

A Region in the Mind: Heaney's Jutland and the Circumference of Nordic Literature

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Abstract

Focusing on three poems on the Tollund Man, this article considers how Seamus Heaney's (1939-2013) poetic responses to the Danish bog bodies and the Jutland landscapes he first encountered in P. V. Glob's *Mosefolket* (*The Bog People*) turn the Danish bog into a site that expands the notional boundaries of the North and Nordic literature, and tests – sometimes controversially – the political implications of universalising the local and the (apparently) peripheral.

Keywords

bog bodies, circumference, Glob, Grauballe, Heaney, Tollund

Seamus Heaney's Nobel lecture memorably describes how he first came to know the name of Stockholm, gazing at the word on the face of the radio dial in the kitchen of his childhood home in County Derry (Heaney 1998: 450).¹ Intimations of a widening world came through the 'short bursts of foreign languages' on the dial hand's sweep between the poles of Radio Eireann and the BBC (Heaney 1998: 449). Yet despite acknowledging the centrality of Dublin and London, Heaney's narrative of discovering the world through the family radio ('I roamed at will the stations of the world', he writes elsewhere ['Electric Light', Heaney 2002a: 81]) records no accompanying awareness of rural Derry as existing on a cultural periphery. On the contrary, the radio itself is seen as the still point of a widening circumference, the origin of an outward journey 'where each point of arrival [...] turned out to be a stepping-stone rather than a destination' (Heaney 1998: 449). It is distinctive of Heaney that he treats the radio receiver much as he describes poetic form itself, as 'both the ship and the anchor' (Heaney 1998: 466, cf. 'Lightenings viii'), and much as, in an earlier essay on Mossbawn, the family's first home, he describes the water pump in the yard as his own personal *omphalos* that 'centred and staked the imagination' (Heaney 1980: 20). The view that supposes a rupture between 'centre and periphery' risks missing something fundamental about Heaney. In the Nobel lecture, he speaks instead of 'a fluid and restorative relationship between the mind's centre and its circumference' (450), and that inclusive word 'circumference' tellingly emphasises the continuum between the two, rather than any disjuncture. There is no real paradox in the fact that Heaney turned his 'peripheral' origins into the poetic wellspring of a career that took him directly to the heart of the world canon. In this he is not unlike his 'hedge-schoolmaster' Virgil himself, the shy young man from Cisalpine Gaul who became the epic poet of Augustan Rome and 'the classic of all Europe'.² But Heaney does present us with a special means by which to reconsider the relationship between cultural centres and their circumference, not least in reconfiguring the idea of Nordic literature. Can the circumference of Nordic literature extend to accommodate an Irish dimension? And if it can, what are the political or ethical implications of drawing Heaney's bog poems within the force field of a

wider conception of 'the North'?

There are several ways to consider how Heaney's poetry may suggest new perspectives on Nordic literature. One is to examine intertextual interventions, such as Heaney's cunningly misleading recollection of a passage from *Njáls Saga* in the concluding section of 'Funeral Rites' in *North* (1975). When Heaney evokes the joyful and beautiful figure of Gunnar Hámundarson chanting 'verses about honour' inside his burial mound 'though dead by violence / and unavenged', readers who are unfamiliar with *Njáls Saga* will easily take Heaney's Gunnar as a figure of reconciliation, representing an end to the cycle of political vengeance in Ireland examined in Heaney's poem and traced as far back as the Neolithic age by allusion to 'the great chambers of Boyne', the archaeological site at Newgrange. Such an optimistic reading is impossible for readers who already know, or else come to learn, that in *Njáls Saga* the imperative to avenge Gunnar's violent death is passed on to the succeeding generation. Heaney appears to elicit an optimistic reading only to undercut it, expecting it to be exposed as not merely naïve but uninformed. This deliberate wrong-footing on Heaney's part is a radically destabilising move, argues Heather O'Donoghue, for whom it 'is intertextuality of a very high order' (O'Donoghue, 2009: 200). Heaney's intertextual device not only inscribes the ethos of the Icelandic sagas on the Irish Troubles, but also offers a reciprocal means to inscribe the twentieth-century Troubles on a correspondingly enriched reading of *Njáls Saga*.

Yet intertextuality is only one way of framing the question of Heaney's correspondence with Nordic literature. Another would be to examine Heaney's assimilative representation of Ireland's Viking past in *North*: his imaginative raid on a mythic Nordic civilization conjured up by references to Iceland, Greenland, Orkney, and Dublin ('North', Heaney 1998: 100), and his naturalization—indeed, Hibernisation—of the Scandinavian settlers in Ireland as 'neighbourly, scoretaking / killers, haggars / and hagglers, gombeen-men, / hoarders of grudges and gain' ('Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces', Heaney 1998: 105), capturing by turns the grubbiness and the glamour of those 'fabulous' yet abidingly familiar raiders ('North', Heaney 1998: 100). In this article I would like to discuss the ways in which Heaney's poems about Iron Age

