'Room to rhyme': Heaney, arts policy and cultural tradition in Northern Ireland 1968-1971

Article

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Drawing on extensive research in Arts Council and government archives in Belfast and the collections of Heaney's manuscripts at Emory and the National Library in Dublin, this essay reconstructs for the first time Northern Irish state cultural policy at the height of the crisis years 1968-1972. It also examines the response of a major poet to this policy, through a genetic mapping of the complex development of Heaney's poem 'The Last Mummer', between 1969 and its publication in 1972. The poem responds to the mumming plays practiced at Christmas when troupes of young men, or 'Rhymers' would enter and perform in the homes of both communities in the North. This tradition also informed 'Room to Rhyme', the Arts Council sponsored 1968 tour of several towns in Northern Ireland by Heaney and Michael Longley and the folk musician Davy Hammond. The make-up of the performers on the tour, the itinerary and accompanying booklet, suggest a deliberate attempt on the part of the Arts Council Northern Ireland to assert a role for itself, and for culture, in the political thaw of the time. In the years immediately after the tour, however, major confrontations between civil rights marches and police, widespread sectarian rioting and ultimately troops on the streets, resulted in even more extreme polarization in the North. As this essay shows, Heaney's manuscripts from this period provide a valuable resource for the examination of the relationship between poetry, the public sphere and notions of cultural tradition in early 1970s Northern Ireland.

'Room to Rhyme': Heaney, Arts Policy and Cultural Tradition in Northern Ireland 1968-1971.

'Room to Rhyme' was the name given to the 1968 tour of several towns in Northern Ireland by the poets Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley and the folk musician Davy Hammond. It was initiated by the director of the Northern Irish Arts Council, Kenneth Jamison, and was the first of a series of such series of readings, featuring the poets John Hewitt, John Montague, Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon, as well as performances of song and prose. In *Stepping Stones* Heaney remembers 'Room to Rhyme' as reflecting in cultural terms a new openness in the politics of the North, as the demands of the Civil Rights movement for reform of the state seemed to be reciprocated in Terence O'Neill's cautious overtures to the Catholic minority and the Irish government.[1] The make-up of the performers on the tour, the itinerary and accompanying booklet, do seem to suggest a deliberate attempt on the part of the Arts Council to assert a role for itself, and for culture, in the political thaw. The incipient traces of such an understanding of arts policy are detectable in the minutes of Arts Council meetings over the previous years, with the report for 1966-7 calling for 'non-political co-operation' between the Arts Councils on both sides of the border.[2] Outside the council such a notion of the efficacy of culture, and literature in particular, as a means of combatting sectarianism had long been alive in the region's little magazines, with John Hewitt being a key figure.

The title of the tour attests to the thinking behind it. 'Room to Rhyme' is taken from the conventional opening of the mumming plays practiced at Christmas all across Ireland, but in the North in particular. As the records of the Folklore Commission attest, it had been customary for groups of youths to dress up and tour rural farms and cottages, performing variations of a standard narrative in return for the funds for, as one witness called it, 'a big drink'.[3] Such folk practices were common also in Scotland and England, and are believed to have been introduced to Ireland in the seventeenth century alongside Scottish and English settlers. The personnel involved in the Irish mumming plays – St. George, Jack Straw, Cromwell – corroborate the connection with plantation. Yet as Glassie points out in his classic ethnography *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, the bands of youth involved were usually Catholic, although they would visit both communities.

The syncretism of the mumming play, its association with Ulster, the 'rhyming' and performance it involved, the idea of a travelling group of players, not to mention the slightly louche conviviality attendant on it, must have made the idea irresistible once it was mooted in 1968. And the relationship of the tour to vernacular and folk practice was further strengthened by the inclusion, alongside the poets, of Hammond with his repertoire of ballads, skilfully selected to appeal to both nationalist and unionist. From the outset, then, 'Room to Rhyme' was framed through a notion of culture as hybrid, democratic and available purposeful appropriation.

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[1] Seamus Heaney, *Stepping Stones*, (Faber, 2008), 117.
[2] 'Arts Council Northern Ireland, Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, 1966-67', Belfast, Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), AC/2/1.
[3] See the many accounts on the Irish National Folklore Collection website, Duchas.ie.

These notions of a local arts policy, inchoate and improvised as they undoubtedly were, appear imaginative and far ahead of their time. The very idea of a concerted cultural policy, with social goals aside from those of simply supporting artistic production or preserving artefacts, that would take its place alongside other forms of state intervention, was in its infancy in 1968. The pivotal UNESCO round table on cultural policy had only just taken place, while the community arts movement, with its ethos of access, participation and intervention was still in the future.[4] Today's justification of arts funding in terms of its role in social cohesion, regeneration, and the politics of recognition has its roots in the latter. Yet in 'Room to Rhyme' we have an initiative that pre-empts such discourses, while constituting a remarkable experiment in the kind of work that arts institutions, at their best, are capable of. Having said that, 'Room to Rhyme' also dramatizes the tensions, misapprehensions and sometimes volatile consequences of an overtly instrumentalised deployment of culture as a mode of action in the public sphere. More specifically, the choice of folk culture as a supplement to Heaney and Longley's lyric poetry created some interesting and symptomatic pressures that can be traced through Heaney's archive and published work over the four years following the tour.

