

AESTHETIC AND FORMAL PRINCIPLES

I will begin an examination of my work with a brief introduction I wrote in 1992 for *Dedalus Irish Poets*, an anthology of poetry published by the Dedalus Press. Each poet contributing to the anthology was requested by the editor, J.F. Deane, to provide a brief introduction to his or her work. I believe the following introduction provides a working abstract of my own 'personal helicon':

'Narrative informs my work, poems often being mini-stories, jibbing at the constraints of "verse", sometimes calling on the archetype. I am drawn also to the persona, while aware of the caveats of M. Holub. The persona makes possible a dialectic (the later Yeats found it useful) in a land where the real dialectic of communities, the "jaw-jaw" has not even begun. "The Croppy Boy" and "Alice of Daphne" are examples.

While acknowledging the New Narrative in the US in the eighties, I grew up with the tradition anyway (I got a present of the collected Milton at fifteen). The earliest poems I kept returning to were "The Great Hunger", "Zima Junction" and "The Quaker Graveyard at Nantucket". I once had all of the latter off by heart.

The poems make comment on collective experience by attempting to focus on particular details of that experience. The "interior" landscape is of less importance than that of the larger community, or communities. The narrator is witness as well as participant. The locale is identifiable to the insular psyche. The *res publica* is never too far away. In *Arboretum* I set about felling, clearing and replanting the interior landscape for a new international. Given the basic tenets here of a shared Christianity, the problem remains as ever to apply them. The narrator sees the death of a British soldier on our soil as an obscenity. Why should Ghandi have all the kudos?

Ultimately nobody is an observer. Is not everyone "a walker/from the knees down?"

I admit little sympathy with that effete nihilism one notes in passing, the quasi-lyrical narcissistic whimper, the brilliant self-conscious carapace of the fine volume, where the real song is Plato's ghost and heavy metal. This is not to denigrate the truly "personal" serving as guide to every person. The poems that helped to shake Stasiland, too, fell off the hungry presses in scattered leaves. I admit, also, a certain rage as a promoter of education, addressing the masses of the bright young mesmerised by choice of the largely non-existent, the dubious, a less-than-bridled capitalism.

As for prosody, give me a supple blank verse line, or free verse where the snatched cadences of the King James Bible (Alice of Daphne) can serve as well as the modern idiom.

Of late the poems tend to work "the poetic line" rather than "the prose sentence". The rhythm is marked (since it is synonymous with movement) and so

time is marked. Understatement, or its opposite, allows a resident tension. The nature and role of the artistic act is a preoccupation in “Orpheus” and “Watching the Descent of Yuichiro Miura”. I feel a greater affinity with Thrace (that other extreme of Celtdom) than with any “free” and cultured Athens.

I exult in the verse of contemporaries and its variety from the presses. I am equally entranced with Wang Wei organising poetry competitions on his melon patch, the last poets of imperial Rome, or the South Korean, Pak Tu-jin, contemplating today in two hundred works the creative power in water-washed stones. For history, there’s more than enough in Joseph Lee, our cancerous nationalism, and the colour-blindness of the flag-facing masses.’¹

I will attempt now to elaborate on the foregoing with specific reference to my own creative work situated as it is in its own particular cultural milieu. I have indicated the importance of narrative, or sense of narrative, to me as poet. Given the intense grounding of my formative years in the Christian prerogative to prepare to spread the ‘good news’² - and this grounding was based on the Bible ‘stories’ - it seems inevitable that a specifically narrative imagination would play a central role in providing me with a later ethical vision when certain parts of the Christian ‘mythos’ itself became suspect. As Richard Kearney remarks, fiction, *per se*, serves as an ‘immense laboratory’ for experimenting with an endless number of imaginative variations.³ Similarly, in *The Burren Days*, a long narrative of some one thousand lines, contemporary Ireland is encapsulated as if in a test tube where two distinct substances strain against each other.⁴

Narrative facilitates an endless number of imaginative explorations as, say, in the spheres of communal mores: in these contexts, ethical judgement is invited to submit itself to the wide

¹ J. Ennis, in J. F. Deane, (Ed.), *Dedalus Irish Poets*, ‘Introduction’, pp. 206-207.