bodies preserved in Danish bogs may be seen to modify the definitions of Nordic literature. Heaney's poems open up the Danish heterotopia of the bog as presented in P. V. Glob's *Mosefolket* (1965, translated by Rupert Bruce-Mitford as *The Bog People* in 1969) to contain the Irish experience, and this process of extension and assimilation necessarily affects the virtual space that is geographically centred in Jutland. How does our perception of the Danish landscape change when it is described as 'the man-killing parishes' in which Heaney expects to feel 'at home' even before he has visited them? The reception of Heaney's poems has charged that virtual space – which is also a real place, or rather several places – with Heaney's expectation of recognition. When we read Glob's classic of Danish archeological literature today, we do so with a similar expectation of recognition: in this case, of a phenomenon that has already been made widely familiar, in great part by Heaney's poems. Karin Sanders, the literary historian of the bog as an aesthetic phenomenon, takes Anthony Vidler's view that bogs represent precisely 'that mingling of mental projection and spatial characteristics associated with the uncanny' (Sanders 2009: 7).³ When Heaney revisits the bog near Silkeborg that preserved the Tollund Man in a poem written just a few days after the news of the IRA ceasefire in September 1994, he too describes the scene by the trope of the uncanny, as 'hallucinatory and familiar' ('Tollund', first published in *The Spirit Level*, 1996). Tollund Moss, as Heaney calls it (the local word 'moss' is cognate with Danish *mose*), is a liminal place, poised between the ancient and the modern, the natural and the cultural, the actual and the virtual, as well as between separate cultures (Sanders 2009: 7 and *passim*).

Heaney's bogland, then, like Arcadia itself, is a region in the mind as well as an archetype and a geographical location.⁴ When Heaney revisits Tollund in 1994, he finds the scene has been landscaped, 'with tourist signs in *futhark* runic script / In Danish and English. Things had moved on' (Heaney 1998: 443).⁵ Bogs erase boundaries and blur definitions, and yet, true to what Sanders considers their 'fundamentally contradictory' and paradoxical nature, they do so precisely by arresting the definitions of the bodies they preserve (Sanders 2009: 7). What do Heaney's bog poems blur, and what do they arrest? One consequence

of Heaney's 'translation' of the bog phenomenon of Danish culture into Irish contexts (mediated, of course, by Bruce-Mitford's translation into English) is a universalising of the Danish material, so that it comes to encompass but also to transcend its Danish as well as its Irish contexts. Here something that might be taken as 'peripheral' from a number of perspectives – an ancient body preserved in a Danish bog – assumes cultural centrality by acquiring an iconic character on a universal scale. But do the artefact and the landscape, and specifically the archaeological literature by which they became known, thereby lose something of their initial definition and historicity, to the degree that their local character – insisted on by Heaney at first, as well as by Glob – is shed? Once more the bog appears as a figure of paradox, undermining the very notion of the definition it may also be seen to preserve. In Heaney's seminal poem 'Bogland' (1969), the 'moss' is proposed as the defining metaphor of Irish identity, conceived as a contrastive counterpart to the American prairie in Frederick Jackson Turner's 'Frontier Thesis'. Yet this ideal bog is defined by 'missing its last definition / By millions of years'. It is neither sea nor land, but both. 'The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage. / The wet centre is bottomless' (Heaney 1998: 41-42). Heaney's inflection of the Freudian metaphor of archaeology resists the polarities of core and surface as well as those of centre and periphery. Another poem, 'Kinship' in *North*, asserts that 'this centre' – contrasting with that of Yeats's 'The Second Coming' – 'holds/ And spreads' (Heaney 1998: 123; Johnston 2003:118).

How does this impinge on an idea of a 'Northern' bog landscape, transcending merely local or national inflections, as a kind of 'objective correlative' for cultural identity? While Karin Sanders has discussed how authors and artists of various nationalities 'have used bog bodies to question national or ethnic identities' (Sanders 2009: 84), the present article does not aim similarly to examine how artists and critics in Nordic countries have responded either to the Danish bog bodies or to Heaney's ekphrastic poems on them, but rather to inquire how Heaney's poems, if taken to modify or extend the definitions of Nordic literature, may offer an example by which to test articulations of cultural identity in the wider 'North'.

For what Heaney offers, above all, is an example: partly as a poetic figure in his own right, the sense in which he himself discussed Yeats and Wordsworth as 'examples'.⁶ Heaney possessed the quality of exemplarity from the moment of his debut, and his death only sealed a common sense that his exemplarity was rooted in the remarkable coherence of his life and work. This makes Heaney a supremely hard act to follow. Perhaps this will only make his example more compelling. Heaney's coherence is not merely the result of a lifelong process but a fundamental aspect of the process itself, namely an obedience to his own instinct to creatively revisit and re-handle artifacts and experiences of the past. His work presents the exemplary model of a poetic vocabulary for understanding cultural coherence and identity as a process of articulation across time. Under the governing metaphors of husbandry and archaeology, Heaney's poems evoke a deep past and the abiding material elements of a archetypal bog landscape: images and scenes that are at once familiar throughout Northern Europe and associated more specifically with a mythical *Nordic* 'North'. Two kinds of processes are highlighted and often juxtaposed: on the one hand, processes of preservation – characteristically resulting from the act of storing up – and on the other, processes of mutation. Heaney's aesthetic sensibility, which we are implicitly invited to share, emerges from his abiding fascination with these processes. From his earliest poems, for instance, Heaney reveals an instinct to preserve by storing up, or 'laying down'. His early poem 'Blackberry Picking' tells how, as a child, he yearly tried to hoard the berries, finding to his perennial dismay that his cache fell prey to rot. 'Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not' (Heaney 1998: 8). Despite this early check, Heaney's impulse to hope survived, and notions of laying down a trove, or of handling a hoard, or of broaching a cache or a cask, recur throughout his work. Take this description of conviviality in 'Oysters', for instance:

And there we were, toasting friendship
Laying down a perfect memory
In the cool of thatch and crockery.
(Heaney 1998: 145)

It is the idea of the meal as an act of *laying down a perfect memory* that makes it hard to imagine anyone but Heaney writing these lines. In 'The Skunk', Heaney writes about 'composing love letters again' eleven years into his marriage: 'broaching the word "wife" / Like a stored cask, as if its slender vowel / Had mutated into the night earth and air / Of California' (Heaney 1998: 176). That accompanying mutation of the spirit in the act of broaching or consuming is characteristic: compare the closing focus on elemental transmutations through the senses in 'Oysters': 'I ate the day / Deliberately, that its tang / Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb' (Heaney 1998: 146). These passages evoke sensations of coolness and fragrance (as well as 'tang') that also seem distinctive of Heaney's sensibility as well as his peculiar sensuousness: think of 'the cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap / Of soggy peat' in 'Digging', with its description of handling new potatoes, 'loving their cool hardness in our hands' (Heaney 1998: 3-4), or again in 'The Skunk', the sensory dynamics in the simile, 'The aftermath of a mouthful of wine / Was like inhaling you off a cold pillow' (Heaney 1998: 176). In the poem 'North', Heaney tells himself to trust the feel of 'what nubbed treasure / [his] hands have known' when he presents himself as lying down in the word-hoard to compose in darkness (Heaney 1998: 101). And even in a famous poem about domestic heat rather than the cool of the earth or the trove or the storehouse ('Mossbawn 1. Sunlight'), love is associated with deep storage: 'And here is love / Like a tinsmith's scoop / Sunk past its gleam / In the meal-bin' (Heaney 1998: 94). The storage of memory and experience enables poetic commitment: as Heaney explains in his Nobel address, poetry strives to create 'an order where we can at last grow up to that which we stored up as we grew' (Heaney 1998: 450).

In retrospect it seems inevitable that Heaney should have been so drawn to the 'moss' as a phenomenon. Even before writing his poems about prehistoric bodies – the first was 'The Tollund Man' (in *Wintering Out*, 1972) about the sacrificial victim worked by the womb of the moss-goddess 'to a saint's kept body' – he was fascinated by the miracle of preservation in bogs:

Butter sunk under
More than a hundred years
Was recovered salty and white.
The ground itself is kind, black butter

Melting and opening underfoot,
Missing its last definition
By millions of years.
(‘Bogland’, Heaney 1998: 41)

The bog bodies Heaney encountered in Glob’s *Bog People* spoke to him of his own personal and familiar experience, and enabled him to speak about circumstances that were peculiarly Irish and contemporary, even though the bodies – unlike the Great Irish Elk raised from the peat in ‘Bogland’ – were (in the main) not Irish.⁷ This act of translation was famously rebuked by Ciaran Carson in his 1975 review of *North* for collapsing the real peculiarities of place and time into a *Golden Bough*-like anthropology ‘in which the real difference between our [Northern Irish] society and that of Jutland in some vague past are glossed over for the sake of the parallels of ritual’ (Carson 2005: 268-9).⁸ Carson illustrates his objection by contrasting the realistic accuracy of Heaney’s descriptive procedure in the first half of the third section of ‘Kinship’ – a laudably austere kind of poetry – with the poem’s overtly mythologising second half, which Carson finds reprehensibly indulgent. The myth-making tendency of the bog poems, Carson objects, is not only facile but colludes with violence. He accuses Heaney’s ‘Punishment’ of appearing to say that ‘suffering like this is natural’:

It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened; they happened then, they happen now, and that is sufficient grounds for understanding and absolution. It is 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. (Carson 2005: 269)

This has proved a lasting criticism in the sense that it still commands acknowledgment, if not assent. Heaney himself pointed out that the bog bodies ‘erase the boundary-line between culture and nature, between art and life’ (Heaney 1999: 4, quoted in Sanders 2009: 20). The question is how Heaney’s handling of this kind of erasure is able to confront the realities of political violence, and while this was undoubtedly more of an open question in 1975 than it might seem today, when the bog poems *de facto* have survived the test of four decades, the test is not yet over. Bodies of ‘The Disappeared’, the victims of paramilitary assassinations, continue to be unearthed in Irish bogs (Peake and Lynch 2016). Darragh MacIntyre’s 2013 BBC documentary *The Disappeared* features two voice-overs of Heaney reading from ‘Bog Queen’. While Carson’s early criticism is neither invalidated nor finally rebutted by the bog poems’ trial through time, it did fail to anticipate that Heaney’s liminal spaces would prove so responsive to historical processes, and that they would be sustained by revisitations and outbranchings over decades. It is the trial through time – articulation through the poetic act of revisiting – that interests me in the ‘organic’ development of Heaney’s poetic language, as well as the nature of its liminal capabilities.⁹ I wish, too, to trace the arc of Heaney’s career from his early self-identification with qualities associated with earth (emblematically in ‘Antaeus’, 1966, revisited in ‘Hercules and Antaeus’ in *North*) to his later aspiration to qualities associated with air by focusing on his two revisitations of his seminal bog body poem, ‘The Tollund Man’. The first ‘revenant’ poem is ‘Tollund’, observing the IRA ceasefire. A decade later, Heaney’s final revisitation is ‘The Tollund Man in Springtime’ from *District and Circle* (2006).