These are of course years that see a transformation of 1968's relatively benign political climate into the polarisation of the early 1970s. The year after 'Room to Rhyme' saw major confrontations between civil rights marches and police, widespread sectarian rioting and ultimately troops on the streets. One response to these events was the establishment in 1969 of a Ministry for Community Relations, based at the Northern Irish Parliament at Stormont. The ministry in turn set up a Community Relations Commission to carry out research and implement practical measures to address the mutual suspicions and grievances of Catholic and Protestant in affected areas. This assistance was mostly economic, targeting the conditions that placed Northern Ireland amongst the most deprived regions of Europe. In addition, the Commission sent representatives into the relevant areas in order to identify, train and advise community activists. By all accounts this was a highly imaginative and energetic organization, with dedicated and committed personnel working in very difficult circumstances. But what is most striking for our purposes here, given recent emphasis on the culture of 'the two traditions' as a means of reconciliation, is the Commission's marked lack of interest in the cultural and artistic field, despite the local precedent of the literary discourses of cultural traditions mentioned earlier. Having said that, however, traces of the kind of ethos behind 'Room to Rhyme' are visible intermittently in the period 1969-1973, and it is to these that we now turn.

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[4] See Richard Hoggart, Michael Green, Michael Wilding, *Cultural Policy in Britain: A Report to UNESCO* (University of Birmingham, 1967).

The NI state's understanding of the relationship between the Community Relations Commission and more general realm of culture can be usefully illuminated by a thoughtful briefing paper written by Eric Montgomery, the director of the Government Information Service at Stormont, dated 8th September 1969.[5] Montgomery had worked in public relations for the military during WWII, and in 1956 set up the GIS to counter adverse reporting of Northern Irish government policy. In the same year he founded the Ulster-Scots Historical society, and was later instrumental in the establishment of the Ulster American Folk Park. His paper, entitled 'Community Relations', sees a close connection between the new Commission and the existing work of the GIS. The strengthening of the former is seen as an aspect of the control, dissemination and manipulation of information. As Montgomery puts it: 'a better description for much of [the Information Service's work] would be "cultural" rather than "public" relations for what we are trying to do is create amongst the whole Northern Irish community a kind of civic patriotism'.[6] The focus is on the creation of a new regional identity for the Northern Irish polity through the creation of a symbolic framework that might be acceptable to all. Yet despite Montgomery's own manifest interest in folk and traditional cultures, he is insistent that the signs and images that are circulated must avoid the traditional:

> …we set out to create a non-controversial image of Ulster separate and distinct from the traditional one associated with Ireland as a whole. We worked on the formula that, because many of our products are looked on as national (as distinct from Northern Irish etc.) or foreign or international and so very few have regional connotations, we must use them in a modern, non-folksy way….
>
> We have therefore, without controversy and with very few exceptions, been able to get rid of colleens, leprechauns, crocks of gold, celtic mists, and all of the other stage props that conjure up the traditional image of Ireland and the Irish. Instead we have

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[5] Belfast, PRONI, CAB/9/CR/1/4

[6] Ibid.

> placed the emphasis on a quite separate, distinctive entity called Ulster or Northern Ireland, a modern industrial region of the United Kingdom.[7]

This then is one approach to culture in the context of community relations that is in the air, so to speak, in the late 1960s. Montgomery's report is technocratic and sanguine, its notion of civic space predicated on rational self-interest and the economic. His model is the series of promotional 'Ulster Weeks' that took place in various places across Northern Ireland, and also a campaign to promote Ulster-made products in England.[8] Accordingly the image that was being self-consciously constructed aimed to avoid the affective palette of kitsch tradition in favour of a neutrality associated with consumer desire and modernity.