² I refer to a period of ten years, 1959-1969, when I was a clerical student preparing for a missionary life.

³ R. Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity*, ‘The Narrative Imagination’, p. 103, where Kearney discusses fictional ‘explorations in the realm of good and evil’.

⁴ ‘The exact descriptions of laboratory processes are at least as fascinating as his [Ray’s] affair with Grainne’, Philip Casey, Review, ‘Diarmaid and Grainne in a new setting’, *The Sunday Press*, 8th June 1986, p. 18.

range of imaginative possibilities proper to fiction.⁵ Thus, Terence Browne found *The Burren Days* to be a ‘frankly pagan poem’ where in the

‘bizarre [Irish] world of papal visits and strange new chemicals, Grainne is her old self, a girl out of the old songs, the pagan, Gaelic world still intact whatever else isn’t in this poem of frank sexual celebration’.⁶

The narrative imagination also serves an ethical phronesis in its power to empathise⁷: it enables us to identify with others and to reach across divides which are otherwise unbridgeable. In ‘Londonderry’, for instance, I attempted a linkage with the Apprentice Boy tradition and was able to identify with it.⁸ This narrative mode facilitates an ‘intersubjectivity of freedom’ without which we would remain indisposed to reaching out to other persons. Kearney finds the empathetic dimension of the narrative imagination at odds with the post-modern assumption he finds in Foucault and Derrida, that poetics should have no truck with ethics. I would agree with Kearney that post-modern poetics, left to itself, could be ‘a feckless game’.⁹ In so agreeing, I am not decrying or underestimating the valuable contribution of postmodernism with its stress on the following concepts - ‘antiform’ (the disjunctive, the open), ‘chance’, ‘anarchy’, ‘exhaustion’, ‘silence’, ‘process’, ‘performance’, ‘participation’, ‘absence’, ‘dispersal’, ‘text’, ‘intertext’, ‘metonymy’, ‘against interpretation’, ‘signifier’, ‘scriptible’, ‘anti-narrative’, ‘polymorphous’, ‘androgynous’, ‘the Holy Ghost’, ‘irony’ and ‘immanence’ - which are the sustaining force, or ‘pneuma’ of substantial sections of my work.¹⁰ I merely point to a personal poetic which would still retain Proust’s claim that narrative imagination in literature and art is the form of human relation nearest to genuine

⁵ Kearney, *op. cit.*, p.103.

⁶ T. Browne, Review, *Poetry Ireland Review* 17 (1986), pp. 84-85.

⁷ Kearney, *op. cit.*, p. 104. Kearney refers to the ‘intersubjectivity of freedom’ made possible by the narrative imagination.

⁸ Ennis, *In a Green Shade*, pp. 17-18.

⁹ Kearney, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁰ I. Hassan, ‘The Culture of Postmodernism’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, v.2, 1985, pp. 123-124.

altruism.¹¹ In Seamus Heaney's phrase, it allows 'the shifting of a weight of personal experience through a certain distance'.¹² In 'Decisions', I attempted to refigure historical memory and to transform an island's psychic self-identity into an ethical mode of self-questioning self-hood. For, devoid of narrative imagining, we would be bereft not only of poetic freedom but also of ethical judgement.¹³ Irish Drama, more so than Irish poetry, has turned also to the past as a sounding board for the present. As Michael Kenneally states in 'The Transcendental Impulse in Contemporary Irish Drama', Irish dramatists have undertaken 'imaginative encounters with specific aspects of Irish history or the lives of historical figures'. Citing a number of plays including Thomas Murphy's *Famine*, Brian Friel's *Translations* and Frank Mc Guinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, Kennedy notes artistic attempts to 'negotiate obstacles posed by social, national and historical forces'.¹⁴ My work would appear to have more in common with our contemporary dramatists than with most contemporary Irish poets.

