Earth Race

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Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction

The central research question in this thesis examines the role that moments of epiphany play in creating poetry that transcends time and place. How do specific observed images and feelings provide a springboard into the universal? Where do we find such moments in the poetry of the recent past? And how does my poetry, in which I use juxtapositions of language between the quotidian and the potential for the numinous, sit within the tradition?

Often, the poems within my collection are products of a search to find wider meaning in small moments. That leap is sometimes designed, sometimes unconscious. I move between local concerns and global issues. The reiteration of the impact of the time in which I am writing is often a key concern. On occasion, there is a clash of lexical fields or an interweaving between real and surreal situations. Dichotomies of various kinds may help place the work in a dynamic and edgy space. In this exegesis, I attempt to set my work in the context of other writers using similar themes and concerns. The first chapter discusses the concept of home in both the sense of a hearth and a terrain or territory. The second chapter considers the role of borders and other liminal spaces. In the third chapter, I consider how these two themes of home and borders are manifested in my own work and whether the chance for epiphanies takes place in some of them. A particular focus is to consider whether T. S. Eliot's key concept of the 'objective correlative'[1] acts as an enabling device.

[1] George Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot* (London: Thames & Hudson), p. 35.

Chapter 2. Home

The concept of home in its various manifestations is at the heart of this first chapter. I begin by considering the ideas on this topic from a number of theorists, including Abraham Maslow, Gaston Bachelard, Jonathan Bate, and Gillian Darley. I also discuss how the concept of home is addressed in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, W. B. Yeats' 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', Dylan Thomas' 'Fern Hill', Patrick Kavanagh's writing, Czeslaw Milosz's *New and Collected Poems*, Ted Hughes' 'Wind', Seamus Heaney's *North,* Gillian Clarke's *Letter from a Far Country,* Eavan Boland's *New Collected Poems*, and Sinead Morrissey's 'Thoughts in A Black Taxi'.[2] In Morrissey's poem, we see that returning home can be complex and fraught with potential dangers through saying the wrong thing. Just her name would reveal too much and allow others to 'place her' in their narratives. In this one poem, my key concerns of home and borders collide.

[2] Abraham Maslow, 'The Pyramid of Human Need: A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological Review,* 2 (1943), pp. 21–28; Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000); Gillian Darley, 'Intimate Spaces', ed. by Marina Benjamin, *Aeon* (2017) https://aeon.co/essays/how-gaston-bachelard-gave-the-emotions-of-home-a-philosophy [accessed 23 December 2024]; William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, revised edition, Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); W. B. Yeats, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', in *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats,* ed. by Richard Finneran, revised edition (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. ; Dylan Thomas, 'Fern Hill', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Walford Davies & Ralph Maud (London: Phoenix, 2003); Patrick Kavanagh, cited in Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), p. ; Czeslaw Milosz, *New and Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2005); Ted Hughes, 'Wind', in *The Hawk in the Rain* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956), p. ; Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975); Gillian Clarke, *Letter from a Far Country* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1982); Eavan Boland, *New Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2005); Sinead Morrissey, 'Thoughts in A Black Taxi' in *There was Fire in Vancouver* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996), p. 24

I move from exploring the potency and meaning of home with its significance for these theorists and other writers to considering where it occurs in my own work. It is rich territory. Both literary theorists and a multiplicity of writers place home and personal concerns centrally in their writing. Home is perhaps the starting point and deep well for our memories.

Helen Vendler, writing in *Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*, suggests that a poet often works from a personal stance at first and then takes a more societal approach. 'The lyric poet has had to evolve new strategies of representation in order to become a social voice.'[3] I acknowledge this evolution as a significant shift in the journey of my poems. As I look for the possibility of epiphanies, specific images used to reveal the poems with home as a context and also those with liminal spaces of borders, in these two chapters, tend to reveal recurring concerns. There is a recording of loss of various kinds and a recognition of ways of surviving.

By using the concept of home as a framing device, I explore both joy and loss. In some of my poems, the house is real and still exists, in others, it is oneiric as discussed by Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*.[43] In other poems, the house has disappeared or become unreachable in some way. The sense of home also extends beyond one dwelling to the first or subsequent parishes of the mind and other significant places. The dichotomy between a specific hearth and a wider sense of home as a place of *hiraeth* for a wider terrain is apparent.

Starting with the context of that which could be described as a roofed space, Bachelard asks,

> Transcending our memories of all the houses in which we have found shelter, above and beyond all the houses we have dreamed we have lived in, can we isolate an intimate, concrete essence that would be a justification of the

[3] Helen Vendler, *Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2003), p. 11.
[4] Bachelard, p. 13.

> uncommon value of all our images of protected intimacy? This, then, is the main problem.[5]

I would contend that some spaces can seem to suggest an extra layer of safety or security. Maslow's 'Pyramid of Human Needs' places home or shelter at the base of aspects needed for survival.[6] After water and food, shelter and community are key for well-being. This aspect encompasses both physical shelter and the emotional and mental need for a sense of community. Maslow's pyramid has a simplicity of structure and also works as a shorthand image to discuss concepts as complicated and crucial as housing shortages and refugee needs throughout the world.[7] What space do we reserve for ourselves? What might we extend to others? When we hear the daily war narratives, can we begin to imagine how those with no shelter at all might survive?

For Jonathan Bate, in *The Song of the Earth*, the sense of place extends to how to be at home in the world and the responsibility we have to the earth. He argues for a global as well as a local care.[8] He discusses how writers as varied as Jane Austen, John Keats, William Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy and Seamus Heaney, recorded and challenged the centrality of the need to be aware of our own sense of place and our impact on it. Although sometimes derided as 'frocks and smocks', Bate asserts that the novels of Austen and Hardy ask questions about responsibilities to the earth. 'For Austen... "culture" is located in a landscape and mode of agriculture, not merely in manners and aesthetics.'[9]

Bate claims:

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[5] Bachelard, p. 3.
[6] Maslow, pp. 21–28.
[7] Filipo Grandi, 'Populist Politicians Will Never Control "Immigration": Here are the Humane Alternatives', *The Guardian*, 14 August 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/aug/14/populist-politicians-immigration-deportation-rwanda> [accessed 23 December 2024].
[8] Bate, p. 3.
[9] Bate, p.7

> Keats has an intuitive understanding of the underlying law of community ecology, namely that biodiversity is the key to the survival and adaptation of ecosystems. In 'To Autumn' the fume of poppies makes us think of opiates against pain and care. Spare the next swathe with your reaping-hook, says Keats, and you might just gain medical benefit: spare the remaining rainforests say ecologists and you might just find a cure for some present or future disease among the billions, of still unstudied plant species you would otherwise annihilate.[10]

As well as slowing the rising temperature of the earth, protecting the rainforests and wild spaces might contribute to developments in medicine. This is a powerful idea. Bate believes poets can challenge us: 'William Wordsworth remains the founding father for thinking of poetry in relation to space, to our dwelling upon the earth.'[11] Wordsworth's economical phrase a 'spot of time' collides place and time.[12]

Whether we look at the macrocosm of a whole terrain or the microcosm of a home we can see the impact of places on our physical, mental and emotional well-being. In his novels and poems, Hardy evokes the complex terrain of Dorset (called Wessex in his work) where the connections between the seasonal rhythms of the year and the hiring fairs with the quarter days of Christmas, Lady Day, Midsummer, St John the Baptist's Day and Michaelmas are still potent. However, industrialisation and the manners and customs of the burgeoning towns are also apparent. Those who have lost their livelihood through misfortune or errors of judgement are reduced to the level of journeymen, where only their ability to work every day keeps them from the poorhouse or workhouse. For some, a shared room in a farmhouse is part of their wages. Hardy's novels give insights into the lives of our rural great-great-grandparents.

[10] Bate, p. 106.
[11] Bate, p. 205.
[12] Bate, p. 206.

Discussing the work of Edward Thomas, Bate argues that 'A home is a house in which one does not live but dwells.'[13] In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard explores the significance of dwellings and how they might allow us to thrive. He claims that houses of all kinds, real, imagined, lost, and oneiric are crucial for experience of the world. He contends that writers of all kinds ask us to imagine the ways in which shelters allow us to both dream and daydream: 'if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming; the house protects the dreamer.'[14] He extends this idea in claiming, 'It is because our memories of former dwelling places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling places of the past remain in us for all time.'[15] This idea resonates strongly with me. Many of my poems use images of houses or specific places as a central focus within or around which my ideas of safety, sanctuary or loss develop. Sometimes, it is in those places that a potential Damascus moment occurs.

Bachelard quotes a passage from Thoreau's journals from 31 October 1850: 'I... think that I could spend my days contentedly in any retired country house that I see it to advantage now and without incumbrance.'[16] Bachelard goes on to suggest that, without realities intruding, the allure of an imagined house can endure for longer. He introduces a provocative idea of George Sand's that people could be classified according to whether they aspire to live in a cottage or in a palace. But the question is more complex than that. We all have our cottage moments and our palace moments. When reading has given us countless inhabited places, we know how to let the dialectics of cottage and manor sound inside us.[17]

Bachelard believes places have an impact on our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. He develops his ideas by looking at how specific aspects of the house call us: the

[13] Bate, p. 274.
[14] Bachelard, p. 6.
[15] Bachelard, p. 6.
[16] Bachelard, p. 62.
[17] Bachelard, p. 63.

corners, the attics, the basements: ‘every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination.’[18] Bachelard makes the bold claim that ‘Our soul is an abode. And by remembering houses and rooms, we learn to abide within ourselves.’[19]

Gillian Darley is an architectural theorist. In an essay published in *Aeon*, she considers the impact Bachelard’s ideas have had on both her own thinking as an architectural practitioner and on the architecture students who read his work. Darley claims that ‘In his *Poetics of Space* Bachelard created a philosophy of at-homeness, rich in emotion and memory’.[20] She suggests that ‘The philosopher evokes an idealised past, places the miniature against the immense and guides us back into childhood.’ With her installation work, *The House*, Rachel Whitehead created a powerful physical response to concepts of home. Visitors were challenged to move their thinking about ideas of home into a subverted space (the artwork echoed *Picture Post* images of houses bombed in the Second World War, showing half a bombed house opened to the air). Whiteread claimed Bachelard as an inspiration. In an interview, she spoke of his influence on her when she was a student.[21]

Aspects of Bachelard’s thinking have been pivotal in developing the decisions made by the hospice movement. The key is to create a space and place where the patient and family members can dwell in safety. In that *Aeon* essay, Darley quotes Kenneth Worple’s suggestion:

> I think it is a book like *The Poetics of Space* that made architects aware that when you are designing hospitals and hospices, you are not designing cells. You are designing rooms and the atmosphere of those rooms. That room has to give back everything the person in the bed wants to give it…places of

[18] Bachelard, p. 6.
[19] Bachelard, p. xxxvii.
[20] Darley. Online essay
[21] Julius Pristaux, ‘Rachel Whiteread: What to keep and what to shred?’, *PW-Magazine*, (4 April 2018) <https://pw-magazine.com/2018/rachel-whiteread-what-to-shred-and-what-to-keep> [accessed 27 December 2024].

> helpless waiting are re-fashioned … as places of contemplation and a gathering-in of memory and self-discovery.[22]

The poet Molly Peacock suggests that 'As the world faces refugee and environmental crises, *The Poetics of Space* underscores the most basic of truths: our homes are primary.'[23]

Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* confronts its audience with what could now be framed as a post-colonial concept in Caliban's eloquent speech on the delights of the island. Here the sense of home extends to a whole domain. Prospero has learned all the riches of the island from Caliban. Because of Caliban's attack on Miranda, he becomes enslaved by Prospero who takes on the role of master of the island. The power shifts over terrain are mirrored in the present. Is ownership of a terrain held by those who know its delights and terrors or the invaders who only wish to use it to their economic advantage?

Nick Hayes has explored some of these power shifts when he looks at land use and the curtailing of freedoms within the United Kingdom, in *The Book of Trespass*.[24] By losing the right to roam because of the restraints put in place by landowners, access to places that could act as safe havens for walking, thinking and meeting are also lost. Patrick Kavanagh contends that when we dwell in safety, we have the capacity to consider the global as well as the local. Kavanagh remarks that 'The parochial mentality is never in any doubt about … artistic validity.' He claims that all great civilisations have been based on parochialism:

> Parochialism is universal, it deals with the fundamentals. It is not by the so-called national dailies that people who emigrate keep in touch with their roots. In London, outside the Catholic churches, the big run is on the local Irish papers. Lonely on Highgate Hill outside St Joseph's Church I rushed to buy my Dundalk Democrat and after reading it I was back in my native fields.

