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## A Survey of Seamus Heaney's "Glanmore Sonnets" as Modern Pastoral Lyrics

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Seamus Heaney, a famous Irish poet after Yeats, has written some pastoral lyrics from his experiences of farm life and childhood memories. These poems, in spite of his simple overt praise of a rustic farm life, have layers of meaning with their vast allusiveness and implications. He is an extremely literary writer dealing with history from the Celtic myth and a long English literary history. Though his style reminds that of a Victorian poet through his allusions of nature, he is a modern poet of innovative skills and senses. The explication of his representative sonnet sequence, the "Glanmore Sonnets" will reveal exquisite, complicated poetics of a modern poet. The poems are basically love poems, and the love is directed to his beloved wife, his lifetime companion. The poems relate the cultivation of a land to the poet's excavating language from the classics and to the images of love making. Through a careful reading of the sonnets this article will broaden our knowledge on how a modern love lyric of layered meanings can retain the past tradition in its complicated poetics.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Like Robert Frost in America, Seamus Heaney, one of most well-known but unintelligible modern poets, is basically a pastoral poet in his love and praise for the simple, naturalistic life. He explores and broadens his poetic world by tracing the vast tradition of English poetry while constantly renewing his subjects and techniques in his modern poems. *Field Work*, his fifth collection, belongs to his later poems and yet, as Corcoran admits "the fact that Heaney chooses to write a sonnet sequence at this stage of his career, . . . , is in one way his most open acknowledgement in *Field Work* of an indebtedness to the English lyric tradition" (142). In a way, Heaney,

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at this mature stage of his poetic career, is “engaged upon a cultural and tribal exploration; he is testing out his cultural inheritance to see where the significant deposits are located; but he is not engaged upon a mindless submission to the old tradition or the goddess of whatever. Heaney is interested in individualism, in the way that Jung explained it, as being a holding-in-balance of the sense of the self with the sense of larger cultural archetypes or entities” (Robert 155).

Heaney's attraction and greatness seem to lie in his capability to personalize his various cultural experiences and not to lose himself in the mysterious world of history. After his deep immersion into the past he returns to the real. Reality and the surreal or imagination coexist in his poetic world. From his cherished personal memories and experiences he gets reminded of the importance of the actual world in his poems. Through a careful explication of his representative sonnet sequence, this paper will analyze the way Heaney modernizes and individualizes his themes while maintaining his stance in the midst of the vast English poetic tradition.

*Field Work* contains “a number of exquisitely worked elegies (Robert 167).” The ten “Glanmore Sonnets” which lie physically at the core of Heaney's fifth collection center on themes, manifest elsewhere in the book. The poems “represent a particularly notable step in Heaney's poetic development. . . suddenly offering up the most conventional form of lyric poem” (Foster 94). It seems quite natural for a middle aged poet to seek an escape from the hurly-burly of a city life to a quiet seclusion in the countryside. The poems realize the poet's dream praising the rustic life of almost no challenges and tangles. The sonnets comment on a transfer, from Belfast to Glanmore, close to Dublin, a change from an urban environment back into a rural one, in some ways close to Heaney's own first world: “a sensuously exact evocation of living eye-level close to the processes and seasons of the natural world, its animal life and its vegetation” (Corcoran 142).

The sonnet sequence introduces multiple themes. Heaney's choice of the sonnet form “indicates a desire to reestablish the ‘old values’ of order, harmony, and lyric ceremony in his work, after the highly-politicised, thrusting quatrains of *The North*” (Parker 167). Appropriately the sequence begins with a dedication to his ‘patron’ at Glanmore, Ann Saddlemyer, the

academic who had leased the cottage to the couple. She is addressed as 'our heartiest welcomer', a phrase borrowed from Yeats's 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory' (Parker 166).

Heaney's tenacity in holding out to the old tradition while balancing it with his strong individuality defines this sonnet sequence as both traditional and modern. What makes his sonnets appealing to ordinary readers while they struggle with the archaic dictions or dialects and unconventional arrangements of words is his combination of these seemingly contradictory elements within his poems.