Laureate of deep time, Heaney places his faith in slow processes. His early poem ‘Death of a Naturalist’ records his terrified impressions when, as a child on a hot summer day, he witnessed what is described as an explosion of biological growth, as countless suddenly mature frogs ‘invade’ the rank flax-dam in which they were spawned. Whereas earlier in the summer the fascinated child had collected spawn from the dam by the jampotful, now he knows that if he dipped his hand ‘the spawn would clutch it’ (Heaney 1998: 6). It is the sudden violence of this change – what the small boy perceives as a vengeful eruption of

the dam's rankness – that frightens him: the imperceptible shift from incremental to exponential growth. In general, the processes of change that Heaney instinctively trusts are slow, gradual, dependable. (Even such dependable processes that appear menacing are slow: 'memory incubating the spilled blood', for instance, in 'North', Heaney 1998: 101). The time-scale of such processes is elemental, even geological. So the darkening brain of his 'Bog Queen' is described as 'a jar of spawn / fermenting underground / dreams of Baltic amber' (Heaney 1998: 112). This jar of 'spawn' does not explode into menacing life like the festering flax-dam but slowly 'ferments' into dreams that are metaphorically associated with amber, that most 'transmutational' of preserving materials, the fossil resin that Ovid represents as the tears of the sun-god's daughters, hardened to stone by their father as they weep for their brother Phaëton (*Metamorphoses* II.364-5). Amber combines the idea of material transformation with the notion of preserving organic remains over vast expanses of time, and 'Baltic' amber suggests a geographical scale that corresponds to the capaciousness of the poem's elemental scale of countless seasonal cycles. Amber, halfway between resin and stone, is the material of organic change as well as preservation: and the aspect of Heaney's bog poems that could only become fully apparent over time is their attentiveness to – and their attendance on – processes not only of suspension, but of transition – and finally, of mutation.

Time has proved the seriousness of Heaney's initial vow to make a pilgrimage to Aarhus, his commitment to an act of devotion that at first was yet to be fulfilled.¹⁰ The temporal arc of the Tollund poems was cast by the first one – if not actually heralded, for the poem does not imply that more poems on Tollund were to follow. The subsequent poems can be said to 'perfect' the previous ones inasmuch as they describe a process of completion, much as the Grauballe Man, reposing in the poet's contemplation, is 'perfected' in his memory. The 1994 poem begins, 'That Sunday morning we had travelled far. / We stood a long time out in Tollund Moss' (Heaney 1998: 443), fulfilling the promise of the original poem: 'I will stand a long time' (Heaney 1998: 64). In the Tollund sequence as it now stands, completion entails not only fulfilment of a promise – confirmed in the poem on the ceasefire of

1994 – but further, in the 2006 poem, an elemental transition from the earth and water of the body and the bog to pure air and (disembodied) spirit. The final poem makes this mutation explicit in its final lines, in which Heaney describes how a bunch of bog rushes he brought back home to Ireland from a recent visit to Tollund withered before he could transplant them.

Through every check and scan I carried with me
A bunch of Tollund rushes – roots and all –
Bagged in their own bog-damp. In an old stairwell
Broom cupboard where I had hoped they'd stay
Damp until transplanted, they went musty.
Every green-skinned stalk turned friable,
The drowned-mouse fibres withered and the whole
Limp, soggy cluster lost its frank bouquet
Of weed leaf and turf mould. Dust in my palm
And in my nostrils dust, should I shake it off
Or mix it in with spit in pollen's name
And my own? As a man would, cutting turf,
I straightened, spat on my hands, felt benefit
And spirited myself into the street.
(Heaney 2006: 57)

Over the years, Heaney's poetry grew increasingly self-referential (Kerrigan 1998: 157). Here the Biblical allusions to God's forming man from dust and breathing life into his nostrils (Genesis 2:7) and to Jesus mixing dust and spittle to anoint the blind man's eyes (John 9:6) join with reminiscences of Heaney's own previous work. The stanza's opening reference to 'every check and scan' harks back to Heaney's own figure of the philosopher Diogenes 'seeking one just man' by the 'blood-prick' of his hawk lantern, 'that you wish would test and clear you, / its pecked-at ripeness that scans you, then moves on.' ('The Hawk Lantern', Heaney 1998: 299). And this final stanza closes with an even clearer reminiscence of Heaney's descriptions of his father and grandfather cutting turf in his programmatic early poem 'Digging'. The arc of Heaney's final Tollund poem – a miniature sonnet-sequence

of six sonnet-stanzas – traces his entire career, indeed his spiritual career. The Tollund Man, who speaks of himself as being ‘so long unrisen’ (as Heaney has described himself in similar terms, as we shall see), describes his own unearthing, lifted together with the sod:

Then once I felt the air
I was like turned turf in the breath of God,
Bog-bodied on the sixth day, brown and bare,
And on the last, all told, unatrophied.
(Heaney 2006: 55)

The poem’s six stanzas, like the six days of creation, entail a seventh day of perfection (which also, in the line ‘And on the last, all told, unatrophied’, looks ahead to the Last Day of Judgment). What Heaney seems to be representing is the personal change that came over him in the 1980s, a process he describes in his Nobel address:

Then finally and happily, and not in obedience to the dolorous
circumstances of my native place but in spite of them, I
straightened up. I began a few years ago to try to make space
in my reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as for
the murderous. (Heaney 1998: 458)

Heaney would continue to elaborate on this change, for instance in ‘The Gravel Walks’ (in *The Spirit Level*, 1996), and he had already described it in ‘Lightenings viii’ as well as in the sestet of ‘Fosterling’ (in *Seeing Things*, 1991):

At school I loved one picture’s heavy greenness –
Horizons rigged with windmills’ arms and sails.
The millhouses’ still outlines. Their in-placeness
Still more in place when mirrored in canals.
I can’t remember not ever having known
The immanent hydraulics of a land
Of *glar* and *glit* and floods at *dailigone*.
My silting hope. My lowlands of the mind.

Heaviness of being. And poetry
Sluggish in the doldrums of what happens.
Me waiting until I was nearly fifty
To credit marvels. Like the tree-clock of tin cans
The tinkers made. So long for air to brighten,
Time to be dazzled and the heart to lighten.
(Heaney 1998: 357)

This elemental transition from the gestational bogland of his younger mind to a midlife 'brightening of air' is retraced, then, in Heaney's final Tollund poem, in which Heaney completes his identification with the Tollund Man, and so also takes a final leave of the figure. The poem is spoken in the first person, the first half in a voice we can ascribe to the Tollund Man, the second half in the voice of the poet. But this quite misrepresents the poem's distinct impression that Heaney and the Tollund Man are superimposed, mapped onto each other, each speaking for and representing the other as well as himself. Heaney's twenty-first-century Tollund Man passes invisibly into the poet's 'virtual city' (a figure of modern culture, reminiscent of the 'unreal city' in Eliot's *The Waste Land*), 'lapping himself in time' as easily as the poet spirits himself into the street. The terrain and the landscape remain, though not unchanged: 'Things had moved on', Heaney observes in his 1994 revisiting (Heaney 1998: 443). Coherence is secured not only by the archetypal constants of the landscape, nor merely by the organic continuities that preserve as well as prove identities (like the 'kesh water' that cures dead bodies with the tannins of sphagnum moss), but by the very process of registering changes by reference to archetypes (cf. Fairer 2009: 8). In the 1994 poem the landscape, we have seen, is 'landscaped': composed, like any museum space, for exhibition and projection. The place is presented as *a scene*, and the modality of Heaney's verb phrases accentuates the potential and the virtual rather than the actual. The roads 'could have been' the by-roads of Ulster townlands. This hypothetical mode allows Heaney to present the scene at not one remove but two: Tollund 'could have' also been a scene *out of a scene* from someone else's poem – 'a still', it transpires, out of John Hewitt's long blank verse poem 'Freehold'

(1944), 'that poem of dream farms / Outside all contention' (Heaney 1998: 443). Intertextualities cross boundaries too, even linguistic ones, since Heaney's *abba*-rhymed stanzas gesture less to Tennyson's *In Memoriam* than to Baudelaire's poem about mortality and digging, 'Le Squelette laboureur' (adapted as 'The Digging Skeleton' in *North*). The bog itself, for Heaney, remains an idealised constant by which to register change.

Now what may this entail for the understanding of the bog in a Nordic context? The example of Heaney's response to Glob demonstrates how the poetic act of universalizing the local not only dissolves the polarities of centre and periphery, but also leads further on to new encounters with 'the local'. In the 'Postscript' to *Bodies in the Bog*, Sanders describes her own final field trip to the Tollund moss, expecting to experience there the incursions of modernity described in Heaney's 1994 poem, and finding herself instead responding to Glob's much earlier and still resonating text, which she read as a schoolgirl:

Evening was gathering over Tollund Fen in Bjaeldskov Dal. Momentarily the sun burst in, bright and yet subdued, through a gate in the blue thunder-clouds in the west, bringing everything mysteriously to life. The evening stillness was only broken, now and again, by the grating love-call of the snipe. The dead man, too, deep down in the umber-brown peat, seemed to have come alive. (Sanders 2009: 233, quoting Glob 1969: 18)

As is immediately apparent from the passage Sanders quotes here, the Danish archaeologist is scarcely less poetic than the Irish poet, and Sanders herself traces many of Heaney's poetic responses to specific details in Glob's text.¹¹ In the opening speech to an exhibition of bog bodies in Silkeborg Museum in 1996, the details in Heaney's narrative of childhood memories of peat bogs chime with Glob's passage: 'I loved the mystery and stillness of the place when work was finished in the evening and you stood alone out there as the larks fell silent and the lapwings began to call and the snipe swerved up suddenly, off and away' (Heaney 1999: 3). Those larks and the snipe reappear in the first stanza/sonnet of 'The Tollund Man in Springtime' (Heaney 2006: 55).