[22] Kenneth Worple, cited in Darley.
[23] Molly Peacock, cited in Darley.
[24] Nick Hayes, *The Book of Trespass* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

> Now that I analyse myself I realise that through everything I write, there is this constantly recurring motif of the need to go back. So it is for these reasons that I return to the local newspapers. Who has died? Who has sold his farm?[25]

Kavanagh suggests that being rooted in a parish allows us to look outwards to global concerns too as we understand the need for the essentials for survival and a safe space.

In his essay, 'A Sense of Place', Seamus Heaney acknowledges that

> We are no longer innocent. We are no longer just parishioners of the local. We go to Paris at Easter instead of rolling eggs on the hill at the gable.... Yet those primary laws of our nature are still operative. We are dwellers, we are namers, we are lovers, we make homes and search for our histories.[26]

The search for a former home or a future home are both impulses that inspire writers. While a playwright might use time and place as important concepts for a range of characters within a drama, the impulse for a poet looking at a place is to place himself or herself as the central character and the drama that takes place is often with the poet as a central figure in the search for a former or desired home.

Some of the grander themes in the poetry of W. B. Yeats look at an historical reading of Irish history or the terrors facing the world. But in his poem, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', Yeats imagines the lure of a home that will hold all that is necessary for wellbeing.[27] In this imaginative space, there will be a chance to thrive. As with Bachelard's ideas around oneiric houses, this poem elucidates and illuminates our need for physical, mental and emotional well-being. There is a simplicity to it and a suggestion of self-sufficiency. The 'nine bean-rows', and the 'hive for the honeybee' suggest simple needs. Yet despite, or perhaps because of its

[25] Kavanagh cited in Heaney, *Preoccupations,* p. 139.
[26] Heaney, *Preoccupations,* .p. 148
[27] Yeats, p. 12.

simplicity, Yeats declares, ‘And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow.’ Yeats had the capacity to bring up this oneiric space even while standing ‘on the pavements grey.’ He was the central figure of his personal drama. He was reputed to have worn a ‘bardic cloak’ to declaim his poetry, yet this poem is one we might imagine him reading more quietly.

Dylan Thomas, too, relocates himself in his mind. In this case, the house is real. In ‘Fern Hill’, Thomas writes about the place where he spent his summers in a rural location away from the close observation of Swansea streets. It was the home of an aunt in southwest Wales. There, Thomas exulted in both the terrain and his place in it. The farm gave Thomas the opportunity to feel both rooted and free.

> I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
> About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home…the hay
> Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
> And playing…[28]

The exuberance Thomas reveals of that place and both actual and imaginative freedoms were a strong contrast to his house in *Cwmdonkin* Drive where everything was watched and seen. In *A Child’s Christmas in Wales,* Thomas describes looking for mischief with his friends, breaking out from the confined spaces, and intense rituals of the family Christmas by running towards the seashore, which is a liminal and empty space.[29]

The freedom of the rural context was as important for Thomas as it was for Louis MacNeice writing about the ‘landscapes of his mind’ as he dreamt of Connemara in southern Ireland in comparison to the constraints of the dour County Antrim town of Carrickfergus in Ulster.

[28] Thomas, *Collected Poems* 1934- 1953(London:J.M, Dent, 1952) p.33
[29] Dylan Thomas, *A Child’s Christmas in Wales* (London: J.M. Dent, 1978).

> The West of Ireland, a phrase which still stirs me, if not like a trumpet, like a fiddle half-heard through a cattle-fair... The very name of Connemara seemed too rich for any ordinary place. It appeared to be a country of windswept open spaces and mountains blazing with whims and sea that were never quiet... and turf smoke and cottagers who were always laughing and who gave you milk when you asked for a glass of water. And the people's voices were different there, soft and rich like my father's.[30]

Constraints or freedom? It is an on-going question. In my poem, 'It Wasn't Meant to be Like This', I explore the allure of liminal spaces and the ways in which the setting out and the returning are set side by side. The one actual dwelling mentioned in that poem was a lighthouse, which is perhaps the ultimate liminal space. A lighthouse is, of course, a confined space able to look outwards too, to keep others from potential dangers. By the end of that poem, I acknowledge that over-riding any extravagant dreams we might have of freedoms, simplicities can become transformed by seeing and experiencing them differently: 'Now a trip to Sainsbury's together/would feel like walking the route to Compostella'.[31] The contrast between the two locations – an ordinary supermarket and a place of pilgrimage – is stark. It suggests how a simple activity could be reframed. Here the transforming word is 'together'.

I turn next to the poems of Czeslaw Milosz to investigate the importance of home to him and the ways in which his sense of exile and the loss of his home are a central dynamic for his work. In his essay, 'Past Master: Czeslaw Milosz and his Impact on the Poetry of Seamus Heaney', Michael Parker writes,

> Though vast in their temporal, spiritual, and intellectual outreach, Milosz's poems maintain attachments to the local and individual, often in the form of

[30] Louis MacNeice, 'Landscapes of my Youth', in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), p. 181.
[31] Lizzie Fincham, *Earth Race*, unpublished manuscript, poem 11.

> elegies for lost family and friends and the places they shared but also in lyric epiphanies which in Heaney's words make 'time stand still'.[32]

In his poem 'The Manor, Lithuania after 52 years', Milosz knows 'There is no house'. The key dwelling place has disappeared but 'the park is still there | Though the oldest trees have been cut down. | And a thicket overgrows the traces of former alleys'. Continuity is seen in the aspects that have not changed, yet there is a change in the environmental deterioration.

> The same ruts as long ago on the sloping road,
> I remembered where to turn but did not recognize the river.
> Its colour like that of reddish automobile oil,
> No rushes and no lily pads.[33]

There is a duality here. There is the sense of the place as it had been all that time ago and the realisation that time has moved on. I try to develop that duality of time and place in some of my poems. These tensions and conflicts allow potential dramas within those two timeframes.

The tensions of time present and time past are particularly shown in the poems in this Home chapter as some of those dramas are still being worked out. In *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot,* Williamson suggests,

> 'Four Quartets' might be regarded as a 'series of images of migration' which explore 'time present and time past'... The ultimate discovery is that if man enters the garden of the past and follows his history, he arrives at the garden from which he set out.[34]

In my poem 'Mineshaft', there is a sense of going back, a return journey both to actual places and to spaces reached by the smell of wild garlic as the bus climbs into wild Gower after

[32] Michael Parker, 'Past Master: Czeslaw Milosz and his Impact on the Poetry of Seamus Heaney', *Textual Practice*, 27.5 (2013), pp. 825–850.
[33] Milosz, p. 592
[34] Williamson, p. 208.

Parkmill.[35] The garden from which I set out was the real and mythical space of Gower and Swansea seashores to other places with different challenges and delights.

For Eavan Boland, too, there is a duality, a setting out and a search for a sense of home. Here the sense is of exile and her outsider status. These were prime motivations for her work. She had to negotiate her concepts of home in both Ireland and England. At ease in neither country, for reasons of language and culture, this search for home proved to be a dynamic impulse in her role as an outsider. Various commentators on her work have explored the centrality of that motif. Jody Allen-Randolph, writing in *PN Review,* considers this aspect of Boland's response to a question about her childhood.

> My childhood, certainly in the London years, wasn't happy. That isn't to say it wasn't a privileged childhood, because it was. But it was fictional and desolate in an odd way. We lived in the Irish embassy. My parents were two hard-working and very engaging people…Nevertheless here was this huge, compartmentalized house. And I felt thoroughly displaced in it. I never believed I belonged there. I never felt it was my home. Some of the feelings I recognise as having migrated into themes I keep going back to, exile, types of estrangement, a relation to objects – began there.[36]

Like T. S. Eliot, Czeslaw Milosz, Derek Mahon, and Seamus Heaney, Boland focuses on simplicities within her domestic setting. (There have been times in the not-too-distant past when the adjectives domestic and personal have been used in a pejorative way to describe the work of female poets. Yet male writers clearly focus on the importance of the domus too. Robert Frost and Ted Hughes both use houses as metaphors for ease and unease and the dynamics of

[35] Fincham*, Earth Race,* poem 1.
[36] Jody AllenRandolph, 'A Backward Look: An Interview with Eavan Boland', *PN Review*, 26.5 (2000), p. 43.

relationships.) Another aspect of Boland's search for an identity as a female poet in Ireland explores the position of women as objects or subjects in a poem.

Two poems, 'Degas's Laundresses' and 'Woman in a Kitchen' are placed on facing pages in Boland's *New Collected Poems*. This juxtaposition of two poems with a focus on women working reveals the centrality and tension of this aspect of Boland's ideas. In 'Degas's Laundresses', Boland develops her ideas about how art might work on our understanding.[37] From the opening stanza, we are aware of the laundresses in their complexities, full of both dreams and the realities of sweat and bleached sheets: 'You rise, you dawn | roll-sleeved Aphrodites'. The sheets hold many of the secrets of the households they are from and where the laundresses might live in a small, shared room. There is a gregarious element to the work: 'Your chat is sabbatical'. Although the work is hard physically, it is also full of talk and closeness. The gender aspect here is that the painter is male, making marks on a canvas and the people doing the repetitive work of washing bedlinen are female. His work endures but their work is repeated daily, done and undone. Yet there is a sense that these women have found a space to share confidence over their manual work. There is almost a suggestion that these women had found a way not to be overwhelmed. This poem took a classical subject, a painting of unnamed women by a revered male artist and subverted it. It gave the women a life and some power.

The territory that the next poem explores is more unusual. It is the unknown, under-rated, unsung territory of one woman (herself) in a modern kitchen in suburbia. Boland's 'Woman in a Kitchen' is bleak. There are machines to take the physical grind out of the work of washing sheets and preparing clothes but there is a joylessness about it: 'Breakfast over, islanded by noise | she watches the machines go fast and slow.' Although the woman is in the

[37] Boland, *New Collected Poems*, p. 108.

kitchen, the work could be proceeding without her presence. It is not until the final stanza that her labour is needed when she starts to iron the sheets.

> The wash done…. The dryer stops dead
>
> The silence is a death
>
> She turns to spread
>
> a cloth on the board and irons sheets
>
> in a room white and quiet as a mortuary.[38]

The use of the lexis of death and hints of winding sheets intensifies the downbeat mood in that kitchen. There is an irony too in the fresh sheets, which are a starting point for a writer. Boland often uses dusk (a liminal space) where she can begin to make the transition from her daily work of caring for children and running a household and having time to write. She irons the white linen sheets first, to have the necessary time and space for the white sheets of her notebook where she can spill words and make marks. Boland suggests the sense of loss this woman (herself) feels in her solitary kitchen. There is no sense of the bodies that have lain beneath these sheets. The semantic field of the last stanza is one of death. The winding sheet suggestion is in the background.

In her essays, Boland has commented on how different the life of a woman poet in the suburbs was to the life of male poets in the conviviality and (professional envy too) of Dublin bars. She was an outsider at that time because she was a female poet in an Irish bardic tradition and she was neither Irish or English enough to feel entirely at home. In 'A Childhood Away from Ireland', Boland says, 'What I had lost was not land but the habit of land.'[39] Rather than easing her situation, her father's status as a diplomat complicated her place in the world. Yet, ultimately, Boland realised that her position as an outsider gave her a unique voice. Suburbia,

[38] Boland, *New Collected Poems,* p. 109.
[39] Boland, *New Collected Poems,* p. 100

although without the allure of rural life nor the putative attraction of city living, finally gave her a rootedness. When Boland described how she found her voice she said,

> The voice I hear every day, which is my own voice, which is emerging from the deepest origins of myself – which is never practised, rehearsed, or made, artificial by self-consciousness has begun to invade my lyric sense of the poem. What I have learned to do, in fact – is in technical terms to use the voice against the line.[40]

She had explained that when she first began to write poems she was constrained by the formal meters used by mostly male poets writing in the bardic tradition. In her later work, she was able to let herself and her poems be free. By accepting the dualities of her place in the world, and the way that duality had contributed to the forming of her unique voice, at home in a suburb outside Dublin, she was able to write with a new confidence.