## II. NATURAL BACKGROUND AND POETRY MAKING

Following a pastoral convention, the "Glanmore Sonnets" depicts the sympathetic relationship a poet, as the maker of an art form, can have with nature. The poems are pastoral in their reality of a rustic life in a rural setting. A pastoral, which originally designated a poem dealing with shepherds and rustic life, in modern use, often means any poem of rural people and setting. Since this classification is based on subject matter and manner rather than on form, we often use the term in association with other poetic types; we thus have pastoral lyrics.<sup>1)</sup> Throughout the ten sonnets of the sequence, each sonnet taking a variation of the Italian form, the first person speaker, probably Heaney himself, shows deep meditations on nature and the poet's intimate relationship with its various aspects. The poet farmers life close to the processes and seasons of the natural world, its animal life and its vegetation along with his keen, sympathetic responses to natural phenomena is complete with pastoral peace. As in other poems praising nature, nature plays the role of a written text to Heaney. Without artificial language or signs, nature itself can give instant, direct, authentic ideas and constantly refreshing experiences to the minds of the beholders.

Heaney's nature is somewhat modified by the addition of imaginary working of the mind. As the poet sees nature as a reflection of reality, "the intertwining of language and reality recurs"(Corcoran 144). The relationship

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1) See the definition of 'pastorals' in *A Handbook to Literature* ed. C. Hugh Holman & William Harmon. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986.

between the poet's language and real life reoccurs in the poems as is suggested by the simile of Sonnet II, "Each verse returning like the plough turned round." Every line completes themes taken up in the first and a verse is created when the turn is made by the ploughshare from one furrow into the next. The simile is suggested by the derivation of 'verse' from the Latin 'versus,' which meant both a line of verse and the turn made by the ploughshare from one furrow into the next (Corcoran 144). This original linguistic juncture between agriculture and culture is at one with the identifications Heaney makes between nature and poetry: in sonnet III, an evening is referred to be "all crepuscular and iambic," and a wind "Is cadences." This delighted, sensuous merging of facts of nature and culture may derive its originating impulse from pastoral tradition.

The sonnet sequence draws an analogy between agricultural matters such as the cultivation of the soil and the poet's creation of new words. The main theme of the poems is concerning the artist's commitment to his vocation, overcoming the human vulnerability in the face of harsh circumstance and death.

Throughout the sonnet sequence Heaney takes a Wordsworthian delight in the intimate, creative relationship between poetry and nature. Heaney's opening sonnet explains this intimate relationship of a relaxed ease of the Glanmore life, "Now the good life could be to cross a field." The relationship Glanmore has with Heaney can be understood in the second sonnet, when Heaney draws an analogy between Glanmore and a "hedge-school," the means of gaining education one time in Ireland. In Glanmore the poet can slowly and painstakingly learn a voice that might "continue, hold, dispel, appease." As in Wordsworthian belief, the poet has an evocative power, giving force and attractive power to each natural element.

The setting of a rural Glanmore, providing a healthy, productive environment for the speaker's inspiration, suggests the poet's escape from the turbulence of an urban environment. A central factor in this process of renewal was the cognate sensation the place does offer. The frugality of the accommodation in a rather small cottage with few possessions was compensated for by an abundance of natural resources and the surrounding beauty. Like Dove Cottage, the Heaneys' cottage "looks straight into bushes

and into a hillside,” and is surrounded by luxuriant vegetation and animal life. Abandoning the regularity of an urban life enabled him to set up his own rhythms, and enhanced that acute responsiveness to seasonal change, to “planetary, biological reality,” which had been with him from infancy (Parker 166). At Glanmore Heaney seems to have experienced a deeper assuredness than any he had known since his days at Mossbawn. Being reminded of his childhood experiences the poet himself sees the two places as analogous. Both Glanmore and the early place were presided over by benevolent, charitable, female deities, and crowded with children and their enthusiasms.

