

**Cultural Memory and Myth in Seamus Heaney's Bog Poems, and Antjie
Krog's *Country of My Skull* and *Down to My Last Skin***

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

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Abbreviations

The titles of Heaney's poetry and prose volumes have been abbreviated as follows:

FK – *Finders Keepers*

GT – *Government of the Tongue*

P – *Preoccupations*

N – *North*

OG – *Opened Ground*

WO – *Wintering Out*

The titles of Krog's poetry and prose volumes have been abbreviated as follows:

CS – *Country of My Skull*

LS – *Down to My Last Skin*

Abstract

This dissertation attempts to compare and contrast the functions of cultural memory and myth in both Heaney and Krog's work. By doing so, I look at what it means for both writers to work within a culture or tradition, and how they both mediate their religious or racial identity within a fractured and divided society.

It is evident that both Ireland and South Africa possess violent and difficult histories. What I look at is the different ways in which both writers reflect on historic acts of atrocity in their work, and how this serves as an attempt to highlight or overcome social divisions. For Heaney, the bodies of sacrificial victims, which have been preserved in peat bogs, represent an important "vehicle for personal and cultural memory" (Purdy 94). Therefore, Iron Age atrocities provide Heaney with "a brutally pertinent understanding of the underlying causes and nature" of the ongoing crisis in contemporary Northern Ireland (Foley 74). (One must emphasise, here, that the Northern Ireland of today is much more peaceful than when Heaney wrote *Wintering Out* and *North*, which are his volumes of poetry that I concentrate on). Heaney, by delving into his Celtic past, also attempts to recover symbols of a common Irish identity in order to find a "voice" outside the framework of Catholic/Protestant religious dogma. Here, myth can be viewed as a positive force that provides an understanding of the archetypal forces of violence, as well as representing something that could potentially regenerate one's society.

On the other hand, Krog, as a "white" Afrikaner, attempts to come to terms with her own culture's complicity (a theme that is shared by Heaney) in the atrocities

committed during the Apartheid era. The victims' stories, revealed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) * hearings, provide Krog with a means "to reach out towards a different collectivity than the one defined by past history" (Olivier 222-3). Krog is painfully aware of the exclusiveness of Afrikaner identity that she has inherited, and she attempts to construct a new sense of identity that will include all South Africans who are committed to knowing their past. Therefore, I propose in this dissertation that Krog reformulates her own Afrikaner mythology of suffering (e.g. the British persecution of Afrikaners during the Anglo-Boer War) into a more inclusive mythology. This represents an important connection with Heaney's work in that both writers share the view that the land belongs to those who have suffered and those who can empathise with the suffering of others.

The following is a brief summary of the chapters in this dissertation:

Chapter One: Stepping Through Origins

(A paraphrased line taken from Heaney's poem, "Kinship", N 40)

This chapter discusses how both Heaney and Krog are acutely aware of their cultural history and origins. I will look at the different ways in which both writers reflect on historic acts of atrocity in their work, and how this serves as an attempt to overcome social divisions.

Chapter Two: Myth and Pseudo-myth

* The TRC, which was chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, held public testimonies of human rights violations that were committed during the Apartheid era. In doing so, the TRC "sought to promote reconciliation by providing reparations to the victims and amnesty to the perpetrators" (Attwell and Harlow 2).

In this chapter I draw extensively on Jung's theories concerning archetypes and the collective unconscious. Here, I adapt terminology taken from Nicolas Oldert who makes a distinction between genuine myths (which are seen as "universal") and pseudo-myths (or symbolic systems that are culturally specific) (136). I also look at Ted Hughes's essay "Myth and Education" where he indicates that myths are "tribal dreams" (192). Both Hughes and Oldert provide an important "lens" with which to view and expand on Jung's psychoanalytical theory. I also discuss how Roland Barthes's semiotic interpretation of myth, which he sees as "a chain of concepts widely accepted throughout a culture" (O'Sullivan, *et al*, 286-7), complements Jung's concept of archetypal images (which are cultural elaborations of archetypes) (Walker 13).

With the aid of this theoretical framework, I explore how both Heaney and Krog in their writing work with myth, which can potentially regenerate one's society. Heaney does so at a more deliberate and conscious level, and is also able to draw from a common Celtic mythology (as well as including other mythologies such as Norse mythology). However, Krog writes against the racist ideology of Apartheid myths, which I define as pseudo-myth.

Chapter Three: "Befitting Emblems of Adversity" and "the Artful Voyeur"

(Quotations from W. B. Yeats's "Meditations in a Time of Civil War", 227, and Heaney's "Punishment", N 38)

In this chapter I explore how past atrocities in Iron Age Europe provide Heaney with an understanding of the archetypal forces of violence within present-day Ireland,

while also taking into account various criticisms of Heaney's "mythologizing mystification of historical realities" (Purdy 98). I look at how Krog also emblematises the stories of victims in her work. Both Heaney and Krog reveal elements of guilt and self-accusation about possibly exploiting the pain of others in their work. One of the main purposes of this chapter is also to cover the debate about the value/efficacy of poetry in response to political and social problems.

Chapter Four: "Baptised in Syllables of Blood and Belonging"

(Quotation from Krog's poem, "Country of Grief and Grace", LS 96)

This chapter examines the way in which Krog deals with the exclusiveness of "white" Afrikaner ideology, or pseudo-myth, based on past suffering and victimisation of the Afrikaner people. Krog attempts to reformulate her own Afrikaner "mythology" of suffering into a more inclusive mythology based on an empathetic understanding of the suffering of "black" people during the Apartheid era. Therefore, Krog is writing against the myth of personal cultural victimisation, which excludes the suffering of other cultural groups. Both Krog and Heaney share the view that the land belongs to those who have suffered and those who can empathise with the suffering of others.

Chapter Five: National Poet and Nomadic Poet

In this chapter, I look at the differences between Heaney, who works within a common Irish-English literary tradition, and Krog, who writes as an Afrikaner in a country of diverse cultures and traditions. I further discuss how both writers draw on diverse local languages and dialects as a means of resisting authoritarianism. In doing

so, I argue that they are both “nomadic writers”, which is a concept I have borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (in Auge 275). I also argue that both Heaney and Krog are “national writers” in the sense that they are cultural workers and healers in their respective societies. My point, here, is that the poet-bard can and should be both nomadic and national (both positions are necessary and complement, rather than exclude, one another).

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Chapter One: Stepping Through Origins

Both Heaney and Krog are acutely aware of their cultural history and origins. It is through this awareness that they are both able to uncover the complexities of “tribal” hatred and violence, which are the negative “spin-offs” of cultural identity within fractured societies. Hence, both writers deal with and reflect on the “collective memory” concerning the atrocities that have been committed in the past. Heaney, in his Bog Poems, was inspired by P. V. Glob’s book, *The Bog People*, which deals with sacrificial victims excavated from the peat bogs. Heaney uses “the unforgettable photographs of these victims” as one of his materials for creating poetry (P 57). Krog, on the other hand, uses the narratives of both the victims and perpetrators presented in the TRC, which provided a forum for uncovering the atrocities committed under the Apartheid regime. The TRC was also responsible for exhuming the bodies of missing activists who “were interrogated, tortured, killed and buried on farms all over the country” by the security police (CS 204). Thus, for both writers the landscape has memory of its own, which needs to “resurface” in order for social healing to occur. This relates to Heaney’s “idea of bog as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it” (P 54).

Tobin indicates that the opening lines of Heaney’s poem, “Kinship”, “offer a commentary on the idea of bogland as Jungian ground, a center that houses the hieroglyphs of the culture and delves into its origins” (126-7). Here, Heaney discovers himself stepping “through origins / like a dog turning / its memories of wilderness / on the kitchen mat” (N 40). I find Tobin’s interpretation unsatisfactory when he indicates that these lines represent a “deflation” of Heaney’s “bardic

pretention [sic] by portraying himself in the less than grandiose image of a dog no longer game for the hunt" (127). What Tobin does not note is the irony of a supposedly "domesticated" dog lying lazily on the kitchen mat, but still unconsciously remembering the hunting instincts of its ancestors. Heaney, like the dog, also finds himself recalling "memories of wilderness" and acts of violence committed by his ancestors that continue to occur in his contemporary Ireland. Elmer Andrews also indicates that Heaney, in "recognising his separation from 'origins'", can only hope to still experience them "on an instinctual, pre-conscious level" rather than be on "a merely purposeful, rationally-pursued quest" (93). I would add that Heaney is sensitive to the fact that there are no simple and rational solutions regarding the conflict in Northern Ireland, and that, by delving into the instinctual and pre-conscious energies of the Irish landscape, he attempts to uncover the deeper issues at hand. For instance, Foley argues that Heaney, by reflecting on Iron Age atrocities, "was able to move beyond the surface details of current events [in Northern Ireland] and employ a symbolic mode which laid bare not only the savage tribal instincts of the perpetrators of the violence, but also the archetypal barbarity of the conflict itself" (73-4).

Therefore it is important to note that Heaney not only delves into the origins of his culture's ideologies, the "centre that houses the hieroglyphs of culture" (Tobin 127), but also explores the non-rational and "animal" instincts that are far older than the formation of culture itself. For example, Jung notes the similarity of animal behaviour patterns to those of humans, which occur in situations when "you are seized by an emotion or by a spell, and you behave in a certain way you have not foreseen at all"

(in Walker 7). As Walker points out, this type of “unpremeditated act stems from the ‘suggestive effect’ of an archetype” (7).

In “Kinship”, the word “kitchen” (as a symbol of domesticity) implies a “hearth”, “fireside” or “gathering place” which can be viewed as the holy family/cultural centre. Hence, the dog dreaming on the kitchen mat gives one a sense of ancestral continuity: both dog and master would have sat near the fireside in prehistoric times (implied by the word “wilderness”) surrounded by other members from their community. One can see from this that the dog, like the kitchen, also represents a symbol of family life and community. This is an important point that Tobin’s rather simplistic formulation of “a dog no longer game for the hunt” seems to miss (127). The image of the “kitchen” can also be seen as a reminder of one’s “primitive” need to consume food. Therefore, one of the things implied in “Kinship” is that human “killing instincts”, like those of the dog, are not easily tamed despite the presence of civilisation. The themes of “origins” and “consumption” are also found in the following words of “Kinship”:

I grew out of all this
like a weeping willow
inclined to
the appetites of gravity. (N 43)

Andrews indicates that “appetites” connotes “both nurture and insatiable demand”, and “gravity” reveals “both an elemental principle of physical order and a suggestion of anxiety and death” (95). It is also evident that the above lines refer to the Mother

Goddess, or Nerthus, as it is “the appetites of the goddess who ‘swallows’ the faithful, reclaiming them for her ruminant ground” (Andrews 95).

Throughout “Kinship” the Mother Goddess is depicted as both a horrifying and awe-inspiring figure: an “insatiable bride” who swallows “our love and terror” (N 41-5). As indicated by Heaney, the Mother Goddess was “the goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, in the bog, to ensure the renewal and fertility of the territory in the spring” (P 57). Thus the Mother Goddess can be viewed as a dual figure: one that is both devouring and regenerative, one that composes and decomposes. Henry Hart says that the “effects” of Nerthus “are bafflingly murderous and regenerative” (94). These different aspects of Nerthus relate to the cycles of the seasons and Irish history: “The mothers of autumn / sour and sink” (N 43). Later in “Kinship” the speaker indicates that “Our mother ground / is sour with the blood / of her faithful” (N 45).

The political and social climate of Ireland has “soured”, and Heaney in his role as a poet, like “Hamlet the Dane”, is the “smeller of rot” (“Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces”, N 23). Therefore, in the Bog Poems, Heaney uncovers the “rotten” aspects of his Irish culture’s inherited ideologies, as well as “rottenness” referring to the misrepresentation of the Northern Ireland crisis by the British colonial news media, which is alluded to, in “Kinship”, with the mentioning of the Roman historian, Tacitus (who in the *Agricola* reported accurately the customs of the Celts) (N 45). The words “rottenness” and “sourness” also imply a potential for transformation to take place: both socially and poetically. This is revealed in “Kinship” with the line: “a windfall composing / the floor it rots into” (N 43). The “windfall” represents a “stripping

down”, like the “Ground that will strip / its dark side” (“Kinship”, N 41), as well as implying unexpected good fortune or the “riches” of composing poetry. However, “composing” also suggests a calming down, reconstruction, reconciliation and social renewal.

Hence, the mother ground can be viewed as a figure who represents transformation and transmutation, which is symbolised, in “Kinship”, by the “mutation of weathers / and seasons” (N 43). One can also see this “alchemical” process taking place in “The Tollund Man” where the “dark juices” of the goddess’s fen “work on” and transform her sacrificial victim into “a saint’s kept body” (WO 47). Thus, the goddess transmutes the Tollund Man into a holy figure to whom Heaney considers praying, thereby risking blasphemy, “to make germinate” dead flesh (WO 48). Foley states that Heaney, through the Tollund Man, “seeks to consecrate the land, transforming the ‘cauldron bog’ of hatred and violence into ‘Our holy ground’, and praying to ‘Him’... to make the victims of the ongoing conflict ‘germinate’ into something new and positive” (65). The themes of reconciliation and social transformation are important to both Heaney and Krog. I would also add that in “The Tollund Man” “germination” (WO 48) refers not only to social renewal but also to the “germination” of poetry in the poem itself and poetry as a genre (and especially poetry that is *rooted* in ancient depths).

This theme of “germination” is related to the following line in “Kinship”: “ferments of husk and leaf” (N 43). Both “germination” and “fermentation” give an impression of transformation (like the fermentation of wine), and are symbolic of the “magical” effect of creating poetry. In “The Bog Queen”, the queen’s brain darkens like “a jar of

spawn / fermenting underground” (N 32). I agree with Tobin when he indicates that what ferments underground, besides the Bog Queen’s brain, “is the archetypal pattern that spawns the atrocities of contemporary Ireland” (126). This negative sense of “fermentation”, the “spawning” of violence and hatred, is also echoed in Krog’s book, *Country of My Skull*, with “fever and destruction fermenting and hissing underwater” (130). However, Heaney’s use of the word also implies, I would argue, that it is his own brain that is “fermenting underground” in the sense of mental contemplation and the creation of poetry. In this way, the mother ground is also the “ruminant ground”: a place for meditation and composing poetry, “the cooped secrets / of process and ritual” (“Kinship”, N 40-1). For both Heaney and Krog “composing” and meditating on the past represent important means to unite social divisions through art.

For instance, when Krog returns to her family farm in *Country of My Skull*, she is forced to reconcile her fond memories of the place as a young person with the present escalation of theft and murders taking place on farms in their area, and the country as a whole. In this respect, Spearey points out that “it is immediately evident that this landscape has altered and become disorienting and must be learned anew” (68). I would add that Krog’s return to her family farm represents an important psychological integration of historic atrocities, which were exposed by the TRC, with her personal experience of the South African landscape. For example, the notice on their farm gate, warning any trespassers that they will be met with an armed response, represents a rude awakening to both Krog and her husband; their immediate response is: “Surely this has nothing to do with us?” (CS 272).

Krog implies, through this episode, that all South Africans have been affected by past atrocities, which form part of the underlying causes for the present acts of violence taking place in the country. Andries, Krog's brother, acknowledges the following concerning the country's present crime problems: "... I suppose this is more real. This is more in step with the country than the paradise of our youth. What we had could not last" (CS 273). What Krog illustrates in *Country of My Skull* is that Apartheid provided an illusion to the "white" minority of peace and security while, on the other hand, many "black" people were living with the reality of Apartheid's brutality. As Andries realises, the illusion of paradise for a privileged minority could not last. It is important to emphasise at this point that Heaney, as an Irish Catholic, is a member of the oppressed minority, and therefore writes from a different perspective than Krog. This is why part of Krog's project in *Country of My Skull* is to seek forgiveness (as well as acceptance) from "black" people for the atrocities committed against them by her Afrikaner ancestors. Carli Coetzee points out that in Krog's work "there is a self-conscious desire to address an audience that includes black South Africans" (686). However, Krog does not only make a self-conscious effort to include a "black" audience: she also on many occasions addresses them specifically. For example, in "Country of Grief and Grace" she asks those whom she has wronged (i.e. "black" people who have been wronged by her people) to forgive her and to take her with them (LS 98). Heaney, on the other hand, does not need to seek acceptance and forgiveness (or at least not in the same way that Krog has to) from any group that his culture has marginalized.

Hence, in *Country of My Skull*, Krog attempts to come to terms with her guilt of being previously privileged at the expense of others. She does find some resolution to this

guilt by being aware of such privilege; for instance, she indicates that it is “no longer an unaware privilege, but one that we know the price and mortality of” (CS 272). The awareness of past suffering also enables Krog to reconnect with her place of birth, her family farm: “This is the place that first wakened me for words and it still does – after all these years, these many other voices” (CS 272). Here, “these many other voices” (CS 272) are the voices of the South African people that have suffered and been “baptised in syllables of blood and belonging” (“Country of Grief and Grace”, LS 96). Krog’s formulation, “the place that first wakened [her] for words” (CS 272) relates to Heaney’s “living roots” that awaken in the poet’s head (“Digging”, OG 4) and “the vowel of earth / dreaming its root” (“Kinship”, N 43). Hence, for both writers language and poetry are deeply connected to and a product of the landscape. The landscape also “awakens” both writers to the atrocities committed in the past and present, and it is this “awakening” that represents the first steps toward reconciling a divided society.

