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The Artful Voyeur: Seamus Heaney as Parrhesiastes

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The *Artful Voyeur*: Seamus Heaney as Parrhesiastes

by

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Abstract

Critics Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson have examined the complicated relationship between Seamus Heaney's poetry and the Northern Irish conflict, arguing that, in general, he refrained from clear political commentary. Despite this, Seamus Heaney was a revolutionary poet celebrated for his vivid imagery and commentary on ordinary life in Northern Ireland. While these critics say he held back on stating his political opinion or mystified the violence, this paper argues that he was a parrhesiastes (one who speaks truth to the rest of society for the sake of truth itself) of his time, choosing to practice the ancient Greek idea of fearless speech rather than the modern Western understanding of freedom of speech. As such, Heaney was clear about his stance regarding the British presence in Ireland but presented his opinions in a way that left many dissatisfied with his portrayal. Particularly in his books of poetry *Field Work*, *North*, and *Station Island;* one can see Heaney's attempt to wrestle with the reality he lived as a poet in a time of great uncertainty. In choosing to write as a parrhesiastes rather than a 'freedom writer,' Heaney speaks out against the interlocutor and solidifies his place as one of the greatest poets of the English language.

Introduction

In an interview with the literary journal *Brick*, Seamus Heaney says that while in school "political was kind of inculcated as a bad word in relation to art and poetry" ("An Interview"). He had to learn to allow such feelings and thoughts to enter into his writing, but always heeded the words of James Joyce "who warns against too much side-taking, not to be the voice of any people, but to be your own voice" ("An Interview"). As Heaney's career progressed, he became a poet known for his commentary on rural Irish life and his constant questioning of his role as a writer in a tumultuous and violent Ireland. Since the beginning of his career, Heaney enjoyed both intense praise from admirers and scrutiny from critics, primarily because of his artistic take on the current events of the time. Whether it was because many connected to his work and style or, in the case of the critics discussed in this paper, because of his commentary (or lack thereof) on the country's political state, Heaney has become a household name amongst people all over the world. Being a well-known poet, Heaney has certainly attracted his own critics. Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson have long critiqued his work as either insufficiently political or deaf to the true horrors of the time. These critics were displeased that Heaney was not overtly pro-British or pro-Irish, also claiming he fails to portray the true horrors of the time because he mythologizes death and destruction. Nevertheless, this paper aims to take a different approach to analyzing Heaney's work.

Rather than claiming Heaney as an honorary member of the IRA or an inarguable representative of every Irish person, this paper rather will explore Heaney's role as a parrhesiastes and his ability to criticize both the British occupation of Ireland and the complicated relationship between poetry and freedom. While some will claim Heaney as a national hero and others as a misrepresentation of the true Irish struggle, there has not been an

exploration of the *in-between*. By analyzing Heaney's work in assuming that he speaks as a parrhesiastes, there can be a more thorough and nuanced understanding of his poetry, his stance on political issues, and how he was able to successfully appeal to millions. Though there have been many analyses and studies regarding parrhesia and its role in literature, there has never been a discussion relating Heaney to the standard. This paper aims to be the first to draw attention to Heaney's parrhesiastic tendencies and better understand him, his poetry, and the criticism he received.

To do so, this paper will analyze poems from three books of poetry Heaney released throughout his career in chronological order, *North*, *Field Work*, and *Station Island*. A close reading and interpretation of his poetry will investigate the parrhesiastic truths and nuanced understanding Heaney has of the Irish conflict, as well as familiarize us with his writing tendencies. To first understand what parrhesia is and what it means to be a parrhesiastes, we will look at Foucault's definitions in a series of talks delivered at UC Berkley. With this information, we will discover the intricacies of Heaney's work, his role as a parrhesiastes, and his self-awareness as an *artful voyeur* ("Punishment" 72).

Literature Review

Many academic papers analyze parrhesia and Seamus Heaney separately, but never have the two topics been viewed together. To develop the implication that Heaney is a parrhesiastes himself, this paper synthesized the two sides of the research. By combining the two, this thesis proposes an obvious similarity between parrhesia and Heaney that cannot be ignored. While the sources used helped understand parrhesia and Heaney as separate spheres, there was a gap in the

research that this paper aims to fill. Nevertheless, the plethora of information on both topics proved useful in this research.