Biographically, however, for Heaney, the time at Glanmore was “a new departure . . . along his own pathways” (Robert 168). He left his post at Queen's, went south, out of the Northern tangle and complexity into the risky exposure of being a full-time writer. Heaney mentioned the experience of living together at a cottage at Glanmore “—as husband, father, poet—was the ‘makings of my adult self’; it was “an experience which left him renewed and fortified physically, spiritually, imaginatively” (Parker 152). His purpose was to change the rhythms of his life and also his verse, and this displacing of himself was successful as is testified in the “assured, melodious lines” of the poems of *Field Work* (Parker 152). By the time the book was finally published, the Heaneys had been living for three years in an Edwardian house in the Sandymount area of Dublin. They had decided to leave Glanmore because the attraction derived from its remote location had diminished to some extent. Heaney had taken up a permanent teaching post in October 1975 at Carysfort Teacher Training College, and in the following year was appointed Head of the English Department, a post he retained until 1981. The circumstances of domestic life were difficult as the house was a long way from the main road; it was sparsely furnished, and extremely cold in winter. The property was too small for a growing family of five, yet they made it a home.

Essentially the cottage life had served its purpose by enabling the couple to achieve a deeper intimacy and understanding as husband and wife, and had given their kids something of the ‘simple animal joyousness’ and innocent delight which must have characterized Heaney's ‘hedge—school’ experience at Mossbawn.

I wanted the kids to have that sort of wild animal life that I had. They were like little rodents through the hedges . . . I wanted that eye-level life with the backs of ditches, the ferns and the smell of cow-dung, and I suppose I didn't want to lose that in myself (from Parker 152).

The pungency of their delight helped the poet to taste again his 'original place,' and added both piquancy and poignancy to many of the lyrics in his fifth and sixth collections. There he was ploughing his own ground:

Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground . . .

Now the good life could be to cross a field  
 And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe  
 Of ploughs. My lea is deeply tilled.  
 Old ploughsocks gorge the subsoil of each sense . . . .  
 (FW, 33)

"Gorge" here has its uncommon meaning of "plough" (St George is the ploughman), so the ploughshares of tradition (poetic form itself, the trope of the 'good life,') open the subsoil of sense, being, daily life (Robert 168). The steady hand, which is the sign of the individual will, holds the pull of the craft into the depth of tradition, thereby, aligning language to history, translating history into renamed reality (Robert 168). Language, tradition, will, emotion: all cohere in an activity of verse which is sheer blessing (Robert 168). The writing is replete with new awareness. In I as Heaney returns to the field shunning the burdens of politics and responsibilities, he feels as if he hears the acres "breathe" into his spirit, and from the breath attempts "to raise/ A voice." The first sonnet ends with the sanctified images giving rise to the themes of fertile, perpetual motions of nature and energy through a succession of long vowels and its nimble iambic rhythm.

. . . *Breasting* the mist, in *sowers'* aprons,  
 My ghosts come *striding* into their *spring stations*.  
 The dream *grain whirls* like freakish *Easter* snows.

In sonnet II, Heaney "restates his essentially religious, Jungian view of the act of creation" (Parker 167). He implies that, behind the creation of any art form, an impenetrable mystery of conspiracy exists. The impenetrable mystery that lies behind the creation of any work of art takes

place when the poet attunes the natural rhythm. Finding himself now “in the hedge—school of Glanmore,” Heaney prays that his humble surroundings will tutor him in song, provide him with a poetic instrument that might “continue, hold, dispel, appease” his epiphanies and fears. The stone connives with the chisel, the wood—grain instructs the mallet.

These lyric experiences at Glanmore mingle with Heaney's memories of Mossbawn, and the shift of time and place in IV, V and VI continues. Each sonnet records moments in the making of his poetic sensibility, aural, visual, tactile stimuli. Sonnet IV makes analogies between the childhood longing to hear the engine's ‘iron tune’ and the adult poet's striving after verbal strength and resonance; both involve keeping ‘an ear to the line’ for something that might never be realized. Instead of hearing the potent, promised sound of ‘flange and piston pitched along the ground,’ the music of that alluring, frightening, populous, mechanized world beyond his borders, the child's faith, patience and persistence earn only a meagre reward the dull thump of “Struck couplings and shuntings,” and the sight of a few ephemeral ripples shaking “Silently across our drinking water.” The child's failure is only temporary and refreshing ideas of encouragement can be achieved after the taste of loss and frustration. Thus, the memory related to the soil and the place and the cultivation of the soil converge into the creation of poems.

