

ABSTRACTS

Crossing Common Ground: W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney

Edward Larrissy

Yeats and Heaney are often assumed to be so unlike that little can be gained from a comparison. However, Heaney became an increasingly serious student of the older poet, even though the latter's influence on his early work was not formative. They both adopted a quasi-anthropological approach to life in the Irish countryside: Yeats in his folklore writings, Heaney in his early poetry. Both take from Irish traditions an interest in liminal states arising on the boundary between the everyday and the marvelous. Both are poets of memory who represent and explore mental associations but find in them deeper, archetypal patterns. And both interrogate the relationship between form and experience. The differences between them, as some recent research has suggested, may owe something to the contrasting structures of feeling associated with their respectively Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. (EL)

Screening Belfast:

“Heaney in Limboland” and the Language of Belonging

Rosie Lavan

Seamus Heaney rarely expressed any fondness for Belfast, and yet its significance in his development as a writer cannot be overstated. Heaney imagined and represented Belfast across forms and media, and this essay considers the most complicated facets of his relationship with the city he left in 1972 through attention to the documentary “Heaney in Limboland,” made for British television in 1970. At once a profile of the poet and of the North in the context of the worsening violence, the film is a crucial companion to Heaney's early writing, prompting fresh consideration of the tensions that emerge in the diction and forms of his poetry at this time. The poet's relationship to his contemporary world was a central preoccupation for Heaney throughout his writing life. Comparing his different versions of the city from the same contemporary moment offers one way of addressing that persistent question. (RL)

Seamus Heaney and the Making of *Sweeney Astray*

Stephen Regan

Seamus Heaney's *Sweeney Astray*, his translation of the medieval Irish romance, *Buile Suibhne*, was a long time in the making. Heaney began work on his version of the story, in verse and prose, in the autumn of 1972, soon after leaving Belfast and settling in Glanmore, Co. Wicklow. The exile of Mad King Sweeney, cursed by St. Ronan and transformed into a bird, had a powerful appeal for Heaney, who initially saw in the story a political allegory concerned with the role of poetry and the imagination in a time of violence. Uneasy about both the direction of his translation and the adequacy of his technique, Heaney put aside his first draft of the work in 1973, finally publishing a revised version with Field Day in 1983. The Notebook containing the first draft of *Sweeney Astray* is highly revealing in terms of Heaney's preoccupations at the time of his move to the Republic, while subsequent revisions show how the work came to carry the imprint of his later poetic and political concerns from 1979 onwards. In making *Sweeney Astray*, Heaney was effectively remaking his own career. As well as being a strikingly innovative translation of a Middle Irish text, the work is also an intensely personal reflection on the role and value of poetry itself, and a catalyst for the changes in Heaney's poetic practice between *Wintering Out* (1972) and *Station Island* (1984). (SR)

“Now, and ever / After”:

Familial and Literary Legacies in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain*

Michael Parker

That *Human Chain* (2010) is among the very finest of Seamus Heaney's collections has come to be widely accepted. The incident which perhaps left the deepest imprint on Heaney and these late poems during the period of their composition was the stroke he suffered in August 2006. The closeness of his encounter with death was, however, not the sole factor causing him to review urgently his work-to-date and what his literary legacy might be. In the preceding years, he collaborated with Dennis O'Driscoll on a substantial volume of interviews, published in 2008 as *Stepping Stones*. During these probing, telling exchanges, recollections from his childhood, adolescence, and early manhood flooded back, and soon found themselves inscribed in new poems. As his seventieth birthday approached, considerable time and energy were devoted to projects relating to that landmark date, including his participation in two

documentaries, Charlie McCarthy's *Out of the Marvellous* and Maurice Fitzpatrick's *The Boys of St Columb's*, both of which stimulated another look backwards.

"Now, and ever / After" addresses Heaney's preoccupation with time past, present, and future, offering a close examination of *Human Chain's* opening movement where his earliest literary influences—from the English canon—are most prominent. It explores recurring anxieties voiced by the poems' speakers that his allotted time might be approaching its end, and that memory itself might become "irretrievable." (MP)

(Self-)In-Mourning: Paul Muldoon's Early Elegies

Wit Pietrzak

The essay focuses on Paul Muldoon's elegies written in the twentieth century, particularly on "Incantata" and "Yarrow," with a view to demonstrating that in the interwoven passages of mourning and narratives of personal growth the poet manages to create images of the deceased people that are infused with individual vividness as they also become parts of the speaker's own self. As a result, his subjects are endowed with a revived life in verse, and become an intrinsic part of the identity of the poet. In the end, death is shown to be a petrifying prospect, but one which can be alleviated as long as the departed are re-inscribed in a language that captures their own idiosyncrasies, which makes it seem as though the words flow from the poet as much as from the dead. (WP)

A Calculation More Curious Than Instructive: Epic Chronology in *Paradise Lost*, Books 1-3

Gábor Ittész

Early critics of Milton's *Paradise Lost* dismissed the possibility of calculating the duration of epic action in the first three, extra-terrestrial, books. When twentieth-century commentators took up the issue, they offered a variety of estimates for the overall duration of the poem's action, and their differences ultimately invited a return to the skepticism of the eighteenth-century forebears. Against this critical background, the paper examines Milton's treatment of time in the opening books of *Paradise Lost*. It explores his various time-keeping techniques and argues that for an adequate reading much more than straightforward temporal signifiers must be taken into account. Imagery, metaphoric and structural indicators, as well as pointers to a relevant timescale, the very continuity of action, temporal dualities, (the assumption of) the consistency of the narrative, and the relevance of mundane experience all contribute to the

overall picture. The result is both an integration of the events in Books 1-3 into an overarching epic chronology, and a set of hermeneutical principles more widely applicable to the interpretation of the whole poem. (IG)

**Compulsion to Re-enact:
Trauma and Nostalgia in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder***

Wojciech Drag

The article sets out to indicate the possibility of interpreting Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2006) as a study of an obsessive longing to repeat and return, which combines the features of Svetlana Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia and the Freudian notion of repetition compulsion. Following an overview of critical approaches to the novel, the article outlines the baffling condition of its unnamed narrator, a man recovering from a mysterious traumatic event. His obsession to re-enact a fleeting moment in the past when he felt authentic is examined as a manifestation of restorative nostalgia's utopian project of reconstructing an absolute truth. His further re-enactments are discussed as motivated by a wish to repeat a painful scenario in order to gain control over a traumatic event. The article concludes with a consideration of *Remainder*'s closing image, re-interpreted as a metaphor for the narrator's immersion in the cycle of repetition. (WD)

**Possession: The Dostoevskian Master Trope of Reading and Writing in
J. M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* (1994)**

Angelika Reichmann

Apart from *Foe* (1986), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) is J. M. Coetzee's most explicit discussion of authorship through the consistent rewriting of a canonical text by a writer who has had the most profound influence on his own writing. Coetzee's reading of Dostoevsky's 1871 *Devils* (or *The Possessed*) and his representation of Dostoevsky is focused on the figure of the "monster," summing up a stereotypical view of both Dostoevsky and his art. The essay argues that this "monstrosity" is inseparable from the master trope of the original Dostoevskian text, "possession," which Coetzee reinterprets in the context of mastery. Thus, monstrosity here seems to be the inevitable product of the attempt to relinquish mastery in textual production, to find a "middle voice" in between being possessed and doing the possessing, and thereby come into being. The resultant text can be conceived of only as a hybrid, monstrous being: an intertextual complex. (AR)