Boland directed a poem, 'Envoi*',* to the muse:

If she will not bless the ordinary
if she will not sanctify the common
then here I am and here I stay and then am I
the most miserable of women.[41]

The influences on Heaney of the historical canon of both English and Irish poetry would have been similar to that which Boland described as challenging. Yet his early poems show that from the start he was confident enough to make his own home a crucial and constant theme. In his essay 'A Sense of Place', he explores the idea of home,[42] specific houses and his parish, in Kavanagh's terms, his townland feature.

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[40] Mark Strand & Eavan Boland*, The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* (New York: W. W. Norton Paperback, 2001), page unknown
[41] Eavan Boland, 'Envoi', in *Outside History* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1990), p.150
[42] Heaney, *Preoccupations*, pp. 131–149.

In ‘Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication’ for Mary Heaney the impact of both his aunt and the significance of this first home on Heaney is clear.

So, her hands, scuffled
Over the bake board,
The reddening stove
Sent its plaque of heat
Against her where she stood
In a floury apron
By the window.[43]

We see the woman through her daily work. When she sits, as she waits for the bread to prove, we see Heaney’s close observation.

Here is a space
Again, the scone rising
To the tick of two clocks.
And here is love
Like a tinsmith’s scoop
Sunk past its gleam
In the meal-bin.[44]

The moment of anagnorisis here comes after the use of the abstract word ‘love’. It is held in something as quotidian as the tinsmith’s scoop, which is ‘sunk past its gleam | In the meal-bin.’

The word gleaming is shorthand in this next poem too for the intensity of the ordinary

[43] Heaney*, North*, p. 12
[44] Heaney, *North*, p.14

moment creating a ‘small epiphany’. The ‘tick of two clocks’, which were unlikely to be synchronised, suggests two timeframes of then and now. In the poem for his mother, ‘When All the Others Were Away at Mass’,

> When all the others were away at Mass
>
> I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
>
> Cold comforts set between us, things, to share
>
> Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.[45]

The word gleaming suggests an acknowledgement of something ‘other’ in the simplicity of the bucket of potatoes. Clean potatoes matter in Ireland with its potato famine hinterland. Later in the poem, Heaney amplifies this hint of celebrating that shared purpose,

> While the parish priest at her bedside
>
> Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying
>
> I remembered her head bent towards my head,
>
> Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives –
>
> Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

Heaney brings an ordinary kitchen and daily work into the realm of an unforgettable moment with the power of memory of two heads leant close together over a task.

In *Light, Freedom and Song: A Cultural History of Modern Irish Writing,* David Pierce writes,

> Stocked with pagan wells, farmhouse kitchens, flour and bread-making, folded sheets, Heaney’s world is full of Corkery’s hidden Ireland, of the underline of the earth, and language, of Bogs and Beowulf.[46]

[45] Heaney, *Clearances ,The Haw Lantern, Faber&Faber, 1987*
[46] David Pierce, *Light, Freedom and Song: A Cultural History of Modern Irish Writing* (New York) p.32

We can see the centrality of a house as a motif in Heaney's work in four poems. One poem is for his aunt, Mary Heaney; one poem is for his mother; the poem 'Skylight' is addressed to his wife;[47] and the poem 'The Birthplace' is about Thomas Hardy's house.[48] The poems 'Skylight' and 'The Birthplace' show the discussions, quarrel and reconciliations with his wife in the context of domestic spaces.

In 'Skylight', the poem shifts from the 'Claustrophobic, nest-up-in the roof | Effect', which Heaney had previously relished, into a new space when the skylight was put in and he says he felt 'Like an inhabitant | Of that house where the man sick of the palsy … | took up his bed and walked away'. There is the suggestion that he had resisted having the building work done: 'You were the one for skylights', but when it was put in, Heaney acknowledges a transformative impact. Again, the power is shown through light. The poem suggests an epiphany moment of experiencing his own house differently. Three of these poems set in a house (all based in Ireland) show a sense of ease. One is more uneasy. 'The Birthplace' records a visit to Thomas Hardy's house in Dorset and how there was a dislocation in the relationship with his wife on that day. It was almost as if the only way they could experience that place was by mirroring the unease of Hardy's doomed couples.

scared at the hurt,

Throat-sick, heat-struck, driven

Into the damp-floored wood

Where we made an episode

Of ourselves,

Unforgettable, unmentionable.[49]

[47] Seamus Heaney, 'Skylight', *Poetry Ireland Review*, 29 (2019), p. 3.
[48] Seamus Heaney, 'The Birthplace'*, London Review of Books*, 4.18 (1982), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v04/n18/seamus-heaney/the-birthplace [accessed 26 December 2024]
[49] Heaney, 'The Birthplace'. p.12

The hints of their need to escape the confinement of Hardy's house into the freedoms and passions of the lane and the wood allow us to understand the intensity of the quarrel and their reconciliation. Strangely constrained by the inside of that house, it was the woods that gave them freedom on that day.

In Ted Hughes' poem 'Wind', the house that could have provided the couple in the poem with a sense of shelter failed in that primary function because of natural forces. The poem opens with an extended metaphor: 'This house has been far out at sea all night'. Bachelard had referred to Balzac's ideas in *Petites misère de la vie conjugale* (1952): 'when your house trembles in its beams and turns on its keel, you think you are a sailor rocked by the breeze.'[50] In Hughes' poem 'Wind': 'Now deep | In chairs in front of the great fire, | We grip | Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought | Or each other.'[51] Both Bachelard and Maslow would recognise the failure of the primary purpose of the house. Because the storm was so strong, the house felt vulnerable and the couple's relationship was not able to give them comfort even though the fire was 'great'.

The duality implied by the word 'home' straddles one house or dwelling and wider ideas, as developed by Kavanagh. His discussion of the importance of the parish influenced a presentation I gave called 'Parishes of the Mind' at Swansea University in 2022. It built on work I had presented in Gregygnog at an Association for Welsh Writing in English conference in 2018. I considered the importance of early parishes and key places and the ways in which we might retain the potency of those, through revisiting them in memory or actual journeys. As I search for my own space and place as a Welsh female writer in (voluntary) exile, I consider aspects of the Welsh word *cynefin.* Owen Sheers has explored this concept in an essay in *The Guardian*. He considers the actual dwelling houses and the wider context of a crucial place:

[50] Balzac, *Petit Misere*, cited in Bachelard, p. 28.
[51] Hughes, page unknown

'The Welsh word *cynefin* is often translated into habitat, but in usage, it goes deeper than that. My favourite definition is "a landscape, which as you step into it, feels like arriving at your hearth"'.[52] I interviewed Sheers at a workshop he ran for Creative Writing students in Swansea and heard how vivid and visceral this long house, its barn and the territory or terrain around it was for him.

For Gillian Clarke aspects of home are critical in her thinking and her specific place is crucial in exploring her ideas in 'Letter from a Far Country'. In that poem, she looks at both real and imagined family places and the role of women. 'It has always been a matter | of lists. We have been counting, | folding, measuring, making…'[53] Although her intention was to write a polemic, it became a celebration of continuities. In her sonnet '*Marged*', written about her Welsh long-house in *Blaen Cwrt*, she examines the contrasts between the bleak life of the former inhabitant and Clarke's own sense of ease and rootedness in that specific place. The short poem conveys the dislocations and potential continuities of *Blaen Cwrt.*

She died

alone in winter, ill and penniless.

Lighting the lamps, November afternoons,

A reading book, whisky gold in my glass.[54]

In conversation, Clarke has described how when they first moved in, they lit a fire to show the neighbours in farms across the valley that they had taken full possession of the house. In her celebrations and elucidations of the challenges for farms and small holdings in southwest Wales, Clarke confronts the issues of rural depopulation and the omnipresent war machines passing overhead. Her poems are grounded in the realities of this space and place. In her poem

[52] Owen Sheers, 'It's a more ancient world than London's', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2018 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/24/owen-sheers-on-gwent-its-a-more-ancient-world-than-londons- [accessed 27 December 2024].
[53] Clarke, *Letter from a Far Country,* p. 7-18.
[54] Clarke, *Marged*, page unknown

'Harvest at *Mynachlog*' the seasonal rhythms of the farm at harvest time and a plane crash are interwoven in the disaster of one day with echoes of Auden's poem, 'About Suffering They Were Never Wrong'.

Hearing
the sun roar like a rush of grain
Engulfing all winged things that live
one moment
In the eclipsing light.[55]

These concepts and ideas of home as an actual house or terrain and exile from it are *leit-motifs* in my work. The centrality of this concern ranges through many of the key concepts explored by Bachelard. He commented on the ways in which real, lost and imagined houses are important to us. Many of my poems focus on actual houses, half-forgotten houses, lost houses, oneiric houses. These poems include 'It is the House', 'Hunter-Gatherers', 'On the Third Afternoon', and 'Security Notices'. These places are usually unreachable in some way although their potency endures. I use visual images of hearths, fires and lamplight to suggest warmth, passion, ease. These symbols often show a division between time past and time present. Some of my poems, such as 'Home, Exile Return', evoke the viewpoint of refugees. In the playful and surreal 'A Fierce Intention to Tell Stories', I imagine a house enlivened by writers and painters, musicians and thinkers. We can people our own spaces with their work if we choose, through the power of our imagination and through technology.

The sense of searching for a home as a source of comfort yet needing an engagement with the world too is a constant impulse in my work. I use T. S. Eliot's ideas as a guide to identifying features of moments that might suggest 'small epiphanies'. In his essay, 'The Use of Poetry and the use of criticism', Eliot argued that

[55] Gillian Clarke, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), page unknown

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative': in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion: such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[56]

The specific emotions I want to express include a sense of loss and a capacity for delight.

Analysis of a Selection of my Poems Exploring 'Home'

In the first poem 'Mineshaft' in my unpublished collection *Earth Race*, I use the extended metaphor of a bus journey to explore a journey across Gower from Swansea Bus Station to Rhossili. The Rhossili bus passes within a mile of where some of my paternal great-grandparents lived in Scurlage, Llanddewi and Knelston. I begin by setting the scene in Swansea, then I make or take the journey across Gower. This is rich terrain for me and certainly my own 'landscape of the mind' and for similar reasons as those I noted earlier in Dylan Thomas's 'Fern Hill' and in Louis MacNeice's ideas. The allure of the rural contrasts with the urban parishes in Swansea. The realities and the delights of this rural place are acknowledged. Reynoldston in Gower was my birthplace, and it held a mythic intensity for me from the start. Stanza 2, with its images of Swansea Market, holds the freight gathered from the stalls of the 'country women'. Their stalls held a central place in the market and, through the produce on their stalls of 'Gower earlies', the seasons were and still are reflected. They brought in both the locally grown vegetables and a different kind of energy. They wrapped the leeks and bunches of thyme in newspaper and *cwtched* their babies 'Welsh fashion' in shawls. My family went to the market every Saturday to buy the local produce. Swansea Market was and still is part of the town's – now city's – diversity. Because of the fresh (and unwrapped) produce, it is possible

[56] T. S. Eliot, cited in Williamson, pp. 124–125.

for people from various ethnic groups to find the key items needed for their own specific cooking. The alliteration of ‘baskets’ and ‘bacon’, ‘clementines’, ‘cockles’ and ‘Christmas trees’, in ‘Mineshaft’ tightens the sound echoes to reinforce the verb forms of ‘clutching’ and ‘embracing’ to reveal the intensity of the foraging by some of the passengers.[57]

The Rhosili bus passes near the Swansea University campus at Singleton and the hospital, both key locations for the city’s continuing diversity. In Stanza 5 there is a hint of a house grand enough to have not only a piano but also a fire lit in the hall. A different kind of vitality comes from a shift into the woods of *Olchfa*. This is where the cockle-women coming in from *Penclawdd* were rumoured to put on shoes as they crossed the liminal space of *Olchfa* Bridge to continue their journey into the urban place. Stanza 6 uses short lines to increase the intensity of the narrative and uses abstract nouns to hold the resonance these woods might suggest of ‘fear, surprise, secrecy and desire’. Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* looks at the potency of woods in our imagination.[58] (In my poem ‘The Woods are Turning’, there are references to woods and their potential as encampments of shelter but also unease. In that poem Buchenwald and beechwoods hold a duality. I discuss that poem in the next chapter on borders.)