At the same time, in the restaurant of a hotel near Omagh, a different set of ideas was being explored. Maurice Hayes was the first director of the Community Relations Commission, in his biography he writes the following:

> Robert Simpson was anxious to encourage artists to embrace the theme of community relations. He set up a sort of rolling dinner party to discuss how a programme could be formulated, which included such people as the young Seamus Heaney, Rowell Friers, Estyn Evans, David Hammond, George Thompson, Sean O'Boyle, Paddy Falloon and others. The crack was so good, and Paddy Falloon's hospitality at Dunadry so lavish, that the group never got down from the philosophical plane to actual business. After the third dinner, the minister resigned and the meetings lapsed.[9]

Simpson was a liberal Unionist, appointed as the first Minister for Community Relations in October 1969. He was sacked from the post in March 1971 by O'Neill's successor, the less reform-minded Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner, and resigned from the Stormont Parliament the next year. The dinners mentioned above must have taken place in between late 1969 and Autumn 1970, at which point Heaney moved to California to teach for a year. Hayes' valuable account sketches a fascinating network of individuals and institutions. There is some overlap with 'Room to Rhyme' – Hammond and Heaney himself – but also new names: E. Estyn Evans, the professor of Geography at Queens University Belfast, and pioneer in the study of rural Irish material culture; his student and the first director of the Ulster Folk Museum, George Thompson, and Sean O'Boyle, the Irish language specialist and teacher of the poets John Montague and Paul Muldoon at St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh. All these names suggest that folk culture in particular was one of the animating concerns of these regular dinners.

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Mark Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads* (London, Palgrave), 115-160.
[9] Maurice Hayes, *Minority Verdict: Experiences of a Catholic Civil Servant* (Blackstaff, 1995), 111.

Hayes does not place the director of the Arts Council, Kenneth Jamison at these meetings. But it may well have been Jamison who interested the Ministry for Community Relations in the potential political agency of the arts. In a fascinating correspondence with Bill Springer, the permanent secretary to the new Minister, he argues for the important role that art and culture might play in a time of crisis. A long letter of 12th February 1970 substantially repeats the contents of a lecture Jamison gave to the Arts Council in late 1969, asserting that there is a deep-seated and fundamental distinction to be made on the level of cultural awareness in Northern Ireland. In the letter it is not 'fine art culture' that he is interested in, but 'that area of culture that is compounded of mythology; language to a much lesser degree because translation is possible; indigenous crafts; archaeological studies and folk customs, including folk drama and folk music'.[10] He then goes on:

> Although these matters should be above politics they have unhappily to some extent become identified with religious and political groups. It is clear that if this prejudice could be overcome we might have a bonding force that could lead to a sense of national unity and identity. For this reason it is held by some to be politically suspect, and with this in mind I was concerned (in the last paragraph of the off-print [of the lecture, which he enclosed]) to stress the historical sense in which Ulster has always been something apart from the rest of Ireland. Some of the traditional cultures I have mentioned have aspects unique to Ulster; others aspects are to be found elsewhere in Ireland. Thus there is not only the possibility of a rediscovery of a specifically Ulster identity, but as well the opportunity to come to understand traditions of a neighbour which, for reasons of national pride (and, perhaps less happily, nationalist aspiration) have been cultivated in the one community and rejected by the other.[11]

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[10] Belfast, PRONI, CAB/9C/2/3

[11] Ibid.

This is a subtle and multivalent account, sensitive to the intersectional inflections of local cultural traditions as Ulster Catholic, Ulster Protestant, Northern Irish and Irish, alive to the suspicions aroused by Irish culture in some elements of the Protestant community, and to the potential address of cultural tradition to community relations in the North, as well as to cross-border understanding. The letter ends: 'A sharing between communities of the older cultural traditions and mythologies would surely be worth cultivating … it may be that a small working party could examine the subject in greater depth. I know that Maurice Hayes and John Malone are particularly interested in this field'.[12]

In the period after 'Room to Rhyme', then, and in the midst of communal and political violence, there is a sustained discussion of the relations between culture and policy abroad between writers, artists, intellectuals, civil servants, politicians and arts professionals. Complex theoretical issues are raised in a context of real urgency and proximity to *praxis*: the role of art, culture and arts organizations in a time of civil conflict, as well as the relationship between popular, folk or vernacular culture and high art, not to mention the broader issue, raised by Eric Montgomery, of regional cultural identity versus modernity. As I mentioned above, however, these discussions to do not seem to have borne any fruit in the actual policy agenda of the Community Relations Commission (an agenda that was notoriously capacious, ill-defined and ad hoc), despite Jamison's continued efforts.

Despite this the Arts Council's records attest to a continuing sense of the necessary work the Council might perform, in response to the ongoing violence, population movement and collapse of the public sphere. And in the activities of the Council itself there is a clear commitment to culture as a means to cross boundaries and construct what Estyn Evans called the common ground. This is apparent in the next tour, 'The Planter and the Gael', featuring John Hewitt and John Montague and perhaps even more so in 'Life Span', a travelling revue in which actors from the Group Theatre performed a carefully selected programme of Ulster song and prose.

The rest of this essay will examine the ways in which the discourse of cultural traditions impacts on the evolution of Heaney's poetry. The Heaney archive in the National Library in

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[12] Maurice Hayes, the aforementioned director of the Community Relations Commission, and John Malone, the pioneering educator whose School Project in Community Relations would soon begin. Heaney knew Malone well.