Therefore, in both Heaney and Krog’s work the creative act of writing occurs by gazing into the “wounds” of the past. For example, Krog says, in “Country of Grief and Grace”, that “the eye plunges into the wounds of anger / seizing the surge of language by its soft bare skull” (LS 95-6). It is appropriate that the latter line of this quotation is paraphrased, in *Country of My Skull*, as a heading (“To seize the surge of language by its soft, bare skull”) above the first collection of excerpts from the victims’ testimonies (27). Here, as well as in the book’s title, Susan Spearey feels that the word “skull” conveys multiple associations “with death and burial, with excavation, with protection and even with infancy and malleability” (65). She further

suggests that in the book's title the word "skull" could also represent a "mapping" (implied by the word "country") of the writer's "interior landscape" (65).

Similarly, Heaney's poetry also represents a "mapping" of his mental landscape, and an "excavation" into his culture and the past; for example, in "Digging", he discovers that by "digging" with his pen he can "awaken" the "living roots" in his head* (OG 4). In *Country of My Skull*, "the Commission must dig up bodies" both literally and metaphorically in the sense of "excavating" the stories of the past, and, in doing so, the TRC becomes "the voice of the people" (154). Here, "digging" up the past is a difficult but necessary experience, and for Krog it is also an intensely traumatic one. For example, in *Country of My Skull*, the grave indicator, the perpetrator, ironically states the following while uncovering a body of one of his victims: "It's hard work, digging" (128). The way the grave indicator sniggers, a few lines later, suggests that he is not genuinely remorseful for his actions, and, from a psychological point of view, it does not appear that he has come to terms with his own past. As Sean Kaliski, a psychiatrist, states regarding the role of the TRC: "every individual will have to devise his or her own personal method of coming to terms with what has happened" (CS 129).

Thus, in Heaney and Krog's work, both writers are personally and deeply committed to knowing and attempting to come to terms with their cultures' violent pasts. However, as Krog suggests in *Country of My Skull*, this endeavour must be undertaken by everyone in society, which has become fractured, if a new sense of belonging is to occur. The penalty for not doing so is made clear when Krog, in a

* Of course, what "awakens" in the head of the speaker is the activity of digging. However, I argue that the "living roots" can also symbolise his psychological and cultural roots.

moment of realisation, says: “you will wake up in a foreign country – a country that you don’t know and that you will never understand” (CS 131).

Returning to the theme of “growing out” of the land: Rita Zoutenbier argues that Heaney, in “Kinship”, “accepts being tied to this ground, which means an acceptance of the culture of which he is a member, and of history and fate” (65). However, Heaney reveals uneasiness in passively “accepting” these things. It is in fact more accurate to say that Heaney endeavours to come to terms with and is painfully (as well as proudly) aware of his cultural origins; Heaney, as Foley puts it, “attempts to come to terms with the fact that his own ‘bog’ land continues to be the site of primitive hatreds and atrocity” (69). Hence, in “Kinship” an irony which is “bitter and exhausted” (Brown 120), can be registered in the following words: “how we slaughter / for the common good” (N 45).

Krog, like Heaney, also attempts to come to terms with a painful and difficult past; for example, she says in her poem “Country of Grief and Grace”: “what the hell does one do / with this load of decrowned skeletons origins shame and ash” (LS 96). Hence, Krog realises, in *Country of My Skull*, that she has to reacquaint herself with “this land” because her “language carries violence as a voice” (216). Here, Krog, as a “white” Afrikaner, attempts to come to terms with her own culture’s complicity (a theme that is shared by Heaney) in the atrocities committed during the Apartheid era.

The victims’ stories, revealed in the TRC hearings, provide Krog with a means “to reach out towards a different collectivity than the one defined by past history” (Olivier 222-3). In *Country of My Skull*, Krog is aware of her own ethnic exclusivity

when she indicates that “Afrikaners are usually versed in bloodlines” (61). Thus, Krog is painfully aware of the exclusiveness of the Afrikaner identity that she has inherited, and she attempts to construct a new sense of identity that will include all South Africans who are committed to knowing their past. Heaney, of course, is a member of a marginalized group, and thus uncovers the past as a means to restore his culture’s heritage and to locate its violent instincts. The importance of knowing one’s past is emphasised by Archbishop Tutu, in *Country of My Skull*, when he points out to Krog: “if you don’t know the past, you will never understand today’s politics” (131). Both Krog and Heaney uncover the past to understand the present-day (but deeply rooted) political and social problems of their respective societies.

This is why Krog in “Country of Grief and Grace” attempts to connect with the “black African heart” that “can only come from this soil”, and in doing so she feels “for one brief shimmering moment” that this country is also truly hers (LS 97). Here, the land belongs to those who have suffered and to “the voices of those who live in it” (“Country of Grief and Grace”, LS 96). The idea of belonging through suffering and by connecting with “the soil” can also be seen in Heaney’s poem, “Requiem for the Croppies”, when barley grows up out of the graves of the Irish peasants who died on the land “without shroud or coffin” (OG 22). This represents an important connection between both writers’ work: they both share the view that the land belongs to those who have suffered and those who can empathise with the suffering of others. Both Heaney and Krog are also nomadic writers in the sense that they both draw from various local languages and dialects, which serves to promote cultural diversity. By exploring and restoring other traditions and languages both writers work towards creating a new collective (and inclusive) identity within their respective societies. The

restoration of different traditions in one's society is also an important function of the national writer or bard. (See Chapter Five for a more detailed discussion about the roles of the nomadic poet and the national poet/bard).

Chapter Two: Myth and Pseudo-myth

In cultural studies, the term “myth” is often used to signify ideologies and systems of belief that justify the exclusion of various groups from social institutions and power structures. For instance, O’Sullivan, *et al*, indicate that “the meanings into which events and objects are constructed are always socially oriented – aligned with class, gender, race or other interests” (43). This relates to semiology, the study of signs, which views myth as “an unarticulated chain of associated concepts by which members of a culture understand certain topics” (O’Sullivan, *et al*, 192). (Later in this chapter I will discuss Roland Barthes’s semiotic interpretation of myth in more detail). This would obviously reflect Krog’s view of myth concerning the racist ideologies of Apartheid South Africa.

However, this view of myth does not reflect Jung and Hughes’s view (to give two examples) that myth is also something “universal” and “essential” to all humankind. From the Jungian perspective, “*myths* are essentially culturally elaborated representations of the contents of the deepest recesses of the human psyche”, and, hence, they represent “the unconscious archetypal, instinctual structures of the mind” (Walker 4). What is important, here, is to distinguish in Jungian terminology between an *archetype*, which is inherited and universal (like an atom or the axial system of a crystal), and an *archetypal image*, which is not inherited and “can be represented in terms of the cultural codes presiding over the depiction of symbols” (Walker 13). It becomes apparent that archetypal images are similar to semiology’s idea of signs as both are culturally influenced. The difference, of course, is that archetypal images are culturally elaborated (i.e. from archetypes) and not completely manufactured by

culture in the way signs are in semiology. Jung explains this with his analogy of “the axial system of a crystal, which ... performs the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, although it has no material existence of its own” (“Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype”, *Collected Works* 9.1, 79). Here, the archetype (the form), like the invisible axial system of a crystal, is “a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*”, but the archetypal image (the content) is what results when an archetype becomes conscious and fills out with “the material of conscious experience” (“Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype”, *Collected Works* 9.1, 79) (also see Walker, 13).

In his essay, “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious”, Jung notes that “primitive man is not much interested in objective explanations of the obvious”, for, instead, “his unconscious psyche has an irresistible urge – to assimilate all outer sense experiences to inner, psychic events” (*Collected Works* 9.1, 6). This view regards myth as “an experiential rather than a material reality” (Oldert 125), or what Hughes regards as the faculty of the imagination that “embraces both outer and inner worlds in a creative spirit” (“Myth and Education”, 192). This idea of art as an embracement of both “outer” and “inner” worlds is further elaborated on by Heaney when he states, in his 1995 Nobel lecture, “Crediting Poetry”, that poetry should be “true to the impact of external reality and ... sensitive to the inner laws of the poet’s being” (OG 454).

Therefore, it becomes apparent that a clear distinction needs to be made, in order to avoid confusion, between genuine myth and the term “myth” used to signify an ideology or symbolic system, which will be defined as pseudo-myth for the purposes of this dissertation. “Pseudo-myth” is a term that I have borrowed from Nicolas

Oldert, who defines it “as symbolic systems – or implicit ideologies – that do not enable people to deal with the fundamental emotional and developmental problems that they face in the course of their lives” (136). The term “pseudo-myth” best fits Krog’s definition of myth as a “system of comforting delusions”, which functions as a logical model that is capable of overcoming contradictions (Krog, CS 190). However, Heaney sees “poetry as divination, as a restoration of the culture to itself” (P 60). This closely parallels Hughes’s idea that myths are “tribal dreams of the highest order of inspiration and truth”, which are capable of healing one’s society (“Myth and Education”, 192).

Walker indicates that “archetypes, as inherited structures, belong to the collective unconscious of the human race and may be said to constitute the images as well as the essential laws of human nature as humanity has slowly evolved over the ages” (10). Jung illustrates this evolution of the collective unconsciousness in his essay, “The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious”:

The collective unconscious, being the repository of man’s experience and at the same time the prior condition of this experience, is an image of the world which has taken aeons to form. In this image certain features, the archetypes or dominants, have crystallized out in the course of time. They are the ruling powers, the gods, images of the dominant laws and principles, and of typical, regularly occurring events in the soul’s cycle of experience. (*Collected Works* 7, 93).

Therefore, genuine myths “are born from within, and constitute a restatement of universally valid human forms” (Oldert 140), or, as Hughes indicates, are an

elaboration of “basic patterns and images” (192-3). This “universality” of myth is well illustrated when Hughes observes in his essay “Myth and Education” that

every real people has its true myths. One of the first surprises of mythographers was to find how uncannily similar these myths are all over the world. They are as alike as the lines on the palm of the human hand... (193)

Hughes does not mean, here, that *all* myths are *exactly* alike (in fact, the words “uncannily similar” make this clear), which one might mistakenly imply from the last line of the quotation. On the contrary, comparing myths to “the lines on the palm of the human hand” is a very accurate and subtle metaphor: no two human beings have exactly the same lines on the palms of their hands, and yet there are basic “palm patterns” (or generic similarities) that all human beings tend to share. For example, palmistry uses these basic patterns as a method for divination, and forensic science uses fingerprints as a means of identifying and distinguishing between people. All individuals, in both instances, share these basic patterns with other human beings (like the double-helix found in DNA), and yet each individual possesses a pattern that is unique. The same is true of myths: one expects there to be cultural differences around the world, but what is surprising (and what cultural studies tends to underemphasize) is that so many of these myths share common themes and similar mythical figures. Lévi-Strauss also notes “the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions” (“The Structural Study of Myth”, 119). For instance, he says in *Myth and Meaning* that

Mythical stories are, or seem, arbitrary, meaningless, absurd, yet nevertheless they seem to reappear all over the world. A “fanciful” creation of the mind in

one place would be unique – you would not find the same creation in a completely different place. (11-12)

Lévi-Strauss makes an important point: why would so many mythologies around the world be populated with gods, monsters, giants, dwarves, and dragons (to list a few examples)? Therefore, it is false to say that these mythical figures are “fanciful”, and, by the same token, to insist that myth is always culturally specific; for example, semiology views myth as culture-specific, and *not* transcultural or universal (O’Sullivan, *et al*, 193). My argument is that myth operates on both levels: as an unconscious archetypal pattern of the human mind and as “an unarticulated chain of associated concepts” (O’Sullivan, *et al*, 192) of a given culture, which is the crystallised product of this archetypal pattern or “the repository of man’s experience” (Jung, *Collected Works* 7, 93).

The collective unconscious as a “repository of man’s experience” ties in usefully with Heaney’s “idea of bog as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it” (P 54). It is this unique ability of the peat bogs to preserve the “bodies” of the past, which are also “crystallised” over time, that makes them such an appropriate metaphor for the collective unconscious. Anthony Purdy points out that “bog bodies have an extraordinary power to abolish temporal distance, to make past present” (94).

Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* sees myth as “a system of communication” and “a mode of signification” (109). Barthes elaborates on Ferdinand de Saussure’s tripartite concept of the *signifier* (a physical object, such as a sound, printed word or image), the *signified* (a mental concept that bears no necessary relationship to the signifier),

and the *sign* which is “the associative total which relates the two together” (Fiske and Hartley, 23). Barthes explains this with his example of a bunch of roses representing a lover’s passion:

For what we grasp is not at all one term after the other, but the correlation which unites them: there are, therefore, the signifier, the signified and the sign, which is the associative total of the first two terms. Take a bunch of roses: I use it to *signify* my passion. Do we have here, then, only a signifier and a signified, the roses and my passion? Not even that: to put it accurately, there are here only “passionified” roses. But on the plane of analysis, we do have three terms; for these roses weighted with passion perfectly and correctly allow themselves to be decomposed into roses and passion: the former and the latter existed before uniting and forming this third object, which is the sign. (113).

Here, Barthes points out that this “analytical breakdown is for convenience only”, for “there can be no signifier distinct from a signified” and neither of these can exist outside the construct of the sign (Fiske and Hartley, 23). Barthes sees myth as *the second order of signification*, which is when the sign changes its role and becomes the signifier of cultural values (i.e. when “a sign carries cultural meanings rather than merely representational ones”) (Fiske and Hartley, 26). Hence, according to Barthes’s terminology, “myth refers to a chain of concepts widely accepted throughout a culture, by which its members conceptualize or understand a particular topic or part of their social experience” (O’Sullivan, *et al*, 286-7). Krog in *Country of My Skull* provides an example of myth as “a chain of concepts widely accepted throughout a culture” when she says:

In the big Afrikaans Dictionary, you will find words like *kafferbees*, *kafferwaatlemoen*, *kafferkombers* – and each time the word is used derogatorily: *kafferbees* – low quality cattle; *kafferwaatlemoen* – tasteless melon; *kafferkombers* – cheap type of blanket. There are also words like *kaffersleg* and *kafferlui*, indicating the intensive form. Very useless is *kaffersleg*. Very lazy is *kafferlui*. (190)

In the above quotation, Krog demonstrates how Afrikaner culture has historically associated “black” people (by calling them the derogatory word “kaffer”) with things that are inferior. By doing so, Afrikaners and “white” people do not see “black” people as human beings like themselves; for example, “white” people might say that “kaffermeids” (“black” maids) “don’t get cold like white people” or that they “don’t feel like other people about their children” (CS 190). Krog demonstrates, here, how Afrikaner culture during Apartheid was able to conceptualise “black” people as less than human. As she implies in *Country of My Skull*, it is this objectification of “black” people that wrongly condones (unconsciously on a cultural level) the atrocities committed against “black” people (in other words, these atrocities occurred because the perpetrators did not see “black” people as real human beings like themselves). Barthes illustrates how objects gain cultural interpretations when he says:

Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society ... a tree as expressed by Minou Drouet is no longer quite a tree, it is a tree which is decorated, adapted to a certain type of consumption, laden with literary self-indulgence, revolt, images, in short with a type of social *usage* which is added to pure matter. (109)

It is this level of myth, as a “social usage”, that Krog works with in *Country of My Skull* in order to challenge the inherited cultural beliefs of Apartheid, which wrongly

and derogatorily associated “black” people with anything inferior. It is this view of myth (or one aspect of myth) that is illustrated by Barthes when he indicates that

one can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the “nature” of things. (110)

However, my argument is that myth also operates on the level of archetypes, which solidifies into “a type of speech chosen by history”. For example, Jung in “Approaching the Unconscious” explains the difference, in his view, between a symbol and a sign:

The sign is always less than the concept it represents, while a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. Symbols, moreover, are natural and spontaneous products. No genius has ever sat down with a pen or brush in his hand and said: “Now I am going to invent a symbol”. No one can take a more or less rational thought, reached as a logical conclusion or by deliberate intent, and then give it “symbolic” form ... it will still remain a sign, linked to the conscious thought behind it, not a symbol that hints at something not yet known. In dreams, symbols occur spontaneously, for dreams happen and are not invented; they are, therefore, the main source of all our knowledge about symbolism. (*Man and His Symbols*, 55)

It is important to note, at this point, that Jung’s concept of signs differs from Barthes’s one. In fact, there is considerable overlap between Jung’s “symbols” and Barthes’s “signs”; for example, O’Sullivan, *et al*, note that “Jung’s search for underlying patterns within symbolic worlds ... complements a science of signs, in as much as he

attempts to identify large-scale paradigms for cultural imagery” (16). Here, both symbols and signs occur unconsciously and unarticulated within a given culture. For example, no one person *invents* a language or a system of associated concepts, and thus symbols and signs contain implicit meanings that are inferred through a particular cultural context. The difference between the two views, of course, is that Jung sees symbols and archetypal images as arising out of the archetypes of the collective unconsciousness.