On the general question of a personal and ethical aesthetic, it is salutary to refer to Kearney again in his discussion of 'Levinas and the Art of Imagining' where he enjoins that ethics needs poetics in order to recollect that its responsibility to the other includes the various avenues of 'play, liberty and pleasure', just as poetics needs ethics to be assured that 'play, liberty and pleasure' are never sufficient in, to, or for themselves: rather, they both originate in, and aim toward, an experience of 'the other-than-self'.¹⁵

¹¹ Kearney, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹² S. Heaney, 'The Frontier of Writing', *Irish Writers and their Creative Process*, J. Genet and W. Hellegourc'h, (Ed.), *Irish Literary Studies* 48, p.4. Heaney is discussing lyric writing, but what he says applies equally, in my view, to the use of the narrative mode.

¹³ Kearney, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹⁴ M. Kenneally, *International Aspects of Irish Literature*, Ed. T. Furomoto *et al.*, *Irish Literary Studies* 44, p. 272.

¹⁵ Kearney, *op. cit.*, p.117.

My aesthetic, then, would espouse the model of the poetical-ethical imagination in pursuance of what Kearney terms a 'poetics of the possible'.¹⁶ This aesthetic might be partly termed 'promethean' in its attempts to anticipate the future by projecting an horizon of imaginary possibilities. Promethean foresight enabled humankind to rise above itself and to imitate the 'gods'.¹⁷ Transmuting 'the gods' to the 'The centuries - implanted hierarchy of affairs', it is certain that this pro-active aesthetic is as important today as it was in the days of Aeschylus.¹⁸ Geoffrey Hill makes the same point when he refers to poetry as being 'responsible. It's a form of responsible behaviour... an exemplary exercise'.¹⁹ For Thomas Kinsella, '[the good poem] never goes out of date, it's as alive as any organic thing'.²⁰ The mythic heroes of imagination disrupt the 'cosmic' hierarchy by exalting the 'human' order. To use a Yeatsian phrase, they seek a 'profane perfection of mankind' in imitation of the 'divine'.

Of equal importance to me has been the cultivation of what I might call an Orphic aesthetic as guiding principle. Orpheus remains a central figure in my imagination as a type of hero-saviour confronting fearlessly the facts of loss of love and death; he went to the depths of hell; he was always defiant even if ultimately he failed to overcome death or to make that perfection cohere which was almost within his grasp. As Seamus Heaney has remarked, Orpheus represents the fully empowered artist, who in the fullest living response to his art goes beyond the original 'entrancement' into what Yeats called the 'desolation of reality'. He embodies, in Heaney's phrases, 'a mystical sense of value' which 'every writer needs to

¹⁶ R. Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination* p. 32. Kearney advances this view as a 'response to the predicaments of the post-modern age'.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 80. Cf. Etymology of Prometheus: *pro-mètheus* (fore-sight).

¹⁸ Ennis, 'Slieve Caoilte', *In a Green Shade*, p. 20, where James Lett, the teenage Wexford insurgent, is envisioned as possessing the same foresight as he prepares to disturb the politic of his day. Cf. Also Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, p. 86, for a detailed elaboration of this theme.

¹⁹ J. Haffenden, *Viewpoints Poets in Conversation*, Geoffrey Hill, p.99.

²⁰ *Ibid*, Thomas Kinsella, p. 113, on Kinsella's view of the function of poetry.

possess: a hopeful, other, removable ... joyful [indistinguishable] spirit of being'.²¹

Similarly, in 'Joy on Night: Last Things in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats and Philip Larkin', Heaney refers to the Orphic effort to raise life back up the slope against all the odds and, in this context, finds Larkin's 'Aubade' wanting: that poem 'does not hold the lyre up in the face of the Gods of the underworld', rather it is seen to renege on Yeats's summons to the poet to attend to the 'spiritual intellect's great work'. The Orphic poetic is, thus, a confrontative, transformative and regenerative one (like Yeats's in 'The Man and the Echo'): its language and dynamic will still pulse on undefeated even when confronted with what appears to be absolute defeat, or limitation, or decay.²² As Stanislaus Breton remarks, it will always celebrate that the world exists.²³ Yeats wrote to the same effect: 'Tragedy must be a joy to the man who dies.'²⁴ Ihab Hassan makes a similar point in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, when he states that post-modern art must refuse to allow 'imagination to abandon its teleological sense: change is also dreams come true'— the essential idea being that art should move always toward 'a redeemed imagination'.²⁵ The figure of Suibne embodies this view in my collection *Near St. Mullins*.²⁶

²¹ R. Kearney, *States of Mind*, 'Dialogues with contemporary thinkers on the European mind': Seamus Heaney, 'Between North and South: poetic detours', pp. 101 - 108, where Heaney responds to a series of questions on his poetry and pinpoints the Orphic imperative.