Neal Alexander studies Ciaran Carson, his writing, and his criticisms of other authors such as Heaney. His book *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing* was invaluable in helping to understand the criticism Carson had toward Heaney and his work. It was helpful to get an idea of who Carson was and his own work in order to see his relationship with Heaney. I picked out information from the introduction and chapter one because of its emphasis on the politics of poetry and references to Heaney's own work. This book helps the paper portray the criticism Heaney received and situate his work within the expectations of the time and the critics around him.

Kerry Burch's essay "Parrhesia as a Principle of Democratic Pedagogy" was essential to demonstrate an understanding of what parrhesia is in a political context. While Foucault explains what parrhesia is, this article helps explain how parrhesia differs from the Western understanding of freedom of speech. In addition to this, the author explains how parrhesia is used and understood to "facilitate the development of both intellectual courage and democracy as a way of life" (71). The positioning of parrhesia as a democratic act emphasizes the fact that Heaney was indeed political in a time of political unrest, cementing him as a parrhesiastes.

The main point of Alex Coleman's article "Seamus Heaney and the Role of the Political Poet" shows how Heaney's poetry was political and used his work for the greater good of society, an essential part of being a parrhesiastes. This article also gives background on the time Heaney lived through growing up in Ireland, which helps grasp the bigger picture of the time and the events he would have witnessed/experienced. While this article was helpful in the

development of this paper, it did not have a large impact. It helps to situate Heaney as a parrhesiastes, which is its main contribution to this research.

Andrew Eder focuses on *North*, *Field Work*, and *Station Island*, which is helpful because of the analysis on the same books in this paper. His article "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: Seamus Heaney and Northern Irish Politics" also gives context of the Troubles, which can then apply to the poems and helps the readers understand the time at which his work was produced. He also speaks about Heaney's work being humanist and focusing on the human experience of such horrors. This is essential to my paper because it also helps position Heaney as a parrhesiastes because of his emphasis on the person and their experience, wanting to provide some sort of outlet for the horrors they experience.

Eamon Halpin argues in his work "Seamus Heaney and the Politics of Imagination" that, while some critics think Heaney was insufficiently political, he says they are simply overlooking the subtlety of his work. Instead of being crudely obvious about his politics, Halpin says that he "reads Heaney as a nationalist poet, but one who reveals to us some of the complexity of his tradition" (64). This is important to portray the nuance of Heaney's work and why critics may have misinterpreted the point Heaney was trying to make. This helps to place the critics as some of the interlocutors Heaney must work around as a parrhesiastes.

Seamus Heaney in Context by Geraldine Higgins was essential in developing this paper. The book is a collection of essays from various authors assessing the background of Heaney's work, his life, the frameworks he used, and so on. The book was only published in 2021, making the information helpful and up-to-date for this paper's research. The book provides contributions from authors all over the world specializing in varied aspects of Heaney's writing. This bolsters content of the book because, not only is there a wide array of information, but each author

understands the specifics of the aspect they write about. The layout of the book as well as its contributions from various sources and its recent publication make it an invaluable resource for this paper.

Edna Longley's "Altering the Past: Northern Irish Poetry and Modern Canons" is not so much a critique of Heaney, but a look at Heaney and other Irish authors in conversation with one another. While this article proves helpful, it is quite difficult to get through and a little hard to understand at times. This work however was important to include because it shows how Heaney helped change the landscape of Irish poetry because of how he wrote (interweaving tradition and finding importance in tradition despite changing attitudes) in order to preserve Irish history/culture within his work.

Finally, Eugene O'Brien looks at Heaney, his writing, his relationship to his home, and his relationship with the politics of Ireland in his work *Seamus Heaney: Searched For Answers*. The most helpful chapters were 3, 4, and 5 because of their emphasis on political poetry and Heaney's life/role in creating his work. The author talks about the "productive ambiguity" of Heaney's work. This "productive ambiguity" emphasizes Heaney's ability to write about the violence occurring without making anyone who reads his work feel alienated. By being ambiguous he is able to appeal to any reader but does not shy away from pointing out the violence of the time; his work remains productive because it forces readers to face reality, but is just ambiguous enough that they don't feel like they have to choose a side in order to connect to his work.

Irish History's Impact on Heaney

When Heaney began publishing his work for the first time in 1966, the Northern Ireland "troubles" were about to begin. This paper will focus primarily on Northern Ireland, a collection of six counties under the rule of the British Empire. The Republic of Ireland is the rest of the island south of Northern Ireland. For clarity's sake, this paper will mainly refer to Northern Ireland as the 'North' and the Republic of Ireland as the 'South' or simply the 'Republic.' This partition of Ireland may be dated to 1920 when the British established separate parliaments in Ireland and, more dramatically in 1921, when, following the Irish War of Independence, the Anglo-Irish Treaty recognized the existence of the "Irish Free State" to the South and "Northern Ireland" in the North. The North was to be controlled by the British and the South was to be its own country, out from under their rule and instead ruled by the Irish.