In Lisa Malherbe’s thesis, *The Perpetrator’s Narrative and Myth*, she defines myths as “isolated systems of belief that play a role in keeping power and cultural structures intact” (9). However, the role of myth need not always be a “negative” one, and I would argue that myth has the potential to “regenerate” one’s social structure and identity. For example, Krog’s own view of myth as a “delusion” which overcomes contradiction by reconciling “the inner world” with “the outer world” (CS 190) is a “reworking” of Ted Hughes’s formulation of myth in “Myth and Education” (192). Hughes’s essay provides a different, yet overlapping, view of myths as “tribal dreams”, which have the power to heal and to “express the real state of affairs” (192-3). This would relate to Jung’s theories of archetypes and the collective unconscious, which form “the deepest recesses of the human psyche” (Walker 4). Myths and dreams tap into these “basic patterns and images” of the collective unconscious (Hughes, “Myth and Education”, 192). Therefore according to Jung’s theories, every myth, despite its location within a specific cultural context, “contains the potential for revealing indirectly some unforeseen or neglected aspect of the human psyche” (Walker 5).

It is important to note that Krog's view of myth as a delusion is relevant with regard to Afrikaner myths (e.g. the Great Trek, Anglo-Boer War, etc) that helped to cement an exclusive cultural identity, which was ideologically based on past suffering and persecution of their people. Krog's work deals with this dilemma by attempting to negotiate a new sense of belonging that will include all South Africans; for instance, she indicates in her poem, "Country of Grief and Grace", that South Africa belongs to the voices of the people who have been "baptised in syllables of blood" (LS 96). I wish to demonstrate, here, that Krog attempts to reformulate her own cultural myths, which created a sense of belonging for the Afrikaner people based on their past suffering, into a more inclusive way: one that acknowledges the suffering of "black" people during the Apartheid era. I argue that Krog elaborates on her own cultural myths, which have the power to re-form humanity "as circumstances change, and the balance of power between [the] outer and inner world shifts" (Hughes, "Myth and Education", 192). As Jung indicates, the artist seizes on an archetypal image, and "in raising it from [his] deepest unconsciousness he brings it into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries" (Walker 20). This demonstrates the need for any particular culture to "readjust its collective perspectives through the agency of myth and symbol" (Walker 20). I argue that both Krog and Heaney attempt to readjust the "collective perspectives" of the societies that they live in, by drawing on myth and applying (or reapplying) it to positive ends.

I would also like to complicate Krog's passage, in *Country of My Skull*, where she states that myth proves that things have always been a certain way, and that "things will never change" (90). (Krog's views are more appreciative of myths elsewhere in

Country of My Skull, which I will return to later.) For example, Ciaran Carson accuses Heaney of a similar fault in “Punishment”:

It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened ... as if there never were and never will be any political consequences of such acts; they have been removed to the realm of sex, death, and inevitability. (184)

It is not true to say that Heaney is suggesting that there are no political consequences (or moral ones for that matter) to the violent acts being committed by his “Irish tribe”. Heaney is outraged and “yet understand[s] the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge” (N 38). What Carson objects to is the idea of inevitability: that human beings are not in complete control of their destinies. However, humans are both rational and instinctual beings, and while we may exercise a certain amount of conscious control over our daily lives there are also “unseen factors” that influence these actions; for instance, in “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious”, Jung states:

Whether primitive or not, mankind always stands on the brink of actions it performs itself but does not control [or does not completely control]. The whole world wants peace and the whole world prepares for war, to take but one example ... In the realm of consciousness we are our own masters... But if we step through the door of the shadow we discover with terror that we are the objects of unseen factors. (*Collected Works* 9.1, 23)

This illustrates the point that we are not as rational as we would like to believe, for we are also governed by instinctual and non-rational influences. Of course, this is understandably an unpleasant realisation, “for nothing is more disillusioning than the discovery of our own inadequacy” (Jung 23). It is exactly these instinctual forces that

Heaney endeavours to uncover in poems like “Punishment” (and by doing so he potentially enables social healing to occur). I would argue that by attempting to understand our instincts we could in fact work towards learning how to manage and control them. Jung makes a good point with his example of societies that wish for peace but paradoxically prepare for war. This illustrates how our primal instincts often stubbornly manifest themselves contrary to the political climate that wants things to change. This does not mean that social change is not possible. On the contrary, it highlights the fact that social ills and their root causes, which myths and symbols can uncover (and possibly diagnose), are often extremely complex (i.e. there are no easy solutions to be made).

For example, Duncan Brown points out that, for Heaney, “the bog people” become important distancing devices, “ways of understanding contemporary violence within the larger perspective” (104). On the other hand, critics like Carson see this distancing nature of myth in Heaney’s poetry as obscuring the contemporary political struggles of Northern Ireland. However, myth also has the power to articulate and link events across time, which is pointed out by Lévi-Strauss when he says in “The Structural Study of Myth”:

On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages – anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. (120)

This is exactly what Heaney achieves by linking Iron Age atrocities with the troubles of contemporary Ireland; for instance, he reveals in “Kinship” how the Irish, both past

and present, “slaughter for / the common good” (N 45). Therefore, I would argue that the use of symbol and myth provides Heaney with an objective “space” that is capable of exploring the unconscious and submerged tribal tensions of contemporary Northern Ireland. Celtic Iron Age atrocities can be viewed, to use the terminology of Hughes, as “inner” symbols that reconcile with the “outer” objective reality of Heaney’s present-day Ireland (“Myth and Education”, 191). Heaney’s work also achieves, by offering “a deeper understanding of our situation and ourselves as individual human beings” (Foley 72), something that is “universal” to human experience. This relates to Hughes’s observation that myths often possess an uncanny similarity all over the world, which illustrates the power of myth to draw from “universal” human experiences (“Myth and Education”, 193). This uncanny similarity of myths challenges the view of cultural studies and semiology that myths are only culturally specific. The central theme found in all myths is humankind’s belief in supernatural beings. As Mircea Eliade points out:

The actors in myths are Supernatural Beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the “beginnings”... In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the “supernatural”) into the World. (6)

“Supernatural Beings” relates to Jung’s idea of archetypes. The faculty of the human imagination facilitates this “dramatic breakthrough of the sacred”, or the collective unconscious. In other words, archetypes (i.e. “the gods”) spontaneously manifest themselves in the form of symbols from within the imagination of the poet or priest, who uses a creative or dramatic outlet in order to find a means of expressing them. Over time these symbols cement and crystallise further to become an ideological

system within a given culture. William Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* gives an excellent analogy of how this happens in practice:

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or
Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the
properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and
whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.

...

Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, &
enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental
deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood;

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such
things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast. (153)

Blake illustrates how “poetic tales” crystallise into a “religion” or systems of belief, which are used by those in positions of power to enslave the minds of people within a given society. This solidification of belief systems represents the negative use of myth (i.e. in the sense that it restricts change and new ideas). However, the “poetic tales” themselves have the potential to liberate the minds of the “vulgar”. Blake indicates that the senses and faculties of these poets (and the common people as well) were numerous and enlarged through telling these “poetic tales”. Thus, it is only when these tales form an ideological system that they then become restrictive and pernicious. This implies that there is always a need for poets to reformulate (or re-dream) their culture’s myths as circumstances change.

It is this faculty of the imagination that embraces both “the world of things and the world of spirits” simultaneously with “an inner vision which holds wide open, like a great theatre, the arena of contention, and which pays equal respects to both sides” (Hughes, “Myth and Education”, 191). Therefore, various gods that “personify” different aspects of nature can be said to represent an embracing of both these worlds. J. R. R. Tolkien is right, in *Tree and Leaf*, to insist that the gods are not simply allegories of “the large processes of nature”:

The gods may derive their colour and beauty from the high splendours of nature, but it was Man who obtained these for them, abstracted them from sun and moon and cloud; their personality they get direct from him; the shadow or flicker of divinity that is upon them they receive through him from the invisible world, the Supernatural. (26-27)

This is why Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* says that “All deities reside in the human breast” (153). The gods are part of us, and are (like archetypes) at the “heart” or “root” (a term Heaney would use) of who we really are. However, it is the human imagination (or “the Supernatural” world) that imbues the gods or archetypes with our own personalities. Thus, humankind obtains, through the faculty of the imagination, symbolic forms for various archetypes (and hence they crystallise to become archetypal images that are, unlike the archetypes themselves, culturally specific).

In his Bog Poems, Heaney draws on the Mother Goddess, “the goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms [to be sacrificed to her] each winter ... to ensure the renewal and fertility of the territory in spring” (P 57), as a means of uncovering and understanding ancient tribal violence which still persisted in Heaney’s Ireland. On the

other hand, Heaney invokes the Goddess through these poems as a means of restoring his indigenous culture, which British colonialism has attempted to supplant and usurp. In “Feeling into Words” Heaney discusses how to some extent this enmity between Ireland and England “can be viewed as a struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and a goddess”:

There is an indigenous territorial numen, a tutelar of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, whatever; and her sovereignty has been temporarily usurped or infringed by a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Edward Carson, and whose godhead is incarnate in a rex or caesar resident in a palace in London. What we have is the tail-end of a struggle in a province between territorial piety and imperial power. (P 57)

Heaney makes the point that Irish culture (both Catholic and pagan) has always been to a large extent matriarchal, and that its political, religious and cultural attitudes reflect this preference. In contrast, British colonialism represents a masculine force whose “conquest”^{*} of Ireland can be viewed, symbolically speaking, as a sexual one. In “Act of Union” Heaney dramatises this sexual/political conflict by imagining himself as the “imperial / Male” England, who addresses Mother Ireland by saying:

And I am still imperially
Male, leaving you with the pain,
The rending process in the colony,
The battering ram, the boom burst from within.
The act sprouted an obstinate fifth column
Whose stance is growing unilateral. (N 49)

^{*} Of course, the situation is far more complex than the word “conquest” implies.

The Act of Union of the title represents both marriage as well as “the parliamentary Act of 1800 ... which created, from 1 January 1801, the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland’” (Corcoran 121). Elmer Andrews sees the “obstinate fifth column” as representing the Ulster Protestants, but later suggests that “perhaps it is the entire situation in Northern Ireland which Heaney is treating as the offspring of the Act of Union” (102). I would argue that the “child” represents both Northern Ireland and the Ulster crisis itself. In one sense, what is implied here is that England and Ireland have gone horribly wrong as a family, and out of their violent and unhappy marriage they have reared a malformed child, who threatens both parents with his violence (i.e. the Ulster conflict). Here the child’s “parasitical / And ignorant little fists” beat at Ireland’s (his mother) borders and are “cocked” (implying both a phallus and a gun) at England (his father) across the water (N 50). In another sense, Heaney also depicts an ordinary family which inevitably experiences problems. The poem also implies that there is a degree of love that is shared between these parents. For instance, the male speaker reveals feelings of love and sympathy towards Ireland when he says to her: “I caress / The heaving province where our past has grown”. Therefore the poem says a great deal about the biological and cultural constructs of an actual marriage. For example, the male is usually a helpless witness to the woman’s pain of childbirth, and he is usually the target of the child’s fists when it grows up.

What is impressive about “The Act of Union” is the male speaker’s guilt and unease about leaving Mother Ireland to deal with the pain that has “sprouted” from the Act of Union, which he is responsible for (N 49). By imagining himself in the position of the “other” (i.e. England), Heaney attempts to understand both sides of the complex relationship (the history and struggle) between England and Ireland. Thus Heaney

complicates the idea of viewing British colonialism simply and only in terms of “rape”, for as the poem’s male speaker indicates: “Conquest is a lie” (N 49).

The Earth Goddess also represents a “universal” religious figure that appears in many cultures around the world. In his essay, “The Environmental Revolution”, Hughes speaks of “the re-emergence of Nature as the Great Goddess of mankind, and the Mother of all life”:

The idea of nature as a single organism is not new. It was man’s first great thought, the basic intuition of most primitive theologies. Since Christianity hardened into Protestantism, we can follow its underground heretical life, leagued with everything occult, spiritualistic, devilish, over-emotional, bestial, mystical, feminine, crazy, revolutionary, and poetic. (187)

Hughes points out that British Protestantism is a male orientated religion that denounces the Goddess figure as heretical. For example, in Protestantism the Virgin Mary, who one could say is Christianity’s representation of the Goddess, is not given the same recognition and prestige as in the case of Catholicism. As a personification of nature the Goddess symbolises change and social renewal (like the change in the seasons and the renewal of life-forces during spring). Therefore, she comes to represent (as a figure of renewal) the cycles of history in which poetic tales (or myths) have to be re-dreamed (especially in times of social crisis) in order for change and healing to begin to occur. However, as I have already mentioned in Chapter One, the Goddess figure can also be seen as a devourer and taker of life (e.g. she claims the lives of the sacrificial victims in Heaney’s Bog Poems), and thus she also symbolises death, winter and the underworld. Jung in “Psychological Aspects of the Mother

Archetype” illustrates these dual aspects of the Mother Archetype, which bears a striking resemblance to the Goddess figure, or Nerthus, in Heaney’s Bog Poems:

The qualities associated with it are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants, are presided over by the mother. On the negative side* the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate. (*Collected Works* 9.1, 82)

This dovetails nicely with Hughes’s extract, which I quoted earlier. Both Jung and Hughes indicate that the Mother Goddess can represent anything that is magical, mystical, hidden, animal (i.e. the instinctual), and irrational. The “negative side” (as Jung puts it) of the Goddess also represents something that destabilises (by rotting, decomposing and stripping down) the established order of things (see Chapter One where I discuss this in more detail), which is often necessary in order for social change to occur. Therefore, Hughes is right to indicate, as quoted above, that the Goddess can represent something that is revolutionary and poetic. Here poetry (as well as myth) can provide images and symbols as an attempt to destabilise authority and promote social change.

Jacques Derrida indicates in “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” that there is “no unity” or “absolute source” of myths, and “everything

* Here “negative” does not necessarily mean it is bad; for example, destruction and decomposition are sometimes necessary in order to enable change to occur.

begins with structure, configuration, or relationship” (116). However, as I have tried to illustrate, this is certainly true of pseudo-myth but not genuine myth. These “sacred beings” (whether one calls them gods, spirits or archetypes) are an imaginative manifestation of humankind’s unconscious self. They are not simply constructions or inventions, but, on the other hand, it is certainly true that various cultures elaborate on them and interpret them in different ways.

Derrida, of course, is sceptical of the “nostalgia for origins”, viewing “the Nietzschean *affirmation*” as the preferred alternative: “the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation” (“Structure, Sign and Play”, 121). What Derrida objects to is the lack of openness of interpretation found in “fixed origins” or structures of thought (“Structure, Sign and Play”, 109). However, I would argue that myths contain subjective “truths” rather than “fixed” ones.

Krog is also uncomfortable with the word “truth”: she has “never bedded that word in a poem” and prefers the word “lie” (CS 36). What Krog is wary of (and rightly so) is the restrictive use of the word “truth” or what Heaney, in “Exposure”, calls the “the diamond absolutes” (N 73). For instance, in *Country of My Skull*, Krog warns against the TRC viewing “truth” only in terms of “justice” instead of also “as the widest possible compilation of people’s perceptions, stories, myths and experiences” (16). For if the TRC chooses the latter, more open and subjective, interpretation of “truth” then “it will have chosen to restore memory and foster a new humanity” (16). Hence the telling (or retelling) of myths and stories can assist in healing a troubled society by

“fostering a new humanity”. This illustrates the positive aspects of myths that can help to reconcile and rebuild societies like South Africa and Ireland, which both possess violent and traumatic pasts.

Therefore, what Krog implies is that there are many “truths” representing the different experiences of South Africans under the Apartheid regime, which need to be shared, rather than one “diamond absolute” version taking precedence over another. For instance, Sean Kaliski indicates, in *Country of My Skull*, that “people will assimilate the truths of this country piece by piece” (130). This relates to what Krog pointed out, in a 1994 seminar, that “Apartheid divided us so successfully that practically no South African can claim memories other than those forged in isolated vacuums” (in Spearey 69). Hence, as revealed by Spearey:

Krog’s attempt in *Country of My Skull* to bring into dialogue and adjudicate between the narrative renderings of such incomplete and often mutually exclusive memories not only suggests a potential antidote for the “malformed” identities of South Africans living under the new dispensation, but also addresses very directly the need to reconceptualize and reform the “reality” of a nation in transition. (69)

I would argue that myth, or the sharing of myths, is a vital process in readjusting to the changing circumstances of any nation in transition. Myths and stories enable societies in transition to “reconceptualise” and reconstruct their views, beliefs and value systems. For example, Krog in *Country of My Skull* illustrates this point when she says:

We make sense of things by fitting them into stories. When events fall into a pattern which we can describe in a way that is satisfying as narrative then we think that we have some grasp of why they occurred. Nations tell stories of their past in terms of which they try to shape their futures. (196-7)

Both Krog and Heaney tell stories of their societies' past in order to work towards shaping (or reshaping and readjusting) their futures. Krog uses the victims' testimonies given during the TRC as a means of attempting to reconstruct and heal the malformed identities of South Africans, which have been inherited through the legacies of Apartheid. Heaney, on the other hand, draws on Iron Age atrocities in his Bog Poems in order to uncover the archetypal and instinctual forces underlying the troubles in his Ireland. The advantage of myths, stories, dreams and allegories is that, by tapping into the universal "language" of archetypes, they possess an infinite array of possible interpretations. A good example of this is found in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* when the stranger points out to Waldo that allegory is "a little door that opens into an infinite hall where you may find what you please" (135). This illustrates that archetypes are actually extremely complex and "fluid" in meaning, even though they may appear, rather deceptively, to be simple and "flat".

