

LIKE PILGRIMS TO THIS MOMENT:
MYTH, HISTORY, AND POLITICS
IN THE EARLY WRITING OF
SEAMUS HEANEY AND LEONARD COHEN

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts
In the Department of English
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the early work of poets Leonard Cohen and Seamus Heaney in light of their treatment of mythology, ritual, and mythologization, moving either from personal to political awareness (Heaney), or from political to personal awareness (Cohen). Heaney, writing in the midst of the Irish Troubles throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, slowly works up to political awareness as the situation from which he is writing becomes more dire. By contrast, Cohen writes during the beginnings of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, moving progressively farther away from the highly political and mythologized work of his first book. This thesis analyzes both poets' first four books of poetry and how each poet addresses the politics of his historical time and place as a minority figure: an Irish Catholic in Northern Ireland, and an Anglophone Jew in Montreal, respectively. Ultimately, each poet chooses to mythologize and use traditional mythologies as a means of addressing contemporary horrors before being poetically (and politically) exhausted by the spiritual and mental exertion involved in the "poetry of disfigurement."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the guidance of my supervisor and the Department of English during my tenure at the University of Saskatchewan. I would also like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, as well as the College of Graduate Studies and the Department of English for their generous support while completing my thesis. Finally, the support of my family has been invaluable during what has been both a fruitful and frustrating time.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1975, Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney put himself in the shoes of a primeval adulteress in *North's* "Punishment": "I can feel the tug / of the halter at the nape / of her neck, the wind / on her naked front" (1-4). The poem, which makes connections between the respective horrors of Heaney's contemporary Belfast and ancient civilization, draws a shaming admission out of the author more pertinent to the contemporaneous than the prehistoric. He compares the adulteress's treatment to that of Catholic schoolgirls in Belfast, who were literally tarred and feathered by the Provisional IRA for flirting with British soldiers (Collins 96). Though he spends much of the poem exploring the primordial adulteress's appearance and making conjectures on what had happened to her, the crux of the poem comes at its end. In the last four stanzas Heaney shifts from identifying with the adulteress to identifying with the bystanders who said nothing as she was hanged for her crimes: "I almost love you / but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence" (29-31). Heaney knows this, because he understands such silence from personal experience: "I who have stood dumb / when your betraying sisters, / cauled in tar, / wept by the railings" (39-40).

Some ten years earlier, on the other side of the Atlantic, Montreal Jewish poet Leonard Cohen wrote "I Have Two Bars of Soap," an erotic poem of death and sex that draws on ancient Jewish rituals to sanctify the act of love. Though the poem's most striking aspect is the speaker's obsession with the object of his affection, "I Have Two Bars of Soap" is fully steeped in Cohen's cultural inheritance as a Jewish man. The speaker notes his soap is "the fragrance of almonds" (2), an essence closely linked with the Pesach, which is the Jewish holiday celebrating the Israelite flight

from Egypt documented in the Book of Exodus. The act of washing his lover and anointing her with “a jar of oil, / just like in the Bible” (8-9) is a ritual cleansing, both of the Pesach and beyond.

Though markedly different in theme, subject matter, and tone, these poems are connected by a mutual preoccupation with ritual and mythology: the ritual killing of adulteresses and the ritual cleansing of a religious feast. What is more, that preoccupation with myth speaks as much to these poets’ contemporary situation as it does to their cultural inheritance as each poet makes past ritual pertinent to their modern lives. A comment by T.S. Eliot in his 1919 essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” serves to elucidate both poets’ concerns in their respective first four books of poetry. Eliot makes the connection between literature of the past and literature of the present:

No poet [. . .] has his complete meaning alone [. . .] you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead [. . .] Existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them [. . .] Whoever has approved of this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. (Eliot 104)

Eliot spoke as much to the creation of a literary canon as to how present concerns alter one’s perception of the past. However, the fact remains that Heaney and Cohen set themselves “among the dead.” From poems that look to a mythologized history (Heaney’s “Saint Francis and the Birds” or Cohen’s “Song of the Hellenist”) to pieces that make the everyday larger than life (Heaney’s “Dockers” or Cohen’s “Celebration”), the poets use myth, history, and ritual throughout their early careers to make statements about their own identity, both political and personal. This thesis addresses the first ten years of each poet’s career and their first four books of poetry. It will examine the evolution of each poet’s treatment of mythology and mythologization in light of identity, moving either from personal to political (Heaney), or from political to personal (Cohen).

Heaney and Cohen, separated by nationality, identity, and geographic location, might seem an unlikely pairing. However, overarching similarities between their respective identities are made clear with the examination of the cultures within which they grew up and first became poets.

Heaney, born in 1939 on a farm outside the City of Derry (called such by Heaney himself, rather than the British "Londonderry"), was educated and eventually taught in Belfast. He grew to maturity as a man and poet in difficult times for his homeland. There had been bombings on and off in Northern Ireland for most of the century, but in the 1960s relations between loyalist and republican took a turn for the worse. Running parallel to a Unionist campaign seeking the reunification of North and South was a general civil rights campaign instigated predominantly by Catholics who demanded equal standing with their Protestant counterparts in terms of employment and fair treatment by officials. These actions were roundly condemned by Loyalists (led by Ian Paisley) who saw the general civil rights movement as nationalism in sheep's clothing (Harkness 94). Loyalists mounted counter-protests in response to the civil rights marches, and the city streets of Northern Ireland became increasingly dangerous throughout 1967 and 1968. On 5 October 1968, a peaceful protest that turned violent in Derry is cited by historian David Harkness as the beginning of what is now called "the Troubles" (95). However, in early 1969 a civil rights march from Belfast to Derry was met with "opposition of the most violent and bigoted kind" (95), with neither government nor police taking any action to quell the organized attacks on the peaceful march. Any hope of defusing the already tense situation in Northern Ireland was lost, as public outrage polarized citizens and British intervention was required for the first time in nearly 50 years. In 1972 the Belfast administration was suspended and Westminster took political control of the six counties, effecting total British involvement in the crisis (96).

Heaney has since marked the 1969 incident as a watershed moment for him, as it was after this confrontation between Protestants and Catholics that he ceased attempting to remain an unbiased observer in the ongoing conflict (Hancock 111). However, even before that moment, Heaney's writing was already becoming gradually more preoccupied with the violence dominating his homeland as attack and counterattack shook the neighbourhoods of Belfast and Derry (Harkness

96). As his poem "Punishment" illustrates, when the poet did make reference to the Troubles, he wrote not of the civil violence marring the landscape of his home, but of a mytho-historical continuum that did not necessarily offer solutions to the Troubles, offering a larger context in which he could express his own hopes and misgivings. That context shifted as both the Troubles and Heaney's career progressed throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. One detects an increasingly pessimistic attitude as the hopeful naturalist of Heaney's first book gives way to the impotently angry Irishman of the mid-1970s, mirroring the rapidly deteriorating situation in the northern six counties.

Andrew Foley characterizes the poet's newfound political preoccupation "as 'an answering Irish myth': as a defining symbol of what [Heaney] terms the 'national consciousness' of the Irish Catholics; and as a repository of Irish cultural history" (62-63). While Foley focuses predominantly on the bog poetry of Heaney's third and fourth volumes (*Wintering Out* and *North*), the cultivation of national consciousness is a pursuit Heaney begins with first collection *Death of a Naturalist* and expands in his second collection, *Door into the Dark*. From listening to his father cultivating the garden ("Digging") in his first collection to digging right down into the bogs in his third and fourth, Heaney combines the fertile imagery of animal husbandry and agriculture with the mythologization of landscape and the annals of history, creating an Ireland of the mind that is equally charming and horrifying in turns. Throughout his work, Heaney constantly makes the ritual and myth of the past pertinent to the contemporary violence with which he lived and worked throughout his early career. Moreover, he mythologizes the contemporary in turn to create a cohesive picture of Irish life, though that picture shifts through the four books.

Whereas Heaney came to maturity as a poet in a time of crisis and violence, Cohen came of age during the very beginnings of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, a time that saw positive changes for Jews in the religious and cultural paradigms of his native city, Montreal. Prior to World War II, Montreal's Jewish community was largely ghettoized along St. Lawrence Boulevard and

discriminated against as a result of its cultural, linguistic, and economic differences (Langlais 53, 59-61, 119). After World War II, however, the shock of war and Nazi atrocities committed against the Jewish people prompted a reevaluation of the western attitude toward Jews (111-12). Beginning just before the war, but burgeoning in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, a new dialogue opened between the Catholic and Judaic faiths in Quebec (124-25).

The Jewish community participating in this new dialogue after World War II was not quite the same community that had been oppressed by the Catholic majority prior to the war. Cohen, as part of a new generation of Jewish Montreal poets, differed from his predecessors. Before the war, the Jewish community had been comprised largely of working-class Jews of Eastern European extraction. It was insular, its geographical location was limited, its dress was distinct from that of larger Montreal, and its primary language was Yiddish (Cohen's family belonged to this group of Montreal Jews, Cohen being the third generation of his family born in Montreal). In the post-war period, however, new economic and educational opportunities for Jews allowed them to move more freely in the larger community: into the universities, into the middle class, and into traditionally non-Jewish neighborhoods (111-21). Moreover, many Holocaust survivors from across Europe and Northern Africa immigrated to Montreal, creating a still more culturally diverse landscape in the city.

Jews of Cohen's generation grew up speaking English rather than Yiddish, went to university, and interacted with the French-Catholic community much more than had Jews of the previous generation (Langlais 111-12). Cohen, for example, lived in Westmount, a wealthy area of Montreal, and attended high school alongside both Catholics and Jews (Nadel 20). The end result of these shifts in the community was that Jews largely ceased to be the beleaguered minority they had once been. The community, which had been a highly visible monolith tied together by language, dress, geography, and shared history, became a multicultural population of more starkly varying economic standing spread right across the city (Langlais 113).

Like Heaney's early evolution, Cohen's progress as a poet follows that of his native society. He begins his public career as a poet with *Let Us Compare Mythologies* in 1956, a volume steeped in righteous anger and examination of societal conscience. Unlike Heaney, he begins with a poetic voice that is alternately combative and pensive, largely politically aware and reliant on the mytho-historic development of his people, the Jews. Whereas Heaney generally examines his own heritage in isolation from his larger culture, Cohen is intensely aware of his status as a beleaguered minority in poems such as "For Wilf and His House" and "Song of the Hellenist." Despite the new economic and cultural mobility Montreal Jews had at the beginning of Cohen's career, the community was still cognizant of its separateness from the rest of Montreal and of the anti-Semitism that had once dominated the city's culture and the atrocities so recently committed against the cultural group (Langlais 113-14). Langlais comes to the somewhat paradoxical conclusion that Jews both assimilated and refused to assimilate, in that they became superficially similar to the Quebecois but refused to enter fully into the culture as a result of historical wariness (114). Cohen's early poetry reflects that distrust. Indeed, Cohen's early poetry immediately expresses the combative ambivalence that it takes Heaney ten years to address. As the Quiet Revolution advanced, however, so did his poetry: from the angry young man of his first volume to the whimsically sarcastic voice of his fourth, Cohen's relationship to his culture's identity, mythology, and mythologization gradually become a source of interest rather than anger.

Cohen is sometimes characterized as "going down instead of up" (Djwa 34). That is, Cohen's poetry is a descent inwards, and the myth he creates is not so much cultural as personal. Unlike the majority of Heaney's early poetry, which concerns itself more with the physical than the self, Cohen's writing is very much centered on the body and the mind of the individual. However, though Cohen's poetic landscape is of the mind and body, it is a landscape nonetheless. The poet takes the cultural memories of his people, ritual, myth, and history, and makes them pertinent to his

own struggles. As his career progresses, he moves from righteous indignation as representative of a wronged people to a less didactic, but sometimes darker, voice. His poetry becomes less “Jewish” than Heaney’s is “Irish” in the end, but myth and ritual are constant companions in Cohen’s lexicon.

There are several points of contact between Heaney and Cohen that make comparisons between them significant. The first of these, of course, is their mutual preoccupation with myth and mythologization. Both writers have been considered “priest-poets” (Djwa 36, Healy 55), as though by navigating and creating mythologies they are simultaneously worshiping their craft and educating the reader. Heaney demonstrates this most clearly in his poem “Freedman,” from *North*, in which he articulates the slavery of ritual, as he is “subjugated yearly under arches” (1). Through the first three stanzas Heaney writes abstrusely, but in the final stanza “poetry arrived in that city” (13) and his words are crystal clear, as if his realization of the existence of poetry loosens his tongue and finally he speaks clearly. He notes, “they will say I bite the hand that fed me” (16), because he has replaced the ritual of Catholicism with poetry. As such, poetry becomes his religion, and he as a poet is one of its priests. His representations of mythology in that book and in previous volumes speaks to an instructive tone, as he speaks in the first person of moments, images, and events as if they were parables. Similarly, Cohen’s poetry often has an air of instruction around it, as he imparts moral lessons in poems such as “Isaiah,” and challenges preconceived notions of religion and identity in poems such as “For Wilf and His House” and “A cross didn’t fall on me” by rewriting and comparing mythologies that exist in a canon external to Cohen’s own writing.

Before exploring the poets’ respective mythologies, however, it is necessary to have a working definition of mythology and what it might encompass. Howard Schwartz, a scholar of Jewish scripture, defines “mythology” quite nebulously as “a people’s stories about origins, deities, ancestors, and heroes” (14). He characterizes mythology as such in light of stories from the Torah, but the very vagueness of this definition allows for a larger interpretation, especially in light of the

historical moments in which Cohen and Heaney are writing. In an article on post-World War II Jewish writing, Religious Studies scholar Oren Baruch Stier writes:

But myths are real. As narratives of what “was” in the past (ancient or recent, fabulous or historical) and of how the “present” came to be, myths, in all their variety, effectively motivate societies and fuel the consolidation of social groups in their never-ending quest for self-definition. (68)

Stier goes on to make the connection between memory, myth, and tradition: “each may be simply a different way of referring to the stories that social groups tell each other about their past” (70), and each of these plays its part in preserving national identity (78). The act of commemorating and remembering history allows those stories to pass into the collective memory and as such, become a sort of mythology. Consequently, Cohen’s invitation to compare mythologies need not be limited to the ancient, and as Cohen’s career progresses, his mythmaking gradually becomes less tied to the traditional.

Likewise, Heaney’s mythologies go beyond the mythology of Christianity or the ancient ritual of prehistoric bog men. Just as Cohen makes the most obvious connections to mythology in poems such as “Saviours,” which expounds upon heroes of the Torah, it is Heaney’s bog poetry that is most clearly tied to myth. As Floyd Collins writes, in his bog poems, “Heaney consolidates his mythic North, deepening the parallels between recent sectarian killings in Ulster and victims of ritual violence in Iron Age Denmark” (93). That said, ritual and myth saturate his poetry even from the beginning, when his sense of place is so firm as to be immovable. It is clear even from the first page of Heaney’s first volume that ritual and myth are an intrinsic part of not only his personal identity, but his poetic identity as well. William Doreski notes that in *Death of a Naturalist* Heaney “distances himself from his subject and even his own actions” (166) so that he becomes a cultural observer, ritualizing in verse the everyday goings-on of a rural community in Northern Ireland. Even his first book, firmly entrenched in rural Derry, is essentially recording “a people’s stories about origins”

(Schwartz 14), and as such, can in places be characterized as mythologization though Heaney does not necessarily call upon ancient traditions for legitimacy.

A second significant point of contact for these two poets is how their treatment of mythology effects an inverse evolution. Cohen begins with the broad mytho-historic context of his people's entire history in poems such as "Song of the Hellenist" and "For Wilf and His House," offering an ambivalent perspective about a people's ability to grow and change. Heaney, on the other hand, begins with the close mythologies of himself, his family, and his immediate surroundings, finding unity and continuity among the past and present in poems such as "Requiem for the Croppies" and "Digging." As each poet evolves over his first four books, his treatment of mythology and level of political engagement shift from his own starting point to become more closely identifiable with the other poet's starting point. Heaney becomes increasingly preoccupied with larger matters in poems such as "The Tollund Man" and "Traditions," while also becoming less certain of unity — though certainly of continuity — between past and present in poems such as "Punishment" and "Whatever You Say Say Nothing." Cohen, by contrast, moves closer to the body and the self, relinquishing the didacticism and combativeness of early poetry and shifting towards a softer and more personal, yet also more ambiguous interpretation of events in poems such as "Montreal 1964" and "A cross didn't fall on me."

This shift is possibly a result of their cultures' respective places in the larger context. Cohen's culture has just come through slaughter in a both literal and figurative sense. Jews have just survived the Holocaust and over a millennium of systemic and systematic prejudice. To say that this prejudice was eradicated would be naïve, but at the same time new opportunities were opening up for Jews in Cohen's Montreal and across the world with a new conciliatory movement in his home city and the creation of a new homeland for Jews in the Middle East. On the other side, Heaney's culture is in the midst of crisis, with the poet writing in the middle of a rapidly deteriorating political and civic

situation. As the larger situation deteriorates, so does Heaney's faith in his own ability to transcend the crisis in which he lives, and the necessity to speak out about that crisis and Ireland's history as a whole makes Heaney both more didactic and ambivalent in places. As Cohen's cultural situation improves on the whole, he finds a more personal perspective in his poetry that does not rely on the tropes of mythology to make larger points about his culture and its relationship with the world.

These shifts in poetic perspective speak to each poet's tendency to use the process of mythologizing to expound upon subjects that are significant to him personally, as well as politically. In early poems such as "Digging" and "Spring Rites," Heaney ritualizes the prosaic, elevating common agricultural practices in his native County Derry to mythic proportions. His sense of place is firmly established in his first two books of poetry, *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*. These poems are rarely overtly political, but Heaney often shows himself to be struggling with his identity as a farmer's son who has abandoned his ancestral occupation and become a man of letters. With that sense of place and crisis of identity created, the poet moves into a more political mindset, at first tentatively, in poems such as "The Outlaw" and "Bogland." In *Wintering Out* and *North*, the poet uses primordial bogs and ancient mythology to express misgivings about the Troubles in Northern Ireland in poems such as "Belderg," "Funeral Rites," and "Bog Queen," culminating in the second part of *North*, when ancient myth and contemporary conflict come together in the near-epic poem, "Whatever You Say Say Nothing." From first volume to fourth, Heaney shifts from the sweetly pastoral to the overtly political as he assumes a more outspoken voice. He becomes less and less concerned with his personal identity and more interested in his political identity and how he can find a means to respond to what is going on around him.

Cohen, by contrast, *begins* his poetic career with contemporary conflict in poems such as "For Wilf and His House" and "Song of the Hellenist." The poet, with an acerbic tongue and earnest anger, casts an authoritative eye on the history of his people, incorporating Hebrew scripture

and Jewish history to make clear statements about the contemporary situation in which Jews find themselves as he writes. As his career progresses, Cohen becomes less concerned with contemporary Jewish politics and begins to focus more on the personal and the sensual in poems such as "I Have Two Bars of Soap" and "Celebration." In *Flowers For Hitler* Cohen continues to record the history of his people, but his interaction with history and art begins to strip away the trappings of myth, using sometimes horrifying imagery. Finally, in *Parasites of Heaven*, the poet walks away from his traditional and semi-traditional mythologies to find a new, more personal interaction with the mythic in poems such as "Suzanne takes you down" — a poem not entirely dissimilar from "Digging."

For Heaney and Cohen the question of identity is an important one, and more often than not that identity is bound up not in what they have done or who they profess themselves to be, but what they *are*, as dictated by their history and cultural mythology: Heaney *is* an Irish Catholic and Cohen *is* a Jew. In both writers' explorations of myth and ritual, there is an important and fairly constant multi-faceted dialectic between past and present, myth and reality, self and other, "beauty and atrocity" (Heaney *North* "The Grauballe Man" 42). That said, neither's cultural identity is static. As each moves through his first four books of poetry, this identity shifts and changes, sometimes growing narrower and sometimes widening to encompass a variety of potential identities; through their careers, they are in a constant state of becoming.

Cohen begins his career with dialectic, finding continuity and discord between the past and present in poems such as "Song of the Hellenist" and "For Wilf and His House," as well as essentially "talking back" to conquering peoples. Throughout his first and second volumes, there is a dialogue between what has been and what is supposed to have been in both concrete and mythic terms, especially in poems such as "The Genius" and others, where he plays with the often anti-Semitic archetypes of Jewry, and "Isaiah," which queries whether true sentiment is lost in the overweening rituals of his religion. Cohen's dialectic becomes at first more urgent in *Flowers for*

Hitler, when he enters into an elaborately sarcastic conversation. He becomes a mocking observer of participants in cultural struggles in poems such as "Montreal 1964" and scoffs at the delicate moral sensibilities of observers in poems such as "All There is to Know About Adolph Eichmann," which flagrantly refuses to see the poetics of atrocity. In *Parasites of Heaven* the dialectic fades into a softer, more subtle, ongoing conversation between the mythic and concrete in poems, where Cohen gives up his didacticism to gently reject grandiose mythology in poems such as "A cross didn't fall on me," and find comparisons rather than dialectic in poems such as "Suzanne takes you down."

Heaney, on the other hand, begins with that softer conversation in his first book. Poems such as "Digging" find unity in the continuity between past and present, professing that, like his father before him, he will dig — albeit in a different way. There is certainly the struggle between his history and his future, as demonstrated by the poem from which the volume takes its name, "Death of a Naturalist," but at the same time Heaney finds himself to be a happy observer of the pastoral farmer's life that is not quite his own anymore. His second volume follows much the same pattern, though there is the beginning of an unease that makes itself known in poems such as "In Gallarus Oratory," which finds the same fault with ritual that Cohen's early poetry did in "Isaiah" and "Saviours," and "The Outlaw," which subtly begins his discussion about the ethics of illegality in a land where the enforcement of law is not always ethical. His third volume finally addresses the Troubles, albeit not in a particularly concrete manner. He starts a dialogue between self and other quite literally by discussing Irish and British linguistics in "Traditions," and exploring the same continuity between past and present oppressions in "The Tollund Man" that Cohen did in "Song of the Hellenist." Heaney's fourth volume in some ways reflects Cohen's first, where the ambivalent dialectic between past and present, concrete and mythic, saturate the volume in poems such as the aforementioned "Punishment," which conflates the fabled past with his very real and troubled contemporary time, as well as "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," which sees Heaney breaking out of

his tendency to simply set the Troubles in a mytho-historic context, and instead grapple with them as a man involved in those selfsame problems. Cohen and Heaney both address mythology in a fairly constant way, and many times they address it in a similar way. However, they do not address it in the same way at the same time. Each evolves throughout his early career to find a new place for himself at the end of his fourth volume, which is in fact the other's position at his career's outset.

Both poets navigate the complexities of the cultural conflicts in which they participate and observe by casting their eyes both forward backwards, each creating a continuum in which the history and mythology of their respective peoples are remembered, rewritten, and newly made.

CHAPTER 1
EARLY FORAYS INTO MYTHOLOGY

"The squat pen rests. I'll dig with it."