While many accepted that the Irish finally had control over the majority of the island, many could not help but feel that the northern six counties were left behind. With this partition, there was also a further segregation of Catholics and Protestants. Catholics were the majority population of the South, while Protestants predominantly occupied the North. This is because Protestants tended to be descendants of British colonizers who came over to Ireland centuries before, so their loyalty remained with the Crown, thus settling in the North. Meanwhile the Catholics, who were predominantly in favor of liberation from British rule, remained in the South. However, this did not mean that there was a perfect split. Many Catholics were left behind in the North after the split, meaning that they became a very small minority of non-Protestant people left under British rule. This led to a continued struggle between Catholics and Protestants, but now the violence was concentrated in six small counties, not an entire island. As a result, tensions had never been higher. Catholics were unwelcomed by their Protestant counterparts;

often discriminated against in law, education, and social standing. In the late 1960s, almost fifty years after partition, civil war broke out once again. The Irish Republican Army (more commonly known simply as the IRA) fought back against their British occupiers, causing an unprecedented sense of fear, danger, and hatred between Catholics and Protestants, Irish and British. This was a sectarian conflict, more vicious than had been seen since the likes of the Easter Rising of 1916. Seamus Heaney witnessed this violence in his young adulthood, the violence that became the very basis for why he wrote.

Heaney's Life as a Poet

Heaney grew up a Catholic in County Derry, Northern Ireland, a hotspot for violence during the Troubles. This location and history greatly influenced his work because the violence was not hidden from him, instead, it was something he would have been all too familiar with. Heaney said of his childhood, "I learned that my local County Derry [childhood] experience, which I had considered archaic and irrelevant to the 'modern world' was to be trusted. [It] taught me that trust and helped me to articulate it" ("Seamus Heaney"). Heaney used his experiences growing up in one of the most violent counties of the Troubles and his family's background in farming as the foundations for his work. He compared his experiences in Derry with the life he found in Belfast attending Queen's University, a time that encouraged him to begin writing. It was a big transition from a young boy in Derry with his family of farmers and small-town Catholic life to a young man in the big city of Belfast at university. By becoming a writer, Heaney was able to insert himself into the conversation and began engaging in parrhesia like he never did before. This engagement developed into a lifelong career of commentary on Irish life and the implications of partisan warfare, both physical and social.

Heaney's identity as a Catholic was also instrumental in his upbringing and eventual career in writing. In Higgins' book, Kieran Quinlan says "Heaney went through several reorientations on his way to a post-religious understanding of the human experience. At every stage, however, Catholicism inflected his poetry and provided a context for his creative explorations" (Higgins 212). While Heaney may have struggled with his faith and the role it played in his life, it was never quite something he gave up or could escape. Even when he identified as an unbeliever, Quinlan notes that Catholicism still shaped Heaney's work. Especially considering that in Northern Ireland "irrespective of personal religious beliefs, everyone was inescapably identified with their denominational origins," Heaney could not escape his Catholic background even if he desired to (Higgins 212). As a Northern Irish person, Heaney's upbringing as a Catholic would be inexplicably intertwined with his livelihood. Since sectarianism was so prevalent, even if Heaney began to identify as an unbeliever, coming from a Catholic family would still cause others to group him in with the Catholics, making it impossible to escape the identity handed down to him as a child.

In addition to being unable to escape his religious identity, Heaney was not immune from criticism for his work. Ciaran Carson and Edna Longley are some of Heaney's staunchest critics. Longley took issue with Heaney's commentary on the violence, finding that he was not overtly political enough. Regarding Heaney's poetry in *North*, she argued that "he does not probe the content more particularly or more politically…" (30). In other words, while others praise Heaney for his poetic and naturalistic portrayal of the Northern Irish experience, Longley thinks he could have done more to state his personal experience and view of the violence.

