It is worth pausing to consider the final six lines of Walcott's poem, as they emblemize the back-and-forth flow between the particular and the universal that distinguishes his poetry, as well as the poetry of Brodsky and Heaney. The barge that Walcott observes here is floating seaward along the East River, in New York City, where both he and Auden lived as lucky outsiders, as "fortunate travellers." The craft—both nautical and poetic—belongs to a particular place, but the local waters it navigates ultimately mingle with the waters of the vast ocean, the universal body of water into which all local streams flow.

Each of the poems in this multiple-author, multilingual poetic series displays a similar confluence of the particular and the universal, a meeting of the *polis* and the *cosmos*. Brodsky's "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot," for example, becomes rooted in the Russian literary tradition by means of its original existence in the Russian language, yet it also engages with world culture by way of its eulogized subject: an English-language modernist poet. Likewise, Yeats's "Under Ben Bulbin" identifies its own readership as Irish in particular (and its title leaves no doubt as to its Irish setting), while the poem's Blakean meter draws it toward a universalist poetics. Finally, Heaney's "Audenesque" sketches the intersection of all of these various international strands, in all of these poems, from his location on Irish ground (toasting Brodsky with "vodka, cold or

³⁶ *The Arkansas Testament* (New York: Farrar, 1987) 64-65.

hot, / aquavit or uisquebaugh”),³⁷ and his poem concludes with an outward-oriented, cosmopolitan gesture—a reference to Auden’s description of poetry as “breaking bread with the dead”:

Do again what Auden said

Good poets do: bite, break their bread.³⁸

The only poet who seems to fall by the wayside in this chain of poems, not coincidentally, is Eliot: the very poet whose death brought Brodsky closer to Auden. A key ingredient of the rooted cosmopolitanism of Heaney, Walcott, and Brodsky is their poetic traditionalism—their awareness of engaging with a long line of poets that extends all the way back to ancient Greece, at least—but the professed aim of many international modernists to “make it new” amounts to a turning away from the history of cosmopolitanism in poetry.³⁹ Only modern poets like Yeats or Auden, who do maintain a sense of tradition in their work, continue to hold up as models for these three later poets. Moreover, the rootedness of Heaney, Walcott, and Brodsky to the places dear to them necessarily entails an assertion of the primacy of the individual identity of the poet, which directly contradicts another modernist dictum: “No ideas but in things.”⁴⁰

3. On Methodology: Text and Context

Throughout my dissertation, I regularly employ two linked methodologies to help me explore issues of rootedness and cosmopolitanism in the poetry written by Heaney,

³⁷ Heaney, *Electric Light* 78.

³⁸ Heaney, *Electric Light* 80.

³⁹ “Make it new” was Ezra Pound’s slogan for modern poetry, which he also gave to his 1934 collection of essays, *Make It New* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934).

⁴⁰ William Carlos Williams’ memorable phrase appears in book one of *Paterson* (1946), rather late in the game for modernism, though it applies neatly to even his earliest Imagist poems. In *Kora in Hell* (1920), Williams echoed Pound’s “make it new” with his own “Nothing is good save the new.”

Walcott, and Brodsky: one approach originates in the field of textual studies, and one in translation studies. Each of these methodologies allows me to show a single poem through something like stereoscopic vision. While textual studies can be concerned with the changing meaning of a particular text in its various published contexts, translation studies is typically concerned with textual meaning as it changes across languages and cultures.

For my purposes, among the most important concepts in the field of textual studies is George Bornstein's notion of the "contextual code," which describes the contents surrounding an individual text (say, a poem) and alludes to the way that those neighboring contents affect the reader's interpretation of the text in question.⁴¹ That is to say, each poem in a collection or anthology shapes the meaning of the other poems nearby, just as its own meaning is shaped, in turn, by the poems that flank it. Paying attention to the contextual coding of a particular edition, such as a collection of poems, may help us to understand the poet's relationship with his or her audience, as well as reveal other political or aesthetic messages that have been encoded within the collection's pages. Moreover, when a poem is moved from one context to another—for example,

⁴¹ Bornstein discusses "contextual codes" in his article "What Is the Text of a Poem by Yeats?" which appears in *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, eds. George Bornstein and Ralph Williams (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993). Bornstein's notion of contextual codes expands upon Jerome J. McGann's distinction between "linguistic" and "bibliographic" codes in *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991). The "linguistic code" is quite simply the words that make up a text, while the term "bibliographic code" refers to "the symbolic and signifying dimensions of the physical medium through which (or rather as which) the linguistic text is embodied" (McGann 56). Specifically, elements of a work's bibliographic code might include "typefaces, bindings, book prices, page format, and all those textual phenomena usually regarded as (at best) peripheral to 'poetry' or 'the text as such'" (McGann 13). In *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), Bornstein further explains that the bibliographic code typically consists of "features of page layout, book design, ink and paper, and typeface as well as broader issues [...] like publisher, print run, price, or audience" (7). Contextual codes are linked to, yet distinct from, linguistic and bibliographic codes, as Bornstein explains: "On the one hand, [...] a contextual code is bibliographic in that it pertains to the physical constitution of the volume; on the other, the contextual code is linguistic in that it is made up of words" ("What Is the Text of a Poem by Yeats?" 179).

from the book in which it originally appeared to a “collected” or “selected” edition of the poet’s work—the new context gives new shades of meaning to the poem. An approach like this one, which highlights the context surrounding each poem, is indispensable when examining the writing of cosmopolitan poets, whose work so often involves numerous cultures and literary traditions. For instance, the opening poem of Walcott’s *Fortunate Traveller* (1980), “Old New England,” with its Lowellian speaker and Massachusetts landscape, prepares the reader for a journey through a collection that may not always be rooted in the Antilles, thereby defamiliarizing even those poems spoken in Caribbean dialects that appear later in the book, such as “The Spoiler’s Return.” That is to say, once we encounter the Walcott of the book’s opening poem, who seems as comfortable adopting a colloquial North American voice as writing in his own voice, we suddenly sense a greater distance between the poet and the Spoiler, a well-known calypsonian of 1950s Trinidad, where Walcott lived for many years.

From the field of translation studies, the concept of the “metatext,” proposed by Anton Popovic in the mid-1970s, is particularly relevant to my work on Heaney, Walcott, and Brodsky, who have all been involved with translation in various ways and to varying degrees throughout their careers.⁴² Popovic insists that any translation of a given work is merely one variant of the metatext for that work, and that the metatext includes not only all other translations, but also any other version of the work, such as summaries, reviews, and adaptations. So whenever Heaney, Brodsky, or Walcott translates, paraphrases, adapts, or otherwise alludes to a particular source text, they are entering into dialogue

⁴² Anton Popovic, “Aspects of Metatext,” *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 3 (1976): 225-35 (*passim*).

with a transcultural, transhistorical network that includes the original author, previous translators, and any other “rewriters” who have woven the metatext.⁴³

Similarly, modern translation theorists have proposed that we consider any single translation as only one among many possible versions; no translation is perfect, so critics should develop unique criteria for judging each translation within the metatext. In order to do so, André Lefevere suggests that we focus on three areas: “process, product, and reception.”⁴⁴ When critics consider Heaney’s recent translation of *Beowulf*, for instance, they should take into account not only “the product, the finished translation,” but also “the strategies behind the making of this product, the objectives with which it [was] made, and, eventually, the role the product plays in a culture and a literature.”⁴⁵ In short, the way in which Heaney carried out, day by day, his translation from Anglo-Saxon carries significance, as does the fact that the project was commissioned by one of the largest publishers of scholarly works (Norton) for inclusion in an anthology and subsequently published in a separate book edition by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.⁴⁶ All of

⁴³ For more on the concept of “rewriting” and its relevance for translation studies, see André Lefevere, *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context* (New York: MLA, 1992) 6-7 and 13-14. Besides translation, Lefevere also considers anthologization, historiography, and literary criticism as forms of “rewriting.”

⁴⁴ Lefevere, *Translating Literature* 12.

⁴⁵ Lefevere, *Translating Literature* 134.

⁴⁶ Heaney’s translation of *Beowulf* appeared first in the seventh edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (ed. M. H. Abrams, 1999) and was then reprinted in the eighth edition (ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 2005). Both Faber and Faber, Heaney’s British publisher, and Farrar, Straus & Giroux, his American publisher, released separate book editions of his translations under the titles *Beowulf: A New Translation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) and *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: Farrar, 2000). Most recently, Norton published *Beowulf: An Illustrated Edition*, with photographs of medieval artifacts and Scandinavian landscapes to accompany Heaney’s text; the publication of this latest edition was probably meant to coincide with, and capitalize upon, the excitement generated by the release of the 2007 film *Beowulf* (dir. Robert Zemeckis), which was filmed with a new technology called “motion capture” that combines live action and digital animation. (The new film also features Angelina Jolie in an appearance as Grendel’s mother, whose character was rewritten for the screen as a seductress of weak-willed human males.)

these factors shaped the way that the translation was made and have affected the way that it has been received.

Translation, understood both in its traditional sense and in a broader, looser way, has played a key role in the work of all three of these poets. Besides *Beowulf*, Heaney has translated Irish myths (most notably, *Buile Suibhne*), portions of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, poetry by Eastern Europeans such as Pushkin and Jan Kochanowski, and Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Philoctetes*.⁴⁷ Brodsky churned out hundreds of English translations of his own Russian-language texts, not to mention poems by Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelstam, Zbigniew Herbert, and Wislawa Szymborska.⁴⁸ He also translated into Russian a dozen or so poems by the English metaphysicals, especially John Donne and Andrew Marvell; several poems by Richard Wilbur; Auden's "Funeral Blues"; Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead"; and a number of poems by Polish, Italian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Greek, Czech, Yugoslav, Cuban, and Australian poets.⁴⁹ Brodsky and Walcott collaborated on several English translations of Brodsky's poems, and, after Brodsky's death, Walcott and Heaney each translated two of Brodsky's "nativity poems" for a collection of the same name.⁵⁰ In *Omeros*, Walcott, in a way,

⁴⁷ All of these translations by Heaney were published as separate volumes, with the exception of the "Ugolino" section of Dante's *Inferno*, which appears in *Field Work* (1979), and Pushkin's "Arion," which appears in *Electric Light* (2001).

⁴⁸ These English translations are included in the "Uncollected poems and translations" section of Brodsky's *Collected Poems in English*, ed. Ann Kjellberg (New York: Farrar, 2000) 497-503.

⁴⁹ Many of Brodsky's translations of poems into Russian are collected in *Bog sokhraniaet vse*, ed. Viktor Kulle (Moscow: Mif, 1992).

⁵⁰ "Imagine striking a match that night in the cave" (trans. Heaney, 78-79), "Flight into Egypt (2)" (trans. Heaney, 98-101), "With riverbanks of frozen chocolate, a city" (trans. Walcott, 68-69), and "The air—fierce frost and pine-boughs" (trans. Walcott, 96-97) in Joseph Brodsky, *Nativity Poems* (New York: Farrar, 2001).

translates himself: he presents his characters' spoken dialogue first in French Creole, then gives the same quoted speech in the poem's next line in standard English.⁵¹

The concept of translation can also be applied in a looser way to each of the three poets' work. Heaney, Brodsky, and Walcott often "translate" those poets from the past who made the greatest impression on their work; others speak through them in their own verse. For instance, Walcott produced several adaptations of Homer: he rewrote *The Odyssey* in a stage version and in his postcolonial epic poem *Omeros*. In both cases, the action was relocated from the ancient Aegean to the contemporary West Indies. Another example of this looser kind of translation can be found in the poems that Walcott and Brodsky each wrote in the voice of Robinson Crusoe.⁵² (Heaney, in similar fashion, wrote a series of original poems called "Sweeney Redivivus" that were "voiced for Sweeney," the legendary Irish king, shortly after publishing his "version" of *Buile Suibhne* under the title *Sweeney Astray*.)⁵³ Walcott's and Brodsky's Crusoe poems are especially pertinent here, since they reveal the different ways that a single source may be interpreted by two poets: through the eyes of Walcott, Defoe's character is a colonial prototype for postcolonial hybridity, ingenuity, and survival, while, through the eyes of Brodsky, the same character is a castaway who represents, first and foremost, the alienation and isolation of exile. For all three poets, the figures whom they translate or

⁵¹ Similarly, the third section of Walcott's poem "Sainte Lucie," from *Sea Grapes* (1976), was written in French Creole, while the following section contains its translation into English.

⁵² Walcott's Crusoe poems include "The Castaway" (57-58), "Crusoe's Island" (68-72), and "Crusoe's Journal" (92-94), all of which appear in his *Collected Poems, 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, 1986). He also explains at length the significance of this castaway figure for his own aesthetics in his essay "The Figure of Crusoe," reprinted in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents P, 1993) 33-40. Brodsky wrote two Crusoe poems—one in English and one in Russian: "Infinitive" (3-4), from *So Forth* (New York: Farrar, 1996); and "Robinsonada," from *Peizazh s navodnieniem* (1995), which appears as "Robinsonade" in *Collected Poems in English*, ed. Ann Kjellberg (New York: Farrar, 2000) 493.

⁵³ The "Sweeney Redivivus" poems appear in the third section of *Station Island* (New York: Farrar, 1984), which was published one year after *Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish* (New York: Farrar, 1983).

“rewrite” are among their greatest influences, thus revealing their cultural allegiances and offering clues to their own aesthetics.

At several key points in the Brodsky chapter, I use my own translations of previously untranslated Russian-language poems by Brodsky to reinforce my argument about his rooted cosmopolitanism. Although my aim in that chapter is to read Brodsky primarily as an American poet and to approach his poetry through the lens of his English collections (just as most American readers would encounter it), certain poems that he composed in Russian actually help to provide a fuller view of his American-era work. For instance, one of the poems in Brodsky’s well known “Part of Speech” cycle, entitled “Tikhovorenii moe” (“My quiet creation”), reveals much about how Brodsky imagines the Russian audience not only of this poem, but of the entire cycle, and therefore helps us to understand how he frames the cycle differently for his English readership.⁵⁴ Another untranslated poem, the much later “Novaia Angliia” (“New England”), depicts the forested landscape of rural Massachusetts as a nightmarish place, where the local flora differs from Eurasian flora just enough that it becomes maddening for the Russian speaker.⁵⁵ Most importantly, Brodsky expresses a bitterness in “Novaia Angliia” toward America that one rarely sees in his English poems and translations. Both of these poems, as well as others that I translated for the chapter, provide a broader, bilingual, bicultural context for the evolving cosmopolitanism of Brodsky’s American years, which one could not access through his poetry in English alone.

⁵⁴ “Tikhovorenii moe, moe nemoe,” *Chast’ rechi* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1977) 88. This is the only poem from the cycle that has never been published in English translation, outside of its appearance within the arguments of a few scholarly publications, such as Valentina Polukhina’s *Joseph Brodsky: A Poet for Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 244-47.

⁵⁵ “Novaia Angliia,” *Peizazh s navodneniem* (Dana Point, Ca.: Ardis, 1995) 139.

Besides my translations of poems by Brodsky, I also incorporate (into all three of the chapters) drafts of poems by Heaney and Walcott that I discovered during archival research, not to mention other relevant unpublished materials. Heaney's papers are housed at the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL) of Emory University, while Walcott's are housed at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library of the University of Toronto. The materials that I came across in these archival collections often complicate or supplement our understanding of the cosmopolitan aspects of a particular poem, book, or even personal relationship. An early draft of Heaney's poem "Punishment," for instance, which is a key "bog-body" poem in *North*, his 1975 collection, shows us that only late in the composition process did Heaney include references in the poem to contemporary Ireland and the Troubles—a surprise, indeed, since one of the key aesthetic features of that collection is its juxtaposition of the ancient and the modern, the far-off and the local. Similarly, Walcott's unpublished poem "Dedication," which he wrote for Brodsky and intended to place at the front of his 1980 collection *The Fortunate Traveller*, amounts to a blessing dispatched from a poet in the New World to a poet in the Old World, by means of which Walcott distinguishes his own multivocal cosmopolitanism from Brodsky's exilic cosmopolitanism, thus providing me with a natural bridge between my chapters on those two poets.

4. Cosmopolitan Poetics: Singular and Plural

Throughout my dissertation, I identify and seek to elucidate a general tendency toward rooted cosmopolitanism that was shared by numerous poets internationally at the end of the twentieth century, but my aim in each individual chapter is somewhat

different: to trace the development of a single poet's rooted cosmopolitanism over the course of his career, and to determine what distinguishes his cosmopolitan poetics from the poetics of the other two. In my second chapter, "Seamus Heaney: Journey into the Wideness of the World," I trace the Irish poet's developing cosmopolitanism—which has its roots in his childhood experience of growing up "in between," as he puts it, in sectarian Northern Ireland⁵⁶—through his poetic career, placing particular emphasis on the mid-career volumes *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), as well as on his two most recent collections: *Electric Light* (2001) and *District and Circle* (2006). Taking my cue from a key phrase in his 1995 Nobel lecture (which I have also used as the subtitle for my chapter), I argue that Heaney's career ought to be understood as a journey that widens ever outward from an original *omphalos* in the rural North, engaging more and more frequently with cultures outside of Ireland and thus forging a pluralist model of Irishness that contrasts with the rustic, homespun, homogeneous national image that most critics associate him with.

I begin my Heaney chapter by interpreting a recent poem, "The Bookcase," as a metaphor for Heaney's rooted cosmopolitanism in general: the bookcase of the title was crafted in Ireland, but its shelves hold "books from everywhere,"⁵⁷ and in the poet's mind this piece of furniture is tied to memories of festive gatherings, when he and other young Ulster poets would get together to discuss poetry—and not just Irish poems, but poetry from all over the world. In the chapter's next section, I survey Heaney's earliest

⁵⁶ This phrase appears in the poem "Terminus," from Heaney's 1987 collection *The Haw Lantern*: "Two buckets were easier carried than one. / I grew up in between" (*Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966-1996* [New York: Farrar, 1998] 272).

⁵⁷ Heaney, *Electric Light* (New York: Farrar, 2001) 61.

collections in order to distinguish the “mossy places” out of which his verse emerges,⁵⁸ after which I examine the dialogism of his third book, *Wintering Out*, with an eye toward understanding how the “two-mindedness” of Northern Ireland’s citizenry shapes the poetics of the collection.⁵⁹ In the section on *North*, I claim that Heaney creates a new poetic role for himself in the mid-1970s by distancing himself from the Troubles in Northern Ireland, both literally and figuratively, and, in so doing, he finds parallels for modern Irish tribalism in Iron Age Jutland and in 1930s Stalinist Russia. Finally, I consider Heaney’s recent poetry—his most consciously cosmopolitan and ethically engaged to date—as the work of a world citizen and world poet aware of his massive influence and global responsibility; in one 2004 poem, for example, he translates a Horatian ode and deliberately places it in the context of the tragic events of 9/11, thereby advocating pluralism and peace, while in another poem he muses upon the beastly violence of *Beowulf* (a work he had only just translated), which he sees mirrored in his childhood memories of sectarian bombings.

In “Derek Walcott: Cosmopolitanism and Multivocality,” my third chapter, I argue that, in contrast to Heaney, the West Indian poet’s work has been cosmopolitan in nature from the very beginning, owing in part to the cultural and linguistic pluralism of his native St. Lucia. In Walcott’s poetry, cosmopolitanism shows up in three key ways: as multiple voices within a single poem; as variations in linguistic registers, either within a single poem or among a group of poems; and as dialogue between different cultures—

⁵⁸ In his poem “Oracle,” Heaney identifies his boyhood self as “lobe and larynx / of the mossy places” (*Opened Ground* 56).

⁵⁹ Heaney has proposed that Protestants in Northern Ireland consciously strive to develop a self-perception that includes identification with Catholics, who, being in the minority, necessarily already had their own double sense of identity: “...I would suggest that the majority in Northern Ireland should make a corresponding effort at two-mindedness, and start to conceive of themselves within—rather than beyond—the Irish element” (*The Redress of Poetry* 202).

for example, African and European. Each of these phenomena amounts to multivocality, which I maintain is the defining feature of Walcott's poetics.

To demonstrate the presence of Walcott's cosmopolitan multivocality at the outset of his career, I begin by analyzing two of his early poems, "As John to Patmos" and "Origins," finding, in the former, the poet carrying on a dialogue (which is the foundation of any cosmopolitanism) with a canonical Western text from his location on his native island in the Caribbean, and, in the latter, an attempt at defining contemporary West Indian identity through the recovery of native, African, and European voices, which together constitute a "new song" in the islands.⁶⁰ In the chapter's second section, I survey Walcott's poetry from the early 1960s through the end of the 1970s, examining key instances of multivocality, such as the 1962 cycle "Tales of the Islands," where Walcott, within a dialogic structure, first uses patois in his verse, and the 1979 long poem "The Schooner *Flight*," with its mixed-race, multilingual speaker who mirrors the diverse population of the West Indies ("...either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation")⁶¹ and embarks on his own maritime odyssey, thus prefiguring Walcott's postcolonial epic *Omeros*.

In the third section of my Walcott chapter, I show how the poet's 1980 collection *The Fortunate Traveller*, in a uniquely cosmopolitan move, complicates the geography of the New World (and the Old World, for that matter) by undermining the perceived cultural division between North and South. In fact, the collection itself is separated into sections labeled "North" and "South," but many of the poems in a particular section of the book could just as well have been placed in another section, since they often describe movements, either actual or imagined, between geographical regions, as well as in and

⁶⁰ Walcott, *Collected Poems, 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, 1986) 15.

⁶¹ Walcott, *Collected Poems* 346.

out of the languages and dialects of those regions. In the final section of the chapter, I focus on Walcott's authorial voice (among a chorus of other voices) in two of his mature works: *Omeros* (1990) and what he identifies as his "last book," *The Prodigal* (2004).⁶² Although the book-length poem *Omeros* is best known as a postcolonial re-imagining of Homer, it has a strong autobiographical thread running through it, as does *The Prodigal* (another, though somewhat shorter, book-length poem), and the peregrinations, reflections, and reminiscences presented in these two books, written by an author who conscientiously engages with his own culture and others, constitute the sum total of a life lived in the West Indies and elsewhere, thus standing as exemplars of Walcott's rooted cosmopolitanism.

In my final chapter, "Joseph Brodsky: Cosmopolitanism in Exile," which focuses on the Russian poet's American period, I argue that his cosmopolitanism, which began to emerge in his poetry very early in his career, came to be entirely transformed after his 1972 exile from the Soviet Union by his double-rootedness in two literary cultures: Russian and Anglo-American. (Brodsky lived in the United States from the summer of 1972 until his death in January of 1996, though he traveled abroad frequently, particularly in Western Europe.) The balance of his roots' grip in the soil of each place shifts over time, so that Brodsky's awareness and understanding of his English-language readership become more finely tuned with each subsequent volume. Ultimately, he splits his work to fit into two traditions within two languages.

I open my Brodsky chapter by analyzing an unpublished poem that Derek Walcott wrote for the Russian poet, entitled "Dedication," which allows me to show how each poet's cosmopolitanism is distinct from the other's (multivocal versus exilic), as well as

⁶² Walcott, *The Prodigal* (New York: Farrar, 2004) 99.

to reveal the poem as emblematic of their friendship. Then, I contend that Brodsky—who wrote many poems and essays in English, taught at numerous American universities, and served as U.S. Poet Laureate—ought to be considered as *both* a Russian poet *and* an American poet, thus challenging his own assertion (not to mention the views of most critics) that he is “A Russian poet, an English essayist, and of course, an American citizen”—but not, according to him, an American poet.⁶³ In the next section of the chapter, I examine the first of three pairs of his American-era collections, the Russian *Chast’ rechi* (1977) and the English *A Part of Speech* (1980), claiming that the poems in these two books mark a shift from hypothetical (or figurative) exile to actual exile, as well as that the English collection, in its selection and arrangement of poems, foregrounds the biographical aspect of Brodsky’s work.

This biographical emphasis, which indicates an awareness of an Anglo-American audience that is hyperconscious of Brodsky as a Soviet exile, reading him for political as well as aesthetic reasons, continues into the poet’s next English collection, *To Urania* (1988), but remains much more subdued in its Russian precursor, *Uraniia* (1987), not to mention the earlier *Chast’ rechi*. After exploring the issue of audience by examining the different opening poems of Brodsky’s second pair of American collections (*Uraniia* and *To Urania*), I turn to an elegy in the English-language collection for a Moscow poet, “To a Friend: In Memoriam,” which I claim is concerned as much with Brodsky in America as it is with the ostensible Muscovite subject of the poem. In the chapter’s final section, I argue that Brodsky’s last pair of American collections, *Peizazh s navodneniem* (*Landscape with a Flood*; 1995) and *So Forth* (1996), most fully express his double-rootedness in both Russian and Anglo-American literary culture. I begin this section by

⁶³ Anna Husarska, “A Talk with Joseph Brodsky,” *The New Leader* 70.19 (14 Dec. 1987): 10.

showing how Brodsky's English poem "Infinitive" and Russian poem "Robinzonada" ("Robinsonade"), which were both written in the same year and whose speakers are Crusoe-like castaways (or exiles), differ from Derek Walcott's more optimistic, postcolonial depictions of the Crusoe figure, as well as how the two poems are shaped by Brodsky's sense of audience and language. In my reading of "Robinzonada," I explain that the castaway's isolation from his fellow countrymen drives him mad, which leads me to "Novaia Angliia" ("New England"), another Russian-language poem written late in Brodsky's life where he associates the American landscape with madness. But I claim that even madness, when caused by living in America, amounts to a kind of rootedness in America.

The point at which the global and local intersect in the work of these three poets is always a point of interest for me. In fact, one can only conceive of cosmopolitanism when it is grounded in particular local geographies. Each of these three poets began in their home culture and moved outward, and every outward movement gave them the courage to move even further out. Their cosmopolitan poetics amounts to a kind of exploration, or even a personal quest for new knowledge, new understanding. Heaney describes this as a "journey into the wideness of the world," which in turn becomes "a journey into the wideness of language, a journey where each point of arrival—whether in one's poetry or one's life—[turns] out to be a stepping stone rather than a destination."⁶⁴

⁶⁴ *Opened Ground* 416.

“...sometimes I make jokes with Joseph and say, ‘Look, it’s Christmas but I suppose you want to go to some poor place in Venice that has some soul instead of going some place and having a party.’ You know, we tease each other, we make jokes like, ‘You’re going to have to put coconuts in this poem.’ Or to Seamus, ‘Why don’t you go back to your bog?’”

Derek Walcott, from a 1990 interview⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Quoted in *Brodsky through the Eyes of His Contemporaries*, ed. Valentina Polukhina (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1992) 320.

Chapter 2

Seamus Heaney: Journey into the Wideness of the World

“[H]ow should a poet properly live and write? What is his relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world?”

Seamus Heaney, Foreword,
*Preoccupations*¹

1. On the Shelf: “...books from Ireland... And books from everywhere”

Each of the three sections of “The Bookcase,” a poem from Seamus Heaney’s recent collection, *Electric Light* (2001), begins with the poet admiring the craftsmanship of the sturdy piece of furniture referred to in the title: its “lines and weight,” its “carpentered right angles,” and the way that the individual boards, “planed to silkiness,” “held and never sagged.”² Since Heaney describes the bookcase in the past tense, however, it must be absent from his present surroundings. It is a remembered object, and after the Irish poet begins to reconstruct its physical features from memory in the opening stanza of the first section, he repopulates its shelves with the books that had rested there in the past:

Whoever remembers the rough blue paper bags

Loose sugar was once sold in might remember

The jacket of (was it Oliver & Boyd’s?)

Collected Hugh MacDiarmid. And the skimmed milk

¹ Foreword, *Preoccupations* (New York: Farrar, 1980) 11. Hereafter *P*.

² *Electric Light* (New York: Farrar, 2001) 60-61. Hereafter *EL*.

Bluey-white of the Chatto Selected
Elizabeth Bishop. Murex of Macmillan's
Collected Yeats. And their Collected Hardy.
Yeats of "Memory." Hardy of "The Voice."

Voices too of Frost and Wallace Stevens.
Off a Caedmon double album, off different shelves.
Dylan at full volume, the Bushmills killed.
"Do Not Go Gentle." "Don't be going yet." (EL 60)

In these three stanzas, Heaney describes a cosmopolitan, Anglophone bookshelf in Ireland. The poets represented here are some of Heaney's major English-language influences, and it is worth noting that only one of them, Yeats, is an Irishman. This is not to say that Heaney does not count other Irishmen among his literary influences—in fact, the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh made a great impact on Heaney, particularly when he was a young man, and Heaney's participation in the Belfast Group in the 1960s and early 1970s was crucial to his self-formation as a poet—but that Heaney has always resisted categorization as an exclusively Irish poet.³ To be sure, Heaney is proud of his Irishness, and his poetry is grounded in Ireland, but his art often transcends Ireland's borders.

³ Many of Northern Ireland's best contemporary writers were associated with the Belfast Group, including Heaney, Ciaran Carson, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon, Frank Ormsby, Stewart Parker, James Simmons, and Arthur Terry. The group, essentially a writing workshop, was founded in 1963 by Philip Hobsbaum, then a newly-appointed lecturer at Queen's University, and met regularly at his house until he left Belfast for the University of Glasgow in 1966, at which time Heaney took over organizational duties and held meetings at his and his wife's house. The Group was also closely affiliated with several literary journals published at the time in Belfast, including the *Northern Review* and the *Honest Ulsterman*. See *The Belfast Group*, Emory University, 20 Feb. 2006 <<http://chaucer.library.emory.edu/irishpoet/index.html>>.

Heaney's rooted cosmopolitanism originates in part with the act of reading. As a reader, he engages both with Ireland and with cultures beyond Ireland, just as he does as a writer. Connecting his readerly experience to his writerly vocation, Heaney writes that

the secret of being a poet, Irish or otherwise, lies in the summoning of the energies of words. But my quest for definition, while it may lead backward, is conducted in the living speech of the landscape I was born into. If you like, I began as a poet when my roots were crossed with my reading. I think of the personal and Irish pieties as vowels, and the literary awarenences nourished on English as consonants. My hope is that the poems will be vocables adequate to my whole experience. (*P* 36-37)

Place plays a key role in Heaney's aesthetics. But the poet's relation to place is always complicated by his cultural inheritance, and Heaney's cultural inheritance is notably plural: he is a Catholic from rural Northern Ireland whose native language is English, yet he identifies himself first and foremost as Irish, and he ultimately emigrated from Northern Ireland southward to the Republic of Ireland.⁴ Moreover, Heaney is a poet who situates himself in the English lyric tradition: Wordsworth's poetry is as much a touchstone for him as is Yeats's or Kavanagh's. All of this—his “roots” in the rural North which are “crossed with [his] reading” of Irish and non-Irish writers—constitutes the “whole experience” that he strives to capture in his work. As his career has developed, his poetry has reached ever outward into the world beyond the modern literary traditions of Ireland, England, and America, and his roots have become crossed with his readings of twentieth-century Eastern Europe; medieval England, Ireland, and continental Europe; and ancient Greece and Rome.

⁴ *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, 1995) 188. Hereafter *RP*.

For a Northern Irishman who came into his own as a poet during the Troubles, positive and civil interaction between groups with opposing ideologies surely has great appeal, so it comes as no surprise that Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of rooted cosmopolitanism may be applied so neatly to Heaney's art and thought.⁵ For years, Heaney has been musing upon ethnic and cultural differences in the North, and his politics are such that he welcomes ideas opposed to his own and encourages others to open themselves to the opposite side's viewpoint as well. And although he has frequently expressed distaste for the term "pluralist," a pluralist Northern Ireland is precisely what Heaney's politics would seem to call for. "I don't think that there is one true bearer of Irishness," he said in a late-1990s interview. "There are different versions, different narratives, as we say, and you start out in possession of one of these. ... But surely you have to grow into an awareness of the others and attempt to find a way of imagining a whole thing."⁶ Essentially, Heaney sees it as one's civic duty to respect other groups and give them room to hold opinions that may contrast with one's own. This amounts to a kind of microcosmic cosmopolitanism, when groups with differing ideologies are not situated in separate nation-states, but must share the same physical space. Not that opposing groups must alter their ideologies on all points in order to inhabit that space together, but they must create an atmosphere, an ethos, in which differences of opinion are welcome and are open for discussion—a atmosphere that

⁵ Throughout this chapter, I use the term 'the Troubles' to refer to the period of sporadic sectarian violence in Northern Ireland from the end of the 1960s until the middle of the 1990s. Many Unionists see the beginning of the Troubles in the civil rights movements of the late 1960s, which most Republicans would argue was itself a response to a corrupt provincial government that discriminated against Catholics, while all agree that the Troubles were well underway by the Bloody Sunday killings on January 30, 1972. The Troubles came to an end with the IRA ceasefire on August 31, 1994, and with the Belfast Agreement, also called the Good Friday Agreement, which was signed on April 10, 1998.

⁶ Henri Cole, "Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry LXXV," *The Paris Review* 39.144 (Fall 1997): 117.

allows for “intercultural dialogue,” in Appiah’s terminology.⁷ The kind of cosmopolitanism that Appiah espouses and that Heaney evinces in his poetry and essays is by means an “aery nothing”—pure theory, floating free of real-world attachments.⁸ On the contrary, it is grounded at the level of the individual; “intercultural dialogue” proceeds from that level, and cosmopolitanism, Appiah argues, must not lose “sight of the values of personal autonomy.”⁹ Likewise, Heaney says that each person “start[s] out in possession of one” version or narrative of his or her culture—is rooted in that version or narrative, is partial to his or her origins—and moves from that point outward to encounter and account for other, often conflicting narratives.¹⁰

Indeed, Heaney’s poetry supplies a record of his own encountering and accounting, of his own experience of making sense of local, national, and global diversity. He moves from a monologic poetics in his early books, particularly in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969), to one that is ever more dialogic, beginning with the place-name poems of *Wintering Out* (1972), where he fleshes out the hybrid etymologies of Northern Irish spaces, and culminating in his most explicitly cosmopolitan poems of *Electric Light* (2001) and *District and Circle* (2006), where he fuses ancient, medieval, and contemporary non-Irish forms and themes with Irish experience, as he initially began to do in *North* (1975).¹¹ In fact, many of Heaney’s later poems may be read as instances of the kind of intercultural dialogue to which Appiah refers: the poet holds conversations with himself in verse that enact the rooted

⁷ Appiah, *Ethics* 253.

⁸ Appiah, *Ethics* 214.

⁹ Appiah, *Ethics* 267, 253.

¹⁰ Cole, “Seamus Heaney” 117.

¹¹ A good number of the poems that appeared in *District and Circle* were also published elsewhere, including in Heaney’s *A Shiver* (Thame, Oxfordshire: Clutag Press, 2005).

cosmopolitanism he advocates. Thus, Heaney's aim that his poems stand as "vocables adequate to [his] whole experience" amounts to rooted cosmopolitanism in practice. And so it is with "The Bookcase."

The object that Heaney describes in "The Bookcase," though cosmopolitan, is also Irish: it is located in Ireland and evokes an Irish past. The nostalgic tone of the poem hints that the bookcase dwells far back in the poet's memory, and a sentence from Heaney's essay "Belfast," which begins with a reminiscence of his days among the Belfast Group, offers a clue to the bookcase's location in time and space: "I don't think many of us had a sense of contemporary poetry—Dylan Thomas's records were as near as we seemed to get to the living thing" (*P* 28). In the poem, Heaney describes a gathering at which those present listen to Caedmon recordings of Dylan Thomas, among others, and drink Bushmills Irish Whiskey (distilled in County Antrim, Northern Ireland): "Dylan at full volume, the Bushmills killed."¹² Heaney's memory of listening to that same Caedmon record with his fellow Belfast poets, coupled with the nostalgic tone of "The Bookcase," suggests that the gathering depicted in this poem also occurred during those Belfast years, in the sixties and early seventies, and that those in attendance were none other than the poets of the Belfast Group themselves. Indeed, the youthful excitement over poetry that Heaney relates in the poem—drinking booze, sharing poems, not wanting the party to end—tallies with his descriptions of the group's social atmosphere in the essay "Belfast."¹³

¹² Dylan Thomas was, in fact, the first poet who was recorded by Caedmon Records when the company was formed in New York in 1952. See Renee Montagne, "Caedmon: Recreating the Moment of Inspiration," Interview with Barbara Holdridge, 5 Dec. 2002, National Public Radio, 5 Dec. 2005 <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=866406>>.

¹³ See *P* 28-30. The sentence that concludes the first section of "The Bookcase," "Don't be going yet," can be interpreted in two ways: first, as an Irish dialect "translation" of Dylan Thomas's phrase "Do Not Go Gentle," which roots the action of the poem in Irish space; and second, as a plea to one or more of the

In the poem, Heaney associates this Northern Irish bookcase not only with his time in Belfast, but also with his childhood on the family farm in County Derry: “Heavy as the gate I hung on once / As it swung its arc through air round to the hedge-back, / The bookcase turns on a druggy hinge” (EL 60-61). The bookcase is not literally present in the poet’s Derry childhood, but is linked by simile to that remembered gate on the farm; the sturdy workmanship of the two objects binds them in Heaney’s mind. An analogous simile occurs earlier in the poem, when the poet compares the jacket of *The Collected Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid* to “the rough blue paper bags / Loose sugar was once sold in” (EL 60). Such a particularized detail implies an intimate familiarity not only with certain editions of books, but also with a certain brand of sugar. The image and texture of the sugar’s “rough blue” packaging have been deeply impressed on the poet’s memory. Once we recognize, because of the poem’s placement in a 2001 collection, that Heaney remembers this Northern Irish bookcase and its contents from his present vantage in the South, we see that “The Bookcase” approaches Heaney’s criterion of a “vocable adequate to [his] whole experience,” though we haven’t fully mapped that experience until we consider in detail the cultural significance of the books and records in the case.

As Heaney describes the items on the shelves of the bookcase, he pays close attention to their materiality—to the colors of their covers and dust jackets, but also to their places of publication. This information, too, underscores the cosmopolitan nature of the poet’s reading habits. I have already mentioned the “rough blue paper” of MacDiarmid’s *Collected Poems*; Elizabeth Bishop’s *Selected Poems* has a “skimmed milk / Bluey-white” dust jacket, and Heaney describes the cover of Yeats’s *Collected*

guests not to leave the party, which, coupled with the first, suggests that the action occurs at an informal, literary gathering.