An interior monologue of my memory takes place inside the Rhosili bus as, outside, the external images of the present become apparent. As the bus travels those 12 miles, at each small settlement the memories of former journeys are strong. The journey is both site-specific and time enmeshed. Earlier journeys from that dank, dark, echoing bus station with puddles underfoot always seemed like a journey from Hades into heaven. My ancestors who had come in from Gower to live and find work in the crowded streets near Swansea Market show up in censuses from the mid-1800s. On this outward journey, I am searching, as Heaney does in his

[57] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 1.
[58] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy* Tales (London: Penguin, 1991).

poem ‘The Peninsula’, for an imaginative sanctuary: ‘The ploughed field swallows the whitewashed gable’.[59]

In Stanza 7 of ‘Mineshaft’, common nouns are used to show the immediacy of what is outside. Where the sound rattles as the cattle-grid is crossed on Fairwood Common, ‘dewponds, sheep, buzzards’ are the visual images that mark out the territory. The dewponds reflect the sky and the raptors stalk their prey. The run-on line of ‘over-flowing’ into the next stanza mirrors the water spilling across the road in Ilston Pill. Memories of my grandmother and the vestiges of the ruined Baptist chapel in Ilston *Cwm* are the backdrop. The houses here are very close to the road. These houses feature in ‘Contained in Ice’ as ‘the houses in the narrowest of narrow villages’.[60] The squareness of the final stanza of ‘Mineshaft’ mirrors the shape of the Norman church and the sound echoes of ‘Norman’, ‘ruins’ and ‘valerian’ add to the sense of closure with the final word home. The valerian is what we ‘snitched’ from that garden but the continuity is held, not in the plant that we failed to plant, but in the ongoing narrative of this place in my, then ours, and then my story. The possible moment of anagnorisis in the poem is in the line ‘red frock in the window visceral as dancing’, as the element of surprise for the observer becomes apparent and illuminates that this was actually a shared journey, which could transcend real time.

The group of Ash House poems began with a scrap of a narrative about an abandoned house in Rhossili. Heaney said, ‘There is nearly always an element of a bolt from the blue about a poem’s origin.’[61] Ash House already was and is an extended metaphor and potent symbol for us. The poem ‘Sold for Three Songs’ begins with the story I was told by a very old man at the bus stop near the church. That was the bolt from the blue for me. He explained his

[59] Seamus Heaney, ‘The Peninsula’, in *100 Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2022), page unknown
[60] Lizzie Fincham, *Contained in Ice* (Birmingham: Cinnamon Press, 2020), p. 10.
[61] Heaney, *Preoccupations,* p. 52.

mother had been a cockle-woman. Perhaps Gwenllian, my grandmother, had bought cockles from her, either in Swansea Market or at her own doorstep.

The house was alluring for us for a number of reasons. The first was the remote location in 'the village at the edge of the world' and the sense of mystery, a story:[62] 'It's a child's drawing | except there is no smoke from the chimney.' It is almost a vernacular house. It is built to blend with the dry stone walls. The fascination for us had been in its potential as a sanctuary. If we had been able to buy it, then it would have shifted from our oneiric house to reality with all its challenges. It has, however, acted for me as a place that suggested continuity for us although we knew there was no chance of that. The fact that it allowed day-dreaming in Bachelard's terms was, and is, part of its potency. In 'Seventeen Countries and Counting', I explore its continuing impact as an unfinished space and place both for me and all who notice it as they walk past it,

> as it slides into our memory
> as the house at the end
> of the world …
> cockle-shell pilgrims who headed past it
> on their way to the beach of the world.[63]

If, and I think it is, this house that we saw and I still see, it is a kind of metaphor for the unfinished business of loss and the questions continue.

The scallop shell mentioned by Sir Walter Raleigh in his prayer the night before his execution, 'Give me my scallop shell of quiet' is a symbol used by pilgrims on their way to

[62] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 34.
[63] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 35.

Compostella[64] (in French towns, these brass shells shine underfoot on the route). Newer pilgrimages that I mention in 'It Wasn't Meant to be Like This' are linked to such journeys.

The third poem in the sequence 'Longer than Jacob', observes the persona of the nonagenarian who 'inhabits' this house. His narrative or monologue is filled with practicalities of the domestic life he has had to practice and endure alone. He follows the rhythms he learned from his childhood, 'I wash and starch seven white collared shirts | in the wash-house each Monday.'[65] In Stanza 4 there is the sound of the iron: 'The iron spits'. The wind 'howls' giving voice to his longing. Here this house allows day-dreaming and a possible different end to the narrative of loss it holds. Both his resilience and sense of hope are paramount. In my imagination, he has a deep faith in his assignation with his bride. I had first thought of the house as a Robert Frost house but perhaps it is more like a house that has a Hardyesque atmosphere with the sense of an underlying sorrow. The church he goes to each morning has a memorial window for Edgar Evans, a Rhosili man who did not return from the Antarctic expedition.

In the *Assignations* section of my unpublished poetry collection, the meetings mostly take place outside houses. The actors in these dramas need to cross the thresholds of the liminal spaces with chances for all kinds of meetings in this surreal world. In 'Cusp' the garden 'spilling with pears and apples' has been left.[66] In 'Chantry Chapel',

> The door is open now into the last space.
>
> You will be waiting
>
> sitting on that stone slab
>
> outside the entrance to the chantry chapel.[67]

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[64] Walter Raleigh, 'The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage'. First published in 1618. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44940/the-passionate-mans-pilgrimage> [accessed 23 December 2024].
[65] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 36.
[66] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 40.
[67] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 41.

Both the ‘open door’ and the word ‘waiting’ are central ideas in my poems. In ‘Paradiso*’* although the door to the house is shut, I already know that in that garden there will be a room with ‘Skylights. A telescope, a table, chairs’.[68]

In ‘Specimen Trays’*,*

Another memory is snagged by the click
of that latch by the corner of piled books
near the gate. When the removal men leave
these photos and paintings will change the energy
of the new space.[69]

Here there is the suggestion of arrival in a new place. The situation is both an extension of my earlier house narratives and a different stage of the journey. The ‘photos’ are fixed items but they and the ‘paintings’ can be displayed to catch a different light perhaps.dd The word ‘energy’ suggests a potential for a different start. In *Contained in Ice,* I had mentioned ‘the last house where valerian spills’. Valerian is a constant on coastal paths and rough terrain. In Steiner’s terms, it acts as a signifier for me. The word ‘intending’ for planting suggests there was a reason for the action not to be completed.

The second poem in the MS sequence, *Hunter-Gatherers,* focuses on a different aspect of home. Again, loss is a central motif. This specific house is shown with the light missing in both a literal and figurative sense. Bachelard had claimed, ‘A lamp in the window is the house’s eye’. Referring to Bosco’s novel *Hyacinthe,* Bachelard suggests that ‘The lamp is the symbol of prolonged waiting’.[70] The contrast between the pronouns in *Hunter-Gatherers,* ‘I’ and ‘we’ shows the loss of the other person.[71] There is a potential epiphany as the ‘December light

[68] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 48.
[69] Fincham, *Contained in Ice,* p. 7.
[70] Bachelard, p. 34.
[71] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 2.

through a tear in blackout curtain' mirrors both the Maeshowe tomb and the 'veil of the temple rent in twain'[72] at the crucifixion (we had gone to Orkney specifically to visit the Maeshowe tomb in December for the winter solstice). I was inspired by Kathleen Jamie's essay about Maeshowe in *Findings.*[73] We knew that although we would be there at the right time and in the right place there was no guarantee that we would see the beam of light at sunset. (My other Orkney poems are published in *Green Figs & Blue Jazz*.[74]) In this poem, the blackout curtain was in a classroom where I was teaching. The ripped cloth, with the small tear, let light through. That epiphany moment for me was something I would have brought home and shared. As our shared space, this house had once had a vitality, referenced in 'russet apples', glasses of wine on a Friday evening, and trading of ideas. Later, any sense of sanctuary was contrived by leaving a lamp lit.

In the poem 'On the Third Afternoon', my focus is on the same house as in *Hunter-Gatherers* but with a more overtly post-lapsarian focus.[75] It describes the point where it was clear it could no longer perform its necessary function as a sanctuary. It was an estate cottage backing onto fields and then woods. Using a surrealist stance, I wanted to suggest how for me it had descended into chaos. The 'apple tree is rotten', 'the strawberry bed is piled high with mail' and the 'white fox' and 'caterpillars' have invaded the space. In Stanza 3, 'the pine table sliced in half" is a metaphor for the relationship that was severed by death. This estate cottage backed onto fields and the woods of the grand house across the valley. Our next-door neighbour, Jack Woods, had been born in our house. His father, a blacksmith had bought the two cottages. In our kitchen, there was a hook where his mother had hung the pig. When Jack

[72] Matthew 27.51.
[73] Kathleen Jamie, 'Darkness and Light', in *Findings* (London: Sort of Books, 2005), p.
[74] Lizzie Fincham, *Green Figs & Blue Jazz* (Birmingham: Cinnamon Press, 2017). p.12
[75] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 9.

died, his widow held bonfires for weeks as the sheds and out-houses were cleared. To us, as observers, a fire seemed like a significant rite of passage.

In my poem 'Is it Always About Beds', I consider allotments and graveyards as significant spaces.[76] Here, both types of beds can be sites of significance. I saw how in Krakov they sit 'cheek by jowl' near the Vistula River and they are places where extended families gather and bonfires are lit. The marigolds are 'hot' because they have been clutched in hands eager to 'cram' them into jam jars and 'preserving jars', with the double meaning of supplies preserved by careful house-holders and the bodies preserved in these graves too. The cemetery and allotments become meeting places. In Greek churchyards, the lamps are kept alight on the graves and in *Eglwysfach,* in the graveyard of one of R.S. Thomas' churches, the potency is from the Holy Well. The red flowers in R.S. Thomas' churchyard come from both 'wild' and 'tidied' gardens hinting at the two wives of Thomas, one who put her energy into her painting and his second wife who was reputed to have red nails. The underlying dynamic for this poem is the sense of continuity, through the turning over of the earth in the allotments in a Sussex village and in Krakov. As in Heaney's poem *Digging*, the earth needs to be dug afresh and the words need to go down to a deeper layer.

My poem 'Specimen Trays' uses the central motif of the trays in what used to be called The Spirit Building in the Natural History Museum in Kensington.[77] In the past, it was possible to go with researchers to look at the specimen jars labelled by Charles Darwin from his voyage on *The Beagle*. I use the image to suggest both natural history specimens and glimpses from memories of houses, corners, 'latches' and 'gates'. These objects and images can be retrieved from an actual storage place or the storage spaces of the mind to suggest a new story. The

[76] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 43.
[77] Fincham, *Contained in Ice,* p. 10.

'white sheets | transfigured in sunshine' suggest passion and the next image, with no punctuation point, 'cadences of the flute' suggests the quick layering of ideas.

The poem 'It is the House' was written in response to the on-going dynamic of the family house of my grandmother's cousins in southwest Wales.[78] In this poem, I create a surreal vision of a shared place. There is the chance for meetings, and experiences to be shared. The 'fire' here is 'lit' and this 'apple orchard' has 'exuberance' and vitality. There is an emphasis on the domestic work of cleaning and cooking but it is not gender specific as my earlier poem about this house, '*Ffaldybrenin*', had been.[79] The name of the house is *Maes y Bedw*, in *Ffaldybrenin,* a hamlet outside Lampeter. *Ffaldybrenin* translates as fold of the king. The kitchen-garden in both poems, the earlier '*Ffaldybrenin*' and this more recent poem, suggests a degree of self-sufficiency, as I noted in Yeats' poem, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. The *Maes y Bedw* house is in *Heol Pysgu* (meaning Spring Road) with the spring opposite this house, which was The Manse. The spring is a powerful memory and symbol too. The reference to bread and a shared meal suggests the potential for an eucharistic moment as in the novel and film, *Babette's Feast*.[80] (I refer to another eucharistic moment in the poem 'Later we Will Dance', which I discuss in Chapter 3 on borders).

Bachelard writes that 'A house that has been experienced is not an inert box'.[81] In a presentation, I had described *Ffaldybrenin* as my ur-house, although I did not spend a night in it (my parents spent their honeymoon there and so these family narratives are potent). Every time we made the journey there from Swansea, it felt as if it was a journey into deep time and a remote place. Despite the celebratory tone of 'It is the House', it is clear, through the image

[78] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 14.
[79] Lizzie Fincham, '*Ffaldybrenin*', *Poetry Wales*, Volume32:4 1997. p.34
[80] Dinesen, Isak [Karen Blixen], *Babette's Feast* (London: Penguin, 2011). First published in 1950; *Babette's Feast*. Dir. Gabriel Axel. Carlotta Films. 1987.
[81] Bachelard, p. vii.

of the ‘tombstone in Bethesda’, that the natural progression of time cannot be stopped and this perfect world in miniature will also end.