Fellow poet Ciaran Carson, however, finds a problem with what others call Heaney's ability that "makes you see, hear, smell, taste this life, which in his words is not provincial, but

parochial" ("Seamus Heaney" *Poetry Foundation*) Instead of relishing in Heaney's ability to call back to his rural childhood and relate it to the violence of the time, Carson insists that "Heaney neglects the political consequences of the violence he anatomises and, in doing so, tends to elide history into myth" (Alexander 5). He believes that Heaney mystifies and mythologizes the violence, writing about it in a way that negates the true terror of the time. Instead of seeing Heaney's poetry as a way for people to connect back to their roots and nature, he sees it as Heaney not taking seriously the casualties of the Troubles.

Understanding Parrhesia

In a series of talks given at the University of California at Berkley in 1983, Michel Foucault explains, describes, and expands on an ancient Greek idea of "parrhesia." The word parrhesia in Greek literally means "everything that which is said." Someone who speaks using parrhesia is what is known as a parrhesiastes; a person who practices parrhesia. In Foucault's explanation, "the one who uses *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes*, is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse" (2). In other words, a parrhesiastes is someone who speaks the truth in its whole form simply because it needs to be said for the sake of itself.

This idea of parrhesia is a difficult concept for people of the modern age to grasp because it simply has not existed in a pure form since the ancient Greeks. Though parrhesia itself no longer exists in its purest form, that does not mean someone cannot tap into parrhesiastic elements. There have been countless people throughout history who may not be fully parrhesiastic, but a case can be made that they were at least *attempting* to be, whether they were

aware of it or not. This is because they were following some of the criteria laid out by Foucault that parrhesia must follow.

For Foucault, there are a few main components someone must follow for their speech to be considered parrhesiastic. First, a parrhesiastes must say everything on his mind and make it "manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his own opinion" (Foucault 2). A parrhesiates also "says what is true because he knows that it is true; and he knows that it is true because it really is true…his opinion is also the truth…there is always an exact coincidence between belief and truth" (3). In other words, a parrhesiastes is not stating what they *think* to be true but what they *know* to be true. Parrhesia transcends opinion, instead conveying something irrefutable and beneficial to the progress of the society.

Foucault continues by explaining a parrhesiates is someone who puts himself at risk or in danger to speak the truth. This danger does not only have to be a physical or fatal one but could also be a danger to social standing or personal relationships. Foucault gives examples of telling a friend that they are doing something wrong and therefore risking resentment from their friend, or a politician losing favor with the public for expressing an opinion contradictory to the majority narrative. Because to be considered a parrhesiastes one must be taking a risk, someone in a higher position of power usually cannot be a parrhesiastes. This is because they are not risking their life, power, money, or social standing. It would take more for a peasant to stand up to their king than for a king to stand up to a lord. Foucault explains that because of this "*parrhesia*, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger…you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken" (4). Since parrhesia is always coming from someone of a lower status

directed toward someone of an elevated one, it "has the function of criticism," as it always includes a risk for the parrhesiastes (4-5).

The final requirement for Foucault's definition of parrhesia is that "telling the truth is regarded as a duty…no one forces him to speak; but he feels that it is his duty to do so" (5). Parrhesia is practiced out of a duty to oneself, society, and for the sake of the truth itself. If someone is forced to tell the truth, then they are not being parrhesiastic because it was not of their own volition. Parrhesia can only be expressed if it is freely done for the sake of everyone else. In short, "in *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy" (Foucault 5). By understanding parrhesia and the guidelines it must follow, we can now better see how Heaney can be considered a parrhesiastes. Heaney was not coerced into writing or writing because he was bored, but because he chose frankness, truth, and moral duty. He wrote because he was as close as we can get as a modern world to the ancient Greek ideal of a parrhesiates.

North Analysis

Published in *North* in 1975, "Punishment" is a poem about a bog body found in Germany known as the Windeby Girl, buried in a peat bog for 2,000 years before being found. In this poem, Heaney reflects on societal norms and laws, what happens when one does not conform to such standards, and what it means for us to punish one another for our transgressions against the group. In a close reading, one can see this poem is more than about the bog body, but is putting this woman into Troubles-ridden Ireland. Heaney is asking the audience: how are we any different from this woman and the people who punished her? His answer: we are not.