Poems as “Murex,” a tint that takes its name from a shellfish out of which the ancient Phoenicians extracted a purple dye.¹⁴ Heaney’s close attention to detail here conveys an intimate familiarity with his books, a familiarity which also yields their publication information in these same stanzas: the *MacDiarmid* was published by Oliver and Boyd, the *Bishop* by Chatto and Windus, the *Yeats* and the *Hardy* by Macmillan. With the exception of the *MacDiarmid*, which came out in both Edinburgh and London, all of these volumes were published in London, and none—not even the *Yeats*—were published in Ireland. (Of course, *Yeats* did publish many other volumes in Ireland.) So not only do Heaney’s reading choices reveal something about his aesthetic preferences and influences, but the very publication information of the books on his shelves underscores the political and cultural realities of England and Northern Ireland, with metropolitan London as producer of culture and provincial Belfast as consumer. Such banal details are merely the ubiquitous and ordinary backdrop of daily life in Ulster—and even, to a certain degree, in the Republic. Moreover, the items on Heaney’s bookshelves lead us to another center of the publishing industry: New York, where his *Caedmon* recordings of Frost, Wallace Stevens, and Dylan Thomas were produced. Even in their material incarnation, then, these books and LPs by poets dear to Heaney reach out of Ireland to England and America. Heaney’s rooted cosmopolitanism, which is embodied

¹⁴ The unusual word “murex” has a rich history in English poetry, of which Heaney is no doubt aware. As George Bornstein notes, Ezra Pound refers to John Keats as “the Murex” in his early poem “L’Art,” and Robert Browning also associates Keats with the same shellfish in his poem “Popularity”: “Who fished the murex up? / What porridge had John Keats?” Clearly, the epithet that Pound gives Keats was borrowed from Browning’s poem, and Bornstein explains that both Browning and Pound employ the murex as a symbol for underappreciated innovation in the arts. Bornstein closes his article with the claim that Pound’s “L’Art” exemplifies the poet’s “early skill at the complex art of literary allusion which became one of his principal ways of making it new” (306). Given the context of the cosmopolitan bookcase, Heaney may be nodding to his precursors in much the same way, entering into dialogue with a trio of poets by speaking a single word. See Bornstein, “‘What porridge had John Keats?’: Pound’s ‘L’Art’ and Browning’s ‘Popularity,’” *Paideuma* 10.2 (Fall 1981): 303-6.

in “The Bookcase,” also finds expression throughout *Electric Light*. The collection contains poems rooted in Irish ground of the North and South, often similar in theme to his early poems in *Death of a Naturalist*; other poems that bear the influence of *Beowulf*, which Heaney had translated only a year earlier; verse translations and rewritings of Virgilian eclogues, two of which Heaney relocates to contemporary Ireland; and elegies for poets abroad, such as Ted Hughes, Joseph Brodsky, and Zbigniew Herbert.

In the second section of “The Bookcase,” Heaney muses upon the historical relationship of Ireland to England, which is one of the central preoccupations of his career; it is a theme he has addressed time and again, both in verse and in prose. Heaney imagines the space beside the bookcase as a place

Where we hang loose, ruminating and repeating
The three words, “books from Ireland,” to each other,
Quoting for pleasure the Venerable Bede
Who writes in his *History of the English Church*

That scrapings off the leaves of books from Ireland
When steeped in water palliate the effect
of snake-bite. “For on this isle,” he states,
“Almost everything confers immunity.” (*EL* 61)

In these stanzas, Heaney takes a postcolonial view of his native island, contemplating Ireland as if through English eyes, imagined and defined from outside. He explores the theme with a sense of humor: the quotation from the Venerable Bede posits a magical, exotic Ireland, as opposed to the more mundane, contemporary reality. But Heaney’s

choice of source is telling: even thirteen centuries ago, Ireland was defined by its contrast with England. As an Irishman, he is always aware of being looked upon from England. For Heaney, the question of the two islands is not merely a matter of teasing out the historical and contemporary relationships between the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England, as important as those relationships may be, but of determining his own position within those cultures. In “Traditions,” a poem from *Wintering Out* (1972), Heaney attempts to define that position by considering two characters from Anglophone literature, one from the exoticized and caricatured Ireland of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, and one from the nationalistically charged Dublin of Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

MacMorris, gallivanting
round the Globe, whinged
to courtier and groundling
who had heard tell of us

as going very bare
of learning, as wild hares,
as anatomies of death:
‘What ish my nation?’

And sensibly, though so much
later, the wandering Bloom
replied, ‘Ireland,’ said Bloom,

‘I was born here. Ireland.’¹⁵

In response to the defiant question of the stage-Irishman MacMorris (“What ish my nation?”), an expatriate fighting alongside the English who attempts in vain to sort out his own complicated ethnic identity, Heaney offers Leopold Bloom, a Jew, born and raised in Dublin, whose father immigrated from Hungary, yet who has no doubt that he is, in fact, Irish. Heaney’s definition of Irishness is therefore a broad, pluralist one, encompassing Irishmen everywhere—North, South, and elsewhere—of every race and creed.

For Heaney personally, this means that when his “roots were crossed with [his] reading,” he remained Irish. Certainly, Heaney sees himself, both as a reader and as a poet, participating in an English lyric tradition. And although that tradition ought to be “English” only in linguistic and literary terms—not political terms—his participation in it is nevertheless shaped by his being an outsider. “I speak and write in English,” Heaney explains, “but do not altogether share the preoccupations and perspectives of an Englishman. I teach English literature, I publish in London, but the English tradition is not ultimately home. I live off another hump as well” (*P* 34). However much he aligns himself with poets like Wordsworth and Hardy, Heaney continues to be Irish. He is rooted in Ireland, and the Irish culture to which he remains partial is the hump he lives off. Nonetheless, the problem of identity cannot easily be resolved, particularly when one belongs to the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. Heaney has written of the “quarrels of the self” that are the result of the “voices” of his education:

Those voices pull in two directions, back through the political and cultural traumas of Ireland, and out towards the urgencies and experience of the

¹⁵ *Wintering Out* (London: Faber, 1972) 110. Cf. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, III.ii.122-24; and James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986) 271-72 (12.1417-12.1431).

world beyond it. At school I studied the Gaelic literature of Ireland as well as the literature of England, and since then I have maintained a notion of myself as Irish in a province that insists that it is British. Lately I realized that these complex pieties and dilemmas were implicit in the very terrain where I was born. (P 35)

The voices that pull Heaney outwards, beyond the borders of Ireland, no doubt influence his poetics, but his relation to them can only be understood in the context of his relation to Ireland and Irishness. His cosmopolitanism is grounded in Ireland, and even his literary forays out into the “world beyond” ultimately land him back on Irish soil.

We ought to recall Heaney’s public protestation that he sounded in *An Open Letter* (1983). That long poem, published as a Field Day pamphlet,¹⁶ was Heaney’s response to being included in the *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Verse* (1982), edited by Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion, a volume that appeared ten years after he had emigrated from the North and resettled in the Republic:

¹⁶ The Field Day Theatre Company, which published *An Open Letter*, was founded in Derry, Northern Ireland, in 1980 by the playwright Brian Friel and the actor Stephen Rea. Although the company had no formal mission statement, its goals were initially to establish Derry as a theatrical center and to create an imagined space—a “fifth province”—in which Irishmen and Irishwomen wouldn’t be hindered by the binary oppositions that then held sway in Irish politics both in the North and in the Republic. The first play that the company produced was Friel’s *Translations*, the success of which led the venture to embark on a much broader political and cultural project. The company grew with the addition of Heaney, Seamus Deane, David Hammond, and Tom Paulin, who became Field Day’s Board of Directors and who agreed with Friel and Rea that artists and writers should have a key role in re-thinking British and Irish discourse on the Troubles. Although the company encouraged political and cultural diversity throughout the island, its core membership was almost exclusively Northern Irish and Catholic. The company continued to produce plays during the eighties and, in 1983, began to publish pamphlets addressing the Troubles, mainly targeted toward an academic audience, by such writers as Heaney, Deane, Richard Kearney, Declan Kiberd, Frederic Jameson, and Edward Said. In 1990, Field Day published its vast *Anthology of Irish Writing*, which was immediately criticized by feminists for overlooking women writers in Irish literary history. In response, two additional volumes with writing by women was published in 2002. (Heaney edited the anthology’s section on Yeats.) See Seamus Deane, ed., *Ireland’s Field Day* (Derry: Field Day, 1985); Marilynn J. Richtarik, *Acting between the Lines: The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics, 1980-1984* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and Eduardo Paguaga, “Field Day Theater Company,” Fall 1998, *Postcolonial Studies*, Emory University, 15 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/FieldDay.html>>.

To Blake and Andrew, Editors,
Contemporary British Verse,
Penguin Books, Middlesex. Dear Sirs,
My anxious muse,
Roused on her bed among the furze,
Has to refuse

The adjective. It makes her blush.
It brings her out in a hot flush.
Before this she was called “British”
And acquiesced
But this time it’s like the third wish,
The crucial test.¹⁷

Even if Heaney were still living in the North, he would refuse the appellation “British.” This is what he means when he refers to Northern Ireland in one of his lectures as “Britain’s Ireland”: he uses that term, he says, as opposed to “British Ireland” or even “Northern Ireland,” “because in the north there is a minority who prefer not to think of themselves as British although they do live in Britain’s Ireland” (*RP* 189). Heaney belongs to that minority, regardless of whether he lives in “Ireland’s Ireland” or “Britain’s Ireland”; the expanse of the island, for him, is Ireland. Nevertheless, he sternly drives home the point for Morrison, Motion, and the world that he now holds citizenship in the Republic of Ireland:

...don’t be surprised

¹⁷ *An Open Letter* (Derry, N. Ireland: Field Day, 1983) 7.

If I demur, for, be advised

My passport's green.

No glass of ours was ever raised

To toast *The Queen*.¹⁸

While this retort may seem utterly nationalistic, Heaney's point is not that he is no longer a citizen of Northern Ireland, but that he is not now nor ever was British. As inclusive as Heaney wants the politics of the island to be, he nonetheless takes offense at being identified as loyal to Great Britain. There ought to be room in the North for Loyalists, Heaney would say, but those Loyalists also ought to make room for the Catholic minority, most of whom are Republicans, and to acknowledge that the allegiance of some belongs first and foremost to Ireland.¹⁹ The only acceptable ethos for Northern Ireland, according to Heaney, is one in which space is created for a plurality of voices—Nationalist, Loyalist, Catholic, Protestant, and otherwise. Intercultural dialogue must be fostered, through which Northern Irish hybridity, historical and contemporary, may be expressed, explored, and embraced, much in the same way that Heaney participates in a dialogue in verse with the many “voices” of his education, his native space, and his pluralist culture.

¹⁸ *An Open Letter* 9.

¹⁹ On the other hand, Heaney knows that Loyalists would “loathe being included within the category of Irishness” and that they would be repelled by “the prospect of being co-opted, forcibly or constitutionally, into an integrated Irish state,” so the dilemma of cultural identity in the North is not a simple one (Cole, “Seamus Heaney” 117). Heaney wants to respect the Loyalists’ refusal of inclusion within the category of Irishness “since it is based on definite historical and ethnic grounds”: “...for fifty years the other side of that refusal has been their bullying attitude to the nationalist minority, saying in effect, ‘Because *we*’re not going to be Irish, you can’t be Irish either. We refuse you that identity.’ ... So while I believe that the Protestants must be granted every cultural and personal and human right to define themselves, they must not be given a veto on the political future ... they must not be granted the right to base the ethos of a new Northern Ireland upon their loyalism and loyalties alone (Cole 117).

In keeping with his cosmopolitanism as rooted in Ireland, Heaney concludes “The Bookcase” by returning to Irish ground and to the physicality of the object itself. As in the two earlier sections of the poem, the first stanza here has the poet admiring the craftsmanship of the bookcase: “Its long back to the wall / And carpentered right angles I could feel / In my neck and shoulder” (*EL* 61). His eye, however, is drawn not only to the carpentry, but again to the books on the shelves—to the “books from everywhere” (*EL* 61). The artisanal and the literary coincide in the second stanza:

Cash in *As I Lay Dying* makes a coffin—
For thirteen stated reasons—“on the bevel.”
From first, “There is more surface for the nails
To grip,” to last, “It makes a better job.” (*EL* 61)

The common theme of carpentry is not the only thing that brings about this reminiscence of Faulkner’s novel; memory and loss also connect the bookcase to the coffin built by Cash. Heaney describes the bookcase and its contents—and perhaps even the era of his life that they represent—with a tone of fondness and lamentation. Though some of the books may remain in the poet’s possession, they now rest on different shelves, and the bookcase itself has long ago disappeared: in a sense, it became its own coffin. One might say that only the older, more cosmopolitan poet can give meaning to the particular configuration on these past shelves, since the “burial” of the bookcase into memory ultimately prompts Heaney to remember it and write the poem—a scribal act that in turn gives meaning to the bookcase as a cosmopolitan object. The bookcase’s final resting place is not in Faulkner’s Mississippi, of course, but in Heaney’s Ireland, which is why in

the poem's last stanzas he relocates the metaphor of the coffin from an American novel to an Irish play:

In *Riders to the Sea* Synge specifies
In the opening stage direction "some new boards
Standing by the wall," and in Maurya's speech
"White boards" are like storm-gleams on the flood

At the very end, or the salt salvaged makings
Of a raft for books, a bier to be borne.
I imagine us bracing ourselves for the first lift,
Then staggering for balance, it has grown so light. (*EL* 62)

Heaney's cosmopolitan readings may lead him on journeys of the imagination both inside and outside of his native land, but he reads from Ireland, and the books, though they may come from afar and guide him outward, nevertheless stand on shelves in Ireland. Like the bookcase, Heaney is grounded in Ireland, and because of this his poem must conclude, via Synge, in Irish space. And when the pallbearers haul away the empty bookcase in the poem's final lines, one can only hope that its former contents find shelter on new Irish shelves.

2. Outward from the *Omphalos*

"We are dwellers, we are namers,
we are lovers, we make homes for
ourselves and search for our
histories."

In the short poem "Oracle," from *Wintering Out* (1972), Heaney remembers crouching as a young boy inside the hollow trunk of a tree at the edge of the family farmyard, then hearing his elders calling him to come out from his hiding spot, out from his "secret nest" (P 17). The child's perspective of this poem is one that Heaney employs frequently in his early verse:

Hide in the hollow trunk
of the willow tree,
its listening familiar,
until, as usual, they
cuckoo your name
across the fields.²¹

That the young Heaney is the tree's "listening familiar," that the adults call to him "as usual," confirms that this hollow trunk is a nook in which the young poet-to-be often conceals himself, and, in the poem's final lines, the boy even seems to merge with the tree: "small mouth and ear / in a woody cleft, lobe and larynx / of the mossy places" (*OG* 56). Indeed, Heaney, particularly in his early books, is a poet of those "mossy places." So it comes as no surprise that, when he describes in a later essay his memory of sitting in "that tight cleft" and gazing up at "the living tree [that] flourished and breathed" above his head, he imagines himself "a little Atlas shouldering it all" (P 18); this tree, this farmyard, these "mossy places," are at the center of Heaney's poetic world. When the adults approach his hideout, cross a fence, and summon him, they may be doing more, at

²⁰ P 148-49.

²¹ *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966-1996* (New York: Farrar, 1998) 56. Hereafter *OG*.

least on the symbolic level, than merely calling him to come to them: “You can hear them / draw the poles of stiles / as they approach / calling you out” (*OG* 56). Leaving his nook in the tree would mean leaving his childhood behind. There is something almost ominous in the scraping or clattering sound of the poles being withdrawn from the stiles, in the image of the adults—the unnamed “they”—inching closer and closer to the young boy, much as the menacing tone in the final lines of Heaney’s earlier poem “Death of a Naturalist” seems not to bode well for the young speaker, who must confront what his pre-adolescent mind is scarcely able to decode:

The air was thick with a bass chorus.
Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were cocked
On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings
Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it. (*OG* 5)²²

The ominousness in each of these poems concerns the awakening from childhood into adulthood, though the particular kind of adult knowledge approached by the child varies significantly from one poem to the other. “Death of a Naturalist” describes a shift from a child’s view of amphibian reproduction—in which “daddy” and “mammy” frogs come together to produce “frogspawn”—to the adult view that the young poet achieves in the

²² “Death of a Naturalist” is the title poem of the volume in which it first appeared, and if that weren’t enough to underscore its aesthetic importance within the collection, the cover of the 1966 volume bears the image of a lone frog squatting on a plane of white beneath the title and author’s name. See *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber, 1966).

lines above, shocked and disgusted at the primal lustfulness of the bullfrogs (*OG* 5). His instinctual response is to flee, though once such knowledge is attained, it cannot be forgotten.

“Death of a Naturalist” marks a child’s initial contact with adult knowledge, but that knowledge is local and rural. It does not amount to a recognition of the wider world beyond the farm, only a new way of seeing the immediate, rural space, which is in keeping with the geographically restricted folk themes of Heaney’s earliest work, both in this volume and the subsequent *Door into the Dark* (1969). The later poem “Oracle,” on the other hand, depicts a boy on the cusp of another kind of adult knowledge. The family elders who summon him from his “secret nest” are the voice of reason and responsibility, which is fitting, because their calling him to join them and to leave his childhood behind coincides with a watershed moment in Heaney’s poetry, one that marks the poet’s shift from a local and ahistorical perspective to a postcolonial and historicized perspective on the Northern Irish landscape.

Wintering Out (1972), where “Oracle” appears, is the first collection in which Heaney emerges from his “mossy places” and begins to explore in depth the complex, hybrid culture of the North; only in this collection does he begin to resituate his native, local space within Ireland’s colonial history and postcolonial present. The young Heaney’s emergence from the hollow trunk of the willow tree signifies his birth as a mature poet into historicity, from mossy womb into messy world, though even after that birth he remains connected as if by phantom umbilical cord to his childhood spaces. In an interview published in 1997, Heaney says that he has “begun to think of life as a series of ripples widening out from an original center”:

In a way, no matter how wide the circumference gets, no matter how far you have rippled out from the first point, that original pulse of your being is still traveling in you and through you, so although you can talk about this period of your life and that period of it, your first self and your last self are by no means distinct.²³

Even after Heaney begins to move outward from the metaphorical womb in *Wintering Out*, he remains the “lobe and larynx / of the mossy places.” He always maintains a connection with his birthplace, though conceptually that space becomes complicated and hybridized by the incursion of history. In all of his collections, from his early work through *Electric Light* (2001) and *District and Circle* (2006), one encounters poems that are set in the rural landscape of Heaney’s childhood, despite the shift in how the poet views that landscape.

When the young naturalist discovers animal sexuality in “Death of a Naturalist,” he does not really go anywhere in the politico-historical sense, whereas in a later lyric like “Fodder,” the first poem of *Wintering Out*, Heaney, with a deceptively simple turn of phrase, deftly situates his native space within its historical context while maintaining the rural thematics and childhood voice. In the opening stanza of “Fodder,” Heaney presents an alternative to the title, and the title word itself never appears in the body of the poem: “Or, as we said, / *fother*, I open / my arms for it / again” (OG 45). The interplay between the title, in standard British English, and the South Derry dialect form of the same word draws attention to the cultural hybridity that manifests in the multiple registers of language in late colonial Northern Ireland. The poet scoops up this animal feed, this “*fother*,” in his arms, embracing the rural traditions of his Irish birthplace (it is surely no

²³ Cole, “Seamus Heaney” 100.

coincidence that ‘*fother*’ and ‘father’ are homonyms), while recognizing that these traditions exist within a realm where metropolitan English, signified by the title “Fodder,” holds much political and cultural sway. The farm that contains the fodder/*fother* is no longer merely any farm, but a farm in the provincial Irish North under British governance. This amounts to a shift from the univocality of *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark* to the burgeoning multivocality of Heaney’s later work—from monologue to dialogue, from mere rootedness to cosmopolitan conversation.

The notion of “widening out” from an “original center” comes up time and again in Heaney’s poems, essays, lectures, and interviews.²⁴ In his 1995 Nobel lecture, “Crediting Poetry,” Heaney describes listening to the family radio set as a child in County Derry—an experience that he presents as a defining moment for himself as a poet and as a human being.²⁵ This aural encounter was among his first with the world beyond the edges of the rural farming community in which he grew up. As he listened to the British radio broadcasts, Heaney became familiar with “the names of foreign stations [printed on the dial], with Leipzig and Oslo and Stuttgart and Warsaw and, of course, with Stockholm”:

I also got used to hearing short bursts of foreign languages as the dial hand swept round from the BBC to Radio Eireann, from the intonations of London to those of Dublin, and even though I did not understand what was being said in those first encounters with the gutturals and sibilants of

²⁴ Cole, “Seamus Heaney” 100.

²⁵ The young Heaney took little interest in news broadcasts, but sought instead “the thrill of a story, such as a detective serial about a British special agent called Dick Barton or perhaps a radio adaptation of one of Capt. W. E. Johns’s adventure tales about an RAF flying ace called Biggles” (*OG* 416). Living in British Ulster, Heaney naturally found entertainment in radio programs which originated in London, though only later, in his adulthood, has he been able muse upon the meaning of such complex cultural influences. Nevertheless, these external influences foreshadow his movement, actual and aesthetic, outward from the family farm at Mossbawn.

European speech, I had already begun a journey into the wideness of the world. This in turn became a journey into the wideness of language, a journey where each point of arrival—whether in one’s poetry or one’s life—turned out to be a stepping stone rather than a destination, and it is that journey which has brought me now to this honoured spot. (OG 416)²⁶

Indeed, Heaney’s Nobel lecture traces segments of the journey that landed him in Stockholm, moving from Mossbawn to a hedge-school in Derry city, to Belfast, south to the Republic of Ireland, and finally out into the wider world. More to the point, the biographical arc that Heaney describes in this lecture is paralleled in his books of poetry. Yet this is a journey not only outward into space, but also backward into time, since, in his poems and essays, Heaney strives to make sense of Ireland’s present by looking to past writers, Irish and otherwise, and by considering the course of history itself—again, Irish and otherwise. In the opening passage of his novel *The Go-Between*, L. P. Hartley wrote that “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.”²⁷ Heaney’s interactions with the “foreign country” of the past, however, bear great similarity to his interactions with contemporary cultures; in both cases, he is in conversation with otherness, whether the other is removed from the poet’s own experience in time or in space. Moreover, when Heaney writes in response to figures like Dante or Mandelstam, they are doubly removed, since the Irish poet must bridge both cultural distance and historical distance.

Heaney also focuses on his outward movement from the family farm, his “journey into the wideness of the world,” in the opening autobiographical essays of his first non-

²⁶ See also “Feeling into Words,” P 45.

²⁷ L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*, 1953 (London: H. Hamilton, 1974).

fiction collection, *Preoccupations* (1980). Even the titles of the first two essays, in the order that Heaney places them, describe a movement out from his home ground: from rural “Mossbawn” to urban “Belfast.” Likewise, the thematic progression of his first four books—*Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), and *Stations* (1975)—sketch a similar movement: Heaney starts with the immediate surroundings and personae of his childhood, then ventures out into the rural landscape of the North, and finally begins to confront the sectarian problems that centered on Belfast. In these early years, Heaney’s awakening awareness of the world beyond the Derry countryside affords him new perspectives on his home ground. Likewise, his growing attention to the plural history of Northern Ireland allows him to see the landscape in a new light; this amounts to a shift from a child’s view of the North to that of an adult whose senses have been attuned to the way that history has shaped his native space, language, and culture.²⁸ This is not to say that the Heaney of *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark* was unaware of such complexities, only that his aesthetic project had changed by *Wintering Out*—that he had moved from a Frostian naturalism (deceptively simple though Frost’s poems may be) to a more obviously nuanced, outwardly cosmopolitan approach to the landscape.²⁹

²⁸ Even though the representation of his childhood in the Nobel lecture has Heaney listening to British programs, considering the names of foreign stations on the radio dial, and encountering bits of then incomprehensible continental speech, this pluralist version of childhood does not show up in his first two books. (A more cosmopolitan perspective on this particular incident of his remembered childhood—listening to the radio set—does show up in another poem, “Electric Light,” though not until many years later, in the 2001 collection of the same name. See *EL* 96-98.) Rather, the perspective of the Nobel lecture is that of the older, more cosmopolitan Heaney, who traces the origins of his cosmopolitanism, rightly, to his earliest memories in the pluralist culture of the North. That perspective would have been impossible as a child, and it only becomes possible via the child’s voice after his first two books, when as a mature poet during the early Troubles Heaney begins to consider in earnest the urgency of pluralist politics.

²⁹ Heaney has identified the poems of Robert Frost, along those of Patrick Kavanagh, as models for his early verse. In “Crediting Poetry,” Heaney says that he “loved Frost for his farmer’s accuracy and his wily down-to-earthness,” a description which could just as well have been applied to *Death of a Naturalist* (*OG* 417).

Heaney begins “Mossbawn,” the first of the two essays in *Preoccupations*, by again directing his reader’s attention to the center of the Heaney universe—in this instance, to the village pump at Mossbawn, County Derry, from which his and neighboring families drew sustenance. For the poet, this is a sacred site:

I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and repeat it, *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door. ... There the pump stands, a slender, iron idol, snouted, helmeted, dressed down with a sweeping handle, painted a dark green and set on a concrete plinth, marking the centre of another world. Five households drew water from it. Women came and went, came rattling between empty enamel buckets, went evenly away, weighed down by silent water. The horses came home to it in those first lengthening evenings of spring, and in a single draught emptied one bucket and then another as the man pumped and pumped, the plunger slugging up and down, *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*. (P 17)

The word *omphalos* has several resonances for the poet. In ancient Greek, it means “navel,” as Heaney explains in the above passage. But mythologically, it meant for the Greeks the center of the world, and that is the sense in which Heaney uses the term—as a mythical center of gravity, a birthplace. Joyce stands in the background here too, in whose *Ulysses* the *omphalos* is marked by the Martello tower of the “Telemachus”

episode.³⁰ In ancient Greece, the concept of *omphalos* was also associated with the oracle at Delphi, a center of prophecy, which may account for the title of Heaney's "Oracle," where the "mossy," hollow trunk of the willow tree also marks the center of the world.³¹ In any case, Heaney's *omphalos* is located at Mossbawn: he moves outward from this point and remains rooted to this point.³²

The two movements I have mentioned—outward into the contemporary world and backward into history—occur simultaneously, precisely because Heaney's education happened concurrently with his movement away from the family farm. As a boy, Heaney benefited from the 1947 Education Act, which allowed him to attend secondary school as a boarder at St. Columb's College in Derry and then Queen's University in Belfast. In secondary school and at university, he acquired a vast and deep knowledge of classical and English literary history, which he has continued to carry with him, as is evident in the essays he has written on Marlowe, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Larkin, and Auden and the translations he has done of Sophocles, Ovid, Horace, Virgil, and Dante. Heaney's political awareness, as well, grew out of his education, as it did for many Catholics of his generation, and that awareness derived especially from his studies of history and literature.³³ Because Heaney's English-style, government-funded education played such

³⁰ See James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986) 7 (1.176), 15 (1.544).

³¹ See Don Gifford with Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*, revised and expanded edition (Berkeley: UC Press, 1988) 17; and J. E. Zimmerman, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (New York: Bantam, 1971) 183. Delphi is also the location of the stone that Heaney mentions in this passage.

³² The symbol of the pump is chosen purposefully here as well. Water, especially groundwater, is a key motif in Heaney's art, and the descent into the earth to retrieve water signifies a descent into the past, whether into history or ancient myth. This is particularly true in the case of the bog, where ground and water mingle, and where each layer stripped might reveal something new about the Irish past.

³³ In a 1979 interview with Seamus Deane, Heaney said that, for Northern Irish Catholics from working-class and small-farmer-class backgrounds, the Education Act granted opportunities that would have been unattainable otherwise. Young Catholics like him "emerged from a hidden, a buried life and entered the realm of education" (Seamus Deane, "Talk with Seamus Heaney," *The New York Times* [2 Dec. 1979], 15 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/12/20/specials/heaney-talk79.html>>, para. 4). And his

a major role in shaping his ethics and aesthetics, his rooted cosmopolitanism is itself a hybrid creation—but, of course, any cosmopolitanism depends upon hybridity. Through his education and in his writing, Heaney initiates a collision of forces—British, Irish, and otherwise—both urban and rural.

Of course, not all of Heaney's experience of cultural hybridity can be traced to his education in Derry and Belfast. Even during his boyhood in the countryside, he was enmeshed in the political and cultural complications of hybrid British-Irish identity, which kindled in him what he calls a "double awareness of division" and a "double sense of manners."³⁴ Looking back on his childhood in the poem "Terminus," from *The Haw Lantern* (1987), Heaney sums up his "double awareness" of cultures with another country-life metaphor: "Two buckets were easier carried than one. / I grew up in between" (*OG* 272). Heaney's sense of in-betweenness, or what he calls "two-mindedness," comes of growing up Irish in a British province, yet the binarisms of his Ulster boyhood were not only political, but also religious (*RP* 202). Sometimes, however, the distinction between the two realms becomes clouded: "Baronies, parishes met where I was born," Heaney writes in the same poem. The barony system is now obsolete in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, yet Heaney's point about the landscape being demarcated by English colonialism is clear. The parish, on the other hand, is still used today as a geographical unit, and when Irish immigrants landed in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they often listed their parish

education gave him the reasoning skills and the critical vocabulary to re-imagine his native space in novel ways and to verbalize his minority experience in the North: "A great deal that was latent and inarticulate began to emerge in this first encounter with the world of letters" (Deane, "Talk" para. 4).

³⁴ Deane, "Talk," para. 2.

name as the place from which they emigrated.³⁵ Religion, like politics, serves as a key marker of identity in the North, and religious affiliations do not necessarily follow lines on a map. Heaney explains that his “community was a mixed one in that Protestants and Catholics lived in proximity to and in harmony with one another,” and that, in this way, his “background differed from that of many Northern writers whose background was urban, maybe even that of a ghetto in Derry or Belfast.”³⁶ That is, the countryside near Mossbawn was not ghettoized, not segregated, as urban areas in the North tend to be; Catholics and Protestants in the rural counties are often next-door neighbors, affording the possibility of dialogue. Indeed, the intercultural dialogue that Heaney encourages throughout his work may stem in part from these early, respectful relationships with nearby Protestants.

Denis Donoghue writes, “If there is a distinctive Irish experience, it is one of division.”³⁷ Perhaps, but where there is division, there is also the opportunity to bridge that division and create a new pluralism. Yet bridging deeply felt differences is never easy. Heaney says that, from his earliest days, he acted toward Protestants with a “courtesy that wasn’t quite a duplicity—maybe. Such courtesy crossed the divide—almost.”³⁸ There is a hesitation in these spoken sentences that acknowledges the difficulty of bridging the sectarian divide and recognizes the power of entrenched group

³⁵ One might wonder exactly which parishes these past immigrants identified as home when they landed in the U.S. There were in the past and are now both civil parishes and ecclesiastical parishes—Catholic and Protestant—and although the boundaries of civil and ecclesiastical parishes are often coterminous, geographical discrepancies sometimes exist. Northern Irish local topography becomes especially complicated when Catholic and Protestant parishes overlap within a single civil parish. See “Areas, Regions, and Land Divisions,” 2007, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 25 Mar. 2008, <http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/local_history/areas_regions_and_land_divisions.htm>.

³⁶ Deane, “Talk,” para. 2.

³⁷ Denis Donoghue, *We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society* (New York: Knopf, 1986) 17.

³⁸ Deane, “Talk,” para. 2.

loyalties. Therein lies the dilemma of rooted cosmopolitanism: how does one begin the dialogue? Where does one find the courage to meet the other?

In his poem “The Other Side,” from *Wintering Out*, Heaney depicts the same hesitation from Protestant and Catholic viewpoints alike: a Protestant neighbor of the Heaneys relates to the poet’s Catholic family at first with scorn and suspicion, then, though shyly, with respect, humanity, and neighborliness. The poem is divided into three sections, and in the first section, the Protestant man, standing “on the other side,” apart from his Catholic neighbors, gazes at the Heaneys’ land and utters dismissively (ostensibly to the poet’s father), “It’s as poor as Lazarus, that ground” (*OG* 59). The young Heaney, speaker of the poem, observes silently, with an “ear swallowing / his fabulous, biblical dismissal,” as the Protestant neighbor turns away “towards his promised furrows / on the hill” (*OG* 59). In the second section, the neighbor criticizes the Heaneys’ religion: “Your side of the house, I believe, / hardly rule by the Book at all” (*OG* 60). Meanwhile, the child speaker attempts to envisage what might be inside the mind of this man, a man so seemingly different from himself, and he does so by comparison with his own mental images of the interiors of a Protestant house and chapel: “His brain was a whitewashed kitchen / hung with texts, swept tidy / as the body o’ the kirk” (*OG* 60). But the final section reveals another aspect of the neighbor’s character:

Then sometimes when the rosary was dragging
mournfully on in the kitchen
we would hear his step round the gable

though not until after the litany

would the knock come to the door
and the casual whistle strike up

on the doorstep. 'A right-looking night,'
he might say, 'I was dandering by
and says I, I might as well call.' (OG 60)

The neighbor, having come on a friendly, social visit, waits politely and respectfully until after the Heaneys have finished their prayers before knocking on the door. In a gesture of good will, he has crossed from "the other side," yet throughout the poem, even in the final section, all involved feel a sense of difference from one another. The young Heaney, especially, is hesitant to connect with the Protestant man, for perhaps his own sense of difference is magnified by childhood shyness:

Should I slip away, I wonder,
or go up and touch his shoulder
and talk about the weather

or the price of grass-seed? (OG 60)

This final line of the poem indicates just how much the boy and the man have in common: they both till the same soil and depend upon that soil for their livelihood. The young Heaney, like the Protestant neighbor, yearns to reach across from his side to the other side, but the divide between them causes him to hesitate. The entire poem, though spoken in Heaney's voice, provides glimpses into the mind of the neighbor—into his

simultaneous desire and reticence to connect with the Catholics—through sympathetic representations of his actions and speech.

“The Other Side” reinforces a point I made earlier about the various connections between childhood, adulthood, the monologic voice of Heaney’s early poetry (in *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*), and the developing dialogism that begins in *Wintering Out*, the volume in which this poem appears. Helen Vendler writes of the poem’s final stanza that the “silent proximity in the dark, the wavering query, the impulse to touch, are gestures that the younger poet would not have been capable of.”³⁹ She goes on to say that the “mere complexity of the neighbour ... suggests a marked advance in representational fidelity over the more stereotypical portraits” of Protestants in earlier poems.⁴⁰ Indeed, in “The Other Side,” Heaney empathizes with the Protestant neighbor, even though that empathy is expressed in the childhood voice that he had used in much of his earlier poetry. The adult poet of *Wintering Out*, with his awakening sense of the importance of pluralism amid the Troubles, reshapes his childhood memories. This poem may stand as an example of cultural hybridity in Heaney’s childhood, but the significance of such remembered hybrid experiences can only be read by Heaney in his artistic maturity.

Writing in “Terminus” of growing up “in between,” Heaney asks, “Is it any wonder when I thought / I would have second thoughts?” (*OG* 272).⁴¹ In places of conflict like Northern Ireland, especially, those “second thoughts” are essential:

³⁹ Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998) 82-83.

⁴⁰ Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* 83. The two poems that she has in mind are “Docker,” from *Death of a Naturalist* (p. 28) and “Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966,” which, though it appeared in the “Singing School” sequence of 1975’s *North* (p. 68; *OG* 131), was written in 1966.

⁴¹ The strategy of “second thoughts” arises out of the subjective experience of division, as Heaney explains in the Nobel lecture, recalling the “destabilizing nature” of his childhood in the North: “Without needing to be theoretically instructed, consciousness quickly realizes that it is the site of variously contending discourses” (*OG* 418).

individuals need not necessarily leave behind their partiality to certain groups, places, beliefs, and customs, but they must make room for others in their politics and ethics. They must think once for themselves and a second time for others. When Heaney listened to the family radio set as a child, hearing simultaneously “the domestic idiom of his Irish home and the official idioms of the British broadcaster,” he says that he “was already being schooled for the complexities of his adult promptings variously ethical, aesthetical, moral, political, metrical, skeptical, cultural, topical, typical, post-colonial and, taken all together, simply impossible” (*OG* 418). But were these “adult promptings” really impossible? Perhaps this schooling seemed to ask the impossible of him at the time, but in retrospect, the strategy that he learned from his boyhood experience of hybridity—that of “second thoughts”—has served him well in his life and art.

3. Toward Dialogue: *Wintering Out* (1972)

Until very recently, with the publication of *Electric Light* (2001) and *District and Circle* (2006), most of Heaney’s critics have focused on his rootedness in Ireland, but have paid little attention to his cosmopolitanism. Such criticism reinforces the illusory insularity of Ireland, whereas Heaney’s poetry since *Wintering Out* (1972) has questioned that insularity. To a great extent, Heaney’s status as a Northern Irish Catholic writing during the Troubles has determined the way in which critics have viewed his oeuvre, in spite of the fact that he has striven to include a multitude of contrasting voices in his work. Not that Heaney has always been perceived as merely the voice of the Catholic minority in the North—on the contrary, most critics complicate or reject outright such a reading—but that his work is often positioned in relation to late-twentieth-century Irish

political themes.⁴² In short, Irish politics, particularly during the Troubles, have been hard to ignore, and even Heaney's early work is often read in hindsight from a Troubles-era vantage. Ironically, Heaney has long had an international readership, but non-Irish readers too have generally failed to imagine the poet outside of an Irish context, even when his poems challenge that context.

In Heaney's early books, the poet is firmly rooted in his rural setting, in the culture and folkways of the Derry countryside, though ironically that setting appears uprooted from history, uprooted from its positioning in late-twentieth-century Northern Ireland. The countryside depicted in virtually all of the poems of *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, and even in some of the poems of *Wintering Out*, is an insular space, where the only temporal links are generational and local, not historical and national.⁴³ Moreover, Heaney limits the setting of these poems to the immediate

⁴² Nevertheless, the only sustained study of Heaney's own politics in relation to his art and thought that has been published is Eugene O'Brien's *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing* (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2002). O'Brien recognizes that Heaney's "work is driven by the desire to create a space where notions of Irishness are pluralized and opened to different influences, and it is predicated on the future, as opposed to the past" (2). Besides O'Brien, however, only a few other critics have taken what might be called a postcolonial approach to Heaney's work—an approach that questions and deconstructs the poet's supposed unyielding entrenchment in Irish culture and politics. Richard Kearney, for example, asserts that Heaney's poems are "not primarily about place at all," but "about *transit*," and that they espouse "the view that it is language which perpetually constructs and deconstructs our given notions of identity" ("Heaney and Homecoming" in *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* [Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988] 102). Andrew J. Auge, as well, sees a deconstructive tendency developing in Heaney's work, especially through the progression of his first four books, claiming that his poetry "explicitly foregrounds the more regressive forms of reterritorialization only to renounce them in favor of a more unsettled deterritorialization" ("A Buoyant Migrant Line': Seamus Heaney's Deterritorialized Poetics," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 14.4 (2003): 270-71). Reterritorialization, in this context, means re-rooting oneself in a pastoralized, pre-colonial, pre-modern Ireland, which is what Heaney does in his first two books, while deterritorialization means a complicating of that earlier vision—creating a Northern Ireland in verse that is neither Irish nor British but both—which is the poet's aesthetic project from *Wintering Out* onward. Most other criticism, while useful, is regionally focused and poet-centered, comprising a blend of formalist analysis, biographical criticism, literary history, and political or cultural contextualization. See, for example, Morrison (1982); Bedford, Maxwell, Brown, Zoutenbier, King, Parini, and Ellmann in Bloom (1986); Andrews (1988); O'Brien, Longley, Deane, Corcoran, and Lloyd in Allen (1997).