My poem ‘Security Notices’ describes a search for a previous house in which we rented a flat. My use of the word section identifies it as Antipodean.[82] It was in Kelburn in Wellington. This poem opens with a casual tone. The verb forms ‘stepped off’, ‘strolled’ and ‘savour’ are suggestive of a mood that is both relaxed and yet with some intensity of focus on details too. By Line 4 the sense of confusion sets in. ‘Double-take’ and ‘ran’, ‘checking and double-checking’ in Line 5 convey panic and disbelief. After the caesura, there is a shift. The shortest line of the poem reveals the loss of the house: ‘Our stilt-house had disappeared’.

The possessive pronoun ‘our’ reveals how it was in time past. The lyricism of the first stanza is replaced by words from a different lexical field, ‘bull-dozed’, ‘security notices’, and ‘fences’. These are words associated with power and the creation of divisions. Houses disappear through natural forces of environmental disturbance, or destructive acts. Milosz knew the Manor House had been lost. I had no warning of this loss. I was expecting to see this significant house. The terrain here is of an actual home, the ‘fennel’, ‘butterflies’, and the ‘nasturtiums’ are suggestive of a nurturing space, yet the ‘stilt-house’ has ‘disappeared’. Like the stilt-houses in vulnerable territories around the world (often situated on the precarities of flood plains), it has been wiped out by a bulldozer. It was, however, still home to all my senses despite no longer being there. The alliteration of ‘both’, ‘butterflies’, ‘bull-dozed’, ‘baptism’, ‘blaze’ and ‘blue’ is the story of this significant place in miniature, and I used the sound echoes to tighten the narrative. The ‘harbour’, ‘slopes’, ‘paths’, and ‘views’ are the constants. Those things could not be destroyed and the candle lit in the church suggests resilience as a sense of closure on that day. A possible moment of epiphany in this poem occurs with the still present smell of fennel and the tenacity of the nasturtiums that find small spaces for survival after the

[82] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 10.

demolition of the house has taken place. The distinctive smell and the vivid colours bring that potential for transcending time into place. Cobalt blue used in stained-glass windows collides into a memory of the blue sea of Wellington harbour seen from this flat.

A series of poems in the *cynefin* section of the MS explore some possible narratives for ancestors who reached Swansea in search of work and a dwelling in the mid-1800s. The evidence of where their searches for new places took them is through some census returns, birth and marriage certificates, and threads of stories from grandparents. There are very few photos. In these poems, I attempted to imagine what their searches for a new home might have been like. What were they leaving behind? What were they hoping for? In 'James Jones Leaves *Llwyndafydd*' (in Ceredigion), the actual terrain can be visited, although the dwelling is long gone.[83] A second cousin of my mother's told me her father had been able to salvage just one stone from the former small-holding. The sorrow of leaving the place of *Maesglas*, Welsh for a blue field where 'heaven had fallen that morning' suggests the impact of the decision they had made together being put into practice. There is a sense here of leaving the field or garden and leaving paradise. The Welsh word *glas* can mean both green and blue like the word glaucous which describes plants that have a colour on the edge of green and blue. Here *Maesglas* might suggest the 'green pastures' of Psalm 23 and the blue of the sky?[84] My family followed the rituals of the church's year and, although I do not generally take religion as a direct theme, I know that religious imagery and thought are often part of my chosen lexis.

For Richard Gilson, my Buckinghamshire ancestor, there was a journey of several hundred miles. In 'Richard Gilson Heads for the Ridgeway', I can only imagine what impulses drove him westwards to Swansea from a forge in the Chilterns.[85] There were numerous siblings,

[83] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 31.
[84] Psalm 23.
[85] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 32.

and possibly power struggles, in the crowded forge. It was near Akeman Street, which was a significant track. He may have heard many stories of other ways of earning a living as he shod the horses for the people passing through. The Gilson name can be found in parish registers of Waddesdon since the 1600s, according to the Buckinghamshire archivist. The first half of the 1800s was a time of famines and poverty and hard choices were made. In 1815 and 1816, after a terrible winter across Europe, possibly caused by a volcanic eruption, harvests failed. I have written of a possible quarrel to hint at the determination of the man and his willingness to take a risk. He set out from the continuity of work in the forge with its noise and heat to an unknown place.

My Gower families can be located in the census returns and baptism records although there are no headstones or markers in the graveyards of Llanddewi, Reynoldston or Llanrhidian. Bidder, the name of my maternal grandmother is certainly a Gower surname, cropping up in historical records from the 1700s. In *Gabriel Powell's Survey of the Lordship of Gower, 1764*, published by the Gower Society, there are numerous mentions of Bydders /Bidders and the rents they paid, the sheep they held and grazing rights.[86] Richard Bydder in The Manor of Vernhill in the Parish of Roscilly had to pay six swallow-tailed arrows or sixpence rent per annum at Michaelmas. An ancestor of mine, I hope. The name crops up in Pennard, Bishopston, with freeholders or tenants.

Home and the parish, dwelling place and terrain are central to my poems. I choose to focus, in T. S. Eliot's terms (in the 'Four Quartets'), on place and time. However, setting out, and looking about is key in my work too. My hunter-gathering impulse is strong. Liminal spaces of households or countries are crossed and it is there that I find the differences that can be relished or sadly exploited by those who do not wish to celebrate differences.

[86] *Gabriel Powell's Survey of the Lordship of Gower*, ed. by Bernard Morris (Swansea: The Gower Society, 2000).

Chapter 3. Borders

Concepts of Borders

In this chapter, I examine the concept of borders in various ways. First, there are actual borders as found in the island of Ireland, specifically in Belfast. Heaney's thinking, Boland's ideas, and my own experiences are paramount in this part of the discussion. For Boland, a female Irish writer, her experience of 'The Troubles' was very different from Heaney's as she was based at that time in Dublin. Her ideas about the 'island of Ireland' are necessarily different as she was living south of the border, but with a profound and historic understanding of the divisions as part of her birthright. Boland's ideas are particularly potent for me because of her outsider status, and for her, there was always the issue of language loss too, neither English nor Irish and mocked for her 'accent or voice' in both countries. Second, there are the borders of division fostered by politicians, as discussed by Milosz and other writers. Third, there are borders of thinking between those who wish to place the climate crisis as a central narrative for our time and those who choose to disregard or play down the significance of it.

My first personal knowledge of the issue of borders was through living and working in Belfast at the time of what was almost a civil war, known euphemistically as The Troubles. Seamus Heaney had recently published his first collection. He was the first poet I heard read. In his work, the issue of borders was both hidden and yet overt. 'Whatever you say, say nothing.'[87] He explained in essays that he was aware of the duplicities that could be read into that line.

The first school in which I taught was in the Ardoyne, on Shankill Road, near the Crumlin Road, with the gaol. We lived in a university flat near Queens in Stranmillis. The two areas were as divided in culture and ideas as those in any other war zone. It was possible for

[87] Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), p. 160.

some of the inhabitants of Belfast to act as if the reports of shootings and bombs were taking place in another country, but my work took me deep into the heart of the prejudices and divisions. The pavement edges were painted red, white and blue and in nearby streets, the colours were orange and green. The gable ends of houses at the end of streets were painted with murals commemorating King Billy or the Pope.

The poem in which I write most directly about this time is 'The Woods are Turning'.[88] In Stanza 3, I refer to the 'Bonfires/bone-fires,' which 'seem to remember all our vicious histories'. The bonfires of Belfast and Londonderry are there, as are 'the walls of fear and suspicion ... cemented into place at newer borders by politicians and other predators.' The Belfast murals were the site-specific walls of fear then. Now, they are the metaphorical walls of hatred we see on every continent. Since before the Brexit referendum onwards, it has suited the narrative of politicians and the popular press to stoke the fires of divisions. With the invasion of Ukraine, the Hammas terrorist attack on Gaza, the Israeli response, the ongoing devastation in Gaza, the situation in Lebanon, Sudan and far-right riots in England and Belfast's cities have already | turned to the colour and texture of smoke'. The word bone-fires carries extra impact. I have heard a Belfast speaker pronounce the word bonfire in that way with a chilling impact of what might be burning as the pyres of tyres are built to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne on 12 July. In 'Thoughts in a Black Taxi', Sinead Morrissey writes of how she took a taxi from the airport to her home city and knew it would be dangerous to reveal her family name or the street in Belfast where she had lived.[89]

The 'island of Ireland' is part of my narrative. I lived and worked there for three years. I have some Irish ancestors, and my maiden name was Collins. (There is a Patrick Purcell in my family history as well as a Gwenllian Cornelius and a Mary Bydder.) The Irish writers

[88] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 20.
[89] Morrissey, *There Was Fire in Vancouver*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996 p. 19

Heaney and Boland are certainly lode-stars. Their work on place and voice, home and borders feels very vivid to me.

Where there are borders there will be outsiders. As Covid took hold, the borders that had seemed crucial became 'meaningless | India walking home from cities to villages, deltas, to mountains'.[90] Those borders across the world were powerless to stop the spread of the virus, however high the walls or deep the rivers or wide the seas. There was a dichotomy between those who could afford to create some illusion of safe havens and others whose only way of surviving was to return to the remote villages of their extended families, where they might be seen not as prodigal sons but as bringers of the new plague.

Those who cross borders are often subject to suspicion, harassment and hatred. As the wars in the world continue to multiply we know that those who are displaced are often women and children. In my poem 'Uniforms', I look directly at the way in which power is exerted over someone perceived to be an outsider.[91] The locus was first a street and then on a tram in Bordeaux. The poem begins with a holiday energy of 'backpacks and cases, skateboards and drums'. We had failed to ask for tickets so took a gamble on not being found out. When 'the uniforms got on', we were 'panicking'. Absorbed by our own situation at first we had not noticed two men being 'escorted off the tram/by the four men in uniform'. When the 'music stopped' the silence showed us what had happened. We had probably watched the start of an interrogation. The word 'escorted' suggests a faux civility we recognise from movies with the double menace of 'good cop, bad cop' operators conducting the questioning. There was a numerical mismatch too, of 'four men' against 'two men'. Our 'fractured French' made humorous through the playful use of alliteration is contrasted with the silence at the end of the poem. The potential menace of drums is replicated in the Cenotaph poems where uniforms are

[90] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 14.
[91] Fincham*, Earth Race,* poem 18.

again a central motif. In the 'Uniforms' poem the power of the moment is held in the fact that the music had been stopped.

The poem 'Home, Exile and Return' was influenced by the work of Milosz, the Lithuanian and Polish writer. It arose from my desire to make an imaginative response to the current situation with refugees and economic migrants across Europe and Africa.[92] I wanted to intercut images from our minds of the terrors of the Third Reich with the fascist stance of politicians and their media enablers now. The refrain I use of 'What is your name' holds the terrors referenced by Morrissey. The interrogations are ubiquitous. Yet Milosz's poems show we somehow have the capacity to perceive terrors and yet carry on with our own lives. The juxtaposition of calm and timeless spaces and the fear and anguish of migrants and refugees and those who are persecuted is part of my intention.

In the first stanza of Milosz's poem 'Campo dei Fiore', cobbles are splattered with 'wine' but we have a shiver of apprehension that it could just as easily be blood that has been spilled.[93] The image of 'baskets of olives' is reminiscent of a hundred still life paintings or their more potent term, *nature mort*. The word 'olives' is a short-cut to events taking place in the Garden of Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives on Maundy Thursday. There is a 'wreckage of flowers' like the palms strewn before Christ on Palm Sunday and the vendors at the tables could be the same key players whose tables Christ overturned when he cleared out the courts of the temple in Jerusalem. The actual location for the first part of Milosz's poem is Rome and of course, the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate and the Roman soldiers of occupation were key players in the drama of the crucifixion. Stanza 2 of Milosz's poem describes the burning of Giordano in this same square with the pyre and the mob and flames hardly interrupting the selling. The casual resumption of ordinary life on that square of death highlights both events.

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[92] Fincham, *Contained in Ice,* p. 15; Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 19.
[93] Milosz, p. 33.