- Heaney, "Digging"

While Heaney and Cohen both use mythology in their first books, the frequency of that mythology and its variety are directly proportional to how concerned each poet is with his contemporary politics. Both draw on their cultures' respective histories as source material. However, Cohen's lyrics in *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956) often possess a more distinct sense of Jewish mythology (both cultural and religious) which aligns with his more didactic stance in this volume. Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), by contrast, relies primarily on the familial and pastoral mythologies of County Derry. These verses are covertly political because his identity as a northern Irish rural Catholic in the late 1960s is contentious by its very nature. The politics and mythology of Heaney's early poetry stem from his innate understanding of his culture and history. Cohen picks out the political notes in his culture's mythology to express a combative stance regarding his own culture's history. Through examining and comparing poems in *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and *Death of a Naturalist*, it becomes clear that though both poets use and create mythologies, they do so to different purposes. In "Requiem for the Croppies," Heaney finds an endpoint to Ireland's bloody history; in "Dockers," he examines the religious conscience of a working class Protestant man; in "Saint Francis and the Birds," he creates a pastoral scene in which truth can be communicated; and in "Digging," he finds equilibrium between his history and his future. Cohen, on the other hand, points to the transhistorical (but ultimately futile) tendency of Jews to hide themselves in "Song of the Hellenist;" he questions the human propensity to confuse ritual and truth in "Saviours;" and in "For Wilf and His House" he offers an angry invitation for Christians to compare mythologies with him. Where

Heaney searches for (and sometimes finds) answers to his and his country's crisis of identity, Cohen only throws up more questions about how his culture interacts with the world.

The politics of Cohen's first book are largely concerned with his identity as a Jew. He marks 1945 as his true awakening as a Jew, when at the age of eleven he saw pictures from concentration camps and became "politicized by the suffering of the Jews at an early age" (Nadel 19). When his first book of poetry was published in 1956, it had been only 11 years since the conclusion of World War II and that awakening. It is perhaps not surprising that in these early years Cohen's Judaism manifested itself as a political/cultural expression, as Cohen himself has said that he found his Jewish education lacking in the sense that it offered tradition rather than theology (19).

Despite (or, more appropriately, as a result of) the political nature of his contemporary cultural self-identification, Cohen pointedly draws on his religion's mythology in his first book of poetry. In "Song of the Hellenist" Cohen uses mythologized historical incidents primarily as a means of conveying a political statement. The poem focuses on these historical moments to explore near-contemporary identity issues. Drawing on the history of Israel in the years leading up to the Maccabean Revolt, Cohen addresses the issue of Jewish assimilation in two distinct historical moments: the Seleucid (Greek) occupation of Israel in the second century BC and Germany between the wars. Cohen draws on Jewish scriptures to bring forth the story of the half-willing assimilation of the Israelites under the rule of Antiochus IV. Rather than focusing on the triumph of the Hasmonean dynasty (the Maccabees) over the Seleucids, however, Cohen focuses on the beginning of the occupation, when the people of Judea became willing participants in the destruction of their own culture.

The poem begins with the speaker discussing the overpowering attraction of Greek culture in the biblical (mythological) era. It is "too great" — perhaps too great an attraction for Judaism to resist. The second half of the first stanza, however, is addressed to Cohen's own people, the Jews: "I tell you, my people, the statues are too tall. / Beside them we are small and ugly, / blemishes on the

pedestal" (5-7). He repeats the theme of the first full sentence in the stanza when he says the "statues are too tall" (5): the Greeks are too overpowering. The focus of this repeated theme shifts in the second part of the stanza. While the general idea seems to be "Greeks are greater than Jews are," the manner of the speaker's delivery changes in tone; in addressing the Jews, Cohen's speaker does not speak of the Greeks to the Jews (as in the first stanza, where he speaks of the Jews to the Greeks) so much as he speaks as a Hellenized Jew to the Jews about the attractions of Greek culture and the Jewish people's limitations.

At first glance, it may seem that Cohen is expressing a rather dour view of his own culture: they are not good enough to be a part of this Greek culture. However, interpretation of this stanza depends largely on how one chooses to define "greatness." The Greeks of the time held a relatively large empire, divided into three provinces (Seleucid, Ptolemaic, Antigonid); they were among the most technologically developed cultures in the western world. They were, in a temporal sense at least, a *great* people: large, advanced, and established. Greater than the Jews.

As Jewish scripture elucidates, however, that sort of temporal greatness signifies very little in the face of being the Chosen People. Cohen's second stanza reflects aspects of 1 Maccabees 1 quite starkly. This passage explains how "a group of renegade Jews" sought to enter into an agreement with the Gentiles because it had gone so badly for them when they had not. As a result, they introduced non-Jewish customs, built a Greek stadium, married Gentiles, and ultimately rejected the Chosen People's holy covenant with God, "[abandoning] themselves to evil ways" (1 Maccabees 1:11-15). In the First Book of Maccabees, becoming a "greater" people in the Greek sense is to lose one's way from God. From a cultural standpoint, becoming "greater" is to rid oneself of one's traditional culture and, ultimately, identity.

There are important parallels between Cohen's poem and scripture. In both passages, there is cognizance of the potential loss involved in adopting a new culture. While the stakes are different, the danger is essentially the same. In the biblical passage, the price of assimilation is breaking God's

covenant, and in the poem the price of assimilation is the loss of Jewish identity, as is explored later in the poem. The speaker in Cohen's poem says, "my children will boast of their ancestors at Marathon" (33). The speaker's children will be Greek, not Hebrew. In Cohen's eyes, that is breaking covenant in a different but significant way.

It is important to note the difference in Jewish motivation in each text. In scripture the Jews are motivated partly by fear: they enter into a covenant with the Gentiles to avoid disaster. They assimilate into the culture enthusiastically, but the initial impetus is self-preservation. Conversely, in Cohen's poem the Jews are motivated by attraction more than fear as the speaker says, "our young men love you" (2). They begin to lose their identity, but it is because they admire the Greeks, not because they fear them. This scriptural sense of fear and concealment becomes evident later in the poem.

Between the second and third stanzas, Cohen leaps from antiquity to what would be almost contemporary to the poem's publication date; that is, Germany between the wars. The fourth stanza opens with a question. It is not a question for the reader, but a question for the audience within the poem: "'Have you seen my landsmen in the museums, / the brilliant scholars with the dirty fingernails, / standing before the marble gods, / underneath the lot?'" (11-14). The question seems ironic for the audience within the poem, but outside the poem it becomes less like irony and more like covert pride. The blemishes on the pedestals of antiquity are shown to be Jewish scholars. They are not great like the Greeks, with their dirty fingernails "underneath the lot." However, the speaker is sure to tell the audience that these scholars are still brilliant despite their earthy origins.

Cohen wrenches the poem from the mythological to the contemporary in the third stanza by mentioning the late 19th-century anti-Semitic text *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (17), as well as the superficially anti-Semitic poem "Burbank with a Baedaker," by T.S. Eliot (18). Here "Song of the Hellenist" becomes not only transcultural but also transhistorical. He moves from an ancient empire to almost contemporary anti-Semitism by discussing Germany between the wars. Cohen's speaker

superficially mocks Judaism to the straight-nosed *Herrenmenschen* (alternatively translated as “gentleman” and “Master Race,” a clear reference to Nazi Germany) and laughs at the child who reminds him of his heritage by asking him to help prepare a Passover Cake (26-28). However, his references communicate an underlying discontent.

Significantly, it is in the stanzas regarding Europe between the wars that the fear embodied in scripture enters Cohen’s poem. Though it is not articulated, the very fact that Cohen begins to discuss being “among the *Herrenmenschen*, among the close-haired youth” (24-25) communicates an immediate sense of anxiety, given their obvious anti-Semitism. It is not love for a culture that promotes assimilation, but fear of it. The speaker makes light of his Jewish heritage on several counts, and given the implication that he is standing among Nazis, it is not surprising he would underplay that heritage to avoid “disaster upon disaster.” Yet for all that, he still called his landsmen brilliant. There seems to be a conflict between the speaker’s internal feelings and external deportment. The unease of the piece as a whole confuses the reader, as one is never sure whether he honestly believes in his people’s brilliance or if those lines were meant to be ironic.

Glenda Abramson notes that modern Jewish poetry “is noted for its astonishing knowledge of its own sources, the heritage upon which it builds while striving to conform to a new reality” (237). Her essay “Hellenism Revisited: The Uses of Greek Myth in Modern Hebrew Literature” speaks explicitly about the modern Jewish poet’s tendency to discuss Jewish and Greek mythology together to create a new literary world for itself, one that draws on mythology to explain the present and re-imagines old mythologies in light of the present (237-50). The re-imagining of mythology is a fairly constant theme throughout Cohen’s first book (see, for example, “Saviours,” the first “Ballad,” and “Pagans”), but mythology is most explicitly paralleled with contemporary events in “Song of the Hellenist.” Cohen modifies scripture by transforming fear of the Greeks into attraction to them (“our young men love you” [2]), and putting that scriptural fear in Germany between the wars instead. This transformation is significant when one considers what happened after each of these

historical events. In biblical time, the Jews overcame their Greek overlords. In near-contemporary times, six million Jews died at the hands of the *Herrenmenschen*.

Cohen's references to the Holocaust become more insistent in later volumes (most notably, *Flowers for Hitler*). However, here he uses his culture's mythology as a means of making overtly political statements about the same horrific event. In later volumes Cohen uses Holocaust imagery almost whimsically — Montreal poet Jason Camlot calls it “aggressively ironic” (qtd. in Ravvin 127) — but in “Song of the Hellenist” Cohen uses these historical events politically through an almost direct parallel between two eras. He demonstrates both a prejudice against his people and a crisis of identity that are far more universal to the Jews than Heaney's is to the Irish in *his* first book of poetry. This is one of the poems in which Cohen neither seeks nor offers explanations, but only throws out more questions.

At the end of the poem, Cohen shifts once again to ancient mythology:

O cities of the Decapolis,
 call us Alexander, Demetrius, Nicanor . . .
 Dark women, soon I will not love you.
 My children will boast of their ancestors at Marathon
 and under the walls of Troy,
 and Athens, my chiefest joy — (30-36)

Cohen's return to the mythic historical, both structurally and in subject matter, universalizes the Jewish fear that in attempting to be accepted by others, they will lose what they are. The speaker demonstrates this is an old struggle, and in Cohen's contemporary Montreal, a struggle still occurring as new opportunities allowed Montreal Jews to appear less visibly “Jewish.” The worry, in this poem, is that they will also become less Jewish on the inside, as well, no longer seeing the “blemishes on the pedestals” as brilliant scholars.

While Cohen himself may not have felt marginalized or invisible as a result of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, he was writing at a time when Jewish identity was in flux:

[. . .] modernity saw the Jews presented with the prospect of equal civil and even political rights in the countries they called home. These rights, however, came at the explicit price of the abandonment of the Jews' status as a distinct group governed by its own laws and customs. Modernity was thus both a promise and a threat. (Butovsky and Robinson 9-10)

In postwar Montreal, the Jewish community had everything to gain and everything to lose by the hand of friendship extended them, as what would put the cultural group on even footing with the rest of Quebec was also what would force it to relinquish its uniqueness. In the poem, becoming more Greek meant the Jews were willingly giving up their own culture for the sake of gymnasiums and unclean women, and mocking their own people in front of Nazis allowed a certain safety. However, it was at the cost of themselves. Cohen draws on this mythology and history to hint at present anxieties. He creates a dialectic in this piece between oppressed and oppressor, past and present, finding none entirely blameless. "Song of the Hellenist" explores Jewish culpability in the transhistorical crisis of identity more than either Greek or German culpability, as it is the speaker's people who build gymnasiums, not the Greeks, and it is the speaker himself who quotes *the Protocols* and laughs at the child who asks to make a Passover cake. The poem is not about what the Greeks and *Herrenmenschen* did to the Jews; they are essentially passive. It is about what the Jews did to themselves. Curiously, however, Cohen never makes the direct connection between the past, the near-past, and his contemporary Montreal. He deals solely in the abstract, never quite touching his own literal reality. There is no sense of the young Jewish Leonard Cohen in this poem; the speaker is an archetype rather than a person.

By contrast, Heaney's dealings with mythology in his first book of poetry are of a less political nature as the poet favours tactile detail over abstract ideals. Published in 1966 (ten years after Cohen's first book), the volume rarely explores contemporary Irish issues in an overt fashion, let alone the burgeoning political conflict in Belfast. In an interview with Seamus Deane, Heaney says he viewed *Death of a Naturalist* as a volume in which "one part of [his] temperament took over:

the private county Derry part of [himself] rather than the slightly aggravated young Catholic male part" (qtd. in Hughes 109).

That is not to say Heaney was not, on some level, preoccupied with his country's history and its ongoing struggle both with England and itself. In 1966, the same year *Death of a Naturalist* was released, Heaney published "Requiem for the Croppies" in *Dublin Magazine's* commemorative issue of the Easter Uprising's 50th anniversary (Healy 53). This sonnet recalls the June 1798 battle at Vinegar Hill, in which several thousand (primarily Catholic) croppies were killed by British soldiers and Irish yeoman during the Year of Liberty (53-54). The work, which would eventually appear in Heaney's second volume of poetry, was one of the only overtly political works Heaney published in the 1960s. The poem foreshadows Heaney's later work in *Wintering Out* and *North*, drawing on the myth-making qualities and historical parallels he is known for in these later books. He draws on the same devices as Cohen does in "Song of the Hellenist," albeit not as overtly. In choosing to write a poem about 1798 to memorialize 1916, Heaney effects the same sort of historical parallel as Cohen. There is the same sense of continuity between eras, though Heaney offers a decidedly more optimistic view than Cohen does.

Heaney's method of mythologizing is somewhat different from Cohen's, partly as a result of his choice of subject matter. Cohen is explicitly writing about Jewish mythology in that he is writing about biblical events, and elevates later struggles by paralleling them with those biblical events. Heaney, on the other hand, deals specifically with an historical event and elevates it to mythical status through his writing. The different ways each poet connects with the past create very different sorts of poems. Cohen always stands at arms' length from his subject matter, dealing with a mythological and abstract past that rarely touches the specific; for example, there are unclean women and dark women, but no single woman. Heaney, on the other hand, begins with a tactile, immediate reality in "Requiem for the Croppies" with his attention to the details of a scene: there is barley in the croppies' greatcoats (1), and they laid behind ditches (4). However, John F. Healy

discusses several ways in which Heaney elevates this sonnet in his essay, "Seamus Heaney and the Croppies: 1798 and the Poet's Early Political Inclinations." According to Healy, this incident on Vinegar Hill is given mythic significance with Heaney's choice of words. The poet refers to the croppies by and large in human terms ("we," "a people," "priest," "tramp"), while their adversaries are described in mechanical, militaristic terms ("infantry," "cavalry," "cannon") (54). Healy explains this as a device by which Heaney vilifies the British and transforms the croppies into nationalist martyrs, an important mythologizing gesture that gives the Irish nationalist cause a spiritual significance.

In terms of mythmaking, Heaney's treatment of both croppy and British soldier raises the conflict from a doomed military encounter to an epic battle akin to Thermopylae. In Heaney's vision of 1798, the croppies are doomed but hopeful men, run ragged through the Wicklow mountains in eastern Ireland, "Until, on Vinegar Hill, the fatal conclave. / Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon. / The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave" (10-12). Healy notes the significant use of "conclave" in this passage, which is an allusion to the gathering of cardinals at the Vatican to elect a new pope (55). Symbolically, if not actually, these croppies become religious as well as political martyrs.

Like Cohen's work, this poem expresses an important exchange between past and present, but unlike Cohen, Heaney chooses to see progress instead of stagnation, as evidenced by the poem's final line. The bulk of the sonnet explores the martyrdom of the croppies, but it ends on a hopeful note with a figurative resurrection: "They buried us without shroud or coffin / And in August the barley grew up out of the grave" (13-14). The croppies' meagre meal of grain grows out of their blood in later years, offering sustenance to a new generation. As Healy notes, "through blood sacrifice on that Calvary-like hillside, this barley is transformed into spiritual sustenance for those who remember" (55).

Healy does not take this reasoning to its logical conclusion, however. The speaker in the poem writes in the first person, as if he were there: as if he had died at Vinegar Hill but is now explaining it as if alive. The implication is that when the barley grows, the croppies are resurrected — not literally, of course, but their intentions are reborn. These croppies are not only martyrs, then, they are saviours. Of the poem, Heaney writes, “[the 1916] rising was the harvest of seeds sown in 1798, when revolutionary republican ideals and national feeling coalesced in the doctrines of Irish republicanism and in the rebellion of 1798 itself” (qtd. in Healy 54).

Taking the resurrection implication together with this quotation from Heaney, it is fitting to consider 1798 the beginning of Ireland’s Descent to the Dead (that is, when Christ descended to the dead after his crucifixion to free the souls in hell), and 1916 a literal and figurative Easter Sunday. Like Cohen, Heaney draws on his own culture’s mythology, both religious and historical. Unlike Cohen, though, Heaney’s poem seems less concerned with specific contemporary politics than simply hope. “Requiem for the Croppies” is commemorative rather than polemical. It is not until later in his career that Heaney sees the Troubles in this same continuum of Irish resistance and struggle (54).

Like Cohen’s “Song of the Hellenist,” the poem returns to the beginning at its end. Heaney’s poem is book-ended by references to barley, and Cohen’s by the invocation of the decapolis. Both poems change the initial meaning of the references at their end, but in different ways. Cohen’s poem ends with the forsaking of Jewish names, and Heaney’s ends with lost barley growing out of graves. The former communicates loss, while the latter communicates growth. Both these poems speak to larger thematic issues in the poets’ work of the time. Heaney’s optimism in “Requiem for the Croppies” is based in the idea that things can and do change. Instead of an ongoing and unresolvable dialectic, he demonstrates a chronological progress in which Ireland’s situation steadily improves. While there is tension in poems such as “Digging,” “The Early Purges,” and “Follower,” Heaney generally chooses to resolve these conflicts as he finds new continuity between past and

present in "Digging," balances sentiment and practicality in "The Early Purges," and creates a strange sort of parity in "Follower" that, while slightly disturbing, still relies heavily on chronological history and progress. Throughout his early work, Heaney consistently and sometimes doggedly seeks resolution, as well as proof of how things change with the passage of time. The only dialogue between past and present is in Heaney's examination of how things are different from how they used to be.

On the other hand, "Song of the Hellenist" sets individual Jewish predicaments into a transhistorical continuum. His pessimism seems based upon his knowledge of the western world's treatment of Jews, almost since the beginning of written history, and that pessimism spans much of the book in poems such as "For Wilf and His House," "Saviours," "St. Catherine's Street," and "Pagans." Cohen rarely, if ever, offers resolution in these poems. Instead, they mythologize historical moments and many transcend history, creating an ongoing dialectic between past and present in which history constantly repeats itself and never resolves. Through these poems, Cohen queries whether things *can* change.

A clear example of this ongoing query is Cohen's "Saviours." He turns a more ambivalent eye on his culture than Heaney does on his; where Heaney sees evolution, Cohen sees inertia. He paints a picture of a people eternally hoping for a saviour and eternally disappointed. Moreover, he explores what happens to these saviours when they are subject to such veneration. Though the poem was published ten years before "Requiem for the Croppies," "Saviours" seems a cynical answer to Heaney's romanticism. While Cohen's constant struggle with clinical depression has been well documented (Nunziata 3), and might be considered partially responsible for his generally dark view in his poetry, the clarity of his voice and argument in this poem suggest a deeper understanding and a genuine criticism of the predicament.

On one level, "Saviours" is a universal poem, discussing the need for saviours, as well as society's collective abuse of those saviours in attempting to venerate them (23-27). On another level,

however, it is an intensely Jewish poem, indicated in part by the figures Cohen chooses to use as examples within the work: Moses, Job, and David, all significant figures in the Torah. These figures are generally considered to be heroes rather than saviours — the Jewish faith is still waiting for a messiah — but Cohen chooses to call them saviours, pointing to the perhaps unfair status that is thrust upon them by the crowds mentioned in the poem.

The first stanza begins the poem somewhat ambiguously: “The Roman sport of crucifixion / casts across the lands and oceans / an old heavy shadow / which has grown into all the graves” (1-4). The most immediate association with crucifixion would clearly be Christ, the most famous of saviours in the western world. This is an interesting setup for the poem, as it focuses on Christ’s Passion and death, rather than his resurrection; the poem focuses on the saviour’s suffering. This is in direct opposition to Heaney’s symbolism; Heaney alludes to the death and resurrection (in that order), but Cohen alludes to resurrection and death. With this reverse construction, Cohen once again refuses the chronological progress Heaney works so hard to communicate. In this speaker’s mind resurrection is not the end of something difficult, but the beginning of something difficult, as well. Instead of accepting Heaney’s idea that things get better, he is questioning whether they can.

The focus of Cohen’s poem becomes not Christian but Jewish as he draws attention to particular Jewish “saviours” in later stanzas. This poem builds upon the same sense of continuity found in “Song of the Hellenist,” though history is not so much paralleled as it is extrapolated. Rather than referring to historical examples and comparing them to other times in the Jewish people’s history, Cohen takes these histories and demonstrates an ahistorical theme predicated on the desire for salvation and the inevitable disappointment of not finding it. Through the poem Cohen moves from ancient Jewish heroes to present saviours; the second-to-last stanza says, “See whom they bring us today / bearing him triumphantly through the traffic / singing before his death” (28-30). Here, he once again transcends history. As with “Song of the Hellenist,” Cohen demonstrates a near-constant cultural problem, albeit a different one. Cohen’s speaker once again

believes that things do not change, and instead there is only a continuum of history as these same issues assert themselves in new contexts.

Between the first and last few stanzas, however, the speaker gradually shifts from past myth to present conundrum. The poem becomes more concrete in the second stanza: "In the valleys men review / their people's documents / and parties are dispatched to find / this heap of stones and this cave and this pillar" (5-8). The second stanza seems to be a concrete recitation of events: people review their histories and seek out the sites of past glories and past heroes to pay them homage. In the process, however, the more metaphysical tragedy of the third stanza takes place: "And dead heroes are raised on wood / above their discovered tombs / to rehearse their ancient arguments" (9-11). The stanza's literal meaning communicates a larger sense of loss through veneration that the speaker expands upon later in the poem. The idea of dead heroes raised on wood brings to mind once again crucifixion, as if these heroes are raised up only to be killed again, this time slowly and painfully while they replay what they once were for those who observe them. Significantly, Cohen makes the same broad criticism of veneration that Healy does of Heaney's "Requiem for the Croppies." Healy writes of the Heaney poem: "Creating this anonymous voice of the collective dead allows Heaney to remain detached from the sweep of events, thereby diminishing, in favour of his mythologizing, any sense of the magnitude of suffering by individuals swept up by history" (56). In Cohen's poetic universe, the barley growing out of graves would rot in the damp instead of becoming sustenance. Cohen does not necessarily criticize Heaney's brand of hope in this poem so much as he criticizes false hope in general. Unlike Heaney, Cohen recognizes the inability of human "saviours" to cope with the sort of faith people put in them, as heroes and kings "are exhumed to die again in the wilderness" (27).

Cohen looks at these human "saviours" swept up by history in subsequent stanzas. There is a timelessness to the first three stanzas of the poem; the first of them is barely specific, and the second and third speak to a universal tendency to put faith in things and people that might not be

able to handle that sort of adoration. The following three stanzas, however, explore the premise of the second two, drawing examples from Jewish scripture — significantly, referring to three of the Torah's most famous figures, the first of which is Moses. Cohen imagines Moses a static figure on a mountain, nailed high (once again referring to crucifixion imagery), no longer looking at the Promised Land, but beyond it: "Nailed high on a mountain / Moses stares beyond the Jordan / beyond the giants and crumbling walls / and sighs an Egyptian curse" (12-15). The making of a monument, in this case, lessens the hero in that the hero himself ceases to believe in what made him a hero in the first place. He looks beyond the wonders (giants), the crumbling walls (Jericho), and the promised land (Canaan) to curse his predicament in a religion not his own, instead of praying to God as a faith-filled Jew would.