⁴³ The uprootedness of Heaney's early poems tallies with his memory of Mossbawn as recounted in the Nobel lecture, where he describes the place as "ahistorical" and "emotionally and intellectually proofed against the outside world" (OG 415). But, in fact, this was an illusion, a child's view of the landscape. When he writes of the same space later in his career, Heaney carefully and deliberately situates it in history.

geography surrounding the family farm at Mossbawn. He focuses on rural figures whose occupations have changed little since before the industrialization of Ireland: turf-cutters, thatchers, potato farmers, water diviners, blacksmiths, and fishermen, to name a few. Helen Vendler calls them “anonymities,” and that term sums up quite well the non-specific, uprooted, ahistorical nature of Heaney’s early work.⁴⁴ These figures could be located almost anywhere in the world and almost anytime in history. Likewise, the child’s voice that narrates many of these early poems is also anonymous; it is the young Heaney who speaks, of course, but he represents a continuous, traditional way of life that stretches back at least into the Middle Ages. Heaney speaks in a voice here that comes from inside of the rural, folk culture—Vendler says he is an “anthropologist of his own culture”—but he doesn’t let on that the culture exists within late colonial Northern Ireland.⁴⁵

To understand the shift to dialogism that occurs in *Wintering Out*, one may find it useful to compare two of Heaney’s earliest bog poems: “Bogland,” the final poem of *Door into the Dark*, and “Bog Oak,” the second poem of *Wintering Out*. When read in sequence, these poems describe a movement from a monolithic, ahistorical Irishness to an Irishness in conversation with its hybrid origins. In “Bogland,” the landscape is clearly Irish, but Irish in a singular, not plural, sense. One might read this earlier poem as a kind of national myth-making, where the bog signifies the Irish past and functions as a depository for Irish history—and indeed Heaney has made clear that this was partly his intention, for when he wrote the poem he had in mind “the frontier and the west as an important myth in the American consciousness” (*P* 55). But while Americans migrated

⁴⁴ See Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* 13-37.

⁴⁵ Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* 18.

westward, Heaney's "pioneers keep striking / inwards and downwards," apparently searching for meaning in history, yet the action seems futile, since the "wet centre is bottomless" (*OG* 41). The monolithic speaker of the poem—the "we" who "have no prairies / To slice a big sun at evening"—though grammatically plural, constitutes a singular Irish consciousness (*OG* 41). Of course, such a national consciousness does not exist, as Heaney clearly recognizes later, when, for instance, he calls for "two-mindedness" in Northern Ireland (*RP* 202). In this early poem, however, that fictive voice erases any hybridity or division that exists on the island. Indeed, the "pioneers" of the poem seem to find only earlier versions of themselves as they dig down into the past, since "Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before," presumably by Irishmen who differ little from the contemporary excavators—burning peat for fuel, for instance, as Irishmen still do today (*OG* 41). The bog's preservational powers are a theme that the poet returns to frequently in his mid-career poetry, but what they have preserved in this poem is the same ahistorical, rural, folk culture that stands at the center of Heaney's first two books. In short, the history that Heaney's singular "we" seeks to recover is no history at all, but a mere reflection of itself.

In *Wintering Out*'s "Bog Oak," on the other hand, the piece of wood referenced in the title, pulled from the bog and "split for rafters," prompts the poet to contrast Irish with English topography, and then to consider how Ireland has been defined by its contrast with England and impacted by English colonialism. Unlike in the English landscape, the "softening ruts" of a cart track in Ireland "lead back to no / 'oak groves'," since the bog dominates this landscape, and here "no / cutters of mistletoe" gather "in the green clearings" (*OG* 46). Such clearings would require the "oak groves" that are absent from

Ireland: mistletoe grows only on oak trees.⁴⁶ Irishmen must often unearth what little wood there is from the bog; here, Heaney describes such an ancient find as a “carter’s trophy” (*OG* 46).

Into this bog space Heaney imagines the poet Edmund Spenser, who indeed served the English crown in Dublin and Cork in the sixteenth century, “dreaming sunlight” and “encroached upon by” wood-kernes who “creep / ‘out of every corner / of the woodes and glennes’ / towards watercress and carrion” (*OG* 46). In the last decade of the sixteenth century, Spenser had seen starving Irish soldiers near Cork, driven into hiding by the occupying English army, and he described these “wood-kernes” as “anatomies of death [who] spake like ghosts crying out of their graves,” “creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not carry them.”⁴⁷ In his essay “Belfast,” Heaney says that, when he reads this passage by Spenser, he feels “closer to the natives, the geniuses of the place,” and his repeated return to this image in his poems, both here in “Bog Oak” and later in *North*’s “Exposure,” implies that he was deeply affected by Spenser’s description of the wood-kernes (*P* 34-35). Nonetheless, Spenser’s is an English voice, a colonizer’s voice, longing for the oak groves of Albion, yet he too remains one of the voices of Ireland—“voices [that] pull in two directions,” drawing Heaney at once into the traumas of the Irish past and “out towards the urgencies and experience of the world beyond it” (*P* 35). Already in this second poem of *Wintering Out*, Heaney presents a less settled, less rooted view of Ireland, where the island’s

⁴⁶ In Ireland, the landscape is nearly devoid of large oaks, though prehistoric evidence indicates that the island was once carpeted with them. Most oaks that do grow in Ireland were planted by English settlers in the midlands starting about 300 years ago.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *P* 34.

history, colonial and anti-colonial, informs its present. He unearths an ancient Irish oak and finds England within Ireland's past.

Heaney has said that "if one perceptible function of poetry is to write place into existence, another of its functions is to unwrite it."⁴⁸ Such an "unwriting" is precisely what the poet accomplishes in the place-name poems of *Wintering Out*, where he enters the tradition of *dinnseanchas*, an Irish folk genre in which the speaker describes how places were named. Heaney explains that *dinnseanchas* poems "relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology," but, in fact, in the Irish-language tradition the native audience would catch the "original meanings," so only the English-language audience requires semantic recovery (*P* 131).

Dinnseanchas poems do generate mythologies: Heaney, however, aims in these poems not to craft a singular or nationalist mythology, but to unsettle any such unitary myths as already exist in the space he describes. Whether these myths be Irish or British, Unionist or Republican, Heaney complicates them by placing them alongside one another and thus revealing how they ought to operate in simultaneity.

The fourth stanza of "A New Song," a poem from the middle of *Wintering Out*, serves as an invocation for the *dinnseanchas* poems, a song to summon forgotten voices into Northern Irish space:

But now our river tongues must rise
From licking deep in native haunts
To flood, with vovelling embrace,
Demesnes staked out in consonants. (*OG* 58)

⁴⁸ *The Place of Writing*, Emory Studies in Humanities (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) 47. Hereafter *PW*.

Heaney writes in “Belfast” that he grew up “between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience, between ‘the demesne’ and ‘the bog’,” and in his poetry he reconciles the two seemingly contrasting, though actually coexisting, realms (*P* 35). He often associates Irish sounds with vowels and English sounds with consonants, and in “A New Song” he makes those associations clear: the demesne, or manorial property of an English lord in Ireland, is “staked out in consonants,” while the vowels that Heaney finds sunk in the Irish ground and water—in the territory occupied by the colonizing English—are invoked to “flood” that demesne. But the “river tongues” that “must rise / From licking deep in native haunts” will not supplant the consonants of the demesne; they will instead share Northern Irish space with those English sounds, forging a sonic co-occupation—a complete language that includes both vowels and consonants.

In “Belfast,” Heaney explains that his birthplace, Mossbawn, was “bordered by the townlands of Broagh and Anahorish,” and that the names of these two townlands, when voiced, constitute “forgotten Gaelic music in the throat” (*P* 36). He focuses on these familiar place-names as well in two of his *dinnseanchas* poems, recovering their Gaelic meanings for his English-language audience. Broagh becomes “Riverbank” (*OG* 55), and Anahorish becomes “My ‘place of clear water’,”

the first hill in the world
where springs washed into
the shiny grass

and darkened cobbles
in the bed of the lane. (*OG* 47)

Though he doesn't do so in the poems, in "Belfast" Heaney gives the Irish original of the two place-names: "*bruach*" and "*anach fhíor uisce*" (P 36). Maintaining the Anglicized orthography of the names Broagh and Anahorish in the poems was likely an intentional choice, since in doing so he affirms both linguistic traditions: the "forgotten Gaelic music" that yields the meanings "riverbank" and "place of clear water," and the modern spelling that acknowledges the cultural heritage of English colonialism. Indeed, the next lines of the poem "Anahorish" posit the place-name as an utterance that typifies a complete Northern Irish language: "*Anahorish*, soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow" (OG 47). Heaney's italicization of the name defamiliarizes it, calling attention to its sounds that are at once English and Irish.⁴⁹ He uproots and then re-roots the place-names of his native space by putting the majority language in dialogue with a lost minority language, thus enhancing what he calls "our sense of the place . . . , our sense of ourselves as inhabitants not just of a geographical country but of a country of the mind" (P 132). The space that we live in, Heaney implies, is not mere geography; rather, we construct that space in our minds, and we ought to strive to understand how its constructedness reflects our culture, language, and politics. That is precisely the aim of Heaney's *dinnseanchas* poems, and the dialogic mode that he employs in those poems is one that he carries through to his other work during the Troubles in *North* and afterwards.

⁴⁹ David Lloyd accuses Heaney of "cultural nationalism" in *dinnseanchas* poems like "Anahorish," "since language is seen primarily as naming, and because naming performs a cultural reterritorialisation by replacing the contingent continuities of an historical community with an ideal register of continuity in which the name (of place or of object) operates symbolically as the commonplace communicating between actual and ideal continua. The name always serves likeness, never difference" ("Pap for the Dispossessed": Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of Identity," *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen [New York: St. Martin's, 1997] 165). Clearly, this is not the case, as names can in fact serve difference; the very typography and phonology of a name like "Anahorish" point to its Irish-language origins and English-language reformulation.

4. Fostering Distance: *North* (1975) from the South

“That poetry makes nothing happen is normally a tolerable fact; but there are occasions on which a poet feels that he must respond to one act with another similar in character and force.”

Denis Donoghue, *We Irish*⁵⁰

In the Nobel lecture, Heaney recalls his time in Belfast during the early years of the Troubles, when he experienced pressure “to conduct oneself as a poet in a situation of ongoing political violence and public expectation” (OG 418). He felt himself painted into a corner, placed in an difficult position as a poet, when the expectation of the Northern Irish public was “not of poetry as such but of political positions variously approvable by mutually disapproving groups” (OG 418). Such impossible demands contributed to his decision to move south to the Republic of Ireland in 1972, to County Wicklow near Dublin, where the pressure to be the voice of the Catholic, Republican minority of the North was eased. This next leg of his journey outward from Mossbawn came as the result of longing “not quite [for] stability but [for] an active escape from the quicksand of relativism, a way of crediting poetry without anxiety or apology” (OG 419). In County Wicklow, at Glanmore Cottage, he composed those poems of *North* in which he addresses the Troubles for almost the first time in verse, as if distance from Northern Ireland were required to make sense of the atrocious events there.

Indeed, Heaney’s choice to create for himself physical distance from the North finds a parallel in his fostering aesthetic distance from his native landscape. Moreover, the two kinds of distance are closely linked: the poet chooses to remove himself, both

⁵⁰ Denis Donoghue, *We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society* (New York: Knopf, 1986) 187.

geographically and aesthetically, in order to remain true to his poetic voice. Writing about another poet who distanced himself from Northern Ireland, Heaney says that Louis MacNeice “provides an example of how distance, either of the actual, exilic, cross-channel variety or the imaginary, self-renewing, trans-historical and trans-cultural sort, can be used as an enabling factor in the work of art in Ulster” (*PW* 46). The same could be said of Heaney, particularly in *North*, although also generally throughout his work from *Wintering Out* onward, when the shift toward dialogism begins. For him, the only ethical and aesthetic option during the politically charged era of the Troubles was to exile himself in order to gain perspective on his home ground.

Eugene O’Brien, writing of Heaney’s move to the Republic and its relation to his art, asserts that “Emigration, as the dissemination of the bond between a people and a place, is a deconstructive lever inserted into this bond. It does not destroy this identificatory connection but does serve to loosen those tribal roots.”⁵¹ Heaney’s tribal roots run deep and were, at this time, a deadly serious matter. Therefore, since his primary loyalty belongs to his art, loosening those roots became the only acceptable solution. In this way, he seems a Northern Stephen Dedalus, whose stated aim in Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is “to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile, cunning.”⁵² Silence may not have been Heaney’s *modus operandi* during the Troubles (unless one considers his refusal to speak directly for the Catholic minority, and instead to speak in his own voice, as a kind of silence), but exile and cunning define Heaney’s poetry in *North*. The “nets flung at” Stephen Dedalus’s soul “to

⁵¹ Eugene O’Brien, *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing* (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2002) 27.

⁵² James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Walter Hettche (New York: Vintage, 1993) 238.

hold it back from flight” are the same nets flung at Heaney: “nationality, language, religion.”⁵³ Heaney, too, flies right by those nets, and his method of distantiation and disassociation parallels Stephen’s in the final chapter of *Portrait*.

Heaney’s poetry in *North* marks the beginning of a true cosmopolitanism in his work, when his aesthetic concerns move beyond Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to the world beyond. *North* is still rooted in Ireland, but the book simultaneously engages with figures and landscapes abroad. Heaney seeks out new ways of seeing Ireland during the Troubles by transporting himself, metaphorically, off the island, just as he transplanted himself south to County Wicklow in body. Most notably, he accomplishes this aesthetic distantiation by associating himself with other exile figures like Ovid and the Russian modernist poet Osip Mandelstam, and by merging the Irish bogscape with other bogscapes in Northern Europe, thus linking contemporary violence in the North with ritualized violence in Iron Age Jutland and Germany. Another way in which he achieves aesthetic distance is not by moving outside of Ireland, but by moving so far into the island’s past that the place becomes defamiliarized: several of *North*’s poems are set in medieval Viking-occupied Ireland, centuries before the current political binarisms were set, yet Heaney finds analogies between that distant age and his own.

As is well known, Heaney first grew interested in the Iron-Age bodies unearthed from Danish and other Northern European bogs upon reading P. V. Glob’s *The Bog People* (1969), which includes photographs of the bodies that greatly affected the poet, and two of his earliest poems to deal with this subject matter—“The Tollund Man” and

⁵³ Joyce, *Portrait* 196.

“Nerthus”—were actually published in *Wintering Out*.⁵⁴ In the first of the three sections of “The Tollund Man,” Heaney makes a promise to himself to travel to Denmark and to view the naturally preserved body that had been given the name ‘Tollund Man’ by researchers; the body was unearthed from a Jutland bog in 1950 and is now on display in a Danish museum:

Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eyelids,
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country nearby
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time. (*OG* 62)

Heaney is interested not in the body alone, but also in the landscape where the sacrificial killing of the man took place: he wants to “stand a long time” in “the flat country nearby.” For already Heaney suspects that, just as bogs are a common topographical feature in both Ireland and Denmark, there may be a correlation between the ritualized

⁵⁴ P. V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron Age Man Preserved*, trans. Rupert Bruce-Mitford (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1969).

violence that sank those ancient bodies into the peat and contemporary violence in Northern Ireland. Even in the following section of this poem, however, he does not yet connect that Iron Age violence to the Troubles, but to the deaths of four young Catholics killed at the hands of an auxiliary police force in the 1920s, during the Irish Civil War:

I could risk blasphemy,
Consecrate the cauldron bog
Our holy ground and pray
Him to germinate

The scattered, ambushed
Flesh of labourers,
Stockinged corpses
Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth
Flecking the sleepers
Of four young brothers, trailed
For miles along the lines. (*OG* 62-63)

Although he does not draw a direct comparison to contemporary violence in the North, the shift in this second section from Iron Age Jutland to modern Ireland clearly indicates that the Troubles are on the poet's mind. Heaney writes in *Preoccupations* that, when he read P. V. Glob's book, "the unforgettable photographs of these victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political

and religious struggles” (57-58).⁵⁵ Thus, his cosmopolitanism, his aesthetic movement outside of Ireland, allows him to decode even the darkest aspects of human nature—to make sense of atrocities at home by looking abroad and to the past. As Helen Vendler puts it, when Heaney initially attempted to comprehend the inhumanity of the Troubles, “immediate history alone did not begin to explain the recrudescence of violence in Northern Ireland,” and he had to seek answers elsewhere (35). Yet that foreign space becomes a kind of unpleasant second home for him, rooted as he is in Troubles-era Ireland:

Out there in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost,
Unhappy and at home. (*OG* 63)

Richard Kearney claims that, in poems like “The Tollund Man,” Heaney returns “to a home away from home: an *unheimlich* home,” but, in fact, the distance from Ireland that he achieves in such poems grants him the necessary aesthetic perspective to write about the Troubles without resorting to journalistic clichés and trite imagery.⁵⁶

Several more bog-body poems appear in *North*, although the 1975 volume opens not with those poems, which are mainly set outside of Ireland, but with a pair of poems that return Heaney to his birthplace, collectively entitled “Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication.” The first of these, “Sunlight,” is an elegy for his Aunt Mary, and the

⁵⁵ Heaney chooses the word “rites” in this sentence not by accident, for there has historically been an almost ritualistic quality to Irish politics. Heaney claims that there exists an “archetypal pattern” connecting Iron Age “ritual sacrifices to the Mother Goddess” and “the tradition of Irish martyrdom for that cause whose icon is Kathleen ni Houlihan,” that is, the female personification of Ireland (*P* 57).

⁵⁶ Richard Kearney, “Heaney and Homecoming,” Chapter 5, *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988) 109.

second, “The Seed Cutters,” though it may appear at first blush to constitute a return to the rooted, rural voice of the early books, actually operates from the distantiated perspective that is the hallmark of *North*. In this poem, Heaney imagines his native space as it would be depicted visually by a Dutch Master:

They seem hundreds of years away. Brueghel,

You’ll know them if I can get them true.

They kneel under the hedge in a half-circle

Behind a windbreak wind is breaking through.

They are the seed cutters. ...

Each sharp knife goes

Lazily halving each root that falls apart

In the palm of the hand: a milky gleam,

And, at the centre, a dark watermark. ... (OG 94)

North is indeed rooted in Ireland and anchored to Heaney’s *omphalos* at Mossbawn, but even that home ground, with which the volume opens, is viewed from afar, as though he has now become a modern poet viewing his earlier premodern self.

Heaney divides the rest of *North* into two sections: the first contains the Viking and bog-body poems; and the second contains several poems of a more personal nature which address the Troubles. Among the bog-body poems in the first section of *North*, “Punishment” draws some of the most disturbing parallels between ancient and contemporary violence, yet it also prompts Heaney to consider his own responsibility amid the Troubles. This poem concerns the Windeby Girl, disinterred from a bog in Northern Germany in 1952 and also featured in P. V. Glob’s book. Heaney, envisioning

the moment of her execution, when she was only about fourteen years old, empathizes with her:

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs. (OG 112)

In these first stanzas, Heaney imagines himself in the girl's position, at first vicariously *feeling* "the tug / of the halter" and "the wind / on her naked front," while in the subsequent lines he only *sees* "her drowned / body in the bog," weighed down by a stone, for she has become an artifact and he is the observer. He continues to distance himself from her as the poem proceeds.⁵⁷ He pictures her as a "Little adulteress," "flaxen-haired" and "undernourished" before her punishment, with a beautiful face now turned "tar-black" in the peat (OG 112). Heaney then imagines himself as a member of her tribe:

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know
the stones of silence. (OG 113)

⁵⁷ Helen Vendler sees quite a different shift in perspective in "Punishment": Heaney, she explains, "first speaks about her in the third person and then, at the exact centre of the poem, speaks to her in a second-person address which he maintains to the end" (*Seamus Heaney* 49). She claims that Heaney wants to counter "his tendency to 'venerate' the bodies" and therefore "confronts the 'little adulteress' directly" (49).

Would he have had the courage to speak out in her defense? Would he have protected her from communal violence? Perhaps not, for he accuses himself of failing to take action when his own countrymen in modern-day Ireland similarly tormented other young women:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilised outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge. (*OG* 113)

In these final stanzas, Heaney likens the fate of the Windeby Girl to the fates of Catholic women in Northern Ireland who were accused of consorting with British soldiers: their heads shaven, they were tied to posts and tarred by their own Catholic “tribe.” As the women are tortured, the poet stands “dumb” before them—figuratively of course, for Heaney was not actually present during the act—and consequently accuses himself of conniving in the atrocity by observing with hypocritical, “civilised outrage,” yet doing nothing. And outraged as he may be, the poet nonetheless admits that he understands “the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge.”

The bog-body poems, and “Punishment” in particular, raise questions of ethical and aesthetic responsibilities during acts of violence: as a citizen and member of the tribe,

should Heaney act in response to atrocity? As a poet, does he have the right to depict atrocity in art, thereby aestheticizing the abominable? Heaney explores these questions by turning to subjects outside of Ireland, focusing on disinterred European bog bodies—and he does in fact aestheticize them, yet he always questions the ethics of doing so. This brings him closer to understanding his role as a Northern Irish poet, though self-exiled, during the Troubles. Distancing himself from the North allows him to see himself more clearly, for despite such actual and imaginative distantiation, the Iron Age bog bodies that he observes often re-route him to contemporary Northern Irish space.

Manuscript evidence indicates that Heaney added the final stanzas of the poem, in which he relocates the action to twentieth-century Ireland, late in the process of composition. An earlier closing to the poem situated the Windeby Girl's tribe in its original historical context, that of the collision between Roman and Germanic cultures in the first century A.D.:

Senate and [Althing]
would both condemn you,
we all might cast

the stones of silence.
Whose righteousness
is preferable?
The groomed proconsul's

civilized concern

for you and yours
or the tribe's exact
and intimate revenge?⁵⁸

In the first line that I have quoted here, Heaney makes reference to two governing authorities: the Roman Senate, recently presiding over Germanic affairs from a distance, and the Althing, a word that in some Germanic languages referred to a tribal council. He does not conflate ancient with contemporary violence in this version, but he nonetheless includes himself in the “we” who “might cast / the stones of silence.” In these closing lines of the draft, instead of accusing himself of “conniv[ing] / in civilised outrage,” as he does in the *North* version, he transfers that connivance onto the figure of “the groomed proconsul,” the Roman provincial governor who silently assents, albeit with “civilised concern,” to the tribal atrocity. But Heaney does not excuse himself entirely, for alongside the final lines of this typescript draft, he pencils in “a third option” in addition to the “civilised concern” of the proconsul and “intimate revenge” of the tribe: “to be weighed / in the careful scale / of stylists.” Therefore, even when Heaney fully distantiates the poem from Northern Ireland, as he does in this draft, he still reflects on his responsibility as an artist, as a “stylist,” in the midst of inhumanity. Since he composed this draft during the Troubles, one must conclude that contemporary violence in the North, and Heaney’s relation as poet to that violence, was not far from his mind. Does the poet assume an unacceptable “righteousness” when he aestheticizes violence?

⁵⁸ Seamus Heaney papers, 1951-2004 (Manuscript collection 960), Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL), Emory University, Box 74, Folder 8. From manuscript worksheets reprinted in *Quarto* 2.1 (Nov. 1975). In this manuscript of “Punishment,” Heaney actually wrote “athelthing” in the first line, apparently confusing “Althing” with the Anglo-Saxon name or title Atheling [*Æþeling*], which means “man of noble blood.”

The poet's role in the face of violence greatly preoccupied Heaney during the Troubles, as is clear from his move to the Republic and his general tendency to distance himself aesthetically from Irish themes and settings in the poems of *North*. But in the volume's second and final section, Heaney confronts the Troubles head on, from his personal, writerly perspective. The material from which the poet fashions his art is language, and language itself had become suspect in the North during these years as journalists and politicians uncritically fashioned vocabulary to describe Northern Irish sectarianism. Obviously, this creates a dilemma for Heaney, which he addresses in "Whatever You Say, Say Nothing," the second poem of the book's final section:

... The times are out of joint
But I incline as much to rosary beads

As to the jottings and analyses
Of politicians and newspapermen ...

Who proved upon their pulses 'escalate',
'Backlash' and 'crack down', 'the provisional wing',
'Polarization' and 'long-standing hate'.
Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing. (*OG* 123)

The language of violence has become infected with journalistic clichés, and Heaney wonders how he could possibly begin to "sing" about his place, and about the horrors within it, when the available discourse seems to trivialize such horrors. Language such as this can only be placed by the poet within quotation marks. The Northern Irish situation

required a new language, a new imagery, a new way of seeing things, and Heaney achieved this by defamiliarizing violence and sectarianism in his bog-body poems and Viking Ireland poems of *North*. The bog-body poems, in particular, lift the Northern Irish reader out of the Troubles and allow him or her to see things in a new way.⁵⁹ But a question remains: even if the poet can find an aesthetic approach, however oblique, to the Troubles, does he have the right to “sing” amid suffering?

Heaney opens his 1988 collection of essays, *The Government of the Tongue*, with a personal anecdote that provides a tentative response to this question. He and his friend, the singer David Hammond, had planned to visit a Belfast recording studio sometime in 1972, shortly before his relocation to County Wicklow, to record some poems and songs for an unidentified mutual friend in Michigan. But, “in the event,” says Heaney, “we did not actually make the tape.”

On our way to the studio, a number of explosions occurred in the city and the air was full of the sirens of ambulances and fire engines. There was news of casualties. ... [The] implacable disconsolate wailing of the ambulances ... was music against which the music of the guitar that David unpacked made little impression. So little, indeed, that the very notion of beginning to sing at that moment when others were beginning to suffer seemed like an offence against their suffering. He could not raise his

⁵⁹ Speaking of poetry’s power to suspend violence, Heaney said in 1997 that a “new language would create new possibility”: “People are suddenly gazing at something else and pausing for a moment. And for the duration of that gaze and pause, they are like reflectors of the totality of their own knowledge and/or ignorance” (Cole, “Seamus Heaney” 114).

voice at that cast-down moment. He packed the guitar again and we both drove off into the destroyed evening.⁶⁰

As the essay goes on, Heaney considers other writers, like the Great War poet Wilfred Owen and several contemporary Eastern Europeans, who did continue to sing amid suffering. But when he comes around to the early twentieth-century Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, Heaney discovers the solution to his ethical dilemma.⁶¹ Should he and Hammond have gone on with their recording session while others suffered? Heaney presents his answer in the form of two further questions:

Did we not see that song and poetry added to the volume of good in the world? ... Could we not remember the example of Mandelstam, singing in the Stalinist night, affirming the essential humanism of the act of poetry itself against the inhuman tyranny which would have had him write odes not just to Stalin but to hydro-electric dams? (*Government* xix)

For the solution to an Irish problem Heaney turns to a modernist Russian poet. This is in keeping with his usual method of distantiation during the Troubles, which applies to his critical thought as well as to his aesthetics in *North*. The first time that Heaney wrote about Mandelstam was in a 1974 review in *Hibernia* of Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin's *Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam*, just as he was composing the poems that would appear the following year in *North*. The Troubles were in full swing at that point, and Heaney's readership is limited to Northern Ireland. So when he writes to his readers

⁶⁰ Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: Selected Prose, 1978-1987* (New York: Farrar, 1989) xi. Hereafter *Government*.

⁶¹ Carmen Bagan provides an excellent overview of Heaney's relation to Mandelstam, Brodsky, and other Eastern European poets in her essay "Taking Possession of 'Extraterritorial' Poetics: Seamus Heaney and Eastern European Poetry in English Translation," *EnterText* 4.3 Supplement (Winter 2004-2005): 77-89, 3 Dec. 2005 <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/~acsrrrm/entertext/4_3/bagan_s.pdf>.

about Mandelstam, he writes to them about their own situation. “We live in critical times ourselves,” he says,

when the idea of poetry as an art is in danger of being overshadowed by a quest for poetry as a diagram of political attitudes. Some commentators have all the fussy literalism of an official from the ministry of truth. Mandelstam’s life and work are salutary and exemplary: if a poet must turn his resistance into an offensive, he should go for a kill and be prepared, in his life and with his work, for the consequences. (*P* 220)

When Heaney uses words like “resistance” and “offensive,” one might get the mistaken impression that he is calling for a poetry as critique of politics. This is not at all the case. On the contrary, the “danger” is that of fostering “poetry as a diagram of political attitudes.” What Heaney wants instead is a poetic resistance that is created by a turn inward, away from politics. That is not to say that poetry is necessarily apolitical, only that its primary concern lies not with the external world, but with its own internal structures, images, sounds, and rhythms. The poet must remain faithful to his voice, not attempt to adhere to “political positions variously approvable by mutually disapproving groups” (*OG* 418). Such aesthetic fidelity, however, itself implies a politics, Heaney claims, because poetry that is loyal to its own order “may be exercising in its inaudible way a fierce disdain of the amplified message [of the political activist], or a distressed sympathy with it,” and is therefore “perfectly justifiable in earshot of the carbomb.”⁶² It is the poet’s imperative, then, to sing amid suffering, even though his inwardly oriented art may be powerless against the ubiquitous cruelty and inhumanity of the external world.

⁶² *Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland*, Pete Laver Memorial Lecture, delivered at Grasmere 2 August 1984 (Published by the Trustees of Dove Cottage [1984?]) 8.

The final poem of *North* is “Exposure,” the sixth section of the “Singing School” sequence, which takes its title from Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium.”⁶³ In “Exposure,” Heaney draws attention to his self-exiled status, comparing himself to Ovid and Mandelstam. He has metamorphosed into a cosmopolitan subject, distant from his *omphalos* yet rooted to it, dodging, like Stephen Dedalus, the nets that had restricted him from flight in the North. But Heaney’s manner of avoiding those nets, his mode of distantiation, provokes a retreat into the self. “It is December in Wicklow,” he begins, and he feels “desperate” and unheroic:

How did I end up like this?
I often think of my friends’
Beautiful prismatic counselling
And the anvil brains of some who hate me

As I sit weighing and weighing
My responsible *tristia*.
For what? For the ear? For the people?
For what is said behind-backs? (*OG* 135)

⁶³ Heaney’s title phrase appears in the second section of Yeats’ 1927 poem, which was collected in *The Tower* (1928). I quote the entire section here as it appears in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard Finneran, revised second edition (New York: Scribner, 1996) 193:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

The “*tristia*,” or the ‘grave sorrows’, that the poet weighs, can only be the Troubles, and with this Latin word Heaney references two other exile figures: Ovid and Mandelstam. Ovid composed his penultimate collection of poems, *Tristia*, while living in exile from Rome at Tomis, on the Black Sea, in A.D. 8, and its poems constitute a plea that he be allowed to return home; Mandelstam’s *Tristia*, titled in homage to Ovid, was published in 1922, well before his several exiles to the Soviet provinces. Yet although his *Tristia* was a pre-exile book, Mandelstam, being a Jew, was always an “internal émigré,” to use a common Sovietism. A question that he asks in *Tristia*’s title poem, in fact, seems to anticipate his later periods of exile: “Who can tell from the sound of the word ‘parting’ / what kind of bereavements await us”?⁶⁴ Because Heaney chose to live in the Republic and was not forced from the North, Mandelstam functions as a more relevant analogue for the Irish poet than Ovid. If a Russian poet were to remain true to his art in the Soviet Union, particularly under Stalin, his vocation necessitated a conscious separation and distantiation from the status quo, which is surely what Heaney has in mind when he invokes Mandelstam. When he asks whether he weighs his *tristia* for “the people” or for “what is said behind-backs,” he poses rhetorical questions. The poet says what he must say for no one but himself, which is why he rejects the impossible political demands that the Troubles placed on him as a poet:

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

⁶⁴ *The Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam*, trans. Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin, 1973 (New York: NYRB, 2004) 23.

The diamond absolutes.
I am neither internee nor informer;
An inner émigré, grown long-haired
And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,
Taking protective colouring
From bole and bark, feeling
Every wind that blows; (*OG* 135-36)

As a poet, he has become an “inner émigré” in Ireland on the Mandelstamian model, withdrawn into song. He is not blind to the suffering in the North, but it is not his duty to take sides in the conflict. As a poet, his only duty is to stand “for the efficacy of song itself, [to be] an emblem of the poet as potent sound-wave,” just as Mandelstam stood before him in another time and place (*Government* xx). Again Heaney invokes the image of the sixteenth-century wood-kerne, an “inner émigré” on the Irish model, grateful that he has extracted himself from the chaos and can begin life anew. As a latter-day wood-kerne himself, however, Heaney is no coward, but a bold visionary—one who sees clearly that his role as poet requires distance from the charged politics of the North.

In Heaney’s *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966-1996*, which gathers together all of the Irish poet’s collections through *The Spirit Level* (1996), the contents of *North* have been altered slightly: after the opening suite of “Mossbawn: Two Poems in

Dedication,” the first poem we encounter in Part One of the collection is “Funeral Rites”; originally, this section of *North* began with another poem: “Antaeus.” Together with the similarly themed “Hercules and Antaeus,” which appears later in the volume, “Antaeus” bookended *North*’s Part One. In *Opened Ground*, however, Heaney and his editors chose to relocate “Antaeus” to an earlier point on the chronology of Heaney’s career—and to an earlier position in this selection of previously published collections—in order to remain consistent with the poem’s 1966 date of composition.⁶⁵ Whatever their reasons for moving the poem might have been (to my knowledge, no other poems in *Opened Ground* have been shifted about), the new arrangement offers new possibilities for interpretation: “Funeral Rites” now stands at the gateway to the largest section of *North*—the section that contains all of the bog-body poems and the Viking Ireland poems. And even though the poem only commences Part One, it also serves as a thematic link to Part Two, where those poems that overtly engage with the Troubles appear—notably, “Whatever You Say, Say Nothing” and the “Singing School” sequence.

“Funeral Rites” is divided into three sections, moving sequentially outward from the personal to the universal. In the first section, Heaney conflates memories of several family funerals, when he “shouldered a kind of manhood / stepping in to lift the coffins / of dead relations” (*OG* 95). These were occasions of personal and familial tragedy, certainly, but we would consider them tragic only because any death is a tragedy, not because the deaths were apparently untimely or in any way linked to violence. Heaney and his kin merely wait for the “black glacier / of each funeral” to pass, as all families

⁶⁵ “Antaeus” is now situated at the end of the *Death of a Naturalist* section of *Opened Ground*, although, in the table of contents, it is listed separately from the other poems of that 1966 collection. At the top of the page on which the poem appears, its composition year of 1966 is given, which is not the case for any of the poems in *Death of a Naturalist* or *Door into the Dark*, the collection that immediately follows “Antaeus.” See *OG* 15.

must do (*OG 96*). But in the second section of the poem, death is no longer a small, infrequent tragedy that everyone must learn to cope with, but a nationwide, seemingly unending series of killings that could have been prevented, which makes them all the more tragic:

Now as news comes in
of each neighborly murder
we pine for ceremony,
customary rhythms ... (*OG 96*)

In the face of sectarian killings like these, natural deaths seem idyllic. Finally, in the third section of “Funeral Rites,” Heaney connects his personal tragedies and the national tragedies to myth and history, preparing his readers for the vast scope of the poems that follow in the rest of *North*—and, more immediately, for the three Viking Ireland poems that directly succeed this one. The poet travels through Irish geography with Norse names—“past Strang and Carling fjords”—and associates the recent dead with Gunnar, a figure who appears in medieval European legends in several languages: Old Norse, Old English, Middle High German, and Latin. In Heaney’s telling, Gunnar, casualty of a sectarian clash, lies “beautiful inside his burial mound, / though dead by violence // and unavenged” (*OG 97*). But as Gunnar passes out of existence, he seems pleased that there will be no vengeance and that the internecine feud will come to an end: knowing this, he turns “with a joyful face / to look at the moon” (*OG 97*). In the Irish present, the outcome of the Troubles remains unclear, though quiet reigns for now, “arbitration / of the feud placated” (*OG 97*).

The first of the three Viking Ireland poems, “North,” picks up historically and geographically where “Funeral Rites” left off: with medieval Nordic seafarers patrolling the Irish coast, where “Thor’s hammer swung / to geography and trade” (OG 98).⁶⁶ This poem, as well as the two that follow (“Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” and “Bone Dreams”), adds another dimension to the cultural diversity of Ireland: besides the island’s various and complicated Irish, British, Gaelic, and Anglo-Saxon heritages, a regional Scandinavian history now rises to the surface of *North*. This historical link to the Vikings allows Heaney to reach back to a point before English colonialism and to claim a Germanic linguistic precedent (however unrealistic) for contemporary English-speaking Ireland.⁶⁷ When he stands on the seashore and strains to make out the “ocean-deafened

⁶⁶ The period of Viking settlement in Ireland lasted from the ninth century until the twelfth century, reaching its peak in the middle of the tenth century. The Norwegian ruler Olaf the White built a fortress in 852 A.D. on a site where the city of Dublin now stands. Rita Zoutenbier claims that Heaney’s poem “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” was inspired by an exhibit at the National Museum in Dublin, which seems likely based on the poem’s second section (“The Matter of Ireland and the Poetry of Seamus Heaney,” *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Harold Bloom [New Haven, Conn.: Chelsea House, 1986] 62):

These are trial pieces,
the craft’s mystery
improvised on bone:
foliage, bestiaries,

interlacings elaborate
as the netted routes
of ancestry and trade.
That have to be

magnified on display ... (OG 100-1)

⁶⁷ In “Bone Dreams,” Heaney imagines himself reaching beyond the English literary history that he has inherited in order to root himself in a language perhaps older than Old English. This is an Anglophone poet’s fantasy:

I push back
through dictions,
Elizabethan canopies,
Norman devices,

the erotic mayflowers
of Provence
and the ivied Latins
of churchmen

to the scop’s

voices” that come to him from the Viking past, collectively embodied in “North” by the “longship’s swimming tongue,” the message that he receives empowers his poetry and affirms the primacy of the individual artist in difficult times:⁶⁸

It said, ‘Lie down
in the word-hoard, burrow
the coil and gleam
of your furrowed brain.

Compose in darkness.
Expect aurora borealis
in the long foray
but no cascade of light.

Keep your eye clear
as the bleb of the icicle,
trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
your hands have known.’ (OG 99)

Viking Ireland, like contemporary Northern Ireland, saw its share of violence—“thick-witted couplings and revenges, / the hatreds and behind-backs / of the althing” (OG 98)—

twang, the iron
flash of consonants
cleaving the line. (OG 104-5)

⁶⁸ In two other mid-career poems, Heaney uses the same literary device as he does here: imagining (or inhabiting) a voice that advises the poet on his own craft. In “Fosterage,” from the “Singing School” series in *North*, Heaney has Michael McClaverty telling him to “...Go your own way. / Do your own work. ... / ... / But to hell with overstating it: / ‘Don’t have the veins bulging in your Biro’” (OG 134). And in the final section of “Station Island,” Heaney invokes James Joyce, who implores him to “Let go, let fly, forget. / You’ve listened long enough. Now strike your note,” but in doing so, says Joyce, Heaney ought to “Keep at a tangent” (OG 245).

and the collective voice of the past seems to be telling Heaney to keep his distance and to rely on his own intuition to express what he sees. Keeping one's eye as "clear as the bleb of an icicle," in this case, means distancing oneself from the Troubles in precisely the way that Heaney succeeded in doing—physically, spiritually, and aesthetically.

5. The Known World: *Electric Light* (2001) and After

Heaney's poetry since his 2000 translation of *Beowulf* shows him at his most cosmopolitan, a world citizen and world poet aware of his massive influence and global responsibility. Yet he still writes first and foremost as an Irishman, and the poems of *Electric Light* (2001) and *District and Circle* (2006), cosmopolitan as they are, nevertheless find their roots in Heaney's Ireland. Likewise, the "tuning fork" that Heaney used when modernizing *Beowulf* was not standard British English, but a dialect he remembers spoken during his youth in his native South Derry in rural Northern Ireland:⁶⁹

Without some melody sensed or promised, it is simply impossible for a poet to establish the translator's right-of-way into and through a text. I was therefore lucky to hear this enabling note almost straight away, a familiar local voice, one that had belonged to relatives of my father's. ... They had a kind of Native American solemnity of utterance, as if they were announcing verdicts rather than making small talk. And when I came to ask myself how I wanted *Beowulf* to sound in my version, I realized I wanted it to be speakable by one of those relatives.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Heaney, introduction, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: Farrar, 2000) xxvii.