Dublin contains several notebooks and /folders containing notes, drafts, reviews and other material from the early 1970s. Very few individual items are dated, but the loose-leaf material is roughly organised according to the two main collections that Heaney wrote in the period: *Wintering Out* and *North*. There are four notebooks that were used in the years 1971 to 1973. I will concentrate on one of these, a dark-red hardback notebook, dated in the library catalogue 1968-1980.[13]

One can date the compositional process of certain sequences of notes, fragments and poems in this notebook with some accuracy. I am going to do so in order to establish the imaginative interlacing of themes and motifs that parallel the kinds of conversations that were taking place around the idea of arts policy and folk culture at the same time in Northern Ireland. At the very beginning of 1970, Heaney writes 'Bye-child'. Seven pages later he notes down the title of P.V. Glob's *The Bog People* and shortly after that comes 'Lady Moira', a poem about a bog body recovered in County Down in the 18th century. (What seems to be the very first archaeology poem, about a French dig where the skeleton of a woman is uncovered, occurs slightly earlier in the notebook). On the next page there is a scattered field of notes, sentences and scorings out, including the line 'Rhymers, Mummers, Scapegoats', and the beginnings of a strange, disenchanted poem entitled 'The Last Camp'.[14] There follows a poem entitled 'Rags', then, in a clear breakthrough, 'The Tolland Man', written fluently and subsequently almost unrevised, over four pages, the fourth dated April 1970. The uncollected poem 'Against Blinking', to which we will return, is written on 24th May. The next poem of interest to us is 'Dead Mole' on 17th June, which will eventually form the final section of 'Bone Dreams' in *North*. Shortly after this, among various other drafts, we find 'Maiden Castle' which again appears in *North*, then another attempt at the French archaeology poem from late 1969. The notebook also contains an important version of 'The Last Mummer' dated 14th Sept 1971.

The notebook thus covers a period of intense poetic activity after a period of extreme civil and political turbulence. It contains the first published bog poem, 'Tollund Man', as well as two other clearly related though abandoned poems ('Lady Moira; and the untitled French archaeology poem). More than this, I suggest that between 10th January 1970 when 'Byechild' is written and 14th September 1971, when a version of 'The Last Mummer' appears, a distinct imaginative terrain emerges in the notebook, one which turns on questions of cultural tradition, its loss and retrieval, its meaning and status as sign or image, its relation to subjectivity and its inscription on landscape and domestic space. I will focus on 'The Last Mummer', as it is a poem that takes up the same traditional practice that framed the 'Room to Rhyme' tour three years earlier.

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[13] Dublin, National Library of Ireland (NLI), Heaney Collection, 1.4.1.
[14] Uncollected, but published in *New Statesman*, 8 June (1970), 840.

As mentioned earlier, two notebook pages of fragments contain references to mummers. On the first of these, the two words 'MUMMERS. SCAPEGOATS' appear, seemingly sectioned off from a list of tradesmen and their tools. On the next page the phrase changes to 'mummers, rhymers' in lower case, but are cancelled and replaced with the single term 'OPERATORS' in capitals. Later on the same page the line 'O families' is cancelled and replaced, in capitals, with 'DIEHARDS. BIGOTS'. This litany of terms lends the figure of the mummer or rhymer a rather different inflection than was the case when 'Room to Rhyme' was touring in 1968. The image of the scapegoat will of course pulse through *North*, but we can sense the beginnings of that imaginative pressure here in the figure of the mummer as one moving between victim and threat. Likewise the other terms: 'operators', 'diehards', 'bigots', place the mummer is a very different semantic field to that of the syncretic, pluralist figure implied by the idea of traditional culture as sponsoring an ideal 'room to rhyme'.

Nearby in the notebook, under the title 'Words for the Walls', are the series of sallies that will coalesce into the poem 'Last Camp'. A proximate one-page, three-part handwritten draft, dated 25th February 1970, picks up phrases from two of these – 'fouled whitewash and tar' and 'poison curd on the walls' – and finishes:

Purses shrivelled like figs,
Cast-offs, spent cartridges –
God, we will defend these

Scraps with nails and canines:
~~Pieties, traditions~~
Our branded detritus,
Rare
Pieties, ~~Precious~~ droppings.[15]

The inclusion of the word 'traditions' in this blighted vista positions it alongside a list of part-objects: nails, canines, and elsewhere in the poem turds, abandoned urinals and scattered brains. Tradition is figured as a gross, material residue, akin to the 'poison curd', presumably graffiti, on the 'fouled whitewash'. What we can see here is the very beginning of an equation between tradition and abject matter that will eventually become very significant to Heaney. In 'Last Camp' such detritus is nevertheless defended 'tooth and nail' as 'pieties, ~~Precious~~ droppings.'