By the third stanza, our attention is now directed to another location, Warsaw, where a carnival tune from a sky carousel 'drowned the salvos from the ghetto wall'. It seems to echo the image used by Shakespeare in *King Lear*: 'Fortune goodnight, smile once more, turn thy wheel.'[94] Milosz then asks us to reflect on the capacity of the people of Rome or Warsaw, 'To haggle, laugh, make love | As they pass the martyrs' pyres'. By telling the story of our human condition through analepsis and prolepsis and using the juxtaposition of tragedies and terrors alongside the continuity of our ordinary days, I think Milosz asks us to question our own stance. Then we do not see things through his eyes with the stance of a distanced witness but more as if we are invited to stand alongside him.

In my poem 'Home, Exile and Return', I considered how the sense of terror can be shown. The simple shelters of rooms that we might see in local museums become symbols of lost spaces for individuals, families or whole populations forced off their land. The first stanza speaks of home, the second of exile, and the third of return. The interrogations took place as searches for safe spaces became paramount. But even if there would be a possibility of a return to the first places, now either those dwellings might have other owners or nothing might be left but the scorched land itself as 'the fields are deserted' and the 'beech woods', like Buchenwald, might be filled with corpses. In 'Created by Hand' the borders range from the simplicities of 'dry stone walls | round the edge of ancient field | marking boundaries | showing possession of territories' to the bolder territorial messages of efforts where 'buildings tried to reach | or mirror the sky with spires or domes'.[95]

I chose 'spires or domes' to suggest the yearning, reaching out for something other as part of various faiths and traditions. In the current unrest in England and Northern Ireland in August 2024, there have been fresh attacks on places of worship, libraries and other places of

[94] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 1997).
[95] Fincham, *Contained in Ice,* p. 25; Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 24.

potential refuge. These places are significant spaces for the emotional and mental health of individuals and communities. But they have drawn the anger of some others who have been led to believe false narratives. There is reparative work to be done in those communities.

Being accepted in a community (or not) can be manifested in different ways. My next focus on borders looks at the symbolic border created by language loss which was a key issue for Eavan Boland. It meant that she did not feel completely at home in Ireland or England. Eventually, as referenced by interviews with and essays by Jody Allen-Randolph it was what gave her a unique voice through her outsider status. Boland's work interests me as it considers her situation and her role as a woman writer in Ireland.

My situation is as a Welsh female writer in voluntary exile. I suspect that the sense of searching that is a constant in my work is linked with what could be called *hiraeth.* In one of my poems, *Cynghanedd*, I consider the role that language loss or language deprivation played in my situation.[96] In a household that could have been Welsh-speaking (as my Welsh-speaking grandmother always lived with us), the decision was taken to deliberately suppress the language. It was a colonial or post-colonial decision. So although I am a Welsh writer with both a literal and figurative Welsh voice I do not speak the language. At my junior school, called *Brynhyfryd* (Welsh for lovely hill), one of our challenges was to learn verses each week of the Psalms of David, so we had those rhythms in our head. Yet there were no Welsh lessons. We could just as easily have learned the sound of Welsh. Why did we not? These verses of Psalm 107[97] (King James Bible Version) 'They that go down to the sea in ships, That do business in great waters, These see the works of the Lord and his wonders of the deep', hold my attention through the clash of quotidian 'business' and luminous words of 'wonders of the deep'. Perhaps the fact that my father worked at the Custom House in Swansea and my husband was a marine

[96] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 23.
[97] King James Bible, 1604.

biologist added to these vivid images that had such an impact on me. The cadences of that verse are in my head too with its pauses and rhythms. My father played the church organ, practised psalms and chants on the harmonium at home, and there was always singing. Here, image and sound worked in synergy.

In his essay 'Feeling into Words', Heaney says,

> Finding a voice means you can get your own feelings into your own words and that your words have a feel of you about them: and I believe that it may not even be a metaphor, for a poetic voice is probably very intimately connected with the poet's natural voice that he hears as the ideal speaker of the lines he is making up.[98]

When Boland was asked if she considered herself as an American poet as she had lived and worked in the United States for so long, she said, 'I am an Irish poet. I always have been and always will be…. So much of a poet's formation has to do with rootedness, not just in a place but in a past'.[99]

I am a Welsh writer despite living and working outside Wales in my adult life. I imagine that if I had lived and worked in Wales as an adult, I could have changed the situation and become a Welsh speaker. In the houses of my childhood, there must have been a powerfully conscious decision by my grandmother to suppress her use of the Welsh language. Her mother-in-law, from *Maes Glas*, the farm in Ceredigion, would not have English in her house. *Dim Saesneg*, she is reported to have said. I wonder now if it was a power struggle between two matriarchs. It was believed at the time that speaking Welsh would hold one back in both educational terms and occupational choices. Like the decisions made in Ireland or Kashmir,

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[98] Heaney, *Preoccupations,* p. 43.
[99] William Walsh, 'Shadows in the Story: An interview with Eavan Boland', *The Georgia Review*, https://www.thegeorgiareview.com/posts/shadows-in-the-story-an-interview-with-eavan-boland/ [accessed 26 December 2024].

power was held by the colonists. In the poem 'Cynghanedd', I refer to 'mistakes made long ago | by men and women in high rooms'.[100]

I do believe there were mistakes made in my own family's decisions. In an earlier poem, 'Not a Slate', published in *Cambria*, I interpreted a story my mother told of a different kind of language deprivation.[101] In the poem 'In Poland Some Endangered Species', I explore the situation for a woman who can eventually redeem her language loss through some occasional conversations with a speaker of her language.[102] Her feet are 'bathed' in an image suggesting Mary Magdalene, so there is a sense of both physical and emotional restoration to health.

Borders of the Mind: The Climate Crisis

The final border is to attempt to record the divisions unfolding now in plain sight between those who live in the rich nations who exploit the resources of the world, while others scrabble in dust for water. It is the final frontier now. I look here at the borders of the mind created by those who interpret climate change in different ways.

In the poem 'Paris Blues: Global Warning', I used three areas of focus.[103] The first was from images of autumn trees, 'fire-working from green to orange | then red' as I worked at a table in the university library in Sussex. The second thread was an art gallery display of winter landscapes, and the final location was a field station outside Oxford that monitors small variations of botanical and biological species and different methods of recording and monitoring changes.

Scientists and politicians all have a part to play in observing and attempting to mitigate the effects of the Anthropocene but even within the groups that work to this end, there are

[100] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 23
[101] Lizzie Fincham, 'Not a Slate', in *Cambria,* 2007, page unknown
[102] Fincham*, Earth Race,* poem 49.
[103] Fincham, Earth Race, poem 25.

different stances and points of view. There is also a vocal group who wish to discredit the work of scientists. Climate change deniers see the situation differently.

My poem 'Floods' confronts or imagines the issue of the climate crisis as if it has already reached the tipping point.[104] It is one of a number of my poems that use public transport of buses or trains as a microcosm. I use them as metaphors, as these are spaces where we sit alongside strangers, hear different languages, and understand how varied the world really is. 'Now that the grass has re-appeared | so greenly after the droughts, then floods' there is a suggestion, as I focus, on 'the edge of the caves | at *Les Baux*... the arena, at *Nimes*, the viaduct at *Pont du Gard* | perhaps we can begin to re-interpret empires from east to west'. I am imagining a new world, a utopia where we... 'rediscover the simplicity of a roof in a cave | or a barn, a hut or a house | to give shelter from rains or the heat of the sun | to people, we have not met, yet'. I suggest that we will have to be bold in our thinking. Our narrow-mindedness about boundaries and borders and our suspicions of 'others' can be changed. The word 'yet' is intended to suggest a need for open-mindedness.

Tu Fu writes that 'Rivers and mountains survive broken countries'.[105] If we acknowledge the primacy of our own need for and reliance on a safe shelter, we need to work to allow that to be a right for others, both here in the United Kingdom, in Europe and across the world. In my poem 'Floods', the final stanza spins us back into the location of inside the train. There is a glimmer of hope. Here the specific objective correlative, in T. S. Eliot's term, is the smell of oranges. We cannot see where the person has peeled them or is eating them, they are 'further down this train' but the visceral response through the release of the powerful smell allows us to see them in our minds' eye. We know too that the segments of oranges are easy 'to share'. The shape of an orange is like a globe so I intend it as a metaphor here for the new way

[104] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 26.
[105] Tu Fu, 'Spring Landscape AD 757', cited in Bate, p. 205.

the world could be shared. It links with the last two lines of *Earth Race*: 'we walked once so lightly on the moon | we do not walk so lightly on the earth'.[106]

When the Roman Empire fell some of the infrastructures remained, including the arenas where crowds had gathered and the use of the Latin language, which was retained for centuries in the ecclesiastical domain, the judiciary, and in education. Those areas are still where power is held. Where and how could new power bases be framed to answer our current challenges? The Latin word for earth, *terra*, gives us the word territory. Whatever happens now, the answers need to be collaborative. The problem created by the Anthropocene is global in its impact. The solutions have to come from a shared response.

In my poem, 'I Took my Seat in the Third-Class Carriage of a Deserted Train', the narrative is uneasy.[107] The characters and scenes are dystopic and disturbing. 'Figures wrapped in grey coats' suggest the greatcoats and uniforms of Nazi commanders. As the train heads north the towns and cities seem abandoned. The few lights become 'fireflies in Dante's dark wood'. Planes had been grounded as we saw 'airports with no cars parked'. Yet even in this dystopic world, 'logs were stacked at every gate and fence'.

I want to suggest attempts at survival in this almost apocalyptic world are at the most basic. Wood is (and always has been) collected for fires for warmth and light. I intend the poems 'Floods' and 'I Took my Seat' to suggest the tenacity of the human race to overcome fear and to find potential for hope. Conditions might be harsh and decisions made in the past have an ongoing legacy but resilience is key to personal and society's survival. We can see the power of resilience in Milosz's poem, 'A Book in the Ruins': 'A dark building. Crossed boards, nailed up create | A barrier at the entrance, or a gate | When you go in.' The poem has invited

[106] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 14.
[107] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 27.

us to collide time and place. Nailed planks of wood hold images of Christ's crucifixion. At the end of the poem:

It is noon and wandering
Through a dark building, you see workers sitting
Down to a fire a narrow ray of sunlight
Kindles on the floor. They have dragged out
Heavy books and made a table of them
And began to cut their bread.[108]

It is at noon too that we observe (in both meanings of the word) the crucifixion. The date of the poem is 1941. It could be 2024 in Ukraine, Gaza or Lebanon. The sense of fear and yet resilience is palpable. The books serve another purpose. There is not a fire for actual warmth but there is a sliver of light to be enjoyed.

In the last two poems of the MS, I look at the global situation through two contrasting frameworks. The tone in the penultimate poem is melancholic. It is a world littered with broken promises. 'The Glass-House Window was Broken'[109] uses the central motif or metaphor of the greenhouse of build-up of gases threatening the world. The 'pages of the speech were smeared by tears' refers to Obama's speech and challenge for COP 26. We have seen how promises have been broken by subsequent governments. The 'peacock garden' is 'silent'. The peacock suggests the parading of politicians. The 'apple tree' is 'broken'. An apple is a *leitmotif* in a number of my poems, often suggesting a post-lapsarian state. In the final line of this poem, the 'ferry' is 'covered in ice'.

The border here is between hope and despair, action and lethargy, truth and fake news. In Maslow's 'Pyramid of Human Needs', after water and food, shelter and community through

[108] Milosz, p. 28.
[109] Fincham, *Contained in Ice,* p. 12; Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 49.

family and friends are the next requirements. In 2024, it is shocking that in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sudan, Gaza, Lebanon, France, and war zones all over the globe these basic needs are still unreachable for many women, children, and men, and for refugees and asylum seekers here in the United Kingdom too. Speeches addressing this issue have been recently delivered by, for example, Filipo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner and Jeremy Gilley who set up the Peace One Day movement, which allows humanitarian aid to get through war zones on 21 September each year. Hope has to be the key. With more emphasis on hope, individuals and groups can be empowered to call for change.

My final poem 'There Will be Drumming and Dancing'[110] moves to a place of optimism and hope and a belief that new ideas and collaboration can thrive. The drum is suggestive of first joy and then menace in 'Uniforms' is centred here on the potential for delight. The word 'dancing' iterates T. S. Eliot's phrase 'there is only the dance'.[111] The contributions of new narratives and new ways of thinking will come from across the world.

[110] Fincham*, Earth Race*, poem 51.
[111] T.S. Eliot, 'Four Quartets, Burnt Norton', in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974).