⁷⁰ *Beowulf* Intro. xxvii.

The *Beowulf* translation itself stands as an example of Heaney's rooted cosmopolitanism: an Anglo-Saxon epic—in a translation commissioned by W. W. Norton, an American publishing firm headquartered in New York—consciously Englished into a rural Irish dialect.⁷¹ André Lefevere argues that, when studying a translation as cultural object, we should consider three things: “process, product, and reception.”⁷² In each of these areas, Heaney's *Beowulf* reflects the poet's cosmopolitan practice: his process was to modernize a non-Irish text into Derry English; the product reflects a collaboration between the Irish poet and American publishers, editors, and scholars of medieval English literature; and the reception of the translation has been broadly international, as Norton stands foremost among publishers of scholarly and student editions, so anyone studying English literature anywhere in the world has a good chance of reading Heaney's Ulster-inflected version in a Norton edition of this most canonical Anglo-Saxon text.

In addition to his major collections, several other texts that Heaney has published in recent years, at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, also exemplify his rooted cosmopolitanism. *Anything Can Happen* (2004), for example, though published in Dublin and produced jointly with other Irishmen and Irishwomen, had an international readership and made an international impression.⁷³ The volume was produced in collaboration with Art for Amnesty and the Irish Translators'

⁷¹ In his article on Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, Thomas McGuire claims that the Irish poet's “vernacularized revision of the poem transcreatively transforms it into a kind of looking glass through which Irish cultural and sociopolitical experience might be seen—sometimes darkly and sometimes vividly” (“Violence and Vernacular in Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*,” *New Hibernia Review* 10.1 [2006]: 80). That is to say, Heaney's decision to present the Anglo-Saxon poem in Derry English evokes the history of British colonialism in Ireland, which, like the text that he translated, was littered with violence. In this way, Heaney expresses the cosmopolitan heritage of his island's unfortunate history.

⁷² *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*, (New York: MLA, 1992) 12.

⁷³ *Anything Can Happen*, a poem and essay by Seamus Heaney with translations in support of Art for Amnesty (Dublin: TownHouse, 2004). Heaney's translation of the poem “Anything Can Happen,” which lies at the heart of this volume, was later collected in *District and Circle* (p. 13).

and Interpreters' Association, with proceeds going to Amnesty International.⁷⁴ *Anything Can Happen* represents the most selfless aspects of Heaney's cosmopolitanism, whereby he hopes that the money raised by the book will change the world for the better, particularly in the realm of human rights. The book contains a translation by Heaney of an Ode by Horace (I.34), his introductory essay, and twenty-three translations by others of Heaney's version of the Ode. He views these translations as a kind of poetic intervention into the post-9/11 world, which he calls "an increasingly callous and endangered world where 'anything can happen'" (10). To speak to these objectionable global circumstances, Heaney and the editors placed the full twenty-four translations "in pairs of what have been termed 'languages of conflict,'" for example, Hebrew and Arabic, Chinese and Tibetan, Serbian and Bosnian, and Hindi and Urdu (19). Heaney chose to translate this particular Horatian Ode just after the 9/11 attacks because it "seemed up to the brutal realities of those days and to the tender mercies they evinced" (13). Indeed, the opening lines seem especially pertinent:

Anything can happen. You know how Jupiter
Will mostly wait for clouds to gather head
Before he hurls the lightning? Well, just now

⁷⁴ *Anything Can Happen* was not the first collaboration between Heaney and Amnesty International. The Irish branch of the organization approached the poet in 1985 with a request to write a poem commemorating that year's Human Rights Day. Heaney readily agreed, and the resulting poem, "From the Republic of Conscience," was printed as a pamphlet by Dublin's Gallery Press, with an illustration by the Irish artist John Behan. In that poem, the speaker describes a visit to an imaginary country whose political system is founded on moral conscience. Visitors enter the country with only what they can carry—no porters, no taxis—and very soon their "symptoms of creeping privilege" disappear. And "At their inauguration, public leaders / must swear to uphold unwritten law and weep / to atone for their presumption to hold office." See Seamus Heaney, *From the Republic of Conscience*, illustrated by John Behan (Dublin: The Gallery Press, for Amnesty International, 1985); and *OG* 276-77. Another recent poem, "Höfn," from *District and Circle*, shows a level of political engagement similar to the two Amnesty International poems. In this latest instance, the topic is global warming: "The three-tongued glacier has begun to melt. / What will we do, they ask, when boulder-milt / Comes wallowing across the delta flats // And the miles-deep ice makes its move?" (*DC* 51).

He galloped his thunder-cart and his horses

Across a clear blue sky. (11)

The poem's final stanza, which Heaney says is the most loosely connected to the original Latin, also reminds us of the horrifying, unsettling nature of the attacks on the World Trade Center and their aftermath:

Ground gives. The heaven's weight

Lifts up off Atlas like a kettle lid.

Capstones shift, nothing resettles right.

Smoke furl and boiling ashes darken day. (11)

Heaney's *Light of the Leaves* (1999) was published simultaneously in Mexico and the Netherlands and includes ten poems in English with translations into Spanish and Dutch.⁷⁵ This work comes in two volumes, one that contains the poems in all three languages and another that contains screenprints by Jan Hendrix, a Dutch artist who has lived and worked in Mexico.⁷⁶ The poems, many of which later appeared in *Electric Light*, engage with cultures, sites, themes, and personae both past and present, Irish and otherwise. In both *The Light of the Leaves* and *Anything Can Happen*, Heaney's pluralist aesthetics and politics intersect with creative practice, as he collaborates with translators, artists, editors, and activists across borders. The very fact that he has been able to work in such a cosmopolitan manner is an indicator of his status and influence as a world poet,

⁷⁵ Seamus Heaney with screenprints by Jan Hendrix, *The Light of the Leaves*, poems in English with translations into Dutch by Jan Eijkelboom and into Spanish by Pura López-Colomé (Mexico D. F.; Banholt, Holland: Imprenta de los Tropicas, 1999).

⁷⁶ Pura López-Colomé, who translated Heaney's poems into Spanish, was born in Mexico City (one of the work's two places of publication) and has translated Woolf, Stein, and Beckett. The Dutch translations were done by Jan Eijkelboom, a Dutchman who has translated Yeats, Larkin, Auden, and Lowell, all of whom were major influences on Heaney.

but the drive to create in collaboration with others abroad grows out of his hybrid experience in Ireland. Heaney's youth in the split culture of rural Ulster, in a farming community where Protestants and Catholics lived and worked alongside one another, set him on the road to understanding that "diversity *within* the border" was necessary in Northern Ireland, and he has now translated that understanding onto the global stage, where diversity and dialogue are no less crucial (*RP* 201). His practice of putting cultures in conversation with one another on the page, which began in *Wintering Out*, has its analogue in his life off the page.

One poem from *The Light of the Leaves*, "The Stick," which has not appeared in any other collection by Heaney, merits special attention. The subject of the poem is a walking stick that once belonged to Charles Stewart Parnell, the nineteenth-century Irish Nationalist politician, which has now, after passing through numerous hands, been handed down to Heaney. The stick, however, is no longer a symbol of the politician, but of the poet—not a symbol of service, but of refusing to serve. Entirely unlike a "rod of correction," the "knot and the curl / And the shine of the grain / Come clean in your palm / Like a *non serviam*."⁷⁷ Reading these lines, one thinks again of Stephen Dedalus, who refuses to "serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church," and instead chooses to "fly by [the] nets" of "nationality, language, religion."⁷⁸ The stick now signifies imaginative freedom and the artist's imperative to forge his own path. But Heaney frets over who will succeed him as its owner:

Now it's mine to pass on

⁷⁷ Since this volume has no pagination, I am unable to give page references. See previous footnote for full citation information.

⁷⁸ Joyce, *Portrait* 238, 196.

I don't want this baton

Getting into the hands

Of what Mandelstam called

'The symphonic police'.

Here, Heaney makes reference to the 1933 essay "Conversation about Dante," where Mandelstam compares the poet to an orchestra conductor, an analogy in which the baton symbolizes the poet's creative authority over the poem as an event unfolding in time and in language. The poet is at once summoner of sound and servant to it:

The chemical nature of orchestral sonorities finds its expression in the dance of the conductor, who has his back to the audience. And this baton is far from being an external, administrative accessory or a *sui generis* symphonic police which could be abolished in an ideal state. It is nothing other than a dancing chemical formula that integrates reactions comprehensible to the ear.⁷⁹

Language speaks through the poet, but the poet also has some autonomy over the way his audience receives that language. His relation to language is symbiotic. The "symphonic police," then, are those who would deprive the poet of that symbiosis, who would rule over language with the baton, and who wouldn't allow language to form itself in the poet's ear. Instead, these "symphonic police" would dictate the sounds, forms, and themes that the audience hears, censoring the poet-conductor's musicality and originality.

⁷⁹ *The Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam*, trans. Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin, 1973 (New York: NYRB, 2004) 136.

So, rather than end up in the hands of the “symphonic police,” Heaney would prefer that
it go

To some finder or keeper,
Some rapt son or daughter
Astray like Aeneas

Conducting himself
By the light of the leaves.

The stick would be better placed with one who wanders in verse, who opens himself or
herself to the language, who “conduct[s] himself / By the light of the leaves”—not by
forcing order onto the symphony of language, but by surrendering to its natural sonics.

I’d see it released

Back into the thickets
And thick of the language,
Into that *selva*

Selvaggia e forte
We cull and come through
As poets, if we’re lucky.

The Irish walking stick, passed from politician to poet, becomes a symbol of the poet’s
craft, opposed to tyranny of language and interpreted through three of Heaney’s aesthetic
guiding spirits. Heaney’s broad range of reference here, which includes Mandelstam’s

conductor, Virgil's wandering Aeneas, and Dante's "wild and strong forest" ("*selva / Selvaggia e forte*"), indicates how far he has journeyed into the world of poetry, though it all began with a stick cut in the Avondale Woods of County Wicklow.

The first three poems of *Electric Light* might give one the impression that Heaney has re-rooted himself in exclusively Irish themes, but as the volume proceeds it opens outward, incorporating Virgilian eclogues, a translation from Pushkin, elegies for Eastern European poets, several lyrics which bear the imprint of *Beowulf*, and several more that are set in Greece and the former Yugoslavia. In the volume's opening poem, "At Toomebridge," Heaney returns to the landscape near his *omphalos* at Mossbawn, but the poem in no way constitutes a retrogression to the monologic voice of his early books. On the contrary, Heaney self-consciously examines in this poem how the aesthetic significance a single place can change so much for him over time. In the first stanza, Heaney sets the scene in an ahistorical, eternal present, describing the site in purely physical terms:

Where the flat water
Came pouring over the weir out of Lough Neagh
As if it had reached an edge of the flat earth
And fallen shining to the continuous
Present of the Bann. (*EL* 3)

But in the poem's second and final stanza, Heaney summons history, reminding himself that, in his early, pre-Troubles work, history rarely figured in his art:

Where the checkpoint used to be.
Where the rebel boy was hanged in '98.

Where negative ions in the open air
Are poetry to me. As once before
The slime and silver of the fattened eel. (*EL* 3)

His poetry must now account for the “negative ions” of Troubles-era checkpoints—which it need not have done earlier in his career—as well as for the history that precedes and parallels the Troubles in the North: in this case, the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen against the British establishment. In his early work, on the other hand, the “slime and silver of the fattened eel” were enough to summon his poetic energies, as they did in his “Lough Neagh Sequence” of *Door into the Dark*, where Heaney described the traditional techniques of eel fisherman in the Northern Irish lough, whose craft had changed little since time immemorial. The “continuous / Present” is no more, and his poetry must now accomplish two new tasks: include a colonial past and imply a postcolonial future.

As *Electric Light* continues, Heaney offers poems rooted in and out of Ireland—poems again set in familiar sites like Mossbawn and Glanmore, and poems that open outward into the “known world,” as Heaney terms the places and cultures that he encounters outside of Ireland. Among the latter group is the poem “Known World” itself, in which Heaney recounts, partly from a notebook he kept, memories of his travels in the Balkans at the time of the Struga Poetry Festival, held in Macedonia in 1978. “In Belgrade,” writes Heaney in the poem, “I had found my west-in-east,” implying that he had discovered a way of connecting his personal experience as an Irishman to the writings of the Eastern Europeans who have so affected him; he could suddenly perceive clearly the culture out of which they had sprung and now saw similarities between that culture and his own (*EL* 23). Macedonia, like Ulster, is a hybrid place, where

Christianity meets Islam, where languages and cultures intermingle. In the sequence “Sonnets from Hellas,” Heaney journeys through the past and present of Greece, finding ancient myths looming behind the everyday coming and goings of contemporary countryfolk. Yet even in Greece he encounters Ireland, as when he views “Mount Parnassus placid on the skyline” in the final sonnet, entitled “Desfina,” and is reminded of mountains at home (*EL 50*). He re-designates the Greek mountain in his native idiom:

Slieve na mBard, Knock Filiocht, Ben Duan.

We gaelicized new names for Poetry Hill

As we wolfed down horta, tarama and houmos

At sunset in the farmyard, drinking ouzos,

Pretending not to hear the Delphic squeal

Of the steel-haired *cailleach* in the scullery. (*EL 50*)

Greece and Ireland, as sites of poetic inspiration, merge in this sonnet, as do the everyday and the mythic. In another sonnet, “The Gaeltacht,” something of the opposite occurs, where it is not Ireland that occupies the foreign, but the foreign that occupies Ireland. The poem opens with Heaney’s nostalgia for his young manhood, when he and others traveled in County Donegal, where Irish is spoken by the natives:

I wish, *mon vieux*, that you and Barlo and I

Were back in Rosguill, on the Atlantic Drive,

And that it was again nineteen sixty

And Barlo was alive (*EL 51*)

As Heaney intimates a few stanzas later, this opening—and indeed this entire poem—echoes one of Dante’s sonnets, entitled “Dante to Guido Cavalcanti,” which opens in a similar fashion:

Guido, I would like that you and Lapo and I
would be taken by enchantment
and placed in a vessel so any wind
at sea would move to your and my will.⁸⁰

The three that Dante Alighieri imagines in the boat are himself, Guido Cavalcanti, and Lapo Gianni, all of whom are associated with the Tuscan style of poetry called *dolce stil nuovo*; theirs was a union both poetic and platonic. Heaney closes the sonnet by invoking Dante and company in their sea vessel to refine the picture of his own remembered union and imagined reunion:

And it would be great too
If we could see ourselves, if the people we are now
Could hear what we were saying, and if this sonnet

In imitation of Dante’s, where he’s set free
In a boat with Lapo and Guido, with their girlfriends in it,
Could be the wildtrack of our gabble above the sea. (EL 51)

Heaney’s uniting of old friends results in another, poetic union: that of himself and Dante, a modern Irishman and a medieval Italian. Likewise, the two seascapes and

⁸⁰ “Dante to Guido Cavalcanti,” *The Complete Lyric Poems of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. Marc Cirigliano (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 1997) 123. This edition provides the Italian poems on the verso pages and Cirigliano’s English translation on the recto pages. The original of this poem is entitled “Dante a Guido Cavalcanti,” and the first line reads “*Guido, i’ vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io*” (122).

landscapes, distant in time and space, settle onto one another. In “Known World,” “Sonnets from Hellas,” and “The Gaeltacht”—as in many other poems of *Electric Light*—the known world and the emerald isle are revealed to be coincident.

Of the poems in *Electric Light* that bear the imprint of the *Beowulf* project, which Heaney was finishing up while he wrote the poems collected in this volume, two are worth looking at closely: “Arion” and “The Border Campaign.” “Arion” is a translation from Russian of a short poem by the nineteenth-century poet Aleksandr Pushkin. The first six lines of Heaney’s version of the poem give a sense of its sound:

We were all hard at it in the boat,
Some of us up tightening sail,
Some down at the heave and haul
Of the rowing benches, deeply cargoed,
Steady keeled, our passage silent,
The helmsman buoyant at the helm; (*EL* 87)

While not every line of this poem adheres to the pattern of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, Heaney’s recent translation of *Beowulf* clearly influences the way in which he re-voices Pushkin in English. The frequent alliteration of ‘S’ and ‘H’ sounds, often within the same line, brings to mind the aural qualities of Anglo-Saxon prosody, in which words within a single line were required to alliterate : “Some of us up tightening sail, / Some down at the heave and haul”. Moreover, Heaney employs an almost entirely Anglo-Saxon vocabulary in this translation from Pushkin—there are very few Latinate words here—and several lines include a mid-line caesura, another essential feature of Anglo-Saxon verse: “Steady keeled, || our passage silent”, and later in the poem, “Sudden wind,

|| a maelstrom”. Reading this poem in Heaney’s version, one can’t help but think of another translation into English: Ezra Pound’s Canto I, which begins with his version of Book 11 of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Pound too translated Homer into an Anglo-Saxon-attuned modern English, and the themes and vocabulary of his opening canto are similar to Heaney’s “Arion”:

And then went down to the ship,
Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also
Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward
Bore us onward with bellying canvas,
Circe’s this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.
Then sat we amidships, wind jamming the tiller,
Thus with stretched sail, we went over sea till day’s end.⁸¹

The resonances between these two translations are clear: the tragic, maritime theme; the alliteration and caesuras; and the Germanic vocabulary—including some words that the two poems share, like “sea,” “keel,” “sail,” and “wind.” Pound hovers behind Heaney’s version of Pushkin, much in the same way that *Beowulf* hovers there too. Thus, Heaney’s “Arion” is cosmopolitan in multiple senses: it is a Russian poem translated into English by an Irish poet who chooses to allow his recent modernization of an Anglo-Saxon epic to color his language and who may be nodding to an American modernist poet who translated a portion of an Ancient Greek epic in much the same way.

⁸¹ *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, fourteenth printing (New York: New Directions, 1998) 3.

Heaney makes the connections to *Beowulf* much more overt in his poem “The Border Campaign,” which opens with a view of a government building in Derry that has recently been bombed by the IRA, whose pre-Troubles border campaign ran from 1956 to 1962:

Soot-streaks down the courthouse wall, a hole
Smashed in the roof, the rafters in the rain
Still smouldering (*EL* 21)

Immediately, the remembered destruction brings to Heaney’s mind the vicious battle in the mead-hall between Grendel and Beowulf. As a boy, writes Heaney, the very notion of an “attack” exhausted and terrified him:

It left me winded, left nothing between me
And the sky that moved beyond my boarder’s dormer
The way it would have moved the morning after
Savagery in Heorot, its reflection placid
In those waterlogged huge pawmarks Grendel left
On the breen to the marsh. (*EL* 21)

The adult poet, with the translation of *Beowulf* fresh in his mind, remembers how the IRA bombing unsettled him as a boy at St. Columb’s College, but this memory quickly gives way to analogous scenes from *Beowulf*, where the end of violence, the demise of a threat, is cause for celebration: “clan chiefs gallop[ed] down paths / To gaze at the talon Beowulf had nailed / High on the gable, the sky still moving grandly” (*EL* 21). These recalled images seem to anticipate the 1994 ceasefire that brought an end to the Troubles, and the subsequent relief that the poet no doubt felt. Though the young Heaney was not

yet aware of it, storied past (*Beowulf*) and unseen future (the Troubles) met in the moment he gazed upon the ruins of the courthouse: “All that was written / And to come I was a part of then” (EL 21). Heaney closes the poem with a refashioning of four lines, here arranged as three, from his *Beowulf* translation:

*Every nail and claw-spike, every spur
And hackle and hand-barb on that heathen brute
Was like a steel prong in the morning dew. (EL 21)*⁸²

The monster’s hand hanging on the gable, though the outcome of a violent encounter, signifies the beginning of peace. In this 1956 memory, the worst is yet to come, but as the mature poet composes this poem, the worst has surely passed. Heaney began to historicize and dialogize his home ground in *Wintering Out*, but in *Electric Light* he often takes that dialogism to a new level: sometimes, it no longer suffices to contextualize a site within Northern Irish history only, hybrid as it may be, for such history can often be better understood in dialogue with another place, another history, another myth. By reaching out of the contemporary North, in this instance to a medieval Anglo-Saxon epic, Heaney reveals new dimensions of his remembered boyhood spaces.

In the title poem of *Electric Light*, which is also the collection’s final poem, Heaney brings his cosmopolitan journey home again, full circle, to Mossbawn, where the family radio set that first tempted him to wander outward from his *omphalos* stands awaiting his return to the past. In this memory of childhood, the Northern Irish countryside has just been electrified:

If I stood on the bow-backed chair, I could reach

⁸² Cf. ll. 983-86 from Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: Farrar, 2000) 65: “Every nail, / claw-scale and spur, every spike / and welt on the hand of that heathen brute / was like barbed steel.”

The light switch. They let me and they watched me.

A touch of the little pip would work the magic.

A turn of their wireless knob and light came on

In the dial. They let me and they watched me

As I roamed at will the stations of the world. (*EL* 98)

Reading these lines, one thinks not only of the Nobel lecture, but also of “Oracle,” where the young Heaney, “lobe and larynx / of the mossy places,” is called out by the approaching adults from his perch within “the hollow trunk / of the willow tree” (*OG* 56). While one way to read that earlier poem is to see the ominousness of impending adolescence and manhood, another way is to recognize the adults who are closing in on him as his protectors. Similarly, in “Electric Light,” the repetition of the phrase “They let me and they watched me” offers reassurance that all is well in the world. And if the boy is ever to return to his *omphalos* as a man, then it must be located in a place of safety and love. Otherwise, his roots won’t hold.

Chapter 3

Derek Walcott: Cosmopolitanism and Multivocality

If the family farm at Mossbawn, in County Derry, is Seamus Heaney's omphalos—the navel of his world, the center of his artistic universe—then Derek Walcott's omphalos is the island of St. Lucia in the Windward Antilles. But while the arc of Heaney's career describes a continual outward movement, away from the omphalos while still remaining connected to it, Walcott's career has a different shape entirely: even in his very earliest poems, traces of cosmopolitanism are evident, likely because of the creolized nature of his native island. Indeed, St. Lucian society is definitively pluralist: at this Caribbean crossroads, cultures, languages, and races intermingle. Moreover, the racial and linguistic diversity of the island can both be traced directly to European colonialism. St. Lucia changed hands between the French and the English fourteen times until it was finally ceded to the United Kingdom in 1814, and because of these changes in colonial government, standard English, English Creole, and French Creole are all spoken on St. Lucia; Walcott uses all three in his poetry. The racial diversity of the island, as on virtually all of the islands in the West Indies, came as a result of the slave trade, and the Afro-Caribbean majority of St. Lucia continues to have a considerable impact on the island's culture, just as it always has.

In Heaney's essay on Walcott, "The Murmur of Malvern," he describes Walcott's 1979 poem "The Schooner *Flight*" as "epoch-making," claiming that Walcott had "found

a language woven out of dialect and literature, neither folksy nor condescending, a singular idiom evolved out of one man's inherited divisions and obsessions."¹ The language that Heaney praises has developed organically out of Walcott's experience—it comes out of his multivocality, which is the defining feature of his art. In Walcott's poetry, multivocality appears in several ways: as multiple voices within a single poem; as variations in linguistic registers, either within a single poem or among a group poems; and as dialogue between different cultures—for example, African and European. These various kinds of multivocality sometimes exist within the postcolonial paradigm and sometimes challenge it. His many voices reveal tensions within the poet and within his culture, pulling him this way or that, but, as Heaney explains, Walcott does not allow those forces to derail his poetry; on the contrary, he makes “a theme of choice and the impossibility of choosing.”² In this chapter, I explore Walcott's multivocality and its relation to his cosmopolitanism throughout his career, from his earliest poems to *Omeros* (1990) and Walcott's most recent book, *The Prodigal* (2004). Along the way, I address some of the major themes of his early and mid-career poetry, after which I consider one of Walcott's collections, *The Fortunate Traveller*, as a representative example of his cosmopolitan poetics.

1. “Nameless I came among olives of algae”: Two Early Poems

In one of his earliest verses, “As John to Patmos,” Walcott envisions St. Lucia as a place of exile, akin to the Greek island Patmos, on which John the Divine, himself living in exile, authored the Book of Revelation. This poem, which initially appeared in

¹ Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: Selected Prose, 1978-1987* (New York: Farrar, 1988) 23.

² Heaney, *Government* 23.

Walcott's first collection, *25 Poems* (1948), and which has been given little attention by critics, is crucial in that it allows the reader an early glimpse of the way that Walcott perceives his placement, culturally and geographically, within the wider world:

As John to Patmos, among the rocks and the blue, live air, hounded

His heart to peace, ...

...

So am I welcomed richer by these blue scapes, Greek there,

So I shall voyage no more from home; may I speak here.³

The analogy that Walcott draws in these opening stanzas is between John on Patmos and himself on St. Lucia.⁴ But the key difference between their two situations is that the place to which Walcott has been exiled doubles as his home.⁵ This notion of native island as location of exile can be read in two ways: first, as the result of living in a provincial outpost that is distant from the metropolitan centers of the European cultures in which Walcott self-consciously participates; and second, as the result of being dislocated from the continent—Africa—that is the historical homeland of his black foremothers and forefathers (though he is also part white). Indeed, in a much later poem, “North and South,” Walcott writes: “I accept my function / as a colonial upstart at the end of an empire, / a single, circling, homeless satellite.”⁶ But Walcott surely does not express such a sentiment without irony, for by that point in his career—the early

³ *Collected Poems, 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar 1986) 5. Hereafter *CP*.

⁴ In fact, the island is not named in the poem, but since “As John to Patmos” first appeared in *25 Poems* (1948), Walcott's first collection, before he had ever left St. Lucia, one can safely assume that the setting is his native island.

⁵ Timothy Hofmeister analyzes the way in which Walcott manipulates a traditional figure of speech in “As John to Patmos” in order simultaneously to establish affinity between Aegean and Antillean islands and to affirm their difference. See Hofmeister, “Classical Analogy as Discursive Act: A Reading of Derek Walcott's ‘As John to Patmos’,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 96.2 (Spring 1997): 275-92.

⁶ *The Fortunate Traveller* (New York: Farrar, 1981) 11. Hereafter *FT*.

nineteen-eighties—he had become much more than a “colonial upstart.” In continuing to cast himself in the role of the provincial, however, he keeps himself an outsider and provides himself with the opportunity to explore fundamental issues, namely, those relevant to life in the postcolonial developing world, such as the cultural positioning of the former provinces against the former metropole. This is a key concern for Walcott, and it also preoccupies many other West Indian writers and thinkers: what is the relationship of the Caribbean to the cultures of Europe, and for that matter, to the cultures of Africa? Such questions pervade Walcott’s work and reveal themselves to be especially complex as they become tied up with issues of history, race, and language.

When Walcott identifies himself as a “single, circling, homeless satellite,” in one sense this is an absurd statement, since he clearly does have a home—the rich, diverse culture of St. Lucia and the West Indies more broadly—yet in another sense he is in fact “homeless” in that his upbringing had oriented him toward Europe, at least in part, while his racial makeup and regional loyalties made it likely that he would remain a “satellite,” not a fully rooted participant in European culture. In fact, it is this self-conscious two-mindedness that draws many readers to Walcott: his acknowledgement of European cultural influence and simultaneous rootedness in the Caribbean was, when he began his literary career, virtually unprecedented. Other West Indian writers who began grappling in the mid-twentieth century with similar issues, such as the Trinidadian V. S. Naipaul and the Barbadian Edward Kamau Brathwaite, are contemporaries of Walcott, but the West Indian literary tradition before them was on the whole underdeveloped and Eurocentric. (Of course, a rich oral tradition has long thrived in the Caribbean, and Brathwaite draws heavily on that tradition, as does Walcott to a lesser degree.)

In fact, Walcott made a conscious choice as a young man to remain aesthetically rooted in his native St. Lucia. He and his close friend, the painter Dunstan St. Omer, made a pact to stay on the island and devote themselves to representing it in art, as he recounts in his long, autobiographical poem *Another Life*: “But drunkenly, or secretly, we swore, / ... / that we would never leave the island / until we had put down, in paint, in words,” everything that they considered their home (*CP* 194). Indeed, Walcott’s youthful, perhaps idealistic, devotion to St. Lucia is reflected in “As John to Patmos” as well, where he swears to “voyage no more from home,” but to “speak here” and to “praise livelong, the living and the brown dead” (*CP* 5). He thought himself bound to the island, its history, and its people. In truth, Walcott has not stayed on St. Lucia his entire life—he has lived in Jamaica, Trinidad, New York, and Boston—though he remains spiritually connected to his native culture and, since the early 1990s, has spent a good part of each year on the island. Moreover, St. Lucia plays a larger aesthetic role in Walcott’s poetry than does any other place. From his earliest volumes through his most recent, St. Lucia, though a comparatively tiny island, is an enormous presence in his work.

The apostle John might seem an unusual analogue for the St. Lucian poet, but there are several ways in which this poem prefigures many later poems in Walcott’s body of work. In another sense, the comparison to John is a perfectly natural place for Walcott to begin, since John was in fact exiled to an island, and it was on that island that the apostle had his revelation. Although the notion of poetry as divination, implied by the comparison, does not recur in Walcott’s art (or if it does recur, it does not develop as a major theme within his poetry), the way in which Walcott enters into dialogue with a

canonical Western text becomes a defining feature of his work. In fact, such dialogue is a foundational building block of Walcott's cosmopolitanism, most notably in his multiple rewritings of classical myth, and of Homer in particular. Moreover, Walcott returns to the Bible frequently in his poetry, especially in the first decades of his career, though he doesn't come back to the Bible's closing book, but to its opening book, Genesis: Adam, as the first human, becomes a metaphor for those making a new beginning in the New World—Walcott reanimates him as “the first inhabitant of a second paradise.”⁷ And in fact, both Adam and John, as Walcott presents them, are exile figures like himself. This “second paradise,” as Walcott envisions it, is literally a new world, where every element of culture—including language, mythology, and literature—must be created anew, even though this re-creation is ironically founded upon the intermingling of European languages and texts with non-European languages and folkways. The irony here is that Adam, a figure who had, in his first incarnation, entered an unpeopled world, devoid of history, has now been reincarnated by Walcott into a world troubled by the violence of history, and his new beginning in a “second paradise” must necessarily be built on the foundations of African and European cultural memory.

This idea points to an aspect of Walcott's work at which many critics have taken umbrage: in their view, the postcolonial artist ought to reject the culture of the European metropole entirely, forging his art from exclusively native sources. Walcott would surely object to such a prescription, for he considers himself, as well as all other black men and women in the Caribbean, no more “native” to the islands than the European colonizers. On the contrary, their position in the New World is as exilic as that of white Europeans.

⁷ Derek Walcott, “The Figure of Crusoe,” 1965, *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993) 35.

Whereas many of his contemporaries embraced African revivalism in the middle and late decades of the twentieth century, Walcott sought instead to forge an art that acknowledges and incorporates the troubling history of colonialism *in toto*. He considers the English language and the masterpieces of the European canon as much a part of his heritage as the Middle Passage, Carnival, and the St. Lucian francophone patois—a language spoken almost exclusively by those of African descent.

“As John to Patmos” also hints at a topic to which Walcott returns again and again throughout his career: namely, the way in which landscape gives shape to language and culture. In the third stanza of this poem, the Caribbean island, simultaneously a site of exile and a new home for its displaced residents appears as an empty, Adamic space in which the beauty of nature allows for the creation of something new:

This island is heaven—away from the dustblown blood of cities;
See the curve of the bay, watch the straggling flower, pretty is
The wing'd sound of trees, the sparse-powdered sky, when lit is
The night. For beauty has surrounded
Its black children, and freed them of homeless ditties. (CP 5)

Granted, Walcott only hints in this stanza at the interconnections between landscape, language, and culture—a theme which he explores much more fully and expertly in later poems like “Names” and “Sainte Lucie” in *Sea Grapes* (1976)—but it is worth noting that even here, in one of his earliest verses, Walcott already had such correspondences on his mind. Though the “black children” of St. Lucia live in exile, like John on Patmos, the natural wildness of the tropics “is heaven” for them and has a way of erasing, or at least alleviating, history. Tropical fertility is set against “the dustblown blood of cities”—and

while cities seem to be associated with the slave trade and with European civilization, the tropical landscape has somehow “freed” St. Lucians of their “homeless ditties.” It is as though their homelessness, a product of slavery, is cured by the island’s wilderness; the supposedly empty Caribbean becomes a second home, a tabula rasa on which a new history may be written.

Two formal features of this third stanza distinguish it from the other stanzas in the poem: the remaining three stanzas consist of four lines, while this one consists of five, and the penultimate line of this stanza is anomalous in that its final word does not rhyme with any other lines nearby. In fact, all of the other stanzas are made up either of pairs of rhymed couplets or of lines in which all four end-rhymes coincide. (Without its anomalous extra line, this stanza’s four remaining lines would rhyme with one another as well.) Because these formal irregularities cause it to stand out, the third stanza may be the key to interpreting the entire poem, extending the analogy between John the Divine and Walcott to include the people of St. Lucia. The final word—“surrounded”—of the anomalous line (“... For beauty has surrounded / Its black children, and freed them of homeless ditties”) seems to refer back to the end-rhymes of the opening stanza, which initiates the comparison of the two writers on their respective islands:

As John to Patmos, among the rocks and the blue, live air, hounded
His heart to peace, as here surrounded
By the strewn-silver on waves, the wood’s crude hair, the rounded
Breasts of the milky bays, ... (CP 5)

Indeed, the word “surrounded” completes both the second line of the opening stanza and the anomalous line in the third stanza, in the first case referring to the poet in his

surroundings, in the second to the poet's people in theirs. The correspondence between the end-rhymes in the first stanza and the word "surrounded" in the later stanza implies a thematic connection between them as well: as is John in his exile on Patmos, so are the people of St. Lucia on their island.

Despite the troubling history connected with this island in particular and with the entire Caribbean in general—the genocide of native peoples, the fact that those of African descent owe their very presence here to the slave trade—St. Lucians can find solace, and even a sense of home, in the natural beauty of the island. In this poem, which was written on the eve of St. Lucia's independence, Walcott seems to imply that something new has begun, that a new culture has arisen, one distinct from those of Africa or even Europe.⁸ A people who had once felt themselves "homeless" have begun to feel at home. Yet it remains unclear at this early moment in Walcott's career precisely what such a culture looks like from the poet's point of view—how St. Lucia relates to Africa and to Europe, to other West Indian islands, and to what extent those relationships are relevant.

In fact, "As John to Patmos" has much more to do with the poet's dedication to his people than it has to do with the people themselves. The reader is merely given to understand that the islanders are "black" or "brown," and that natural "beauty has surrounded" them, but Walcott devotes the bulk of the poem to descriptions of place

⁸ Although Saint Lucia did not gain independence from Great Britain until February 22, 1979, nationalist movements were widespread throughout the West Indies beginning in the late 1940s, inspired in part by the independence and partition of India in 1947. In the fall of 1947, delegates from the various British-governed islands met in Jamaica for the First Conference on British West Indian Federation. The Federation officially began its existence only in 1958, and it fell apart by the end of 1961. Beginning in 1962, the islands began to claim independence one by one—Jamaica was the first, and Trinidad and Tobago quickly followed suit. Even after St. Lucia's independence from Great Britain, it remained part of the British Commonwealth. See Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001) 19-20.

solely as they relate to himself and to John. Indeed, only a single sentence, spanning two lines, makes direct reference to the people that share the island with Walcott.⁹ But the poet does refer obliquely to the other islanders in the final couplet, where he asserts his loyalty to them, asking them to hear “What I swear now, as John did / To praise livelong, the living and the brown dead” (*CP* 5). In essence, this is a rooted cosmopolitan pledge: to remain true, as an artist, to one’s native, colonial culture—the horrors of its past and the vibrancy of its present—while doing so within the literary context of the Western canon, “as John did.”

Indeed, the poem contains themes that will become dominant in Walcott’s mature poetry and serves as an early example of his rooted cosmopolitanism. Among the most significant of these themes is the parallel between the Greek and Caribbean archipelagoes, which Walcott develops over the course of his career and which culminates, no doubt, with his book-length poem *Omeros* (1990). In his comparison of the two archipelagoes, Walcott means for the Greek islands to stand for canonical Western culture, often with specific reference to classical myth and literature, though sometimes, as here, to Christianity. In fact, dialogue with the Western canon becomes a hallmark of Walcott’s poetry, although in the poem “As John to Patmos” that dialogue appears curiously one-sided: the voice in which the poet writes here offers no clue as to his culture or ethnicity. In order for dialogue between Europe and the New World to exist, an American voice must be present, yet here Walcott merely mimics the voices of his European predecessors. To a certain degree, this comes as no surprise, since Walcott was educated in the English colonial system, and at this point in his life, as an apprentice poet, he is surely seeking to discover his own voice by writing in the style of those

⁹ “For beauty has surrounded / Its black children, and freed them of homeless ditties.”

canonical European poets whom he encountered in school.¹⁰ As Walcott continues to hone his craft over the decades, however, the dialogue between the European voices of his education and the Caribbean voices that surround him becomes much better defined, often taking the form of an exchange that incorporates standard English and a West Indian dialect. In “As John to Patmos,” the absence of an explicit Caribbean voice emerges as a key variation from the later pattern.

The theme of native space as place of exile recurs often in Walcott’s art. Throughout his career, he often defines St. Lucia—and the West Indies more generally—against Europe and Africa, so it comes as no surprise that, when he writes about his homeland, he describes it as though its inhabitants were at once locals and strangers. Even in this early poem, one sees the poet’s devotion to his home, yet that home appears only as a verdant landscape, almost entirely devoid of people. Of course, the natural surroundings that the poet describes here will continue to be thematically significant, even when the unpeopled landscape becomes peopled.¹¹ The culture of St. Lucia, however, has yet to occupy the central role in Walcott’s poetry that it comes to occupy later. Although Walcott vows in the second stanza of “As John to Patmos” to “voyage no more from home,” one has the distinct sense that his rootedness in the culture has yet to

¹⁰ Indeed, Stewart Brown has written that many of Walcott’s early poems were “blatantly ‘in the style of’ various masters,” and even quotes the poet himself as saying that this “whole course of imitations and adaptations was simply a method of apprenticeship” (Brown, *The Art of Derek Walcott* 15). Walcott’s apprenticeship, Brown claims, was an “enabling mask” which “furthered Walcott’s career as the poet, the man of letters, in a society which placed small value on poetry as an end or art for itself but appreciated the spectacle of a local prodigy flaunting his colonial education and drawing praise from the metropolis or its representatives” (16).

¹¹ The theme of the dominance of nature becomes especially important in the poems that involve the figures of Robinson Crusoe, whose exile signifies a European presence in the supposedly empty, wild landscape of the West Indies. Ironically, black West Indians were as much “exiles” as the Europeans who brought them there in chains, and their new surroundings were no more familiar to them than to the Europeans.

find its expression in his work. Only when multivocal, particularly St. Lucian voices appear in Walcott's work does the rooted cosmopolitan mode become fully realized.

Several of the main themes that had been sounded in "As John to Patmos" are picked up again in "Origins," which alone constitutes the second part of Walcott's *Selected Poems* (1964). Key among those themes are the dialogue between the West Indian poet and European culture, the analogy drawn between the Caribbean and the Aegean, and the notion of an entire culture existing simultaneously at home and in exile. The poem begins with the speaker's emergence from nowhere—from "nothing"—which almost certainly refers to V. S. Naipaul's famous assertion that "History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies."¹² The speaker of "Origins" seems to speak on behalf of the residents, especially the non-European residents, of the West Indies—those whom the Trinidadian novelist accuses of creating "nothing"—and the opening stanza satirizes their supposed lack of history:

The flowering breaker detonates its surf.