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[15] Dublin, NLI, Heaney Collection, 1.4.1.

These elements speak obliquely to a related poem in the notebook. 'Against Blinking' (dated 24th May 1970) has an epigraph from Estyn Evans' *Irish Folkways*: 'an ill-disposed person could, merely by looking at it, 'blink' a cow so that its milk would yield no butter', and draws directly on the book for much of its content.[16] This is one of several poems that will eventually contribute towards 'The Last Mummer' as it is published in *Wintering Out* in 1972.[17] As the epigraph might suggest, local folk traditions are central, but not the material practices of craft and subsistence on which earlier poems in *Door into the Dark* (1969) focused, but defensive charms against the evil eye. The first part of the poem lifts the details of a series of such rituals from a single page of Evans' book.[18] It then moves on to the source of the danger they protect against:

… the blinker, peering through hedges
In a buzz of dung-flies and midges

Can pipe venom in his hot eye,
Sour and cud your white pantry

Until the milk is bile and gall
And whitewash blisters on the wall.

He'll be swishing through the aftergrass
Tonight, blazing at our windows.

Folklore here performs a consolidating role for community, but only through the imagination of a bestial and scatological other, and it is this figure that interests Heaney. 'Against Blinking' thus calls on the obscene part-objects in the fragments titled 'Words for the Walls' and in 'Last Camp', together with the progressively more sinister Mummers/Rhymers/ Operators/Diehards image-complex nearby in the notebook. But there is also a direct intertextuality in its images of blistered whitewash and soured milk, images that are articulated in much more enigmatic form in 'Last Camp'. According to Evans the malicious blinker, possessor of the evil eye, could imperil a household's production of butter by staring at the cow from whose milk it came. But there was a way of protecting against such attack: 'when the butter at last breaks a small ball of it is traditionally taken and smeared on the wall'.[19] In 'Against Blinking' this becomes the advice to 'stud / The wall once butter breaks / With butter lumps, smear streaks // Of it on your cupboards'.

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[16] E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folkways* (Routledge, 1967), 305.
[17] Seamus Heaney, *Wintering Out* (Faber, 1972).
[18] Estyn Evans, ibid.

'Against Blinking' thus provides an important new perspective on 'Last Camp'. 'The poisoned cud on the walls' of the notebook is a negative version of Evans' tradition, or an image for traditional practices that have themselves somehow soured and congealed. 'Last Camp' thus refracts rural tradition through an urban landscape of riot and pogrom, and in so doing figures folk practice as another uncanny, petrified residue alongside turd, ash and clinker. The congruity of 'Against Blinking', 'Words on the Walls', 'The Last Camp', and their proximity in the notebook, indicate a common imaginative resource in Estyn Evans and cultural traditions more generally, though with differing valencies and degrees of exploitation. In all cases however, folklore functions less as common ground than a field of antagonism. This anxious relationship with tradition is also present in an allied sequence of unpublished poems that feeds into 'The Last Mummer': 'Ephete', 'Tramp' and 'Beggar'.

'Ephete' is an unusually abstracted poem for Heaney, but stands as a remote but decisive source for 'The Last Mummer'.[20] The poem draws upon folk tradition, in the form of a dialect name for caterpillars – 'the granny greybeard' – and a spell for inducing rain, through which the speaker wishes to 'wash the pieties out of familiar skies' ('pieties' here recalling 'Last Camp' where the word is used in a similarly dismissive manner). The speaker also sets himself at odds with what he calls 'waterlore' – perhaps a reference to baptism – saying, in a word that survives into 'Mummer', that he is 'trammelled' by it. The cancelled lines that refer by contrast to the 'astute stares' of the 'irreligious' and 'unfearful' introduce the idea of the gaze of a vaguely intimidating, but seemingly admired, non-christian other. The speaker is caught between the pagan and the christian, comfortable with neither. In the final lines, which also make it into 'The Last Mummer', the speaker awaits the violent 'cracking' of his 'weather-eye', some sort of release from the position that Heaney's speakers often struggle with: that of judicious, timid onlooker. Subsequently, in an important handwritten couplet added to the typed-up draft, the poem finishes with: 'And here are spittle and dirt:/ I'll make the sign'. As becomes evident in the drafting process, this is a reference to the miracle story in John 9: 1-12, where Jesus mixes saliva and mud to smear it on the eyes of a blind man, so restoring his sight. It is an earthy, unpretentious, yet deeply weird image, apt for the end of a poem that walks the line between folk wisdom and the Christian supernatural. It also continues the poem's preoccupation with forms of vision. It is telling however that in the final revision the speaker seems to dedicate himself to a Christian subject-position. This will change as the writing proceeds.

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Dublin, NLI, Heaney Collection, 1.4.6.