Chapter 4. Epiphanies

This chapter examines my whole poetry manuscript to see where epiphanies might occur. Are they most likely to occur in the poems with home as the central concept in the poems with borders as a key motif or in yet others where the main impulses of the poems lie outside those two key concerns? The poems explored in Chapter 2 Home may tend, because of their lyrical context, to allow more opportunities for epiphany moments than those in Chapter 3 Borders, where the challenges are more societal, as the poems discussed in that chapter have mostly developed ideas with a political stance. I have considered what various other writers have written about potential moments of epiphanies.

In 'Mossbawn', the first essay in *Preoccupations*, Heaney explains that despite knowing the whole of Keats' 'Ode to Autumn', 'the only line that was luminous then was "To bend with apples the mossed cottage trees" because my uncle had a small orchard where the apple trees were sleeved with a soft green moss'.[112] Here Heaney references how, for him, one line with a connection to his own experience was where the light came in. Is that part of what happens to us as we read and write poems? Is there one thing that snags our attention? Is it linked with one image (as it was for Heaney) with something already seen?

I think that a transformative moment for me is often caught by one word or image that is unsettling or particularly vivid. For example, in my poem, 'At the Very Border of Imagined Time', written in Krakow, the Damascus moment was in the Church of St Francis. I had wandered through the city earlier with friends. We drank wine in the square, saw the market hall and lit candles in several churches. We knew the devasting history of this place. I went into the Church of St Francis alone after exploring the back streets, getting slightly lost and feeling palpable unease in some of the streets. I think the unease I felt as I had deliberately walked

[112] Heaney, *Preoccupations*, p. 26.

away from the tourist-filled squares was part of the contrast I was searching for. I needed to be able to imagine the horrors of former times. I had crossed the river literally and figuratively. As I returned from those harsh streets, I looked for the Church of St Francis. There was a noisy tourist group in this last church but after they left, I was free to sit alone in silence and sunlight. When I turned around from the high altar and saw Wyspianski's Window of God, the impact was and still is visceral. The word 'paint-box' holds the potential of all the colours, all the delights of the whole world. In my work, the visceral moment is more likely to be centred on a proper noun or a common noun rather than an adjective or adverb, although having said that I know that the colours red or blue are sometimes the indicators of my attention being caught. It was the power and joy of that window that was so vivid and memorable.

In my 'Earth Race' poem, written in the very early days of COVID-19, I move from light-hearted images of the music and videos of Stormzy and a memory of a house we once saw with a cobalt blue baby grand, to the news reports of the virus. Populations were already on the move, trying to get somewhere safe. Into this chaos came the image of Bergman's film, *The Seventh Seal*, with the chess game.[113] That film was in black and white, further suggesting polarities. The head of steam of the poem was built up by the last two lines where I contrasted the awe of the moon landings (again seen in black and white) with the mess we seem to have made of the earth. At that point I was attempting, in Heaney's terms, 'to make time stand still'.[114] By using the image of the chess game and then the moon landings I was trying to collide the helplessness and yet potential of the human race.

In my poem 'Walled and Unwalled', there is a double lexis of military words – boundaries, soldiers, revolution, prison – contrasted with domestic words – wet wool, singing,

[113] *The Seventh Seal*. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. AB Svensk Filmindustri. 1957.
[114] Heaney, cited in Parker, page unknown

fiddler.[115] What I hope becomes an epiphany moment is the resilience of the human spirit in the last few lines. In solitary confinement, in a Syrian prison, forbidden to speak, the prisoners listened for 'the sound of feet moving' as a way of staying connected to the world. A Turner Prize exhibit I saw several years ago challenged us, as do Heaney's words: 'Whatever you say, say nothing'.[116] He explained what he meant by that line with a discussion about how hard it is to speak the truth without inflaming situations. Enforced actual silence for the prisoners in the Syrian film or the wisdom of what my grandmother would have termed 'keeping a still tongue', as referenced by Heaney, is potent. As Heaney was the first poet I had heard or read (from then on, his poetry and prose both made a powerful impact on me), it is no surprise that a search for what he described as small epiphanies is part of my interest in looking at poems by others and in my own work.

I admire the ideas of Derek Mahon, explored in his *Paris Review* interview, where he speaks of the potential for the numinous. He talked of how, even as a young child, he seemed to be aware of 'the numina inherent in things'.[117] I like writing about things. I like the names of apples, butterflies, musicians, and painters. Having lived for forty years with a taxonomist perhaps that fascination with detail is no surprise. In 'I Think I'd Rather be a Painter', I write about decisions and choices when making work. The moment of recognition, as I tried to paint the chateau, was realising that I actually wanted to show ordinary life supporting the life of the chateau as the shirts caught a drying wind, in Pentecost terms. And, of course, that was the moment of chance that gave me my subject.

Despite preparation, trial and error, I had no control over that washing on the line catching my attention. I think it is that moment of attention being caught, that potential for something else that is key. In a conversation, Robert Frost challenged Wallace Stevens for

[115] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 15.
[116] Heaney in O'Driscoll, p. 123.
[117] Eamon Grennan, 'Derek Mahon, The Art of Poetry, No. 82', *The Paris Review*, 154 (2000).

writing about 'bric-a-brac'[118] rather than the 'one thing' approach Frost chose. As a hunter-gatherer, I collect ideas from everywhere until there is a tipping point.

I suggest it is possible to find the potential for epiphany moments in some of my poems. Those I identify in Chapter 2 Home might occur through an image (as suggested by T. S. Eliot) in both his criticism and his poems in 'Four Quartets', where there is a time shift of some kind. Those epiphany moments in the poems considered in the Home chapter include 'Mineshaft', where the visceral impact of the red dress transcends time. It and I were ready for a new dance.[119] In 'Hunter-Gatherers', the 'Maeshowe' moment in an ordinary classroom one December with a sliver of light brought the link between time and place into a new vitality although the lamplight for the cottage had to be set up in the morning.[120] In my poem 'Illusion', the journey by car at night was any places, all places, Connemara, Dorset, Tuscany and all times, but for the moment of epiphany there was the simplicity of one light in an upstairs window.[121]

In Wordsworth's terms 'the spot of time,' Bate says, 'crucially elides temporality and place'.[122] The light still on, late into the night, in 'Illusion' suggested to us, that someone was working on a potentially creative task. Quite often on our journeys, we wondered if we had missed a turning. We were usually travelling in unreliable cars and somehow one light in a window was an affirmation of our route or journey. These strange juxtapositions of images are often part of the discovery process for me. Then the first one or two images act as magnets for other ideas. In 'Security Notices', I knew the double narrative of time past and time present with the shock of loss, needed a constancy of some kind. It was in the vestiges left of the garden with the smell of fennel and the tenacity of nasturtiums that the former house was brought back

[118] Robert Frost,
[119] Fincham, Mineshaft in Earth Race, poem 1
[120] Fincham, Hunter Gatherers in Green Figs and blue Jazz, p.12
[121] Fincham, Illusion GF&BJ, p. 55
[122] Bate, p.206

to life.[123] There is a link with this next poem, as plant life is mentioned in that too. In 'It is the House', the apple tree grounds the work as an Edenic space.[124] This poem features the *leit-motifs* of light and bread with an epiphany moment of the fire lit and the bread shared. Light of various kinds, sun, moon, lamps, fires, and hearths hold an important place in my work. Another key feature of my work is a sense of exploration and revisiting a known place, as in T. S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets'. In Chapter 3 Borders, the potential moment of anagnorisis might occur with a glimpse of some other way of reading a narrative? In this context it is more likely to be a moment of recognition of some disturbance and a need to reconsider or reframe the situation.

In my poem 'Now in the Saxophone Sea of Morning',[125] sound echoes of 'slides', 'tide', and 'thyme' tighten the ideas into one 'spot of time' in Wordsworth's terms, to a cliff-top and a view across the English Channel. There is an echo of Gloucester in *King Lear.* The rest of the stanzas show where some of the refugees in the small boats might be coming from and also the resilience of those who have to remain in harsh regimes. There was an extraordinary and hopeful news report this summer of 19 Afghan women who arrived in Edinburgh to resume their medical studies, which had been interrupted by the Taliban. They have been supported by a tenacious Scottish family. But there are tragic reports this week of more deaths in an attempted crossing.

In my short poem 'Desire Paths', I consider what the realities for many migrants might be. In these 12 syllables, we can see the situation in miniature.[126]

Desire paths

Backpacks.

[123] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 10
[124] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 12
[125] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 28
[126] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 21.

Water bottle.

Mobile phone.

In *Earth Race,* the poem shifts from a lyrical morning in deep time past, exploring a house we might buy, to the present and all-pervading bleakness as the coronavirus virus took over the world, 'as thousands of men, women, and children | head through Turkey into Greece', and 'India walking home from cities to villages, deltas to mountains.'[127] The dichotomy between before Covid-19 and after is, in Thomas Kuhn's terminology, a paradigm shift.[128] The tipping point came in *media res*. In those early days of March 2020, we had no idea how that virus would cause so many deaths and so much upheaval across the world. In my poem 'Uniforms*'* the significant and disturbing event also occurs in *media res*. The contrast between the holiday noise and the silence in the tram after the men had been escorted off by the men in uniform made us question the situation. What exactly had we just witnessed? In the middle of a carefree journey, there was a moment of realisation of omnipresent fear for some people. The 'tipping point' in *'*Home, Exile Return' turns into a potential moment of recognition in the second set of questions in the final stanza return.[129] 'Where are your papers?' Even if it were possible to return home it might no longer be an available space. It might be occupied territory or newly contested.

Not all the fifty poems in my *Earth Race* manuscript fall easily into the two chapter headings of 'Home' and 'Borders'. Written (and in the case of half of the poems already published) while I have been working towards this degree, the narrative curve and choices originally had a rather different agenda. The poems from *Green Figs and Blue Jazz* were narratives of loss and *Contained in Ice* were poems focused on the zeitgeist of climate crisis. Will I find that some of these other poems in the MS also hold suggestions of epiphany

[127] Fincham*, Earth Race,* poem 14.
[128] Thomas Kuhn, p. 128
[129] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 14.

moments and if so where and why might that happen? Certainly, some of these poems are 'outliers', not sitting easily in the two main chapters. One thread I notice is that there are often poems about waiting.

In a *Granta* essay, Andrew Motion writes,

> I began to think of poetry as the medium to express in its purest form the heroic and tragic effort of humanity to catch an emanation of – well what is the word for it? World-essence. Life's redemption Wallace Stevens calls it. By making links as the neurologist Nancy Anderson says in *The Creating Brain*, between forms of objects or symbols or words or remembered experiences that have not been previously linked.[130]

T.S. Eliot said 'the poet's mind is a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images which remain there until all the particles which unite to form a new compound are present together.'[131] Seizing and storing are shorthand for my methodology. Eliot had also argued that the Metaphysical Poets were constantly 'amalgamating disparate experience.'[132] The words amalgamating and disparate resonate with me as I attempt to collide ideas. Contrasting ideas and images and using varying semantic fields is part of the mix for my work. The quotidian words and everyday images might allow for the luminous or numinous to happen.

Dichotomies of light and dark, the hearth and wild spaces are certainly key in my work. In many of my poems, I strive for a contrast of theme or place or mood. I often switch between two different lexical fields. Is that duality part of what might contribute to what Peter Brook called the 'Aha moment'?[133] Key locations include churches, cathedrals, markets, graveyards,

[130] Andrew Motion, *Poetry in the Beginning* (London: Granta, 2017).
[131] T. S. Eliot, page unknown
[132] T. S. Eliot, page unknown
[133] Peter Brook,in conversation with David Britton

allotments, kitchen gardens, trains, trams, buses which are all public spaces but can allow for moments of privacy too.

In my poem, 'Later we Will Dance', the potential epiphany moment occurs as the chef prepares a Greek salad for the arrogant man.[134] The journey on the bus beside the sea takes place at the time of Brexit. It is a shadow image of the bus conjured by Boris Johnson and covered in lies. This bus is filled with passengers heading to work, 'speed reading thrillers next to bank clerks | who have learned English all summer'. The various nationalities sit side by side. As the stories of an ordinary day take place, the preparation of the meal in the Italian restaurant becomes a potential eucharistic moment like the one in *Babette's Feast*. The pace has slowed.