Of course, there are various ethical problems surrounding the utilisation and possible exploitation of the victims' pain in both Heaney and Krog's work (even if it is used to enable reconciliation and social healing to occur). Both Heaney and Krog reveal elements of guilt and self-accusation concerning this dilemma, which I discuss at greater length in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: “Befitting Emblems of Adversity” and “the Artful Voyeur”

Heaney’s Bog Poems have sometimes been criticised for mythologizing and mystifying historical realities. Edna Longley notes, regarding the binary division of *North*, that a few critics have “found Heaney’s personal and documentary explicitness [of part 2] more to their taste than the mythic approach of part I” (72). For example, Colin Falck finds it “a relief... that [Heaney] can still call on some of his old directness in dealing with the Ulster conflicts” (in Edna Longley 72). I would argue, however, that the mythic and symbolic are not only necessary, but can also have a greater emotional and psychological impact than the so-called “historic realities”. Krog, like Heaney, also emblematises the suffering of victims in her work. Both writers, as artists, favour symbolism and metaphor in their work rather than simply documenting violence and suffering in their respective societies. Nevertheless, both Heaney and Krog reveal elements of guilt and self-accusation with regard to “exploiting” the pain of others in their work.

One of the central problems facing “a poet tested by dangerous times” (Heaney, “The Impact of Translation”, GT 39) is how one writes against oppression and social injustices yet still maintains artistic freedom. The importance of a writer’s need to maintain artistic independence can be seen in “The Flight Path” when an IRA member confronts Heaney and asks: “When, for fuck’s sake, are you going to write / Something for us?”; and to which Heaney replies that if he does write something, he will be writing for himself (OG 413). This is the reason why Krog entitles her text *Country of My Skull* and not *Our Skull*, for by doing so Krog sets out to tell her own

story (i.e. her emotional and psychological response to the TRC process), which provides a platform for telling the country's "truths" or stories. By doing so, Krog maintains her artistic freedom and licence in "quilting together" (CS 170) the many testimonies told during the TRC hearings. For instance, Krog says the following to a friend who queries the "accuracy" of her text:

I am busy with the truth ... *my* truth. Of course, it's quilted together from hundreds of stories... Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time... And all of this together makes up the whole country's truth. So also the lies. (CS 170-1)

Here Krog mediates the victims' narratives through her own perspectives and creative impulses as an artist. For instance, she indicates that she cuts and pastes "the upper layer" (the "reality" of the past) "in order to get the second layer told" (the symbolic and subjective "truths"), which is the deeper story that she wants to tell (CS 170). This implies that there is a greater "truth", i.e. one that is able to "move" people on an emotional level, than the "purely factual" one. Thus, in order for a new collective identity to be forged it is necessary to move beyond and through the factual evidence, which insists that there is only one "truth". As Laura Moss puts it:

The reporter [i.e. Krog writing as Antjie Samuel] distills and compresses testimonies within the narrative. The allegorical second layer takes precedence over the "realistic" first layer... The molding of an individual's truth is presented within the text as necessary for collective reconciliation. (94)

Krog's project in *Country of My Skull* can be likened to what Heaney says concerning Wilfred Owen and other "war poets":

The shorthand name we have evolved for this figure is the “poet as witness”, and he represents poetry’s solidarity with the doomed, the deprived, the victimised, the under-privileged. The witness is any figure in whom the truth-telling urge and the compulsion to identify with the oppressed becomes necessarily integral with the act of writing itself. (GT xvi)

I would argue that both Krog and Heaney are artistically “compelled to identify with the oppressed”. Of course, writers who identify too strongly with the oppressed are in danger of increased subjectivity, which is why Heaney in “The Flight Path” rejects the IRA member’s blunt insistence that Heaney should write only for them. By writing for only them and one side within the conflict (even if it is “his” side which is the most deprived, victimised and oppressed), Heaney would be guilty of silencing other voices and perspectives. Hence, it is better to say that writers should have partial solidarity (i.e. on an empathetic level rather than on a political one) with the oppressed. It is important to note that as a “white” Afrikaner Krog is, in one sense, a member of the oppressors and not the oppressed (i.e. “black” people), who therefore arguably should not speak for them. Note that this is different to Heaney’s situation in Northern Ireland where Catholics and Protestants were both, to some degree, in the wrong. This is why in Krog’s work she is deeply apologetic to the members of the oppressed for the wrongs committed against them by her people (and thus she feels ethically compelled to gain their forgiveness and acceptance), which is something that Heaney does not have or need to do. It is also the reason why Krog dedicates *Country of My Skull* to “every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips”.

On the other hand, both Krog and Heaney are in and are witnesses of the guilt-ridden, uneasy, complicit area between warring parties in an ancient conflict. For both

writers, art is formed out of the suffering of the oppressed in order for national reconciliation to occur. Here, the poet is a person who feels guilty for possibly exploiting the victims' suffering, and who, by the same token, also shares (on an emotional level) the victims' pain. Therefore, the poet-witness is socially responsible (but retains a measure of his or her independence), and is not completely silent and removed. Of course, in being thus both writers open themselves up to criticism (and criticise themselves in turn) regarding appropriation and exploitation of the victims' suffering, which is a theme I will return to shortly. However, there is also a danger for a writer who strongly identifies with the oppressed to the extent that he or she loses some artistic objectivity. To give an example, Heaney writes the following with regard to Mandelstam's (a lyrical poet living in the Soviet Union) view of poetry as "an unharnessed, non-didactic, non-party-dictated, inspired act":

As opposed to these prescribed and propagandist themes, the essential thing about lyric poetry, Mandelstam maintained, was its unlooked-for joy in being itself, and the essential thing for the lyric poet was therefore a condition in which he was in thrall to no party or programme, but truly and freely and utterly himself. (GT xix)

This extract illustrates, as I have already mentioned, the importance of poets maintaining their independence. However in practice this is far more difficult (or even impossible in the sense that neither Heaney or Krog ever reaches a "final solution") and morally complex than the extract acknowledges. Hence the poet has continuously to live in and engage with the moral complexities of his or her society while also trying to maintain a measure of independence (of course, complete independence from social pressures is an impossibility). If one looks at "Exposure", for instance, one can see that Heaney faces this same dilemma of what a poet's role should be

during times of political oppression and social upheaval; here Heaney as a poet has to choose between the “beautiful prismatic counselling” of his friends and “the anvil brains” of those who hate him (N 72). Heaney’s “friends” are less absorbed in and by the troubles and pain facing Northern Ireland, and so they prefer poetry that speaks from a distance: poetry that is beautiful, ideologically inclined and that possibly offers simple assumptions. Jeremy Cronin in “Three Reasons for a Mixed, Umrabulo, Round-the-Corner Poetry” (henceforth referred to in this dissertation as “Umrabulo”) is correct to criticise this type of aesthetically and theoretically inclined poetry* that, “like a Grecian urn” on display (thus implying voyeurism) in a “colonial museum”, is removed from its social context, or what he calls “the mud of its production” (*Even the Dead*, 1). One could say that Heaney’s “friends” do not want to get their hands dirty, and hence they are unwilling to engage with the “mire” and “complexity” (alluding to Yeats’s “Byzantium”, 280) of the Ulster crisis.

On the other hand, “the anvil brains” in “Exposure” may refer to the IRA and Irish nationalists who would want Heaney to write about *their cause* (N 72). However, such “art” (one that subscribes to propagandist themes and can only make heavy-handed assertions) would sacrifice its artistic integrity, even if it were on behalf of the morally and politically correct. The word “anvil” is a very appropriate metaphor for conveying the bluntness, violence and “passionate intensity” (Yeats, “The Second Coming”, 211) of propaganda writing. The word “anvil” also provides an accurate depiction with regard to the language style of such writing: something that is heavy, cumbersome and forced (much like iron that is forced and beaten into shape when

* Cronin is also defining a difference between cultures which can assume a unified literary tradition and certain aesthetic features in their poetry, and those which, as in South Africa, cannot.

being forged). In “Place and Displacement” Heaney defends the “lyric stance” of poets in Northern Ireland:

Their concern with poetry itself wears well when we place it beside the protest poetry of the sixties... [T]he purely poetic force of [their] words is the guarantee of a commitment which need not apologize for not taking up the cudgels [of protest writing] since it is raising a baton to attune discords which the cudgels are creating. To attune it within the pit of their own consciousness ... [and] not in the arena of dustbin lids and shoot-to-kill operations. (FK 118)

For Heaney, poetry that is thoughtful, controlled and attentive to moral complexity is far more effective and responsible than protest writing, which by being a product of the “heat” of the moment cannot gain a perspective beyond the present conflict that it is embroiled in (and also contributing to). This is the reason why poetry “wears well” as opposed to protest writing: it has the potential power to “attune discords” within an individual’s “consciousness”. It achieves this, for instance, through the use of tones and images which resonate with the reader’s emotions and thoughts. I would also add that poetry offers insight into the conflict because it views the situation from multiple perspectives, which future generations can read and look back on without stirring up ancient hatreds. I would argue that in order to achieve this insight poets must first “attune” the conflict within “the pit of their own consciousness”; i.e. they must heal the wounds of the conflict within themselves in order to write their poetry and heal their society. This gives rise to the idea of the poet as a hurt, solitary (but socially responsible) figure, or what one would call a wounded healer (which is something that both Heaney and Krog have in common). The idea of propaganda writing as a cumbersome and ineffective weapon also relates to when Heaney says in “Exposure” that the hero’s “gift” becomes a “slingstone / Whirled for the desperate” (N 72). Here,

those who blindly and thoughtlessly take up arms (i.e. without ethically considering the consequences) in the struggle can only offer a primitive (and ineffective) means of “resolving” the conflict, which in actual fact serves to fuel the animosity between disparate groups. In “The Redress of Poetry” Heaney makes the important point that poetry cannot be used to implement social changes in the way that activists would want it to:

For the activist, there is going to be no point in envisaging an order which is comprehensive of events but not in itself productive of new events. Engaged parties are not going to be grateful for a mere image... They will always want the redress of poetry to be an exercise of leverage on behalf of *their* point of view; they will require the entire weight of the thing to come down on their side of the scales* ... [which is why it is necessary for the poet] to add a complication where the general desire is for a simplification. (FK 258-9)

Here, poetry’s purpose is to find images and ways of comprehending the complexity of events, which is especially important when there is a general desire by “engaged parties” (i.e. activists and political groups) to simplify the situation. Poetry does offer value to society because by comprehending the complexity of events one can work towards change and social healing. However it is not the poet’s task to fix problems (which is different from attempting to diagnose and heal them) that political and religious leaders have failed for centuries to solve; this is probably more true of Ireland than of South Africa, where the dilemmas faced in the Ulster crisis were more complex than those of Apartheid (which was clearly in the wrong). My point is that in both Ireland and South Africa the problems are on-going, and one cannot simply eradicate past religious or racial prejudices with quick fixes. One could argue that the

* This relates to Heaney “weighing and weighing / [his] responsible *tristia*” in “Exposure” (N 73).

poet's voice is more persuasive because it is unconstrained (or attempts to be) by political agendas; hence the "unconstraining voice / [can] Still persuade us to rejoice" (Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", 143). It is through images and analogies that poetry can help persuade people in a traumatised society that there is hope: a way out of the conflict. This is why Heaney in "Earning a Rhyme" illustrates the need for poets to discover images that soothe social ills when he says:

The whole unfinished business of the England/Ireland entanglement presented itself at a local level as a conflict of loyalties and impulses, and consequently the search was on for images and analogies that could ease the strain of the present. The poets were needy for ways in which they could honestly express the realities of the local quarrel without turning that expression into yet another repetition of the aggressions and resentments which had been responsible for the quarrel in the first place. (FK 60)

This highlights the necessity for poets to be attuned to the moral complexities of their societies, and to be uncomfortable in assuming the views of their cultural/racial/religious affiliations, which is why Heaney in "The Tollund Man" "feel[s] lost, / Unhappy and at home" (WO 48). The above extract also gives one the sense of a poet as a healer: someone whose words soothe and ease the strain of social conflict rather than being a voice that is "full of passionate intensity" (Yeats, "The Second Coming", 211). Wilfred Owen illustrates how the poet should be a healer and cleanser of wounds by saying in "Strange Meeting" that "when much blood had clogged [the soldier's] chariot-wheels, / [he] would go up and wash them from sweet wells" (35).

I would argue that Heaney's Bog Poems provide "images and analogies" that "ease the strain of the present" troubles in Northern Ireland (FK 60). These poems "discover a field of force" that "encompass[es] the perspectives of humane reason" and at the same time "grant[s] the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity" (Heaney, "Feeling into Words", P 56-7). Thus, Heaney's Bog Poems provide what Yeats would call "befitting emblems of adversity" ("Meditations in Time of Civil War", 227). Foley indicates that "the gist of Heaney's argument is that by discovering, or uncovering ... appropriate symbols, or images, or analogues, it is possible for poetry to make clear the historical, even archetypal, antecedents of political violence, as well as the underlying psychological impulses of its perpetrators" (62).

This potential ability of poetry and myth to heal society is illustrated when Heaney says that poets in times of social conflict need to search for images and analogies to ease these pressures. This is exactly what both Heaney and Krog are trying to achieve with their poetry. Heaney, on the one hand, uses bog bodies and Iron Age atrocities as a means of symbolising (as well as highlighting and diagnosing) the present-day conflicts of his Ireland. Some critics argue that Heaney does not provide any solutions that would resolve the Ulster crisis. Such criticisms do not take into account the fact that the problems faced in Ireland (and South Africa) cannot be simply or completely resolved (i.e. in both countries, one cannot easily or ever completely erase what has happened in the past). However, Heaney as a "skull-handler, parablist, / [and] smeller of rot" ("Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces", N 23) does locate and heal the wounds and illnesses within his society. The words "smeller of rot" imply that Heaney does in fact diagnose the diseased in his society and the rotten aspects of his culture. It is also

important to note that the words “smeller of rot” contain an edge of self-critical irony. Here, Heaney is critically aware of himself (in a half-comical way) as a figure who, rather disgustingly and embarrassingly, is inescapably drawn to violence and atrocity, like a dog to a bad smell. On the other hand, Krog in *Country of My Skull* and “Country of Grief and Grace” draws on the stories and testimonies of the victims of Apartheid, and hence one could say that she, like Heaney, is also a “skull-handler”, “parablist”, and “smeller of rot” (though without Heaney’s sense of irony). By this I mean that she also attempts to locate (and heal) the rot and disease within South African society, whose “shameful Apartheid past has made *people* lose their humanity” (CS 58). Thus, by drawing on the TRC hearings Krog attempts “to restore memory and foster a new humanity” in South African society (CS 16). However, Attwell and Harlow note that “fostering a new humanity” in South African society is easier said than done:

A great deal has been said about the so-called “miracle” of the South African transition [after the 1994 elections]. The corollary to the notion of a miracle is the continuing legacy and discomfort of compromise: the effort to rebuild a society whose underlying social relations and even attitudes remain substantially unchanged. The pressure is on to find the resources, policies, and vision to “bind the nation together” and to take its people decisively from a traumatized past to a reconstructed future. But, as hard as one might strive for healing and reconstruction, the past stubbornly manifests itself. (2)

This illustrates my point that there are no miracle or instant solutions to the problems in both South Africa and Ireland (or any other country suffering from a traumatic past). However, people can work towards reconstructing their society through the “discomfort of compromise”. Here poets must place themselves in uncomfortable

positions (like the speaker in “Punishment” and “Exposure”, and Krog in *Country of My Skull*), and in so doing their poetry aims at generating discomfort for both sides that are embroiled in the conflict. Therefore poetry cannot be expected to implement social changes in a direct way, but it can however destabilise cemented attitudes and ideologies by adding “a complication where the general desire is for a simplification” (“The Redress of Poetry”, FK 258-9). This resonates with *Country of My Skull* in which Wilhelm Verwoerd (the grandson of Dr Verwoerd) quotes Paul Russell saying: “one of the legacies of war is a habit of simple distinction, simplification and opposition ... which continues to do much of our thinking for us” (99). Wilhelm illustrates how in and by war ambiguity is lost, which poets and people in society need to “try and make space for” (CS 99).