Heaney then reworks and extends 'Ephete' by hand on the same page, retitles it 'Tramp', and, alongside other changes, alters 'I came trammelled in the lost toils of water' to: 'trammelled in the nice taboos of the country', continuing: 'picking a seemly way// through the long toils of ~~ignorance~~ blood/ and feuding.[21] The evocation of 'taboo' and 'blood' pushes the poem towards violence and sectarianism, recalling the association of the 'scapegoat' with the mummer and the rhymer in the notebook. No longer describing a speaker warily assessing the competing attractions of folk culture and religion, the poem identifies directly with folk culture and, in line with the sentiments behind the 'Room to Rhyme' tour, remarks on the skill of its protagonist in negotiating communal difference and dispute. The beggar is 'trammelled' by the baptismal 'toils of water', but nevertheless has the ability to stay outside the warring factions of conventional (confessional) society. The poem has become more explicitly political and context-specific here, beginning to thread itself into a wider range of debates and discourses. Culture in general, and *poesis*, the activity of 'making' the sign, and its relationship with access to a more expansive vision, are all implicitly at issue.

'Tramp' is typed up in two drafts as 'Beggar', and becomes yet more located, and more complex, not least in the way the motif of vision and the gaze is treated.[22] If 'Ephete' imagined a torrent to wash the 'pieties' from polite society, the beggar yearns in a much more apocalyptic tone, to call a hard rain upon the world 'like a shock of the unforeseen', to 'let a curse fall on the skinny lid of each weather eye'. The cautious rural prudence of the 'weather-eye' is opposed to the eye that is opened by the mystery of the unforeseen, calculative rationality is contrasted with eschatology. There is also, however, a new temporal marker and concomitant narrative structure introduced into the poem: 'since the scales fell', Heaney writes, the beggar 'yearns to offer that sacrament of hurt'.

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

'The scales' refer to Paul of course, and the account of his baptism and recovery from blindness in Acts 18. In this way the healing of the beggar's blindness, and his acceptance of the new light of faith are neatly elided. Yet, departing from Paul, an interpolated verse describes the conversion as a forcible one, where 'loud-mouths ~~and loved ones~~ drove ~~herded~~ me/ under the bullying thumb of grace'. The reference to 'loud-mouths and loved ones', clamorous demands to conform coming from both public and private spheres, brings the poem closer again to contemporary realities.

In the context of the early 1970s, and the growing pressures on cultural workers outlined in the first part of this essay, the manner in which a scene of conflicting discourses in public space emerges here, together with the new narrative of conversion and its effects, is significant. But the imaginative matrix within which 'Beggar' is generated remains defined by the pagan-christian duality, rather than the narrower field of the role of cultural tradition in a time of crisis. So much appears true from the way the end of the poem again homes in on the poultice of spittle and dirt, condensing within it all the ambivalence of the beggar's new-found role. After the scales have fallen from his eyes, Heaney has the beggar first offering a 'sacrament of hurt', then an 'ache of light', finally 'suffer[ing] light like blame'. Whatever indulgence he is now to 'peddle', it includes his own pain and vulnerability. No longer picking a nice way among the taboos, his role now seems passive: as in Kafka's parable of the leopards in the temple, the beggar has become part of the rituals he once disrupted. Meanwhile the notion of suffering 'blame' again summons the spectre of the scapegoat. All of which accounts for the way at the close of the poem, rather than 'making the sign' outright, the beggar now 'hesitates to mix spittle and dirt'. If, as suggested earlier, this mixing is also the making of the poem, the relationship between such making and other orders of discourse, as well as between the subjectivity of the maker and his audience, is also implied.

A subsequent series of holograph sheets revises 'Beggar' markedly and brings it much closer to section II of 'Mummer'.[23] The poem is split into two parts. In the first, a new line emphasizes further the theme of the beggar's dislocation from a public sphere of implicitly conflicting discourses: 'His tongue went whoring amongst the civil tongues'. Civility, civic life, the realm of public and measured speech is evoked, and this nudges the poem even

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[23] Dublin, Heaney Collection, NLI, 1.4.18.

closer to the space that Heaney's poetry itself is, as we have seen, expected to occupy. The beggar refuses to conform to such civility, however, and Heaney's choice of verb in this line associates him instead with the body, transgression, sexuality. As such the poem, like previous versions, pits the beggar against religious regulation of desire. Yet the reference to civility also introduces the sense of the secular public sphere, and another set of demands.