Heaney puts himself with the girl at her sacrifice, refusing to imagine such horror happening without him. With "I can feel the tug/of the halter at the nape/of her neck, the wind/on her naked front," Heaney is making himself feel the suffering of the girl ("Punishment" 71). He is not simply observing, he has taken on her pain. He is familiar with the ritual sacrifice of the girl, finding her death similar to the victims of the Troubles. Those who die in the conflict are just like the girl, ritual killings in order to achieve a greater purpose. In the fourth stanza, Heaney describes her as "a barked sapling" before her death, who was then found thousands of years later "oak-bone, brain-firkin" ("Punishment" 71). Spacey understands this metaphor as the girl being "a barked sapling, that is, young and supple, covered in bark (think skin), but now she is a tough and seasoned *oak-bone*, *brain-firkin*." Before being sacrificed and buried in the bog for thousands of years, this girl was just like any other young person. She was young, free, full of life, and yet to be toughened by the realities of life. The parallels between this girl and those who grew up experiencing violence in Ireland are the same. Just as this girl used to be innocent and free, so did those young people of Ireland. But over time, both they and the girl were hardened, becoming as solid to the outside world as an oak tree. They all became hardened to nature and hardened to the world.

Heaney continues, "Little adultress,/before they punished you/you were flaxen-haired,/undernourished, and your/tar-black face was beautiful" ("Punishment" 71). This stanza is the first time in which Heaney addresses the victim as "you," making his words and feelings personal. This girl is no longer a bog body found in Germany, but a fellow human being. Heaney is addressing this girl as his equal, seeing her as who she was before her death. While he acknowledges her fault as an adultress, he separates himself from her punishers, simply calling them "they." He is removing himself from the punishment, looking at the girl saying, "I know

the sin you committed, but who am I to cast the first stone?" He sees her as she was before, with light-colored hair and undernourished from living in a difficult time. But despite the toll the bog has taken on her body, turning her face tar-black, he sees her as his equal, beautiful in her mistakes and the punishment doled out to her. Despite what her body has turned into over the years, Heaney knows the similarities of their lives.

Though Heaney sees himself in her, he says "My poor scapegoat,/I almost love you/but would have cast, I know,/the stones of silence./I am the artful voyeur" ("Punishment" 71). Now, instead of separating himself from her punishers, Heaney is acknowledging that even he would have participated in her murder. He knows that she does not deserve what she is getting because he calls her a "scapegoat," but that does not stop him from remaining silent during her punishment. He admits that he almost loves her, but not quite enough to make a change. Not quite enough to risk his own place in the tribe to save her. Again, this is very reminiscent of the modern-age struggle Ireland was going through at the time. Heaney, being an artful voyeur, will look upon the savagery and punishments all around him, unsure of his place as a poet. If he is to speak out, would he make a difference, or would he just end up in the bog with her? By calling his bystander behavior casting "stones of silence," Heaney yet recognizes that by staying silent he is taking an active role in the violence. He is not just observing what happens to the woman but actively participating by not stopping it. Heaney is taking accountability for his lack of action, and again, examining his role in modern Ireland. If he is to remain silent on the violence of the Troubles, Heaney wonders how he is any better than the people who sacrificed the bog woman thousands of years ago.

The last two stanzas of the poem bring this idea home, with Heaney bringing all of this to the present day and his feelings toward the Troubles:

I who have stood dumb

when your betraying sisters,

cauled in tar,

wept by the railings

who would connive

in civilized outrage

yet understand the exact

and tribal, intimate revenge. (“Punishment” 72)

These stanzas once again implicate Heaney in the violence, saying that despite what he has seen he *has* “stood dumb” to it all. This is no longer hypothetical, but Heaney admits that he has not stood up against the violence when he could have or should have. Spacey notes that the “betraying sisters” are the women of the time who would have been humiliated for being friendly with British troops, “they are equivalents to the bog girl; they suffer similar punishments, yet are spared their lives.” This shows that the violence and humiliation Heaney is meditating on with the bog woman is not just ancient, but something that he knows is happening right now. He tells the bog girl earlier in the poem that he knows he would stand by and let it happen to her because that is what he does now. He is not just assuming how he would act in such a situation, but recounting how he does in the modern setting. At the same time, however, he understands the “exact/and tribal, intimate revenge” that is taken on these women and those who do not remain on the side of the ‘tribe.’

Though empathetic towards the bog woman, he cannot help but also fully feel for those punishing her. The same feeling applies to those fighting back against the British occupation; he

hurts for those who are lost or punished for speaking against the counter-violence of the Irish, but at the same time as an Irish Catholic, he can't help but understand the tribal revenge. No matter what he does or believes, he is a part of that tribe and will always be. By holding that innate membership, he also holds the innate need for "exact" and "intimate revenge" ("Punishment" 71). Though Heaney may struggle with how the punishment is done, he knows that it must happen. No matter how much he protests, the 'tribe' is going to carry out its punishment regardless.