In contrast to “anvil-brained” propaganda writing, the counselling of Heaney’s friends in “Exposure” would have him favour the aesthetic and theoretical, the “diamond absolutes” (N 73), and to strive for “the beauty and permanence of the perfectly achieved work of art” (Morrison 70). However Heaney, in “Exposure”, is unable to ignore his social responsibilities when he finds himself compelled to “sit weighing and weighing” his “responsible *tristia*” (N 73). Again one finds, as in “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces”, a half-comical and self-critical edge to Heaney’s words. In “Exposure”, Heaney caricatures himself, echoing and predicting the criticisms of himself by others. These critics argue that Heaney, by weighing his “responsible *tristia*”, does not offer any solutions to the Ulster crisis. However, Heaney counters such criticism in his essay “The Government of the Tongue” by pointing out that “poetry is its own reality and no matter how much a poet may concede to the corrective pressures of social, moral, political and historical reality, the ultimate fidelity must be to the

demands and promise of the artistic event” (FK 183). In this, Heaney has the same conviction as Yeats does, that poetry must be granted a certain amount of freedom for artistic vision and inspiration to take place, for the poet is *not* a statesman or policymaker who instructs society. In “On Being Asked for a War Poem”, Yeats suggests:

I think it better that in times like these
A poet’s mouth be silent, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right. (175)

Yeats’s point is that one cannot expect poetry to implement social changes, and it would be presumptuous for poets to assume that they are more morally aware and “gifted” at solving social ills than the rest of society. However, as I have previously indicated, poets can diagnose and soothe social ills through the use of images and analogies. Hughes illustrates this idea of the poet-healer when he says in “Myth and Education” that priests continually elaborate on tribal dreams (or myths) according to the change in circumstances, and by doing so they in these visionary works seem to heal us (192-3). On the other hand, Yeats’s poem does speak even though he (as the poem’s speaker) thinks that poets should be silent; one can compare this to “Punishment” which also speaks even though Heaney in the poem casts “the stones of silence” (N 38). It is also important to note that Yeats does not take a definite position about poets keeping silent: thinking that it is better to keep silent or temporarily silent (which the words “in times like these” implies) is not the same thing as saying that they must do so. Heaney in his essay “Yeats as an Example?” illustrates the necessity of poets protecting their integrity when he says that

it is proper and even necessary for [Yeats] to insist on his own language, his own vision, his own terms of reference. This will often seem like irresponsibility or affectation, sometimes like callousness, but from the artist's point of view it is an act of integrity, or an act of cunning to protect the integrity. (FK 99)

This is why Heaney in "The Flight Path" insists that if he writes something it will be for himself (OG 423). Like Yeats, Heaney might also be accused by some people of being "irresponsible" or "callous" regarding his unwillingness to take a more politically active stance in his poetry. However, as Heaney rightly indicates in "Government of the Tongue", what gives poetry its governing power "in the rift between what is going to happen and whatever we would wish to happen" is that it "holds attention for a space, functions not as distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on us" (FK 190). Thus, one of poetry's tasks, as a power to concentrate self-reflexively, is to leave everyone in society (accused and accusers) "speechless and renewed" (Heaney, FK 189), or, in other words, to reveal and make them aware of their own complicity, as well as the social and moral complexities of the situation. Notice that this is not the same thing as prescribing a solution (as if there is only *one* simple solution to be found) to the ills of society. On the other hand, Heaney points out that "no lyric has ever stopped a tank" and when "faced with the brutality of the historical onslaught, they are practically useless" ("The Government of the Tongue", FK 189). It is not poetry's task to provide a practical end to the violence (and it cannot be expected to "stop tanks"), which is something W. H. Auden in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" highlights when he says:

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives

Would never want to tamper, flows on south
 From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
 Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
 A way of happening, a mouth. (142)

Poetry does not make anything happen and cannot implement any practical solutions. However it does offer a contribution as a voice (or a mouth) and “a way of happening”, which indicates that it is something living and never ending (like the flowing river metaphor implies). This illustrates the point that there are no final solutions to the problems that face a society. This extract also makes a similar point to Heaney in “The Government of the Tongue”: that “poetry is its own reality” and that the poet’s “ultimate fidelity must be to the demands and promise of the artistic event” (FK 183). This is why poets must protect the integrity of their poetry which “survives / In the valley of its making”, and hence it should not be tampered with by executives and policymakers. There is also the idea of the poet as an isolated and hurt figure whose poetry flows “From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs”. Auden addresses Yeats saying: “Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry” (“In Memory of W. B. Yeats”, 142). Here the poet’s pain in witnessing and experiencing the “madness” of his or her conflicted society provokes his or her artistic response, which illustrates the idea of the poet as a wounded healer. One could say that both Heaney and Krog were also hurt into poetry by their respective societies, and their poetry contains and shows that hurt. In “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” Auden demonstrates how poetry as an unconstrained voice (i.e. one that retains a measure of political neutrality) can in fact initiate healing and bring about change through the persuasion of its words:

With your unconstraining voice
 Still persuade us to rejoice;

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. (143)

Therefore poetry can only make a valid contribution and offer social healing if it is an unconstrained and independent voice, if it lives “in the valley of its own making”. The metaphor of farming a verse to “Make a vineyard of the curse” suggests social transformation has to be worked at and cultivated with effort in much the same way as writing poetry. Attwell and Harlow concur when they claim that opposed to the notion of a “miracle” is the effort it takes to rebuild a society like South Africa’s, “whose underlying social relations and even attitudes remain substantially unchanged” (2). The words “In the deserts of the heart / Let the healing fountain start” also relate to Krog’s idea of the TRC’s role in fostering a new humanity (CS 16). The words “the deserts of the heart” imply a lack of empathy and pity, which needs to be restored by poet in reader in order for social healing to begin. It is exactly this type of special emphasis on pity, rather than side-taking and politicising, that is also evident in Wilfred Owen’s “Strange Meeting”, which was written from within the nightmare of World War One:

Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
 I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
 Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
 I would have poured my spirit without stint

But not through wounds; not on the cess of war. (35-6)

Owen illustrates how a poet should be a healer or a washer of wounds, rather than a combatant and pour his or her spirit through wounds and the waste of war. This emphasises the social and ethical responsibility of poets, which is something both Heaney and Krog are mindful of in their own work. Owen in "Strange Meeting" emphasises "the pity of war, [and] the pity [that] war distilled" (35). The poet's function in times of war and conflict is to promote pity and compassion in his or her society, which is implied when Auden says that "the seas of pity lie / Locked and frozen in each [citizen's] eye" ("In Memory of W. B. Yeats", 142). Heaney in "Punishment" also experiences feelings of pity and tenderness towards the victim, which is evident in phrases like "my poor scapegoat", and by the fact that he has numbered all her bones (N 38).

In *Country of My Skull*, a conversation takes place between Krog and an academic (not named) who, quoting Theodor Adorno, tells her that "[a]fter the Second World War it was said in Germany: it is barbaric to write a poem after Auschwitz" (237). Krog responds to this by applying it to the South African context and the ethical problems of writing after Apartheid:

That is precisely why I say that maybe writers in South Africa should shut up for a while. That one has no right to appropriate a story paid for with a lifetime of pain and destruction... So let the domain rather belong to those who literally paid blood for every faltering word they utter before the Truth Commission. (CS 237-8)

Notice that Krog also considers, like Yeats in “On Being Asked for a War Poem”, keeping temporarily silent. Of course, the difference here is that Krog considers keeping silent so as not to appropriate the victims’ pain, and not because poets have “no gift to set a statesman right” (175). However Krog does not remain silent and does write about the TRC hearings, which does not negate her deep feelings of guilt and self-accusation for possibly appropriating the victims’ pain. (Note that Heaney goes through similar feelings of guilt and self-accusation). I disagree with Sanders, here, when he indicates that literature pre-empts *any* accusation of “barbarism” by “giving the domain of words over to the other”:

Country of My Skull demonstrates how the literary abides upon the same basic structures as the [TRC] hearings, and thus how, in the final analysis, the report, as it writes what it terms “the South African story”, shares such structures as conditions of possibility not just with the hearings, but also with literature. In so doing, it points out a direction for literature after apartheid which pre-empts any accusation of “barbarism” by showing how those elements testimony shares with lyric poetry set to work an ethics of advocacy, the task of giving the domain of words over to the other. (17)

I agree here with Sanders’s point that the TRC hearings and literature share similar structures such as storytelling, and that this does to a certain extent give “the domain of words over to the other”. However, what Sanders does not acknowledge is the danger of literary voyeurism and possible appropriation of victims’ pain, and therefore one cannot, as he rather simply puts it, pre-empt *all* accusations of barbarism. For example, Fiona Ross says in “From a ‘Culture of Shame’ to a ‘Circle of Guilt’” that the stories told during the TRC

have been widely represented in the print media, on television and over the airwaves. Stories and tellings are fragments, parts of people's lives. They are not representative, nor can they be made representative. They are particular instances, synopses of experience, told at particular times for particular audiences. They are located in specific contexts. (Online)

Ross, unlike Sanders, sees the danger of literature (or other media) dislocating the TRC testimonies from their original contexts. Here poets should not abdicate their ethical and social responsibilities when representing the pain of others in their work: they must be self-critical of possible exploitation, by "weighing and weighing" their "responsible *tristia*" ("Exposure", N 73). Like Heaney, Krog also weighs her "responsible *tristia*" when considering whether it is morally right to create poetry out of the experiences of those who have suffered. Krog has often been criticised for exploiting the suffering of others in *Country of My Skull*. As Meira Cook puts it:

These stories populate the narrative of *Country of My Skull* and exist in a variety of diverse forms: as transcripts from the TRC hearings, as unsigned versions of stories presumably culled from testimony of victims, and as fables and allegories by or about victims that have been reframed by Krog in her guise as memoirist... Krog's presentation of victims' stories of apartheid injustice in the form of a discontinuous narrative that radically destabilizes notions of truth and authenticity, raises the spectre of appropriation at best, and lays this text open to charges of abuse at worst. (74-5)

I disagree with Cook when she claims that Krog's presentation of the victims' testimonies lays the "text open to charges of abuse". Krog's self-critical awareness of potentially exploiting their testimonies arguably counters this accusation. It is also not accurate to say, as Cook does, that a "discontinuous narrative" will necessarily radically destabilise "notions of truth". I would prefer to say that Krog challenges the

notion of a single “truth” or historical record by drawing from the collective experiences of the victims in order to facilitate a new sense of belonging that will include all South Africans. Laura Moss indicates that “it seems irresponsible [for the writer] to disembody the [victims’] testimonies in the service of the larger good” (94). As I have already discussed in Chapter One, Heaney in his Bog Poems shares this theme of the individual being sacrificed for the “common good”. In “utilising” the victims’ testimonies from the TRC, Krog, like Heaney, finds herself in a difficult (if not impossible) position, which is perfectly illustrated when she says: “No poetry should come forth from this... [I am] [s]tunned by the knowledge of the price people have paid for their words. If I write this, I exploit and betray. If I don’t, I die” (CS 49). There is no real solution to this problem of writers, who write in conflicted societies, potentially betraying and exploiting the victims’ pain in their work. Both Krog and Heaney are deeply aware of these moral implications, and yet they are both artistically compelled to write about the atrocity in their respective societies. If poets fail to respond to the conflict in their societies they would indeed “die” both artistically and morally (i.e. they could be accused of being callous and aloof). This emphasises the impossible situation that both writers find themselves in. One could argue that an awareness of exploitation and appropriation does not condone it. However, these examples of self-accusation do reveal an empathy and ethical awareness in both writers.

If one looks at “Punishment”, Heaney reveals a deep sense of guilt and tenderness when he says to the girl’s preserved corpse:

I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
 and darkened combs,
 your muscles' webbing
 and all your numbered bones. (N 38)

Voyeurism and appropriation are also implied in "Country of Grief and Grace" when Krog indicates that "the eye plunges into the wounds of anger / seizing the surge of language by its soft bare skull" (LS 95-6). From the above examples, it is evident that both writers are acutely aware of the fact that art may obscure the raw pain that was experienced by the victims. On the other hand, I would argue that both Heaney and Krog honour (as well as credit and communicate) the victims' pain by including it in their work. There is, of course, an important difference between the two writers' sources: the TRC victims can and do speak, whereas the bog people are silent. Therefore Heaney speaks for the bog people (even if he is accused of speaking over them), and by doing so validates their existence in history. The bog people also cannot be harmed in the same way as the TRC victims, whose testimonies expose the pain that they and their families are *still* experiencing. The difficulty and impossibility of fully representing the victims' pain is well illustrated when Krog says, in *Country of My Skull*, that her experience in the TRC has taught her that "there is no way you can begin to imagine the language, the rhythm, the imagery of the original stories" (238). Krog realises that by condensing the victims' narratives (in her roles as reporter, translator, and writer) one inevitably loses something from the original stories and experiences. Of course, one gains something as well; for instance, one is able to share these stories with others even if it is impossible to "truthfully" represent the raw pain experienced by the victims. In "Umrabulo" Jeremy Cronin is critical of poems being like Grecian urns: "The object of a contemplation ... that obscures: / The mud of its

production; / The complicity in our gaze” (*Even the Dead* 1). Here, the complicity in the artist’s gaze is comparable to Heaney’s “artful voyeur” and Krog’s “eye [that] plunges into the wounds of anger” (see above). In both Heaney and Krog’s case, the “mud” represents “the raw materials” of pain and suffering that are necessary when producing works of art for a divided and conflicted society.

Moss notes that in *Country of My Skull* “the victims presenting their own stories become metaphors in a nationalized narrative of trauma and reconciliation” (94). However, Krog has been criticised for altering and “transforming” the original testimonies for her own literary purposes. For example, Meira Cook accuses Krog of appropriating Lekotse’s testimony and reducing it to “a Chaucerian fable” (85). (Heaney has also been accused of similar charges regarding his reading of ancient religious and tribal sacrifice in terms of contemporary politics). Meira Cook is heavy handed in her criticism of Krog when she says that

Krog treats [Lekotse’s] testimony as a literary work rather than as a real and traumatic event... In transforming his testimony into text, Krog effectively robs Lekotse of the meaning of his experience in much the same way the white invaders deprived him of his property and dignity. (85)

I do not think it is fair, here, to compare Krog to the “white” invaders (i.e. the policemen who interrogated Lekotse). Cook does not seem to consider the possibility that Krog might in fact be restoring Lekotse’s dignity (or attempting to) by making his experience more immediate to the reader through the use of symbolism. What seems to offend some critics, like Cook, is that Krog transforms Lekotse’s testimony into poetry, which she entitles “The Shepherd’s Tale” (CS 210). On the other hand, John

Kearney in “Living Liberal Values” sees Lekotse’s testimony as “one of Krog’s most effective strategies” (200). Kearney points out that Krog presents Lekotse’s testimony in poetic form, and then, just as startlingly, she scrutinises (and analyses) it in close detail “in order to convey the full tragic dimension of the way the shepherd’s life has been shattered by the brutal police invasion of his home” (200). In “The Shepherd’s Tale”, Lekotse poetically and poignantly illustrates how his life was turned upside-down by the policemen who invaded his home when he says: “On that day / it was night” (CS 211). The psychologist in *Country of My Skull* indicates that this statement

introduces the ambiguity, the tension between two poles*, the difficult equilibrium that is maintained throughout the story, not only in the facts of the testimony but in the symbols used: day and night, white and black, life and death, educated and illiterate. (217)

This illustrates how myth and symbolism (as well as poetry) can have a greater emotional and psychological impact than the so-called historic “facts” (which I have already pointed out at the beginning of this chapter). Critics like Shane Graham are also more sympathetic to Krog’s use of artistic licence; for instance, he says that “Krog is reluctant to bring forth poetry out of pain, [but] nevertheless uses the familiar conventions of poetry to underscore the dignity of the old man’s narrative” (in Moss 86). Krog does indeed transform Lekotse’s testimony into a type of fable or allegory (Cook 75) about the need for greater compassion and empathy in the “New South Africa” if national healing is to occur. The moral of Lekotse’s story is “his empathy, his ability to think into other positions” (CS 218), and his “urgent need to understand” the world of others (CS 219). However, in doing this, Krog gives

* Note that the dramatic portrayal of the tension between opposites is a very common theme found in most myths.

Lekotse's testimony a "poetic" voice: one that generates a powerful symbolism that emotionally and intellectually engages the reader. An example of the effectiveness of symbolism can be seen when an artist mentioned in *Country of My Skull*, Judith Mason, makes a blue plastic dress in honour of MK Commander Phila Ndwandwe who died in detention. Although Ndwandwe's captors kept her naked she made herself blue plastic panties "to keep her dignity" (CS 280). Krog writes the following lines in *Country of My Skull*:

may your spirit dance free
in this blue blessed dress

for you ...

and perhaps
also
for us. (280)

Here both Krog and Judith Mason attempt to restore dignity and humanity (like Heaney who restores dignity to Iron Age victims in his Bog Poems) not only to Ndwandwe, but to the whole country as well. As Krog puts it, "the plastic of shame and humiliation, has been transformed into this haunting blue salute of beauty" (CS 280). Note that Heaney in "Punishment" also finds beauty in the victim's tar-black face (N 38), and hence his poem also transforms her corpse into a haunting "salute of beauty". One could argue that for Krog the blue dress, like the victims' testimonies, also becomes a "befitting emblem of adversity" (Yeats, "Meditations in Time of Civil War", 227). However, this does not change the fact that Krog, like Heaney, appropriates the victims' pain in their work, which is something they are both

painfully and guiltily aware of. For example, Fiona Ross indicates that “some of those represented as victims have been angered at finding their stories in *Country of My Skull*”, for “they feel they revealed more than they wanted to at the public hearings on which Krog draws” (“From a ‘Culture of Shame’ to a ‘Circle of Guilt’”, online).