White bees hiss in the coral skull.

Nameless I came among olives of algae,

Fœtus of plankton, I remember nothing. (*CP* 11)

The first two images here—of the breaking wave and of the "white bees" buzzing inside a skull-like piece of coral—may be read as references to European colonists in the Americas, whose landfall was indisputably violent, like the "breaker" that "detonates its surf" upon impact, since they steadily eradicated nearly all of the natives as they built

¹² V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, 1962 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 209.

new economies on the usurped land.¹³ Thus, the “coral skull,” though literally a chunk of coral that has been occupied by enterprising bees, ought to bring to mind the actual skulls of the long dead native peoples of the West Indies, as should the “skulls of crackling shells” that “[crunch] underfoot” as the speaker walks along the beach at the close of this first section (*CP* 12). Yet even this interpretation oversimplifies the poet’s intended meaning, since the modifier “flowering” in the first line implies that something beautiful may grow even out of destruction. The second half of this stanza finds the speaker—who, as I have already claimed, speaks not only for himself, but for all West Indians of color—emerging “nameless” from “olives of algae” and “plankton,” as if from the primordial ooze, remembering “nothing” of his origins. He has come ashore, amnesiac, in the wake of the “flowering breaker” that preceded him. (One thinks immediately of the African slaves, forbidden to speak their own language or practice their own religion, whom the European colonists brought with them.) He may have no memories, but as we discover in the second stanza, he soon acquires a knowledge of history and culture—though they may not be his own or even those of the original inhabitants of the Antilles:

Clouds, log of Colon,

I learnt your annals of ocean,

Of Hector, bridler of horses,

Achilles, Aeneas, Ulysses,

But “Of that fine race of people which came off the mainland

¹³ Because Walcott does not make direct reference to a specific Caribbean island in “Origins,” it is impossible to say whether the poet has in mind the Carib, Taino, Igneri, or other indigenous people of the Caribbean. In a quotation that appears in the second stanza of the poem, there is a mention of Icacos, a Trinidadian cape, which would imply that the natives in question are either Caribs or Ignieri, but since that reference is doubly removed, throughout my reading of the “Origins” I refer to them simply as “West Indian natives.”

To greet Christobal as he rounded Icacos,”

Blank pages turn in the wind. (CP 11)

These clouds, like the waves of the first stanza, move freely over the ocean between the Eastern and Western hemispheres, and thus come to signify the movement of Western culture between Europe and the Americas. (Cristóbal Colón is, of course, the way in which speakers of Spanish refer to Christopher Columbus.) The clouds might also have signified the movement between *Africa* and the Americas, but European colonial values demanded that only European culture be preserved, so the African story became largely forgotten. I say “story” here because it corresponds to the metaphor of the book, which appears at least three times in this stanza: the ship’s “log” that Columbus kept; the “annals” of European history and literature; and the absence of native culture as represented by the “blank pages [that] turn in the wind.” Again, as in the poem “As John to Patmos,” Walcott enters into dialogue with Europe, and again that dialogue finds its basis in literature. But here we encounter an irony that had been wholly absent from the earlier lyric, for, in “Origins,” the “annals of ... Hector, ... Achilles, Aeneas, Ulysses”—Homeric and Virgilian heroes—which the poet had “learnt,” are set in ironic contradistinction to the “blank pages” of the native inhabitants of the islands. Indeed, the presence in the poem of West Indian natives on any “page” is restricted to quotations (the first of which I have given above) from what is apparently a European text, referred to in the poem only as “Bulbrook,” as though the only way in which the natives might become present in history is for a European to speak for them.¹⁴

¹⁴ The text that Walcott has in mind is most likely John A. Bulbrook’s *The Aborigines of Trinidad* (Port of Spain: Royal Victoria Institute Museum, 1960). In the portion of “Origins” that I have been discussing, Walcott gives a quotation from Bulbrook referring to “Icacos,” which is in fact a cape on the southwestern tip of Trinidad that Columbus may indeed have “rounded” when he landed on the island in 1498.

In terms of cosmopolitan dialogue, the second stanza of “Origins” seems to mark a departure from Walcott’s usual dialogic model, since the poet himself appears absent from the conversation here; he does, however, remain sympathetic to both groups—as a reader of, and therefore participant in, European culture, and as someone not visibly European, who may therefore be identified with the Caribbean natives. Indeed, if we read the first stanza against the second, the void left by the natives appears to be filled by Walcott (and those for whom he speaks) as he emerges from nowhere: while the natives have disappeared, like “blank pages [that] turn in the wind,” the poet comes “nameless” into the world, from “nothing,” just after the explosive “breaker detonates its surf,” thereby creating blankness. Although he stands at a remove from both European and native West Indian cultures, the speaker of the poem nonetheless “reads” them both; therefore, he does in a certain sense participate in the dialogue between these two cultures. In fact, his positioning as a reader of a European text about “that fine race of people”—the natives—centuries after their genocide creates the conditions in which the dialogue may take place. Yet one has the distinct sense that this dialogue actually concerns the poet and his people, not their native predecessors, and not Europeans. After all, the poem is entitled “Origins,” and Walcott works here to define who contemporary West Indians are and out of which cultural contexts they have emerged. Pre-colonial and colonial history most certainly bear on these definitions, yet up to this point in the poem, one racial group is notably absent from the conversation: Africans.

Therefore, “that fine race of people which came off the mainland / To greet” Columbus may well be the Trinidadian “aborigines” of Bulbrook’s title. Bulbrook also published an earlier book entitled *The Ierian Race* (Port of Spain: Historical Society of Trinidad and Tobago, 1940). Both of these works are cited in Maximilian C. Forte’s “Writing the Caribs Out: The Construction and Demystification of the ‘Deserted Island’ Thesis for Trinidad” in *Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies* 6.3 (Aug. 2004-Aug. 2005) and can be found online at <<http://www.centrelink.org/forteatlantic2004.pdf>>.

In the poem's first section, which I have been discussing exclusively up to this point, the only place in which one might detect an Afro-Caribbean presence is in the final two lines of the opening stanza—and there only because one knows that the poet himself is part black, and only on the condition that one accepts the notion that the poet speaks for others of African extraction as well as for himself: “Nameless I came among olives of algae, / Fœtus of plankton, I remember nothing.” Memory, especially collective memory, is a key theme in “Origins.” Even when the poet speaks in the first person, as in the lines that I have just quoted, he clearly implies that he represents an entire people. In the second section of the poem, one discovers that, for black West Indians, collective memory of their racial homeland may not be accessible, for that memory is shrouded “in cerecloth,” “embalmed in an amber childhood” (*CP* 12). It seems that the poet's and his people's memory of African culture remains frozen in a state of immaturity, and thinking back on it is akin to thinking back through death. He occupies a space “between the Greek and African pantheon,” in a culture that has been orphaned, and he does not know where to look for its parentage (*CP* 12). This second section ends with the poet seeking out an African foremother, apparently a slave transported from the river country of West Africa to the islands of the West Indies:

Now, the sibyl I honour, mother of memory,
Bears in her black hand a white frangipani, with berries of blood,
She gibbers with the cries
Of the Guinean odyssey.

These islands have drifted from anchorage

Like gommiers loosened from Guinea,
Far from the childhood of rivers. (*CP* 12)

Walcott makes two botanical references here that are crucial to understanding this passage: “frangipani,” or plumeria, is a small, multi-branching tree, native to the West Indies and Central America, with clusters of red or white flowers that cover the tree; and “gommiers,” or birch-gum trees, also native to the Americas, are large deciduous trees, with shiny, reddish-brown bark, that yield a strong-smelling resin. (When Walcott writes that his “mother of memory, / Bears in her black hand a white frangipani,” he surely has in mind the flower, not the tree itself.) In both of these cases, the poet writes within an African context, but the specific botanical details that illuminate that context are peculiarly American. The African sibyl, in transit to the West Indies—having never been there before—holds a Caribbean flower in her hand.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the poet describes the Antillean archipelago through the image of trees drifting westward on the sea from Africa—but the particular trees in the metaphor are in fact native not to Africa but to the West Indies. The plant imagery in this section is typically rooted cosmopolitanist: even when engaging with a culture that is foreign to him, the rooted cosmopolitan uses what is familiar in his native environment to decode the new and the unfamiliar. Walcott seems to assert here that, when reclaiming history and memory, one must remain partial to the present. The rootedness of the gommier or the frangipani comes to represent the rootedness of the people of the West Indies.

In the second half of “Origins,” Walcott presents the sea as a force that unites the Old World and the New World, even though it also signifies the gulf between them. He

¹⁵ It is surely no coincidence that Walcott uses the phrase “Guinean odyssey” to refer to the sibyl’s journey, in that it pairs an outmoded adjective referring to a part of Africa with a noun deriving from the title of an ancient Greek epic, since she, like the poet, remains caught “between the Greek and African pantheon.”

imagines that the two hemispheres have been sewn together by the trading ships— particularly by Columbus’s “caravels”—that hauled goods back and forth, but he also implies that black West Indians have lost the connection with something that remains on the other side of the sea:

The plunging throats of porpoises simulating, O sea,
The retching hulks of caravels stitching two worlds,
Like the whirr of my mother’s machine in a Sabbath bedroom,
Like needles of cicadas stitching the afternoon’s shroud.
Death of old gods in the river snakes dried from the ceiling.
Jahveh and Zeus rise from the foam’s beard at daybreak. (*CP* 14)

Throughout the poem, Walcott depicts Africa as a land of rivers, which he contrasts with the West Indies, an archipelago that by its very nature is dominated by the sea. So the “old gods” whose death appears in “the river snakes dried from the ceiling” are surely African gods, while those who “rise from the foam’s beard at daybreak” are the gods whose presence the poet feels in the Caribbean. But “Jahveh and Zeus” need not necessarily define the culture, since their presence in the islands is as artificial as would be the presence of African deities. Both of them, however, exist in the West Indies as a legacy of European colonialism—one the “living God” of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the other a long since spiritually irrelevant god and, more importantly, an emblem of the Western literary canon. Jahveh and Zeus both occupy the cultural space in which the poet lives and writes. But that does not mean that making sense of the pluralist heritage of the West Indies comes naturally to him or to the other islanders. As the poet stands gazing at the sea and contemplating the absence of African gods and the presence of

European ones, his instinct prompts him to withdraw into himself, perhaps in search of a meaning that assimilates yet transcends the shards of civilization that have washed up at his feet: “The mind, among sea-wrack, sees its mythopoeic coast, / Seeks, like the polyp, to take root in itself” (*CP* 14).

Certainly, the only true possibility of survival and forward movement for a culture in exile, such as the African and European cultures of the Caribbean, can be found in renewal—in assembling the bits and pieces from the sundry traditions that it has inherited and then creating something new from the jumble. In the West Indies, language is one of the elements of culture in which such renewal has become most visible. Beginning even this early in his career, in the 1960s, Walcott incorporates unique colloquialisms from West Indian dialects. “Origins” is among the first poems in which language, though it occupies a place of importance on its own, stands also as a metaphor for the culture more broadly. In the poem’s fifth section, which I present here in its entirety, Walcott imagines the era when Africans first arrived in the islands and were forced to reshape their speech to communicate with European colonists and to accommodate the new landscape:

Was it not then we asked for a new song,
As Colon’s vision gripped the berried branch?
For the names of bees in the surf of white frangipani,
With hard teeth breaking the bitter almonds of consonants,
Shaping new labials to the curl of the wave,
Christening the pomegranate with a careful tongue,
Pommes de Cythère, bitter Cytherean apple.

And God's eye glazed by an indifferent blue. (*CP* 14)

The bees in this section's third line have already appeared earlier in the poem, at the opening of the first section, where they emitted a collective "hiss in the coral skull" (*CP* 11)—an image meant to recall the genocide of West Indian natives—and where they were therefore representative of death and danger. Their presence here underscores the urgency of the situation for those of African background, since black men and women who fail to adapt may suffer the same fate that the natives did. And adaptation here means linguistic adaptation: abandoning the native African language and adopting a new European one. That is what Walcott has in mind when he refers to "a new song" in the first line of this section; from the context, however, we cannot discern whether the "new song" is meant to replace the European tongue, or whether the "new song" and the European tongue are, in fact, one in the same.

The fourth and fifth lines of this section each describe the process of language acquisition, but the alliteration and imagery used in the fourth line to describe this process clashes with the very different alliteration and imagery of the fifth. The fourth line, with its hard consonants—its Ts and Ks—represents the violence of language learning, of forcing one's lips, teeth, and tongue to conform to a new set of speech sounds. In content, too, this line contains images of linguistic violence: "hard teeth" that must break "the bitter almonds of consonants." The fifth line, on the other hand, describes a much different and even painless process, where soft, flexible tongues readjust their customary "labials" to their new seaside surroundings—"to the curl of the wave." Acoustically, as well, this line's liquid Ls, purring R, and long As suggest a more comfortable, organic adaptation. In fact, these two lines in sequence mirror the historical

development of language in the West Indies: African slaves were first forced to adopt the language of their masters, then they made the language evolve by altering its syntax and phonetics, incorporating vocabulary from African languages, and creating neologisms to describe their Caribbean environment and colonial situation. Certainly, the linguistic innovations of this second stage are subtly revolutionary, but, more importantly, they express something unique to the local geography, history, and culture.

Language is a mirror of culture; it grows from pluralist roots and necessarily becomes cosmopolitan. All modern languages have evolved through the interaction of multiple ethnic groups, speaking different languages or dialects, and the language as a product of those continual contacts reflects a single culture's positioning within the surrounding world. When West Indians "[shape] new labials to the curl of the wave," they make the language their own and thereby forge a mirror of their culture that is unique to the local geography. The local language then ceases to be, for example, the standard English or standard French of the continental metropole, but becomes reinvented and reinvigorated as a creole, pidgin, or patois. Language must expand to encompass the new environment, the new conditions. In its standard European forms, language may lack even the most basic vocabulary to identify such seemingly mundane West Indian phenomena as flora and fauna. In this section of "Origins," for instance, Walcott speaks of "Christening the pomegranate with a careful tongue, / Pomes de Cythère, bitter Cytherean apple." From the context, one might think that this christening is actually a *re*-christening, while in fact the pomegranate has not been renamed at all. On the contrary, the fruit has been transformed for the New World, and language must race to catch up with the reality it describes. The *pomme-cythere*, known also as the golden apple, which

neither in appearance nor flavor resembles the pomegranate, is the fruit of a tropical tree, so the Eurasian pomegranate has shape-shifted into the Antillean *pomme-cythere*.¹⁶ Curiously, these lines can be read as a microcosm of Walcott's broader dialogism, in that they represent the collision of Old and New World cultures. The word "pomegranate" ultimately derives from the classical Latin *pomum granatus*, an apple with many grains or seeds, while the St. Lucian patois *pomme-cythere*, or "Cytherean apple," as Walcott ably translates it, takes its name from the ancient Greek myth in which Paris awards a golden apple to Venus, whom he had judged the most beautiful of the goddesses; Cythera, as it happens, is a Peloponnesian island sacred to Venus. The naming of this New World fruit, the *pomme de cythère*, is executed "with a careful tongue"—a grammatical, Francophone tongue—yet its name gets taken up, abbreviated, and creolized in the colloquial language, becoming *pomme-cythere* or even *ponm-sitè*. All the while, its etymological connection to the Old World is maintained in the modifier (*cythere*), and Walcott reinforces that connection by pairing the *pomme-cythere* with the pomegranate, thereby ensuring that Western antiquity and classical myth remain visible in the background.

In the final two sections of "Origins," Walcott muses further on the nature of the "new song" that has evolved in the West Indies, as well as on the lost connections between Africa and the West Indies. Keeping up the metaphor of Africa as a land of rivers and the Antilles as a seascape, the poet speaks of the relationship of his people to their ancestral tongue: "We have washed out with salt / the sweet, faded savour of rivers,

¹⁶ Golden apples actually grow on two distinct but related species, *Spondias cytherea* and *Spondias dulcis* (*Anacardiaceae*), which are now cultivated throughout the tropics, from Southeast Asia and Polynesia to Central America and the Caribbean. Other names for this fruit include golden-plum, Jew-plum, and *ponm-sitè*. I have followed Richard Allsopp's example in spelling *pomme-cythere* as one word and without the original French accent. See Allsopp (ed.), *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 261 and 447.

and in the honeycombs of skulls / the bees have built a new song” (CP 15). The image of the skull, of course, represents the lost culture of West Indian natives, although “skulls” might also signify islands, since the enterprising bees—which had previously been associated only with death, but now represent new life—have occupied an abandoned space, like the African slaves and their offspring, and made it their own.¹⁷ Indeed, contemporary West Indians now inhabit islands where Caribs and Taino once thrived, and though the voices of those natives have been silenced, a “new song” has risen up to fill the vacant space. This song, however, has only a tenuous connection to Africa:

... The surf has razed that
memory from
our speech, and
a single raindrop irrigates the tongue. (CP 15)

The New World experience, it seems, washes away nearly all vestiges of the ancestral, Old World culture, but something essential remains—something perhaps inexpressible, yet nevertheless present, like the subtly metallic taste of a raindrop on the tongue. And that residual taste in the mouth changes the flavor of everything.

2. Dialogue, Exile, and Departure: From *In a Green Night* (1962) to *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979)

¹⁷ The image of the “bees” that “built a new song” in the “honeycombs of skulls” has a curious parallel in “The Stare’s Nest by My Window,” which is the sixth section of W. B. Yeats’s “Meditations in Time of Civil War.” There, another set of enterprising bees inhabit the empty nest of a “stare,” or starling, thus coming to represent closure, renewal, and peaceful rebuilding. “O honey-bees,” the poet exhorts, “Come build in the empty house of the stare.” See *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, revised second edition, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1996) 205.

The many voices, dialects, and languages of Walcott's experience, of his native culture, have continued to be an aesthetic shaping force throughout his career, initially finding expression in poems such as the two I have been discussing ("As John to Patmos" and "Origins") and, most famously, in the closing interrogatives of "A Far Cry from Africa," from *In a Green Night* (1962):

Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?

I who have cursed

The drunken officer of British rule, how choose

Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?

Betray them both, or give back what they give? (*CP* 18)

Walcott chose then, and continues to choose, to "give back what they give," that is, he chooses not to betray either one of his cultural heritages, but to embrace them both. The creolizing impulse has always been strong in Walcott, and it manifests in his verse as dialogue—both multivocal dialogue and dialogue with the self. Among the most dialogic of Walcott's early works is the sonnet sequence "Tales of the Islands," also from *In a Green Night*. This is one of the first texts in which Walcott tries out a colloquial voice and, perhaps more significantly, gives the sequence a dialogic structure, similar to Heaney's "Station Island." Most of the ten poems that make up "Tales of the Islands" are given titles, both in English and in French, which derive from European literature, songs, and myths—for example, "Qu'un sang impur..." ("That an impure blood..."), a quotation from the Marseillaise; "Dance of Death," a popular theme in Medieval drama and painting, associated with the Black Death; and "Lotus eater..." which of course refers to the Lotophagi section of the ninth book of the *Odyssey*. The content and settings

of the sequence, however, are wholly West Indian, and Walcott relays through them a set of distinct impressions of multicultural, multilingual St. Lucia. Most importantly, the poet intermeshes standard English and colloquial speech, creating a dialogism that becomes discernible sometimes within a single poem, sometimes when reading one poem against another. Both types of dialogism appear in and around the sixth “chapter” of the sequence, with its forceful patois opening:

Poopa, da’ was a fête! I mean it had
Free rum free whisky and some fellars beating
Pan from one of them band in Trinidad,
And everywhere you turn was people eating
And drinking and don’t name me but I think
They catch his wife with two tests up the beach
While he drunk quoting Shelley with “Each
Generation has its angst, but we has none”
And wouldn’t let a comma in edgewise.

(Black writer chap, one of them Oxbridge guys.) (*CP* 24-25)

In these ten lines before the sonnet’s turn, the language is marked as nonstandard English by the irregular nouns (“them band”) and verb forms (“I think / They catch,” “he drunk”), not to mention the creole vocabulary (“Poopa,” which literally means “papa,” and is loosely equivalent to the exclamatory “man” in colloquial American English; “fête,” or “festival”; and “tests,” or “guys”). The poem is flanked by others written in Walcott’s usual standard-English voice, so it stands out as something unique. Walcott may not actually be the “Black writer chap” that the speaker describes, but he does resemble “one

of them Oxbridge guys” in the classical English education that he received at the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica. Taken together, the poems of “Tales of the Islands” imply a linguistic pluralism both on St. Lucia and in the mind of the poet. Even in this single poem, the voice of the educated Walcott-like persona, who quotes Shelley, is filtered through the dialect voice of the West Indian speaker.¹⁸

Indeed, language itself is an ideal tool for the cosmopolitan poet, since virtually all languages draw on multiple other languages for some vocabulary and, occasionally, for grammar; this is particularly true of West Indian pidgins and creoles, since they have been influenced by European, African, and indigenous Caribbean languages. In some of his poems from the mid-1970s, Walcott taps into his rich linguistic heritage to an even greater degree than he had in “Tales of the Islands,” sometimes to explore his linguistic and cultural origins—as he had done in the aptly titled “Origins”—and sometimes to define his culture as it exists in the present. Naturally, these two aims often coincide. In the opening section of “Names,” from *Sea Grapes* (1976), Walcott claims that his “race began as the sea began, / with no nouns, and with no horizon” (CP 305). The poet uses the word “race” here in an idiosyncratic way: he intends it to mean West Indians, or perhaps Afro-Caribbeans in particular, but certainly not Africans as an entire racial group, for this is another New World poem. Walcott attempts to orient himself in time and space:

I began with no memory,

I began with no future,

¹⁸ In citing this specific quotation, or paraphrase, from Shelley, Walcott may be sending his readers on a wild goose chase; like other critics, I have been unable to locate its source. Paul Breslin, who suspects that “the search for an actual source is pointlessly literal,” notes that, in an earlier version of the poem, the reference was to Keats, not to Shelley (*Nobody’s Nation* 306). J. Edward Chamberlin gives the full text of that earlier version in his *Come Back to Me, My Language* (118).

but I looked for that moment

when the mind was halved by a horizon. (*CP* 305)

As in “Origins,” the poet emerges as though from the sea, without memory and without language. In order to understand who he is and where he comes from, Walcott looks to the horizon, suspecting that what he lacks lies beyond it. In the following stanza, however, he realizes that his search has been in vain: “I have never found that moment,” he admits, “when the mind was halved by a horizon (*CP* 305). This concession amounts to a partial turning away from the ancestral culture and a recognition of responsibility for forging a new culture in the West Indies. The poet seems to fear the consequences of numerous ethnic groups living together in the islands, cut off from their homelands, and wonders whether West Indians have “melted into a mirror, / leaving our souls behind” (*CP* 306). But in the second section of the poem, he focuses on something that the pluralist culture has produced: a creolized language. Initially, the new language in the West Indies was virtually identical to the old language in Europe, but the European colonists soon adapted the language to the newness of the landscape: “Being men, they could not live / except they first presumed / the right of every thing to be a noun” (*CP* 307). The English word “noun” derives from the classical Latin *nomen*, which means “name”—so the colonial impulse to name, to label everything in the world, means presuming “the right of everything to be a noun.” The cosmopolitanism of language in the West Indies first emerges when the landscape alters the colonial language, but becomes amplified when another ethnic group alters the language yet again, creolizing those nouns and names:

The African acquiesced,

repeated, and changed them.

Listen, my children, say:

moubain: the hogplum,

cerise: the wild cherry,

baie-la: the bay,

with the fresh green voices

they were once themselves

in the way the wind bends

our natural inflections. (*CP* 307)

The wind may indeed bend the “natural inflections” of the Afro-Caribbean community, in the sense that the geography—and the European languages of that geography—demand that black West Indians learn to speak differently from their ancestors, but they also, in turn, reshape the European languages. Whether French or English, whether “*moubain*” or “hogplum,” nouns become creolized, bent by the wind of African inflection.

Moreover, the multiple and creolized languages of Walcott’s experience come to represent his very identity, and in these poems from the 1970s the poet begins to engage with his pluralist linguistic heritage. “Come back to me, / my language,” he pleads in “*Sainte Lucie*” (*CP* 310):

O Martinas, Lucillas,

I’m a wild golden apple

that will burst with love

of you and your men,

those I never told enough
with my young poet's eyes
crazy with the country,
generations going,
generations gone,
moi c'est gens Ste. Lucie.
C'est la moi sorti;
is there that I born. (CP 314)

Walcott shifts back and forth between the standard languages of the metropole and the creoles of provincial St. Lucia, but clearly the power of the poet's speech centers on the island, where all of the languages and linguistic registers intersect amid a creole culture and West Indian landscape. Indeed, "Sainte Lucie" constitutes another oath of allegiance to the island ("moi c'est gens Ste. Lucie ... is there that I born"), like the ones Walcott had earlier sworn in "As John to Patmos" and the autobiographical *Another Life*, where he and his friend, modeled on the painter Dunstan St. Omer, pledged "that we would never leave the island / until we had put down, in paint, in words" every detail, however insignificant, of their homeland (CP 194). "Sainte Lucie" seems to be a reassertion of those earlier oaths, one that expresses not only the poet's rootedness, but also his cosmopolitanism. Like Heaney, who remains spiritually connected to his Northern Irish omphalos even at a great distance, Walcott strives to express his St. Lucian identity, whether he writes from another Caribbean island or from his second home in the United States.

In his 1992 Nobel lecture, “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory,” Walcott spoke of the confluence of language and the verbal arts—especially poetry and drama—in the West Indies, claiming that both are products of exiled communities: “Deprived of their original language,” these communities “create their own [language], accreting and secreting fragments of an old, an epic vocabulary, ... but to an ancestral, an ecstatic rhythm in the blood that cannot be subdued by slavery or indenture.”¹⁹ As he has long done in and through his poetry, Walcott asserts in the lecture that reassembling these linguistic and cultural remnants is “the basis of the Antillean experience, this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary, these partially remembered customs, and they are not decayed but strong” (*Twilight* 70). Ironically, the poet’s recognition of exile as a shaping force leads him not to an African or Asian archetype, but to a European one: Robinson Crusoe.²⁰ In Walcott’s work, Daniel Defoe’s character, “the namer,” comes to represent all West Indian writers, whose “utterances, [whose] words, when written, are as fresh, as truly textured, as when Crusoe sets them down in the first West Indian novel,” although their ancestral language lies incomplete “behind them, borne from England, from India, or from Africa.”²¹ Indeed, the West Indian experience is a diasporic experience, and in that sense, every community has been shipwrecked like Crusoe. Regardless of his or her ancestry, the West Indian poet faces the fragmentation of tradition, while the “original language dissolves from the exhaustion

¹⁹ *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (New York: Farrar, 1998) 70. Hereafter *Twilight*.

²⁰ I mention the possibility of an Asian archetype here because much of Walcott’s Nobel lecture focuses on Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, as a cultural site, where the population—like that of other Caribbean islands, in fact—includes a large number of South Asians, who initially came to the island as indentured laborers. Walcott also mentions other immigrants to Trinidad, such as “the Sephardic Jew, the Chinese grocer and the Lebanese merchant selling cloth samples on his bicycle” (*Twilight* 71).

²¹ Walcott, “The Figure of Crusoe,” *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents P, 1993) 36.

of distance like fog trying to cross an ocean” (*Twilight* 70). The poet becomes a latter-day Crusoe, naming his surroundings for the first time.

Some critics have objected to Walcott’s identification with Crusoe, arguing that his invocation of a European archetype runs counter to postcolonial imperatives, particularly because the context of the Crusoe-Friday, master-servant relationship has become as widely discussed in postcolonial criticism as the context of the analogous relationship between Prospero and Caliban in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. Both literary texts, to be sure, have special resonance in the West Indies because of their island settings, and the vehement objections of these critics are understandable. Nevertheless, it is possible to view Walcott’s appropriation of the Crusoe figure in a different way entirely: as a maneuver that rejects and transcends the usual postcolonial paradigm. “In choosing to arrogate a position usually identified with the master,” Patricia Ismond argues, “Walcott engages in something of a subversive act: he tacitly refuses the condition of servitude and inferiority as the primary term of his identity.”²² Regardless, in Crusoe poems like “The Castaway,” “Crusoe’s Island,” “Crusoe’s Journal,” and “New World,” Walcott does not exclusively identify with the Crusoe figure. On the contrary, he often counts himself among “Friday’s progeny, / The brood of Crusoe’s slave,” who, like the African in “Names,” learn European languages, but then repeat and change them (*CP* 72):

like Christofer he bears
in speech mnemonic as a missionary’s
the Word to savages,
its shape an earthen, water-bearing vessel’s

²² *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott’s Poetry* (Mona, Jamaica: UWI Press, 2001) 48.

whose sprinkling alters us
into good Fridays who recite His praise,
parroting our master's
style and voice, we make his language ours,
converted cannibals
we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ. (CP 93)

In these poems, all of the figures are castaways, but predominance is certainly given to European culture, since the non-white West Indians must adopt the European tongue, creolized though it may become through their usage. Certainly, one detects an ironic tone in the above passage, especially in the appellation “good Fridays,” as though the islanders were mere schoolchildren who sought to please their European master by “parroting” his teachings, learning language by rote through religious ritual. But for Walcott, Crusoe nonetheless serves as the primary West Indian archetype, the first “namer,” and all “shapes, all objects multiplied from his” (CP 93).

The themes of cosmopolitanism and exile come together again in “The Schooner *Flight*,” a long poem from Walcott’s 1979 collection *The Star-Apple Kingdom*. In many ways, this poem anticipates *Omeros*: it centers on an Odysseus-like figure, Shabine, who emblemizes Trinidad in the same way that Helen in *Omeros* emblemizes St. Lucia. The protagonist shares Walcott’s mixed-race, multilingual background and stands in as an alter ego for the poet himself, yet his voice also becomes an instrument through which Walcott can express his cosmopolitanism. Shabine, whose name is actually derogatory West Indian slang for “mulatto,” speaks a dialect that is creolized like his culture, and his racial makeup also represents the pluralist society that he comes from:

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation. (CP 346)

Shabine does indeed stand for his nation, though what Walcott has him saying in the final line here is meant to apply to the West Indies as a whole, not to Trinidad in particular.

All of the islands are multicultural, multiethnic, and any attempt to define the culture of a particular island by the example of a single ethnic or linguistic group is destined to fail.

Shabine cannot be “nobody,” precisely because he is everybody. And while he displays a rootedness in the sense that he represents the average islander who is bound to his home,

Shabine also embodies the rootlessness of West Indians as a people whose ancestral culture remains distant in time and space. This rootlessness appears in the poem through

Shabine's travels, since departure and wandering are among the primary themes of “The Schooner *Flight*.” The poem opens with Shabine leaving his home and the woman he

loves, “weeping / for the houses, the streets, that whole fucking island,” and closes with him, at sea, navigating by the stars and imagining that “the light over me / is a road in white moonlight taking me home” (CP 345, 361).

Images of departure, travel, and homecoming have been present in Walcott's poetry since the beginning, though they have appeared with more and more frequency as he has gained an ever wider international audience, and thus more reason to travel. In a 1985 interview, speaking partly in reference to his collection *The Fortunate Traveller*, Walcott said, “I've never felt that I belong anywhere else but in St. Lucia.”

The geographical and spiritual fixity is there. However, there's a reality here [in St. Lucia] as well. ... One is bound to feel the difference between these poor, dark, very small houses, the people in the streets, and yourself because you always have the chance of taking a plane out. Basically you are a fortunate traveller, a visitor; your luck is that you can always leave. And it's hard to imagine that there are people around you unable, incapable of leaving either because of money or because of any number of ties. And yet the more I come back here the less I feel that I'm a prodigal or a castaway returning.²³

St. Lucia functions as the center of Walcott's artistic universe. Nevertheless, his privileged circumstances have caused him to feel a sense of distance between himself and the St. Lucian people, and he has devoted much creative energy to interrogating this perceived "gulf." Indeed, among his earliest attempts at what might be called "fortunate traveller" poems is a poem fittingly entitled "The Gulf," set in the late 1960s during and immediately after a visit by the poet to the southern United States. Seated on a flight from Texas, Walcott ponders the objects he carries with him, mementos from his travels, and realizes that they represent new attachments in newly visited places: "All things: these matches // from LBJ's campaign hotel, this rose / given me at dawn in Austin by a child, / this book of fables by Borges, ... Fondled, these objects conjure hotels, // quarrels, new friendships" (*CP* 104-105). The various items signify new commitments, yet he comes to realize "that those we love are objects we return" as well, and "that I shall / watch love reclaim its things as I lie dying" (*CP* 105). Between himself and those

²³ William Baer, ed., *Conversations with Derek Walcott* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1996) 115. Hereafter Baer.

he loves, whether new friends in the U.S. or old ones in the West Indies, he feels a gulf “daily widening” (CP 107). The poet’s freedom of movement, while widening his world, has also made his connection to home more tenuous.

This poem brings to mind the final sonnet of the earlier “Tales of the Islands,” which Walcott also narrates from an airplane seat. Flying away from St. Lucia, he watches as the plane “Turned to the final north and turned / above the open channel ... until all that I love / folded in cloud; ... each mile / Dividing us and all fidelity strained / Till space would snap it” (CP 27). Again, the gulf below becomes not only physical but metaphorical, indicative of the poet’s fear that the departure is one from which he cannot ever truly return. In a 1983 interview, Walcott spoke of “the Wordsworthian sense that you don’t return to what you once were, so even if you are home, you are not back to what you were. ... it’s just that you have grown up, or the land has grown up differently, so you don’t really connect” (Baer 87). The fear of being unable to return is expressed as well in the poem “Homecoming: Anse La Raye,” set on St. Lucia, where “sugar-headed children,” failing to recognize Walcott as a local, “race / pelting up from the shallows / because your clothes, / your posture / seem a tourist’s” (CP 127-28). He has become somehow marked as different, as an outsider, and at this moment the poet realizes that “there are homecomings without home” (CP 128). The concept of home continues to preoccupy Walcott throughout the 1980s and 1990s, from *The Fortunate Traveller* to *Omeros* and beyond, and in his most recent work, such as *The Prodigal*, Walcott seems to have managed to carry St. Lucia with him everywhere, so that, even during his travels in Europe and North America, he always has one foot on his native West Indian soil.

3. “Then all the nations of birds lifted together”: *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981)

In two of his mid-career collections, *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981) and *The Arkansas Testament* (1987), Walcott groups his poems geographically according to their settings—at least, that is how the organization of these two books appears at first glance. But as with so much else in Walcott, the categories of place that structure each book do not turn out to be so simple. *The Arkansas Testament*, a collection that Walcott dedicated to Seamus Heaney, is divided into two sections, “Here” and “Elsewhere,” while *The Fortunate Traveller*, dedicated to Joseph Brodsky, is divided into three sections, “North,” “South,” and another “North,” with the middle section occupying much more than half of the volume’s total contents.²⁴ In fact, Walcott originally intended for *The Fortunate Traveller* to be entitled *North and South*.²⁵ The two “North” sections contain poems that are generally set in the United States and northern Europe, while the “South” section contains poems set in the Caribbean, Latin America, and southern Europe. But in fact many of these poems could just as well have been placed in another section of the book, since they often describe movements, either actual or imagined, between geographical regions, as well as in and out of the languages and dialects of those regions. The book, then, is a textual manifestation of Walcott’s own cosmopolitanism, in which the poet places the many voices of his experience into dialogue with one another.

The opening poem of *The Fortunate Traveller*, “Old New England,” places the reader directly in coastal New England à la Robert Lowell, and there is surprisingly little

²⁴ As a matter of fact, Walcott wrote a poem called “Dedication,” addressed to Brodsky, with which he planned to preface the collection. The poem was to appear before the table of contents, though Walcott ultimately chose not to publish it at all. I discuss “Dedication” at the opening of the next chapter, “Joseph Brodsky: Cosmopolitanism and Exile.”

²⁵ Ms. collection 136, box 6, Derek Walcott Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

indication that the speaker through whose eyes the landscape is viewed comes from afar, much less from the Caribbean in particular. In this way, “Old New England” is atypical within the collection, for the speakers of the other poems in this first “North” section self-consciously reveal their outsider status to the reader. (Nevertheless, the mere act, as a West Indian poet, of writing a poem about one of the United States’ oldest regions, is a cosmopolitan act; the poet who stands behind the speaker remains an outsider.)

Likewise, the speakers of the “South” section generally engage with other, usually Northern, cultures from within their own native space, and the speaker of “The Fortunate Traveller,” the central poem of the final “North” section, is an envoy in Europe representing the economic interests of Third World constituents. Thus, the reader encounters a new speaking voice in every poem, many of them strikingly different from one another, making this among the most multivocal of Walcott’s collections.²⁶ A good number of these speakers are themselves outsiders—traveler figures—and their nomadic status highlights the collection’s cosmopolitanism, which would have already become evident through the multivocality that asserts itself more and more clearly with the turn of each page. Yet the volume is held together by the themes of travel and political power—one might even say travel and “empire,” though the poems are nearly all set in postcolonial places and times—and the multiple voices in which Walcott speaks do not seem artificial. On the contrary, each of the voices has evolved out of the poet’s own

²⁶ Clement H. Wyke argues that *The Fortunate Traveller* is a single poem, unified by the voice of a single “traveller,” and that the multivocality of the collection comes as the result of the “author’s ambivalence,” which is expressed “through a pattern of dual, ambiguous and paradoxical elements integrated by the complex personality of the traveller himself” (210). In essence, Wyke appears to have diagnosed the poet with split-personality disorder. See Wyke, “‘Divided to the Vein’: Patterns of Tormented Ambivalence in Walcott’s *The Fortunate Traveller*,” *Postcolonial Literatures: Achebe, Ngugi, Desai, Walcott*, eds. Michael Parker and Roger Starkey (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995) 209-25.

experience, so that even the playful pidgin of “The Spoiler’s Return” and the disenchanting formality of the title poem ring true.

The anonymous speaker of “Old New England” connects the regional landscape with two very American themes—the Civil War and the whaling industry—that Lowell had also tackled in such well known poems as “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket” and “For the Union Dead.”²⁷ The poem also serves as a rumination on the Vietnam conflict, drawing comparisons between past whalers and present warriors. Sometimes, in fact, the distinction between the two groups, as well as between the past and the present, becomes confusingly blurred: “the crosses of green farm boys back from ‘Nam” that pepper a cemetery hillside seem to have been immediately preceded by the “black clippers” that “brought ... our sons home from the East,” though, of course, those clippers are whaling ships from the distant past (*FT* 3, 4). Such confusion may be expected, since Walcott has surely attempted to fit too much into this poem of just thirty-five lines: besides the Vietnam conflict, the whaling industry, and the Civil War, he also elaborates upon the historical treatment of Native Americans and the relationship between Christianity and American politics. The resulting poem is symbolically dense but lacks thematic focus. In any case, “Old New England” serves as an appropriate introduction to the rest of the collection, since the main themes of the book—travel and empire—appear in “Old New England” as well.

In the second poem of the volume, “Upstate,” the poet’s status as an outsider is much more apparent. Although he is a stranger, Walcott seems to imply that he may

²⁷ In an earlier draft of “Old New England,” Walcott goes so far as to identify the elder poet by name when describing an old Indian trail which “lies ribboned like the brown blood of the whale / like Lowell’s poetry.” See manuscript collection 136, box 6, folder 15, Derek Walcott Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

actually be more capable of expressing something about the place than a native:

“Sometimes I feel sometimes / the Muse is leaving, the Muse is leaving America” (*FT 5*).