This poem is parrhesiastic because Heaney is not only calling out himself but also the ways the Irish are responding to the Troubles. Foucault says that "parrhesia is a form of criticism, either towards another or towards oneself, but always in a situation where the speaker or confessor is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor" (4-5). Typically the parrhesiastes speaks out against the interlocutor itself, but Heaney takes this time to question himself and his own morals. He forces himself to consider his place in the Troubles and how he can respond but ultimately finds that he will always be stuck in the middle. On the one hand, he is heartbroken over the death and the violence. Eder describes Heaney's politics as "a distinct humanism, meaning that Heaney values human interests, values, and dignity over political ideologies, religious dogmas, or social conventions." He is not in favor of the violence but knows that at the end of the day, the tribe will always carry out its revenge anyway.

Field Work Analysis

"Casualty" is one of the poems published in Heaney's collection, *Field Work*, about a man Heaney knew, Louis O'Neill, who was killed in an explosion at a bar shortly after the Bloody Sunday murders (Fawbert "Casualty"). Though Heaney acknowledges that he and the

man are very different from each other ("Incomprehensible/to him, my other life"), he still has a tender respect and admiration for the man as a fellow human being experiencing the horror of the time ("Casualty" 100).

Heaney begins the poem by describing the man as drinking by himself as he ordered: "without/Having to raise his voice,/Or order a quick stout/By a lifting of the eyes" ("Casualty" 100). This man is a regular at this bar but is described anonymously enough that the reader can picture whoever they want, maybe even someone they know personally. The man is "A dole-kept breadwinner/But a natural for work," with "His deadpan sidling tact/His fisherman's quick eye/And turned observant back" ("Casualty" 100). He is like any other man Heaney would have encountered in his rural upbringing. This man is all of those Heaney knew from his time in County Derry, yet also simultaneously anonymized to be anyone we picture him to be. Keeping this man unfamiliar but saying that he "loved his whole manner" shows Heaney's deep appreciation and true admiration for the simple people and lives of those he knew ("Casualty" 100).

Despite this appreciation, he knew that this man did not understand him. He knew the man did not understand Heaney's life in Belfast and Dublin compared to his rural life in Derry, but Heaney still tried to understand him. The man, however, tried to understand, "In the pause after a slug/He mentioned poetry" ("Casualty" 100-101). The man did not understand Heaney, his work, or his aspirations, but still tried to make the connection. Heaney, however, insecure in his role as a poet and not wanting to offend the man would try to change the subject; "always politic/And shy of condescension, I would manage by some trick/To switch the talk to eels/…Or the Provisionals" ("Casualty" 101). Heaney shows his liminality as someone who comments on

the lives of people like the man in his poetry, uncomfortable trying to have a conversation with him about the thing he is so unsure of.

Heaney notes the “common funeral” that takes place after Bloody Sunday, a familiar sight after the years of violence between the IRA and British Paramilitaries (“Casualty” 101). The Catholics of the area tried to remain inside and out of sight to be safe, but the man “would not be held/At home by his own crowd/Whatever threats were phones/Whatever black flags waved” (“Casualty” 101). The man would not be held “by his own crowd,” or in other words, by the Catholics of the area. While every other place was closed because of the events “He had gone miles away/For he drank like a fish” and wanted a pub to go to (“Casualty” 102). Heaney sees the man as he goes into the pub, saying “I see him as he turned/In that bombed offending place,/Remorse fused with terror/In his still knowable face,/His cornered outfaced stare/Blinding in the flash” (“Casualty” 102). Heaney witnesses the man as he enters into what should have been a closed pub, but instead is turned into a bombing. The man seems to be looking right at Heaney as he sees the terror, confusion, and remorse in his face. Heaney is looking right at him, right into his eyes, right into his “still knowable face” as he is utterly destroyed (“Casualty” 102). The man stares at Heaney in defeat as the bomb goes off, almost as if to say “Is this what I get for trying to do a normal thing?” Despite the horror of Bloody Sunday, the man was simply trying to lead a normal life and do a normal thing like going to the pub. Instead of being able to pretend that nothing had happened and forgetting for a moment about the violence around him, he is faced with the violence head-on, experiencing it for himself in the bomb explosion. He looks at Heaney knowingly, with defeat in his eyes; he can’t even just get a drink.