The next stanza deals with a hero of a different nature. Unlike Moses, who faced formidable adversaries and had the power of God on his side though he was materially bereft, Job had all manner of earthly goods taken from him to test his faith. In Cohen's poem, however, Job hangs instead of stands in the burnt field in which he decried God: "Job hangs in a burnt field / unable to frighten the crows / his friends still talking at his feet / and no whirlwind disturbs the quiet desolation" (16-19). Job becomes not a figure of tested faith, but a scarecrow — and a failed one, at that. He cannot even fend off the crows anymore. The whirlwind that was God's presence challenging him to know the mind of God is gone. Instead of a fallen saviour, one might continue to consider Job a symbol of tested faith, but in a new context, in which the spiritual safety of homogenous culture Jews enjoyed prior to the Quiet Revolution is gone. Without the all-encompassing spiritual support of an insular community (i.e., the whirlwind of God's presence), perhaps the whole culture is, like Job, hanging in a field. To fend off the crows they unsuccessfully look for false saviours who ultimately fail to save.

The sixth stanza centres on David, the Israelite king who is credited with galvanizing the Jewish nation and choosing Jerusalem as the spiritual and political centre of Israel. David is

sometimes held to be the greatest of the Israelite kings, though certainly not without fault. In Cohen's incarnation, David is suspended from a roof: "David swings from his roof / and the people say that in his mind / he and his warriors build a great temple" (20-22). David had intended to build a temple for the Ark of the Covenant, but God tells David this task is for a different generation. Scripturally, God had told him that the task of building a temple was not his and he moved beyond the idea, but in Cohen's poem David is stuck in that moment of scripture, 2 Samuel 6 and 7. He does not move forward or backward. Like Moses, he is static. The way Cohen writes him — swinging from a roof — he seems hanged by his own impotence.

All three of these heroes are important symbols in the Judaic tradition: Moses and David as literal saviours of the Jewish people, and Job a powerful symbol of placing trust in God and consequently a saviour of the Jewish people in a spiritual sense. Cohen does not contest the importance of these figures. Rather, he demonstrates what occurs when they are venerated to the exclusion of recognizing what they were. That is, they are each, in their own way, stuck in a particular moment of their lives; the particular moment that he is remembered for most clearly by Jews and Christians alike. The point is not that these heroes are remembered the way Cohen describes them — destitute and faithless — but rather that they become shellacked but hollow shells of what they once were. They are no longer human; they are monuments that in Cohen's mind, at least, ultimately signify nothing on a metaphysical level.

Ronald S. Hendel discusses the problematization of biblical narrative in his essay, "The Poetics of Myth in Genesis." He notes that in the 20th century, the Bible (both history and mythology) "has become increasingly a question of rhetoric, ideology, and poetics rather than history or philology" (157). That is, *how* the Bible yields meaning has become as important as meaning itself. The upshot of that, according to Cohen's poem, is that historical realities are transmogrified by contemporary interpretations of them as they are "nailed to stakes and desert trees" (24). These "men of ages with deathless words" are "exhumed to die again in the wilderness"

(26, 27). Especially significant in these words is that each saviour is crucified after resurrection, as if he dies for the sins of the world after he should be laid to rest, and not before. This overarching metaphor goes back once again to Cohen's preoccupation with dialectic and questioning. He refuses the security of chronological evolution, and instead lays out a constant struggle without resolution and in its place sees a continuing fight that transcends history. This constant struggle reinforces the idea of dialectic, as the present reflects and alters the past in a multitude of ways.

Stier speaks to a similar concern in his essay on myth, nationalism, and collective memory. He almost echoes the anxiety Cohen expresses in this poem, saying, "national memory is forged at the expense of the individual, whose remembrance is recorded so that it can be subsequently swallowed up" (80). These saviours pass into the collective memory of mythology, ceasing to be men and becoming symbols. In memorializing these saviours, people kill their individuality — the same criticism leveled at Heaney's "Requiem for the Croppies." Curiously, however, Cohen resorts to the very methods he is criticizing in this poem. While his examples are more concrete in "Saviours" than in "Song of the Hellenist," the poet still relies on the abstract rather than the specific for most of the poem, and the reader is left wondering, which saints? Which prophets? Whose harps? Heaney's abstraction in "Requiem for the Croppies" glossed over individual struggles for the sake of an imposed narrative, but Cohen's abstraction reinforces the transhistorical nature of his questions and goes to the heart of the issue he is addressing. These questions are not individual concerns or actions, but an entire culture's dilemma. Just as the saviours lose their humanity and individuality, so to do the worshippers.

The final two stanzas bring the poem into the present, though Cohen remains as abstract as ever. For Cohen, this is an ongoing concern: "See whom they bring us today / bearing him triumphantly through the traffic / singing before his death / O he will love us O he will approve of us" (28-31). It is important that Cohen specifies "See whom they bring us *today*." With this word Cohen creates a vision of transience: this is not a saviour for all time. Rather, he will die just as each

of those men of ages died, and a new one will be brought out for the crowd tomorrow. In the meantime, as the final stanza suggests, there will be rituals to keep worshipers placated (32-36). He once again creates a transhistorical problem that reinforces the dialectic between past and present, though he never manages to tie that transhistorical problem to his own time and place.

Cohen places Jews in the same sort of continuum that Heaney places the Irish — where the Irish are digging, the Jews are waiting. In Cohen's mind, however, they have perhaps gotten tired of waiting and have taken to finding new saviours every day. These saviours, then, are not really saviours at all, but a stopgap for the anxieties of a nation. They are things to build ritual around rather than people. In "Saviours," the forced waiting is an ongoing struggle. In "Requiem for the Croppies," the struggle is all but finished — Heaney has not incorporated the ongoing struggle of the Irish into what Brian Hughes calls the "mytho-poetic landscape" of his poetry (109).

The fact that Heaney does not see the burgeoning Troubles as part of the same continuum just yet is perhaps partly why his first volume of poetry does not address them. While "Requiem for the Croppies" was written to a particular purpose for a particular audience, in *Death of a Naturalist* Heaney is left to his own devices. Consequently, the volume is full of short lyrics about his life as the son of a farmer ("At a Potato Digging," "The Early Purges"), a few about his wife ("Poem [for Marie]," "Honeymoon Flight," "Valediction") and a very few touching on Irish history or Catholic mythology ("For the Commander of the Eliza," "Saint Francis and the Birds," "Gravities").

The only time the Troubles are referred to in the volume is in a single stanza of "Docker," and even then it is only mentioned in passing, as a means to describe a man (presumably Protestant) in a pub: "That fist would drop a hammer on a Catholic — / Oh yes, that kind of thing could start again. / The only Roman collar he tolerates / Smiles all round his sleek pint of porter" (5-8).

Tragically, unbeknownst to either Heaney or his docker, that kind of thing did start again, and soon. But here, it is only a possibility, and Heaney's words do not betray whether it is near or far.

As with the first stanza of "Saviours," Heaney comes at the crux of the matter from off-centre — the poem is not explicitly about the Troubles, but it addresses them nonetheless. The poem foreshadows some of his later work, most notably the second section of *North*, a series of near-prose poems addressing the Troubles not as a poet, but as a man. Here, he recognizes the docker, presumably by the indicators he gives in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing":

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule
That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod (III. 13-17)

The way Heaney expresses the Troubles in "Docker" is decidedly more understated than his poetry eventually becomes, and certainly more subtle than the manner in which Cohen addresses cultural concerns and crisis. Instead of making the decision to articulate a position on the Troubles (as Cohen might have done), Heaney decides to place them in the personal context of a man looking at another man in a bar, and the possibly unfair assumptions one makes about the other. The speaker harshly judges the man as a person of regimented faith ("God is a foreman with certain definite views" [10]) simply by looking at him, and as such Heaney speaks to the prejudices of two individuals rather than painting an entire culture with a transhistorical problem.

As with "Requiem for the Croppies," Heaney starts with the immediate (a man in a pub) and moves to the abstract mythic (conflicting faiths). In this poem it is a more obvious shift, but it is the same progression. Whereas Cohen's speaker is off in ancient Israel somewhere for most of "Saviours," Heaney's speaker is in a pub with a guy: a guy the reader might actually meet at some point, with prejudices the reader might have to address. Because Heaney ties it inextricably to reality — a man he could have seen — the poem becomes more pertinent to reality. Though Heaney generally steers clear of the Irish Question in *Death of a Naturalist*, these few lines create a personal connection to larger transhistorical issues that Cohen's whole book barely addresses.

Of course, Heaney by and large chooses to leave the Troubles out of his first volume. Indeed, the only poem speaking explicitly to Heaney's own mythology — the Catholic mythos of hagiography and scripture — is "Saint Francis and the Birds." Try as one might, it is near impossible to find the same political engagement in this poem that is found in "Song of the Hellenist." Instead, the lyric is a sweet ballad about St. Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds: "When Francis preached love to the birds, / They listened, fluttered, throttled up / Into the blue like a flock of words" (1-3). Heaney likens St. Francis to a poet, ending the small lyric with, "Which was the best poem Francis made, / His argument true, his tone light" (9-10).

Many have considered the first poem of the volume, "Digging," to be Heaney's poetic statement of purpose — Charles F. Duffy notes that both Heaney and his critics have singled out "Digging" as one of the most, if not the most important poem of his early career (44). However, it is perhaps these last two lines of "Saint Francis and the Birds" that best communicate Heaney's attitude toward discussing politics within his poetry. The poem's final line suggests a willful disengagement from the sort of heavy dialectic Cohen embraces. Even as Heaney's writing becomes more political in subsequent volume, his tone in some sense remains light. Unlike Cohen's speaker in poems such as *Let Us Compare Mythologies*' "For Wilf and His House" or *The Spice-Box of Earth's* "Isaiah," Heaney generally refuses to make judgments about what people do, but queries why they do it, be it in this volume or in his more overtly political volumes of the early 1970s (Hughes 109). Hughes points out that in later volumes:

[...]the shift has not been, on the whole, towards direct apprehension of the actual — not, that is, towards the articulation of a coherent and embattled political position in the poems themselves, but rather towards the slow, deliberate fleshing out of a mytho-poetic landscape in which the contemporary problem of Ulster, and indeed of Ireland, can be seen in perspective. (109)

Rather than directly addressing the Irish Question, then, Heaney creates a context for it by drawing on the history and mythology of the land and its people. In essence, Heaney is "digging" throughout his entire early career.

Much has been written on politics and place in Heaney's 1970s poetry (particularly *Wintering Out* and *North*), but it is significant that Heaney's sense of place begins here, with *Death of a Naturalist*. Heaney is less politically engaged in his first book than Cohen is in his. Nevertheless, Heaney is a Catholic and a republican in a time and place when, taken together, those markers were fraught with historical and political baggage. As he writes *Death of a Naturalist*, Heaney is sitting on a powder keg that will explode in the following years. Heaney undoubtedly chose to shy away from the more blatantly contentious issues of his contemporary society. That said, throughout *Death of a Naturalist* there is a clear sense that Heaney is struggling with his various identities — husband ("Valediction"), farmer's son ("Death of a Naturalist"), Catholic ("Poor Women in a City Church"), and Irishman. While the volume is in general neither overtly political nor overtly mythological, one can see the seeds of both in its poems, even on the first page in the first poem: "Digging."

Torn between the manual labour of his forefathers and his own more sensitive occupation as scholar and poet, Heaney finds himself divided. The first two stanzas create a sharp divide between Heaney and his father:

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging [...] (1-5)

In this passage the poet is divided from his father in a variety of ways: Heaney is doing the quiet work of writing, while his father is engaged in manual labour; Heaney hears his father, but his father seems not to be aware of him; Heaney is inside, while his father is outside; Heaney is above his father, looking down. While these simple things would be easily rectified in literal terms (Heaney's father could come inside and write a letter, for instance), the divide between Heaney's identity and his father's runs much deeper. The poet's use of weapons as simile ("snug as a gun") creates an immediate urgency. His separation from his father is clearly an important preoccupation, perhaps because a difference in professional occupation might concern more than simply how Heaney was

going to earn a living. Significantly, this is the third poem of Heaney's addressed in this chapter that broaches labour — a common preoccupation for the poet in his first volume.

Collins reads the poem as Heaney wrestling with his identity as an Irishman and poet (19-20). As Eugene O'Brien notes, this divided identity is a result of the poet's movement between spaces, both physical and thematic (*Seamus Heaney Searches for Answers* 34). While weekdays would be spent "studying English literature and becoming enculturated into the middle-class, literary, cultured ethos," on weekends "he was immersed in Catholic, rural, Gaelic, nationalist social cultural mores" (34). This divide in identity is clearly two-fold: the abandonment of his forefathers' manual labour seems, on some level, an abandonment of his identity as a Northern Irish republican, as well. He moves from the Catholic, rural Derry farm to the loyalist, urban university. As in Cohen's "Song of the Hellenist," there is a certain amount of anxiety in "Digging" related to cultural identity. If he moves in Protestant, urban, educated circles, he runs the risk of abandoning his Catholic, rural, nationalist roots. Like "Song of the Hellenist," there is a dialectic between past and present, labourer and poet. Unlike Cohen, he seeks unity between past and present where Cohen found that continuity but discord. Heaney once again links it to the contemporary and the immediate: the labour he grew up with and the people he knows. In "Digging" the poet takes a fairly banal scene and makes it mythological with his ability to transcend the immediate meanings and impressions of a time and place. As John McGurk notes, "Heaney has an uncanny capacity to transform basic intuitions into universal insights" (277). Back, presumably in his family's rural Derry home, Heaney is starkly confronted with this dialectic as he sits inside writing and his father is outside digging.

Heaney does not write about his father's digging with any sort of antipathy. While some humour might be derived at referring to his father's backside as a "straining rump" (6), he clearly admires his father's abilities, finishing his description of his father's act of digging (in both past and present) with "By God, the old man could handle a spade" (15). Through the third and fourth stanzas, there is a clear temporal progression. The third stanza describes the immediate act of

Heaney's father digging in that moment when the poet looks down at him. However, the fourth stanza shifts backward, to when Heaney was a part of the process: "He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep / To scatter new potatoes that we picked, / Loving their cool hardness in our hands" (12-14). There is a clear shift from the present to the past. In the moment Heaney is writing, the poet no longer digs potatoes. He is moving away from what he was, and what his father still is.

Moreover, there is a sense of anxiety about progression in the fifth stanza: "By God, the old man could handle a spade. / Just like his old man" (15-16). This stanza calls to mind the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, which traces Christ's lineage back to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-16). In addition to establishing patrilineal order, Heaney also creates the impression of ancestral labour. This sense of progression parallels nicely with "Requiem for the Croppies," which addresses chronological progression, and eventually resolution. In "Digging," Heaney is working out in personal terms what he dealt with in mytho-historical terms in the other poem.

He continues to use mythological imagery as the poem progresses. Even his description of his grandfather cutting peat has an air of myth about it, as the grandfather is unequivocally the *best*:

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog
[...]
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging. (17-18, 22-23)

This passage is a curious mix between almost onomatopoeic realism and mythmaking. As Collins notes, the "turf breaks up into damp monosyllables" (20). Mythology overtakes realism where Heaney loses the precision of description; he describes his grandfather digging minutely until the phrase "going down and down" (22). There is a sense of eternity in those words — the continuity of generation after generation going down and down, digging. It is here, in the first poem of his first book, that he begins to construct the mytho-poetic landscape that he expands upon in his later, more overtly political volumes. For Heaney, the land is almost a character in itself.

Scholars such as David Lloyd suggest that Heaney's land is constant underneath colonial and human change: "'Digging' holds out the prospect of a return to origins and the consolatory myth of a knowledge which is innocent and without disrupting effect" (22). However, the tension in the poem belies that assumption. Unlike his father, and his father's father before him, Heaney is not digging — at least not in the same sense: "the curt cuts of an edge / Through living roots awaken in my head. / But I've no spade to follow men like them" (26-28).

Rather than hearkening to a placid life, "rural, Catholic, and more remotely, Gaelic" (Lloyd 23), Heaney is at odds with that life, much as the Jews were at odds with their former selves in "Song of the Hellenist." Separated by profession and distance, Heaney attempts to integrate his own identity, shaped both by rural upbringing and urban schooling. Unlike Cohen, who finds no answers, Heaney comes round to melding the two in the final stanza: "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it" (29-31). It is an imperfect echo of the poem's first lines; significantly, the weapons simile ("snug as a gun") is missing. The initial anxiety of the poem has dissipated, because he has realized it is not that he does not dig; rather, he labours in a different way. As Sarah Fulford notes, "Heaney's early poems do not *naively* tap the roots of Irish/Danish soil for an untouched national consciousness. Rather, the effect of the poems is to investigate what digging the land for identity might mean" (111). With this poem Heaney begins to mine the depths of Irish consciousness: personal, national, and mythological. Anthony Purdy notes that "the poem's unconscious verbal triggers (or seeds?) are to be found in the folk wisdom enshrined in sayings and proverbs and internalized by him as a child" (96). It is with this poem that a dialectic between past and present begins in Heaney's work very subtly. Significantly, it is very personal as well. Heaney never does deal in Cohen's abstracts. He is unmistakably tied to what is tangible and tactile, and though he does not cultivate land himself, he observes and understands farm labourers in a way Cohen never even tries to. Unlike Cohen, Heaney characterizes himself as a labourer of a different sort, and thus finds parity with these men with whom he thought he had no common ground.

That very tangible interaction with both ideas and things evolves as Heaney's books progress. In both "Digging" and "Requiem for the Croppies," Heaney's dialectic resolves into unity and chronological progress, but his exploration of the continuum of history in later volumes becomes a complex unresolved dialectic between past and present, minority (republican Catholic) and majority (loyalist Protestant), the rational and the intuitive (Hart 397).

If "Digging" is Heaney's statement of purpose for his first book, then "For Wilf and His House" is Cohen's. Like "Digging," this poem has a strong sense of cultural identity. Unlike Heaney's poem, however, "For Wilf and His House" is steeped in righteous anger. The poem witnesses a transformation in the speaker, from presumed guilt to defiance as Cohen charts the speaker's revelation of Christianity's historical interaction with Judaism. In this poem, Cohen establishes the dialectic that Heaney is only hinting at in "Digging." Heaney's poem searches for (and finds) unity and continuity, but Cohen addresses a rupture in the continuity between past and present as the speaker realizes what he thinks happened in the past is perhaps not what happened at all.

The first stanza of "For Wilf and His House" expresses immediate guilt: "and I wept beside paintings of Calvary / at velvet wounds / and delicate twisted feet" (4-6). Though the speaker refers to his entire culture in this stanza ("When young the Christians told me / how we pinned Jesus / like a lovely butterfly against the wood" [1-3]), these lines have a strong sense of personal culpability. It is not only his ancestors who crucified Jesus; the speaker counts himself as among their number, as if each Jew since the death of Christ is in some way personally responsible for that death. Cohen's use of the first-person plural pronoun "we" recalls Heaney's "Requiem for the Croppies." Though neither Cohen nor Heaney was directly involved in the incident he explores, the poems' respective narrators take ownership of those actions as if they had been. Both poets incorporate their cultures' histories into their contemporary identities.

It is important to note, however, that though the speaker's reaction to his knowledge of the death of Christ is an emotional one, it is equally an aesthetic reaction. He creates a sensual scene based around the artistic representations of Christ's crucifixion. In his description Christ is a beautiful and delicate thing, placed almost lovingly upon the wood of the cross. However, it is a painting — an image, not a reality. Cohen does not weep at the literal crucifixion, but at its representation. While Cohen finally starts to address tangible detail, he is still at a distance from his subject matter; it is not the reality, but a depiction of reality. And as the reader learns at the end of the poem, it is an "elaborate lie" (28). This first stanza expresses sorrow and implied personal guilt, but already Cohen foreshadows a new understanding that develops throughout the course of the poem.

The second stanza begins a shift in the speaker's perspective. While the first stanza clearly addresses his personal sorrow, the second turns to the broadly historical. What is especially interesting about this stanza is the conflation of Jewish and Christian history. Obviously, much of Jewish and Christian history is shared history, as Jewish scriptures comprise the first two-thirds of the Christian Bible. That said, here Cohen combines the Old Testament suffering of the Jews at the hands of the Egyptians with the nation's post-biblical suffering at the hands of Christians. The first three lines of this stanza deal with Christian warriors: "But he could not hang softly long, / your fighters so proud with bugles, / bending flowers with their silver stain" (7-9). Cohen seems to be referring to the Crusades: bugles of the conquerors, foliage destroyed by angry swords. Significantly, Cohen separates Christ from the followers of Christ; His delicate sacrifice is disturbed by the actions of His followers.

In the fourth line of the stanza, Cohen shifts from post-biblical history to the Old Testament; more specifically, the speaker refers to Exodus, and Moses' preparation of the tent for the Ark: "and when I faced the Ark for counting, / trembling underneath the burning oil" (10-11). The mention of burning oil makes a strong parallel to the Ark of the Covenant founded under

Moses, and the animal sacrifices Moses was to perform on the first day of the first month (Exodus 40: 1-11). Additionally significant is the mention of “the meadow of running flesh,” which “turned sour” (12) While the Israelites were in the wilderness they ate what God provided: manna from heaven covering the camp along with the dew, and flocks of quails descending upon the camp, both of which rotted after the first day, except on the Sabbath. Instead of manna, however, the speaker’s perceived guilt is what has gone sour. He gently abandons his teachers (presumably Christians), and warns those who come after him of what they will be accused (13-14).

In this light, the idea of “waiting to be counted” takes a new, more contemporary meaning: Jews in concentration camps counted by numbers on their arms. Cohen figuratively parallels aspects of this moment in Exodus with the historical reality his culture had so recently faced: Cohen’s speaker stands before the Ark (and the altar of burnt sacrifice) to be counted, waiting for God’s judgment to be imposed. At the same time, he stands before that same altar of burnt sacrifice in a death camp. The lines “bugles / bending flowers with their silver stain” (8-9) puts the reader in mind of guns, which were certainly not present in the book of Exodus. This allows a more contemporary parallel to be drawn. In this case, the Jewish people are forcibly offered as burnt sacrifices to a perceived divinity gone perverse. With this reading, the meadow of running flesh turned sour refers more to Jewish mass graves in Poland and Germany, bodies left to rot in the open when they were not burned. In many ways, the Holocaust is an echo of the Exodus. Enslaved, mistreated, and killed, the Israelites fled their Egyptian overlords in the hopes of finding something better — which they did. Eventually.

Cohen is writing shortly after World War II, a time of renewal for the Jewish people, when many of them are returning to their historical homeland: Canaan. Both historical moments are fraught with hardship and great evil at the hands of either Egyptians or those raised in the Christian tradition (i.e., Nazis, and the silently consenting anti-Semitism that plagued Europe, based in part on the perception of Jews as “Christ-killers”), but at the end of both is hope and a homeland. As

Cohen's speaker takes on the guilt of his ancestors as his own, it is only fitting that he would also take on their suffering, as well. Though the speaker is clearly talking in contemporary times about his contemporary perceptions growing up, he assumes both the suffering and guilt of his people as part of his cultural identity.