²² S. Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, pp. 158 - 159, where Heaney sees the role of poetry as forwarding poets and readers within themselves.

²³ Kearney, 'Being, God and Poetics of Relation', *States of Mind*, p. 257, on the contribution of Stanislaus Breton to a modern poetic.

²⁴ J. Scully, Ed. *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, p. 25 'A General Introduction for my Work' from Yeats's *Essays and Introductions*.

²⁵ Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, p. 371, where the author refers to the limitations of self-parody and self-subversion.

²⁶ Ennis, cf. concluding section of this sequence where Suibne purifies his 'own name' in flight, section XXXV, pp. 49-52.

It is an important tenet for me, therefore, that the poet sacrifice himself to an envisaged standard. As Heaney remarks, this must be one that actually precedes and survives the demands of technique and artistic skills'.²⁷ Ellman's famous remark on Yeats is apt,

'If we must suffer, it is better to create the world in which we suffer, and this is what heroes do spontaneously, artists do consciously'.²⁸

Yeats, himself, is our task master at this work. He wrote of his own poetry, 'A poet writes always of his personal life, in its fullest work out of its tragedy'. Again, 'I wanted to cry as all men cried, to laugh as all men laughed'. And, 'I can put my own thought into the mouth of rambling pedlars...'²⁹ In my own attempts in this vein, I have used not 'rambling pedlars' but a range of personae, mostly well defined as in the historical personae of 'Decisions'³⁰ and 'This Other Umbria'³¹, fictional beings as in 'Letter to Connla',³² an artistic communion in *Down in the Deeper Helicon*,³³ the autobiographical 'fiction' of *Arboretum* and the disassociated voices of 'Telling the Bees'.³⁴

In the context, as Brian Arkins has noted, poets tend to be torn between the pull of articulating a private vision and the call to involvement in society.³⁵ The same point is made by Seamus Heaney in *Transitions* where he states that the 'final aim of poetry is ... to be of service, to ply the effort of the individual work into the larger work of the community as a whole'. What is feasible, perhaps, is a political - historical poetry that includes *both* the individual person *and* society at large: one way is through a 'political poetry' that respects

²⁷ S. Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, where he discusses the solitary legacy of Hugh Mac Diarmid in an essay entitled, 'A Torch Light Procession of One'.

²⁸ *Ibid*, where Heaney quotes Ellman on Yeats.

²⁹ Scully, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-20.

³⁰ Ennis, *In a Green Shade*, pp. 8-25.

³¹ Ennis, *Telling the Bees*, pp. 46-60.

³² *Ibid*, pp. 8 - 44.

³³ Ennis, *Helicon*, 'With the Old Masters', pp. 33-56.

³⁴ Ennis, *Telling the Bees*, pp. 62-100.

³⁵ B. Arkins, 'Too Little Peace: The Political Poetry of Desmond Egan', *Irish Writers and Politics*, Ed. O. Komesu and M. Sekine, *Irish Literary Studies* 36, p. 270 ff.

the ambiguities and complexities of human affairs.³⁶ I attempted to write this kind of poetry in ‘Decisions’: each persona in the poem is an intensely private one, while also being inextricably linked to the positive, or negative, political dynamic of his era. This combination of a personal and communal aesthetic is also discussed by Richard Kearney in ‘Towards a Hermeneutic Imagination’ where he states that a ‘Hermeneutic poetics privileges metaphors of dwelling on earth, building with care, loving the possible, drawing from the well’: this approach is, for Kearney, fundamentally different from that of the romantic cult of subjective genius.³⁷ Kearney refers, in this context, to the recurring metaphor of drawing from a spring and quotes Heidegger, ‘All creation is a drawing, as of water from a spring’. I used the same imagery in *Down in the Deeper Helicon*, a book of ‘personal’ sonnets that are also simultaneously ‘other’ where disparate selves collide, intermingle, coalesce, then fly apart as in the final section of the sequence.³⁸