What Sanders's 'Postscript' shows is not only how reception invariably leads back to points of origin, but also how the poetic response to the bog begins with the archaeologist and continues not only with the poet but also with the literary scholar. The mediating figure, it should be emphasised, is the poet. It is telling that in her quotation from Glob, Sanders omits the date with which his evocative passage begins – 'An early spring day – 8 May, 1950' (the fifth anniversary of VE Day, though Danes commemorate their own liberation, 'Befrielsen', on 5 May) – the more easily to assimilate his account to her own experience. Heaney has observed of T. S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding' that parts of it belong, like Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale', to a kind of poetry that 'is at a third remove from the local historical moment and is suspended in the ether of a contemplative mind' (Heaney 2002b: 169, quoted in O'Driscoll 2008: 237). Much of Heaney's bog poetry is of this kind, and that contemplative suspension is precisely what characterises Sanders's valedictory revisitation of Glob's text. While Glob himself is more like a novelist, immersed in and alive to 'the historical moment' of exhumation (complete with date), in her 'Postscript' Sanders follows the example of Heaney's poetry in favouring the transhistorical: the moment that cuts across time.

One moment that appears to have cut across time is Heaney's immediate recognition, on first seeing the photographs in Glob's book, of his own grand-uncle Hughie's features in the face of the Tollund Man. In several essays and interviews Heaney has explained how the Tollund Man immediately 'felt as close to me as a contemporary, as familiar as my Great Uncle Hughie, who had a similar bristle on his long upper lip and a similar weathered look that suggested both stoicism and a capacity for survival' (Heaney 2008: 29). 'It was the kind of face I had known as a child', Heaney explains on another occasion,

the slightly mustached face of an old countryman such as my Great-Uncle Hughie, a man whom I first saw standing tall in a turf-cart, profiled and gaunt and quite remote, as lean-featured in life as he would be when he lay in his coffin in death – exactly as if he were the Tollund Man lying in peace and in profile on the turf of a Jutland bog. (Heaney 1999: 5)

'To me', Heaney reveals in his interview-autobiography *Stepping Stones*, Great-Uncle Hughie 'was always the ur-ancestor on the Heaney side of the family' (O'Driscoll 2008: 25). Heaney also admits that the figure of his grandfather cutting turf on Toner's Bog in 'Digging' was actually modelled on his great-uncle, whom he accompanied to the bog on several occasions in his boyhood. 'Rode with him up in the cart – he's present as "the god of the waggon" in the fifth section of "Kinship" – and when we came home helped to build the turf up in a stack' (O'Driscoll 2008: 25). So the 'sad freedom' of the tumbril rider that Heaney wishes for himself in his imagined future motor trip through the Danish countryside in 'The Tollund Man' (Heaney 1998: 65) is overlaid with intimate memories of family and local life. But at the same time, Heaney explains, the head of the Tollund Man 'had the stillness and focus of a votive object' (Heaney 2008: 29). When he finally stood in the presence of the head at the museum in Silkeborg in 1973, 'it was like being at one and the same time in the presence of a family portrait and a sacred icon' (Heaney 1999: 5). In this 'poetic recognition scene', to adopt the phrase Heaney uses to describe literary moments of initiation and investiture, the familiar and the numinous reveal themselves in a common face: the occasion is 'bathed in an uncanny light. [...] The poet has been, as it were, unhomed, has experienced the *unheimlich*' (Heaney 2008: 21) – even as he experiences 'the feelings of excitement and homecoming' Heaney has described at the moment of opening Glob's pages.

Heaney's description of the poet 'unhomed' by a 'poetic recognition scene' draws our attention to an aspect of his bog poems that relates to the experience of exile. *North* ends with 'Exposure', an anguished poem of reckoning in which Heaney, newly moved from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland, examines his own state of 'responsible *tristia*', describing himself as 'An inner emigré, grown long-haired / And thoughtful; a wood-kerne / Escaped from the massacre' (Heaney 1998: 144). *Tristia*, recalling Ovid's exile, is the price paid for *otium*, poetic freedom, and possibly too for the 'sad freedom' that Heaney identifies with the sacrificial tumbril rider in 'The Tollund Man' and wishes for himself driving in search of 'Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard' (Heaney 1998: 65). The paradox of finding oneself, feeling oneself

at home in the state of displacement is a fundamental trope of the 'Tollund' poems. In the first, the speaker expects he will find himself 'lost / Unhappy, and at home' (Heaney 1998: 65). In Heaney's 1994 pilgrimage to the Tollund Moss, the plural pronoun speaks for a wider national community:

we stood footloose, at home beyond the tribe,

More scouts than strangers, ghosts who'd walked abroad
Unfazed by light, to make a new beginning
And make a go of it, alive and sinning,
Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad.
September 1994
(Heaney 1998: 443)

In 'The Tollund Man in Springtime', the speaker identifies himself at first as 'neither god nor ghost' in a liminal space between all categories, and 'simply lost' to the world before his reawakening (Heaney 2006: 55). The poem's midway 'transfer of voice', so to speak, between the Tollund Man and Heaney is mediated by an endorsing quotation from an obituary essay by Leon Wieseltier on one of Heaney's tutelary figures, the Polish-Lithuanian poet Czesław Miłosz: "The soul exceeds its circumstances." Yes. / History not to be granted the last word / Nor the first claim...' (Heaney 2006: 56). According to Wieseltier,

Miłosz's teaching was that history was no more to be granted the last word. One does not live entirely, or even mainly, for one's time. The soul exceeds its circumstances. (Wieseltier 2004, cf. Falconer 2011: 407)

Heaney reconnects with the recently deceased Miłosz (mediated by the literary community that articulates his memory) and draws Miłosz into the Tollund Man's field of force partly because Miłosz validates Heaney's refusal to be trapped by 'the dolorous circumstances of [his] native place' and partly because Miłosz is a figure of the poet's triumph over numerous kinds of exile. Heaney finds liberty in 'the redress of

exile' (as Heaney's phrase is adapted in Matthew McGowen's recent study *Ovid in Exile* [McGowen: 2009: 1]), and recognises exemplary patience in 'cattle out in rain, their knowledgable / Solid standing and readiness to wait', inspiring 'newfound contrariness' (Heaney 2006: 57). Abstracted from Denmark or any other locality, the bog has become the poet's 'study' (Heaney 2006: 57). Jutland has become internalised, a state of mind, a figure not just of place but of displacement, of 'unhomedness' but also 'at-homeness'.