This parallel between past and present once again echoes Cohen's other poems, most clearly "Song of the Hellenist," and to a lesser extent, "Saviours." The former poem addresses a continuing struggle for the Jewish people, much as "For Wilf and His House" does, by paralleling past and present as well as coming full circle at the end by returning to the decapolis and visions of Calvary, respectively. "Saviours," addresses the same anxiety of false belief, though it manifests itself differently here.

Cohen, however, seems less concerned with hope than he is with hardship, as demonstrated in the poem's third stanza. Cohen speaks of his own youth; living in a young country sullied less than most European countries by anti-Semitism (15-17), there is a freedom in Montreal and Canada that permitted him to mourn openly as a child: "there I could sing my heathen tears / between the summersaults and chestnut battles" (18-19). This passage denotes youth; these two activities, summersaults and chestnut battles — quite literally fights with chestnuts — are the games of children. This awakening, then, is clearly the awakening of a very young man, barely more than a child. That fact speaks to the spitting anger of the piece; they are the indignant and angry words of a young man just realizing he has been wronged by his elders.

As the stanza progresses, the subject turns outward. It is more figurative: "love the distant saint / who fed his arm to flies / mourn the crushed ant / and despise the reason of the heel" (20-23). The mention of a "distant saint" (20) refers to Cohen's early interest in Christianity, and in this stanza the distance of both atrocity and bona fide saints allows the speaker (and Cohen) to interact with Christianity in a more calm environment than would have been permitted at almost any other time and place in the past 2000 years. The "crushed ant" metaphor is one that transcends religion.

Rather than pointing at Christianity or Judaism, these two lines speak of a broader sense of empathy that mourns for the crushed ant, be it a Christian martyr or a Jewish victim. Equally, these lines indict the reason of the heel's violence, be it contemporary (secular), historical (Christian) or biblical (pagan).

The fifth and final stanza sees an end in sight as it acknowledges the new promise for Jews in postwar Europe and North America: "Raging and weeping are left on the early road. / Now each in his holy hill / the glittering and hurting days are almost done" (24-26). In the fourth line of the stanza, the line from which the title of the volume is taken, Cohen's speaker issues a challenge to his Christian compatriots: "Then let us compare mythologies" (28). That challenge can be issued because the very accusations Cohen levels are, according to his speaker, drifting into the past. That is not to say, of course, that anti-Semitism has been eradicated; rather, the systematic segregation of, and discrimination against, Jews was beginning to come to an end in the time Cohen was writing. As such, the speaker is able to issue the challenges Jews before him could not. Significantly, it is in these last stanzas that Cohen finds an answer instead of a question, as he realizes how badly he and his people have been misused and does not question that. This is possibly the only time in the entire volume this occurs. However, it is the singular answer that Cohen's speaker finds that enables the poet to ask the rest of the questions he throws out in the volume. The invitation to compare mythologies is not only to other faiths, but his own, as well.

The final stanza of the poem echoes the first stanza, much as Heaney's "Digging" (and "Song of the Hellenist," and "Requiem for the Croppies") did. However, rather than doing away with anxiety, as "Digging" does, the poem's cyclical nature promotes anxiety by virtue of its contentiousness. His weeping at the sight of Calvary is turned bitter: "I have learned my elaborate lie / of soaring crosses and poisoned thorns / and how my fathers nailed him / like a bat against a barn" (29-31). Cohen's speaker now separates himself from Calvary — it is no longer "we" (all of Jewry), but "my fathers." He reneges on his perceived personal responsibility. It is no longer a

beautiful picture, but an elaborate lie. Cohen refuses the culpability he so readily assumed in the first stanza. Furthermore, the imagery surrounding Calvary in this stanza is not so delicate. Christ becomes a bat against a barn, not a fragile butterfly. The brutality of this image is part of the elaborate lie he has learned from the mouths of Christians. Throughout the poem, Cohen covers the brutality against his own people with poeticism. In this moment, any veil of romanticism drops and the reality of violence committed against Jews is clear not by accusation, but by acknowledging the lie that justified it. Like Heaney, Cohen is separating his forefathers from himself, and yet also acknowledging his own place on this continuum. The speaker's revelation in this poem is more controversial than Heaney's is in his; nevertheless, both poets are sitting in the midst of something and becoming aware of that fact. "For Wilf and His House" and "Digging" follow a similar structure. Both speakers are at the end of a line of succession and grappling with their place in that succession, and each poem documents a realization on the speaker's part. However, the realizations and the context of succession are very different. Cohen finds a history steeped in suffering and prejudice and breaks away from it in an act of defiance. Heaney finds a history of continuity as grandfather and father both cultivated the earth, and he seeks his own place in that order. The conclusions the two poets draw are diametrically opposed. Where Heaney finds unity, Cohen finds discord; where Heaney resolves the dialectic, Cohen thematically declares it irresolvable.

This is due in part to the historical situation in which the poets find themselves. Cohen is emerging self-consciously from a long period of discrimination punctuated by the single most horrifying event of the 20th century. Conversely, Heaney is writing at a time when suffering and prejudice are largely under his society's surface, not yet burst forth into violence. Already pessimistic at the age of 22, Cohen examines his culture's history and present through the use of mythology and mythologizing, asking questions and issuing challenges but giving no answers to anything except his own personal realization. Conversely, Heaney explores aspects of his own culture with a clearly teleological view. He writes as if he, like Cohen, is at the end of something rather than the

beginning, and that all will be resolved in time. As their work progresses in subsequent volumes, both poets shift in focus. While *Let Us Compare Mythologies* is certainly rather suspicious of the tropes of mythology and culture, it remains an earnest inspection of Cohen's own mythology and the mythology of others. In subsequent books, Cohen's poetry moves increasingly farther away from that earnest examination of culture and broad, traditional mythologies, choosing to focus more closely on an examination of mythology in light of personal (rather than political) identity. Heaney, by contrast, moves toward the political identity that is present in Cohen's first book and his digging becomes less about personal and familial identity. In the process, he turns up more questions than answers about his political identity as he plumbs the depths of Irish consciousness and Irish landscape, and abandons the conclusions of which he was so certain in *Death of a Naturalist*.

CHAPTER 2
FINDING NEW DEPTHS

"I labour towards it still."

- Heaney, Bogland

As Heaney and Cohen expand their poetic horizons throughout their next books, one detects a slow shift away from their previous positions, if not their preoccupations. Cohen remains fascinated with Jewish and Christian mythology, both ancient and contemporary, but *The Spice-Box of Earth* and *Flowers for Hitler* approach that mythology and history in a very different way. Moreover, Cohen begins to use the trope of mythology differently — rather than exploring ancient history made myth as a means of examining historical and contemporary problems, Cohen often uses it as a broader means of comparison through symbolism and metaphor. His politics retain that same sense of questioning, but he finds more concrete locations instead of abstractly conflating place and time as he did in poems such as "For Wilf and His House" and "Saviours." When he speaks in broad terms it is with a different context; rather than casting an eye on the whole of Jewish history, he begins to speak to the human condition in a less culturally specific, yet more personal matter. When his Jewish identity plays a part in his poetry, it becomes much more specific in terms of time and place. Similarly, Heaney rethinks his position: he mythologizes in a manner comparable to his first book of poetry, but the tensions he resolved so quickly in *Death of a Naturalist* become more difficult to sort out, and by *Wintering Out* he is much less preoccupied with uniting those binaries than ever before. Unlike Cohen, however, Heaney begins to explore outward and in some sense downward as he mythologizes the history and inferred ritual of bog people to comment on contemporary politics. Cohen moves increasingly toward discussing the immediate and personal throughout *The Spice-Box of*

Earth and *Flowers for Hitler*, whereas Heaney grows more political in *Door into the Dark* and *Wintering Out*.

I. *The Spice-Box of Earth* and *Door into the Dark*

The Spice-Box of Earth, published in 1965, moves deeper into the sensualism for which Cohen has become known — Scobie notes that the volume “established his reputation as a sensuous and romantic lyricist” (60). *Let Us Compare Mythologies* certainly makes use of sensual (largely sexual) imagery, but much of it is in service to larger ideas — “Lovers,” for example, communicates a love affair, but the image of breasts is overpowered by mention of pogroms and the fact that those breasts are burning in an oven, presumably in a concentration camp (similar uses of erotic imagery can be found in other poems from the volume, such as “When This American Woman” and “Prayer for Messiah”). However, the eroticism in *The Spice-Box of Earth*'s poems is often of a decidedly more physical, immediate nature, demonstrated perhaps best by “Celebration,” a description of fellatio whose relevance to this discussion lies in how Cohen chooses to describe the act.

Cohen ritualizes the sex act, his “manhood like a sceptre” (3), her “tongue about the amber jewel” (4-5), his semen a “blessing” (6) — even going so far as to call it a ceremony (12). As the poem progresses myth and history manage to creep in, betraying Cohen's constant preoccupation with what went (or came, as the case may be) before him. The third stanza recalls ancient ritual, as the final stanza in “Saviours” did. The former ponders “those Roman girls / who danced around a shaft of stone / and kissed it till the stone was warm” (“Celebration” 7-9) and the latter discusses “how the temple girls scent their skins” (“Saviours” 32). Rather than using that sensual imagery to express concern over ritualizing (“Saviours”) or to communicate cultural anxiety (as he does in his discussion of “unclean women” in “Song of the Hellenist”), here Cohen uses ritualistic imagery to prop up the speaker's immediate experience — a new technique employed throughout the collection in poems such as “Song,” whose speaker flees to literature and myth to quell the speaker's lust; “I

Have Two Bars of Soap," which heavily references Jewish practices by alluding to ritual cleansing and the scent of almonds, an important staple in Passover dishes; and the conflation of prayer and sex in "When I Uncovered Your Body," to name a few.

Cohen references biblical mythology in the final stanza of "Celebration": "Kneel till I topple to your back / with a groan, like those gods on the roof / that Samson pulled down" (13-15). However, Cohen's use of biblical imagery in this poem recalls Heaney's "Docker." That is, referring to Samson seems a ready simile born of a Jewish education, rather than the use of myth to discuss broader historical questions — the same way Heaney's slightly sarcastic prodding of Protestantism seems to be an intuitive part of his identity as a republican Catholic Northern Irishman. That is not to say, of course, that Cohen is no longer preoccupied with many of the same things in this volume that he was in his first (other poems in the volume belie that notion), but it does suggest that his understanding of those same things becomes more intuitive than formal — what Djwa calls "experience made myth" (33). It is a transformation that becomes more noticeable in Cohen's third book, *Flowers for Hitler*. Djwa suggests in her essay "Black Romantic" that "in *Spice-Box* this longing for the old lost ideals is re-worked in terms of a neo-Hassidic myth. No longer able to accept a despotic God, the poet as priest is forced beyond Genesis into a desolation which is 'unheroic, unbiblical'" (36). Though *The Spice-Box of Earth* does retain much of *Let Us Compare Mythologies'* formality, it is clear that he is beginning to move beyond the straightforward mythic into his own re-imaginings of those same legends. The questions Cohen asked in his first book have shifted, then — his search is a more personal, rather than cultural, one.

The fact that Cohen retains this formality in *The Spice-Box of Earth* means that the treatment of his subject matter remains equally distant. While this sort of arms' length approach might seem appropriate in his exploration of grand historical narratives in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, the implied sensuality of this volume's poetry makes it slightly discomfiting. The speaker distances himself from the sex act by his use of simile and grand diction as much as he distances himself from mythology.

In contrast, reading Heaney's poetry is often like grasping soil in both hands; there is a strong sense of tangible reality that generally persists in his work no matter what the content. As Heaney's search becomes more broadly cultural in his second book of poems, *Door into the Dark*, he manages to retain his connection to the land and the people of rural Ireland. Indeed, Alan Shapiro groups *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark* as a unit in which Heaney is "writing almost exclusively of regional life and work, of hunting, blackberry picking, turf gathering, and of the various ways 'living displaces false sentiments' in the real world" (13). In light of this quotation, one wonders how earnest Cohen's sentiments actually are, as in this volume and his previous work he looks at sex and myth with an incredibly cerebral gaze. Heaney, on the other hand, retains the visceral and sometimes everyday nature of his poetry, though his probing of the rural life moves to a darker place in some ways: a slightly more seditious moment. In *Death of a Naturalist* Heaney writes a poem about someone searching (and finding) water ("The Diviner"), but in *Door into the Dark* he writes "The Outlaw." Superficially, this poem is about a man with an unlicensed bull, but underlying Heaney's familiar movement within the rural mythos there is the beginning of a social comment which comes to fruition in *North*.

The change, according to critics and the writer himself, occurs as a result of violence in Northern Ireland. *Door into the Dark* was published in 1969, the same year as a series of disastrous marches over the summer left dozens wounded in County Derry (Hancock 112). As Hancock notes, "death was to leave the more significant mark on his poetry after 1969, as increasing levels of violence in the province made issues of allegiance and identity more pressing" (112). Hancock goes on to argue that a 'political' writer was born in Heaney after the Derry marches turned violent — Heaney himself was on the march that summer, and could easily have been caught up in the sectarian violence despite the fact that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was meant to be non-denominational and political only insofar as it demanded equal rights for citizens of the six counties regardless of their religious affiliations (111). Though Heaney had previously attempted to

represent both the loyalist and republican side of things in his earlier career as an essayist, 1969 was a watershed year for him in that, as Heaney himself said, “up until then, a Catholic might believe in shades of grey” (111). Though the poems in the volume would most likely not have been influenced by the marches, the escalating violence in Northern Ireland undoubtedly affected *Door into the Dark*, albeit not as obviously as it did *Wintering Out* or *North*.

Door into the Dark, then, is not so clearly political as the poetry of his subsequent two collections. However, in reading it, the certainties found in *Death of a Naturalist* — the teleological view of Ireland’s history, the resolution of anxieties, the faith in his own craft as a means of exploration — begin to come apart at the seams. This is demonstrable not only in Heaney’s subject matter and his imagery, but even the nature of how Heaney approaches the narration of his poems. In contrast to much of *Death of a Naturalist*, “The Outlaw” begins with Heaney laying the scene in a few almost prose-like lines: “Kelly’s kept an unlicensed bull, well away / From the road: you risked a fine but had to pay // The normal fee if cows were serviced there” (1-3). Despite the rhyming couplets (a structural motif carried through the piece), this passage retains a prose-like feel because of its rhythm and its expository nature. In his previous book, the poems tend to cast an imagistic impression, such as “Ancestral Photograph” (“Jaws puff round and solid as a turnip, / Dead eyes are statue’s and the upper lip / Bullies the heavy mouth down to a droop” [1-3]), sometimes with a thesis at the end (“Blackberry Picking,” for example). Alternatively, the poems are often a personal recollection beginning with a self-referential declarative statement, such as in “the Early Purges”: “I was six when I first saw kittens drown” (1). Where oftentimes in *Death of a Naturalist* he creates a mythos around the land and the people, in “The Outlaw” he simply tells a story. Heaney’s departure from his earlier technical inclinations makes this poem seem much less mythic at first glimpse.

Despite that, however, the poem creates around itself a larger mythos tied more strongly to his contemporary Ireland than the poems of his previous collection. Heaney’s language in this poem is surprisingly similar to Cohen’s overblown poetic treatise on fellatio in some ways — the speaker is

taking a cow to be serviced by Old Kelly's unlicensed bull, but as with Cohen's poem, Heaney's diction becomes decidedly more lofty than seems appropriate for the task at hand as the poem progresses in the first two stanzas. Money is called "clammy silver" (7); the speaker's perch on the gate becomes his "lofty station" (10); the bull is an "illegal sire" (12) and an "outlaw" (23). Heaney's elevated diction manages also to elevate the subject matter so that the poem itself becomes a metaphor for larger issues. Steven Matthews notes in this poem Heaney's "ability to hear undercurrents of music and meaning beneath the everyday" (20). Similes throughout the piece are often industrial or militaristic in nature, especially those pertaining to the unnamed bull: he is "unhurried as an old steam-engine shunting" (13), "impassive as a tank" (18). Heaney's language in these instances bring to mind the harsh reality of Northern Ireland, a land soon to be militarized by the British in order to "keep the peace."

These subtle references to militarism colour the reader's interpretation of the events in the poem. In the first few lines, it is clear the speaker feels he is being treated unjustly — there is no particular reward for using the illegal bull, as he has to pay the same fee as he would for a licensed bull. Nevertheless, the speaker still chooses to take his "nervous Friesian" to be serviced there (4). The speaker offers no real explanation as to why he would choose to take his cow there. It is possible it is the only bull in the area, but more likely (as Heaney grew up in rural Derry), it is either the quality of the bull itself or most likely, the sense of danger at defying the (British) authorities. Were it necessary, it would hardly be defiance. This foreshadows a passage in the poem "Singing School" in *North*, where Heaney's father neglects to mention the "line / Of turnips where the seed ran out / in the potato field" to the authorities (2. Constable 23-25). But for all that, the speaker is clearly still reluctant to take his cow there, or at the very least rather bitter about doing so. He "gave Old Kelly the clammy silver, though why / [He] could not guess" (7-8).

Though this poem is superficially pastoral, Heaney's use of symbolism and the speaker's clear reticence betray a deeper underlying meaning in "The Outlaw." In the microcosm of the simple

act of taking a cow to an unlicensed bull, Heaney betrays much broader cultural anxieties. The speaker is invited to bring the cow back should it not get pregnant, demonstrating a certain amount of determination on the part of Old Kelly, who is eager to demonstrate that his illegal bull is just as good as any licensed bull (20-22). As “Requiem for the Croppies” demonstrates, Heaney placed a great deal of stock in the imagery of germination and birth, as the barley from the pockets of 1798’s dead croppies grows into the birth of an independent nation in 1916. It is a metaphor he attempted to carry on to *Wintering Out* in that he initially named the collection “Winter Seeds” to communicate the possibilities of hope and renewal in Northern Ireland — optimism that was quashed by the rapidly deteriorating situation in Belfast, prompting the name change (Parker 129).

It is logical, then, to take the concept of birth and renewal and apply it to animals as well as plants. The defiance in this poem is relatively minor as the speaker takes his cow to an unlicensed bull, and it is certainly not on par with the actions of the Provisional IRA. However, acts of defiance and protest, both large and small, are attempts to flout the authority of the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland. It is through defiance and protest that the Catholic minority believed change (and consequently, rebirth) would be possible. In “The Outlaw” this is made both literal and figurative, as the poem addresses copulation. However, these attempts at rebirth come at a cost. At the end of the poem, Old Kelly is portrayed almost savagely as he “whooped and prodded his outlaw” (23). The bull eventually returns to calmly eating straw, his duty finished (24), and the reader is left wondering if the animal and outlaw in the piece is really the bull, or Old Kelly himself.

In later years, Heaney reflected on his position as a young Catholic man in Northern Ireland, desiring change but conflicted about how that would, or should, happen: “[the] citizen’s perception was also at one with the truth in recognizing that the very brutality of the means by which the IRA were pursuing change was destructive of the trust upon which new possibilities would have to be based” (*Crediting Poetry* 22-23). Though he articulates this internal conflict much later in his career — at his Nobel Lecture in 1995 — the crisis within Heaney as both “Christian moralist” and “mere

Irish," who was horrified by and yet still anticipated the violence that wracked Northern Ireland for decades, begins in 1969. Significantly, Heaney's ambivalent attitude toward his cultural and political place begins later in his career and in his life. Whereas Cohen begins his career at 22 with an almost combative ambivalence, Heaney slowly edges into that position over the course of his first few books of poetry, only truly touching that political experience in his fourth collection.

Cohen enacts an almost opposite transformation in his first few books, as demonstrated by the slow shifting of his gaze from the cultural/mythological to personal experience in *The Spice-Box of Earth*. The shift is very clear in poems such as "Celebration," but the idea of an evolution in his poetry from the first volume to this one is best demonstrated in the longer lyric poem "Isaiah." The poem is similar to "Song of the Hellenist" in that it recounts a moment in Jewish scripture, tying it to the present in a clear way. However, unlike in "Song of the Hellenist," the speaker questions Isaiah more than the people. In "Song of the Hellenist," there is a distinct warning to the Jewish people that spans generations and history: do not lose the culture. "Isaiah," by contrast, challenges scripture. Djwa's aforementioned proclamation that Cohen reworks his longing for lost ideals in *The Spice-Box of Earth* is especially relevant to this particular poem. Instead of drawing on scripture for authority, Cohen's reading of Isaiah is more ambiguous than ambivalent, demonstrating a slow evolution in *The Spice-Box of Earth* from the didacticism of *Let Us Compare Mythologies* to the sarcastic and at times almost playful exploration of atrocity of *Flowers for Hitler*.

The poem clearly draws from the first book of Isaiah, in which Isaiah prophesies the downfall of the Jewish people due to their own hubris. The first five chapters of the book, as well as chapters 28 and 29, prophesy judgment against Judah for feeling too temporally secure in its covenant with God – that is, just because they are a Chosen People does not mean that Jews will not be conquered by other nations. As with "Song of the Hellenist," where Cohen only focuses on the half-willing assimilation of the Israelites into Hellenism instead of the Maccabean Revolt, in "Isaiah" he focuses on God's judgment of Israel rather than the promise of Messiah, which

dominates Isaiah (especially the second book). In both cases, the poet draws upon less well-known aspects of the scripture.

The opening of the poem seems to be coming from one who does not believe Isaiah's prophecies; throughout the first five stanzas, this speaker questions the prophecies, pointing to the opulence of Jerusalem (1-3, 10-16), the health of the land (20-25), and the inevitability of having enemies in such a lush and righteous place (28-32). Within these stanzas the speaker essentially "talks back" to Isaiah, but falls into the traps Isaiah is cautioning against. One of Isaiah's major criticisms of Judaism at the time he lived was that ritual was superceding charity in the Temple. To this the speaker says, "In the sculptured temple how many pilgrims, / lost in the measures of tambourine and lyre, / kneeled before the glory of the ritual?" (4-6). In this passage Cohen's carefully chosen words betray the very thing the speaker is arguing against. The pilgrims are venerating the ritual instead of God. The same trouble is found in the next three lines, in which the speaker says the daughters of Zion are "not less splendid" than the golden idols (8). Isaiah also criticized the veneration of idols, and it is significant that the daughters of Zion are not more splendid, but no less splendid. The syntactical structure of this phrase again reveals Isaiah's (and God's) justified concern. The fact that idols are compared to the daughters of Zion is slightly heretical. Splendour is for God, not idols, nor the well-heeled daughters of Zion. Splendour is also not for the judges, "their fortunes found in law" (11). The manner in which the judges make their fortune is also problematic, as the law (religious law, in the times of Isaiah) was meant to interpret and enforce God's will, not become a means of attaining wealth. The second stanza queries, "why did Isaiah rage and cry, / Jerusalem is ruined, / your cities are burned with fire?" (17-19), but anyone with a sense of the scripture will know that the speaker has answered his own question.

The third and fourth stanzas show a bit more strength in the speaker's argument, though the argument is short-sighted. He argues that there is no reason for Isaiah to caution their downfall, because the land is fruitful and the roads are safe (20-27), and notes that any righteous country is

bound to attract enemies (28-30), “but the young were strong, archers cunning, / their arrows accurate” (31-32). In this case the speaker’s downfall is that he only looks to the present and not to the future — which, by rights, is the occupation of the prophet. As it is the place of the prophet to look into the future, it makes sense that the speaker would not look so far ahead, but the speaker’s naïveté is obvious as the poem moves into the fifth stanza: famines come without warning, robbers might always repopulate the roads, and enemies are sometimes more powerful than one suspects. And yet, the speaker calls Isaiah foolish, “smelling vaguely of wilderness himself” (34).