Heaney’s “Punishment” has been attacked by some critics for “its mythologizing mystification of historical realities” and its alleged failure to condemn violence outright (Purdy 98). For example, Joseph Brazeau, in his thesis “*Mired in Attachment*”: *Cultural Politics and the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Thomas Kinsella*, finds that “Punishment” “does not condemn the practices that it exposes” (166). Brazeau seems to miss the entire point that the poem is making: Heaney is both outraged by and understanding of (which is not the same as wholly accepting) the practices of his tribe (N 38). I further disagree with Brazeau when he implies that Heaney is simply silent or silenced by tribal revenge in “Punishment”:

There is perhaps an interesting connection between the powerlessness of the scapegoated victims and the powerlessness of the speaker who cannot risk a similar fate by voicing his outrage. The opening lines of the poem ... suggest that the speaker identifies with the victims... By the end of the poem, however, the speaker’s sympathy for the victim dissolves in his explicit affirmation of the practices of the group, and this confounds our attempt [as readers] to redeem his position. (166)

Brazeau implies, by saying that the speaker of “Punishment” is powerless and “cannot risk a similar fate by voicing his outrage”, that the speaker lacks the courage to stand up to the perpetrators. Heaney does use the word “outrage” in the poem, which does speak in and through the poem (N 38). Again, Brazeau misses the point Heaney is

making in this poem, which is that poetry “is like the writing in the sand [alluding to Jesus in Chapter Eight of John’s Gospel] in the face of which accusers and accused are left speechless and renewed” (Heaney, “The Government of the Tongue”, FK 189). Arguably, the position that Heaney takes here, that poetry should “not propose to be instrumental or effective” in providing solutions (FK 190), requires a great deal of courage (in the sense of standing one’s ground as an artist and not being swayed by political or social pressures). I also find Brazeau’s argument that Heaney’s “sympathy for the victim dissolves in his explicit affirmation of the practices of the group” an oversimplification and misreading of what is actually taking place in the poem. Heaney “understand[s] the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge” (N 38), which is hardly the same thing as “explicitly affirming” his group’s actions. Instead, I would argue that Heaney empathises with both the victims and the perpetrators in “Punishment” (and the whole body of cultural and religious history which informs all this: the weight of history working on the present), for he is able to see the situation, as a poet, from all sides rather than favouring only the perspective of the victims, which would have been the easier and safer thing (i.e. one that might have attracted less criticism from critics like Brazeau) to have done. In this way, Heaney is much like Krog in *Country of My Skull*, who through Lekotse is able to “think into” other people’s positions (CS 218).

In refusing to “take sides” Heaney implicates himself in “Punishment” as a “guilty bystander” for witnessing “Catholic girls in Northern Ireland” being “cauled in tar’ for repudiating I.R.A. totems and taboos” (Hart 92). Here Heaney attempts to connect the violent atrocities committed against women in both the past and present when he confesses to the corpse of a girl exhumed from a bog: “I almost love you / but would

have cast, I know, / the stones of silence" (N 38). It is evident from these words that although Heaney empathises with the girl, for he "almost" loves her, that he also, "like the others of his 'tribe', casts those equally blameworthy 'stones of silence' and dumbness" (Corcoran 117). However, the poem does "speak" afterwards (i.e. to the reader of the poem) even if the speaker in the poem remained silent when the events took place. The whole poem pulses with a terrible tenderness and pity, which is evident from the very beginning of the poem where Heaney, as the speaker, says: "I can feel the tug / of the halter at the nape / of her neck" (N 37). Here the speaker attempts to place himself in the victim's position, and attempts to share in her feeling of pain without ever losing sight of the fact that by doing so he is an "artful voyeur" (N 38).

Thus the speaker feels a great sense of tenderness and pity for the girl, but he also "sees" and "understands" (but does not completely accept) "the exact and tribal, intimate revenge" (N 38). Corcoran says the word "exact" implies that the "revenge" corresponds fittingly to the crime of betraying one's "tribe", and therefore "the 'understanding' is also a condoning" (116). Corcoran overstates the case of Heaney's "condoning": at most one can concede that it is possibly a partial condoning, but it is false to say that Heaney condones the actions of his "tribe" outright. What Corcoran fails to note is that just because Heaney understands the actions of his "tribe" (and its long source in history, pain and psychology) this does not mean that he wholly condones them; the speaker in "Punishment" does say, after all, that he "connive[s] in civilised outrage" (N 38). Hart points out that as Heaney eulogises he also accuses, and "his verdict is triple-edged" in that he implicates the victim, her victimisers and himself (Hart 92). This idea of multiple culpability is implied when Christ confronted

a crowd that had gathered to stone an adulteress and he said: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her" (Corcoran 117). However, Heaney in this case is both a stone-caster (and he has also had stones cast at himself by the IRA and his critics), in the sense that it is his "silence" that condones her victimisation, and someone who sympathises with her predicament and is morally outraged at her abuse. As P. R. King puts it, Heaney insists that the artist's role "is to stand on all sides and to accept 'the mire and complexities' of the blood of a whole people" (94). (This is, of course, a necessary yet painful and difficult process). Here, the words "mire" and "complexities" allude to Yeats's "Byzantium" (280).

"Casualty" evokes the figure of Louis O'Neill, Heaney's drinking friend, who was blown up in a Protestant pub because he had "broken an IRA curfew after Bloody Sunday" (Corcoran, 137). O'Neill represents an individualist who is "a loner by instinct" and who "has none of the 'shoaling' habits that would have enabled him to conform" (Morrison, 78). It is evident that O'Neill and Heaney overlap in their roles as non-conformists, for the poet can be viewed as a painfully independent being with terrible responsibilities to the community. Heaney indicates in "Casualty" that it was natural for O'Neill, as a free entity, to go wherever he wished and to be lured towards the "warm lit-up places" (OG 156). At this point in the poem, Heaney asks the question: "How culpable was he / That last night when he broke / Our tribe's complicity?" (OG 156). Hart indicates that Heaney "turns the question on himself, because he too seeks to break free from tribal complicity" (135). Hart overstates the case, here. It is not really possible to break *completely* free from tribal complicity. After all, the words "culpable" and "broke" imply that O'Neill was responsible, in part, for his own death. In other words, Heaney implies that one does owe something

to one's tribe. It is safer to say that the speaker, as a poet, *partially* identifies with O'Neill's sense of individuality, which is illustrated when the speaker goes fishing with him:

I tasted freedom with him.
 To get out early, haul
 Steadily off the bottom,
 Dispraise the catch, and smile
 As you find a rhythm
 Working you, slow mile by mile,
 Into your proper haunt
 Somewhere, well out, beyond... (OG 157)

Here poet and fisherman "find a rhythm" that is outside the social constraints of the "tribe's complicities", but they cannot completely detach themselves from the "tribe" because the land is still there for when they return. It is important to emphasise, here, that a complete detachment from the dilemmas facing Northern Ireland would also be socially irresponsible (like the "beautiful prismatic counselling" of Heaney's friends in "Exposure", 72). This illustrates the point that one needs as a poet to protect one's artistic integrity and licence in order to be an independent voice (or to be partially outside the confines of one's social group), but at the same time one also needs to be committed to one's society and to engage with its dilemmas. For instance, Heaney makes a case in "Place and Displacement" for

the idea of poetry as a symbolic resolution of opposing truths, the idea of the poem as having its existence in a realm separate from the discourse of politics, [which] does not absolve it or a poet from political responsibility. Nobody is

going to advocate an ivory tower address for the poet nor a holier-than-thou attitude. (FK 118)

The “symbolic resolution of opposing truths” ties in with the ideas of moral complexity and the necessity of the poet to find images that ease the strain of social conflict. Heaney also makes an important point that poetry has its own existence and does not share the same outlook as politics (whose task it is to implement practical solutions); as Auden puts it: poetry survives “in the valley of its making” (“In Memory of W. B. Yeats”, 142). However this does not absolve poets from their political and ethical responsibilities. For instance, Jay Parini makes the following point about “Exposure”:

Heaney’s memorable “wood-kerne” (foot soldier) on the run, blending with the landscape, feeling every wind that blows (including the wind of guilt), is an emblem for the modern Irish poet. Without independence and withdrawal, a poet’s work becomes infected with the language of propaganda; but this independence depends, paradoxically, on an intimacy with his environment that has made Heaney Ireland’s successor to Yeats. (118)

Therefore as a poet or writer one should view the moral complexities of one’s social environment by being “attached” and yet “detached”, “inside” and yet “outside”, the community one is writing about. In “Exposure” Heaney adopts this position with the contradictory senses of guilt and pride when he states: “I am neither internee nor informer” (N 73). Corcoran indicates that “Heaney may not be ‘internee’, the hero on a compound, but he is not ‘informer’ either, or betrayer” (126). This is however an uncomfortable and uneasy position that Heaney places himself in, which is illustrated in “The Tollund Man” when Heaney finds himself “lost, / Unhappy and at home”

(WO 48). Evidence of having to place oneself in a difficult position of “moral complexity” can be seen in Heaney’s “Clearances” where Heaney is “taught” by his mother “to face the music” between “the hammer and the block” (OG 306). (I am aware, of course, that this is not the “usual” or only reading of the poem, which also speaks of a skilled, watchful blow splitting the block of coal). This implies that one needs, as an artist, to be in a precarious and uncomfortable position in order to observe, share and “feel” (see “Punishment” and “Exposure”, N 37, 73) the moral complexities (e.g. to be aware of other voices and perspectives), “the grains in the coal”, of one’s own position. One can see from “Clearances” that Heaney favours the idea of poetry as a form of craftsmanship as opposed to propaganda “poetry”; for instance, Heaney has to get “the grain and hammer angled right” in order to split the block of coal and “to strike it rich” (OG 306).

To conclude, both Heaney and Krog are painfully aware that they may betray and exploit by emblematising the victims’ suffering in their work. Yet by doing so, their work endeavours to facilitate greater empathy and understanding within their respective societies. Thus what is required of a poet or an artist “tested by dangerous times” (GT 39) is that he or she should be acutely aware and self-critical of appropriating the pain of others. The alternative is not to produce art at all, or at least art that deals with “distasteful” subjects such as violence and oppression. As Krog says, to do this would be to die (CS 49). This would not only be a physical death, but also to die as an artist, a “social healer” and participant. Heaney would also indicate that a poet or an artist should “face the music” (“Clearances”, OG 306) or, in other words, see things from all angles and not settle for simple assertions.

Chapter Four: “Baptised in Syllables of Blood and Belonging”

Krog attempts to reformulate her own exclusive Afrikaner mythology of suffering into a more inclusive mythology based on an empathetic understanding of the suffering of “black” people during the Apartheid era. Therefore, Krog is writing against the myth of personal cultural victimisation which excludes the suffering of other cultural groups. Both Krog and Heaney share the view that the land belongs to those who have suffered and those who can empathise with the suffering of others. Both writers also attempt, in their work, to create a space for reconciliation to occur. As Heaney writes in his essay “Cessation 1994”: “The cessation of violence is an opportunity to open a space – and not just in the political arena but in the first level of each person’s consciousness – a space where hope can grow” (FK 47). This can be compared to Krog when she says that the TRC has painstakingly “chiselled a way beyond racism and made space for all of our voices” (CS 278).

Krog attempts in “My Beautiful Land” to build an imaginative space where South Africans are no longer defined by race:

look, I build myself a land
where skin colour doesn’t count
only the inner brand of self. (LS 11)

This poem was first written in Afrikaans during Apartheid, and read in this context the poem provides a prophetic vision of the “New South Africa”. As Stephan Meyer indicates, the introduction of the translated version of the poem in *Down to My Last Skin* changes the context in which it is read:

Written in 1969, the poem is a critical utopian fantasy: critical in the sense that it sketches an anticipated utopian racial harmony “where black and white hand in hand / can bring peace and love / in my beautiful land” [LS 11]. It is a fantasy, in the sense that the narrator builds *herself* an imagined land [that is not divided by race]... But the poem is reinserted into the active literary and social context at a time when this fantasy has become the reality of nation-building... (9-10).

What is important for both Heaney and Krog is that all voices and perspectives need to be included in order to achieve a sense of unity in their respective societies. For both writers, it is important to empathise with those outside of one’s cultural group. For example, Heaney says in his essay “Cessation 1994”:

The refusal to consider any move that might erode the Britishness of the Ulster Protestant way of life is totally ingrained in the loyalist community, and ... it would be stupid and insulting to expect them to renege on their sense of separate identity. But it is neither stupid nor insulting to ask them to consider consenting to some political adjustments that would give the nationalist minority equally undisputed rights to the grounds of their Irish identity. (FK 47)

This passage highlights the importance of finding a compromise or common ground between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. What Heaney proposes, here, is that both Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland respect their separate identities. Krog, on the other hand, attempts to find in her work a shared sense of belonging for all South Africans where everyone “can come to rest” (CS 217). Krog suggests that South Africans can achieve this if they are able to empathise with the

suffering of other racial groups. She implies that in doing so South Africans can work towards a new sense of shared belonging by being “scorched / a new skin” (CS 279). For both Heaney and Krog it is important that one particular group should not claim exclusive rights for themselves and, by doing so, deny other groups theirs. Krog in *Country of My Skull* illustrates the dangers of not doing so when, for instance, her mother writes the following in an essay (which Krog has translated from Afrikaans to English) “picturing the Afrikaner psyche” after Dr Verwoerd’s assassination:

And I prayed that my hand should fall off if I ever write something for my personal honour at the cost of my people and what has been negotiated for them through years of tears and blood; that I will always remember that to write in Afrikaans is not a right, but a privilege bought and paid for at a price – and that it brings with it heavy responsibilities. (98)

Spearey notes that the essay appears anachronistic and “tragically misplaced” in the post-Apartheid era, and “yet on some levels, the invocation to remember the cost at which present privileges have been won resonates strongly with contemporary narratives of nation-building” (76). This is why I partially disagree with Carli Coetzee’s argument that Krog inserts her mother’s essay into *Country of My Skull* as a means of contradicting its argument; on one level this is certainly true, but on another level her mother’s essay does, as Spearey indicates, resonate strongly with contemporary narratives of nation-building in South Africa:

[T]his essay was written in Afrikaans, and is here translated by the daughter [i.e. Krog] in an act of treachery against exactly the sentiments expressed in her mother’s essay. The quotation from her mother is inserted here as part of an argument for the necessity of betraying the landscape of the ancestors,

Krog's use of it directly contradicting the logic and argument of the original.
(690)

I also disagree with Carli Coetzee that this constitutes a complete betrayal of Krog's Afrikaner ancestors. By translating her mother's essay, Krog does reveal certain positive aspects of Afrikaner culture such as being responsible to one's community, and remembering the sacrifices made by one's ancestors (as well as their pain and suffering). Here, Krog would agree with her mother concerning the "heavy responsibilities" of writing for one's people and those who have suffered. Notice that this is also something shared by Heaney in his poetry where he also emphasises the "heavy responsibilities" of writing for one's people and remembering the sacrifices (both literally and figuratively speaking) that they have made. However, Krog, unlike her mother, empathises (as does Heaney) with the suffering of other cultural groups and not only her own. Therefore, I would argue that Krog incorporates her mother's essay in *Country of My Skull* as a means of negotiating a new sense of belonging that includes all South African cultures. For instance, in "Country of Grief and Grace" Krog indicates that South Africa "belongs to the voices of those who live in it" (LS 96). Interestingly, in *Country of My Skull* she adds to this with the following: "My own bleak voice among them" (210). Here, Krog's "bleak voice" lacks her mother's sense of privilege and ownership regarding the Afrikaner language.

The words "My own bleak voice" are comparable in "The Tollund Man" to the "sad freedom" of the victim and Heaney as a poet who is "lost, / Unhappy and at home" (WO 48). Heaney's voice as the speaker in "Punishment" is also a "bleak" one in the sense that his position (i.e. that he is both outraged by and understanding of his tribe's revenge) is an uneasy mid-way one (N 38). Similarly, in "Exposure" Heaney adopts

the unhappy position of a thoughtful (and socially responsible) wood-kerne who has “escaped from the massacre” rather than being “a hero / On some muddy compound” whose “gift” (if one can call it that) is like “a slingstone / Whirled for the desperate” (N 72-3). In “Exposure”, Heaney’s “spent flukes of autumn” and sparks of “meagre heat” (N 72-3) are also comparable to Krog’s “bleak voice”. It is evident from these examples that both Heaney and Krog share the idea of the poet as someone who speaks with an unimposing and humbled voice. The poet’s voice lacks the loud and simple certainty of the hero’s position in “Exposure” who, on the other hand, speaks with “passionate intensity” (Yeats, “The Second Coming”, 211).