We are dealing with an existential concept well explored by Sartre. ‘The condemnation of the self’ to others is seen as our *facticity*. It is the reverse side of our freedom. We cannot live with the other and we cannot live without him.³⁹ In this scenario, we have the conflicting claims of an existentialist imagination and a humanistic ethic that in Irish literature is as old as Suibne and is a theme I have explored again in *Near St. Mullins*.⁴⁰

In negotiating between this Scylla and Charybdis, I have consistently employed the use of the persona. Eliot, himself, has remarked that a poet has ‘a particular medium’ to express, not ‘a

³⁶ R. Kearney, *Transitions*, p. 301. Cf, also, Arkins, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

³⁷ Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity*, p. 48.

³⁸ Ennis, *Helicon*, ‘The Gentle Palm, Muse Country II p. 97-112. Cf also Ennis, *A Drink of Spring* for an earlier ‘drawing’ from the spring. Cf. Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 76.

³⁹ Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, pp. 243-248, where Kearney discusses ethics, literature and history with reference to the philosophy of Sartre.

⁴⁰ Ennis, *Near St. Mullins*, where the figures of Ronan and Moling represent the ‘humanist’ stance.

personality'⁴¹ and it is in this sense that I use the term persona. The persona, as a mechanism for aesthetic recreation, allows one to imagine oneself under the other person's skin, to *see and say* things as if one were, momentarily, another and to experience how the other lives. The methodology is a commonplace in drama and fiction. As a poetic imaginative device, it opens up for us in a more concentrated format the 'otherness' of the other. We are raised to his heights, sink to his depths and explore the often barren hinterlands in between, his skin and bone and vitals become ours: we 'must' lie down with the other in 'the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.'

A sense of aesthetic coherence has also been afforded me by a spontaneous orientation on my part to the use of myth and archetype. This tendency may be at least partly attributable to what Robert Welch explains as the 'peculiar fortune of Irish literature that it is, in all its phases, totally absorbed by origins'.⁴² In this study he quotes (in translation) from the poet Seán O'Riordáin: 'there must be a searching out of a pattern other than one's own. When one contacts that pattern, thoroughly experiences it, then one realises and experiences one's own'.⁴³ I find this concept related to Eliot's more formal portrayal of 'the objective correlative [as] a situation, a chain of events which act as formula of that particular emotion'⁴⁴ In the same work, Robert Welch refers, also, to a writer discovering 'his individuality when he finds ways of entry into the mother-lodes'.⁴⁵ These latter I identify with the primordial archetypes among which, as Jung has stated, the 'anima' is most

⁴¹ Scully, *op. cit.*, p.66, Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

⁴² R. Welch, 'Some Thoughts on Writing a Companion to Irish Literature', *Irish Writers and Society at Large* Ed. M. Sekine, *Irish Literary Studies* 22, p. 230.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 234. Cf. Also Heaney, *Irish Literary Studies* 48, p. 14, 'When a poem begins to move with an energy of its own we can be sure a preconscious source is giving power from below'.

⁴⁴ Scully, *op. cit.*, Eliot, p. 58.

⁴⁵ Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

prominent.⁴⁶ An examination of these recurring patterns, archetypes, or primordial images informs the greater part of this study of my work.

It may be that in the manner of Yeats I, too, regard myth, at least partly, ‘as a sacramental refuge from history, a great tradition of timeless archetypes, restoring the dream of a lost unity of culture’.⁴⁷ But I disavow any homogenous cultural identity as norm or ideal, some fatuous ‘Irishry’; rather, as in the manner of Joyce, I see the use of myth and archetype opening up ‘a poetics of cultural difference’ and an acceptance of plurality.⁴⁸ Myth and archetype, then, would be an exploration of how things could be. The prospect might be very bleak as at the end of ‘Orpheus’ but at least it would be one that was personally striven for. Sometimes, then, by simultaneously demythologising and remythologising (as in ‘Decisions’) we may save the mythic concept. Richard Kearney states that the ‘value of myth resides in its ability to contain more meaning than a narrow history [or telling] of facts’.⁴⁹ Myth here would include, for me, its various constituent archetypes and modes, including narrative.