What is obviously missing from the speaker’s reasoning is the idea of a world beyond the superficial and physical — a problem that, for both the people of Israel and Cohen, is dangerous. In later years, Cohen noted the necessity of genuine seriousness: “Seriousness is voluptuous, and very few people have allowed themselves the luxury of it [. . .] But now I see people allowing their lives to diminish, to become shallow, so they can’t enjoy the deep wells of experience” (qtd. in Huston 93). It is clearly a preoccupation the poet had had for many years. Though dealt with quite differently, this preoccupation with cultural identity and spiritual seriousness is similar to the issue at hand at the beginning of “Song of the Hellenist,” in that the Jewish people lose their spiritual way for the sake of material gain. As with “Song of the Hellenist,” “Isaiah” occurs in the small space before incident: in the former, the incident is revolt; in the latter, the incident is decimation as ten tribes of Israel are enslaved and ultimately lost. Unlike in Maccabees, it is not fear, but false security that brings the downfall of the Israelites. Thematically, the poem addresses something more difficult to pin down than simply losing one’s culture. It speaks to a deeper spiritual (and more personal) problem, denoting how Cohen’s use of mythology and myth-making has begun to turn inward. As Djwa notes, Cohen’s new preoccupation with self (and excess) “is an attempt to find a new answer to the human predicament by going down instead of up” (35). This ties Cohen’s poetry once again to Heaney’s: like Heaney’s father and the poet himself, Cohen is in some sense digging. Rather than digging into soil or memory, however, he is digging into himself.

In this poem, Cohen does not make the precise connection to the present that he did in "Song of the Hellenist." The sixth stanza effects a similar shift in theme to that midway through the earlier poem, but instead of finding a historical place, Cohen looks to a personal moment that transcends time in a way that deserves comparison to Heaney's "Digging." Though Cohen's moment of crisis is more sensual than familial, it is a personal resolution possessing a certainty that is altogether lacking in Cohen's first book of poetry. In this stanza, the poet shifts from the mythic historic to the immediate. It is a sensual moment in a poem largely expository. Cohen describes the purity of his beloved, the beauty of her hair, the sensuality of her body, and how none of these things can be corrupted by "rebel prince" or "false swearer" or "faithless corrupter" (40, 42, 44). It is an abrupt shift — more abrupt than the shift in "Song of a Hellenist," largely because it superficially has little to do with what precedes it. However, given the underlying ambiguities of the previous five stanzas, it is not out of place. In this moment, despite the difficulties of myth and history and faith and ritual, the sensual experience and love is a truer mythology than Isaiah's railing against the excesses of his culture. As Djwa notes:

In [Cohen's] world there are no fixed values, spiritual or sensual, that stand beyond the transitory moment, and the moment itself, experience made myth, blends imperceptibly with other moments and other mythologies, so that in the shifting the values change, leaving only the value of experience made art. (33)

Cohen returns to Isaiah in the final passage of the poem, after the decimation of Israel in the wars he rightly predicted. He "reels beyond / the falling dust of spires and domes, / obliterating ritual" (52-54). In this poem, the death of ritual corresponds with the death of Jerusalem's wealth; the cantors are left bereft, the name of God is barely spoken on anyone's lips, and the congregation is lost (54-56). Mythology sits in a precarious position; as biblical scholar Howard Schwartz notes, "ritual keeps the myth alive. But as soon as the ritual falls into disuse, the myth loses its primary purposes: linking the past and the present through acting out of ritual" (21). This harkens back in some ways to "Saviours," in which Jewish heroes are left to rot and die so that ritual and mythology become empty. Like Moses, Job, and David, Isaiah is left wandering in a desolate place.

However, Cohen's view is not so dour in this poem. Rather than being crucified or hanged or becoming a scarecrow, Isaiah is consumed by love and in the desolation of Jerusalem he "hums a gentle sound / to make the guilty country uncondemned" (63-64). Moreover, with material possessions lost, the people "truthfully desolate and lonely, / as though witnessing a miracle, / behold in beauty the faces of one another" (65-67). However foolish Isaiah seemed initially, then, his point has not been lost on the people of Israel. Moving beyond the trappings of ritual and wealth and even perhaps mythology, the people truly see each other for the first time in what must have been a very long time.

This is a departure from the nature of discourse in "Song of the Hellenist." Where "Song of the Hellenist" explored the transhistorical problem of cultural identity, promoting a dialectic between past and present that would not be resolved, "Isaiah" sits in both the past and present in a much more stable way. With the menagerie of possessions and status stripped away, the true faith of human interaction and human experience is manifest. It is the same sort of resolution present in Heaney's "Digging": opposing tensions are released, and there is peace, even hope, at the end of the poem. In this poem Cohen's own digging reveals an identity that, despite the poem's subject matter, is more universal than cultural. While he continues to rely on scriptural history and traditional Jewish mythology, Cohen is no longer speaking exclusively from a Jewish standpoint or specifically to Jews. In "Isaiah," he is not cautioning that people must not forget they are Jewish, but that people must not forget they are human.

The unspoken conflict in the earlier parts of this poem are in some ways reminiscent of a similar sort of unspoken conflict in "The Outlaw." Cohen and Heaney approach the conflict in different ways — the speaker in "The Outlaw" is uneasy, and the speaker in "Isaiah" is overconfident. However, both poems speak to a similar anxiety about religion and faith in their treatment of identity and law. The speaker in "The Outlaw" subtly explores the treacherous paths of civil disobedience in the name of nationalism. The speaker in "Isaiah" explores the problem of

endorsing ritual over faith. What ties these two problems together is the inability to separate religion and politics. To be Catholic was by and large also to be republican in Northern Ireland, but they were not supposed to be the same thing; the Christian moralist in Heaney was horrified at the shedding of blood. Similarly, to be Jewish in "Isaiah" was to glory in ritual, but again, ritual and truth are not the same thing.

Heaney's "In Gallarus Oratory" follows a similar theme to "Isaiah," more concretely religious than "The Outlaw." The poem demonstrates that Heaney is not given over entirely to the ambivalence present in his subsequent two volumes, though it is in some senses darker than his first book. It draws on the same sense of mythology that Cohen does in "Isaiah," sitting closer to ritual than faith. However, as with Cohen's poem, "In Gallarus Oratory" resolves itself at the end in a slightly unexpected way.

The poem begins with a prose-like tone reminiscent of "The Outlaw," giving the feeling of relating an experience rather than creating a poetic impression: "You can still feel the community pack into / This place: it's like going into a turfstack" (1-2). Heaney creates a connection between the culture and the religion by comparing the ancient place of worship to something fundamentally Irish: a stack of peat. Significantly, Heaney chooses the second-person pronoun "you," which makes the reader an active participant in the poem. While he speaks of the past, he makes it clear that the poem is in the present, reflecting back upon a previous time. In this way, it becomes far more personal than Cohen's "Isaiah" does. While Cohen's departure in the sixth stanza of "Isaiah" suggests a more personal bond than the rest of the poem, the speaker still sits firmly in the mythic past as opposed to the tangible present. In Heaney's poem, the reader is brought immediately into the earthy and very real oratory, as if the poet is talking specifically to "you."

Heaney continues the theme of tangibility by tying the poem inexorably to the land and to the people who inhabit it — what David Lloyd calls the "family romance of identity" (121). In the case of this poem, Heaney also ties religion to the land as if, as both O'Brien and Lloyd suggest, his

identity and the expression of that identity through his poetry is indivisible from his roots as a Catholic, a Gael, and the son of a farmer. This is manifest in the final lines of the poem, when Heaney postulates that Church is not in its buildings, but in the land: "And how [God] smiled on them as out they came, / The sea a censer and the grass a flame" (11-12). Heaney assumes that the previous congregants of Gallarus Oratory did not find the Divine in that building ("No worshipper / Would leap up to his God off this floor" [6-7]), but in the land of Ireland itself. To say that Catholic rites are in the land is an affirmation of the land but also a clear signal that the land is Catholic. Though Heaney's poetry is never overtly seditious in this volume — even "Requiem for the Croppies" is a glorification of the past rather than a comment on the present — the undercurrent of resistance has begun in this volume. It is a reference to the literal faith of the people, a theme largely absent from *Death of a Naturalist*. Significantly this poem retains the certainty of his previous work, denoting Heaney's still-present faith in the inevitability of Ireland's freedom and a belief in continuity between past and present, as evidenced in earlier works such as "Requiem for the Croppies."

A second significant theme running through the poem is that of darkness. The poem from which the collection takes its title, "The Forge," is certainly not an overtly republican poem, but the fact that he chose the line "door into the dark" as the volume's title communicates a world of meaning. The poem itself finds the speaker looking at a forge, proclaiming "All I know is a door into the dark" (1). He does not know what is inside, only imagines machinations and equipment. The collection is overrun with "the dark": in "The Outlaw" the bull returns to the dark (24); the first poem is called "Night-Piece"; "Night Drive" describes the white light of headlights illuminating signs on a darkened road — to name but a few references. Throughout "In Gallarus Oratory," the dark within the church is palpable as worshippers "sought themselves in the eyes of their King / Under the black weight of their own breathing" (9-10). Hughes notes that the darkness of the volume "may be physical, metaphysical or moral" (114).

In "The Forge" and "In Gallarus Oratory" the darkness is slightly different. The former is a place of mysterious sound and religious devotion to work; the latter is a place of oppressive night, an almost pagan "barrow" where worshippers huddle together. "The Forge" is a place of creation, however, and in some sense the congregants spilling out of Gallarus Oratory are reborn in the light, as if they are coming out of Plato's cave and seeing Truth. They are both in some sense religious wombs from which new things (metalwork) and new people (reborn in the literal light of God, via the sun) spring. As Hart notes, both poems "gain intensity from the 'dark night' they struggle to illuminate" (87). In being tied so strongly to rural work, the forge is inherently Irish in Heaney's lexicon. In being a place of the Catholic God, Gallarus Oratory is equally Irish. One detects in both these poems the same sense of hope found in "Digging" and in "Requiem for the Croppies," as well as in "Isaiah." "In Gallarus Oratory" almost echoes the sentiments in "Isaiah," as the people of Cohen's fallen Judea are awakened (and in some sense reborn) when they are no longer amidst the ritual that subtly oppresses their spirit.

Heaney's concept of birth and rebirth, however, are tied closely to the land in a way Cohen's is not: Heaney creates a sense of the fecundity of rural Northern Ireland, especially when taken with the eroticization of the rural experience — for example, the blatant sensuality of unfreezing a water pump in "Rite of Spring": "then a light // That sent the pump up in flame. / It cooled, we lifted her latch, / Her entrance was wet and she came" (10-12). It is in some ways the opposite of Cohen's "Celebration": rather than almost desexualizing sex, Heaney sexualizes the nonsexual. Even the name — "Rite of Spring" — brings to mind maypoles and the rebirth of the land after winter. The fecundity of the land is certainly present in *Death of a Naturalist*, but the new ties to sex and birth create a hitherto unseen sense of movement: moving forward through generations rather than looking back through them.

It is at the end of *The Spice-Box of Earth* and *Door into the Dark* that there is some hint of the poetry to come. Throughout both collections there are marked similarities: a certainty in faith

("Isaiah" and "In Gallarus Oratory"), a sensuousness new to Heaney but familiar to Cohen ("Celebration" and "Rite of Spring"), and a new approach to the discussion of mythology. Their second volumes both follow upon their first but with a slow evolution toward a new mythos which intersects in *The Spice-Box of Earth* and *Door into the Dark*. However, poems near the end of each volume hint at the transformation to come, which sends each poet spiralling off into his own new expression of mythology. For Cohen, that change is evidenced by "The Genius."

Situated at the back of the volume — second to last — the poem expresses the black irony that defines *Flowers for Hitler*. Cohen's speaker spits a string of stereotypes in "The Genius," saying he will be "a ghetto jew," "an apostate jew," "a banker jew," "a Broadway jew," and "a doctor jew" (2, 9, 16, 21, 27). In each stanza, he bitingly explores the false identities his people have worn throughout history, finishing his list with an image more true to him than any of the others he presents in the poem:

for you
I will be a Dachau jew
and lie down in lime
with twisted limbs
and bloated pain
no mind can understand. (32-37)

While the poem ends with a didacticism reminiscent of *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and virtually unseen in *Flowers for Hitler*, the form is new; he moves away from the romantic lyricism for which the volume is known and writes in short, spitting bursts. It is also one of the first poems of his career where he overtly refers to the Holocaust, which demonstrates a certain similarity to Heaney in terms of subject matter. Just as Heaney took years to face the atrocities committed against his country and his people in his poetry, Cohen took a long time to confront poetically the atrocities committed against his nation. "The Genius," with its black humour, hints at a new attitude and a new willingness to shake off the abstract veil of ancient mythologies to get at a more explicit and immediate exploration of injustice.

So too do the final poems of *Door into the Dark*, “Bann Clay” and “Bogland.” For the first time in the volume, nearly at its end, the reader finds Heaney digging again — and digging much deeper than he had in his first book of poetry, right down through the peat. Like Cohen, Heaney does not completely effect a transformation in these two poems. As he says in “Bann Clay,” after spending the poem talking about the Irish clay and labourers digging it up, “I labour / Towards it still. It holds and gluts” (23-24). This seems to be the beginning of a narrative to be completed in *Wintering Out* and *North*. One gets the impression Heaney is on the cusp of a new poetic understanding of his contemporary situation in much the same way Cohen is. In “Bogland” Heaney discusses things that have come out of the bogs — the skeleton of a Great Irish Elk and prehistoric butter (9-11, 13-15) — but he has not yet gone down into them, as he does in later volumes. At this point, they are simply “bottomless” (28). Hughes discusses the mythology of “Bogland”:

It is hard to resist the feeling that, in conceiving his Irish myth, he is daring the reader to distinguish between the facts of folklore and the blarney of the bog-dweller [...] However much “our pioneers keep striking / Inwards and downwards” there will be no end to the wonders to be discovered, and the poet as historian will find in such images [...] inexhaustible evidence of cultural traditions. (114, 115)

What Heaney will find down there, however, remains to be seen.

II. *Flowers for Hitler* and *Wintering Out*

Both *Flowers for Hitler* and *Wintering Out* are marked as departures from previous work. Of *Flowers for Hitler*, Michael Q. Abraham says,

Indeed, *Flowers for Hitler* contains little of the fragile eloquence that epitomized the “golden-boy poet.” Containing terse and violent anti-poetry, a so-called “Ballet-Drama in One Act,” and sporadic drawings by the poet, *Flowers for Hitler* holds a more direct fascination with pain, disease, and death. (32)

Similarly, Heaney’s notion of digging as both a physical and cultural act, as well as his burgeoning poetic awareness of himself as a Catholic Ulsterman, according to many critics, “lie dormant in *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, but they are systematically revealed and exploited in *Wintering*

Out and North" (Hughes 111). Both *Flowers for Hitler* and *Wintering Out* demonstrate a new kind of self-awareness in their authors. Cohen's political "awakening" as a Jew at age 11 is explored in a much more comprehensive way than in his previous volumes. For Heaney, a political awakening in 1969 informs his poetry more literally than ever before. In terms of mythology, the poets effect another shift from their previous work. Cohen essentially abandons the mythology of antiquity and instead chooses the immediate, the sensual, and the near-past. By contrast, Heaney travels deeper into history than he ever has previously, beginning to explore the ancient mythology of his own people through his new interest in the bog people, and politicizing the more recent past.

Both volumes of poetry begin with an epigraph. Though this is not a new thing for Cohen — he quotes a passage from Faulkner by way of introduction to *Let Us Compare Mythologies* — it is for Heaney. Moreover, Cohen uses two epigraphs in *Flowers for Hitler*, one a quotation from Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, and the other a note on the book's title. Abraham notes that the quotation "locates the tragedy of the holocaust more in the survivors than in the murdered, more in the saved than the drowned" (32), and infers that the epigraph is meant to signal Cohen's new preoccupation with pain and darkness, however casually he deals with it (32-33). However, as Michael Greenstein points out, critics have a tendency to ignore Cohen's self-penned note on the collection's title:

A while ago
this book would
have been called
SUNSHINE FOR NAPOLEON
and earlier still
it would have been
called
WALLS FOR GENGHIS KHAN

In Greenstein's mind,

[a]lthough most theologians have insisted on the uniqueness of the Holocaust as an extreme instance of malice and atrocity, Cohen implies that evil is relative, part of a historic continuum. Even if Cohen's note is ironic, nevertheless the casual "while ago" and the

links with Napoleon and a remote Genghis Khan deny the singular, unprecedented nature of Hitler's methods. (II)

It is a relativism Cohen clearly rejects in his earlier volumes. *Let Us Compare Mythologies* is steeped in moral indignation and righteous anger. *The Spice-Box of Earth* moves farther away from Cohen's static identity as a Jew, but as poems such as "The Genius" demonstrate, he has not quite forsaken biting accusation. *Flowers for Hitler* signals a definite shift in the poet's sentiments and a re-imagining of his identity. As Abraham notes, "no longer willing to be stereotyped as Jewish, as a poet, or as a Jewish-poet, Cohen claims to be attempting to move beyond influence to a more direct engagement, anti-stylistic, with his own world and experience" (33).

Heaney's epigraph, a poem written for fellow Northern Irish poets Michael Longley and David Hammond, is equally a departure. The piece, which would in another form become the final section of *North's* "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," specifically and immediately discusses civil unrest in Northern Ireland in a way hitherto unknown in Heaney's poetry. While *Death of a Naturalist's* "Dock" makes some reference to the Troubles and other earlier poems address Heaney's Catholicity ("In Gallarus Oratory," "Poor Women in a City Church," "St. Francis and the Birds"), in this epigraph Heaney finally begins to talk about bombs, about machine guns, and about the six counties' suffering under the urban warfare shaking Belfast and its people to the core (3-5, 9-12). Hancock notes a "stark new context for the naturalist" (112). That is, dew is no longer on the bawn, but on the motorway. However, Heaney continues to distance himself from the immediate experience: "There was that white mist you get on a low ground / and it was deja-vu, some film made / of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound" (6-8). Curiously, rather than a bog man or another ancient or even something Irish, Heaney alludes to an American film. Despite the incongruousness of the allusion in light of the bulk of Heaney's poetry, it is incredibly apt.

In the epigraph, Heaney looks upon an internees' camp soon after what must be August 9th 1971, when internment without trial was introduced (Hancock 112). Adapted from the play of the same name, *Stalag 17* follows a group of American G.I.s in a German POW camp, among whom

they suspect a Nazi collaborator. While the G.I.s suspect one rather cynical and callous prisoner, it turns out the spy is someone else entirely. The allusion follows the anxiety of the poem in which this epigraph eventually finds itself, that “whatever you say, you say nothing” — that there is no one and nothing to trust in a world of secret assassins, spies, and sentence without trial or verdict.

As Hancock notes, “political concerns are rarely far from the surface” in Heaney’s work (112). Though the poet never so overtly refers to the Troubles again in the rest of the volume, this epigraph colours the reader’s perception, so that every poem, be it the imagistic and sometimes combative passages of the first part or the more domestic verses of the second, is infused with a righteous anger that is altogether new for Heaney and old hat for Cohen.

A new preoccupation of Cohen’s seems at first similar to Heaney’s, but upon closer inspection is quite different. Like Heaney, Cohen has a newfound poetic interest in his immediate political surroundings, as evidenced in poems such as “Montreal 1964” and “The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward.” Like Heaney, Cohen is writing at a time of burgeoning unrest — the FLQ became violently active only a few years after the publication of *Flowers for Hitler*. However, unlike Heaney, Cohen is not directly involved in the conflict in the same way. While he would certainly have witnessed a certain amount of civil unrest, he is not as intrinsically linked to it as Heaney would necessarily be; where Heaney is clearly conflicted as a member of the oppressed minority which is violently seeking its freedom, Cohen is largely an observer in the struggles surrounding him in Montreal. Where Heaney is finally finding his voice as an angry young Irishman, Cohen has lost much of his ire.

Instead, he approaches the subject of Canada with a sarcasm characteristic of the collection. For example, he begins “Montreal 1964” with the slightly satirical question, “Can someone turn off the noise?” (1). Cohen is otherwise occupied, as clearly demonstrated throughout the first stanza: “Pearls rising on the breath of her breasts / grind like sharpening stones” (2-3) and “the bed fumes like a quicksand hole / we won’t climb on it for love” (6-7). His relationship with the struggle going

on outside is entirely ironic: “the street yearns for action nobler than traffic / red lights want to be flags” (8-9). Rather than a man caught in conflict, Cohen’s speaker is at best dismissive of the struggle he sees around him: “*Canada is a dying animal / I will not be fastened to a dying animal / That’s the sort of thing to say, that’s good, / that will change my life*” (17-20). Significantly, Cohen deconstructs the mythos of nationalism and mocks the rhetoric of freedom — in this poem and in others throughout the volume. He keeps his speaker (and himself) from blatant hypocrisy by casting a satirical light on the earnestness of his earlier poetic self: “I dread the voice behind the flag I drew / on the blank sky / for my absolute poems will be crumpled” (24-26). In this volume, Cohen does not quite forsake the mythology he relied on so heavily in his previous collections, but he does deal with it in a very different way. He is redrawing the lines of reverence for himself by no longer subscribing to the myth of nationalism, be it Canadian or otherwise.

Heaney, by contrast, seems to hit his stride in his third collection of poetry in terms of social and political comment. A linguist by trade, much is often made of the poet’s obsession with “Irish” words — Hughes notes that Heaney’s dogged use of sometimes unusual Saxon and Irish words reveal his “acute sense of the physical production of speech — which becomes an important motif in *Wintering Out*, described by Edna Longley as a unique brand of ‘revolutionary, action, linguistic, decolonisation’” (Hughes 112-13). In this volume he draws attention to his own linguistics in the poem “Traditions.”

In general, critics tend to explore the mythology of Heaney’s bog poetry and the inherent politics within them. Equally important is the means by which Heaney mythologizes what is not initially fantastical, often making the very human Irish Troubles larger than life and as a result equating Ireland’s contemporary experience with the grandiose legends of the past. The poem “Traditions” is a perfect example of this. The Gaelic language is a “guttural muse” (l.1) bullied into silence by the “alliterative tradition” (l.3) of English. Significantly, though Heaney’s dialectic between past and present, myth and history, Irish and English really comes into play for the first

time in this volume, Heaney paints his own half of the dialogue as silenced, grown “vestigial, forgotten / like the coccyx / or a Brigid’s Cross / yellowing in some outhouse” (1.5-8). The allusion to a Brigid’s Cross has multiple meanings; the symbol, made of rushes, used to be common in Irish homes and was thought to stave off disaster. Though it is an unflinchingly Catholic symbol in contemporary times, there is some thought it is derived from a pagan sun wheel, connecting this poem back to the bog men Heaney writes about. Since the crosses are traditionally made of rushes, new ones were made every February 1st as a means of welcoming spring, the time of rebirth. The crosses are fragile, but they were continually remade in order to maintain the safety of the house. This practice has largely fallen out of use in the twentieth century, so Heaney’s yellowing cross becomes a symbol of not only language, but the culture the Irish have lost as “custom, that ‘most / sovereign mistress’ / beds us down into / the British Isles” (1.9-12).