In the second part the beggar 'dreams' an onslaught of folk charms against those he moves among: 'I have dreamt dung-flies and granny slugs/ emptying over the scrubbed step'. The granny slugs, as portents of rain and later 'the unforeseen', have been present ever since the first draft of 'Ephete'. However now the setting of the poem is more sharply delineated than in any of the previous versions. An apocalyptic air of ruination and decay is summoned, like that which defined the landscape of 'Last Camp', albeit now in a rural and non-modern context: collapsing thatch, cockroaches, doors rotted with fungus. A context for this association with decay is supplied towards the end of the poem: 'and now there is always a bell/ ringing somewhere out on the roads', suggesting the medieval scenario of a leper tolling his progress through desolation. This might also account for the way that, instead of 'sign', or 'hesitation', the poem ends with him 'carrying a black spot'. The healing poultice of spittle and dirt of the earlier drafts, which then became the ambiguous 'sacrament of hurt', is now completely inverted into a material symptom of disease. Certainly there is no question here of the beggar being assimilated to a some more confident religious or civil structure. To the contrary, the social conforms to the beggar/leper's dereliction. Hence the 'doors' that 'have broken softly as fungus at the knock of my stick'. Several important image-streams are converging here, acting together to configure the theme of cultural tradition into a new constellation of related ideas: resistance to both violent communal taboos and the artificial decorum of public speech, apocalypticism, blindness and vision, the dissolution of domestic and public space, association with materiality, abjection, contamination and sexuality. Heaney types the holograph up in eleven couplets as a twenty-two line version of 'Beggar'.[24]

Bearing this pivotal draft in mind, we are now in a position to consider 'The Last Mummer' itself. An early holograph of what now becomes a three-part poem is dated 4th September 1971. It seems that Heaney returns to 'The Last Mummer' when he comes back to Belfast from California. It is a very different city to the one he left. In August internment without trial was introduced, and the following months saw the worst unrest experienced anywhere in western Europe since the war. As Michael Parker has shown, it is in this baleful atmosphere that Heaney embarks on an intensive rewriting and reorganization of a collection entitled *Winter Seeds*, that he had already submitted to Faber & Faber.[25] The first manuscript had included only s.1 of 'The Last Mummer' which, as we have seen, was written on 16th May 1969. The new manuscript, now called *Wintering Out* was accepted on 14th October, but Heaney adds new poems throughout the rest of the year, including the full version of 'The Last Mummer'.

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[24] Dublin, Heaney Collection, NLI, 1.4.4.

Section II of *Wintering Out*'s 'The Last Mummer' is a re-writing of 'Beggar', itself a version, as we have seen, of 'Ephete'/'Tramp'. On 4th September 1971 Heaney takes the new version of 'Beggar' and copies out the first twelve lines by hand.[26] The references to a decaying landscape are removed, and the mention of a 'straw headdress' changes the main character definitively from beggar or leper to the eponymous rhymer. It is at this point in the compositional process that the protagonist is at his most threatening: his step is 'minatory' and, in a startling contemporary, highly-politicized metaphor, is described as 'our simple Klansman/ cast with old lags and junkies// among the alleys, padlocked sheds/ and glass-toothed back walls'. What is more, as Heaney goes on to draft Part III of the published poem, he also purloins the last lines of 'Against Blinking', transferring to the mummer the threatening, incendiary gaze of the blinker: 'he'll be swishing through long grass, blazing at your windows'.

Significantly this version of the poem, the most disenchanted and troubling in its portrayal of folk tradition, ends with a moment that repeats 'Against Blinking' and extends the end of the final draft of 'Beggar', that is to say, it brings an uncanny, archaic outsider into contact with normative domestic space. At first this encounter conforms to the time-honoured ritual of the mummer's festive visit: 'his rites, once entered on, obligatory'. But this is then changed to:

'he knows you've drawn your blinds on him,
and seeks no invitation,
has abandoned rites of entry

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[25] Michael Parker, 'From Winter Seeds to Wintering Out: The Evolution of Heaney's Third Collection', *New Hibernia Review*, 11.2, (2007), 130-141.
[26] NLI. 1.4.1.

to proffer the black spot'.

What had begun as a 'sign' at the end of 'Ephete', and become first a 'sacrament' in 'Beggar', and then a token of disease and entropy, now takes a completely undecipherable form, as a blank, enigmatic, a-signifying moment, a code with no message.

I want to suggest that it is the mummer's own alterity that is concentrated in the image of the black spot, for the image starkly condenses the deepening ambiguity about the Tramp/Beggar/Leper/Mummer's status within the socio-symbolic order that has reached its apogee in these lines. Has the mummer turned away from the house, acknowledging that folk practices are no longer tolerated? Or has he abandoned the decorum of seeking an invitation and transgressed domestic space without the traditional 'obligatory' rites of entry? In either case tradition has definitively lost the mediating function present in the references to the mummer's 'seemly' negotiations of taboos that remain earlier in this draft. Something has happened, and it is not the conversion of the previous 'Beggar', where he is assimilated to Christianity, nor the visionary cracking of the eye by the unforeseen. Instead, as noted earlier, the rhetoric of desolation is more akin to the terrain of early 1970. It seems that the apocalyptic event called for in 'Ephete' has come to pass, and with it the mummer, and tradition, are revealed as meaningless tokens. The social-symbolic order has collapsed, and folk tradition can neither be assimilated by competing discourses (Catholicism, the public sphere, poetry itself) nor assert its own world of meaning.