As regards the poetry itself that I have written and that I write, it would have the critical, mocking, impertinent eye of the Utopian Plato always in Yeatsian attendance.⁵⁰

I say this even though one might momentarily enthuse over some ‘superabundance of imagined response’, or ideally sense the poem ‘walking on air’ – those times when one’s poem ‘has a wildness and yet a subject is also being fulfilled’, when in Frost’s phrase, are

⁴⁶ C.J. Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* p. 32, ‘... the anima is the archetype of life itself’.

⁴⁷ Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity*, ‘Aesthetic Application. Myths of Utopia and Ideology: From Yeats to Joyce’, p. 184.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ‘Hermeneutics of Myth and Tradition’, p. 91.

⁵⁰ W.B. Yeats, ‘What Then’, *Collected Poems*, pp. 347-348.

come across an ‘unexpected supply’ and remember ‘something[we] didn’t know [we] knew.’⁵¹

More often than not, though, in terms of the poetic act itself, it may be yet another abortive ‘raid on the inarticulate’ or, in the words of Jean-Francois Lyotard, ‘the labour of “working through”.. to find the idiom that is least inappropriate’.⁵² This is the state of mind of the Unnamed in ‘Letter to Connla’ whose ideal poem is written only in his head.⁵³

Form for me, as for Pound, would be either fluid (as a tree has form) or fixed (as water is held in a vase), *vers libre* being used when it is more radiant, real and part of the emotion than could be contained in fixed metres.⁵⁴ Thus, ‘The Corbetstown Pieces’ uniquely break the overall sonnet sequence in *Down in the Deeper Helicon*. Like Frost, I would attempt ‘to catch sentence tones – that haven’t been brought to book [with] poems ... all set to trip the reader head foremost into the boundless’.⁵⁵ This was my approach in the sonnets of *Down in the Deeper Helicon* which Sara Berkeley found disconcerting,⁵⁶ the coda being used as the trip-wire and moved around. Also, there, by constantly varying the rhyme-scheme and the position of quatrains, sextets, tercets, couplets and codas, I ensured no two sonnets were the same in form: in this way I was able by conscious and constant variation ‘to make all [the] poems sound as different as possible from each other’.⁵⁷ To vary the image, it is always a case of ‘fly poem or be damned’ in the manner of the flight of Liam O’Flaherty’s young

⁵¹ *Irish Literary Studies* 48, *op. cit.* pp. 4-5, where Heaney discusses the poetry of Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost.

⁵² Kearney, *States of Mind*, p.303.

⁵³ Ennis, *Telling the Bees*, p. 13, where the Unnamed refers to verses already quoted as ‘not written’.

⁵⁴ Scully, *op. cit.*, Pound, ‘Credo’ p. 37.

⁵⁵ Scully, *op. cit.*, Frost, p.49.

⁵⁶ S. Berkeley, Review, *Poetry Ireland Review* 48, pp. 81-82, ‘I could not help faintly suspecting some kind of plot, a conspiracy that kept me always on the edge of understanding’.

⁵⁷ Scully, *op. cit.*, Frost, p. 54 ‘The Figure a Poem Makes’.

seagull.⁵⁸ The poems are also written as if intensely felt: to quote Frost again, ‘no tears in the writer, no tears in the reader’. Frost has a particularly lovely image of a poetic construct that I try more and more to emulate: ‘like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting’.⁵⁹

Any poet’s aesthetic could be an interminable list of do’s and don’t’s. One might echo William Carlos Williams, ‘I have never been one to write by Rule, even by my own rules’.⁶⁰ Hart Crane’s advice is perhaps best when he states that ‘a poet will accidentally define his time well enough simply by reacting honestly and to the full extent of his sensibilities to the states of passion, experience and rumination that fate forces on him, first hand’.⁶¹ This is the ‘heavy metal’ I referred to in the Dedalus Introduction.⁶² As regards ‘horizons’ these must be kept open. I have never been tempted by the need to exploit Ireland rather than to express it.⁶³ It is also as important for me to feel at home in ‘The Far East’⁶⁴ and ‘With Tutenkamen’⁶⁵ as in *The Burren Days*. The artist, like the Infant Child of Prague, holds the world in his hand and I have sought themes as well literary and personal paradigms far afield. Ireland, like Egypt, as Mary Massoud writes, can boast of a singular past.⁶⁶ And, like many other westerners, I sensed a real affinity with the young Egyptian king: his attempts at