Ironically, writing in 1974, critic John Wilson Foster proclaims that Heaney’s strengths “place him in seriousness and maturity beyond hailing distance of most younger British poets” (25). To Heaney this would be something of a backhanded compliment. He has always been, either quietly or outspokenly, self-proclaimedly Irish. Moreover, an important part of that self-definition is that in being Irish, he is *not* British. Writing the poem “An Open Letter” nine years later to protest his inclusion in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, he writes,

A British one, is characterized
As British. But don’t be surprised
If I demur, for be advised
My passport’s green
No glass of ours was ever raised
To toast the Queen. (14-19)

In *Wintering Out*, Heaney is not yet so forthright. In “Traditions” he portrays the Irish and English dialects as two mythic women, a “guttural muse” (1.1) and “most sovereign mistress” (1.9-10) — in some ways echoing his poem “Heracles and Antaeus,” written in 1966 but published almost ten years later in *North*. In that poem, Antaeus takes the part of the guttural muse: a half-wild, intuitive creature of ancient Irish custom. Heracles, on the other hand, is the reason of a new age.

Unlike the struggle in "Heracles and Antaeus," in "Traditions" there is a much clearer winner: their "most sovereign mistress." Heaney says "We are to be proud / of our Elizabethan English" (II.1-2), and in saying so, his most sovereign mistress becomes not only custom, but Elizabeth I, and potentially Elizabeth II, as well. Heaney, like Cohen, speaks with a certain amount of irony: "cherished archaisms / are correct Shakespearean" (II.7-8), and the argument over whether to use the word "bawn" (Irish) or "mossland" (English) becomes a stubborn sort of war (II.12). This poem presents a new aspect in Heaney's dialectic. The struggle is no longer only between past and present, but between Irish and English, as well. Stephen Matthews points out that Shakespearean English was essentially appropriated by the Irish, "translated into a local and familiar landscape and custom" (112). There is an ongoing exchange between Irish and English language, then, as the Irish make the cherished language of their oppressors their own. They begin to speak the same language and, in fact, the Irish speak a loftier version of that language by taking on the dialect of Shakespeare. This is a slight against the English, certainly, but also indicative of how another culture has imposed itself on Ireland. This sentiment follows Cohen's "Song of the Hellenist" in many ways, denoting Heaney's new awareness of himself as a political as well as poetic being. Like Cohen's speaker, who was imposed upon first by the Greeks and then by the *Herrenmenschen*, Heaney's speaker is imposed upon by Britain and its customs. Unlike "Song of the Hellenist," which makes clear that at least in ancient times the Jews loved their new culture, whether Heaney's speaker believes that assimilation has been completely forced upon the Irish or if it was entered into willingly is not certain. Either way, however, like Cohen's Jews, the Irish have adopted foreign words, and traditional customs (i.e., the Brigid's Cross) have fallen by the wayside.

Unlike Cohen's speaker, however, Heaney's speaker is not resigned to that fate, though he is in some sense bitterly light-hearted about his predicament. The final stanza refers to two Irish characters in disparate works of literature: the first, a minor character used for comic relief in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and the other the main character of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Shakespeare's MacMorris

is clearly an idiot: a bit of comic relief in a difficult part of the play (3.2). His characterization and ridiculous accent betray a certain prejudice against the Irish: "Of my nation! What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal. What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?" (3.2.1251-53). He is, as all Irishmen apparently were, "going very bare / of learning, as wild hares" (III.5-6).

Curiously, the final stanza of the poem — alluding to a fellow Irish author who made much of myth, James Joyce — widens the possibility of citizenship for the Irishman; the character Leopold Bloom, wandering through Dublin, is Jewish and treated as an outsider in Joyce's *Ulysses* (Tracy 1). While Joyce might have been meaning to draw attention to anti-Semitism in Ireland at the time, or perhaps just needed a ready-made foreigner (Tracy 2), Heaney carefully chooses a character who falls outside the traditional notions of Irish: Catholic and Protestant, republican and loyalist, IRA and United Ulstermen. Simply, to a fiercely nationalist anti-Semite: "'Ireland,' said Bloom, / 'I was born here. Ireland'" (III.11-12). Once again, Heaney returns to the land; critics have time and time again noted Heaney's strong sense of place, and in this poem in particular he does not specify what sort of Ireland he is after — Catholic or Protestant, united or divided — he is simply after an Ireland that is Irish, whatever that might mean in 1972.

"Traditions" has a decided ambivalence to it: the first section laments the loss of the Irish tongue, the second gently derides the Irish for their use of Elizabethan language and satirizes argument over British versus Irish words, and in the third Heaney explores Irish characters in literature. The issues of learning and belonging are investigated in this section, not language. This third section seems almost ill-fitted to the rest of the piece, but the underlying message seems more cohesive than a superficial reading reveals. Structurally, then, this poem follows Cohen's "Isaiah." The "time out" to discuss the speaker's lover in the sixth stanza of "Isaiah" actually contributes a great deal to Cohen's poem thematically, as the honesty of the speaker's lover contrasts strongly against the facades of the people of Jerusalem. In "Traditions," a similar device is at work. In the

first two sections Heaney laments what was, but as the third section demonstrates, Heaney is not quite sure what “Irish” means anymore. He only gets so far as Not British. Though not particularly pleased with MacMorris’s drunken-sounding question, he is asking the same thing: “What ish my nation?” (III.8).

This is perhaps why he so carefully constructs what Hughes refers to as the “mytho-poetic landscape” — both in his discussion of land (bogs) and people (linguistics). Hughes comments that Heaney’s Ireland is not only a geographical country, but a country of the mind, as well (115). Just as the submerged mythological history of the bogs are a part of his country, so too is the submerged, almost mythic history of his language: the subconscious acquiescence to historical British power through words as simple as “varsity” and “deem” (II. 3, 4); the submerged resistance in using “bawn” rather than “mossland” (II.12); the defiant proclamation that he was “born here.” Indeed, Heaney constructs his mytho-poetic landscape in every aspect of his writing.

Cohen’s mytho-poetic landscape, on the other hand, has much less to do with geography and much more to do with the recesses of his own mind. Writing his first two volumes of poetry in a modernist style relying heavily on formal presentation and the trope of ancient mythology, Cohen attempts to break away from that inheritance in *Flowers for Hitler*. Abraham addresses the conundrum the poet finds himself in, saying that for Jewish poets of his generation, coming to maturity years after the Holocaust rather than living through it as adults, “an almost genetic attachment to religion is coupled with the grim knowledge that recent events have crippled its reliability” (8). So instead of following his previous reliance on Jewish myth, in his third volume Cohen addresses his identity as a Jew in a manner more ambiguously inflammatory than didactically mythological, especially in poems such as “Hitler the Brain Mole.”

In the poem, Cohen imagines himself as both Nazi and Jew in one breath: “Hitler the brain-mole looks out of my eyes / Goering boils ingots of gold in my bowels / My Adam’s Apple bulges with the whole head of Goebbels / No use to tell a man he’s a Jew” (1-4). This poem in some sense

echoes Cohen's note on the collection's title — while Greenstein notes that Cohen "takes literally the maxim that to understand another person one must get under his skin" (II), there is equally some sense of culpability in this poem, made more clear when the poem is considered with other passages from the book, such as his pessimistic declaration of a first poem, "What I Am Doing Here":

I do not know if the world has lied
 I have lied
 I do not know if the world has conspired against love
 I have conspired against love
 the atmosphere of torture is no comfort
 I have tortured. (1-6)

That is to say, Cohen, in both the epigraph and the poems of the volume, explores the idea that cruelty as well as suffering are universal to the human experience. The speaker of both epigraph and poem claims that despite the Holocaust, World War II, and the birth of atomic warfare, he is not so different a human being than he would have been otherwise (7-13). All human beings are culpable, and what is more, they always have been. This is not necessarily a new concept for Cohen, though he has not said it so starkly in previous work. The bluntness of this poem casts a new tone upon earlier poems such as "Saviours" and "Song of the Hellenist." In "Song of the Hellenist" his speaker places as much blame, if not more, on the Jews who assimilate into Greek and German culture as he does on the Greeks and Germans themselves. In light of "What I'm Doing Here," the earlier poem becomes a more focused indictment of Jews and their willingness to disappear, both visibly and culturally, rather than a criticism of cultures that would seek to overpower Judaism. It can also give new meaning to Heaney's "Traditions," especially in light of Heaney's subsequent poems "Punishment" and "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," both of which admit a personal culpability and a personal choice to not do what the speaker deems to be right. At the end of the first stanza of "What I Am Doing Here" Cohen's speaker starkly says, "I refuse the universal alibi" (14). As Heaney and Cohen's poetry evolves, it becomes clear that they both eventually refuse this alibi by taking responsibility for what they have and have not done.

In refusing that alibi, Cohen moves away from his former poetic self. Instead, he enters a literary world almost in opposition to the mythological identity he assumed in his earlier poetry. Instead of identifying himself as a beleaguered Jew, Cohen begins to see himself as simply part of a flawed and often vicious humanity. The motif of confession running through the volume in poems such as “What I Am Doing Here,” “The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward,” and “Hitler the Brain Mole” seems to be Cohen’s attempt to have people at least admit to that. Humanity as a whole must refuse that universal alibi — a point Cohen drives home in poems such as “All There is to Know About Adolph Eichmann,” where he describes a completely average man and then demands of the reader whether we expected talons or green saliva instead of what he was: a human being. Cohen’s characterization of Eichmann (and indeed, his characterization of the Holocaust as a whole in *Flowers for Hitler*) poetically echoes some of the feelings expressed in Hannah Arendt’s controversial collection of essays *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*, which was published as a series in *the New Yorker* in 1963. As Steven E. Ascheim notes, Arendt “argued that [the Holocaust’s] evil was not the outcome of a superior will to power or demonism but originated under rather trivial conditions, in some respect in a sphere of action that lay below moral considerations” (225). Like Arendt, Cohen refuses to see the Holocaust as a singular act of intentional human cruelty, and instead focuses on “the banality of evil” in all humans, in all moments.

There is much less a sense of “us and them” in *Flowers for Hitler*. It is only fitting, then, that Cohen would force his speaker to identify with the pinnacle of human cruelty, Nazi Germany, in “Hitler the Brain Mole.” Cohen manages to horrify the reader in only seven lines, not only with his Kafkaesque torture at the hands of Nazi war criminals, but with “I’m making a lampshade out of your kiss” (5). While the image itself is gruesome, more unsettling is the realization that the speaker has become the people who occupy his body. What Cohen is doing here, essentially, is quite literally assuming the guilt he hints at in poems earlier in the volume.

Cohen's poetry evolves through his first three volumes, issuing challenges and asking questions until he finally concludes in *Flowers For Hitler* that even if he does not expect answers, asking questions at all is ultimately futile. Heaney, on the other hand, only begins to overtly ask questions in his third volume. Later, in *North*, Heaney approaches conflict in a similar way to Cohen. As mentioned previously, he admits his own culpability in poems such as "Punishment," where he acknowledges the burden of his own sense of tribalism, and "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," in which he hits out at (but still acquiesces to) the silence of the middle classes in Belfast during the Troubles. In *Wintering Out*, however, Heaney has a more difficult time grappling with the concept of guilt, choosing to approach questions of culpability and identity from the same standpoint as Cohen in his first collection: through myth and the construction of myth. In previous volumes he tended to mythologize the tangible, but here, in *Wintering Out*, he moves directly into the realm of ritual and mythologizes history through his exploration of bogs and bog men.

Heaney's new preoccupation with the bog lands, which he carries into his fourth collection, offers "primeval memory; its spirit is mythical, ruminative, ponderous" (Hughes 116). Equally, however, Heaney's bog poems address contemporary concerns. As Christopher J. McGinley explains in his essay "The Boundaries of Land: Sectarian Division and the Politics of Space in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney," Heaney uses ancient spaces to express concerns over complicity, fear, and violence in "A Northern Hoard," even going so far as to parallel the spaces within Heaney's poetry with sectarian boundaries in Ulster at the time he is writing (128-130). Heaney does not make direct reference to the Troubles in this series of poems, but as with Cohen's "Song of the Hellenist" and "Saviours," in light of Heaney's contemporary circumstance it seems an almost inevitable comparison, compounded by the very realness of bog men not as skeletal remains, but as preserved bodies with food in their bellies and stubble on their faces. As Purdy notes, "bog bodies have an extraordinary power to abolish temporal distance, to make the past present" (95). With his choice of subject matter, Heaney eschews abstraction once again. Even when exploring mythology, he

chooses examples that have tactile counterparts outside his poetry, and he uses visceral imagery to give a clear and specific picture of what he chooses to discuss.

The first poem Heaney wrote about bog men was "The Tollund Man." In that poem, Heaney finds parity with the bog man, sacrificed to the pagan queen Nerthus millennia ago. While poems such as "Bog Oak" might admire the dogged courage of antiquity's peasants, Heaney does not allow his reader to forget that "the history of Gaelic peoples has been, in part, a history of ritual slaughter not obviously different from the sectarian violence of contemporary Northern Ireland" (Hughes 116). Heaney creates a sense of continuity between ancient pagan violence and contemporary sectarian cruelties that he carries through to his next volume.

In this, Heaney's first foray into creating that continuity and parallel, the poet initially distances himself from the Tollund Man, saying "Some day I will go to Aarhus / To see his peat-brown head, / The mild pods of his eye-lids, / His pointed skin cap" (l.1-4). Significantly, as Jonathan Bolton notes, the poet begins "The Tollund Man" with gestures toward pilgrimage (207). Though the speaker seems to look on the Tollund Man as a sort of specimen, at the same time it is a specimen to be revered, furthering the myth-making involved in this poem. To examine the Tollund Man is in some sense distancing, but as with "In Gallarus Oratory," Heaney's speaker begins with himself rather than the bog man's mythologized history of ritual slaughter, which makes the poem as immediate and contemporary as it is mythic, scientific, or historic. In the third stanza he imagines himself standing near the bog the Tollund Man was pulled from, reminding the reader that this "specimen" is a human being:

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time.
Bridegroom to the goddess,

She tightened her torc on him
And opened her fen,
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint's kept body,

Trove of the turfcutters'
Honeycombed workings. (I.9-18)

As Hughes notes, in this passage “we have the preserving bog giving up its secrets, the fearful ritual, the imagery of copulation and of the bog as womb, the transmitting of a cultural and mythic identity in the work of the turfcutters, and the suggestion of an inherited belief in ritual slaughter” (118). Heaney’s fertility imagery has gone sour. Whereas “Requiem for the Croppies” gave seeds that were resurrection, “In Gallarus Oratory” transmuted darkness into rebirth, and “The Outlaw” questioned whether illegal copulation would lead to any sort of meaningful conception, in “The Tollund Man” the womb is paradoxically a place of death. Heaney’s digging into a bottomless bog has led him to a place that offers little of the hope he espoused in his first and second volumes. After the bloodbaths of 1969’s Civil Marches and Bloody Sunday in 1972, it is no wonder that Heaney has lost his faith. The poet’s rapidly deteriorating optimism mirrors the rapidly deteriorating situation in Northern Ireland. The rebirth the IRA were attempting to force was bathed in the blood of civilians as the Ulster Defence Force retaliated and whole neighbourhoods in Belfast were subject to urban warfare as people were bludgeoned to death and exploding bombs marred the whole city. The womb-like bog becomes a metaphor for the state of Ireland in the 1970s, postulating the idea that this attempt at rebirth only exposes old wounds, creates death instead of life, and is ultimately futile.

The second section of the poem shows Heaney pondering blasphemy, to

consecrate the cauldron bog
Our holy ground and pray
Him to germinate

The scattered, ambushed
Flesh of labourers,
Stockinged corpses
Laid out in the farmyards. (II.2-8)

Here Heaney once again calls on the image of fertility and birth, but in this context it offers no optimism, as only corpses will be birthed. It ironically echoes the resurrection of “Requiem for the Croppies” and the fecundity Heaney once found in this land. No barley grows out of this blood and

the continuity Heaney finds between past and present here is that of death, not of unity in common purpose as he did in "Digging." The idea of consecrating this place of death brings to mind a parallel between ancient ritual slaughter and Heaney's contemporary sectarian violence, as both were in some sense sanctioned by religion — though in contemporary times that religious sanction is unequivocally a perversion of doctrine. Heaney's exploration of the continuity between past and present becomes truly dialectic here; instead of the evolution of "Digging" or the gentle arguments of "Saint Francis and the Birds," or the hope of "Requiem for the Croppies," "The Tollund Man" creates an ongoing conversation between past and present atrocity.

The final section of the poem finally draws the Tollund Man and Heaney's speaker together: "Out here in Jutland / In the old man-killing parishes / I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home" (III.9-12). Hughes explains "the term 'parishes' ironically underlines the disparity between the religious justification of the deed and its cold-blooded, impious cruelty, and its appropriateness to the grim situation in Northern Ireland is obvious" (118). These last few lines of the poem underscore a feeling of helplessness which Heaney expands upon in *North* with poems like "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" and "Singing School." However, unlike in that collection, Heaney veils his concern more completely in myth in *Wintering Out*. The reader is left to work out why Heaney will feel both lost and at home in the savage history of Jutland. The only logical answer, it seems, would be because where he lives now is not so different than that cruel place — but he will not go so far as to say that himself.

As his poetry evolves in the next volume, his mythological work hints at more than simply distress; it confesses a secret understanding of the sectarian violence he laments in *Wintering Out*, digs deeper and more frantically than in *Death of a Naturalist*, and nearly glories in the minor civil disobedience so discomfiting in *Door into the Dark*. Cohen, on the other hand, almost abandons his previous preoccupations with myth and history, digging as deep as Heaney does, but looking within himself rather than outside. In some sense, their positions become opposite what they were with

their first volumes. Heaney's righteous indignation is slow coming, but full-blown by the time of *North*. Cohen's is all but spent.

CHAPTER 3
SHIFTED PERSPECTIVES

"Is there a life before death?"

- Heaney, Whatever You Say Say Nothing

In examining Cohen's and Heaney's fourth volumes of poetry in relation to their previous three, it is clear that both poets undergo an evolution. Most interesting about these evolutions is that they are in many ways opposite one another. Heaney begins, by and large, with the mythologizing of his immediate surroundings in poems such as "Digging" and "Docker." Cohen, on the other hand, begins with the broadly mytho-historical, charting the legends and struggles of a people in poems such as "Song of the Hellenist" and "For Wilf and His House." Whereas Cohen ends with the individual mythologies of individual people in such poems as "Suzanne takes you down" and "A cross didn't fall on me," Heaney ends with the exploration of mytho-historical concepts in poems such as "The Grauballe Man" and his ongoing struggle with how the individual deals with larger historical problems in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing." In terms of points in their respective careers, Cohen seems exhausted with the political just as Heaney is finally angry enough actually to say something about it. Both poets' work evolves thematically, but at the same time there is a definite sense of their poetic origins in *North* and *Parasites of Heaven*. Cohen and Heaney combine their newfound points of view with their earliest approaches to mythology and exploration of identity. Differences between the poets' styles have a fundamental effect on how the reader perceives this shift. Heaney's obsession with the tactile details of physical reality bleeds into his mytho-historical poetry so that even his most broadly historical poetry remains fundamentally personal, as well. By contrast, Cohen's tendency to deal with the abstract makes his more personal

narratives seem arms' length. For both poets, their fourth books represent the culmination of slowly evolving positions. Where Heaney gently works up to political awareness, Cohen slowly retreats from it.

Parasites of Heaven in some ways finds Cohen in a new state of mind. Though he has lost some of the earnestness of his earliest work, he retains much of the whimsy of *Flowers for Hitler* in many of the poems and does continue to make reference to traditional mythologies. What generally separates this volume from his previous work is the lack of specificity regarding traditional mythologies. It is true that as a writer Cohen always was more abstract than Heaney, but in this volume one finds him much more abstract than in earlier work. Indeed, the lack of poem titles within the book speaks volumes about Cohen's state of mind. Poems with titles such as "Saviours" and "Hitler the Brain-Mole" yielded thematic clues, but in *Parasites of Heaven* he lays out verse that seems almost stream-of-consciousness, with little of the formality or traditional mythology Scobie notes in Cohen's earliest work. A perfect example of this is "A cross didn't fall on me," a seven-stanza poem that pulls the playfulness of *Flowers For Hitler* together with gestures toward larger mythology reminiscent of *The Spice-Box of Earth*. Unlike his previous work, however, in this poem Cohen mentions mythology only in passing, no longer an end in itself or even a means to an end, but simply a part of his poetic lexicon. This parallels Heaney's early poem "Dockery," the identity politics of which are understated and personal rather than drawing on grand narratives.

There is a sense of futility in "A cross didn't fall on me." In some ways, Cohen seems to be mourning a loss of the ancient mythologies he clung to in earlier works. More so even than in *Flowers For Hitler*, Cohen is turning away from one of his traditional tropes as a poet: a cross didn't fall on him (1), the rain won't make him feel like a feather (7-8), and the desire he once had to grow wings and lose his mind is gone (37-42). This poem is in some sense a rejection of the wonder he once possessed, particularly in poems such as "Isaiah," where people looked at each other and saw the truth of themselves, or in "For Wilf and His House," which despite implied horror also

communicated a sense of majesty. Instead, he reads out the headline of a Montreal newspaper: "Intervention decisive de Pearson / a la conference du Commonwealth" (21-22), and it is not even today's newspaper, but yesterday's (23). He has embraced banality, and the confession that "I mean to find / a passage or forge a passport / or talk a new language" (39-41) seems sarcastic at best. The repeating line, "Love me because nothing happens," which occurs at the end of each stanza, suggests that Cohen is looking away from the history and majesty and mythology which so occupied him previously. In earlier works, he might have thought that nothing happened, but he did not seem so married to the idea that nothing ever would, either. This is perhaps due in part to a new interest in Zen Buddhism. While it was not until 1993 that Cohen went into a monastery, his preoccupation with the Japanese religio-cultural movement began almost thirty years earlier, around the time he was writing *Parasites of Heaven* (Smith 45). The idea of "nothingness" (*sunyata*) is part of Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism's particular interpretation of that absolute nothingness makes Cohen's poem not quite so nihilistic as it might appear. As Gregory K. Ornatowski notes, "by negating both the 'non-Being' and the 'Being' of traditional Platonic philosophy, 'absolute nothingness' thus results in an emptiness that is at the same time an 'absolute present' (Nishida), 'creative nothingness' (Nishitani), or 'positive fullness' (Abe)" (93). In light of this, the poem becomes as much about turning toward a new sort of mythology based in a personal choice as it does about turning away from his older preoccupation with the grand metaphors of Judeo-Christian beliefs.

In this poem, Cohen interacts with his contemporary, literal reality the same way that Heaney did at the beginning of his career in *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*. However, unlike Heaney, who found hope ("Digging") and irony ("Rite of Spring") and horror ("The Early Purges") in his reality, Cohen inserts a sexual element ("Love me because nothing happens") and his own sarcastic voice in the release of his former mythologies' majestic aspects. In that way, Cohen holds onto a piece of his earlier self: he was not much of an optimist to begin with, after all.

Heaney's fourth volume, *North*, matches *Parasites of Heaven* in that he seems to have lost the optimism he had in his earlier writing, but it diverges from it in the sense that while Cohen has been moving forward, from ancient mythologies ("Song of the Hellenist") to nearer histories (*Flowers for Hitler*) to his contemporary and apparently boring life ("A cross *didn't* fall on me"), Heaney has been going backwards and downwards, digging from his father's garden down to the bottom of bogs, the first poet of his generation to do so (Collins 55). In *Door into the Dark*, Heaney's pioneers were "striking inwards and downwards" ("Bogland" 23-24), and though Hughes believed "there will be no end to the wonders to be discovered, and the poet as historian will find in such images [. . .] inexhaustible evidence of cultural traditions" (115), Heaney seems to have gotten to the bottom of those bogs and the cultural traditions he finds are not ones with which he seems particularly happy.