The idea of “non-ownership” is illustrated in Krog’s “My Beautiful Land” where she imagines a place “where I can love you ... without saying ‘I do’” (LS 11). As Meyer points out, this is “a place where love does not mean sacrificing one’s freedom to the other through the constraints of hegemonically imposed vows” (10). “Free love” can also metaphorically represent racial unity and freedom from racial subservience. Krog in “Land” is deeply aware that her ancestors claimed the land for themselves when she says: “under orders from my ancestors you [the land] were occupied / had I language I could write for you were land my land” (LS 114). Krog finds it impossible to write for the land using Afrikaans, her native tongue, which “carries violence as a voice” (CS 216). This is the reason why Krog incorporates in *Country of My Skull* other voices and narratives (i.e. the testimonies of the TRC hearings) and why she strongly identifies with the “black” victims in the text. Therefore, unlike the position apparent in her mother’s essay, Krog’s belonging in *Country of My Skull* and “Country of Grief and Grace” arises from an attempt to empathise with the suffering of other cultural and racial groups:

because of you
 this country no longer lies
 between us but within
 it breathes becalmed
 after being wounded
 in its wondrous throat

in the cradle of my skull
 it sings, it ignites
 my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of heart
 shudders towards the outline
 new in soft intimate clicks and gutturals

of my soul the retina learns to expand*
 daily because by a thousand stories
 I was scorched

a new skin.

I am changed forever. I want to say:
 forgive me
 forgive me
 forgive me

You whom I have wronged, please
 take me

with you. (CS 278-9)

* Except for lines 12-15 this passage appears verbatim in "Country of Grief and Grace" (LS 98).

The words “clicks and gutturals” allude to “black” African languages, which Krog has “assimilated” (CS 130), or come to identify with, through the victims’ stories told during the TRC process. The words “clicks and gutturals” also relate to Heaney’s poems like (to give a few examples) “Anahorish”, “Broagh” and “Gifts of Rain” where language and belonging are rooted and embedded in the landscape. For instance, in “Gifts of Rain” Heaney says:

The tawny guttural water
 spells itself: Moyola
 is its own score and consort,

bedding the locale
 in the utterance,
 reed music, an old chanter

breathing its mists
 through vowels and history. (WO 25)

Duncan Brown points out that “the description of the water as ‘guttural’ suggests ... a close relationship between the landscape and the Northern Irish dialect” (59). It is this local utterance that Heaney in “Traditions” calls our “guttural muse” (WO 31). In her poetry, Krog is also inspired by the local, guttural dialects of her land (i.e. both Afrikaans and “black” South African languages). The word “bedding”, as well as being a sexual metaphor, implies that these languages are embedded in the landscape. There is also a sense that these local dialects flow from or grow out of the landscape; here the word “bedding” can imply both a river and garden bed. These images of “flowing”, “growing” and “bedding” are also found in Heaney’s “Anahorish”, which is his “place of clear water”:

where springs washed into
the shiny grass

and darkened cobbles
in the bed of the lane. (WO 16)

Zoutenbier indicates that “Anahorish” is the one of Heaney’s first poems “where landscape becomes language” (57), which is implied by the words “soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow” (WO 16). This poem, like “Gifts of Rain”, also uses the river image to symbolise the landscape as being the source, the springhead, of language and poetry. One can relate this idea of local languages being the “springhead” of poetry to Krog’s *Country of My Skull* when a Berber poet indicates, at a poetry workshop, that “the task of the poet is to remember the watering places – the metrical feet of the waterholes” (222). The fact that this is a desert landscape implies that the local languages and dialects are precious resources, which are necessary for the survival of the people living there. One could say that both Heaney and Krog “remember the watering places”, the different languages and dialects, and by doing so they also ensure their societies’ survival by potentially reviving, invigorating and healing them.

In Heaney’s “Gifts of Rain” the phrase “breathing its mists / through vowels and history” (WO 25) gives one a sense of the ancient depth of these local dialects (much like the Berber’s watering places in *Country of My Skull*), which poetry can revive and restore through what T. S. Eliot (1933) calls the “auditory imagination” or

the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back ... [fusing] the most ancient and civilized mentalities. (94)

Heaney indicates, here, that T. S. Eliot's definition of "the auditory imagination" was perhaps the most important thing he gained from reading Eliot's prose, which illustrates its importance as one of the guiding influences in Heaney's own poetry ("Learning from Eliot", FK 34). It also closely resembles what Krog attempts to and does achieve in her work. Both Heaney and Krog use the syllables and rhythms of local dialects to penetrate and sink into "the most primitive and forgotten" (which is also a function of myth) in order to bring something back and revive their own traumatised societies. In so doing they fuse both "ancient and civilised mentalities"; for example, Heaney in "Punishment" is both outraged by (representing his civilised mentality) and understanding of his tribe's intimate revenge (N 38). Notice that Eliot's phrase "sinking to the most primitive and forgotten" also connects with the water metaphor, symbolising the ancient depth of local dialects, which I discussed earlier in regard to both Heaney and Krog's work.

Krog attempts to renegotiate her racial identity as a "white" Afrikaner by empathising with the suffering of "black" people who were victimised by the Apartheid regime. For Krog, however, empathy by itself is not enough: at the end of the poem previously quoted from *Country of My Skull* (278-9), she also reveals an extraordinary sense of humble commitment to the victims by asking them to take her with them. This is also evident in Krog's "Land" when she says: "I want to go underground with you land / land that would not have me" (LS 114). Meyer indicates that "Krog's

distraught attachment to the land takes the form of commitment to it" (15). However, what Meyer does not also emphasise is the way in which Krog is almost begging the land for its acceptance, which contrasts sharply with the tone and perspective of her mother's essay. While her mother is more certain about her right, as an Afrikaner, to belong to the land by emphasising the suffering of her people, Krog reveals (by asking those whom she has "wronged" and the land to take her) a deep sense of insecurity about asking to belong to a country that was once occupied under the orders of her ancestors ("Land", LS 114). It is evident that Krog in both the previously mentioned poem in *Country of My Skull* and "Land" addresses "black" South Africans in order to gain acceptance in a land from which she feels excluded. Carli Coetzee illustrates this by saying:

Krog's country of her skull is a landscape from which she feels herself barred, as a white South African, on account of her whiteness, on account of the name of her father [i.e. Afrikaner patriarchy]. It is a landscape familiar from her childhood, the landscape of the fathers and the brothers; but she can never again enter it. And at the same time it is a landscape into which she wishes to be invited by her fellow South Africans... In Krog's work, there is a self-conscious desire to address an audience that includes black South Africans. (686)

Here, Krog is painfully aware of the sins of her "fathers" and "brothers" (i.e. the Afrikaner politicians, lawmakers, and the perpetrators of the violence against "blacks" during Apartheid) and therefore she feels barred from belonging to the South African landscape. This is why she feels ethically compelled to address and apologise to "black" South Africans on behalf of her Afrikaner ancestors, and why she feels the

need to empathise with their pain. For example, in “Country of Grief and Grace” she says the following:

deepest heart of my heart
 heart that can only come from this soil
 brave
 with its teeth firmly in the jugular of the only truth that matters
 and that heart is black
 I belong to that blinding black African heart
 my throat bloats with tears
 my pen falls to the floor
 I blubber behind my hand
 for one brief shimmering moment this country
 this country is also truly mine. (LS 97)

Krog’s deepest heart “that can only come from this soil” resonates with Heaney’s poems like “Anahorish” and “Gifts of Rain” (which I discussed earlier) where land, language and belonging are all interconnected. On the other hand, where Krog differs from Heaney is her intense need to identify with the victims. Heaney, for instance, feels a great sense of pity and tenderness for the victim in “Punishment”. However, he balances these feelings of empathy with an understanding of his tribe’s violent actions. Of course, Krog finds herself in a different position from Heaney’s: her Afrikaner tribe’s actions during Apartheid, unlike Heaney’s in “Punishment”, were completely in the wrong. This explains Krog’s situation, but it does not negate the ethical problems about identifying with the “other” when, for instance, she says: “I belong to that blinding black African heart”.

Krog's "one brief shimmering moment" of belonging in "Country of Grief and Grace" (LS 97) dovetails well with the "moments of fierce belonging" in *Country of My Skull* (277). In both these examples she reveals a powerful sense of belonging (even if only for a moment) which differs from Heaney who never speaks with such intense attachment. Heaney always endeavours to balance his sense of belonging (of being rooted to the land) with a necessity for partial artistic independence and freedom. Of course, it is Krog's uneasiness about asking to belong to the land that compels her to search for these "moments of fierce belonging" during the TRC process. For Krog, these feelings of uneasiness and insecurity about asking to belong to the South African landscape are partially resolved through confession and by asking forgiveness. This is illustrated in "Country of Grief and Grace" when Krog says that

if the old is not guilty
does not confess
then of course the new can also not be guilty
nor be held accountable
if it repeats the old. (LS 100)

Thus confession facilitates accountability for both "sides" (i.e. "white" and "black" people) and is the first step in creating a more compassionate society. Krog's idea of accountability is similar to Heaney's "idea of multiple culpability" in "Punishment" in which no one in any society is without "sin" (Corcoran 117). Hence, reconciliation can only be made possible if everyone is held accountable. As Krog warns in "Country of Grief and Grace", without accountability and empathy the cycle of oppression will continue "in a different shade" (LS 100). Krog implies in *Country of My Skull* that this is precisely what happened to the British and Afrikaners after the Anglo-Boer War; the British were not held accountable (i.e. they did not confess) for

the atrocities they committed against Afrikaners during the war. Krog illustrates this in a 1994 seminar on Truth and Reconciliation by speculating the following: “Wasn’t the mere fact that the abuses of the [Anglo-Boer] war were never exposed perhaps not a key factor in the character that formulated apartheid laws? ... What would have happened if acknowledgement had been made about British wrongs and forgiveness asked?” (in Spearey 68). Therefore her mother’s essay serves to highlight how Afrikaner culture became centred round their own suffering, and did not validate the suffering of other racial groups. For instance, the only call Krog’s mother knows is “that of concentration camps, tears and blood” of the Afrikaner people (CS 98). Spearey provides the following contrast between Krog’s poem in *Country of My Skull* (278-9), which is a reworking of “Country of Grief and Grace” (LS 98), and her mother’s essay:

Both her mother’s essay and her own poem are transcendent projections of desires, but one monumentalizes and fetishizes and shores up boundaries and criteria for belonging and uses past suffering as justification for ascendancy and as a bond of community, while the other defamiliarizes and unsettles and moves from the space of interiority to a call for a new skin and for forgiveness as it endeavours to make all of those boundaries more permeable and open to negotiation. (76)

It is certainly true that Krog’s poem does attempt to redefine the racial categorisation that was inherited through Apartheid; for instance, she indicates that she has “scorched / a new skin” (CS 279). However, as I have attempted to argue, Krog shares her mother’s idea of past suffering “bonding” a community, but unlike her mother, includes all South Africans. Thus, the ability to empathise with others outside one’s cultural group is the major difference between Krog and her mother. Krog suggests

that through empathy South Africans can potentially transcend racial, cultural and linguistic differences. This is well illustrated when Krog sings the Sesotho version of the national anthem:

I stand, caught unawares by the Sesotho version and the knowledge that I am white, that I have to reacquaint myself with this land, that my language carries violence as a voice, that I can do nothing about it, that after so many years I still feel uneasy with what is mine, with what is me... And I wade into song – in a language that is not mine, in a tongue I do not know. It is fragrant inside the song, and among the keynotes of sorrow and suffering there are soft silences where we who belong to this landscape, all of us, can come to rest.
(CS 216-7)

The “keynotes of sorrow and suffering” are comparable to the “syllables of blood and belonging” in “Country of Grief and Grace” (LS 96). Carli Coetzee points out that “it is through the song [of the national anthem], through singing in a language other than the language of [her] Afrikaner ancestors, that Krog seems to find a new way of saying, tentatively, ‘we’” (694). Here I like the word “tentative” because it suggests an unsure position that is open to a degree of doubt. Olivier says the following about passages in *Country of My Skull*, like the one quoted above, that work towards social transformation and promoting a new collectivity:

On the poetic level these passages are an attempt to transform the “country of my skull” from a country of death and a place trapped inside Krog’s psyche into a place where the dead can be buried and where a new collectivity can be celebrated. As is implied in some of Krog’s poetry, this would require a new poem, a new language that will incorporate the voices of untold numbers of victims and decades of suffering. (223)

Fiona Ross in “From a ‘Culture of Shame’ to a ‘Circle of Guilt’” also notes the possibilities of individual transformation in Krog’s work:

Krog writes specifically of the possibilities of individual transformation offered through the Commission’s process. Emergent from the splinters and fragments of the stories she presents, we witness a reshaping of the identity of an Afrikaans woman. The dedication of *Country of My Skull* – “To every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips” – is a tacit acknowledgement of the complicity of cultural identity in the shapes of abuses in the past. The stories of violation and amnesty, set within the larger story of the workings of the Commission, are in Krog’s hands a foreground to a deep questioning of what it means to be Afrikaans in a state newly emerging from apartheid. Underlying the narrative of pain told at the Commission is another story of a woman grappling with the personal meanings of the past, and with their relation to a cultural identity. (Online)

For Krog, one way of promoting a new collectivity and including all South African voices is through translation. J U Jacobs indicates that “in order to translate this painful cultural self-recognition into a realm of shared discourse, Krog tells her South African story not in Afrikaans, but in English”, which becomes “her language of narrative compromise, of reconciliation” (48). However, Krog maintains “you can only really contribute (in the sense of changing tradition and boundaries) to the literature of a language if you have grown up in that language” (in Meyer 4). Here, Meyer points out that Krog’s “appeal for mother-tongue writing exists in conjunction with her advocacy of translation and multilingualism” (5). This represents an important difference in approach between Krog and Heaney. Krog writes from within her native language (i.e. Afrikaans) and then translates her work into English, while Heaney transforms the English language by crossing his “roots” with his “reading” (P

37). As Duncan Brown points out, Heaney “graft[s] his native dialect onto the imposed English language” (53). However, both approaches do achieve the same effect in transforming the English language and capturing the tone of their respective native tongues. Heaney says the following in regard to tone:

Tone is the inner life of a language, a secret spirit at play behind or at odds with what is being said and how it is being structured in syntax and figures of speech. It has subtly to do with the deepest value system that the group speaking the language is possessed by. (GT 33)

This is true of both Krog and Heaney, for both writers work with the English language but also manage to convey a different value system or tone to the imposed English one. (Afrikaners, like the Irish, would also consider English as an imposed language.) This does not mean that there is nothing lost in translation (or, in Heaney’s case, transforming the English language from within). J U Jacobs says that “what is lost in translation [in *Country of My Skull*] are the actual languages, the rhythm and imagery, of the original stories, of the victims and perpetrators as well as [Krog’s] own, but what is achieved is a measure of distance from the pain, albeit at a cost” (48). For both Krog and Heaney, English becomes the language of compromise and reconciliation, as it proves useful in reaching a wider audience in their respective communities.

Chapter Five: National Poet and Nomadic Poet

In looking at the differences between Heaney and Krog, some critics might argue that Heaney works within a common Celtic-Irish tradition and that Krog writes, as an Afrikaner, in a country of diverse cultures and traditions. However, in this chapter, I wish to complicate the idea that Heaney's Irish culture "assumes" a common culture and literary tradition as indicated by Cronin in "Umrabulo" (*Even the Dead*, 1). I argue that both Krog and Heaney are "nomadic writers" in that they both explore other traditions, cultures and languages in order to work towards a new collective identity in their respective societies. I have borrowed the term "nomadic writer", which signifies someone who is "an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to [his or her] own language", from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (in Auge 275). By the same token, both writers are also "national writers" in the sense that they both function as bards, or cultural workers, in their respective societies.

In cultural studies, the bard is usually seen in negative terms: as someone who mediates and manipulates language in order to reaffirm predominant cultural views and prejudices. For example, Fiske and Hartley indicate that "the classically conceived bard functions as a *mediator of language*, one who composes out of the available linguistic resources of the culture a series of consciously structured messages which serve to communicate to the members of that culture a confirming, reinforcing version of themselves" (64-5). Hence, according to Fiske and Hartley, "the bardic mediator occupies the *centre* of its culture" (65). However, I would argue that the poet or bard has also always had "poetic licence" to communicate other perspectives, and to generate discomfort that challenges culturally reinforced ideas,

which is a point that Fiske and Hartley do not acknowledge. Thus the poet-bard does not only write (or should not only write) from within the centre of his or her culture, but also from outside that culture as well in a way that decentralizes and destabilizes their culture's predominant views and cemented beliefs. What becomes apparent in both Heaney and Krog's work is the need to write from a decentralized position (i.e. where one's cultural identity does not claim precedence over those of other cultural groups, which is something that characterised Afrikaner nationalism during Apartheid South Africa). This "nomadic" aspect of Heaney's poetry is something Cronin fails to note in "Umrabulo" when he compares Heaney's place in his literary culture to South African poetry*:

Our contemporary, the great northern Ireland poet,
Writes from within and for
A culture that assumes Homer, Spenser, Yeats.