⁵⁸ Cf. O’Flaherty’s short story, ‘His First Flight’, *The Short Stories of Liam O’Flaherty*, pp. 36-38.

⁵⁹ Scully, *op. cit.*, Frost, p. 57.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, Williams, p. 71, ‘A New Measure’.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, Crane, p. 162, ‘General Aims and Theories’ from *Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet*, by Philip Horton.

⁶² Deane, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁶³ D. Kiberd, ‘Decolonising the Mind: Douglas Hyde and Irish Ireland’, *Rural Ireland, Real Ireland*, Ed. J. Genet, *Irish Literary Studies* 49, p. 121. ‘The Irish writer has always been confronted with a choice: either to express Ireland or to exploit it.’ My midland poems set in the forties and fifties hopefully ‘express’ the spirit of that place.

⁶⁴ Ennis, *Down in the Deeper Helicon*, p. 84.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 62-66.

⁶⁶ M. Massoud, ‘Introductory: Irishness and Egyptianness’, *Literary Inter-Relations: Ireland, Egypt, and the Far East*, *Irish Literary Studies*, 47, p. 14.

reformation and his acceptance of tradition in his life as well as the vulnerability of his young person when the layers of gold were stripped away amid the intimacies of his tomb.

The rest is mechanics, the Yeatsian ‘trade’. Metre will satisfy a need for ritual repetition. Rhyme, as Seamus Heaney details in his essay on Yeats and Larkin, can show us *how* to endure – ‘the inhuman, the recalcitrant, desolation and violence are embraced in a great “Rejoice” as in Yeats’s “The Man and the Echo”.’⁶⁷ The mechanics of poetry will always be with us. In his essay, ‘Rhyme in modern Anglo-Irish Poetry’ Peter Denman finds a drift from internal and cross-rhyming (associated with the early Clarke) to the end-rhyme formats of Heaney and Murphy.⁶⁸ For trenchant commentary on contemporary public affairs, Clarke also used vertical rhyme as I do in ‘Fair City’.⁶⁹ Assonance also extends for me the scope of rhyming or free verse conventions. Denman echoes Heaney when he refers to the binding power of rhyme and its sense of ‘strong closural force’.⁷⁰ Codas, too, will ‘set the darkness echoing’.

Finally, echoing Heaney’s comments on Robert Lowell, my aim would be to have a poetic line exactly equal to the occasion.⁷¹ After ‘Orpheus’, there is no need to flex the ‘literary muscle’.⁷² Let the verse be ‘igneous’ (‘Telling the Bees’) or ‘sedimentary’ (*Arboretum*).⁷³ At all costs, the work should ‘engage’ as in the Orphic mode. Each poem can be an Orphic act, an attempt to win back the muse Eurydice, only to see her slip away from one’s fingers

⁶⁷ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, p. 163, where Heaney discusses Yeats’s poem.

⁶⁸ P. Denman, ‘Rhyme in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry’, *Literature and the Changing Ireland*, Ed. P. Connolly, *Irish Literary Studies* 9, p. 190.

⁶⁹ Ennis, *In a Green Shade*, pp. 85 - 88 especially.

⁷⁰ P. Denman, *op. cit.* p.196.

⁷¹ S. Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue*, p. 147.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.129, where Heaney discusses two kinds of poetry one ‘igneous with event’ and the other, *sedimentary* with *record*.’

despite the poet's 'constantly singing'.⁷⁴ As ever, in the words of Marianne Moore quoting

Auden:

'There is only one thing that all poetry must do: it must praise all it can for being as for happening'.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Title of a James Simmons Poetry Collection (1980).

⁷⁵ Scully, *op. cit.*, p. 107.