Forsaking his earlier optimism in poems such as "Digging" or "Requiem for the Croppies," Heaney finds and makes comparisons between the rituals of the past and the atrocities of the present, much as Cohen did in his early career in poems such as "Song of the Hellenist." In "The Grauballe Man," for example, he refers to the *bog man* as one of many "hooded victim[s]" (47), and as Collins notes, sacrifices to the pre-Christian deity Nerthus (whom the man had most likely been killed for) were often hooded, as recent victims of the Ulster Defence Association had been at the time Heaney writes (95). Instead of his earlier teleological view, in which liberty and new life are the natural conclusion of history, Heaney has a more cyclical view of human existence and a new sense of the barbarism within its nature.

Throughout "The Grauballe Man," Heaney uses two major metaphors: nature and birth. In the beginning of the poem, Heaney writes about how much like the bog the Grauballe Man has become:

The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak,
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg (6-9)

The Grauballe Man has become part of the landscape physically, but in the larger context of *North* it seems he has also become part of the landscape spiritually and metaphorically. The nature of his death has been absorbed into the landscape of Ireland just as his body has been absorbed into the bog. That metaphor is made more compelling in the latter half of the poem, which compares the bog man to a baby:

his rusted hair,
 a mat unlikely
 as a foetus's.
 I first saw his twisted face
 in a photograph
 [...]
 bruised like a forceps baby. (29-33, 36)

Collins explains the bog man's removal from the bog as a "painful second birth" (94). However, it is also his first birth and no birth at all. It is a true birth in the sense that this is the first time he is *exposed* to the world as he is: a part of the landscape's bloody past and present. However, it is hardly a birth at all in the sense that what made him what he is — a sacrifice and a symbol of atrocity in both ancient history and the contemporary — happened thousands of years ago. Though it took him millennia of gestation to actually become a bog man, for Heaney the barbarism of human sacrifice is nothing new; the Grauballe Man being pulled from the bog does not give Heaney a new knowledge of atrocity. Rather, it is the confirmation of something he already knew: Ireland is cruel. It is not the croppies' resurrection, nor is it the natural conception of "The Outlaw." Instead, the bog, like Ireland, becomes a fatal womb, birthing dead martyrs instead of babies. When Heaney queries, "Who will say 'corpse' / to his vivid cast?" (25-26), it implies that though this man is dead, he is far from simply being a part of the past. The "beauty and atrocity" (42) of his life and death are just as relevant, as tragic, and as urgent as they were when he died. "The Bog Queen," taken from the same volume, explores gestation in the bog womb more thoroughly, but it essentially communicates the same point as "The Grauballe Man." Though Heaney tends to address the nature of Ireland more than the nature of humanity, it is important to note that many of the bog people

Heaney writes about were discovered in Scandinavia, meaning that the sort of atrocity he writes about in this volume is not simply Ireland's. Just as Cohen broadened his perspective in *Flowers for Hitler* and *Parasites of Heaven*, Heaney's poetry in *North* can sometimes be reflected upon the whole of humanity, as well, though never as explicitly.

Like Cohen in his early poetry, Heaney creates parallels between past and present in his bog poetry. In "Song of the Hellenist," Cohen conflates biblical identity struggles with the near-contemporary, essentially arguing that certain Jewish struggles are the same as they have always been. Both employ birth as an important symbol, albeit in different ways. Cohen, ever the abstractionist, explores briefly how the speaker's children will be not Jewish, but Greek, despite their literal heritage as children of a Jewish man. He does not engage with the details of the scene, however: the colour of the children's hair, whether they will look Jewish or Greek, or how being Jewish and Greek at the same time will affect them. Heaney's exploration, as noted above, is a decidedly more visceral experience as he describes the physical reality of bog people, but the idea of generations is present in both, as if in both poems things change superficially but literally do not change much at all.

In "The Bog Queen," Heaney makes the same parallel between past and present violence that he does in "The Grauballe Man." The struggle for the Irish has essentially always been the same, as has the justification for their actions. As Hart notes, "[the I.R.A.'s] mythic acts hark back to Christian and earlier pagan 'paradigms' of resurrection and revelation" (402). Heaney cements this claim in other poems such as "Funeral Rites," "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces," and "Ocean's Love to Ireland" where he again creates the dialectic between past and present, predator and victim, conqueror and conquered. In these poems, the difference is not so much theme as it is historical time period. Heaney takes incidents from across history and mythology, be it mythic Norse heroes ("Funeral Rites") eleventh-century Vikings ("Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces"), or Elizabethan Ireland ("Ocean's Love to Ireland"). As many scholars have noted, Heaney's tendency overall in *North* is not to come down on one side or the other of sectarian struggles in Ireland, but to set them in the

context of Ireland's bloody history and its status as a colonized country. While in previous books history was a series of events in a chronology, in *North* historical moments lose their distinctness as they are set in a continuum of constant violence, as John Hildebidle notes, "To distinguish between various myths — personal, tribal, political, cultural, historical — is in fact to misrepresent the character of the book, which is fundamentally concerned with interconnection" (40).

Whereas Heaney is concerned with the interconnection of historical incidents and identities in many of *North's* poems, Cohen seems to be dealing with a metaphorical loss of identity. In "Give me back my fingerprints," for example, the poet is talking to someone who seems to have literally taken away his fingerprints. The poem, in short rhyming quatrains (ABCB), is a modified ballad stanza. It has a sing-song quality about it that makes it sound humorous, but at the same time the loss of fingerprints points to an underlying anxiety about identity. Fittingly, as the volume in general speaks less about cultural and more about personal identity, Cohen seems to have lost his fingerprints to a woman rather than to anti-Semites. The poem does put one in mind of *Flowers For Hitler* in the sense that fingerprints are skin, and he makes some rather horrifying references to Jewish skin used for lamps in his previous volume, but overall the poem speaks more to Cohen's anxiety about being "caught" by a woman than anything else.

The poem is rich in terms of metaphor, as fingerprints become a symbol of identity, the uniqueness of fingerprints a placeholder for the uniqueness of individual identity: "I touched you once too often / & I don't know who I am [...]// There are no other like them / & that should make them proud" (5-6, 31-32). With this poem, it becomes clear that Cohen's questions of identity have shifted focus from the cultural to the personal; no longer concerned with his identity as a Jew in relation to others ("Song of the Hellenist," "Hitler the Brain-Mole"), he questions his identity more strongly as a man in relation to women than he had previously. There is a certain sense of mythologizing in this piece, as his fingerprints are anthropomorphized and made much more than simply the ends of his fingers, but with this poem and others ("It's not so hard to say goodbye,"

“Clean as the grass,” “Suzanne wears a leather coat,” “In almond trees”), it is clear that mythology is no longer one of the major tropes of his poetry. Cohen’s use of the body (bawdy) in poetry is not new — poems such as “Celebration,” “Montreal 1964,” and even “Song of the Hellenist” all rely on sensual imagery, some of them quite heavily. Poems such as “Give me back my fingerprints” demonstrate a new balance between myth and body that relies more heavily on the body as symbol than mythology as metaphor. In this way he reflects Heaney’s early poetry, which gestured at mythologies but was ultimately more concerned with the corporeal.

When Cohen does choose to deal with the more metaphysical aspects of poetry, he is much less specific than he once was. “O love intrude into this strangerhood,” for example, echoes “Saviours,” in allusion, if not form. “O love intrude” employs a similar sort of biblical imagery, albeit not as specific. Where “Saviours” makes reference to particular Old Testament heroes, “O love intrude” does not mention heroes by name, but by title: “Where I can learn to master / As my heroes did / The visionary discipline” (6-8). Additionally, the use of the word “leper” as an adjective echoes the Judeo-Christian mythology Cohen employed so readily in his first two volumes. The epic nature of this short poem calls to mind much of *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, but it lacks the proliferation of specific mythological allusions that characterized his first volume.

In a poem such as “I am a priest of God,” Cohen turns the idea of himself as a “priest-poet” (a title given him by Djwa, among others) on its head. In some ways it is reminiscent of poems such as “Saviours” or “Isaiah,” which point to the victory of ritual over faith, but it is also very different in that Cohen gives the poem a much more personal voice and much less specific subject matter. Instead of setting the poem in a firm mytho-historical context, he sets the speaker up vaguely, simply as a “priest of God” (1). The poem ends with the speaker telling a crowd that “even now in 1966 / I’m not sure I’m a priest of God” (21-22), but he starts exploring this uncertainty at the beginning of the first stanza in saying, “I walk down the road / with my pockets in my hands” (2-3). Literally, this could mean that the speaker’s pockets are turned out. The more immediate

assumption, though, is that Cohen has got it back to front, an idea borne out by the rest of the poem as the speaker finds himself horribly confused: "I thought I was doing 100 other things / but I was a priest of God" (12-13). While the speaker confesses to liking the sound of it (8-11), he is clearly not enamoured of the idea in general. This poem demonstrates a fundamental breakdown in the mythological structures of Cohen's poetry. Indeed, one could infer from this poem that Cohen is quite disenchanted with his role as priest-poet, allowing the poem's speaker to turn to more visceral things: "I loved 100 women / never told the same lie twice" (14-15). It embraces the same query about personal identity that "Give me back my fingerprints" does, though in a different way. In "Give me back my fingerprints," the speaker knows precisely where his identity has gone, though he is not certain how to get it back. In "I am a priest of God," he is not sure who he was in the first place. In contrast to Cohen's early poetic ambivalence, this poem betrays more ambiguity. It is not so much that the poem's speaker is conflicted about his identity as a priest of God, but more that he is confused by it.

When Cohen chooses to use mythology in *Parasites of Heaven*, he is less concerned with conventional mythologies and their bearing on his identity as a Jew than he was in previous volumes. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, *Let Us Compare Mythologies* is often very concerned with Cohen's identity as a Jew in a broad historical sense: he discusses his identity as a pan-historical "Christ-killer" in "For Wilf and His House," as a beleaguered minority in danger of losing identity in "Song of the Hellenist," and as a member of a group too concerned with ritual in "Saviours." All of these rely specifically on Jewish experience, be it scriptural history made myth or near-contemporary history. In *The Spice-Box of Earth* Cohen becomes less concerned with his political identity as a Jew, but poems such as "Isaiah" and "I Have Two Bars of Soap" still rely heavily on Jewish scripture and ritual. As with Heaney, there is a major divide between his second book and his third: where *The Spice-Box of Earth* is earnest and *Let Us Compare Mythologies* is didactic, *Flowers For Hitler* is flippant and gruesomely playful. In that volume Cohen widens the scope of mythology and identity, and yet at

the same time he remains clearly Jewish in his preoccupations: the Holocaust and his cultural/societal place in Montreal. In *Parasites of Heaven*, Cohen seems to leave that behind. In some sense, he comes full circle in this volume: he returns to mythology, but the manner in which he broadened his scope in his intervening books influences the way in which he uses mythology.

One of the most clear examples of this in the book is "Suzanne takes you down," a longer lyric poem which also became the song "Suzanne." In this poem, there are two sorts of mythologies. In the first and third stanzas, Cohen mythologizes a person, much as Heaney did in "Digging" in his first volume. Unsurprisingly, rather than talking about his father, Cohen talks about a woman: Suzanne. Cohen's poem makes her more than a woman, and she calls to mind a mythic figure from "Saint Catherine's Street," a poem from *Let Us Compare Mythologies*: "Once with a flaming belly she danced upon a green road" (18). Unlike that figure, however, this woman is not diminished and she is real. This is one of Cohen's few poems which address the tactile details of a setting and talk about a particular thing. Though he is certainly never quite as apt as Heaney at describing those details, the first stanza's first half relies on those small things to create a concrete rather than abstract scene: "you can hear the boats go by [...] / [...] and she feeds you tea and oranges / that come all the way from China" (3, 7-8).

Toward the second half of the first stanza, Cohen moves from the tangible to mythmaking in his characterization of Suzanne when "she lets the river answer / that you've always been her lover" (12-13). Cohen vaguely anthropomorphizes the river, but in the context of the stanza it seems more likely that Suzanne has got into the speaker's head, as she "gets you on her wave-length" (11). Suzanne is somewhere between heroine and damsel. While "you've touched her perfect body / with your mind" (17-18), "you want to travel with her, / you want to travel blind" (14-15). The speaker wants to be led, as opposed to leading. Suzanne is someone to follow, and the question is not whether you can trust her, but whether she can trust you: as if she has something beautiful to show you, but she needs to be certain you are worthy of it. With these lines, Cohen moves between the

concrete and the abstract. Her body is concrete, but your mind is abstract; traveling with her is specific, but to travel blind is abstract, as it forces the speaker into ambiguity. You do not know where you are going or why. The poem is mythic as minds touch flesh and the speaker becomes the reader with Cohen's use of second-person pronouns, as if everyone who listens to the song or reads the verse is also traveling with Suzanne. It creates a mythological universality that is paradoxically very individual as well, as every reader in turn becomes a traveler with Suzanne. The fact that "you've always been *her* lover" broadly implies a male gaze and consequently a masculine voice, but this poem still allows a broader reading than much of Cohen's earliest poetry, which was firmly ensconced in Jewish identity.

The third stanza continues the mythological aspects of the first, though there is a Christian undertone as Suzanne becomes "our lady of the harbour" (41) — a clear reference to Marian Christianity. In this stanza, Suzanne allows you to travel with her — she "leads you to the river" (37) where you find treasures which do not appear to be valuable at first glimpse. However, "she shows you where to look / among the garbage and the flowers" (42-43). Here, Suzanne and the speaker find beauty in the banal — a more cheerful view of things than the speaker took in "A cross didn't fall on me," but at the same time not so different, either, as both poems embrace the banal. Like "A cross didn't fall on me," this poem turns inward in some sense, as "Suzanne she holds the mirror" (48). Cohen's poem does not specify what she is holding the mirror to, but the fact that you note it can imply that she is holding the mirror up to you. That is, part of the beauty you see "among the garbage and the flowers" (43) is, in fact, you.

This poem is softer than others by Cohen that deal with mythology. There is a sharp tone to his mythological poems in his first and third volumes, and even in the sensualism of *The Spice-Box of Earth* there is often a bitter or ironic edge to his words. However, in this poem he is expressing a feeling more than an idea, choosing to mythologize a person instead of exclusively borrowing mythologies from a larger system of belief. This makes the mythology more intimate. Instead of

relying on the tropes of cultural and religious mythology of his previous volumes, Cohen creates a new mythology around a single person. Even in the second stanza, which contemplates Christ, there is that same softness, an impression that is sensual rather than intellectual and thoughtful rather than didactic. One does not find the dialectic between past and present seen in “Song of the Hellenist,” or the struggle between Christian and Jew in “For Wilf and His House.” Instead, there is a unity among past and present that Cohen effects through his playful modification of Christian mythology.

Rather than referring to mythology for legitimacy or as evidence, he is, essentially, *playing*. Cohen takes Christian scripture and twists it in a not unkind way. There are definite parallels between the poem’s second stanza and the New Testament, but at the same time the allusions are not conventionally Christian. The stanza opens with “Jesus was a sailor / when he walked upon the water” (19-20). This is a reference to John 6, Mark 6, and Matthew 14, but what is of particular interest is that Cohen calls Jesus a sailor rather than a fisherman, which is the standard nautical metaphor of the New Testament (see Matthew 4:19) and denotes gathering in and nourishing rather than traveling and adventuring. When Cohen puts the words “All men will be sailors then / until the sea shall free them” (25-26) into Jesus’ mouth, he creates a new impetus for followers: rather than gathering in, they need to go out. However, the point of Cohen’s poem is that one wants to follow Suzanne, not Christ, and so while he still calls upon traditional mythology, he plays with it to serve a more individual purpose.

In that same roundabout way, he potentially makes reference to Calvary when he says “and he spent a long time watching / from a lonely wooden tower” (21-22), as well as “he sank beneath your wisdom like a stone” (30). Cohen chooses figurative language over literal reference, communicating a mental failing on your part in that you allow Jesus to sink, even though in the last part of the stanza you want to follow him. Significantly, Cohen abandons the gestures toward tangible detail that he makes in the first and third stanzas in the second — again, because Jesus is not the point of this poem. Where he dealt with conventional mythology with very literal

comparisons in previous work (e.g., using the simile “like a bat against a barn,” describing Calvary in “For Wilf and His House”), this stanza portrays a more general sense of mythology instead of specifics. His gestures at traditional mythology imply mysticism and majesty, but ultimately the crux of the poem is Suzanne, not Jesus.

This second stanza, though very similar in form to the first and third, seems to depart quite dramatically in theme. In this poem, however, the point is not to address conventional mythologies, but to address this enigmatic woman. In previous works he often used mythology as a means to explore his identity as a Jew, but in this poem he constructs a mythology to explore someone else’s identity — or at the very least, a man’s attitude toward her identity. By alluding to Christian scripture in the second stanza, then revisiting it in the third (“our lady of the harbour”), he creates a parallel between Suzanne and Christ. The richness of Christian metaphor overlays your encounter with Suzanne. When you “want to travel blind” (15, 32, 50), either with Christ or Suzanne, it is a leap of faith — blind faith. The fact that Christ is “almost human” connotes that Suzanne is inhuman. Freedom rests in giving up both to Christ and to Suzanne. His intention does not seem to be apotheosis, but a comparison to communicate how charismatic and enigmatic Suzanne is. Significantly, however, where Christ touches you with his mind, you touch Suzanne with yours. There is a definite space between the two, communicating that they are different sorts of freedoms. Cohen creates a sort of mysticism here that is grounded more firmly in spirituality than ritual or religiosity.

Though a very different poem in many ways, the parallel between human and divine calls to mind “Requiem for the Croppies” by Heaney. As explored in Chapter 1, Heaney uses Christian imagery in “Requiem for the Croppies” to create an impression of the croppies. The poem is not about Christ, yet the characterization of the croppies as martyrs, their Good Friday on Vinegar Hill, and their resurrection at Easter 1916 creates a sense of the mythic that extends beyond the corporeal. As croppies were more than simply nationalists, so Suzanne is more than simply human.

A certain amount of anxiety could be implied in "Suzanne" — decide in Christian scripture casting a dour view on Suzanne's prospects, for example, or the idea that if only drowning men can see Christ, then perhaps you only see Suzanne because you are drowning. However, that does not seem to be part of the comparison Cohen makes; the very arms' length treatment of Christian mythology prevents that from coming to the fore, as neither Christ's death nor resurrection is dealt with concretely in the poem. Christ's "sinking" is vague at best, and the poet focuses more on the presence of Christ than on Christian mythology. As Heaney only takes part of the whole in "Requiem for the Croppies," looking at Republican successes and ignoring the Troubles, Cohen only takes part of the biblical story, applying the mystical and leaving the painful behind.

An interesting complement to Cohen's "Suzanne" is Heaney's "Whatever You Say Say Nothing." Like "Suzanne," "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" is not necessarily representative of the whole volume, but it demands analysis for the same reason "Suzanne" does: it demonstrates a conflation of the themes and styles that span his early career. The poem, which explores the behaviour of civilians in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, comes full circle in a similar way to "Suzanne." In the first part of *North* Heaney is firmly entrenched in the mythologies of bog people and their connection to the so-called ritual slaughter of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. However, the second part of the book hearkens back to his earlier works in much the same way that Cohen's "Suzanne" does. That is, he explores a tactile, immediate reality, but not in the same way as in previous books. He writes in contrast to the soft pastoral reality of *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, or the burgeoning political protest in *Wintering Out* swathed in discussions of etymology or the mythology of bogs. The second part of *North* combines Heaney's present-day Ireland with a new-formed political voice no longer clothed in metaphor. Significantly, he returns to the submerged mythology of his first two books, but instead of his previous political optimism, he offers the sort of ambivalence found in Cohen's first volume of poetry. As with Cohen, instead of gesturing at answers and resolution, he finds discord and a spitting new voice reminiscent of "For

Wilf and His House.” As Hildebidle suggests the poem’s title essentially sums up the theme of *North* (40), it is fitting for “Whatever You Say Say Nothing” to occupy a place of prominence in analysis. This is one of very few poems where one sees Heaney’s frustration and possibly even anger at the situation in Northern Ireland. As Collins notes, “caught between the violence of the Provisional IRA and the Protestant paramilitary groups, Heaney is necessarily obliged to ponder the personal and cultural polarities” (57).

The first section of the poem is ostensibly written “after an encounter / With an English journalist in search of ‘views / on the Irish thing’” (I.1-2). The speaker (possibly, though not definitely Heaney, who presumably wrote this after he had returned from his visiting professorship at Stanford) is “back in winter / Quarters where bad news is no longer news” (I.3-4). That is, he is back in Northern Ireland. The speaker’s description of journalists in this first section of the poem is surprisingly military. Journalists “sniff and point” (I.5) like dogs finding drugs at customs. Media equipment “litter the hotels” (I.7) like bodies or shrapnel. Just as he created martyrs through his diction in “Requiem for the Croppies,” Heaney is creating a mental battlefield in the North with his choice of words in this poem. As is often the case with Heaney, the poet creates an impression by saying something and nothing at the same time — perfectly normal in Northern Ireland, where “whatever you say, you say nothing” (III.12).

There is the same sense of evolving in this section of the poem as there was in “Requiem for the Croppies:” a very different evolution than in the first poem, but an evolution nonetheless. “Requiem for the Croppies” telescoped history from 1798 to 1916, but “Whatever You Say Say Nothing” traces a very definite change in a very short period of time, from “gas / And protest to gellignite and sten” (I.11-12). Rather than seeing himself at the end of something, Heaney’s speaker sees himself in the midst of it. This is presumably largely because he is living in the midst of civil unrest, but at the same time Belfast was not so much calmer in the late 1960s that it would have been impossible to have had the dour view of the Troubles that he clearly possesses in the mid-

1970s. As demonstrated by the poem "Dock" in *Death of a Naturalist*, he was very cognizant of the potential for violence in Belfast at the time. However, in the 1960s he seemed to have an almost unflagging optimism that made his previous brief discussion of Irish identity rosy in comparison to his exploration of the Troubles in *North*. In *North*, he sees no resurrection, and he certainly sees no second coming.

In the fourth quatrain of the first section, the poem shifts from the military situation in Northern Ireland to the civic situation when he moves from the clichés of veritable civil war to his own reality. From this point, the poem deals not with the Troubles themselves, but largely with how citizens dealt with them, English journalist and Irish citizen alike. The final line of the fourth quatrain reminds the reader of Heaney's earlier optimism when he says, "Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing" (l.16). However, that optimism is quickly quashed in the fifth quatrain:

Expertly civil-tongued with civil neighbours,
On the high wires of first wireless reports,
Sucking the fake taste, the stony flavours
Of those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts (l. 17-20)

The use of the word "sanction" in this stanza ties the quatrain back to the second stanza's final line, when the speaker says he inclines "as much to rosary beads / As to the jottings and analyses / Of politicians and newspapermen" (l.8-10). The mention of popish superstition in the form of the rosary opens a much larger debate than one might initially suppose — a query that envelops both Heaney and Cohen's treatment of religion and myth. Some scholars, such as Lucy McDiarmid in her essay "Heaney and the Politics of the Classroom," infer a suspicion and fear of religious (as opposed to political) Catholicism on Heaney's part, particularly in the long poem "Singing School" as well as "Freedman," both from *North* (115). Poems such as "In Gallarus Oratory" communicate a slight distrust of organized religion, though he seems not to reject Catholicism entirely. Henry Hart quotes Heaney as admitting, "the community to which I belong is Catholic and nationalist" (401). In 1970s Northern Ireland, they must have seemed almost indivisible, but at the same time one cannot equate violent Republican terrorism with the Sermon on the Mount. The end result of the indivisibility of

politics and faith in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" is that having no articulated politics is in some sense having no faith, either. Whether anyone is politically or spiritually Catholic or both, their religion is politeness and their ritual is silence. In the sixth stanza, when Heaney parrots the so-called proper reaction to sectarian violence ("Oh it's disgraceful," "It's getting worse," "They're murderers"), the idea that "'The voice of sanity' is getting hoarse" (24) reflects as much on bystanders as it does on political terrorists.