I live in a country with eleven official languages,
Mass illiteracy, and a shaky memory.

Here it is safe to assume
Nothing at all. **Niks.** (*Even the Dead* 1)

Cronin claims, rather simplistically, that there is an important difference between Europe, which has a unified literary tradition (i.e. a classical Western tradition), and South Africa that has diverse traditions. In fact, Cronin mentions three different (but also chronologically interlinked) literary traditions "assumed" by Heaney's culture: Greek (Homer), English (Spenser) and Anglo-Irish (Yeats). This does suggest a

* Of course, I am aware that Cronin is also comparing a settled Western English literary tradition and history to South Africa's.

continuous time span and a progression of literary development; i.e. from Classical to Elizabethan to Modern. On the other hand, they do represent diverse cultural traditions (even if they have had some influence on each others' development) which undermines the idea that Heaney is writing "from within and for" a unified cultural tradition: it would be safer to say that Heaney "assumes" many cultural traditions, and there are certainly more than only the three mentioned by Cronin (although I do concede that he could not really have been expected to mention more than he does in the poem). My point is that Cronin's formulation does not give one a proper sense of the complicated mix of languages and traditions that Heaney draws on in his poetry (e.g. Gaelic, Scottish, Anglo-Saxon, etc).

Heaney, to give an example, also draws on Norse mythology and culture in his Bog Poems. In this respect, Brown points out that in Heaney's *North* "the Viking ancestry of modern Ireland has particular prominence, both in its legacy to modern Ireland in itself, and because it provides a physical link between Ireland and Northern Europe" (87). Brown further indicates that "the 'North' of the volume's title becomes not only Northern Ireland but Northern Europe as well in the first section [of *North*], as the discovery of Viking artefacts in the bog suggests to Heaney a wider frame of reference" (88). Therefore, it can be argued that Norse and other mythologies (such as Greek and Celtic mythology) provide Heaney with a "wider frame of reference" in order to interconnect various different cultures in Northern Europe. In the same way, Krog uses translations of various "tongues" (i.e. of the testimonies given during the TRC) in *Country of My Skull* in order to draw from a "wider frame of reference". Both Heaney and Krog can be said to be "nomadic writers" who incorporate other languages and traditions in their work as a means of generating more inclusivity and

diversity in their respective countries' writing. Auge indicates that the "nomadic writer" aligns herself or himself "with those liberating forces which resist reification in order to keep the pathways of becoming open" (270). An example of Heaney as a "nomadic writer" is well illustrated in "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces":

My words lick around
cobble quays, go hunting
lightly as pampooties
over the skull-capped ground. (N 24)

Auge says that "Heaney places his poetry on the portal of ancient trade routes, the Dublin quays, where he sets it loose to pursue a cosmopolitanism founded on an awareness of shared human mortality" (284). Heaney is able "mythologically" to link Ireland and Northern Europe. Heaney in "Broagh" illustrates the complex cultural diversity of Northern Ireland by incorporating various "non-English" words. Kennedy indicates that

Tom Paulin has noted that "boortrees", "rigs" and "docken", drawn respectively from Irish, Scots and English, voice the complicated linguistic mix of Northern Ireland. Heaney highlights the complicated origins of Northern Ireland by bringing together its three defining histories and traditions: Gaelic, Scottish Planter and Anglo-Saxon. (304)

It is evident from this that Northern Ireland, like South Africa, has a diversity of languages and traditions which Cronin's "Umrabulo" does not acknowledge. While Northern Ireland does not have eleven official languages like South Africa, it nevertheless has various "unofficial" languages or dialects. Molino also makes the following observations regarding Heaney's "Broagh":

The word “broagh”, as well as the other dialect terms in the poem, accentuates the cultural diversity of Northern Ireland. “Broagh” is not a term used by Catholics or Protestants exclusively, nor is it used by persons of Irish origin to the exclusion of the Ulster Scots. Rather, the term is native to the inhabitants of a particular district of Ulster, Protestant and Catholic alike. Although strangers may find the term “difficult to manage”, “broagh” is not presented as a term that the English could not subsume within their dictionary, that still other English speakers could not master. (193)

Here, Molino indicates that the insertion of the word “broagh” “into a poem written in English at once celebrates the oral tradition of Irish literature, broadens the scope of Anglo-Irish literature, and underscores the dynamics of Ireland’s history and literature” (192-3). Thus I have attempted to illustrate that Heaney’s poetry does possess elements of nomadism by incorporating various European dialects and mythologies in his work. My point is that Heaney does not draw exclusively from his native Irish mythology or language, which is why writing in English (for Krog it is translation into English) can be viewed as an important means of cultural decentralisation or nomadism.

Krog presents an interesting discussion regarding “national poetry” and “nomadic poetry” in a section of *Country of My Skull* entitled “Waterholes” (CS 220). This discussion takes place in a poetry workshop, where two Senegalese poets and a Berber (the nomadic poet) give their views concerning the tasks of poets writing within their respective cultures. The first Senegalese poet says that “you are a good poet if you can say old things in a new way” and “the ‘newer’ the way you say it, the better poet you are” (CS 221). I would argue that this is exactly what Heaney and

Krog achieve in their work as “national poets”. For Heaney Iron Age atrocities form an important historic connection to the Ulster crisis of his present day Ireland. Krog, by the same token, reformulates her Afrikaner culture’s myths of national belonging through suffering in a more inclusive way which all South Africans can be a part of. This illustrates my point that the role of the “national poet” or bard need not (and should not) be a negative and restrictive one that conforms to the predominant views of a given society. On the contrary, the role of the bard is often also a dynamic one that promotes change and transformation within a society. The second Senegalese poet, on the other hand, indicates that poets must be of the correct ancestry and remain faithful to their traditions:

In my culture you don’t just become a poet. You have to apply first ... and your ancestry is studied and your ability tested. And if you are chosen, you take up an apprenticeship with the chief poet. And he teaches you the nation’s poetry. And your people’s poetry is your people’s lyrical soul, their history. And you may *not* say it in a new way, you may *not* change it, because then you forge what has happened. You change history. If you are talented enough you may add your own piece later... The more accurately you preserve the poetry, the better you perform, the better poet you are. (CS 221-2)

Here, the second Senegalese poet gives an account of one aspect of the traditional conception of the bard, which, to paraphrase Fiske and Hartley, is a mediator of language who occupies the centre of his or her culture (64-5). Note that Heaney also preserves his Celtic people’s ancient lyrical soul and history, and has a long “bardic” tradition in his culture. On the other hand, he differs from the second Senegalese poet, because he also says things in a new way and is not *only* concerned for the reestablishment of ancient traditions. This traditional conception of the bard (as only a

cultural preserver) is, however, inadequate in societies like South Africa and Ireland that possess many cultural and religious groups. I would argue that even in countries with a more unified cultural tradition it is also important (maybe even more so than in multicultural societies) for poets to criticise the negative and redundant aspects of their cultures' belief systems, and not to simply echo and maintain their cultural traditions. This is illustrated when Hughes points out in "Myth and Education" that priests (this is also true of poets) continually elaborate on their cultures' myths as circumstances change (192-3). Therefore the poet-bard is not only a preserver of cultural traditions, but also one who elaborates on and changes them as well, which is especially needed and required when one's society is faced with a crisis.

Krog in *Country of My Skull* implies that a solution to the problem of writing for a society of diverse cultures is found in poets who are "nomadic" (or, in other words, writing from a "decentralised" position) but still write from *within* their cultural group. For example, in *Country of My Skull* the nomadic poet, who is a Berber, says:

In my culture the task of the poet is to remember the watering places – the metrical feet of the waterholes. The survival of the whole group depends on whether you can find the waterholes in the desert. You must remember them in such a way that other groups are none the wiser. The group will never cast you out or see you as mad – but the day you betray the position of the waterholes to someone else, that is the day they will leave the poet behind in the dunes. (222)

The Berber implies, here, that other coexistent cultures are all looking to survive in the same desert space. This sharing of space^{*} represents an important role that a

^{*} Of course, he does not share the information about the location of the waterholes.

nomadic writer plays in a society of diverse cultures. However, I argue that the Berber can also be viewed as a national poet, which is evident in the important role he plays in remembering “the watering places – the metrical feet of the waterholes”; i.e. he preserves and protects his local language or dialect. This represents an important connection with both Heaney and Krog who in their poetry also remember and speak the words of their local cultures in their respective societies, which I have discussed at length in Chapter Four. These views given by the Berber are remarkably similar to Krog’s views concerning translation and writing from within her mother tongue; i.e. by writing in Afrikaans she does not betray the position of her “waterholes”. The fact that Krog entitles this section of *Country of My Skull* “Waterholes” implies that she is more sympathetic to the nomadic poet’s position regarding the role of poetry. Here, “the metrical feet of the waterholes” represent the poet’s mother tongue and the “position” from which he or she writes. Indeed, Krog does not believe in “betraying” her cultural and linguistic position (i.e. she writes in Afrikaans, rather than English, and uses translation as a means of “sharing” her work with other language groups). The sharing of stories through translation forms Krog’s main project and achievement in *Country of My Skull*. Thus, translation for Krog represents her solution for achieving nomadism (i.e. a means of resisting authoritarianism that was inherited through Apartheid and British colonial rule), which, as Auge puts it, “keep(s) the pathways of becoming open” (270). What is interesting, here, is that Krog as an Afrikaner writes from the position of a group that has historically been both marginalized (i.e. by the British) and has marginalized others (i.e. “black” people under Apartheid). This presents a major difference between Krog and Heaney, the latter of whom writes from the perspective of a group that is marginalized but has never marginalized others.

Heaney is what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1986) would term a “minor writer”: a writer who writes for a marginalized group (in Auge 270). (This is *not* to suggest that Heaney’s poetry is “minor” as a contribution to literature.) Concerning “minor writers”, Auge says: “The most reactionary response, ‘the most Oedipal of reterritorialization’, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is to attempt a revival of the aboriginal language and culture” (270). Heaney, in contrast, “revives” not only his aboriginal Celtic language and culture, but also other cultures such as the Norse one. By grafting these local dialects onto the imported “English” one, Heaney destabilises English as a voice of colonial authority. This presents an important defence of what English can achieve as an “imported” language, which complicates Deleuze and Guattari’s rather simplistic picture of the “minor writer” as only a reviver of his or her “aboriginal language and culture”. For instance, Auge points out that in poems like “Anahorish” “Heaney seeks not so much to reterritorialize himself and his culture back onto his native idiom, but rather to deterritorialize the imposed colonial language – to unsettle and disrupt English by infusing it with sonic traces of the discarded Gaelic or Hiberno-English” (275). Here, Heaney uncovers in his poetry shared ancestral beliefs (e.g. Goddess worship of the Celts and Norse people) that link with Northern Europe. Therefore, it is not entirely true to argue, as Cronin suggests, that Heaney writes for one culture (“Umrabulo”, *Even the Dead*). It is safer to say that Heaney uses his Celtic heritage as a means to “tap” into the “collective unconscious” of Northern Europe, which, although it is divided culturally and linguistically, shares a common history. Cronin, of course, does have a point: South Africa’s diverse cultures cannot claim a shared history like Europe. This is why Krog sees the TRC as

an important means of unifying South Africans, for uncovering South Africa's Apartheid past would in fact begin to generate a shared history.

Deleuze and Guattari indicate that the second alternative response (the more revolutionary one) of "minor writers" is nomadism (in Auge 270). Thus Deleuze and Guattari assert that a "minor writer" should "make use of the polylingualism of one's own language ... to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality", and, by doing so, "become a nomad and immigrant and gypsy in relation to one's own language" (in Auge 275). The idea of being a "gypsy in relation to one's own language" is comparable to the uncomfortable "in-between" position of the speaker in Heaney's "Punishment", and the "wood-kerne" and "inner émigré" of "Exposure" (N 73). This is exactly what Heaney and Krog achieve in their work: Heaney by "grafting" local dialects onto English, and Krog through translation. However, Auge indicates that for writers like Heaney, those who write for marginalized groups, "the state of pure nomadism is unattainable" (as well as, I would argue, pure nationalism):

Their work oscillates instead between reterritorializing and deterritorializing movements, thereby enacting the difficult struggle involved in transferring one's allegiance from the familiar pieties and identities of the past to the unknown and as yet unimagined possibilities of the future. (272-1)

I would argue that this is true of Krog as well, who I have already indicated writes from both perspectives as a member of a cultural group that has been marginalized and has marginalized others. Both Heaney and Krog struggle with their "familiar pieties and identities" (as an Irish-Catholic-Celt and Afrikaner respectively) that need

to be “transferred” (i.e. by empathising with other social groups) in order for reconciliation to take place.

Molino says that “Heaney obviously has not directly solved any of the problems of Northern Ireland, but he has chosen poetically to address the ‘Irish thing’ by means of linguistic inclusiveness – despite, or because of, the friction it generates – rather than the discursive exclusiveness characterised of political dogmatism” (199). The problem with Molino’s argument, here, is that he assumes it is possible to directly solve the very complex problems of the Ulster crisis. Indeed, Heaney does maintain a degree of political neutrality by avoiding concrete solutions to a complex problem, which cannot be easily solved. I disagree with Kennedy, who is more critical of Heaney than Molino, when he argues that “it is difficult to understand how a world of individual tribes led by warrior chiefs can be a practical political alternative. More importantly ... Heaney’s evocation of an idealised past risks reproducing the ideology of nineteenth-century Celticism” (305). I find Kennedy’s interpretation, here, a rather odd one: Heaney never says or implies in his poetry that a world “led by warrior chiefs can be a practical political alternative”. Kennedy also exaggerates when he indicates that Heaney is in danger of evoking an “idealised past”. Heaney does not shy away from some of the negative aspects of his Celtic past, which is why phrases like “how we slaughter / for the common good” (“Kinship”, N, 45) and “the old man-killing parishes” (“The Tollund Man”, N, 48) are meant to be read, in part, as a criticism of his culture. Heaney is right to insist that poetry cannot be used as a propaganda device, for its power comes from the way it subtly affects its readers. For Heaney, the object of poetry is to generate a sense in the reader of a multiple

culpability where no one is left feeling blameless or is able to proclaim their innocence, where everyone “feels each wind that blows” (“Exposure”, N, 73).

On the other hand, Krog in her poetry and *Country of My Skull* is deeply aware that her people (i.e. “white” Afrikaners) are to blame for the suffering of “black” people under Apartheid, which is why her work reveals her internal struggle to belong to a country that she feels does not want her or belong to her (“Land”, LS, 114). However, Krog’s empathising with the suffering of “black” victims does not present a final and resolved solution to her personal identity crisis. She finds belonging in “one brief shimmering moment”: a moment of realisation that means everything (“Country of My Skull”, LS 97). Here, Krog’s personal journey to belong to the South African landscape and attempt to connect with the pain of “black” people does, as an example of possibility, offer “white” people a potential way forward in devising their “own personal method[s] of coming to terms with what happened” (CS 129). Notice, here, that this implies that there are no final and generic solutions to South Africa’s problems.

To conclude, it is evident that countries like Ireland and South Africa, which have a diversity of cultures, need to have writers who are both nomadic and national ones. My argument, here, is that for the poet both positions are necessary and complement rather than exclude one another. This is a point that Deleuze and Guattari do not acknowledge when they favour the nomadic writer’s response, which they view as the most revolutionary one, over that of the national writer, who attempts to revive his or her aboriginal language and culture (in Auge, 270). However, both Heaney and Krog destabilise authority by drawing on and reviving local cultures in their work. Heaney

uses local dialects to destabilise English as an “imposed” colonial language, and Krog draws on local “black” dialects to destabilise “white” (both Afrikaans and English) authority. By doing so, both Heaney and Krog fulfil the roles of nomadic and national writers in their work.

This idea of nomadism is also implied in Cronin’s poem “Umrabulo”. Attwell and Harlow note that the word “Umrabulo” is “a term used in several South African languages and cultures to describe the customary passing around of beer and the proverbial conversation that accompanies it” (8). This suggests a need for a sharing of views, languages, myths and stories in societies like Ireland and South Africa, which both possess a diversity of cultures and traditions. Both myth and poetry can serve an important function of both *reviving* ancient local cultures and languages, and *destabilising* authority and a sense of ownership that one dominant culture in a society may believe it is entitled to.

One of the poet-bard’s central tasks, especially in fractured worlds and communities, is re-dreaming the myths of his or her society in order to allow for the possibility of healing and reconciliation to occur. One could say that nomadism plays an important role in the “new” dream, poetic tale or mythology of both Ireland and South Africa. Nomadism enables reconciliation to occur by challenging the idea and existence of diamond-hard and crystallised truths, and by promoting multiple viewpoints and perspectives, or what Heaney would call moral complexity, in one’s society. Thus poetry and myth can potentially change the perspectives of society’s citizens, by attempting to melt the frozen “seas of pity” in their eyes (Auden, “In Memory of W. B. Yeats, 142).

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