In 'Mineshaft*',* the moment of change was the shock of the 'red frock in the window'.[135] The frock is not being worn. It is behind the double windows of the bus and the shop but still has the capacity to shift time. The element of surprise is a crucial aspect of that impact. I knew the route so well I already had it in my memory bank but the red dress was in the present moment. In 'Security Notices', the element of surprise holds the impact for the loss of the house. 'Our stilt-house had disappeared.'[136]

In 'Waterhouse's Cathedral', the time and place shift occurs in the final stanza with the Polish Mass and the male voice choir in Wales.[137] Here, two very different traditions, the Roman Catholic Mass sung in Polish and the voices of the Welsh male voice choir become interchangeable. 'I will tell you of that morning … | when the sound of men singing the Mass in Polish | was like a male voice choir in Wales.' These were scraps of real memories that I chose to collide into an imagined event. There was a foregrounding narrative of the two of us

[134] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 13.
[135] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 1.
[136] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 10.
[137] Fincham, Contained in Ice, p. 11

bringing our days to the table. Bread and wine already featured and so did science and music. By chance, one day I was called into the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Brighton. After a few minutes, I realised the service taking place was for the Polish community in Brighton. The Polish café opposite the Victoria and Albert Museum is called Daquise and has been a meeting place for spies, and was a place we often met. Highlighting where reality and imagination cross over.

In the surreal poem 'Assignations, You Can Choose', written in the time of Covid when no meetings were possible, the images are of specific places for potential renewal.[138] There are choices to be made. Skagen Fish Quay suggests the 'smell of fish' and the glitter of fish scales. The wildwood has 'forking paths' suggestive of Frost's 'The Road not Taken', whereas the use of known or unknown implies various correspondents. The final stanza brings the moment of anagnorisis: 'It will tell you the meeting place'. It almost has a sound echo of 'In my father's house there are many mansions'.[139]

The assignation in 'cusp' is a continuation of other meetings, with the 'man with the two dogs | walking leisurely' and 'the woman with a red coat already waiting.'[140] The red coat is suggestive of romance. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess is seen by Angel Clare when she is dancing in the field, wearing a red ribbon. Is there a suggestion of tragedy here too?

In 'Chantry Chapel' there is a potential moment of a reunion of the mind where 'you will be waiting.'[141] The 'high summer garden' is teeming with flora and fauna, there is the sound of the rill. Inside the chantry chapel, there is a quiet dark as deep and potent as the tomb at Maeshowe.

[138] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 39.
[139] John 14.2.
[140] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 40.
[141] Fincham, *Earth Race*, poem 41.

A sense of hope is manifested in 'Not the Elgin Marbles nor a Giotto Drawing' by the work of the garden which continues in the usual way with 'wheelbarrows and hoses'.[142] The vines are tenacious although the greenhouse struts are 'rusted' and a windowpane is 'cracked'. Although there are challenges to making this garden thrive, 'one insistent fig tree offers up | the first green fruit in a collar | frill of emerald leaves.' The chance of regeneration in this one greenhouse conveys a sense of both a personal narrative and hope for a wider context despite climate change ravages. That just one fig tree has managed to thrive symbolises the potential of small ideas with the possibility of radiating outwards. The work of those gardeners has continued despite all challenges and the sense of continuity is strong. There are of course questions we would now ask about the role of those Victorian collectors? As Jonathan Bate says in *The Song of the Earth,*[143] 'the history of the greenhouse is bound up with that of empire'. Yet, these plant species have contributed to the richness of these gardens.

A recent report has shown that woods with a variety of trees can withstand storms more effectively than those with a single species plantation.[144] I would like to take that idea as a metaphor for human life too. Variation in all its aspects, with the potential for hybrid vigour, is to be celebrated. The sense of hope in 'Is it Always About Beds'[145] is conveyed by the cyclical work in the allotments and Sunday Mass in the Church of St Francis in Krakow. Here, the specific sense of joy is manifested by the stained-glass windows created by Wyspianski. 'Wyspianski's stained-glass windows | explode the paint-box over our heads'. The face he used for God was not of someone of noble birth or high importance but the face of a beggar. These public spaces of churches or grand gardens, synagogues and cathedrals, temples and mosques (like the allotments and churchyards) do, of themselves, all hold a sense of continuity.

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[142] Fincham*, Earth Race*, poem 42.
[143] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, London: Picador, 2000
[144] Julien Barrere, Forest Storm resilience depends on the interplay between functional composition and climate-Insights from European-scale simulations. Functional Ecology, Volume 38: 3, p. 500-516
[145] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 43.

In those timeless places, a possibility of something else might occur. It might be a random meeting or a different way of seeing a place or a situation. A moment of anagnorisis occurred in the week of the Queen's funeral. A formally dressed musician, in a black suit was playing an organ in London Bridge Station. A security worker in a yellow jacket approached and asked if she might sing with the organist. As she began to sing the organist relaxed her shoulders as she realised this was a superb voice. Here the aleatory moment, the creative change was key.

Considering Derek Mahon's celebration of the numinous or T. S. Eliot's stance on objects, do certain items of clothing, frocks, shirts, and robes hold a visual impact that can translate into a visceral sense of 'something else'? The juxtaposition of the severe black suit and the yellow jacket suggestive of *jaune* was part of the narrative. In many of my poems, I suggest that clothes hold significant power. I have already referenced the significance of the red dress in 'Mineshaft' and the red coat of the woman in 'cusp'. The flannel shirts are being sewn for Swansea Market by my grandmother's sister in 'Rumpelstiltskin's Girl'.[146] The cottage industry work was hard but the shirts were well-made and sold easily. Like the repetitive work in 'Degas Laundresses', the work done by the women is ordinary, yet vital. The various shirts in 'A Crowded Ark'[147] are suggestive of a whole life. Like the shirts thrown over the balcony by Gatsby in Baz Luhrmann's film of the novel, they are representative of lost days.[148] The almost widower in Ash House in Rhossili still starches a fresh shirt every day. The boots of the soldiers in the Normandy trench are the footwear of soldiers and workers everywhere. The boots being repaired and polished in the Gower poems suggest a carefulness and a kind of love too. There are the symbolic clothes of the men in uniform on the Bordeaux tram. The 'balaclavas, burkas, army camouflage and cardinals' robes' in 'The Woods are

[146] Fincham, *Earth Race,* poem 37
[147] Fincham, GF&BJ, p51
[148] *The Great Gatsby*. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Warner Bros. 2013.

Turning', act, in each case, as a type of synecdoche to represent abstract ideas of exploitation, fear or division.[149] The white robes in the Dominican church in Krakov suggest a continuity, a tradition. In these ordinary items of clothing, shirts, and boots (the essentials in Maslow's terms) there is the potential to see something other, the potential for the numinous that Derek Mahon claimed was so powerful.

For something 'other' to happen, there is often a sense of surprise or shock or a kind of mismatch of images. In 'Later we Will Dance'[150] there were crowded places, the bus and the train station, but later in a small Italian cafe, the pace slowed to the sight and sound of one chopping board, and despite the talk from the man about his watches, there was a sense of timelessness. The honeybees from the start of the poem key into 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' and by the end of this poem the peace has come 'dropping slow'.[151] Despite the disturbance and divisions of Brexit, it is clear that workers from all around the world want to travel and thrive. In 'Hunter-Gatherers', there has been a sense of loss, yet with the Maeshowe moment, through the randomness of the torn curtain, there is a sense, somehow, of a potential continuity. It celebrates the return of the light after the winter solstice.[152]

In 'Security Notices', I began by declaring I would need to collect the images for both of us. It was not until I found that the actual house where we had had our flat had been destroyed that I realised how few those images would be. My expectations were overturned so I had to look more closely to find images in terms of T. S. Eliot's 'objective correlative' or things in Derek Mahon's philosophy: 'Found the same slopes, paths, views.'[153]

Finding the potential for a small epiphany in Heaney's terms was a key purpose as I developed the poems. I have found that contrasts of images and language are part of this search.

[149] Fincham, Contained in Ice, p.23
[150] Fincham, Contained in Ice p. 8
[151] Yeats, p.62
[152] Fincham, GF&BJ, p.12
[153] Fincham, GF&BJ, p. 16

Sometimes I use a contrasting lexical field to highlight dichotomies. Waiting, watching, and listening are crucial too.

Where has my search for 'small epiphanies' led me? I had looked first at the work of some writers and theorists on their ideas on the potency of home and borders. I investigated how those two themes, among others of loss and meetings, were revealed in my own work. I think in the end and in the beginning too, the answer will be that it is in the detail. It is in a celebration and investigation of the ordinary to reveal something new, something else. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is reputed to have said, 'God is in the details'.[154] I want to suggest that the numinous moment is in the detail. In addition to naming the types of objects and images that occur and recur in my work (such as fire, light, plant life, clothes, music, and locations of houses, gardens, churches, and markets), I have seen how details are significant. For example, my grandmother's hair was red, a colour sometimes viewed with suspicion since the Middle Ages. Was speaking English part of her need to integrate in the face of suspicion? There was a family story of her being criticised by a neighbour for hanging out washing on a New Year's Day. Had she, a Welsh Baptist transgressed some social mores or superstitions?

A Swansea street as watchful over details as Heaney's townland or Belfast? The measure of worth in those Swansea streets, at that time, was the whiteness of washing on the line and the whitened doorsteps of pavement houses. (Half a century later, Boland spoke of a woman in one of her writing workshops who said she would not admit to being a poet as her neighbours would think she did not wash her windows). Did my grandmother abandon speaking Welsh to fit in? Should I view her decision with more clarity and charity?

This need to drill down into questions beyond the superficial, whether experienced at the moment or drawn from sharp memories, links my own work with that written by poets I

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admire. Heaney and Boland were not afraid of using quotidian words and commonplace actions to illuminate deeper ideas of love and loss.

The details of the need to fit in I allude to in 'Home, Exile and Return' and in 'Uniforms' hinges on the specifics of names and birthplaces referenced by Sinead Morrissey's 'Thoughts in a Black Taxi' poem. The details of names in Ulster and the island of Ireland are crucial: Seamus or John? Montague or Capulet?

A fire lit in the hearth in 'It is the House' and lamps lit in 'Hunter-Gatherers' and 'Illusion' provide the gleam identified in Heaney's poems for his mother and aunt. Epiphany moments in my own approach to the creative process may stem not only from current observation but also from memory.

In an interview with Peter Sior at the Franco-Irish Literary Festival in 2012 Heaney said,

> Everybody in their life has those moments when something memorable occurs that you remember forever – orphaned in a little patch of light – and it has significance and you don't quite know what it is and about.[155]

Taking Heaney's suggestion, the not-knowing (at first) why a detail matters becomes part of the work of the poem. The spring opposite The Manse in 'It is the House', and the Holy Well in *Eglwysfach* in 'Is it Always About Beds' suggest sites of special significance from pre-Christian times, like the tomb in Maeshowe aligned to the light that I write about in 'Winter Solstice' and 'Hunter-Gatherers'.

The detail of the title 'Waterhouse's Cathedral', which is the alternative name for the Natural History Museum in Kensington, collides religion and science ready for our imagined conversation (in the Polish restaurant) about prawn eye development and the Polish Mass in

[155] Seamus Heaney in conversation with Peter Sior

Brighton. Details of the actions of workers from other countries in ‘In Poland Some Endangered Species’ and ‘Later we Will Dance’ elevates their work through a kind of grace.

Observation from memory provides authenticity but does it provide the basis for an imaginative leap into the future or something beyond? I believe it may. In ‘Hunters Moon’, ‘the peat fire burns memory and future away’.[156] We hold memories of sitting beside fires but the future might be burning too. Peatlands store large amounts of carbon dioxide, twice as much as the world’s forests. Peat burning has a significant impact on climate change because it releases large amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The word ‘future’ is an important detail suggesting the impact of our choices and how we might sabotage ourselves.

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Chapter 5. Conclusion

At the start of this exegesis, I posed questions concerning the role that moments of epiphany may play in creating poetry that transcends time and place. I set out to examine how specific observed images provide a poetic springboard into the universal, both in my own poetry and in the tradition from which it emerges.

This exploration of the evidence demonstrates a strong case for arguing that epiphany moments, stemming from sometimes minute observations, can prompt an imaginative leap into unknown territory. This may be the product of the poet's craft or the poem itself creating an unexpected pathway.

That being so, further questions emerge. When is this transition shown at its most effective; how is that achieved? From this examination of my own work and the work of others, I conclude that it is the precision and detail of the observation within the epiphany moment that enables the metaphorical and transcendental leap. The detail within the naturalism of the observation empowers the speculative success of the numinous.

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