Glob's *Mosefolket* has become a classic of Danish culture as well as archaeological literature. In light of its exceptionally rich reception, not only in the literary but in the visual arts, it may even be described as a 'world classic'. But how does Heaney's reception impinge on the phenomenon of bog bodies in the Danish national consciousness, and on the reception of Glob's book in a Nordic perspective? A recent book on the Grauballe Man by Pauline Asingh of the Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus describes the special place this bog man has come to occupy in Danish popular culture ('den danske folkesjæl') since his discovery in 1952 (Asingh 2009: 24-7). When the body was found Glob was notified immediately, as it was he who had taken charge of the Tollund Man two years previously, and it was Glob who again presented the discovery to the world. Glob's account of the bog bodies stressed the sacrificial nature of the deaths and linked the sacrificial killings to the cult of the fertility goddess Nerthus. It was Glob's emphasis on the benign aspects of the fertility ritual, Asingh argues, that caught the Danes' imagination in the aftermath of the Second World War. Within the paradigm of archaic communal sacrifice, violence could be domesticated and accepted as natural – as natural as death itself. Glob's account, Asingh suggests, encouraged Danes emerging from the conflicted experience of the Nazi occupation to imagine their earliest forebears living in harmony with the natural world. In the serene composure of the Tollund Man, and no less in the troubled features of the Grauballe Man (the throes of death mirroring the trauma of birth), violence and rupture could be assimilated to the benign rhythms of the seasons in deep time. The Grauballe Man especially is described as a national treasure, 'our crown jewel' ('vor kronjuvel'), dearest to the nation's heart. Asingh quotes the Danish philosopher and journalist Arno Victor Nielsen: 'Han

er tudegrim, men vi elsker ham, som kun en mor kan elske ham, for han er en af vore egne' (Asingh 2009: 27) (He is ugly as sin, but we love him as only a mother could love him, because he is one of our own).

'One of our own': the phrase betrays no possessive anxiety, no fear of alienation. While the Tollund Man and the Grauballe Man have both become iconic figures in Western culture together with the Danish bog landscape that preserved them, neither their international fame nor their literary and artistic reception beyond Denmark appear to have rendered them any less Danish – despite Heaney's projection on them of 'the brutality of human violence and national sacrifices in Ireland' (Sanders 2009: 87). Yet the Danish bog landscape may nevertheless be said to be indelibly inscribed with Heaney's projections. Does this make a difference to the way we frame ideas of Nordic cultures with reference to the Iron Age bog sacrifices across northern Europe? Can Heaney's example serve a tutelary purpose? Ideally, Heaney's example may be taken to elicit readings of Nordic literary histories that are accurate as well as fantastic – that accommodate the homely, the local and the familiar as well as the transcendent, and even the 'marvellous' and the numinous – but that meditate on the articulation of cultural memory in growing awareness of its very constructedness. It also encourages a reading in which sensuousness is associated with deep storage and with the mysterious power of 'hiding places', and a confidence in the centrality and integrity of the domestic and the local (for a historical account of this 'Romantic' reading of the North, see Fjågesund's article in this issue). But as we have seen, Heaney's appropriation of Nordic materials has also been criticised as a means by which the actualities of historical situations are mystified, and culpably so. Do the poetic archaeologies of Glob and Heaney offer a means of sanitising as well as domesticating 'the old man-killing parishes' and the violence they represent, either by hypostatizing them or otherwise translating them into the register of a mythopoetic sensibility? Do these poetic archaeologies offer a means of romanticising the Troubles? Or of trivialising them, so that Heaney's phrase 'each neighbourly murder' in 'Funeral Rites' (Heaney 1998: 97), once genuinely chilling, comes to sound too familiar, or wrongly familiar, too close to *hyggelig*? How justified is it to imply that a 'region in the mind' such as Heaney's

bogland has a purchase on real places, and even more importantly, on political events?

This is where Heaney's own example is stern and exacting, not indulgent. What Heaney provides to Glob's account of the bog bodies is a long-sustained and fully articulated test of the redemptive reading of sacrificial violence: an example of how an iconic element of the Nordic past may be put to the proof by exposure to actual conflict. Heaney's example is a challenge. It invites us out of what might otherwise have been a complacent and parochial reading of Glob ('romantic' in only a trivial sense) by Heaney's own enduring commitment to the epiphanic vision of his bog poems and to their extraordinary capacity for renewal as well as preservation – a keeping of faith observed in many ways, and performed most crucially in Heaney's poetic revisitations of Tollund. The bog poems became Heaney's means by which to genuinely face as well as to outface sectarian violence – a means to keep, in the phrasing of 'The Grauballe Man', the scales genuinely poised between, on the one hand, the burden represented by the demands of aesthetic confines ('the Dying Gaul / too strictly compassed / on his shield') and on the other, 'the actual weight / of each hooded victim, / slashed and dumped' (Heaney 1998: 116) – while keeping outright partisanship at bay. Or as Heaney puts it in his Oxford lecture 'The Redress of Poetry':