The Muse here, as in the following poem, “American Muse,” appears as the aged wife of a working man, whose body bears the imprint of her weariness: “Her tired face is tired of iron fields, / its hollows sing the mines of Appalachia, / she is a chalk-thin miner’s wife with knobbled elbows, / her neck tendons taut as banjo strings” (*FT 5*). (Although the poem’s title brings to mind New York state, the poet seems to locate America’s Muse somewhere further south.) Ironically, Walcott, the visitor from afar, is the one who observes and documents the decline of the Muse, and in doing so, reanimates her on the page, thereby creating art out of landscape that had seemed to him creatively barren.

Indeed, if he weren’t confident that his outsider’s perspective contributed something new, then he wouldn’t have written the poem at all. The poet proclaims that he is “falling in love with America,” but he remains a stranger whose foreignness is marked, not on his skin as one might expect (for the setting is, after all, rural, mostly white America), but in his dialect (*FT 6*). As he often does in his St. Lucia poems as well, Walcott here conflates the landscape with the culture. Somehow, American speech has become inextricably bound up with American geography: “I must put the cold small pebbles from the spring / upon my tongue to learn her language, / to talk like birch or aspen confidently” (*FT 6*). Only after the foreign poet has taken the landscape inside of himself will he be able to begin describing it in verse. This is not the impossible endeavor that it seems: as Kwame Anthony Appiah explains, “the points of entry to cross-cultural conversations are things that are shared by those who are in the conversation,” and often “what we start with is some small thing that we two singular people share.”²⁸ In this

²⁸ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* 97.

poem, Walcott recognizes that Americans relate to their surroundings in the same way that he relates to his native landscape. Moreover, a tree is a tree, and it only takes a little imagination to shift from the perspective of a star-apple or banyan tree to that of a birch or aspen. Once the foreign poet has made that shift, the American Muse welcomes him “as warm as bread or as a homecoming” (*FT* 6). Then, having understood the cultural place of the birch and the aspen, the poet feels himself at once at home and away from home. He now has something unique to say about America, for his voice is new to the place and his outsider’s mind is engaged with it.

The tone of the last poem in the book’s opening “North” section, however, differs greatly from the previous poems and prefigures the poet’s racial alienation in the title poem of *The Arkansas Testament*. This poem, entitled “North and South,” works with two sets of meanings of the paired nouns in the title: 1) one set contrasting the developed nations of the North (mainly Europe and North America) with the developing nations of the South (virtually everywhere else, but especially, in this case, Africa and the Caribbean), as well as implying the history of colonialism that those categories evoke; and 2) another set conjuring up the geographical and cultural divisions within the United States as a legacy of slavery and the Civil War. Of course, behind both of these semantic sets lies the theme of race and racism, and that shared theme constitutes a part of what holds the poem together. Moreover, the paired sets find a parallel in Walcott’s own movements about the Americas, and the geographic and political content of the sets constitutes a dialogue on race and power in the United States. The pairing of semantic sets might even be the impetus for that dialogic mode. The sets also lend structure to the fourteen-stanza poem, in that the first nine stanzas have the Caribbean speaker musing on

Northern empires, both historical and contemporary, while the final five stanzas find him in Virginia, thinking more specifically about racism and the U.S. Civil War.

In the middle, or “South,” section of *The Fortunate Traveller*, among the most relevant poems, for my purposes, is “The Spoiler’s Return.” The speaker of the poem is the Mighty Spoiler, a well-known calypsonian of 1950s Trinidad who also serves as an alter ego for Walcott himself.²⁹ The Spoiler died a couple of decades before the action of “The Spoiler’s Return,” which takes place around 1980 during Carnival in Port of Spain and nearby Laventille, and in the poem the Spoiler has just risen from the dead—from Hell, actually—dispatched by Satan “to check out this town” and “to sing what I did always sing: the truth” (*FT* 53). The Spoiler, like so many other figures in Walcott’s work, is a traveler—if one counts Hell as a trip abroad—and now he has returned home to pass judgment on his old stomping grounds. Although Walcott preserves some of the Spoiler’s more vulgar, carnivalesque attributes, the poet also turns him into something of a literary cosmopolitan—one who quotes seventeenth-century English poems and drops references to Dante and Rabelais, among others. Indeed, the poem itself, though voiced for the Spoiler, meanders back and forth between dialect and standard English. The Spoiler stands as a prime example of the poet’s multivocality. Walcott has assimilated the dialect voices of the West Indies and the literary language of the English canon, and is fully capable of writing poems in which he employs both. Thus, when Walcott has the undead Spoiler, who tells his audience, “I decomposing, but I composing still” (*FT* 53), quote from the Earl of Rochester’s “Satyre against Reason and Mankind,” the shift out of

²⁹ John Thieme identifies the Mighty Spoiler (Theophilus Phillip) as the speaker of the poem in his monograph *Derek Walcott* (New York: Manchester UP, 1999) 19.

that early modern text and into a final couplet from the Spoiler's calypso "Bed Bug" is seamless:

*Were I, who to my cost already am
One of those strange, prodigious creatures, Man,
A spirit free, to choose for my own share,
What case of flesh and blood I pleased to wear,
I hope when I die, after burial,
To come back as an insect or animal. (FT 54)*

The entire poem, like the above excerpt, consists of rhymed couplets in iambic pentameter, and this is another way in which Walcott negotiates the literary and popular traditions: although calypso songs typically follow a ballad structure, rhymed couplets are not foreign to the genre, and they suit the Spoiler's style well. Walcott does remain appropriately faithful to the calypso genre in terms of content: the Spoiler sings "the truth" as he sees it, offering a political critique of Trinidadian society. He imagines how his audience might justify the corruption that he sees on the island:

all you go bawl out, "Spoils, things ain't so bad."
This ain't the Dark Age, is just Trinidad,
is human nature, Spoiler, after all,
it ain't big genocide, is just bohbohl; (FT 55-56)³⁰

But he refuses to accept this, forecasting instead a continued stripping away of civil rights:

The time could come, it can't be very long

³⁰ Richard Allsopp explains that "bohbohl," or "bobol," refers to "Fraud and corrupt practices organized, usually on some scale, by well-placed persons in authority in a company or in government administration" (*Dictionary* 109).

when they will jail calypso for picong,
...
it has been done before, all Power has
made the sky shit and maggots of the stars,
...
until all language stinks, and the truth lies,
a mass for maggots and a fete for flies; (*FT* 56)³¹

Surely, Walcott could (and no doubt would) echo these sentiments in his own voice, but the crucial feature of the poem is not so much *what* is said as *how* it is said. The multivocality of the poem—both the code-switching and the intermixing of forms—constitutes a textual expression of Walcott’s cosmopolitan experience, who, like the Spoiler, has put down roots in the West Indies but carries on a conversation with other places as well.

The second and final “North” section of the book is dominated by the long title poem, spoken by a jet-setting diplomat who, quite comfortable in his life of privilege, has become entirely disconnected from his third-world constituents. Images of death fill the poem, and Walcott has the speaker describe himself as only one among many who prey on the unfortunate masses:

We are roaches,
riddling the state cabinets, entering the dark holes
of power, carapaced in topcoats,
scuttling around columns, signalling for taxis,

³¹ Richard Allsopp explains that “picong” is a “spontaneous, verbal battle in rhymed song between two or more contending calypsonians, in which the wit and humorous impact of a contender’s improvisation determines his supremacy; it is a major item of calypso war staged in tents” (*Dictionary* 439).

with frantic antennae, to other huddles with roaches;
we infect with optimism, and when
the cabinets crack, we are the first
to scuttle, radiating separately
back to Geneva, Bonn, Washington, London. (*FT* 90)

The ironic tone evident here pervades the entire poem, making it clear that the speaker is both confessing and censuring himself, but that bitter irony surely comes not from the speaker but from Walcott. That is, the puppet-master Walcott makes the bureaucrat speak with a brutal honesty of which he would not be capable on his own. “[W]ho cares how many million starve?” the speaker thinks, “Their rising souls will lighten the world’s weight / and level its gull-glittering waterline” (*FT* 92). These are not thoughts that the bureaucrat would voice aloud; they are too shameful. Yet in spite of the man’s despicability, one can’t help but think that Walcott has injected a little something of himself into this figure. In his essay “What the Twilight Says,” Walcott writes that “the inevitable problem for all island artists” is “the choice of home or exile, self-realization or spiritual betrayal of one’s country. Travelling widens this breach” (*Twilight* 35). The bureaucrat’s betrayal may be a wild exaggeration of what the poet has felt as an artist-in-exile, but the correlation exists nonetheless. This guilty voice, too, dwells inside the poet.

After the utter pessimism of the title poem, which represents the polar opposite of the more affirming rooted cosmopolitanism that suffuses the majority of Walcott’s verse, the final poem of *The Fortunate Traveller*, entitled “The Season of Phantasmal Peace,” comes as a breath of fresh air. It as though Walcott knew that he had to offer an antidote to the darkness of the title poem. Although “The Season of Phantasmal Peace” has been

faulted by many critics for its evanescence and disconnection from reality, its first stanza provides an excellent metaphor for the cosmopolitanism that Walcott typifies in his finest moments:

Then all the nations of birds lifted together
the huge net of the shadows of this earth
in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues,
stitching and crossing it. They lifted up
the shadows of long pines down trackless slopes,
the shadows of glass-faced towers down evening streets,
the shadow of a frail plant on a city sill—
the net rising soundless as night, the birds' cries soundless, until
there was no longer dusk, or season, decline, or weather,
only this passage of phantasmal light
that not the narrowest shadow dared to sever. (*FT* 98)

In this dreamlike vision of cosmopolitanism, legions of birds, “twittering” in their “multitudinous dialects,” literally lift the darkness from the face of the earth, “stitching and crossing” a vast fabric collectively. One could easily imagine Walcott, or any of the countless voices of his poems, as one of these birds, unhindered by language or race, entering into conversation with “all the nations of birds,” while still remaining exactly who he has always been: a St. Lucian whose very identity was forged in much the same way that these multifarious birds have woven a network of earthly shadows.

4. Epilogue: Authorial Voice in *Omeros* (1990) and *The Prodigal* (2004)

“‘Forget the gods,’ Omeros growled, ‘and read the rest.’”

Derek Walcott, *Omeros*³²

Although both of them are book-length poems, the pairing of *Omeros* and *The Prodigal* may at first blush seem a strange one. After all, *The Prodigal* consists mainly of an old man’s autobiographical musings, loosely organized according to his peregrinations and reminiscences, while *Omeros* is a postcolonial epic, driven and structured by its complex, novelistic narrative. In fact, *Omeros*, too, has a strong autobiographical thread running through it, and that thread both destabilizes the epic genre and personalizes the narrative at the heart of the book. Readers often come to *Omeros* assuming that Walcott has rewritten the *Iliad*, and perhaps even the *Odyssey*, onto the postcolonial world—that he has simply transferred the action from the ancient Aegean to the contemporary Caribbean. That assumption, as it so happens, has misled many readers. Certainly, *Omeros* and Homer’s two epics do correspond to each other in some ways: in Walcott’s poem, characters named Achille and Hector come into conflict; his Philoctete has a wound on his leg which will not heal; and Helen in *Omeros* is a stunningly beautiful woman who represents St. Lucia itself. Moreover, Achille (in place of Odysseus) undertakes an odyssey at the heart of the book. Beyond that, Walcott’s and Homer’s texts actually have very little in common.

In his lecture “Reflections on *Omeros*,” Walcott claimed that he did not intend the book to be “a template of the Homeric original because that would be an absurdity.”³³ James Joyce had already done that, Walcott argues, with *Ulysses*, echoing Homer through

³² *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, 1990) 283. Hereafter *O*.

³³ “Reflections on *Omeros*,” *The Poetics of Derek Walcott: Intertextual Perspectives*, ed. Gregson Davis, Spec. issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 96.2 (Spring 1997): 231. Hereafter “Reflections.”

the Irish experience, and Joyce's novel is "on a scale that no artist of today with any sensibility would attempt because then you would be doing a third version of the *Odyssey* via Joyce" ("Reflections" 231). Walcott sees ancient parallels throughout the Caribbean, in the geography, to be sure, but also in personal names: slaves were often given names from classical mythology and literature by their masters, and those names became part of West Indian culture and persist even today. Even within the poem, Walcott shows an awareness of such parallels: "when would I not hear the Trojan War / in two fisherman cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?" (*O* 271). The correspondences between *Omeros* and Homer's epics grew organically out of those preexisting parallels, but Walcott's poem has a life of its own, entirely distinct from the "template of the Homeric original."

Walcott's authorial voice in *Omeros*, though it appears intermittently, has the effect of pulling the reader out of the action from time to time, much in the way that the ruminations of a novel's first-person narrator tend to do. Moreover, his asides offer clues to the reader as to how to interpret the book. By listening to the speaker, we cannot but be aware of the artifice of *Omeros*, that it is a "fiction, since every 'I' is a / fiction finally" (*O* 28), and we discover that the key theme of the book is the artist's relationship to those whom he depicts, as well as to the landscape:

I watched the afternoon sea. Didn't I want the poor
to stay in the same light so that I could transfix
them in amber, the afterglow of an empire,

preferring a shed of palm-thatch with tilted sticks
to that blue bus-stop? Didn't I prefer a road

from which tracks climbed into the thickening syntax

of colonial travelers, the measured prose I read

as a schoolboy? ... (O 227)

Representation and responsibility are what is at stake here, just as they have always been in Walcott's work. Even in early poems like "As John to Patmos," the issue of allegiance to the native landscape and culture arises. A certain amount of guilt comes along with Walcott's privileged, cosmopolitan position, but of course that guilt is a sign of his rootedness as well. The key question, then, is this: "Hadn't I made their poverty my paradise?" (O 228). Paul Jay argues that *Omeros* is "less a poem about the Caribbean than a poem about *writing about the Caribbean*, one that embodies the various strands of Walcott's identity," and that would certainly account for the poet's ambivalence over his depictions of St. Lucians.³⁴ In the end, Walcott does not merely write about his characters: he lives among them. The many voices of *Omeros*, the most dialogic of Walcott's works, add up to the sum total of a life lived in the West Indies; the book is therefore an exemplar of his rooted cosmopolitanism.

The Prodigal, though perhaps not as dialogic as *Omeros*, is a cosmopolitan text in its own right. Within the poem, Walcott claims that this will be his "last book," and in many ways it reads as such.³⁵ The poet appears more comfortable writing in his personal voice here than he ever has before, and the book constitutes a summing up of Walcott's life, rather similar to T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. He engages with a number of themes that have preoccupied him over the course of his career and memorializes key figures in

³⁴ Paul Jay, "Fated to Unoriginality: The Politics of Mimicry in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*," *Callaloo* 29.2 (2006): 546.

³⁵ *The Prodigal* (New York: Farrar, 2004) 99. Hereafter *P*.

his life who have passed away—most significantly, his twin brother, Roderick, and Joseph Brodsky. As long as it is, *The Prodigal* contains no plot and is essentially a series of linked occasional poems that Walcott narrates as he moves through geographical space and back into his memories. Edward Baugh notes that the poem “extends the dialogue between ‘Here’ and ‘Elsewhere’”—the two categories that structured the contents of *The Arkansas Testament*—“which has been a significant aspect of his poetry and his self-quest since the volume entitled *The Fortunate Traveller*.”³⁶ Indeed, much of the book has the poet travelling in Europe, the United States, and Latin America, but he never allows his readers to overlook his roots in St. Lucia. The oath of allegiance that he swore as a young man, with his friend, Dunstan St. Omer, dedicating himself as an artist to the people of St. Lucia, again emerges here: “There was a vow I made, rigid apprentice, / ... swearing not to leave them for real principalities in Berlin or Milan” (*P* 94). He now calls this vow “provincial and predictable,” explaining that his craft “widened reputation and shrank the archipelago” (*P* 95). Even so, this final book, this final poem, amounts to an homage to St. Lucia: Walcott has kept his promise after all.

The dialogism that has shaped so many of Walcott’s poems is present here too, though the voices belong predominately to himself and to the dead: the entire book amounts to an extended conversation with the self. Adam Kirsch writes that the book is “like the last movement of a symphony in which all the earlier themes return, transformed by memory and tinged with melancholy.”³⁷ Indeed, *The Prodigal* is a poetic capstone to Walcott’s career, with familiar tensions still unresolved. Its melancholy

³⁶ Edward Baugh, “Homecoming,” rev. of *The Prodigal*, *The Caribbean Review of Books* (Feb. 2005), 15 Sept. 2007, <<http://www.meppublishers.com/online/crb/>>.

³⁷ Adam Kirsch, “The Odyssey,” rev. of *The Prodigal*, 29 Nov. 2004, *Slate*, 17 Mar. 2008, <<http://www.slate.com/>>.

nature must certainly relate to the poet's loneliness as an artist: Brodsky is gone, Roddy is gone. The only solace appears to be the island of St. Lucia itself. Walcott evidently has an emptiness inside of him that provokes him to continue travelling, yet he repeatedly experiences feelings of guilt for having left home. Within the first few pages of *The Prodigal*, for instance, we learn that, according to the poet, "frequent exile turns into treachery" (P 6). But this sentiment has been present in Walcott's art from the beginning. In the final poem of the 1962 sonnet series "Tales of the Islands," he describes the experience of flying by plane away from St. Lucia, watching out the window "until all that I love / Folded in cloud; ... / ...each mile / Dividing us and all fidelity strained / Till space would snap it" (CP 27). Despite his fears, however, Walcott's ties to the Antilles never do snap. He always comes back to St. Lucia, if for no other reason than to reanimate the many voices of his poetry. Walcott seems to be at his most content when, at the end of his travels, his native island comes into view, and he is almost home:

Then, health! Salvation! Sails blaze in the sun.

A twin-sailed shallop rounding Pigeon Island.

This line is my horizon.

I cannot be happier than this. (P 92)

At the conclusion of *The Prodigal*, it would seem that, after numerous departures in numerous poems over the years, Walcott has finally succeeded at going home for good. But once he has made landfall, the sea is still nearby, tempting him to leave again, to drift toward "that line of light that shines from the other shore" (P 105). Perhaps this everlasting wanderlust, forever counterbalanced by the need to stay put, is the curse of the rooted cosmopolitan.

Chapter 4

Joseph Brodsky: Cosmopolitanism in Exile

In the spring of 1981, when he was in the midst of gathering together and arranging the poems that would appear in his collection *The Fortunate Traveller*, Derek Walcott wrote a thirty-one-line poem called “Dedication” that he intended to place at the front of the volume, ahead of the table of contents and separate from the collection’s three main sections. Joseph Brodsky is the addressee of “Dedication,” a poem that could be summarized as a blessing dispatched from a poet in the New World to a poet in the Old World. At the time, Brodsky was living in Italy as a fellow of the American Academy in Rome, and Walcott makes multiple references in the poem to Brodsky’s Mediterranean surroundings and to the long, rich cultural history that centers on southern Europe. (He also lifts images from key poems by Brodsky and elaborates on them.) The classicism of the poem, with its several nods to Greek and Roman antiquity, would have made it an ideal opening to such a conspicuously cosmopolitan book as *The Fortunate Traveller*—not to mention the poem’s West Indian author and Russian addressee—but in the end, “Dedication” did not appear in the book at all, nor did Walcott choose to publish it anywhere else.

Nevertheless, Walcott did dedicate *The Fortunate Traveller* to Brodsky, and, in its final published form, the page on which the entire poem “Dedication” would have appeared now bears three concise dedicatory words: “For Joseph Brodsky.” Yet even

though the poem was never published and exists only as a typescript in the University of Toronto's collection of Walcott's papers, it remains worthy of attention because it is emblematic of the friendship that sprung up between these two cosmopolitan poets—a friendship that was founded in no small part on their ethical and aesthetic affinities. In “Dedication,” as he so often does in his poetry, Walcott relies upon multivocality to bring a social or cultural phenomenon to life on the page: here, he ventriloquizes Brodsky in order to evoke their friendship in all its complexity. By this I do not mean to say that Walcott writes in Brodsky's voice, but that the poem functions as a kind of dialogue of two poets with only one speaker. “Dedication” is clearly spoken in Walcott's voice, but it is focalized, as it were, through Brodsky. Walcott describes Italy as if through Brodsky's eyes, and he imagines the place as he thinks Brodsky might imagine it, replete with imagery from some of Brodsky's better known mid-career poems—in particular, the rotten teeth at the heart of “In the Lake District,” a symbol of fallen civilizations; and the cypress of the final line of “Letters to a Roman Friend,” a symbol of Ovidian exile:

More strength and grace to your work
I send you now, Joseph, from
the sunshine poured to the brim
of this hemisphere, to cypresses
wrestling in Tuscany, to the calcified bread
of heaven within whose holes
the anchorites died like weevils,
Joseph, we wake to wrestle devils,
and an aching cavity. Wine is stored

in the ageing cellars of the heart,
manna blossoms in the spring orchard,
and through the grid of terraces
the ancient flame is lowered after winter
and all of Italy throbs in heat.¹

Walcott sends his communiqué from the Western hemisphere, a place “poured to the brim” with spring sunshine—the poem’s only clue, vague as it may be, to his precise location, whether on the U.S. East Coast or in the Caribbean—to Brodsky on the European side of the prime meridian, in an Italy where the ancient, the medieval, and the modern converge. The Christian imagery in “Dedication” may strike some as incongruous, since Brodsky was Jewish by ethnicity, but he actually maintained a lifelong fascination and engagement with Christianity, a fact that Walcott surely had in mind as he composed this poem.² Brodsky’s interest in the Christian heritage accords with his general “nostalgia for world culture” (“*toska po mirovoi kul’ture*”)—that is, with his perception of himself as a participant in the long tradition of cosmopolitan thought.³

¹ Ms. collection 136, box 6, folder 6, Derek Walcott Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

² For instance, beginning in 1962, Brodsky wrote an annual “*rozhdstvenskoe*” poem (a “Christmas” or “Nativity” poem; the two meanings are expressed by a single word in Russian), which have been collected in *Rozhdstvenskie stikhi* (Moscow: Nezavisimaia gazeta, 1992) and *Nativity Poems* (New York: Farrar, 2001). He wrote the last of these poems in December 1995, just weeks before his death.

³ In his essay on Osip Mandelstam, the Russian modernist poet who coined the phrase “nostalgia for world culture,” Brodsky claims that the “notion of a world culture is distinctly Russian.” He continues: “Because of its location (neither East nor West) and its imperfect history, Russia has always suffered from a sense of cultural inferiority, at least toward the West. Out of this inferiority grew the ideal of a certain cultural unity ‘out there’ and a subsequent intellectual voracity toward anything coming from that direction” (“The Child of Civilization,” *Less Than One: Selected Essays* [New York: Farrar, 1986] 130). Brodsky is not the only reader of Mandelstam to think of this “nostalgia” as one that is oriented toward Europe and that precludes Russian national identification. Vadim Polonskii, in fact, argues that Mandelstam’s self-perception as an outsider (*raznochinets*) in fin-de-siècle Russian society actually contributed to his need to define himself through association with figures outside of his own culture: “...out of [his] disconnectedness from national life grows an inclination toward a global existence, an Acmeist ‘nostalgia for world culture’, an ability to perceive Homer, Dante, and Pushkin as contemporaries and ‘companions’ at the liberated ‘feast’ of the universal spirit” (“Mandel’shtam, Osip Emil’evich,” *Entsiklopediia Krugosvet*,

And the Christian images that Walcott gives his readers here are especially fitting, since they evoke both the ancient origins of Christianity and the key concept of exile, which for Brodsky has both actual and metaphorical significance, not to mention its connection to his cosmopolitanism. The “manna” that “blossoms in the spring orchard”⁴—ancient fare that sustains the modern poet—is no different from “the calcified bread / of heaven within whose holes / the anchorites died like weevils.” But the anchorite is a religious hermit, an exile figure, who withdraws into the solitude of his cave in order to overcome worldly temptations. (The very word “anchorite” derives from the Greek *`anachoréo*, or “I withdraw.”) To Walcott’s way of thinking, both he and Brodsky have withdrawn from contemporary political life into the universalism of the artist, though they now “wake to wrestle devils / and an aching cavity.” We can determine the nature of those devils and the origin of the toothache by restoring two of the key images in this poem to their original context in Brodsky’s work.

The image of decayed teeth appears in one of Brodsky’s best known poems, “In the Lake District,” where the speaker, a newly arrived immigrant to the U.S. who ironically labels himself “a spy, a spearhead / for some fifth column of a rotting culture,” finds himself surrounded by American dentists, while his own mouth contains “ruins more abject / than any Parthenon.”⁵ In that poem, the speaker’s rotten teeth mark him as an unwilling envoy from a “rotten civilization,” while in Walcott’s “Dedication” the symbol remains ambiguous.⁶ Another image in “Dedication” is similarly ambiguous: that

<<http://www.krugosvet.ru/>>). For the purposes of my argument, however, “world culture” ought to be understood as just that—a culture that is truly global, not merely European.

⁴ Cf. Exod. 16.1-15

⁵ *A Part of Speech* (New York: Farrar, 1980) 67. Hereafter *PS*.

⁶ It is worth noting that, in the Russian original, Brodsky uses the word “civilization,” not “culture,” as George L. Kline had translated it: “...*piataia kolonna / glinoi tsivilizatsii*...” in “V ozernom kraiu,” *Chast’ rechi: stikhotvoreniia 1972-1976* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1977) 28. Hereafter *ChR*. Valentina

of the “cypresses / wrestling in Tuscany.” But before locating a possible source for this second image in Brodsky’s body of work, we ought to consider how Walcott develops both images (teeth and cypress) in the second half of his poem:

I wish you the blessing of Ovid
on your Roman elegies, with the fret
of spring wind through the tendrils
of vines and hair, and the cold palm
of the sunshine on your tonsure;
what aches in the broken teeth
the rotted cavities of the Coliseum
is the sweetness of an ancient tongue,
and who walks inside of you over the stones
dark with the doubts of the cypress
and thinking that it had come to an end
inhabits you, vein by vein, by the imprint
of one skeleton fitting another,
the grapes of the eyes and the vines
of the arteried arm. You whom
I have grown to love as a brother,
and of whom I boast: My friend.⁷

Polukhina notes that the words “culture” and “civilization” are “synonyms for Brodsky,” and that, in his own English translation of his essay “Flight from Byzantium,” “the word ‘civilization’ is twice translated as ‘culture’” (*Joseph Brodsky: A Poet for Our Time* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989] 40).

⁷ Ms. collection 136, box 6, folder 6, Derek Walcott Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

Brodsky wrote his “Roman Elegies,” the twelve-part poem that Walcott mentions above, in 1981, during the same period, obviously, that the St. Lucian poet wrote “Dedication” with him in mind, but it is another “Roman” poem that Walcott seems to be thinking of when he evokes the image of the cypress twice in these lines. That poem is “Letters to a Roman Friend,” one of several on the theme of exile that Brodsky wrote in the early months of 1972, when he knew that he would soon be forced to leave the Soviet Union. Although we can only guess how much Walcott knew about “Roman Elegies” at the moment of writing “Dedication,” his implicit comparison of that series to “Letters to a Roman Friend” makes perfect sense, since the two have much in common, both thematically and structurally. But while the sadness at the heart of “Roman Elegies” lies within the cityscape of Rome, the sadness at the heart of “Letters” amounts to a pining from afar for the ancient city itself. The speaker of the poem—or rather, the letter-writer—whose ostensible audience is a Roman citizen named Postumus, sends his messages, his *tristia*, back to Rome from his location on the shores of the Black Sea, where he is probably living in exile. The Ovidian echoes are surely intentional, and many critics have proposed that these correspondences add up to something that is more than merely echoes—that Brodsky meant for the poem to be understood as spoken by Ovid himself.

The closing stanza of “Letters to a Roman Friend” depicts the calm and beauty of exile—away from the centers of power—that is nonetheless undergirded by nostalgia for the culture located at the heart of the empire:

Pontus drones past a black fence of pine trees.

Someone’s boat braves gusts out by the promontory.

On the garden bench a book of Pliny rustles.

Thrushes chirp within the hairdo of the cypress. (*PS* 54)

The rustling pages of the book on the bench tempt the exiled poet to accomplish the impossible—to return to Rome—while the cypress stands far from the metropolis, on the seashore, signifying a long, safe life away from political danger. In Brodsky’s poetry, especially after his 1972 exile from the Soviet Union, this tension between the book of poems and the cypress is often present: although his personal book starts out as an anthology of mainly Russian verse and his exilic cypress appears at first standing on an American shore, these symbols become less stark and distinct as his career develops. Ultimately, the cypress becomes a site of comfort and shelter, and the book of poems is no longer oriented toward just one culture.

David M. Bethea proposes that it is useful to think of Brodsky’s poetry in terms of “triangular vision,” by which the Russian poet “constantly looks *both ways*, both to the West and to Russia” and “implicate[s] himself as the ‘hybrid’ result of that dialogue.”⁸ While Bethea’s model certainly corresponds to Brodsky’s exilic cosmopolitanism, it has the disadvantage of depicting the poet as standing at a remove from both cultures—gazing at both of them, but not rooted in either one. I argue instead that we ought to think of Brodsky as maintaining a double-rootedness in both Russia and the West—specifically, in the United States—and that the balance of his roots’ grip in the soil of each place alternates over time. Throughout Brodsky’s body of work, we encounter images of exile used figuratively, but, after the summer of 1972, those images take on a literal meaning as well, lending even more weight to the universal sense of alienation that so often appears in his poems. In this chapter, I trace such images through Brodsky’s

⁸ *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1994) 49, 52.

three American-era collections of poetry—both in Russian and in English—and consider what they signify for the poet and his audience. With each subsequent volume, Brodsky shows a fuller awareness of his Anglo-American readership, ultimately splitting his work to fit into two traditions. While his first American collection was oriented mainly toward his Russian audience (even in English translation), his final collection seems to come to life simultaneously in two languages, with some pairs of Russian- and English-language poems taking up the same themes, images, and settings—though neither poem of a given pair is a translation of the other.

Throughout this chapter, I base many elements of my argument on an assumption that may run counter to some critics' expectations, and perhaps even to their convictions: I propose that Joseph Brodsky is an American poet. In saying this, I do not mean to imply that Brodsky is not a Russian poet as well; rather, I think that his work exists simultaneously in two literary traditions: a Russian tradition and an Anglo-American tradition, with much cross-fertilization between the two. Were he able to respond, Brodsky himself would not likely have agreed wholeheartedly with my assessment of him as an American poet, since he primarily identified as a Russian-language poet of Petersburgian poetic lineage, but, after his relocation to the U.S., he ultimately did come to conceive of himself as an active participant in the Anglo-American culture of letters. But Brodsky usually delimited even that self-conception with qualifications. During an interview that was held shortly after he had heard the news that he had won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Brodsky was asked whether the prize had been received by “an American poet of Russian origin” or “a Russian poet living in America,” and his reply serves as a good place to begin thinking about his authorial identity: “A Russian poet, an

English essayist, and of course, an American citizen.”⁹ To be sure, Brodsky ranks among the greatest Russian poets of the modern period, and he received his American citizenship in Detroit in 1977; moreover, many critics have judged his English-language essays among the finest of the latter half of the twentieth century. He also wrote hundreds of poems in English, became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, taught at numerous American universities, and served a two-year term as the U.S. Poet Laureate, yet he frequently let such details remain unmentioned when asked about his national identity as it related to his writing.¹⁰

So why did Brodsky resist describing himself as an American poet? After all, he continued to compose poems during his American period, from the time of his entry into the U.S. in July of 1972 until his death in January of 1996, and although the majority of those poems were written in Russian, their American settings and themes are nonetheless crucial to their makeup and aesthetic cohesiveness. Besides, who is to say that American literature must be written in the English language? There has been a push among Americanist scholars in recent years to reconsider the linguistic boundaries of American literature—beyond even the countless literary works in Spanish—and Brodsky’s vast

⁹ Anna Husarska, “A Talk with Joseph Brodsky,” *The New Leader* 70.19 (14 Dec. 1987): 10.

¹⁰ Brodsky resigned from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1987 upon hearing the news that the academy had extended an honorary membership to Evgenii Evtushenko, the Russian poet who Brodsky thought conformed too willingly to the ideological needs of the Soviet establishment. “I cannot in good conscience sustain membership in an organization,” Brodsky explained, “which has thus so fully compromised its integrity.” See Edwin McDowell, “Brodsky Quits Art Group over Evtushenko Induction,” *The New York Times* (20 June 1987), <<http://www.nytimes.com/>>.

As for teaching, Brodsky held multiple-year positions at the University of Michigan, Columbia University, and Mount Holyoke College, not to mention many shorter appointments at other institutions. In fact, Brodsky’s immigration to the U.S. was made possible through the efforts of several faculty members in the Slavic Department at the University of Michigan, where he taught for nine years beginning in the fall of 1972. See Benjamin Stolz and Michael Makin, “Joseph Brodsky, 1940-1996,” Dec. 1996, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/slavic/dept/brodsky/joseph_brodsky_1940-1996.html>.

At least three of Brodsky’s poems relate to his service as U.S. Poet Laureate: “A View from the Hill” (*SF* 62-63; “Vid s kholma” [*PSN* 101-2]), “Lines for the Winter Recess” (*CPE* 488), and “To the President-elect” (*CPE* 492).

oeuvre of Russian-language poems composed in the U.S. would seem to support firmly the case for such a rethinking of the American canon.¹¹ What is more, Brodsky did not write poetry in Russian exclusively, though he sometimes obscured that fact when speaking in general terms about his work.¹²

In another interview, several years after the one just mentioned, Brodsky again resisted an interviewer's initial attempts to get him to define himself as an "American" or "Russian" poet, claiming that "what matters is what I manage to do" on the page, but he then gave in and proposed that readers and critics typically define a writer in one of two ways, "by their language or by their nationality."¹³ Of course, in Brodsky's case, this simplistic method of establishing identity could be misleading: "If you want to define me by language," he continued, "I am obviously a Russian poet. But if you want to define

¹¹ See especially Werner Sollors, *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Language of American Literature* (New York: NYU Press, 1998), as well as the volume that he edited with Marc Shell, *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations* (New York: NYU Press, 2000). A special issue of *PMLA* devoted to "America: The Idea, the Literature" came out in January 2003; of particular interest in that issue is Marietta Messmer's article that reassesses the linguistic biases of American literary scholarship: "Toward a Declaration of Interdependence; or, Interrogating the Boundaries in Twentieth-Century Histories of North American Literature" *PMLA* 118.1 (Jan 2003): 41-55.

¹² Brodsky may have written hundreds of poems in his native Russian, but he also wrote at least fifty-five poems, of various lengths, directly in English, beginning with his two elegies for W. H. Auden and Robert Lowell in the mid-1970s. Within a couple of years of his arrival in the U.S., he was already co-translating his poems with poets who were native speakers of English (such as Anthony Hecht, Derek Walcott, and Richard Wilbur), and, by his final English collection, *So Forth* (1996), he was doing nearly all of his translations completely on his own.

In the otherwise impeccably edited seven-volume series of Brodsky's collected works in Russian, *Sochineniia Iosifa Brodskogo*, only thirty-three of Brodsky English poems are represented in the English-language section entitled "Poems Written in English and Autotranslations." None of the English poems from the "Uncollected Poems and Translations" section of Brodsky's *Collected Poems in English* appear in *Sochineniia*. The choice to present only those poems written originally in English, and not Brodsky's translations of his own poems, serves to minimize the importance of his English work and to reinforce further the widespread Russian conception of Brodsky as an exclusively Russian poet. In spite of the inclusion of the word "autotranslations" in the title of this section, only three of Brodsky's self-translations appear in *Sochineniia*. Such phenomenal self-translations as "Eclogue IV: Winter," "In Memory of My Father: Australia," and "Porta San Pancrazio," just to name a few out of dozens of possibilities, are missing (*CPE* 289-94, 360, 393). See *Sochineniia Iosifa Brodskogo*, compiled by G. F. Komarov, edited by Ia. A. Gordin, second edition, volume IV (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii fond, 1998) 317-74.

¹³ Cynthia L. Haven (ed.), *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations* (Jackson, Miss.: UP of Mississippi, 2002) 170.

me according to citizenship, I am an American poet.”¹⁴ Issues of citizenship aside, the fundamental problem with Brodsky’s conclusion is that he did not apply his own criterion properly: that is, he wrote poetry in English as well as in Russian, so he cannot be only a Russian poet. Using this same criterion, then, one must conclude that he is both a Russian-language poet and an English-language poet—though many would no doubt express skepticism, as indeed many already have, over the artistic merits of Brodsky’s poetry in English. Nevertheless, I contend that Brodsky’s Americanness, like his Russianness, is essential to his art, regardless of which language he writes in.

For these reasons, my focus in this chapter remains fixed primarily on the poems in English that Brodsky published during his American period. More specifically, I seek to understand how Brodsky self-consciously presents himself to his Anglo-American readers, shaping and reshaping poems and translations for an English-speaking audience in the West. My aim is to offer a critical reading of his three main English-language, American collections with an eye toward revealing their cosmopolitan origins, themes, and context. Each of these collections is modeled loosely on an earlier Russian collection, yet the differences between the English and Russian collections are striking. The three English collections, like many of the poems that they contain, may be read as loose translations of their Russian-language precursors, and although, as one would expect, much has been lost in translation—lost, that is, even in material terms, since there are far fewer poems in the English collections—much has also been added, altered, reshuffled, and reconceptualized.

¹⁴ Haven, *Joseph Brodsky* 170.

1. From Nowhere with Love: *Chast' rechi* (1977) and *A Part of Speech* (1980)

And as for where in space and time one's toe end touches,
well, earth is hard all over; try the States.

Joseph Brodsky, *A Part of Speech*¹⁵

Brodsky's first American collection of poems, the Russian-language *Chast' rechi*, was published in 1977, five years after his arrival in the United States, during which time he had been teaching at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, giving poetry readings all over the U.S. and Europe, and attending international literary festivals.¹⁶ The title is a phrase that means, word for word, “a part of speech,” and those who speak Russian employ that phrase in the same way that we do in English: hence, “*chast' rechi*” refers to a grammatical unit within a sentence, whether noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc. But the Russian title also retains a slight hint of ambiguity, which is due to the absence of definite and indefinite articles in the language. This means that the title could also be translated as “part of *a* speech”—that is, a “portion” or “excerpt” of a spoken lecture. Of course, for a poet—not to mention his readers—this second meaning is no less relevant than the first.

¹⁵ This is the final couplet of “The classical ballet, let's say, is beauty's keep,” a poem that Brodsky dedicated to the great Russian dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov (*PS* 77).

¹⁶ In fact, Ann Arbor's Ardis Press published *Chast' rechi* in tandem with another volume, *Konets prekrasnoi epokhi* (*The End of a Beautiful Era*, or *The End of the Belle Epoque*), but since that other collection contains only poems that Brodsky wrote from start to finish in the Soviet Union between 1964 and 1971, I do not consider it an “American” collection, despite its publication in the United States. See *Konets prekrasnoi epokhi: stikhotvoreniia 1964-1971* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1977).

Chast' rechi was also the title of a short-lived “almanac of literature and art,” inaugurated in 1980, which borrowed its title from Brodsky's work and whose aim it was to recreate, “as a single whole, the literary-artistic process in Russia over the past 100 years” (*Chast' rechi: al'manakh literatury i iskusstva* 1 [1980]: 2). To my knowledge, only two numbers of the journal were published. Its debut issue was a tribute to Joseph Brodsky, which included poems and drawings by the poet, photographs and biographical profiles of him, and criticism on his work. Some of the most influential intellectuals of the Russian emigration were on the editorial board of this “almanac”: the literary critics Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis; Sergei Dovlatov, a popular satirical novelist; Liudmila Shtern, a political activist and later author of a memoir about Brodsky; and the poet-translator Gennadii Shmakov.