When the handwritten draft is typed up in three sections as 'The Last Mummer', section II is identical to the published version. Section III, however, begins with the unnerving four lines quoted above concerning rites of entry and the black spot. And yet, crucially, Heaney cuts these from the published version, and instead begins with lines 5 and 6 of the holograph: 'You dream a cricket in the hearth, a cockroach on the floor, a line of mummers marching out the door'. The cockroach harks right back to the earliest version of 'Beggar' and preserves something of its atmosphere of decay. But with the removal of the four lines the tone has changed considerably from the previous uncanny encounter, anchored around the a-signifying base materialism of the black spot. Instead section III of the poem moves into the security of the house itself, and it is the 'you' that is centre-stage and dreaming rather than the mummer. He is channelling mostly nostalgic, comforting images. The dream-vision of 'a line of mummers marching out the door', for example, is a return to an idealized past condition where a successful performance is over and the troupe depart: here folk practice is still comfortably integrated into the social. Such unreal, dreamt images are then subtly corroborated by real, indexical ones: a lamp's flame wavering in the draught, water left on the floor from the mummer's snowy boots. Finally, the published poem unproblematically reconciles the pagan and the Christian: moon and host, monstrance and holly tree, before a last opposition between dark tracks and glistening, dew-laden grass: 'He makes dark tracks, who had/ Untousled a first dewy path/ into the summer grazing.' The reference in the last two lines is to the traditional association of mumming with seasonal markers. The poem ends with a melancholy trace of the distance between past and present, the dark tracks he now makes contrasted with the primal, sensual untousling of the grass in a lost summer dawn, before his premodern practices had ceded their place in the social world. In this sense the poem returns to the concerns of s.1.

'The Last Mummer' as published can be read as a poem in which Heaney mobilises the tradition of the mummer as reconciliatory figure in the spirit of the 'Room to Rhyme' tour, and accompanying ideas of the unifying potential of cultural tradition. Witness how the first section, with its mention of 'St. George, Beelzebub and Jack Straw', associates the Mummer with medieval plays that cannot be assigned to either religious community in the North. Corroborating this, s.1 also suggests that the Mummer's violence, his stone-throwing at the house where a family are watching television, is an attack on a modernity that is rendering him dispensable. Although this can be read within the context of contemporary discourses of Northern Irish modernization promoted by Eric Montgomery and others, it is essentially part of a familiar, not to say conventional, lament for the loss of a valuable heritage. Both s. 1 and s. III of the poem, then, can be assimilated to the kinds of discourse on cultural traditions that were abroad in the Northern Ireland in the early 1970s and previously. Traditions are non-sectarian, valuable, but endangered and in need of preservation.

Section II, as published, does not substantially jar with this reading. But attention to the drafts reveal the very different context out of which it evolved. The first seven lines of s. II in *Wintering Out* rehearse the notions of the mummer picking his way through taboos, and whoring amongst the civil tongues. Ribald, non-aligned, transgressive of both religious dogma and civic culture, this is the 'Room to Rhyme' vision in essence. But in 'Beggar' this was followed by a present-tense section, introduced by a temporal marker '*Now* there is always a bell', that introduces the proffering of the black spot.[27] It is this development that appears to draw the figure of the Mummer in again, who becomes, in the next transitional draft, a macabre Klansman among old lag and junkies, himself a 'black spot' that combines irrationality, abjection and violence. In effect 'Beggar' pushes the persistent, underlying and familiar notion, running through the drafts, that in modernity cultural traditions are under pressure from various other forms of life, to its absolute limit, rendering the mummer into first a grotesque parody of the rhymer, and then a pure materiality that congeals the dereliction of the natural, social and symbolic landscape.

Ironically, it is the partial, uneven supersession of traditional practices that makes them, or their forms and signs, available to be instrumentalized politically as part of a hegemonic project like 'Room to Rhyme'. But this displacement of lived meaning ensures that these forms and signs will also carry with them a spectral negativity that, in conditions such as those of Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, where modernity itself appears to be collapsing, cannot be so easily controlled. Heaney is haunted by this recalcitrance, its dangers and possibilities, as my genetic reconstruction of 'The Last Mummer' has shown. It is not too much to say that it is the trace of the real of antagonism, of the historical itself, as it makes itself felt in both the discourses of the social-symbolic world and the pages of the compositional process. In Heaney's writing of the 1970s it will soon emerge again, no longer as a black spot, but in a new light, transformed into the dark, material forms of the bog bodies of the manuscripts and poems of *North*.

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[27] NLI. 1.4.18. My italics.