### III. THE POET AS ETYMOLOGIST

The poem is about language; especially, the creation of new words which describe most adequately nature and natural phenomena. This creation of new words has something to do with the creation of love. Heaney is “not rural and sturdy and domestic, with his feet planted firmly in the Irish mud, but is instead an ornamentalist, a word collector, a connoisseur of fine language for its own sake” (Alvarez 16).

He is not reticent but seductive with fine language. Ground is the word which ends the first line of the first sonnet, in the phrase “opened ground.” The “ground” is that of poetry itself (Corcoran 143). In the “Glanmore Sonnets,” the phrase is deliberately translated out of the historical agony into the realm of aesthetics (Corcoran 144). The opening of hidden “ground”

means that the poet is searching out tradition as well as adding and creating new meanings of words. Sonnet II shows the opening up of the “hiding places” of one's power, as the connotative words such as “sensings” and “mountings” indicate. However, the sonnet VI refers to “the unsayable lights,” reminding us of the difficulty with which complex experiences struggle out of its “hiding place” into the articulation of a poem. It is also interesting that Heaney mentions the art of sculpture in its relation to writing poetry, when in II, Oisín Kelly is imagined “hankering after stone/ That connived with the chisel, as if the grain/ Remembered what the mallet tapped to know.”

The irony lies in Heaney's pretense to be a rural poet who just retired from the busy life in turbulent cities. He is far from countrified; instead, he sounds like an intensely literary writer, bringing in heroes and heroines with names from Irish myth and quoting the dialect in variants of words. The sonnet sequence is greatly allusive to other poems. The fact that Heaney chooses to write a sonnet sequence is in one way his most open acknowledgement of an indebtedness to the English lyric tradition, especially to Thomas Wyatt, the first English sonneteer, who appears in the last Glanmore sonnet's question “How like you this?” Wordsworth appears at the beginning of the sequence, sonnet III. Sonnets IV, V, and VI may also be thought Wordsworthian in the way they seek out moments from Heaney's childhood, the expansion of rich imaginative experience. In IV, the child misses the reputed “iron tune” of the train when he puts his ear to the line, but the poet retrieves a poem from the memory. And in sonnet VI the legendary story of “the man who dared the ice” is brought in from Heaney's childhood memory.

In the fifth sonnet of the sequence Heaney makes a whole poem out of “boortrees,” a variant of “bourtrees,” which is the old Scots' dialect for the elder tree. From “the ‘boortree’ bower of his first home he examines the distinctive textures of the two languages and traditions that shaped his upbringing, the intimate native tongue of Mossbawn and the more formal, extended register of language acquired at St Columb's and Queen's” (Parker 167). His naming of the tree as “bower tree” expresses the relationship in the creation of new words can have with the creation of love in the world. The bower tree offers for the poet the place to meditate on new words as



well as to develop a self-fulfilling love relationship.

Heaney often mingles sensuality with other senses such as smell, touch, taste, these different senses implying love and desire. In the same sonnet the definition, "Elderberry? It is shires dreaming wine," achieves a blend of sexual passion and domestic affection. The poet's role as an "etymologist" under the tree whose "small buds" "shoot" and "flourish" connotes sexual, productive implications. The "boortree" is offered as an instance of what has made this poet an "etymologist of roots and graftings" in the "tree" of language. An appropriate note of stiffness enters in the fifth line, when Heaney recalls how Standard English forms were imposed upon him, "elderberry I have learned to call it." "Elderberry," by contrast, is "shires dreaming wine," an image suggestive perhaps of English opulence and pretentiousness, a world away from the homeliness and fecundity of "saucers brimmed with meal" (Parker 169). Despite his clear preference for the 'bruised' language of home, Heaney is not insensible to the benefits derived from that other culture (Parker 169). To Heaney the making of a poem itself is an act of naturalization, setting into sensuous Irish stock linguistic slivers from his English education, cultivated words like "corrugations," "swart," "caviar," and "etymologist."