Three years after the publication of *Chast' rechi*, Brodsky put out the first collection of his poems in English that he had a direct hand in shaping. Although this collection is entitled *A Part of Speech*, a word-for-word translation of the Russian title, in many ways it differs significantly from the earlier collection. While *Chast' rechi* covers a clearly defined period—from the very beginning of 1972 until 1976, thus including only Brodsky's most recent poems¹⁷—*A Part of Speech* reaches as far back as 1965 and as far forward as 1978, with an unbalanced selection of poems from certain years. Still, I would argue that the heart of the volume remains the same, since most of its key poems came out of *Chast' rechi*. For example, the English collection does not at all offer a representative sample of poems from the middle and late 1960s: three of its poems are dated 1969, but only two other poems from the 1960s appear within its pages. Therefore, even though *A Part of Speech* technically covers the years 1965-1978, the majority of the poems here date from the 1970s, and one might imagine the English collection as growing outward from the body of poems in the earlier Russian collection, much like a tree that looks quite the same as it did three years ago, but whose branches now extend a bit further into space.

Brodsky recognized that *A Part of Speech* in English did not have the same level of period coherence as *Chast' rechi*, and in his prefatory note to the collection, he imagines his poetic output situated along a timeline—or, rather, two timelines, a Russian one and an English one, with the English necessarily falling always behind:

Since a translation, by definition, lags behind the original work, a good number of poems included in this collection belong chronologically in

¹⁷ Brodsky no doubt began to write the first poem in *Chast' rechi*, “24 dekabria 1971 goda” (“December 24, 1971”), on Christmas Eve in 1971, but the poem is dated 1972. Moreover, the collection itself is given the subtitle *Stikhotvoreniia, 1972-1976 (Poems, 1972-1976)*.

Selected Poems, published in 1973. The reason for my putting them in this book, however, is not so much a desire to provide the reader with the complete picture as an attempt to supply this book with a semblance of context, with a sense of continuum.¹⁸

While it is certainly true that the originals of many of the poems in the English *Part of Speech* correspond chronologically to certain groups of poems that had been gathered together in *Selected Poems*, the cohesiveness of that earlier volume was due to its having a single translator for all of the poems: George L. Kline. Repositioning these *Part of Speech* poems, which had been translated into English by various hands, alongside Kline's translations would not have made any sense, even if it were possible to reedit and reissue *Selected Poems*. Also, the last few poems in Kline's collection of translations were dated 1971-1972, which would place them toward the end of the first half of *A Part of Speech*.¹⁹ The parallel timelines—Russian and English—that Brodsky imagines in the above quotation do not map well onto these two collections, since there is overlap in the periods that they cover. More importantly, those timelines call attention to the derivative nature of Brodsky's poetry in English at this point in his career: while he may be writing some "American" poems, everything is composed first in Russian and only then translated into English.²⁰ By 1980, the year of *A Part of Speech*'s publication, Brodsky had only begun to dabble in writing verse in English, and most of the translations in the collection were either done by others or in collaboration with Brodsky. In short, the poet had yet to develop the distinct English voice that appears in *To Urania* and *So Forth*.

¹⁸ Untitled note from the author in *PS*, which appears after the copyright page and before the beginning of pagination.

¹⁹ In fact, three of the poems from Brodsky's *Selected Poems* (trans. Kline, 1973) do appear in *A Part of Speech*: "Nature Morte" (43), "Nunc Dimittis" (55-57), and "Odysseus to Telemachus" (58).

²⁰ The single exception to this statement is "Elegy: for Robert Lowell" (*PS* 135-37).

The first poem Brodsky wrote that is set in America, and perhaps the first poem he wrote from start to finish after his arrival in Ann Arbor, is “An autumn evening in the modest square,” which also happens to be the first poem in the second section of *A Part of Speech*—a section that, confusingly, shares its title with the collection itself and contains a poetic cycle also called “A Part of Speech.”²¹ This section marks a firm temporal break from the book’s first section, *A Song to No Music*, in that all of the poems in the *Part of Speech* section were composed (or at least completed) after Brodsky’s immigration to the United States. The final poem of the *Song to No Music* section, “Odysseus to Telemachus”—just like the Ovidian “Letters to a Roman Friend,” in fact, which comes only two poems earlier—has the poet musing upon exile in hypothetical terms, while this first poem of the second section, “An autumn evening in the modest square,” has him literally in exile and speaking in his own voice. At this point in the book, then, the prospect of exile becomes the reality of exile. In this way, the English-language collection *A Part of Speech* differs significantly from *Chast’ rechi*, the earlier Russian collection, which Brodsky structured intentionally in order to avoid marking a strict delineation between those poems written before his expulsion from the Soviet Union and those poems written afterwards.²² In an interview some years later, Brodsky

²¹ The version of “An autumn evening” that appears in *A Part of Speech* was expertly translated by George L. Kline. Based solely on the arrangement of poems as they appear in this collection and the earlier *Chast’ rechi*, it is impossible to determine their order of composition, since the three poems that Brodsky wrote in the latter half of 1972—this one, “1972,” and “In the Lake District”—are arranged in a different order in the two collections.

Lev Losev, in his recent literary biography of Brodsky, explains that three of the American-era poems collected in *Chast’ rechi* and *A Part of Speech*—“1972,” “The Butterfly,” and “The classical ballet, let’s say, is beauty’s keep” (“Klassicheskii balet est’ zamok krasoty”)—were all begun before Brodsky left his native country. See Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: opyt literaturnoi biografii, Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2006) 195. Hereafter *OLB*.

²² This delineation would have been even hazier had Brodsky followed through with his initial plans. He had intended for Ardis to publish a single volume of his poems in 1977, which would have covered the period 1964–1976, but Lev Losev, who was at the time temporarily working for the press, came up with the idea of dividing the poems into two books. Of course, Brodsky and the others at Ardis ultimately accepted

explained that, although in the summer of 1972 he had “crossed from one empire into another,” in no way did that summer mark a “psychological boundary” in his life or work.²³ (If such a boundary did exist, it must have been earlier, perhaps midwinter 1971-1972, once Brodsky’s suspicions that he would soon be forced to emigrate began to be confirmed.)²⁴ The only divisions in *Chast’ rechi* are based on genre—two long, multipart poems are set apart from the rest of the volume—and those divisions have nothing at all to do with the flow of events in Brodsky’s life. The temporal, biographical divisions of *A Part of Speech*, on the other hand, seem to reinforce an awareness of an Anglo-American audience in the West—one who is hyperconscious of Brodsky as a Soviet exile and reads him for political as well as aesthetic reasons.

As a so-called “exile” poem, however, “An autumn evening in the modest square,” at first blush, seems a strange choice to head up this exile-focused section of the book: the setting of the poem and its subject matter coincide, as readers might expect in a poem on the theme of exile, but the speaker of the poem, who is ostensibly the banished poet himself, could well be anyone, even a native-born American, and not necessarily someone cast out by the Soviets. Therefore, “An autumn evening” is much more about the United States as a cultural space than it is about being exiled within its borders. In fact, the exiled poet only shows up for certain in the poem’s final stanza, while the

Losev’s suggestion, and the two books were published as *Konets prekrasnoi epokhi* and *Chast’ rechi*. But Brodsky did not like the idea of dividing the poems into pre-exile and post-exile groups, as Losev had proposed: “Brodsky ... introduced into this plan a substantial amendment. On principle, he did not want to begin the second collection with the poem ‘1972’, that is, to create a borderline between the poems written in Russia and those written abroad. ... If something qualitatively changed in his life and his poems, he believed, then this happened at the verge of 1971 and 1972, not five months later” (*OLB* 195).

²³ Qtd. in Losev, *OLB* 195.

²⁴ On December 31, 1971, Brodsky received an “official” invitation to immigrate to Israel from the fictitious “Ivri Yakov” (“Jakob the Jew”), supposedly a resident of Rehovot, Israel, but clearly an invention of the Soviet authorities. As the poet no doubt understood, this so-called invitation did not bode well for his chances of remaining much longer in the Soviet Union. See Cynthia L. Haven (ed.), chronology, *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations* (Jackson, Miss.: UP of Mississippi, 2002) xix.

majority of the poem's lines are given over to describing its setting: a stereotypical small town somewhere in middle America. After a brief, one-stanza geographical orientation ("a small town proud to have made the atlas," put there by a "mapmaker" who was either "witless" or had been intimate with "the daughter of the mayor" [PS 61]), the next three stanzas of "An autumn evening" amount to a catalogue of physical objects and manmade structures looming in curiously empty public spaces. The town contains all of the necessary businesses and services—a general store, movie theater, café, bank, post office, church, and multiple "saloons"—but none of these places appears to be currently occupied by townspeople. In fact, in these stanzas, the only living creatures that the poet describes are insects: "Grasshoppers, in the silence, run amok. / By 6 p.m. the city streets are empty, / unpeopled as if by a nuclear strike" (PS 61). The nuclear holocaust imagery cannot be happenstance; the mere presence of a former Soviet citizen in this little American town serves as a reminder that the exigencies of the Cold War are never far away. Yet the outcome of the imagined blast, that the streets become "unpeopled," is far more important, within the frame of the poem, than any larger geopolitical context, since the main theme of "An autumn evening," as it turns out, is not so much exile in particular as it is lack of human fellowship in general.

Besides the passing mention of the mapmaker and the mayor's daughter in the opening lines, the only other people who appear in "An autumn evening" (chief among them a figure who we can assume is the poet himself) show up in the poem's final lines. The four stanzas leading up to that last stanza establish an atmosphere of solitude and claustrophobia, even though no one has yet entered the poem who can experience those

feelings. Not only is the townscape unpeopled, but everything seems to have been compressed and slowed down, if not halted entirely:

Here Space appears unnerved by its own feats
and glad to drop the burden of its greatness—
to shrink to the dimensions of Main Street;
and Time, chilled to its bone, stares at the clockface
above the general store, ... (PS 61)

The absence of fellow townspeople becomes magnified by the compression of space, creating the impression that the entire world has been reduced to this single, empty town, and that time has ground to a halt. Space and time actually appear as personifications here—space “unnerved” and world-weary, time “chilled to its bone” and listless—which makes the town seem even more “unpeopled,” since non-human characters have stepped in to take up the roles of the missing townspeople. It is a grim portrait of what might at first seem an innocuous setting. And what makes it even grimmer is the poet’s entry into this apocalyptic landscape in the final stanza: it is one thing to observe and describe a place, but quite another to live in it. Curiously, in this stanza Brodsky refers to himself in the second person, a technique that he frequently employs in poems where he aims to link the personal with the universal. Yet he addresses not a reader of his poem, but himself—a solipsistic rhetorical move that further emphasizes the poet’s loneliness and seclusion from any local community:

The dreams you dream are not of girls half nude
but of your name on an arriving letter.
A morning milkman, seeing milk that’s soured,

will be the first to guess that you have died here.
Here you can live, ignoring calendars,
gulp Bromo, never leave the house; just settle
and stare at your reflection in the glass,
as streetlamps stare at theirs in shrinking puddles. (*PS* 61-2)

Moving into this final stanza, the poem shifts from public space to private space, from “it” (the town) to “you.” The focus suddenly becomes personal, with the prospect of impending death making the continuous solitude of the empty town all the more poignant. But how do we know that Brodsky is talking to himself?

In her article on Brodsky’s use of second-person pronouns, E. A. Kozitskaia-Fleishman argues that there are four categories of possible referents for the pronoun “you” in Brodsky’s poems: “you” can be understood “as a named / unnamed (tacit) concrete addressee; as an aloof lyrical ‘I’; as a reader who has a particular emotional or social experience that brings him together with the author; and, finally, as a person in general.”²⁵ Moreover, she claims that sometimes one pronoun within a poem can refer simultaneously to more than one of these categories. Clearly, “An autumn evening” has no “concrete addressee,” whether named or unnamed, since there is nothing here that points toward the unique experience of an individual person (other than that of the author). On the contrary, the poem is based throughout upon generalizations—any small town could be described in the same physical terms as this one. Knowledge, however sketchy, about Brodsky’s life, which most Anglo-American readers would no doubt bring to the book with them, promotes a biographical interpretation of the poem (that is, an

²⁵ E. A. Kozitskaia-Fleishman, “‘Ia byl kak vse’: o nekotorykh funktsiakh liricheskogo ‘ty’ v poezii I. Brodskogo,” in *Poetika Iosifa Brodskogo: sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Tver’: Tver. gos. un-t., 2003) 108.

exiled Russian poet living in Ann Arbor, Michigan, might look a lot like the “you” here), but the poem’s generalizing tendency pushes the second-person pronoun in the direction of the universal at the same time. The “you” may be the poet, but it could just as well be anyone else. And whether we consider the addressee of this final stanza “an aloof lyrical ‘I’” or “a person in general,” the nightmarish situation in which he (or possibly even she) exists is one of exile, either literal, figurative, or both.

To make matters worse, “An autumn evening” contains clues that the poet-as-speaker (versus poet-as-addressee) does not have a clear-eyed view of the town he lives in, and that despite his perceived isolation, a healthy community thrives there. All of the businesses that he enumerates require patrons, the civic institutions require citizens (as well as a mayor, who is alluded to obliquely in the first stanza), and the church requires parishioners and a pastor (who are, admittedly, mentioned in the third stanza, but only in speculative, not concrete, terms).²⁶ The most visible representative of the local community, however, is the milkman, who goes from house to house, making his deliveries, and presumably knows almost everyone in the town personally. Yet his discovery of the soured milk emphasizes the isolation of the “you” from the other townspeople: the milkman will be the first person to learn, in his capacity as service provider, not as friend, that the poet-as-addressee (“you”) has died. That is to say, the only regular relationship that the poet-as-addressee apparently has with anyone else in the town is a business relationship. Even if the “you” of the final stanza were not Brodsky, but a reclusive “person in general,” his existence, “ignoring calendars” and “never leav[ing] the house,” would amount to an internal exile, akin to the poet’s very real exile abroad.

²⁶ “And if parishioners should cease to breed, / the pastor would start christening their autos” (*PS* 61).

Another of the earliest American-era poems in the second section of *A Part of Speech* also concentrates on the themes of alienation and isolation amid a small-town setting. That poem, “In the Lake District,” was written, like “An autumn evening,” within the first few months of Brodsky’s mid-1972 arrival in the United States, but there are several key differences between the two poems. The first of these differences is that the speaker uses the first-person pronoun in “In the Lake District,” which is entirely absent from “An autumn evening”:

In those days, in a place where dentists thrive
(their daughters order fancy clothes from London;
their painted forceps hold aloft on signboards
a common and abstracted Wisdom Tooth),
there I—whose mouth held ruins more abject
than any Parthenon—a spy, a spearhead
for some fifth column of a rotting culture
(my cover was a lit. professorship),
was living at a college near the most
renowned of the fresh-water lakes; the function
to which I’d been appointed was to wear out
the patience of the ingenuous local youth. (*PS* 67)

The effect of the presence of the first-person pronoun, in contrast to the “you” of an “An autumn evening,” is striking: in this first stanza, the speaker may speak of himself only in general terms, but one nonetheless imagines him out mixing and mingling with the populace, frustrated by the privileged daughters of omnipresent dentists and fed up with

his students—those “ingenuous local youth.”²⁷ Even though his decayed teeth mark him as an outsider, and even though he feels himself “a spy, a spearhead / for some fifth column of a rotting culture,” he still emerges regularly from his home, unlike the homebound poet-as-addressee in “An autumn evening.” The second key difference between “In the Lake District” and “An autumn evening” appears not in the poem itself, but at its foot, where the place and date of composition are given as “Ann Arbor, 1972.”²⁸ Associating the details in the poem with a particular town has the effect of linking it to the actual poet’s lived experience, rather than encouraging a universal interpretation, as with “An autumn evening.” Likewise, the first-person pronoun of “In the Lake District” contrasts with the other poem’s “you”—the “person in general”—and evokes the physical body of the poet in this particular time and place. The final stanza then comes to highlight Brodsky’s supposed inability to write in the early months of his exile, which, ironically, is belied by the very existence of this poem: “Whatever I wrote then was incomplete: / my lines expired in strings of dots” (*PS* 67). This writerly impotence is the consequence of the trauma of separation from his Russian-language audience, which is an issue that Brodsky later takes up at length in such poems as those that make up the “Part of Speech” cycle, where the poet feels himself reduced to nothing *more* than a “part of speech”—a mere word on the page with no one to read it.

Still, in many of his comments on being a poet in exile—especially those comments in his essays and interviews—Brodsky presents his personal situation,

²⁷ This phrase in the original Russian is much more blunt: “...where I’d been summoned / to torment the local ignoramuses” (my emphasis; “...*kuda iz nedoroslei mestnykh / byl prizvan dlia vytiagivan’ia zhil’*” [*ChR* 28]).

²⁸ In *Chast’ rechi*, the original Russian poem, entitled “V ozernom kraiu,” lacks this level of detail; it is merely dated 1972, and no place name is provided—further evidence that Brodsky intended for his English audience to read his work biographically, or at least assumed that they would.

traumatic as it may have actually been, in a generally positive light. In one interview, he proposed that, “Perhaps exile is the natural condition of the poet ... I feel a kind of great privilege in the coincidence of my existential condition and my occupation”—as though, from the artist’s point of view, forced migration were somehow desirable.²⁹ Brodsky also famously, or perhaps infamously, claimed in an essay that “from a tyranny one can only be exiled to a democracy” (*OGR* 24), implying that exile, particularly in the twentieth century, has been a mainly pleasant phenomenon, and he concluded one overtly biographical poem, written in the U.S. on his fortieth birthday and looking back on his life as an émigré, with these lines: “Yet until brown clay has been crammed down my larynx, / only gratitude will be gushing from it” (*TU* 3). Nevertheless, this poem’s conclusion, as well as these excerpts from his interviews and essays, contradict the sentiment that Brodsky most often expresses in his poems that are set in America. Instead, alienation and solitude are the norm, much as they are in “An autumn evening” and “In the Lake District,” where the town itself, at least in the mind of the poet, seems determined to treat him as an outsider—to prevent him from becoming a fully fledged member of its community.

The sense of alienation and isolation that the poet describes in those two earlier poems reemerges in the 1975-1976 cycle of poems called “Chast’ rechi” in Russian and “A Part of Speech” in English. The “Chast’ rechi” cycle consists of twenty thematically linked poems, while the “Part of Speech” cycle consists of only fifteen poems, all

²⁹ Giovanni Buttafava, “Interview with Joseph Brodsky,” *L’Espresso* 6 (December 1987): 156-57; qtd in David Patterson, “From Exile to Affirmation: The Poetry of Joseph Brodsky,” *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 17.2 (Summer 1993): 365

translated by Brodsky.³⁰ The English cycle departs from the Russian cycle, omitting and reordering poems, thereby morphing into a substantially different text. Rather than focus immediately on the differences between the Russian version and the English version, however, I will begin by considering the English cycle on its own aesthetic terms—in an editorial vacuum, so to speak. In doing so, I will touch on some of the key formal and thematic issues of the cycle in this version, then highlight certain fundamental differences in the Russian version. I have chosen this approach in order to draw attention to what the English version foregrounds—that is, what sort of meaning Brodsky creates for his American readership—and then to contrast that meaning with what is foregrounded in the Russian version. Brodsky’s sense of audience shapes and reshapes the cycle, from the choice of individual words and phrases to the arrangement of the poems that make up the piece.

All of the poems in the “Part of Speech” cycle adhere to a standard formal structure—in both versions and in both languages. With the exception of the third poem in the English version, “‘From nowhere with love’,” which runs to sixteen lines, each poem in the cycle consists of twelve lines. All but one of the poems are presented as a single stanza.³¹ The meter used throughout the cycle, a very loose one, is typical for the mature Brodsky: in Russian, it is called a *dol'nik*. A *dol'nik* is a meter in which one or two unstressed syllables occur between strong syllables, though there need not be a

³⁰ The first version of the cycle to appear in English was actually translated not by Brodsky but by Daniel Weissbort, and it was published in *Poetry* magazine in March of 1978, just one year after the Russian cycle had been published by Ardis. Weissbort’s translation is useful in that it cleaves much more closely to the Russian original, in terms of sense and arrangement of poems, than does the FSG version. A reader who knows English but does not speak Russian can look at this version and quickly gain an understanding of how the cycle was originally structured. One poem from the original cycle, however, is missing from Weissbort’s translation: “Tikhovorenje moe” (“My quiet creation”), which I discuss below. See “Part of Speech,” trans. Daniel Weissbort, *Poetry* 131.6 (March 1978): 311-20.

³¹ The exception is “The North buckles metal” (“Sever kroshit metall”), the second poem in all of the versions, which is divided into three four-line stanzas.

regular pattern of intervals between stresses—in fact, most often, there is *not* a regular pattern.³² Also, the number of stressed syllables in a *dol'nik* line is not predetermined; the “Chast' rechi” and “Part of Speech” cycles use trimetric, tetrametric, and pentametric lines, often within a single poem—although most lines tend toward tetrameter. Russian poetry, to a much greater degree than English poetry, is dominated by traditional forms, so Brodsky’s incorporation of this looser meter into his mature verse defied poetic conventions. As G. S. Smith notes, “The free *dol'nik*, with its capacity for variation in line length and stressing, provided Brodsky with the means to defeat formal predictability.”³³ Perhaps more importantly, the *dol'nik* is more easily recreated in English than would be other, more rigid meters, so the “Chast' rechi” / “Part of Speech” meter rarely forced Brodsky to alter his syntax from one language to the other. The rhyme structure of the cycle’s poems, however, did often necessitate creative rearrangements of syntax and, sometimes, more radical semantic changes.³⁴ Finally, none of the poems in the cycle have titles, allowing them to be subsumed under the collective title and making it clear that Brodsky did not apparently conceive of them as single, autonomous poems.

The first poem of the “Chast' rechi” / “Part of Speech” cycle, like the first page of a novel, is significant in that it prepares the reader to interpret what follows in a particular

³² G. S. Smith proposes that the English prosodic equivalent of the Russian *dol'nik* is “strict stress-meter” (“The Versification of Joseph Brodsky, 1990-1992,” *The Modern Language Review* 97.3 [1 July 2002]: 661). For other parallels between English and Russian prosody, Smith refers his readers to the following comparative study of poetics: Marina Tarlinskaja, *Strict Stress-Metre in English Poetry Compared with German and Russian* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1993).

³³ Smith, “The Versification of Joseph Brodsky, 1990-1992” 668.

³⁴ For example, the final couplet of the first poem in the English cycle reads, “Only sound needs echo and dreads its lack. / A glance is accustomed to no glance back” (*PS* 92), while the Russian original might be more literally translated, “It is only for sound that space is always a hindrance; / the eye doesn’t complain of the lack of echo” (“Eto tol’ko dlja zvuka prostranstvo vseгда pomekha; / glaz ne posetuet na nedostatok ekha”; *ChR* 83). The poems always adhere to one of two rhyme patterns: quatrains with alternately rhymed lines (ABABCD) or rhymed couplets (AABBCCDD).

way. Whatever themes are sounded in that first poem will likely seem more important when they recur in later poems of the cycle. Moreover, the first poem is *always* the first poem. Every time the reader takes the book down and opens it to the first page of “Chast’ rechi” or “A Part of Speech,” the poem that begins the cycle will always be the one that shapes the reading experience—and it will probably be among the first poems that come to mind when the reader thinks back on the cycle. It is the thematic key to the rest of the piece. In the English version of the cycle, the opening poem commences with the voice of a first-person speaker:

I was born and grew up in the Baltic marshland
by zinc-gray breakers that always marched on
in twos. Hence all rhymes, hence that wan flat voice
that ripples between them like hair still moist,
if it ripples at all. ... (PS 92)

The speaker is clearly a poet-figure whose lyrical style—his “rhymes,” his “wan flat voice”—are attributed to the geography of the land that bore him and to the “zinc-gray breakers” of the adjacent Baltic Sea. In fact, the geographical referent “Baltic marshland” tells us almost precisely from which country the poet originates; there are only so many flat places on the shores of the Baltic. The poem continues with its maritime imagery—the “clap” of a sailboat’s “canvas,” “the seagull’s metal / cry,”—and carries on the theme of the landscape’s effect on the psyche: “What keeps hearts from falseness in this flat region / is that there is nowhere to hide and plenty of room for vision.” This theme is picked up again in the first quatrain of the second poem of the English cycle:

The North buckles metal, glass it won't harm;
teaches the throat to say, "Let me in."
I was raised by the cold that, to warm my palm,
gathered my fingers around a pen. (PS 93)

Again, this second poem emphasizes what had already been voiced in the first: that the poet is a product of his environment. What Brodsky presents in these first two poems of the English cycle is a myth of origins, and that he does so specifically for his Anglo-American audience in the West. After all, the first poem, "I was born and grew up," is consigned to the position of seventh out of twenty in the Russian cycle, and moving it to the very front of the English cycle significantly changes the tone of the piece.³⁵ The speaker of this poem speaks in Brodsky's own voice: that of a Leningrad poet who has resettled in the West. Because of this reordering of poems in the English version of "A Part of Speech," the only way to read the opening of the cycle, as I see it, is to hear an exiled, exotic poet describing his origins—as a person, as a poet—to his new English readership, and I think that this imposed interpretation carries the reader through the rest of the cycle.

The tyranny/democracy dichotomy that appears time and again in Brodsky's poetry and essays ("...from a tyranny one can only be exiled to a democracy") rumbles in the background of "A Part of Speech," waiting to be picked out from the ambient noise by English readers—readers who are curious about a poet who has relocated from the

³⁵ Further evidence for my "myth of origins" interpretation can be found in the brief acceptance speech that Brodsky gave at the official banquet when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987: "Members of the Swedish Academy, Your Majesties, ladies and gentlemen, I was born and grew up on the other shore of the Baltic, practically on its opposite gray, rustling page. Sometimes on clear days, especially in autumn, standing on a beach somewhere in Kellomäki, a friend would point his finger northwest across the sheet of water and say: See that blue strip of land? It's Sweden" ("Acceptance Speech," *On Grief and Reason* [New York: Farrar, 1995], 59). Brodsky is clearly paraphrasing the first poem of the English "Part of Speech" here, yet in this case he is actually referring to his own biography.

“tyrannical” Soviet Union to the “democratic” United States (*OGR* 23-24). These readers, who have been sensitized to the biographical theme by the first two poems in the English cycle, might see Russia represented as a place steeped in a violent history, where “a prince [is] empurpled in his own blood,” and where the Russian people submit limply “to the [invading] Tartar mass” (*PS* 96). This is all in the distant past, of course, but Brodsky gives the sense that Russia’s bloody history is somehow always present—in the “limp grass,” the “leaf splayed in the roadside mud,” and in the drone of “a worn-out motor” that seems to murmur the name of a tyrant from classical antiquity (*PS* 97).³⁶ Tyranny is always close at hand. The United States, of course, has also had a violent history, but in the cycle America is shown in a tranquil light:

Near the ocean, by candlelight. Scattered farms,
fields overrun with sorrel, lucerne, and clover.
[...]
A mouse rustles through the grass. An owl drops down.
[...]
There’s a smell of fresh fish. An armchair’s profile
is glued to the wall. The gauze is too limp to bulk at
the slightest breeze. And a ray of the moon, meanwhile,
draws up the tide like a slipping blanket. (*PS* 101)

The American landscape of “A Part of Speech” is described in serene, pastoral terms; it is a place where one “can sleep soundly” (*PS* 101). In this America, you can “let / yourself out to the street whose brown length / will soothe the eye with doorways, the slender forking / of willows, the patchwork puddles, with simply walking” (*PS* 104). Most

³⁶ The “tyrant from classical antiquity” is the Carthaginian general Hannibal.

importantly, though, America for the speaker of the “Part of Speech” cycle is a place where you can cleanse your memories of the “rotten civilization”—a place where you have the “[f]reedom / [...] [to] forget the spelling of the tyrant’s name” (*PS* 106). All of these poems that describe the here/there, democracy/tyranny binarism are present in the Russian “Chast’ rechi” as well, but they are not quite as visible there. The Russian cycle, with its different arrangement of poems, calls attention to another theme—namely, that of the poet isolated from his native audience.

Just as “I was born and grew up” offers a thematic key to reading the English “Part of Speech,” so does the first poem in the Russian “Chast’ rechi” provide a key to reading this original version of the cycle. The opening poem of the Russian cycle (which is the third poem of the English cycle) appears to be, quite simply, a letter from the speaker to his audience—though it may be difficult to determine precisely what kind of audience:

From nowhere with love the enth of Marchember sir
sweetie respected darling but in the end
it’s irrelevant who for memory won’t restore
features not yours and no one’s devoted friend
greet you from this fifth last part of earth
resting on whalelike backs of cowerding boys (*PS* 94)

These are the first six of the poem’s sixteen lines, and what we have here is the header of a very peculiar epistle: the location of the sender (or speaker), followed by the date, identification of the recipient and sender, and a greeting. Everything so far is perfectly ambiguous, except for one thing: although the speaker initially claims to be writing from

“nowhere,” he actually gives a clue to his location when he says that he is writing “from this fifth last part of earth / resting on whalelike backs of cowerding boys.” Of course, the phrase “from this fifth last part of earth” could refer to anyplace, but “cowerding boys” is a geographical hint. This hint is even clearer in the Russian: there, the phrase might be translated, “from one / of the five continents, supported by cowboys.”³⁷ The Russian word used is “*kovboi*,” which is a borrowing from English, and could only refer to American cowboys: the speaker is in the United States.

It is clear, then, that the speaker is writing from America, though it may feel like “nowhere” to him, but to where and to whom is he writing? There are clues to help us solve this riddle, though some of them have been obscured in the English version. The first clue is the phrase translated here as “sweetie respected darling.” The Russian reads “*dorogoi uvazhaemyi milaia*,” all of which are terms of address, some more intimate than others. The problem, though, is that the first two have masculine endings while the third has a feminine ending. So the speaker is writing to a person, or people, of indeterminate gender. The next clue is the phrase “greet you,” which comes from the Russian “*vas privetstvuet*.” But the form of the “you” in the Russian indicates one of two things: either the speaker is not on familiar terms with his addressee and is thus using the formal pronoun, or he is addressing more than one person. But like the ambiguous gender, this too is complicated later in the poem when the speaker says, “I’m howling ‘youuu’ through my pillow dike / many seas away...” (*PS* 94). In this instance, the second-person pronoun used is the singular, more familiar form.

There are no easy solutions in “From nowhere with love.” Everything has been defamiliarized: the poem is rhetorically and thematically illustrative of the poet’s

³⁷ “...s odnogo / iz piati kontinentov, derzhashegosia na kovboiakh” (*ChR* 77).

existential crisis. The speaker, who is simultaneously writing a poem and a (love) letter, may be in America, but he feels as though he is nowhere, afloat in time (“the enth of Marchember”), and he no longer knows with whom he is communicating—or whether he is communicating at all. He may be writing to his poetic audience, or he may be writing to a woman he loves, a close friend, or a former acquaintance. Unlike the speaker of “In the Lake District,” he is able to write, but who is listening?

Among the poems that are missing from the English “Part of Speech” is the twelfth poem of the original Russian cycle. This poem picks up on the theme of being disconnected from one’s audience that first appears in “From nowhere with love”:

My quiet creation, my mute one,
though you toil, stretching bridles to their limit,
where can we file a complaint about the yoke and
to whom can we convey how we are leading our life?
Just as you search long past midnight for the fried egg
of the moon beyond the curtains with a lighted match,
so do you brush off by hand the dust of madness
from the splinters of a yellow grin onto your writing paper.
No matter how you spread this scribble that is
thicker than molasses, with whom ahead or
even at your elbow will you break, once again,
this apportioned slice, my quiet creation?³⁸

³⁸ For the Russian original of this poem, see *ChR* 88. I owe much thanks to Marina Anderson for her assistance in translating this syntactically complex and lexically abstruse poem.

The very first word in this poem is a pun that is impossible to recreate in English. The phrase that I have given in English as “quiet creation” (*tikhotvorenie*) is a single sibilant away from the Russian word for poem (*stikhotvorenie*); the compound noun “poem” is made up of two morphemes which might be translated as “verse creation.” So when the speaker in this poem addresses his “quiet creation,” Russians may hear him simultaneously addressing the poem itself—the “verse creation.” When the speaker asks his “mute one,” his poem, who the two of them can communicate with (“where can we file a complaint [...] / to whom can we convey how we are leading our life?”), it becomes evident that the “quiet creation” is only “mute” because no one is listening. As M. N. Shabaltina notes, this epithet (“mute”) “characterizes not so much the poem itself as the addressee: not the muteness of the poet, but the deafness of the reader.”³⁹ In fact, from the poet’s point of view, the reader doesn’t exist—he or she is “nobody”—while from the reader’s point of view, the poet doesn’t exist—he is writing “from nowhere,” and so may as well not be writing at all. Shabaltina goes on to explain that the real author of the poem, Brodsky,

notwithstanding the [temporal] proximity of the current generation, was deprived of their support (‘even at your elbow’) and feared the impossibility of union with the future generation (‘but with whom ahead...’), so much so that only the reader can confirm the authenticity of what is spoken (written) and make the ‘quiet creation’ into a poem. But

³⁹ M. N. Shabaltina, “Ob odnom stikhotvorenii I. Brodskogo,” international conference: “Iazykovaia semantika i obraz mira,” 7-11 Oct. 1997, Kazan State University, Russia, 11 Dec. 2004, <http://www.kcn.ru/tat_ru/science/news/lingv_97/n220.htm>, para. 5.

this will not happen: reception is impossible, because the reader is
'deaf.'⁴⁰

For Brodsky's Russian audience, the cycle is framed quite differently than it is for his English audience. There is much more emphasis in the Russian version on the problem of communication for the poet in exile. Russian readers may thus have a more pessimistic view of the closing lines of the cycle's penultimate poem than would English readers: "What gets left of a man amounts / to a part. To his spoken part. To a part of speech" (*PS* 105). Perhaps all that is left of us after we pass out of existence *is* a part of speech. But only if someone is listening.

Just as there are more than two ways to read a poem, so are there more than two ways to read a cycle of poems. Whether inadvertently or not, Brodsky ensured that his "Chast' rechi" / "Part of Speech" cycle remained constitutionally unstable. In 1980, the same year that the English collection *A Part of Speech* was released, the poet published six Russian poems under the title "Iz tsikla 'Chast' rechi'" ("From the 'Chast' rechi' cycle").⁴¹ Because four of the poems meet the formal and thematic requirements of the cycle, they could easily have been printed in the Russian cycle without raising any eyebrows. As for the other two, a sonnet and an eight-line poem with a title, who can argue with the author when he says that they belong in the cycle? To make matters more complicated, these six poems were later collected in Brodsky's 1987 collection *Uraniia*, and some of the other poems in close proximity to them within that volume were also formally and thematically similar to the "Chast' rechi" poems.⁴² Finally, two of the poems from the original Ardis cycle were printed as separate poems—out of their "Chast'

⁴⁰ Shabaltina, "Ob odnom stikhotvorenii", para. 6.

⁴¹ *Chast' rechi: al'manakh literatury i iskusstva* 1 (1980): 3-5.

⁴² *Uraniia* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1987) 7, 16, 48, 65-69.

rechi” context—in the 1983 collection *Novye stansy k Avguste* (*New Stanzas to Augusta*).⁴³ One of those two poems was ““From nowhere with love,”” the opening poem and framing text for the Russian cycle. It is as though the one poem in Brodsky’s oeuvre that best expresses his exilic disorientation suddenly got up and walked out of its own native environs—thereby enacting the disorientation that it depicts so vividly. Brodsky’s later collections—especially his English collections—are no more stable than this first pair of American collections. In fact, *A Part of Speech* may have been the soundest of all his English-language books of poetry, since it was necessarily derivative of its Russian counterpart; that is, because Brodsky was not yet entirely comfortable in English, his self-translations had not yet begun to complicate his poetics.

2. The Bread of Exile: *Uraniia* (1987) and *To Urania* (1988)

Brodsky’s second collection of poems written during his exile in the United States, *Uraniia*, was published by Ardis in June of 1987 and contains poems written between 1976 and 1987. Farrar, Straus and Giroux published an English version of the book a year later under the title *To Urania*. This English version differs greatly from the previous year’s Russian collection, which is no doubt due in part to the time lag between Russian-language publication and translation into English. By this time, Brodsky was doing most of the translations of his poems himself—a time-consuming affair, which is all the more remarkable considering his simultaneous, prolific output of original poems in both languages—and even a team of translators would have had trouble churning out translations of the nearly two hundred pages of poems in *Uraniia*. In fact, the English collection does not contain anywhere close to all of the poems from the Russian

⁴³ *Novye stansy k Avguste* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983) 129, 130.

collection; on the contrary, because of the translation lag, a good number of the poems in *To Urania* had first appeared in *Chast' rechi*, not in *Uraniiia*.

Even the inclusion of earlier poems, however, does not account for the arrangement of the poems in the English collection, which only roughly follows the original Russian contents—and sometimes the English arrangement departs completely from the Russian original. But as different as the Russian and English versions of the book may be, they nonetheless represent the work of a singular poet during one more or less demarcated period, with the English collection reaching back a few years further into the past and the Russian collection racing ahead toward the historical present. That is, each collection, in each language, has a coherent and intentional structure, elements of which are shared by both of them, despite their differences in content.

Both collections open with relatively short, lyrical poems that, in typical Brodskian fashion, are crammed with surrealistic imagery, though in each case one detects an autobiographical current running beneath the opaque surface of surrealism. In the English-language collection *To Urania*, however, the poem that Brodsky chose as his opening, “May 24, 1980,” much more overtly foregrounds its autobiographical elements. In that poem, we encounter a persona who has “braved for want of wild beasts, steel cages, / carved my term and nickname on bunks and rafters,” who has “beheld half a world” from “the height of a glacier,” “planted rye, tarred the roofs of pigsties and stables,” “admitted the sentries’ third eye into my wet and foul / dreams,” and “Munched the bread of exile.”⁴⁴ These details correspond to some of the widely known contours of Brodsky’s life, although they do not appear here in strictly chronological order. They make up the romanticized personal mythology that is frequently cited by critics,

⁴⁴ *To Urania* (New York: Farrar, 1988) 3. Hereafter *TU*.

journalists, and interviewers: the poet's participation as a young man in geological expeditions in Siberia, along with other travels within the USSR; surveillance by Soviet authorities in Leningrad, where his poetry had become tremendously popular among young people; then, imprisonment, followed by internal exile, when he lived and worked in the village of Norenskaia; and, finally, expulsion from the Soviet Union. In fact, it makes perfect sense that this poem would have an autobiographical focus, since Brodsky wrote it on his birthday—hence its title: “May 24, 1980,” the day on which he turned forty. The poem is peppered with appearances of the first-person pronoun (I count fifteen of them in twenty lines), making it all but impossible for Brodsky's American readers to forget that they are being spoken to by an exiled Russian bard—by someone who speaks for humanity on the other side of the Iron Curtain. In this way, *To Urania's* opening poem cannily captures the attention of its Cold War audience.