In this first section of the poem, Heaney's relationship to ritual and myth is submerged in a contemporary and somewhat ordinary narrative, much as it was in his earliest work. Like digging, or drowning stray cats, the conflict Heaney discusses in this poem is an everyday occurrence and an everyday concern. His Catholicism, as well, is an everyday issue as nationalism becomes as much a common concern as an abstract ideology. However, as the poem progresses into the next sections, the everyday becomes more epic than Belfast's urban warfare. By contrast, the IRA and loyalist martyrs become a sad but everyday reality rather than the larger-than-life figures of Heaney's "Requiem for the Croppies."

In the second section of the poem, urban warfare is dealt with rather swiftly as it opens with the abrupt sentence, "Men die at hand" (II.1). More important to Heaney is the way in which those who have not died address that death. The second two lines of the first quatrain carry a bitterness, comparing the win of a Scottish (Catholic) football team to the mammoth struggle between republican and loyalist: "As the man said when Celtic won: 'The Pope of Rome / 's a happy man this night'" (II.3-4). It might seem like some clever way to underscore the futility of the struggle, but to assume so would downplay the importance of something so simple as a Celtic (Catholic) win over the Rangers (Protestant). American political commentator (and soccer fan) Frank Foer traces the sectarian violence occurring on game days to the present, and how on one ill-fated night in 1999 a young Celtic fan lost his life to a gang of Rangers supporters (37, 53). A Celtic victory to a mid-1970s Belfast was no small thing.

But for all that, Heaney notes how the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland shy away from any outward sign of sectarianism: "We tremble near the flames but want no truck / With the actual firing" (II.7-8). While a soccer game might be something to comment on, the sometimes open warfare in the streets was not; it is too contentious to come down on one side or the other when people are dying. That is not to say, however, that Catholics in Northern Ireland were not bitter about how they had been treated, however reticent they were to talk about it. Heaney's speaker explores the hidden anger at the decades of mistreatment Catholics suffered at the hands of their neighbours and the government: "Long sucking the hind tit, / Cold as a witch's and as hard to swallow, / Still leaves us fork-tongued on the border bit:" (II.9-11). Here again, Heaney's choice of words and metaphor elevate a common sentiment of the time into something mythic. Significantly, he chooses a turn of phrase that brings to mind his earlier pastoral poetry. In husbandry terms, "sucking the hind tit" refers to the runt of a litter of piglets who must suck the hind tit (and consequently get less milk) because it is stepped on by the other piglets and cannot fight its way to a better spot. The simile "cold as a witch's" brings to mind the folklore of Early Modern witch-hunts. It creates a double meaning, compounded by the use of the term "forked tongue," that metaphorically explains the evil acts occurring in the North, as incubi and succubae were believed to be fed from the witch's tit in that same Early Modern folklore. Lines from the second stanza also feed the overall impression of fairy tale, albeit with a more religiously pertinent theme: "His flock suspect / In their deepest heart of hearts the heretic / Has come at last to heel and to the stake" (4-6). In these three quatrains, Heaney reads the civic struggle of Catholic civilians who are both angry and nervous, afraid of the IRA's violence and yet also on some level seeing it as justice. As noted previously, in later years, Heaney spoke of the necessity of change in his Nobel Lecture:

[T]he minority citizen in oneself, the one who had grown up conscious that his group was distrusted and discriminated against in all kinds of official and unofficial ways — this citizen's perception was at one with the poetic truth of the situation in recognizing that if life in Northern Ireland were ever really to flourish, change had to take place. (*Crediting Poetry* 22-23)

The nature of that change, however, was fraught with difficulty. As noted in Chapter 2, Heaney goes on in his lecture to explain that the IRA was attempting to effect the sort of change that was necessary, but the nature of their methods undermined that possibility (*Crediting Poetry* 23).

In the midst of the Troubles, however, Heaney is not so thoughtful. Instead, he writes, “The liberal papist note sounds hollow // When amplified and mixed in with the bangs / That shake all hearts and windows day and night” (II.12-14). Again, Heaney’s choice of words creates an epic impression. It is not likely that bombs were going off every second of the day and night from 1969 on, but the poet’s diction creates the impression that at least in the minds of Northern Ireland’s citizens, that is what was happening. In poems such as “Punishment” he demonstrates how the past is like the present by linking the tribalism of the ancient and contemporary, but in “Whatever You Say Say Nothing” he makes the present like the mytho-poetic landscape of the first section by making the contemporary larger than life. Just as the first section of *North* draws parallels forward from the past, so this second section draws parallels backward from the present. In setting the Troubles in their historical context, he must do both.

This dialectic between past and present is cemented in the fourth and fifth stanzas of the poem’s second section, when in an aside he says,

(It’s tempting here to rhyme on ‘labour pangs’
And diagnose a rebirth in our plight

But that would be to ignore other symptoms.
Last night you didn’t need a stethoscope
To hear the eructations of Orange drums
Allergic equally to Pearse and Pope.) (II.15-20)

This small section brings together a variety of themes running through both this volume and, in fact, Heaney’s poetry up to *North*. Throughout his first four books, the themes of fertility and fecundity play major roles, both in his political and pastoral poetry. In “Requiem for the Croppies,” bloody barley grows into a crop on Vinegar Hill. In “Digging” Heaney’s father is digging potatoes and his own sort of poetic digging is meant to yield a different sort of nourishment. *Door into the Dark’s*

"The Outlaw" is about the act of conception, and *Wintering Out's* original title, *Winter Seeds*, connotes a sense of rebirth. Toward the end of *Wintering Out*, however, the ideas of fertility and fecundity become perverted as the bog becomes a sort of ungodly womb in "The Tollund Man" (as explored in greater detail in Chapter 2). In this volume, the idea of strange birth and perverted fertility are carried through metaphorically in the first section, but in "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" Heaney says it outright. It is a culmination of the imagery's progress through the four books, and a rather tragic culmination, at that. Heaney has lost his faith. In 1975, civic violence and sectarian martyrs do not herald the rebirth of Ireland, republican or otherwise. He pinpoints the necessity for Ireland's rebirth but also acknowledges that in the present climate, that will not be possible. He gestures at the Battle of the Boyne with Orange drums and at 1916 with the mention of Padraic Pearse, but sees no concluding moment or figure. Heaney draws together history as he did in "Requiem for the Croppies," but this time he comes up empty. As Hildebidle notes, the only way for things to change is to acknowledge that context must change, and that by playing out these historical moments nothing actually gets accomplished (40). Hart goes further by saying that Heaney's *North* "expose[s] the shadowy demarcations between story and history and tabulate[s] the consequences of blind devotion to fossilized myths" (402). This reflects some of Cohen's early poetry, especially "Saviours" and "Isaiah," which both cast aspersions on the ascendancy of ritual over faith.

The sixth and seventh stanzas of the section draw Heaney's dour conclusion into the present, though he once again connects it to the past. He makes reference to Conor Cruise O'Brien's rather patronizing term "little platoons," which refer to the IRA's political violence. Heaney brings the dialectic between past and present to the fore in mentioning both Cruise O'Brien and his ancestor, 18th-century Irish politician Edmund Burke, both of whom resolutely opposed militant republicanism in their day, and both of whom are known for their eloquence. Heaney, by contrast, has a "pestering / Drouth for words at once both gaff and bait / To lure the tribal shoals to epigram / And order" (23-26). Heaney chooses the Irish "drouth" over the English "drought," as

well as “gaff,” a word with multiple meanings, but in this context most likely the verb form, meaning either “deceive” or “strike.” Heaney’s intentional use of Irish words brings to mind “Traditions” from *Wintering Out*, where the poet mythologizes the Irish use of words.

In addition to referencing an earlier work, Heaney’s unusual diction in this passage obscures meaning. As the speaker is presumably devoid of words (“drouth for words”), it is fitting that it would be difficult for the reader to make sense of what he means, especially in the segment of the phrase where he explains precisely *how* he will bring the tribal shoals to epigram. Indeed, the whole prospect of finding any words for the many-faceted situation in Northern Ireland seems optimistic at best, which is perhaps partly why they have all chosen to say nothing. The speaker (and Heaney, seemingly) does still place his faith in words, however — not necessarily his own words, but words in general, mythologizing their power by clinging to the idea that “given the right line” (28), anyone could clarify the situation. Unfortunately, words have left the speaker.

The third section of the poem returns to the “expertly civil-tongued” suburbs of Belfast. The section opens with the quoted line “‘Religion’s never mentioned here’” (III.1). This quotation begins a set of three pat platitudes, each with a sarcastic addendum (III.1-3). This bears stylistic resemblance to Cohen’s “Montreal 1964,” where the poet’s speaker mocks the platitudes of idealists. Heaney goes into greater detail than Cohen did, however. Throughout the poem’s third section, Heaney lays out the hypocrisy of civilians in Northern Ireland, that they would spout these axioms yet at the same time manoeuvre to determine the sectarian affiliations of every Irish person they meet. In some sense, these civilians are creating a mythology of their own, by proclaiming that “one side’s as bad as the other” (III.3) regardless of what is actually going on in Northern Ireland, and “you know them by their eyes” (III.2) as if members of the IRA and loyalist paramilitary groups had something mystical about them so that one could tell who they were just by looking. It is no wonder that Heaney’s speaker wishes that “that some small leak was sprung // In the great dykes the Dutchman made / to dam the dangerous tide that followed Seamus” (III.4-6). Heaney alludes once

again to history, here. The Dutch, of course, are known for their dykes, but in Ireland the Dutch are known equally well, if not better, for producing William of Orange, the man who conquered James VII & II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and sealed the fate of Ireland as a conquered people. The quickness with which the speaker goes from present to past once again places the two in a continuum. The fact that “it’s near time that some small leak was sprung” (III.4) cements this as it implies that the oppression (dykes) of the 17th century reaches into the speaker’s contemporary time, and leaks can still spring from it.

The fact that Heaney uses the Gaelic form of James — Seamus, the poet’s own name — cannot simply be attributed to wanting to use a word that rhymes with “famous.” Heaney creates a clear parallel between past and present once again, aligning himself beside James VII as impotently bidding for what by birth should be his: the right to rule England, and the right to speak unhindered in his own land, respectively. The dam becomes not only prejudice, but the oppressive silence the poem’s speaker suffers as a man not just incapable of finding the necessary words to address the Troubles, but also not allowed to do so. The dangerous tide following “Seamus” is not necessarily the historical upswell of Catholic monarchists militarizing in Ireland, but the outpouring of the speaker’s own anger. The dam becomes the gag the speaker refers to in the third stanza. Equally one must address the homonym of “dam” — damn — which expresses the political Orangemen’s condemnation of the nationalist struggle and the civic condemnation of the speaker’s personal struggle to say something that has meaning. With this comparison, the inability to say something becomes an epic struggle between factions with whole countries and cultures in the balance, and thus, becomes mythic, as well.

The last four stanzas of the section explore what Heaney calls “The famous // Northern reticence” (III.8-9). The line from which the poem takes its name is in the third stanza: “Where to be saved you only must save face / And whatever you say, you say nothing” (III.11-12). Hildebidle notes that the source for the title is “any Belfast shopwindow, where posters remind all sects that

any speech is dangerous" (40). The difference between the poem's line and the poem's title shifts meaning for both. The title is almost a directive, belied by the poem's contents, and in particular by the stanza which holds the phrase from which the poem takes its name; though not aligning himself with republican or loyalist, Heaney demands the right to say something, to point to the hypocrisies of Northern Ireland and within himself. Collins notes that the poem demonstrates that "self-effacement has become self-protection" (100). That is, only in being invisible and anonymous are people able to preserve themselves. But for all that, invisibility is a practical impossibility. Names, schools, and addresses will give one away, and according to memoirist Polly Devlin (Heaney's sister-in-law), even pronouns widen the gap between Protestant and Catholic (159). In fact, even saying nothing carries its own weight, as Hildebidle notes that "even to say nothing is to take a side" (40). For Heaney, a poet writing in the midst of the Troubles, whose essential duty is to say *something*, the frustration is almost palpable, and as Hildebidle says, "does much to explain the particular darkness of *North*" (40).

Again, Heaney addresses the problem in historical and mythological terms, comparing the Irish subtleties of speech and location first to smoke-signals (III.13), and then to Greek mythology in the form of the Trojan Horse (III.22-23). Heaney's reference to Greek mythology allows a comparison to Cohen's "Song of the Hellenist." "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" has a different tone, but both poems speak to the effort to hide oneself, be it through different names, different customs, or simply silence. Heaney's poem, clothed in spitting anger, has a more pugilistic tone. Unlike the struggle Cohen explores, this civic struggle becomes warlike, just as journalists were warlike in the first section: "Oh, land of password, handgrip, wink and nod [...] // [...] Besieged within the siege, whispering morse" (III.19, 24). All of "the wee six" are at war, and Heaney does not mean street fighting down the Falls Road and the Shankill. What is more, all of the wee six are in some sense traitors. Bizarrely, the battle over pronoun and name becomes more epic than bombings

and Orange drums. The famous Northern reticence is a mythic, insurmountable being that plagues every person in Northern Ireland.

The fourth section of the poem is the same passage used by way of epigraph in *Wintering Out*, discussed in Chapter 2. Besides the introduction of capitalization at the beginning of each line, the only difference between the epigraph and this section is a new specificity. Instead of, "That's chalked up / on a wall downtown" (9-10), Heaney says, "That's chalked up / In Ballymurphy" (IV.9-10). Ballymurphy, a Catholic working class neighbourhood in Belfast, was a fierce battleground for the IRA and British Army, a major flashpoint for the Troubles and in fact one of the main reasons that internment without trial began in the early 1970s. If "life before death" is chalked up in Ballymurphy, Heaney chooses a dark vision of Northern Irish existence, that the only life to be had is one fraught with danger on the brink of disaster and death at all times. Yet, in the context of the poem, that seems to be the only life there is in Belfast for many.

As Heaney concludes the poem, he takes on what Collins calls a stoic indifference (101): "Competence with pain, / Coherent miseries, a bite and sup: / We hug our little destiny again" (IV.10-12). Despite the poem's general frustrations and anger, it ends with resignation. However, the nature of that resignation once again hearkens back to myth; Heaney's choice of the word "destiny" implies a sense of predestination. Taken with the rest of the poem, Heaney's resignation becomes as epic as his struggle. Rage as he might against the closed society in which he lives, he is powerless to do much of anything about it except write this poem.

Significantly, it is one of the only poems Heaney wrote in this period that genuinely expresses an opinion about the Troubles. Both *Wintering Out* and *North* generally set the Troubles in historical context rather than saying how he feels about them one way or another. Ironically, as Hart notes, Heaney was not only criticized for being too partisan by critics such as Edna Longley and Cruise O'Brien, he was more often censured for not being partisan enough by fellow nationalists (4). However, "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" stands apart from most of the volume in that Heaney

seems genuinely irate for the first time. Though the poet comes to a poetic political awakening in his fourth volume, he tends not to engage in the sort of polemics that Cohen did in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*. This is perhaps the mark of a more mature poet (*North* was published when Heaney was 36; *Let Us Compare Mythologies* was published when Cohen was 22), but it is equally the mark of a more hesitant soul. Unlike Cohen, who wrote from the relative safety of Montreal, Heaney wrote much of *North* in the midst of urban warfare before he made his controversial move to Wicklow.

Both Cohen's and Heaney's respective fourth books of poetry complete the first arc of each of their poetic careers, but for different reasons. Cohen's arc is completed as much by the hiatus between *Parasites of Heaven* and *The Energy of Slaves* (six years) and serious questions about the latter's quality as it is by thematic differences between the two volumes. As Cohen's focus turns more directly to music from the late 1960s on, his identity as poet takes a backseat to his identity as songwriter, both in the public eye and in his own writing. In *Flowers for Hitler* Cohen's speaker dreads his "absolute poems will be crumpled" ("Montreal 1964" 26), but later Cohen's voice turns more specifically to singing in works such as "A Bunch of Lonesome Heroes," where he sings, rather than writes, for the crickets, the army, your children, and "for all who do not need me" (*Songs From a Room* 1969).

Heaney's arc, by contrast, is completed by a definite thematic shift between his fourth and fifth books of poetry. His books leading up to *North* effect a process of digging progressively deeper until he has pulled myth and corpses out of Irish and Danish bogs (Doreski 166), but *Field Work* takes the poet back to the pastoral landscapes of his earliest volume. This is due in part to a geographical change — moving from Belfast in the North to Wicklow in the Republic — but potentially also to something of a change of heart. Heaney's determination to say something in the face of the six counties' determination to say nothing takes its toll on the writer. As Shane Murphy notes, the inherent difficulty of gauging a response to atrocity with mere words makes discussing

that atrocity near impossible (92-93). As a result, after the culmination of his "digging" in *North*, Heaney once again turns a more pastoral eye on his homeland.

CONCLUSION

Whereas Heaney slowly works up to political awareness, Cohen gently retreats from it. In some sense, it seems both poets are addressing Adorno's oft-misquoted dictum "no poetry after Auschwitz." Adorno spoke to the paradoxical impossibility and inevitability of creating art in the midst of barbarism (Hofmann 184). However, the axiom has become a sort of catch-all for how makers of culture and art often find it nearly impossible to address things such as the Holocaust in their writing (183). Even Cohen, who comes out swinging in his first book, seems unable to address the sheer horror of Auschwitz until his third volume of poetry. While Heaney's own cultural situation was by no means as dire as Cohen's, Heaney writes from the centre of disfigurement, living in Belfast in the midst of the Troubles.

Both poets use mythology to their advantage in attempting to come to grips with horror. Cohen chooses not to deal with atrocity directly in his first volume, instead expressing spitting anger at what has been done to his people and using mythology in poems such as "For Wilf and His House" to make a general statement of fury about anti-Semitism. He briefly touches on the Holocaust in his second volume with "The Genius," but it is only in *Flowers For Hitler* that he really attempts to deal with the Holocaust both as a Jew and as a poet. Almost as if it exhausted him, Cohen by and large turns away from mythology and Holocaust imagery in his final book. By contrast, Heaney is finally spurred into saying something when atrocity is committed on his doorstep in 1969. However, like Cohen, he chooses to address horror through mythology. Instead of talking about what has actually happened, he creates a mythological context that may attempt to explain the Troubles, but never actually touches them. It is only in the latter half of *North* that he chooses to

engage contemporary politics explicitly, and like Cohen, it seems to exhaust him, as he abandons political poetry for a good many years after his fourth volume's publication.

Approximately ten years into their respective careers with the publication of their fourth volumes, both poets had in some senses finished the first arcs of those careers. In their first books, the sort of mythology each poet used in some sense dictated how concerned he was with his contemporary politics. While both used their cultures' respective histories as source material, *Let Us Compare Mythologies* often drew on a more conventional Jewish mythology (cultural and religious), which Cohen often used to make points about his people's cultural and political situation. Poems such as "Song of the Hellenist" and "Saviours" speak to Cohen's cultural anxieties by referring to his culture's mythology, while "For Wilf and His House" addresses a long-held (but flawed) belief in his people's culpability. The poet's political self-consciousness speaks to his historical situation, growing up in a postwar era when he was a member of arguably the most wronged people in recent history. Consequently, he begins a complex dialectic between past and present, querying whether things have changed for his people, and whether his people are capable of changing, as well. Somewhat pessimistic, Cohen examines his history and his present through the trope of mythology, issuing challenges but expecting no answers.

Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist*, by contrast, often relied on "unconscious verbal triggers (or seeds?) [. . .] found in the folk wisdom enshrined in sayings and proverbs and internalized by him as a child" (Purdy 96). The fact that the poet used these familiar tropes speaks more to an innate sense of his identity than a conscious choice to explore that identity. In poems such as "Dock" and "Requiem for the Croppies," Heaney begins to scratch the surface of what his identity and/or heritage might mean, but by and large the volume contains a more personal sort of struggle characterized by "Digging," in which the poet seeks continuity between his ancestors and himself, though he knows he will not follow in his ancestors' footsteps. When Heaney does address history at this point in his career, it is often with a teleological view; Heaney's poetry finds unity and

resolution where Cohen's creates discord and dialectic. Ironically, Heaney writes as if "the glittering and hurting days are almost done" (Cohen *Let Us Compare Mythologies* "For Wilf and His House" 26), when Northern Ireland had not gone through fire yet.

Moving into their second and third volumes, however, both poets begin to effect a shift in their thinking. In later books, Cohen's poetry moves away from his earlier examination of culture and mythology, choosing to address a more personal identity through his use of myth and poetry. Heaney, on the other hand, moves toward the sort of political questioning of Cohen's first book. In *The Spice-Box of Earth*, *Flowers for Hitler*, *Door into the Dark*, and *Wintering Out*, both poets move towards those endpoints, which are found in their respective fourth books. Cohen remains fascinated with Jewish and Christian culture and tradition, be it ancient or contemporary history made mythic, but *The Spice-Box of Earth* and *Flowers for Hitler* approach and use mythology differently than Cohen's first book. Rather than exploring ancient myth as a means of creating dialogue between political identities, Cohen often uses it as metaphor and comparison. His poetic voice retains some sense of questioning, but he moves closer to home, Montreal, and when he speaks in broad terms it is in a different context; instead of addressing the whole of Jewish history, he speaks to the human condition in general. When his Jewish identity plays a part in his poetry, it becomes much more specific in terms of time and place. By the time the poet gets to *Parasites of Heaven*, Cohen has almost abandoned his previous preoccupations with myth and history. When he does choose to use mythology, it often mirrors Heaney's early use of mythology, in that it often seems more impressionistic than didactic. The questions he threw up in his earlier books signify little to him anymore as he moves towards a new understanding of self and identity.

Effecting an almost opposite transition, in *Door into the Dark* Heaney begins to use mythology comparable to that of his first book of poetry, but the tensions he resolved so quickly in *Death of a Naturalist* become progressively more difficult to smooth, and by *Wintering Out* he is no longer preoccupied with resolving those tensions. Instead, he begins to look to the past in order to

lay out a context for what is happening in the present, much like Cohen did in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*. Unlike Cohen, however, Heaney explores outward as he uses Northern Europe's history and mythology to comment on contemporary politics. As his poetry evolves into *North*, Heaney's mythological work confesses a secret understanding of the sectarian violence he laments in *Wintering Out*, and nearly glories in the minor civil disobedience he found so uncomfortable in *Door into the Dark*.

Heaney and Cohen navigate the complexities of cultural conflict in a variety of ways throughout their early careers, looking both to the future and to the past. Each creates a mythopoetic landscape in which the mythology of their respective peoples are remembered, rewritten, and newly made in light of contemporary conflict.

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