#### IV. THE ROLE OF WIFE AS A REMINDER OF REALITY

The underlying theme of the "Glanmore Sonnets," as modern pastoral lyrics, is about the creation of poetry and love. As their life together strengthens the marriage and enriches their family life, the poet's wife, Marie, becomes an important presence in the "Glanmore Sonnets," the central sequence of *Field Work* which draws together the themes of art, love and language. They praise love, especially the intimacy with nature and the love relationship between husband and wife. The poet's cultivation of land and naming things of nature are deeply related to his love and desire toward his wife. The love relationship is a most common, domestic love life the poet has with his wife. The poet equates his wife with natural phenomena. His wife, with her continual presence in the sonnets like other natural elements, offers both inspirational source and often a restraint on the poet's excessive imaginative power.

Unlike the traditionally acknowledged role of women as inspirational sources, in this modernized view of women the wife works as a reminder of practical worldly responsibilities and duties. The poet constantly needs his wife to achieve a balanced relationship between lyric and life, imagination and reality, making him accept the responsibility for what he says. In Sonnets III, VIII, IX and X, Marie is a “stabilising and energising force” (Parker 167).

We had been married six years, and, you know, I think it takes a while to get to know how to be married. What happened to us personally as a couple, as a family, was that we got married again in a different way. We started life again together.

The image of the poet's wife consorts with unbeautified, almost cacophonous sounds which are delightful in their natural harmony. Sonnet III records one such epiphany, a marriage of sound and sight (Parker 168). The sensual music, the lyric's images are almost too intense, too exquisite. Crisp, explosive 'k's consort with each other and climax in that delicious polysyllable, 'crepuscular,' which can mean 'indistinct,' 'glimmering,' or simply 'pertaining to twilight.'

This evening the cuckoo and the corncrake  
(So much, too much) consorted at twilight.  
It was all crepuscular and iambic.

As if driven by the 'melodious grace' of the sounds Heaney often places 'checks' in the poem, such as the phrase in parentheses and the deflating comment of his wife at the mention of 'Dorothy and William.' When Heaney is about to make a direct comparison of his wife and himself, “in their strange loneliness,” to Dorothy and William in Rydal Mount, his romanticization is in check by his wife's interruption. The poet dreams as did Wordsworth, when he suggests the similarity between himself and Dorothy; whereupon he has his wife interrupt: “You're not going to compare us two. . .?” It is “a shaft against hubris typical of Heaney” (Parker 167). Having recognised and voiced his feeling of affinity with a lyric giant such as Wordsworth, he fears his own impertinence. To allude, for Heaney, is to pay tribute, to claim kin, but not equality (Parker 167). And so in the final couplet he retreats to a durable ground, to nature, to “a rustling and twig-combing breeze,” to modest “cadences.”

The poem shows the overcoming of the dangers through mutual understanding as in sonnet VII, for example, the fierce overnight gales described in the octave gives way in the setnet, and the poet's jubilant tone is depicted in a phrase, "marvelous and actual" and the poet's loud proclamation of "A haven." In the sonnet, just before "Midnight and closedown," he would listen to the litany of names from the BBC weather forecast—"Dogger, Rockall, malin, Shetland, Faroes, Finisterre" – and picture awesome, mysterious regions, inhabited solely by cutting winds. Solace and sanctuary prove to be temporary. In contrast to these exposed spaces, possessed for long periods by "Green, swift upsurges" of natural violence, are "the lee" and "lees" of Wicklow, which Heaney had made his "haven."

In VIII and IX, threatening elements converge on Glanmore, bringing with them black presences, bloody reflections, which serve as a reminder, of an objective correlate of, terror-stricken experiences from his Mossbawn childhood as well as explosions and carnage from his recent experiences.

Thunderlight on the split logs: big raindrops  
At body heat and lush with omen  
spattering dark on the hatchet iron

His vivid, fearful imagination breeds familiar animals as evil presences – the magpie, the toad, the rat – and induces him to interpret their natural activities as sinister maneuvering.