Heaney continues, “How culpable was he/That last night when he broke/Our tribe’s complicity?” (“Casualty” 102). Heaney is questioning if the man is even to blame or if he can

even be criticized for ignoring the 'tribe's' call for staying in and closing businesses. How can the man be blamed for wanting to do a normal thing? Something that should be normal and not living in fear of being bombed and murdered? In saying that it was "our tribe's complicity," Heaney is also implying that the bomb that killed the man was one of their own, one of the IRA's doing. So in that case, not only was the man slaughtered, but he was killed by the very people who were supposed to be looking out for him. Heaney is asking his audience to consider: "If we even kill our own, what is the good of the violence?" The man asks Heaney this question too, saying "'Now, you're supposed to be/An educated man,' I hear him say. 'Puzzle me/The right answer to that one'" ("Casualty" 102). The man, acknowledging Heaney's experience at university, knows that even he cannot give an answer.

Heaney closes the poem by describing a day he went out on the water fishing with the man, entering into his element instead of forcing him to come into his. He says of the time, "The Screw purling, turning/Indolent fathoms white,/I tasted freedom with him" ("Casualty" 103). In recounting his time with the man, Heaney realizes that it is this connection with a fellow human being that makes him feel free, not some militia that is supposed to be fighting back against the British or his role as a poet. It is this human connection, this exchanging of the human condition that truly allows both Heaney and the man to feel freedom from their environment. He closes the poem with the lines "Dawn-sniffing revenant,/Plodder through midnight rain,/Question me again" ("Casualty" 103). With these final lines, Heaney is now able to revisit the question posed earlier by the man. But, instead of not being able to answer or fearing that by criticizing the violence he will be disowned by the 'tribe,' Heaney simply tells the man to question him again. Heaney, as a parrhesiastes, will now stand up to answer in truth and face the harsh reality of the Troubles.

Station Island Analysis

"Sandstone Keepsake" is a poem published in Heaney's book *Station Island* from 1984, and it must be read "in the context of the Troubles in Ulster at a time of internment without trial, of H-Blocks at Long Kesh and hunger strikers" (Fawbert "Sandstone Keepsake"). In the poem, Heaney is reflecting on a rock he picked up in Inishowen in County Donegal, close to the border between the North and the South. This poem is a reflection of North versus South and Heaney's place between the two, especially as a son of the North who then moved to the South.

The poem begins with Heaney holding a rock, "so reliably dense and bricky/I often clasp it and throw it from hand to hand" ("Sandstone Keepsake" 150). This rock *is* Ireland, both North and South. The history and complications of living in Ireland are reliably dense, something that is hard to understand and deep-rooted in the lives of many. Heaney tosses the rock back and forth, much like how he moved back and forth between the North and the South. This motion can also be read as Heaney going back and forth between wanting Ireland to be free but also not being able to condone the violence that occurs. When he gets the rock off the beach in Inishowen he can see "light after light/came on silently round the perimeter of the camp" (Heaney "Sandstone Keepsake" 150). Heaney is seeing the lights come on at the prison (H-Block) on the Northern side of the border. This is where political prisoners would have been sent to be jailed, beaten, and tortured. By referring to the prison as a camp, Heaney is telling the audience that this is much more than a prison, but a place similar to Many prisoners starved on hunger strike against their imprisonment, and Heaney is making sure the audience knows that this is not something done out of futility. In the last two stanzas of the poem Heaney writes:

Anyhow, there I was with the wet red stone

in my hand, staring across at the watch-towers
from my free state of image and allusion,
swooped on, then dropped by trained binoculars:

a silhouette not worth bothering about,
out for the evening in scarf and waders
and not about to set times wrong or right,
stooping along, one of the venerators. (“Sandstone Keepsake” 150)

These stanzas put us with Heaney at this place, looking at this prison, so close yet so far away, from a literal “free state” and a metaphorical one. We are standing with him in the free state of the Republic, able to imagine and illusioned by the privilege of living in a free society, that looking at the prison reminds us of how not everyone has this experience. Despite the more comfortable life living in the South, the reality is that many people are still suffering in the North, left behind and separated from the rest of the island. Heaney is remembering his place, remembering his privilege of being able to be a poet and having ‘escaped’ from what his life could have been in the North.