"Obedience to the force of gravity. The greatest sin." So Simone Weil also writes in *Gravity and Grace*. Indeed her whole book is informed by the idea of counterweighting, of balancing out the forces, of redress – tilting the scales of reality towards some transcendent equilibrium. And in the activity of poetry too, there is a tendency to place a counter-reality in the scales – a reality which may be only imagined but which nevertheless has weight because it is imagined within the gravitational pull of the actual and can therefore hold its own and balance out against the historical situation. This redressing effect of poetry comes from its being a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances. And sometimes, of course, it happens that such a revelation, once enshrined in the poem, remains as a standard for the poet, so

that he or she must then submit to the strain of bearing witness in his or her own life to the plane of consciousness established in the poem. (Heaney 1995: 3-4; cf. McGowen 2009: 204-5)

It is worth pausing to reflect how relatively rare it is for any body of poetry to be put to the test of 'holding its own' under 'the strain of bearing witness' against the acute stress of a protracted, violently divisive historical situation. Or indeed, for any body of archaeological material or literature. Heaney faced his own time by allowing his poetic vision to encompass his 'own wide pre-reflective stare' ('Alphabets', Heaney 1998: 294) – the perspective of his early 'pre-reflective life of Mossbawn' (O'Driscoll 2008: 180).¹² Like Heaney's description of himself and his young siblings in his Nobel address, the bog bodies are 'in suspension between the archaic and the modern' (Heaney 1998: 447), the timeless and the immediate. The bodies become 'perfected' or finished in the memory and the poetic imagination, yet they are also a means of observing change and development. The archaic landscape of the Northern European bog, its archaeology and history, are made to serve as 'objective correlatives' in Heaney's art. The apparently peripheral, in geographical and historical terms, extends in all directions. Heaney confronted the Irish Troubles by drawing them into the gravitational and devotional force of an archaic phenomenon associated with places – Tollund and Nebelgaard – that would at first sight seem peripheral in the context of Irish politics. This should not be taken merely as encouragement to place poetic trust in the apparently peripheral, but further as encouragement to abide by such a trust and 'take the strain', as Heaney urges his sons in 'A Kite for Michael and Christopher' (Heaney 1998: 231). Heaney's example also serves as encouragement to take longer and broader perspectives on Nordic cultures and the literatures of the North than any insular or strictly 'localist' views can accommodate.

Endnotes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, parenthetical references to Heaney's poems are to Heaney 1998.

² 'Bann Valley Eclogue', in Heaney 2002a: 11. 'The classic of all Europe': Eliot 1944.

³ Citing Vidler 1992: 11. See also Sanders's second chapter, 'The Archaeological Uncanny'.

⁴ 'A region in the mind which does exist and should be visited often': Lewis 1936: 352.

⁵ For a brief discussion of this poem which anticipates some of my examples in this essay, see Moloney 2007: 170.

⁶ 'Yeats as an Example?' (1978) in Heaney 1980: 98-114, and Heaney 2008.

⁷ The exception is the bog body exhumed in 1781 on the estate of Lord Moira in County Down. Glob's account (1969: 103-4) inspired 'Bog Queen' in *North*.

⁸ Carson's review was exceptionally hostile, but reservations were voiced by sympathetic critics too: Seamus Deane, for instance, concedes 'that the Viking myths do not correspond to Irish experience without some fairly forceful straining', if only to affirm that 'the potency of the analogy of the two at first was thrilling' (Deane 1997: 69).

⁹ My idea and vocabulary of 'the organic' is fundamentally indebted to Fairer 2009.

¹⁰ In the poem's first line, 'One day I will go to Aarhus', decorum overrides geographical accuracy. As Heaney has explained in a speech at the Tollund Man's museum at Silkeborg, the sibilance of 'Silkeborg' yielded to the sonorous solemnity of 'Aarhus'. 'The sound of "Silkeborg" would have been like a hiss at the end, whereas Aarhus is like a solemn intonation, which is surely more appropriate. Its vowels are darker, boggier, mossier' (Heaney 1999: 6).

¹¹ When Heaney describes the Grauballe Man as 'a forceps baby', he is clearly responding to the famous first photograph of the accidentally squashed head and bony shoulders emerging from the peat, but also perhaps to Glob's description of the Grauballe Man as 'naked as the day he was born' (Sanders 2009: 24, quoting Glob 1969: 41). Glob's description of 'centuries of peat-cutting, indicated by a sort of honeycombing of the surrounding peat strata' (1969: 39) becomes 'the turf-cutters' / Honeycombed workings' in Heaney's 'The Tollund Man'. The Windeby girl's 'exposed' brain in Glob (1969: 113) also supplies her 'brain's exposed and / darkened combs' in Heaney's 'Punishment' (1998: 118).

¹² Writing of 'Alphabets', Robert Faggen observes: 'At the end, Heaney's work chooses to remain parochially "agog" to the mystery of existence, going with, as well as behind, the sophistications and pleasures of language to exalt the primordial consciousness' (Faggen 2003: 245).

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