Heaney's excessive indulgence in the sounds of nature and thereby the imaginative creative moments are checked by the wife's tart retorts. But, in Sonnet IX the roles are reversed, and it is now the turn of the poet's wife to feel chaotic. She says she isn't merely 'imagining things.' Having come to the 'hedge-school' of Glanmore to contemplate and compose, however, Heaney resents being forced into action and away from imagining, into abandoning the idealized "burnished bay tree" of poetry for the "tart-leafed" reek of reality and responsibility. To the poet, the thought of having to kill the rat generates repugnant images from childhood, "Blood on a pitch-fork, blood on chaff and hay/ Rats speared in the sweat and dust of threshing." Though he is spared the role of executioner by the empty briar's "swishing," he cannot evade the fear that still "Haunts" his wife's face, and his own guilt at having failed her.

The uniqueness of this modern lyric lies in the poet's affirmation of love under the influences of the outside conflicts. This trend reflects the modern transition from the early romanticizations of love to a praise for the mundane unornamental love of daily life. The sonnets find their comforts in "pastoral" calm, in poetry, and in the achieved mutuality of marriage yet these consolations are set in their frailty against reminders of the world's pain. The poet and his wife succeed in making a small protective cell of love among the reminders of worldly pain and conflicts. In VIII, the innocent sight of a magpie inspecting a sleeping horse brings to mind the "armour and carrion" of a historical battlefield. In IX, a rat "sways on the briar like infected fruit," terrifying the poet's wife, and other rats killed in threshing leave their "Blood in a pitch-fork, blood on chaff and hay." In the midst of their jubilant loving state, like anybody else, they still recognize their vulnerability to the pain or pathos of life itself. The juxtaposition of the countering elements adds to the poignancy of the sonnets. The bitter memory of human suffering of sonnet VIII is countered with the urgent imperative of sexual desire, as in the phrase "My all of you," which expresses the man's immediate need to be taken out of himself, out of his recognition of reality. With this all-pervasive circumstances of violence in mind, Heaney dramatizes "his anxieties over the morality, justification and efficacy of poetic utterance in contemporary Ireland" (Parker 154). By celebrating the experience of his marriage everyday, Heaney began to answer such questions and to learn to trust 'in the clear light.' In sonnet X, the surreal is firmly embedded in the physical reality and the literary within personal experience (Parker 171). The actuality of the "moss," "Donegal," "turf-banks," "wetting drizzle" and "dripping sapling birches" keeps the allusions of the famous runaway lovers—Lorenzo and Jessica from *The Merchant of Venice* and Diarmuid and Grainne from Celtic myth — from seeming romantic. After the ninth line where biblical resonances ('And in that dream I dreamt') dally with the tender conversational tones of an Elizabethan love lyric—Sir Thomas Wyatt's "They flee from me" is the source for "how like you this?"— the sonnet moves from the 'public' domain of literature into the private past (Parker 171). Again it is the decisive act of his wife, her deliberate kiss, that breaks the spell, that frees them from stasis of history and raises their relationship onto a new, exquisitely

sensuous stage of physical nature. Through this process and subsequent acts of love, a space has been created which is uniquely theirs, a “separateness,” a place for dewy dreams. The sequence closes with the poet asserting the priority of domestic love over political/ social responsibilities, yet at the same time acknowledging the fact that sexual communion, like the poetic act, seems to offer only a temporary “respite” from the “cold climate” of external realities. The final sonnet evokes a dream in which husband and wife lie down together and apart, in the attitude of death, as well as the embrace of sexual love. Though adverse political conditions might continue to threaten the lyric impulse, Heaney remains resolute for sowing the “dream grain” and helping the “dream grain” whirl.

I dreamt we slept in a moss in Donegal  
On turf banks under blankets, with our faces  
Exposed all night in a wetting drizzle,  
Pallid as the dripping sapling birches.  
Lorenzo and Jessica in a cold climate.  
Diarmuid and Grainne waiting to be found.  
Darkly asperged and censed, we were laid out  
Like breathing effigies on a raised ground.