The final stanza of the poem imagines us as the prison guard, seeing Heaney on the coast across the water. Heaney is “a silhouette not worth bothering about” and “not about to set times wrong or right.” Instead, he is someone “stooping along, one of the venerators” (“Sandstone Keepsake” 150). These lines show the subversiveness of Heaney’s role and work as a poet. While others may view him as someone not worth worrying about, he knows that his work makes a difference. While he may not be able to fully “set times wrong or right,” he certainly can be a part of the change to do so (Heaney “Sandstone Keepsake” 150). In writing such lines,

Heaney even acknowledges his doubts about himself and his role as a poet. While most of the time he questions if he should be even setting foot into the political arena, he is realizing that his words do make a difference, and with enough of them, he can help make a major change. While the British and critics of his work like Longley see Heaney simply as "one of the venerators" doddling along while history passes by, Heaney is recognizing the true scope and magnitude his work as a poet has on the future of society (Fawbert "Sandstone Keepsake" 150).

Counterargument

One of the stipulations Foucault explains about parrhesia is that "rhetoric stand[s] in a strong opposition," because "dialogue is a major technique for playing the parrhesiastic game" (7). This interpretation of parrhesia would then discount the work of artists like Heaney because, rather than delivering a speech to a crowd or something more direct, he relies on literary devices and poetry to portray his thoughts. Some who may not agree with Heaney's interpretation of the violence, like Carson, could argue that Heaney was in fact not a parrhesiastes and instead used his poetry as a shield instead of outright stating his thoughts and opinions. However, even Foucault admits that parrhesia and rhetoric are not always separate, "one can also find some signs of the incorporation of *parrhesia* within the field of rhetoric in the work of rhetoricians at the beginning of the [Greek] empire" (7). Foucault goes on to explain that, according to Quintillian, parrhesia is more like a "natural exclamation" to escalate an audience's emotional response, but it cannot be "simulated or artfully designed" (7). Instead, it has to be something that is conveyed and created simply because it is the natural thing to do. While to some extent poetry is "artfully designed" because of its layout, stanzas, wording, etc., Heaney still got as close to parrhesia as possible considering we live in a post-parrhesiastic world. While he was

someone who took his craft and designed it carefully, that does not take away from the parrhesiastic validity of his work. Heaney's work is still a "natural exclamation" of his own life experiences and those of the people around him, and the parrhesiastic truth of that is not made invalid by where he decided to break a stanza.

If parrhesia is done only for the sake of truth itself, some may even take issue with the fact that Heaney profited from his work. According to Byrne, when Heaney died he "left more than £400,000 in his will" and he even won the first million-dollar Nobel Prize in 1995 (Montalbano). Though a parrhesiastes cannot be parrhesiastic to make money, that does not mean money cannot be a side effect of parrhesiastic work. Heaney wrote because he needed an outlet to process the violence of the Troubles and the warfare going on around him, not because he needed to make extra money. If that was the case, it would have been much for lucrative for him to turn to another career. Considering the worth of his estate at his death, there would have been other options for him to make even more money. Instead, because he needed a way to process the events around him and to be a voice of reason in such senseless violence, Heaney turned to parrhesiastic poetry instead. While he made money from his work, that was not the primary reason for his endeavors, therefore the income he made cannot be held against him. Parrhesia is spoken because it has to be for the sake of itself, the money Heaney made was a mere extra on top of his work as a parrhesiastes.

Conclusion

Seamus Heaney, despite his critics, was a revolutionary poet who found a home in many hearts of people around the world. In order to fully appreciate Heaney's work, one must consider Heaney's role as a parrhesiastes, someone who speaks the truth simply because it needs to be

said. Heaney was a parrhesiates because of his ability to criticize both the British occupation of Ireland and the complicated relationship between poetry and freedom. In viewing his work in such a way, there can be a more thorough and nuanced understanding of his poetry, his stance on political issues, and how he was able to successfully appeal to people everywhere. By negating these topics, critics such as Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson fail to fully appreciate the nuance of Heaney's work.

It was important to fill such a gap in this research because no one had made this consideration before. While there has been ample research regarding parrhesia and Heaney as separate entities, their paths had not crossed until this paper. It was important to do so because it now allows readers to have a better understanding of Heaney's role as a poet during such tumultuous times without falling into the trap of thinking he was not political enough or he benefitted from the violence. Instead, it gives us the ability to see Heaney as the *artful voyeur*, a person who knows their place in society but questions his right to commentate on it. Heaney's work "create[s] a space for the Irish to coexist with their issues and problems in a way that can help them to truly move past their trauma" (Coleman 16). In doing this, Heaney becomes not just a poet but a hero for those who struggle with the effects of the violence to this day.

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