The opening poem of the original Russian collection, “Kak davno ia topchu...” (“How long I've been treading...”), has a much more tenuous relation to Brodsky's biography, and incidentally, it does not appear anywhere in the English collection. Certainly, if readers are aware of the most basic facts about his life—particularly, that he was living at the time in exile—they may discover minor correspondences between his life and the poem, but those correspondences seem beside the point. Instead, the biographical elements here merely serve as a starting point to build toward something universal and perhaps terrifying. That is to say, the speaker of the poem is not necessarily a Russian exiled to a foreign land, but anyone who feels estranged by his own existence.

Time, in fact, is more relevant in “Kak davno ia topchu” than space: without a doubt, distance from something lost plays a key role in this poem, and although that distance may be spatial as well, it is unquestionably temporal. Of course, the nature of loss dictates that our longing for the lost person, place, or thing is tied up with memories of the past, to which one can never return, but if one has been removed spatially, as well as temporally, from what he has lost, then closure will be all the more difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, space functions primarily in “Kak davno ia topchu” as a metaphor for time. The first line of the poem tells us that the speaker has arrived from somewhere, but at no point does he reveal the origin of his trip, or more generally, his origins—that is, where he comes from, or who he is—so that the only thing that appears to matter is the journey itself: “How long I’ve been treading you can see by my heel” (“*Kak davno ia topchu, vidno po kabluku*”).⁴⁵ It is as though the poem’s speaker has arrived on foot just as we turned to the first page of the collection. Even after reading the entire poem, we know nothing else about him, only that he has been traveling. And obviously, the journey is a metaphor for life itself. Yet time, not space, is at the heart of the poem: “And what is nice about the rooster’s loud crowing / is that it sounds like yesterday” (“*To i priiatno v gromkom kukureku, / chto zvuchit kak vchera*”; *U* 7). Because he does not say so, we cannot be sure whether or not the cry of the rooster evokes nostalgia for a particular place in the mind of the speaker; regardless, what matters most here is the temporal adverb “yesterday” (“*vchera*”), which curiously functions in this sentence as a noun: the sound of the rooster is the sound of the past.

This poem’s sadness is not exilic in any literal sense—the speaker does not apparently long for an actual motherland from which he has been forcibly removed—but

⁴⁵ *Uraniia* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1987) 7. Hereafter *U*.

it certainly does describe the sense that we all have of being separated from our past. Throughout the poem, as well, he defines himself by the physical objects that surround him, thereby illustrating his alienation from the world, for he is alone in the poem. As he moves through unpeopled spaces, the world becomes merely the objects that it contains, nothing more, and even they have a sinister quality: a “spider web” that cannot be removed “from the brow with a finger,” for example, or “a lock of hair fallen askew on the forehead” like a “dark thought” (*U 7*).⁴⁶ In fact, the permanence of objects contrasts with the transitory presence of the speaker, whose very existence remains in question. The objects will remain, of course, after he has departed, but his presence among them will have mattered very little, if at all, and the world of objects must strain to retain a memory of him:

... The poor neighborhood out the window
 offends the eye, so that it, in turn,
 remembers the face of the tenant, and not,
 as he thinks, the other way around. (*U 7*)⁴⁷

Indeed, the speaker’s existence is so tenuous that the first-person pronoun disappears after the poem’s first line, giving way to impersonal constructions (e.g., “one cannot remove [something] from one’s brow” [*“ne sniat’ s chela”*]; “nothing is dreamed” [*“nichego ne snitsia”*]) or being replaced by a generic noun (“tenant”) and subsequent

⁴⁶ “*Pautinku tozhe pal’ tsem ne sniat’ c chela*”; and “*No i chernoï mysli tolkom ne zakrepit’ / kak na lob upavshuiu koso priad’*.”

⁴⁷ “*Nischii kvartal v okne / glaz mozolit, chtob, v svoi chered, / v litso zapomnit’ zhil’ tsa, a ne / kak tot schitaet, naoborot*.” The Russian phrase “*glaz mozolit*” (“offends the eye”) could be literally translated as “causes a sore to form on the eye,” and Brodsky puns on this meaning, implying that the “poor neighborhood” does this intentionally in order to remember “the face of the tenant.”

pronoun (“as he thinks”).⁴⁸ The details of his biography, which would have been accompanied by the “I” pronoun, do not lie on the surface of this poem, as they did on the surface of “May 24, 1980.” On the contrary, the identity of the speaker carries little meaning here: his exile is not physical, but metaphysical.

The individual poems in the Russian *Uraniia* and English *To Urania* do not exist in a vacuum: their meaning as singular, self-contained objects is supplemented by the contextual code of the collection—by the poems that come before them and after them—just as their position within each volume gives meaning to the volume as a whole.⁴⁹ As opening poems, “Kak davno ia topchu” and “May 24, 1980” set the tone for each collection, which, in the first case, is broadly philosophical, and in the second, narrowly autobiographical. Curiously, the Russian original of “May 24, 1980” in *Uraniia* is untitled, merely bearing its significant date of composition at the foot of the poem. It appears toward the end of the Russian collection, in the middle of the final section, called *Zhizn' v rasseiannom svete*, or *Life in the Diffused Light*. The title of this section is

⁴⁸ In fact, the idea that we express in English with the phrase “I do not have any dreams” would be given in Russian as an impersonal construction, but that construction would also include a first-person pronoun in the dative case: “*Mne nichego ne snitsia*”—literally, “To me, nothing is dreamed.” In this poem, however, Brodsky leaves off the initial first-person pronoun “*mne*” (“to me”).

⁴⁹ George Bornstein discusses “contextual codes” in his article “What Is the Text of a Poem by Yeats?” which appears in *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, eds. George Bornstein and Ralph Williams (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993). The phrase refers to the contents surrounding a particular work in a particular published context. For instance, if a poem is included as part of a collection, the other poems nearby will affect how we read it. Bornstein’s notion of contextual codes expands upon Jerome J. McGann’s distinction between “linguistic” and “bibliographic” codes in *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991). The “linguistic code” is quite simply the words that make up a text, while the term “bibliographic code” refers to “the symbolic and signifying dimensions of the physical medium through which (or rather as which) the linguistic text is embodied” (McGann 56). Specifically, elements of a work’s bibliographic code might include “typesets, bindings, book prices, page format, and all those textual phenomena usually regarded as (at best) peripheral to ‘poetry’ or ‘the text as such’” (McGann 13). In *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), Bornstein further explains that the bibliographic code typically consists of “features of page layout, book design, ink and paper, and typeface as well as broader issues [...] like publisher, print run, price, or audience” (7). Contextual codes are linked to, yet distinct from, linguistic and bibliographic codes, as Bornstein explains: “On the one hand, [...] a contextual code is bibliographic in that it pertains to the physical constitution of the volume; on the other, the contextual code is linguistic in that it is made up of words” (“What Is the Text of a Poem by Yeats?” 179).

actually a double-entendre, since the noun (“*rasseianie*”) from which the adjective “diffused” (“*rasseiannyi*”) derives can also mean “diaspora,” so the title retains a subtle undertone of banishment, especially because it was written by an exiled poet, and a Russian speaker might just make out, behind the literal meaning, a the hum of a second, alternate meaning: *Life in the Diasporic Light*.⁵⁰ My point is twofold: the Russian collection relegates the poem to a position of little prominence, and the section in which the poem is located contains a number of other poems that are thematically similar—poems explicitly about Brodsky’s experiences outside of his homeland. And by borrowing the title from one of those “diasporic” poems, Brodsky identifies the section itself as potentially autobiographical. Nevertheless, this is the final of the book’s three sections, so one of its poems—especially one buried within it, like the untitled Russian original of “May 24, 1980”—plays a much more minor role in shaping the reader’s perception of the Russian collection as a whole than “May 24, 1980” plays in its position at the very front of the English collection, where it fixes the identity of the poet as an exile from the Soviet Union.

One may wonder where and when Brodsky’s cosmopolitanism begins to emerge in *To Urania*, since the solipsism of the opening poem may seem diametrically opposed to the outward orientation that cosmopolitanism would presumably necessitate. In a way, though, this is a spurious question, since Brodsky’s mere presence as a Russian exile in the U.S.—the same position from which, not coincidentally, he narrates “May 24, 1980”—makes him more than qualified to be counted among the ranks of cosmopolitans. Perhaps a more relevant question would be where his roots are fixed—that is, whether by

⁵⁰ The etymological root of “diaspora” means a “scattering” in ancient Greek, which is relevant here because “*rasseiannyi*,” which I translate primarily as “diffused,” might also be translated as “scattered.” And indeed, in Russian, a “scatter-brained” person is said to be “*rasseiannyi*.”

this point he has put out sturdy roots in America, and whether his Russian roots are holding firm. The first poem reveals little on this point, other than that, despite his banishment from the USSR, Brodsky remains grateful to be alive and well in the States: “Yet until brown clay has been crammed down my larynx, / only gratitude will be gushing from it” (*TU* 3). Of course, he also feels gratitude for his entire life up until his 1972 exile, since this final couplet is a response to an earlier question (“What should I say about life?”) that itself refers to the complete contents (“life”) of this capacious, yet concise, autobiographical poem.

The gloomy, dense, yet oddly luxuriant second poem of the English collection, “To a Friend: In Memoriam,” seems at first blush to be firmly rooted in Russia and in the Russian literary tradition, although that rootedness is brought into question in the poem’s final lines. Brodsky wrote “To a Friend” in 1973—seven years before this collection’s opening poem, and a year after landing in the U.S.—upon hearing a rumor (false, as it turned out) that Sergei Chudakov had frozen to death in a Moscow doorway, or as Brodsky puts it in the poem, “in the Third Rome’s cold-piss-reeking entrance” (*TU* 4).⁵¹ Chudakov was a little-known literary figure from among the *shestidesiatniks*, a loosely defined group of progressive, socialist intellectuals and artists slightly older than Brodsky,⁵² and he has been described by critics as a “pimp,” “conman,” “library-book

⁵¹ I am grateful to Russian literature scholar Oleg Proskurin, who currently teaches Russian at Middlebury College in Vermont, for pointing out to me the connection between this poem and the rumor of Chudakov’s death, as well as for sending along several relevant articles and other resources.

⁵² The term “*shestidesiatnik*,” which derives from the Russian word for “sixty,” was coined in 1960 by the critic Stanislav Rassadin in an article in the Soviet journal *Iunost*, and was meant to refer to that generation of Russians who had been approximately twenty years old in 1956, three years after the death of Stalin, when Khrushchev famously spoke out against Stalin’s “cult of personality.” This period of Soviet history is known as the “thaw” (“*ottepel*”), when reformers, including the *shestidesiatniks*, sought to build what they called “socialism with a human face.” As a group of poets, the *shestidesiatniks* included four “official” members (Andrei Voznesenskii, Evgenii Evtushenko, Robert Rozhdestvenskii, and Bella Akhmadulina), as well as many likeminded cohorts (such as Bulat Okudzhava, Rimma Kazakova, and

thief,” “bum,” and “Russian Villon.”⁵³ To be sure, he never held a regular position as a critic at any publication, and, more than likely, he did not make any money from his poems. On the contrary, although he once worked briefly for the revered journal *Znamia*, he lost the job because he was “constitutionally unable to stay in one place” and “did not want to be made into a ‘human being’.”⁵⁴ Brodsky at some earlier point in time must have become acquainted with this poet-scoundrel, and when the erroneous news of Chudakov’s death reached Brodsky in Ann Arbor, it seems to have transported him spiritually back to the Soviet Union—or at least to the picture in his mind of the grimy underside of Moscow in which Chudakov lived. But I am getting ahead of myself: Brodsky certainly wrote the poem with Chudakov in mind, and even addresses him directly in several lines, yet Chudakov’s name does not appear even once anywhere within the poem. It was only later that critics who knew Brodsky and Chudakov (or knew their work) published articles that revealed the identity of the addressee.

Instead, the poem begins with the words “To So-and-So, to you...” (“*Imiareku, tebe...*”), which Brodsky translates as “It’s for you whose name’s better omitted...” (*TU* 4). The effect of this opening phrase is to connect the speaker of the poem, Brodsky, with another poet in Russia who cannot be named—someone who, like Brodsky himself, does not have the approval of the Soviet authorities. And, in fact, the anonymous poet-addressee appears to have lived such a disgraceful life that even in death his name might sully those of the living. (It is ironic, then, that Chudakov did not die in that doorway,

Iunna Morits). See Stanislav Rassadin, “Vremia stikhov i vremia poetov,” *Arion* (1996, no. 4); Igor’ Shaitanov, “Poet v Rossii,” *Arion* (1996, no. 4); Vladimir Britanishskii, “Studencheskoe poeticheskoe dvizhenie v Leningrade v nachale ottepei,” *NLO* 14 (1996); and Sergei Korotkov, “Shlagbaum dlia romantikov shestidesitnikov ubila perestroika,” *Stolichnye novosti* (14-19 Apr. 2004).

⁵³ Oleg Mikhailov and Oleg Khlebnikov, “Moskovskii plut iz magadanskikh lagerei,” *Novaia gazeta* (22 Jan. 2001); and Lev Anninskii, “Vozvrashchenie: odnazhdy v Znameni,” *Prolog: Internet-zhurnal molodykh pisatelei*, <<http://www.ijp.ru/>>.

⁵⁴ Anninskii, “Odnazhdy v Znameni.”

because his disgrace was such that in continuing to live he had to remain underground, just as in bringing him out into public view Brodsky had to keep him nameless.) Despite Brodsky's choice to leave Chudakov unnamed as he addresses him, however, his professional respect for Chudakov becomes evident near the midpoint of the poem, where he refers to him as "a word-plyer" and "the sharp pen of the most smashing ode / on the fall of the bard at the feet of the laced Goncharova" (*TU* 4). (Natalia Goncharova was the wife of Alexander Pushkin, the "bard" of this line.) Yet respect Chudakov as he might, Brodsky nevertheless signs off anonymously in the final two lines of "To a Friend," as though he—perhaps also out of disgrace—cannot give his own name either: "With a bow, I bid you this anonymous, muted farewell / from the shores—who knows which? Though for you now it has no importance" (*TU* 5).⁵⁵ Not only is Brodsky nameless (in effect, "nobody"), but he also writes from nowhere to another poet who he thought had ceased to exist.

The critic Lev Anninskii claims that "the absence of names here is a poetic condition. An apotheosis of the impersonal. A message from the anonymous to the anonymous. Figures who rise up out of 'nothing' and disappear into 'nothing'. An association of ghosts who have drawn each other out from under gravestones."⁵⁶

Anninskii's mention of gravestones is not incidental: at the beginning of the poem, Brodsky justifies his omission of Chudakov's name with the claim that "for them it's no arduous task / to produce you from under the slab," and he worries that, "apart from this paltry talk of slabs," he might be too far above for Chudakov "to distinguish a voice" (*TU*

⁵⁵ The syntax of the first half of this final line in Brodsky's translation could obscure his intended meaning. In the original Russian poem, the meaning is much clearer: "s kakikh beregov neizvestno." That is, he sends his "anonymous, muted farewell" from "the shores of who-knows-where"—a place that hardly exists.

⁵⁶ Anninskii, "Odnazhdy v *Znameni*"

4). But it is curious that Anninskii refers to both Chudakov and Brodsky not only as “anonymous” figures, but also as “ghosts.” Brodsky was not dead, after all, though in this and other poems written in the early and mid-1970s he gloomily depicts his exile from the Soviet Union as an unbridgeable separation from his native audience, which amounts to a kind of literary death. Whereas Chudakov could exist only underground, Brodsky could not exist in Soviet Russia at all. Nevertheless, Brodsky remains spiritually rooted in Russia in spite of the impossibility of actually living there. This poem itself, with its Moscow setting and with Chudakov as its addressee, stands as an example, albeit an enigmatic one, of his Russian rootedness. (Moreover, when the speaker hopes that the addressee may “lie, as though wrapped in an Orenburg shawl, in our dry, brownish mud” after death, the use of the first-person plural possessive pronoun amounts to Brodsky planting his flag in the Russian soil.) But the poem’s final, “anonymous, muted farewell,” from “who knows which” shores, makes us realize that throughout the poem, as Brodsky had ostensibly been addressing the disgraceful Chudakov, “whose name’s better omitted,” he had actually been speaking of himself—someone who had been wiped off the map of Soviet Russia, virtually dead to his native audience.

3. A Russian Crusoe: *Peizazh s navodneniem* (1995) and *So Forth* (1996)

Out of all three collections of Brodsky’s poetry in English, *So Forth* (1996) is the most independent, both in terms of content and style, from the Russian-language collection that immediately preceded it, *Peizazh s navodneniem* (*Landscape with a Flood*;

1995).⁵⁷ Even the choice to give his final English collection a completely different title from its counterpart Russian collection (unlike *A Part of Speech* and *To Urania*), is evidence for the aesthetic independence of *So Forth*. The collection contains a greater proportion of poems composed originally in English than *A Part of Speech* and *To Urania* (twenty-one out of sixty-four, or about one third of all the poems in the collection), and Brodsky himself, working alone, translated into English all but eight of the forty-three poems in *So Forth* that had their first existence in Russian.⁵⁸ And when Brodsky translates his own verse, he takes such lexical and stylistic liberties, usually for the sake of preserving rhyme and meter, that the results ought probably to be called not translations, but rewritings. No matter what they are called, the peculiar brand of English that emerges in Brodsky's self-translations coincides with the idiolect of the poems that he wrote originally in English. As a result, *So Forth* possesses a smoothness of style and a consistency of tone that had been missing from the earlier books. Brodsky clearly intended for this collection to be received as the work of an English-language poet—in fact, the task of determining which poems were originally composed in English and which were composed in Russian, not to mention who translated them, has been made much more difficult here than in the previous two collections: whereas in both *A Part of Speech* and *To Urania* the name of the translator was given, when appropriate, at the end of each poem, in *So Forth* that information can only be found printed in minuscule type on the book's copyright page. The message is clear: these are English poems, and

⁵⁷ *So Forth*. New York: Farrar, 1996. Hereafter *SF*. *Peizazh s navodneniem*. Dana Point, Ca.: Ardis, 1995. Hereafter *PSN*.

⁵⁸ Of the eight poems in *So Forth* that were produced with the help of other translators, only one of them was translated without Brodsky's collaboration: "View from the Hill," which was translated by Alan Myers, who began translating Brodsky's poems in the nineteen-seventies.

although some of them were translated from Russian, their prior existence in that other language is merely incidental.

The opening poem of *So Forth*, “Infinitive,” reads at first as though it were a page lifted from one of Derek Walcott’s books, with its Crusoe-like speaker addressing the “savages” who live on the tropical island where he has been shipwrecked (*SF* 3).⁵⁹ Both Brodsky and Walcott associate Crusoe with the figure of the poet (“the namer”),⁶⁰ but while Walcott’s Crusoe—a castaway in the distant past who views his native, European, imperialist culture as a failed endeavor—marks the mythic beginning of a hybridized West Indian culture (indigenous, African, and European), Brodsky’s Crusoe, who exists solely in the present, is concerned primarily with the problems of communication in exile and survival amid new, strange surroundings. To Walcott, Crusoe is an ancestor, but to Brodsky, Crusoe is none other than the Russian poet himself. Brodsky wrote “Infinitive” in English, which tallies with his wish that *So Forth* be read as an English collection (especially since this is the opening poem), and, fittingly, among its main themes is the poet’s vexed relationship with the English language—or, at least, with the native language of the island on which he has been shipwrecked. In the poem’s opening lines, Brodsky sketches two of the everyday, ever-present, seemingly banal challenges that castaways, immigrants, exiles, and refugees must contend with—uncustomary grammar and unfamiliar fare:

⁵⁹ Walcott’s Crusoe poems include “The Castaway” (57-58), “Crusoe’s Island” (68-72), and “Crusoe’s Journal” (92-94), all of which appear in his *Collected Poems, 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, 1986). He also explains at length the significance of this castaway figure for his own aesthetics in his essay “The Figure of Crusoe,” *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents P, 1993) 33-40.

⁶⁰ Walcott, “The Figure of Crusoe” 36.

Dear savages, though I've never mastered your tongue, free of pronouns
and gerunds,
I've learned to bake mackerel wrapped in palm leaves and favor raw turtle
legs,
with their flavor of slowness. Gastronomically, I must admit, these years
since I was washed ashore here have been a non-stop journey,
and in the end I don't know where I am. ... (SF 3)

Although the castaway shares with the islanders a universal sense of humanity, the smaller, commonplace differences mark him as foreign, as an outsider. On their island, he must do things their way. Unlike Daniel Defoe's character, who brought the Enlightenment to his desert island and educated "his man" Friday in the proper English manner, this Crusoe admits that he "aped" the islanders—but, he explains, "you started aping me even before I spotted / you" (SF 3). It seems that everyone on this beach mimics everyone else, which perhaps stifles self-awareness and innovation: "Look what life without mirrors does / to pronouns, not to mention one's features!" (SF 3). All island residents comes to look alike, thus eliminating the need for pronouns to distinguish between "me" and "you," or even "us" and "them." Although the island seems like a place of madness, where no one knows any longer who they truly are, its madness is a cosmopolitan madness, with the locals learning from the outsider and vice versa. In fact, Brodsky's poems often depict cosmopolitanism as madness—or, at least, as utter disorientation, which itself is maddening. The final sentence that I quoted in the excerpt above ("Gastronomically, I must admit, these years / since I was washed ashore here have been a non-stop journey, / and in the end I don't know where I am.") is reminiscent of

numerous such expressions of disorientation in Brodsky's poetry, the best known of which, of course, lies within "From nowhere with love" in the "Part of Speech" series.⁶¹

Cosmopolitanism and exile cannot be separated out in Brodsky's outcast poems with American settings, unlike similar poems written before the summer of 1972,⁶² since being in the New World necessarily entails—for the Russian poet—engagement with a foreign culture, which ironically becomes a second home for him, sheltering and nurturing him like an adoptive parent. In the poem "Infinitive," the castaway grows accustomed to the exotic food and attempts to learn the language; he even stops "longing for the past participle or the past continuous" (*SF* 4) and settles instead for the present tense, satisfied *to do* his daily routine or even just *to be* (as the poem's title surely indicates): "Islands are cruel enemies / of tenses, except for the present one" (*SF* 3). In a certain way, the castaway, having understood that the islanders were once outsiders just like him, has no need for the past tense, for nostalgia. It would seem that they too likely migrated here at some point in the past, making the island, essentially, a country of immigrants: "Perhaps your ancestors also / ended up on this wonderful beach in a fashion similar / to mine" (*SF* 4). If everyone comes from somewhere else, then the pain of separation from the homeland becomes dulled.

⁶¹ I am thinking especially of the lines, "From nowhere with love the enth of Marchember sir / ... not yours and no one's devoted friend greets you from this fifth last part of earth / ..." (*PS* 94). Curiously, the image of the mirror (or rather its absence) appears in this poem as well, when the speaker plays the "double" of his addressee, who has remained back in the speaker's native land, by reflecting her (or him, or them) "like / an insanity-stricken mirror" (*PS* 94). In both cases, the missing mirror, or the impossibility of reflection, seems to aggravate the speaker's alienation and isolation. See also "Odysseus to Telemachus" ("I don't know where I am or what this place / can be. ... / To a wanderer the faces of all islands / resemble one another. ..." [*PS* 58]) and "To a Friend: In Memoriam" ("With a bow, I bid you this anonymous, muted farewell / from the shores—who knows which? Though for you it has no importance." [*TU* 5]).

⁶² See, for example, "You're coming home again..." ("Vorotish'sia na rodinu..."; *Selected Poems*, ed. Kline, 33), "Letters to a Roman Friend" (*PS* 52-54), and "Odysseus to Telemachus" (*PS* 58).

All of this begs the question: in which language are we to imagine the castaway writes his missive? Clearly, he must be using the lingua franca of the island (the fictitious language without “pronouns and gerunds”), since he addresses the “savages” directly and therefore expects to be understood, just as Brodsky wrote the actual poem in English for his Anglo-American audience. In the final lines of “Infinite,” we learn that the castaway is inscribing his poem into the sand on the island’s beach:

... I write this with my index finger
on the wet, glassy sand at sunset, being inspired perhaps
by the view of the palm-tree tops splayed against the platinum sky like
some
Chinese characters. Though I’ve never studied the language. Besides, the
breeze
tousles them all too fast for one to make out the message. (*SF* 4)

The question of communication seems key here: the castaway finds inspiration in the windblown treetops, but he cannot transcribe them quickly enough, much less decipher their meaning. It is as though the foreign landscape will never make sense to the exiled poet, however much he tries to describe it in his work. And when he writes in English, the language of the “islanders,” what is the point of trying to communicate the meaning of the landscape anyway? (On the other hand, those “islanders” might find some value in observing their native landscape through the eyes of an outsider, which means, for them, encountering it anew, seeing it defamiliarized. This would account, at least in part, for the popularity of Brodsky’s American-era poems in English.) His inability to read the palm trees’ “Chinese characters” implies that his own sand-inscribed message will never

be read, that the sea or the wind will erase it, just as the breeze “tousles” the trees before any meaning can be communicated.

In another 1994 poem, “Robinsonade” (“Robinzonada”), the trees are also communicators, and again the poet serves as a conduit for their message. Brodsky composed “Robinsonade” in Russian, and, like “Infinite,” it is spoken from the point of view of a latter-day Crusoe on a desert island. The relationship between these two poems is complex: neither is a translation of the other, but they each address the same themes and share a single speaker. Both poems seem to have sprung up in the mind of the author at the same time, perhaps even as a single “work,” but they were then written down separately in two different languages.⁶³ Unlike “Infinite,” however, “Robinsonade” was not included among the contents of *So Forth*, but its close similarity to the English poem makes it worth examining.⁶⁴ Curiously, the local islanders play a much smaller part in “Robinsonade,” and the speaker’s tone is more fully Defoe-like—that is, colonialistic—than in “Infinite”:

... A victim of shipwreck,
in twenty years I’ve sufficiently domesticated
this island (though perhaps it’s a continent),
and the lips move all on their own, as while reading, muttering:

⁶³ This is not the only time in Brodsky’s oeuvre when two extraordinarily similar poems appear simultaneously in Russian and English. For instance, two poems from the mid-1980s, “Letter to an Archeologist” (*TU* 99) and “Tol’ko pepel znaet, chto znachit sgoret’ dotla” (“Only ash knows what it means to burn up completely”; *PSN* 24), imagine an archeologist in the distant future discovering and sorting through the ruins of contemporary human civilization, which will have been buried in the earth. Similarly, two 1994 poems, the English “A Postcard” (*SF* 119) and the Russian “A Photograph” (“My zhili v gorode tsveta okamenevshei vodki”; *PSN* 174, *SF* 118), each present generalized descriptions of entire contemporary cultures: the former is a snapshot of the U.S., and the latter of Russia. Together, these two poems were published in the *Times Literary Supplement* on October 28, 1994.

⁶⁴ “Robinsonade” was, however, included in the final section of Brodsky’s *Collected Poems in English*, “Uncollected Poems and Translations,” in a 1995 translation by Jonathan Aaron in collaboration with Brodsky (*CPE* 493).

“Tropical vegetation, tropical vegetation.” (*CPE* 493)

The parenthetical comment in the third line of this excerpt seems to be a nod toward the autobiographical (“continent” = North America), especially when paired with the reference to having lived for “twenty years” as a castaway. (To be precise, Brodsky had at this point been living for twenty-two years outside of his native country.) But such biographical details merely serve as a convenient way to begin opening up the poem; what is most important in “Robinsonade” are its thematic parallels with “Infinite.” The speaker of the Russian poem may feel as though he has “sufficiently domesticated” his new environment, but the details of his message—which appears to be written in his native language for his native audience—betray the madness that the foreign landscape has actually inflicted upon him. The ubiquitous “tropical vegetation” dominates the thoughts of the poet, and his “already glazed / eye no longer distinguishes the print of one’s own flat sole / in the sand from Friday’s” (*CPE* 493). Removed from his native culture, exiled from the actual audience of this Russian poem, the poet no longer knows what differentiates his own art from that of those around him—the American poets. Has he become one of them?

The maddening tropical landscape of “Infinite” and “Robinsonade” has its northern parallel in another poem of the same era. In “Novaia Angliia,” or “New England,” a 1993 poem that appeared in *Peizazh s navodneniem* but not in *So Forth*, Brodsky describes the Massachusetts woods—which American readers would most likely associate with the bucolics of writers like Thoreau and Frost—as though it were the exile’s worst nightmare:

Though everything here seems senseless, the trees continue to grow.

You can see them through the window, but the far-off view is best.

And the air is almost shocking: it is so much overblown

that one could easily mistake a Boeing for a butterfly.⁶⁵

One cannot help but wonder: do trees ever grow sensibly? In his essay “The Condition We Call Exile,” Brodsky speaks of a “retrospective machinery that gets unwittingly triggered within an individual by the least evidence of his surroundings’ strangeness. Sometimes the shape of a maple leaf is enough, and each tree has thousands of these” (*OGR* 29). So what is “senseless” about these trees is their slight difference from the trees in the speaker’s native land. The form of the American species makes it recognizable as a maple, or an oak, but any subtle variation from the Russian species serves as an ever-present reminder that the exile lives amid a foreign landscape: “and since a trifle is all that it takes to drive you mad, / be wary of the local trees—the alders, the elms, and the oaks.” The arboreal imagery in this poem, naturally, does not appear by chance: the trees may make the poet crazy, may make him feel unmoored, uprooted, but their own steadfast rootedness, which seems to contrast with the foreignness of the poet, actually reflects and affirms his necessarily local existence. Still, whether the exiled poet finds himself surrounded by familiar yet maddeningly foreign trees or gazing at an unpeopled townscape seemingly frozen in time, his greatest fear is to die alone in a strange land, unnoticed by anyone but the milkman, which accounts for the fury with which Brodsky concludes “New England”—chopping down those infuriating trees and refusing to kiss the soil from which they grotesquely emerged:

Someday all of this will be kindling for the stove;

they will make of it a pencil or, God willing, a bed.

⁶⁵ Translation mine. For original, see *PSN* 139.

But the earth—in which you will also be obliged to sleep,
utterly alone, no less—you will never have to kiss.

Yet even death in America and subsequent burial in American soil, whether against one's will or not, turns out to be, in its own way, a kind of rootedness. Curiously, the Russian language in which Brodsky writes this America-era poem, with its conspicuously American landscape, also manages to assert the poet's rootedness in the local soil, as though his personal claim on the land were strong enough that he could stake it in his personal idiom. And as for actual death as a form of rootedness, Brodsky, in characteristically cosmopolitan fashion, ensured that, after his passing, his body ended up buried not in the United States or Russia, but in another place he held dear: Venice.

Conclusion

“American” Cosmopolitanism

Another Russian-language poem from *Peizazh s navodneniem* (*Landscape with a Flood*) again finds Brodsky disoriented and apparently uprooted amid a foreign landscape—this time, however, in Dublin. Given the Irish setting and unquestionable personal relevance for its addressee, who as far as I know does not speak a word of Russian, it is unfortunate that the poem, “To Seamus Heaney” (“Sheimus Khini”), has never been published in English. Here is my translation of the entire poem (unfortunately, I was not able to retain its galloping tetrameter or dactylic end-rhymes):

I was wakened by the shriek of gulls in Dublin.

At daybreak their voices resounded

like souls so utterly miserable

that they cannot even experience grief.

Clouds passed above the sea in four tiers,

just like a theater moving toward the drama onstage,

punching out in Braille a postscript of fury

and helplessness on a glazed frame.

Sculptures loomed in a lifeless park.

I winced: I am a mere thought, or rather, close to one.

Three fourths of life is a recognition

of oneself in an inarticulate wail
or... in complete petrification.
I was in a city where, unable to have been born,
I could, if I mustered my courage,
still die, but never lose my way.
The shrieks of Dublin gulls! The end of grammar,
a sonic footnote to an attempt to cope
with the air, with a dash of a foremother's feelings,
who reveals the forefather's treachery—
with their beaks they tore apart my hearing like a curtain,
insisting upon the elimination of wordiness,
of letters in general, and that they begin their monologue anew
on a clean inhuman note.¹

The key image here (if an image can be sonic) is the shrieking of the gulls that opens and closes the poem. Their cries might seem maddening in the same way that the trees of “New England” were maddening, but it is also possible to read them as a byproduct of Brodsky’s attempt to identify with Heaney: on a small island that has a big ego, where even the clouds seem theatrical as they float “toward the drama onstage” (“*navstrechu drame*”), where the very air retains a whiff of ancient tribalism (“the forefather’s treachery”), a Russian poet becomes overwhelmed by the sonic dominion of the gulls’ shrieks, by the grandiosity of the landscape in general, and suddenly he understands why an Irish poet would be obliged to eliminate “wordiness” (“*dlinnoty*”) from his verse—why an Irish poet would need to bring the mythic down to the level of colloquial speech.

¹ For the Russian original of this poem, see *Peizazh s navodneniem* (Dana Point, Ca.: Ardis, 1995) 189.

I call attention to this particular poem, “To Seamus Heaney,” because, like countless other poems written by Brodsky, Heaney, and Walcott, its mere existence highlights their shared sense of collaboration, kinship, and common poetic lineage. In this case, the text happens to indicate an affiliation between Brodsky and Heaney, but, as often as not, such poems, when they do not look back to an important predecessor, celebrate the work of certain contemporaries of these three poets—contemporaries who also exercise rooted cosmopolitanism. For instance, Brodsky’s two magnificent, multi-section long poems, “Lithuanian Divertissement” and “Lithuanian Nocturne,” are both dedicated to the Lithuanian poet Tomas Venclova, while Heaney’s “To the Shade of Zbigniew Herbert” and “Out of This World” are dedicated to Polish poets who made a profound impression on him (the latter poem was written in memory of Czeslaw Milosz).² Each of these poets shares the cosmopolitan sensibility of Heaney, Walcott, and Brodsky, yet they also maintain a marked partiality to the places they call home.

Like Venclova, Herbert, and Milosz, the three poets on whom I have focused in this dissertation might be classified as “world poets”: all of them were published outside of their home countries, they won numerous international prizes for their poetry, and, unlike the vast majority of poets, their writing provided them with an income sufficient to live on. Nevertheless, I maintain that it is not their “world poet” status that creates their cosmopolitanism, though it may enable it. Rather, the experience of hybridity begets cosmopolitanism. In each poet’s case, the cosmopolitan nature of their written work grew out of lived experience—Heaney in the split culture of Ulster, Walcott in the multicultural, multilingual Caribbean, and Brodsky as a Russian living in America.

² Brodsky, “Lithuanian Divertissement” (*CPE* 41-43) and “Lithuanian Nocturne” (*CPE* 215-25); and Heaney, “To the Shade of Zbigniew Herbert” (*EL* 81), and “Out of This World” (45-49) in *District and Circle* (2006).

America itself has proven especially fertile ground for cosmopolitan poetry. While it would be rather easy to discuss a handful of poems written by Venclova, Herbert, and Milosz—all of whom lived or spent a considerable amount of time in America—and to reflect on how those poems relate to American culture, I would instead like to consider the work of three other, slightly younger poets who currently live in the United States and to whom the torch of rooted cosmopolitanism has been passed: another Irishman, another West Indian, and another East European (in fact, a Slav, like Brodsky). A brief glance at a single poem by each of them will suffice to bring to light some features of the subsequent generation's cosmopolitan poetics.

Paul Muldoon's "Milkweed and Monarch," from *The Annals of Chile* (1994), is rooted in the poet's native Ireland (almost literally rooted, since the action unfolds alongside his parents' graves), but, in the psychological sense, the setting of the poem cannot be so neatly pigeonholed. As he kneels in the cemetery, the poet finds he is "stricken / with grief, not for his mother or father,"

but a woman slinking from the fur of a sea-otter
in Portland, Maine, or yes, Portland, Oregon—
he could barely tell one from the other—

and why should he now savour
the tang of her, her little pickled gherkin,
as he knelt by the grave of his mother and father?³

The poet imagines his mouth being filled with "the taste of dill, or tarragon," which initiates a flood of memories linked to two places and two women, his mother and the

³ Paul Muldoon, *Poems, 1968-1998* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001) 329.

American (sealchie though she may be), causing the distinction between home and abroad to become blurred.⁴ Like Brodsky, it would seem, Muldoon is doubly rooted in two places—in this case, Ireland and America: “he could barely tell one from the other.”⁵

The Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison’s “For Rosa Parks,” from her 1986 collection *I Am Becoming My Mother*, praises the selflessness of the American civil rights icon while interlacing her experience with the experience of black women everywhere, from the American South to Nigeria and the West Indies. What binds these women together is their resilience in the face of misery—no matter what has happened to them, they have “just kept walking,” and Rosa Parks was no exception:

And how was this soft-voiced woman to know
that this “No”
in answer to the command to rise
would signal the beginning
of the time of walking?⁶

Goodison conflates her own memories with imagined scenes, to the point that it is no longer clear who is speaking, as though the downtrodden everywhere shared a voice:

No, walking was not new to them.
Saw a woman tie rags to her feet
running red, burnishing the pavements,
a man with no forty acres
just a mule
riding toward Jerusalem.⁷

⁴ Muldoon, *Poems* 329.

⁵ Muldoon, *Poems* 330.

⁶ Lorna Goodison, *Selected Poems* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: U of Michigan P, 1992) 66.

Like Walcott, Goodison speaks for the people who live in the places she is partial to, whether Jamaicans, Africans, Americans, or Canadians, but her multivocality is more slippery than Walcott's—she slides imperceptibly in and out of the voices she occupies. At the closing of “For Rosa Parks,” we cannot even be sure, and perhaps it does not matter, whether Rosa Parks is the one “who never raised her voice / never lowered her eyes / just kept walking / leading us toward sunrise.”⁸ Regardless, in Goodison's poems, the local and the universal coincide, and her multiple voices escort us from one realm to the other.

Finally, the Polish poet Adam Zagajewski's “Watching *Shoah* in a Hotel Room in America,” which appeared in *Canvas*, his 1991 collection of English translations, provides a fitting metaphor to close this study of cosmopolitan poetics: an émigré author, lying in bed in an American hotel, making poetry from memories, from his present surroundings, and from a universal concern for humanity. As the poet strains to hear the soundtrack of the famous documentary film about the Holocaust, a jovial group of people in the neighboring room sing “Happy Birthday” louder and louder, drowning out the “dying Jews” on the television.⁹ Gazing at the screen, he sees his past, and his country's past, rise before him:

The trees of my childhood have crossed an ocean
to greet me coolly from the screen.
Polish peasants engage with a Jesuitical zest
in theological disputes: only the Jews are silent,

⁷ Goodison, *Selected Poems* 66.

⁸ Goodison, *Selected Poems* 66.

⁹ Adam Zagajewski, *Without End: New and Selected Poems*, trans. Clare Cavanagh, Renata Gorczynski, Benjamin Ivry, and C. K. Williams (New York: Farrar, 2002) 184.

exhausted by their long dying.

The rivers of the voyages of my youth flow

cautiously over the distant, unfamiliar continent.¹⁰

Zagajewski's rooted cosmopolitanism demands that, even as a Walcottian "fortunate traveller" surrounded for the moment by carefree mirth, he must reckon with the weight of history and the ever-present prospect of injustice, much like Heaney, who, when he enters the "Republic of Conscience," realizes that the responsibility to conduct himself ethically in the world rests squarely on his own shoulders:

No porters. No interpreter. No taxi.

You carried your own burden and very soon

your symptoms of creeping privilege disappeared.¹¹

¹⁰ Zagajewski, *Without End* 184.

¹¹ Heaney, "From the Republic of Conscience," *Opened Ground* 276.

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