The last two lines can be purely ornamental; yet they imply the desire for the continuity of their mundane love and add a solemn, reverberating, Tennysonian grandeur. In order to break the spell his terror has induced and purge away his increasingly alarming sense of exposure, Heaney introduces the figure of his wife into the poem, and a shared memory. Instead of calming him, this image of appeased suffering intensifies the urgency of his needs, his hunger for a sexual catharsis which will free him from the pangs of conscience and consciousness for a moment.

The sonnet sequence as love lyrics expose Heaney's gift as a modern poet. He has an abundant gift which “the English distrust in one another but expect of the Irish: a fine way with the language” (Alvarez 16). He is a poet bestowed with words and, like all lovers, he might want to display the beauties and range of subtleties to his beloved. Unlike most, however, he knows how to discipline his passion. This process of discreetly disclosing his passion is done through literary allusions and restraint of his emotion, thus enhancing the poetic effect. Here he proposes his act of atonement, in

the form of a dream embracing the most intimate of memories. Even the final image of the sequence has its chilly undertone: “it is not rest” which is seen on the couple's “dewy dreaming faces” but “respite,” the temporary peace that comes between.

## V. CONCLUSION

Written in the traditional form of the sonnet sequence, the ‘Glanmore Sonnets’ celebrates the day's process and the diversity of living. The pleasure they gather seems to exist within the boundary of the acknowledged value system. They praise marriage and the possible fury of erotic love between the husband and wife. However, through the poet's wild imaginative power, the poet moves beyond the cliches of married life and embodies “a sense of freedom and release” (Robert 172). Heaney, like imagination itself, has the power of flight moving over impossible distances. In a way his apartness from the rule-bound lives of the sane gives him an access to the minute world of nature. In Heaney's poems “the discourse of nature works against and is measured by the discourse of culture” (Robert 172).

Heaney has written his sonnet sequence in the midst of the frightening but exciting challenges of the outside world. What marks him as a master poet is his effort to temporarily evade conflicting situations and his readiness to accept the changes. A reoccurring concern in *Field Work* as in other collections of poems around the same period is the tension between song and suffering. In counterpart to the spiritual harmony and artistic growth enjoyed by the poet, Heaney was aware of the “immolacable, disconsolate wailing” of sirens continuing in the North. During their last two years in Glanmore, 1975 and 1976, killings in the province totalled 247 and 297 respectively— amongst the victims, his second cousin, Colum McCartney, killed in a random sectarian attack (Robert 172).

It is almost miraculous for a poet writing at the latter end of the twentieth century to sound so Victorian. Heaney's skill in this difficult balancing act seems to be the answer to his extraordinary popularity. The British “have never taken more easily or so willingly to Modernism: Apart

from Joyce and Beckett, the great experimental movement in literature was largely an American concern: Eliot, Pound, Crane, Moore, Stevens, Williams, all of them attempting in their different ways to break the links with English poetry and make it new in distinctly American or cosmopolitan ways” (Alvarez 16). If modernism, in other words, was a literary Declaration of Independence. Heaney was the poet who followed the gradual process of change adapting the old forms to the rhythms of twentieth century speech. So the contemporary critics are comfortable with Heaney because he himself is comfortably in a recognizable tradition.

Heaney is also a rural poet, born and brought up in the country and now wisely retired to it from the hurly-burly of literary life. He suggests his analogousness to Wordsworth in one poem, his position in it, however, is far from countrified. As with other modern poets, he is an intensely literary writer: his poems on the Irish troubles sound like Yeats, his elegy on Lowell sounds like Lowell; he brings in heroes and heroines with beautiful names from Irish myth, and quotes Wyatt and Dante.

The ‘Glanmore Sonnets’ is superb love lyrics praising the love relationship between husband and wife and yet containing within them the poet's concerns about language and writing then finally the concerns of the actual world. In the poems immediately succeeding the sonnets, Heaney again dwells on the critical role played by his wife in his personal and artistic maturation.

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