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Betweenness Unveiled: Poetry as a Connective Force

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**BETWEENNESS UNVEILED: POETRY AS A
CONNECTIVE FORCE**

By

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B.A. University of Maine, 2002

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in English)

The Graduate School

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December, 2006

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By Wilson Clement

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Robert A. Brinkley

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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In recent history, literary criticism attempted to maintain absolute standards by which the quality of literature was to be judged. The literary community's partial submission to attacks on this position has made it possible for its members to recognize that these rigid standards can never be universally accepted.

We argue that they must therefore accept, as legitimate modes of critique, both Seamus Heaney's claim that it is the duty of poetry to redress wrongs of whatever type and his unspoken claim that this redress is done by poetry's working for opposing realities. The work for these often contradictory realities, says Heaney, is done from between them by bringing them together through the generation of small bits of mutual understanding.

Though they almost never speak of the subject directly, poets' and philosophers' agreement with Heaney is so broad as to be practically universal. Martin Heidegger sees a reality between a thing and the saying of that thing. He sees presencing as the

reconciling now between the past and the future. Hegel sees a mediation between a being and a thing perceived by that being. Irigaray speaks more of the connective pathways between things and ideas than of the things or ideas so connected. Derrida is more interested in difference than in the realities between which difference exists. It seems apparent that thinkers as different as Aristotle and John Cage view "Betweenness" as a unique reality—one we should care about.

As our language builds opportunities for communication within the unique realm of "betweenness," poets seize them. Poets as different as Sappho and Lyn Hejinian, Sir Phillip Sidney and Laura Riding, Carolyn Forché and Leigh Hunt, or Allen Grossman and Charles Baudelaire all believe in and use this special realm of betweenness to make right by bringing an element of mutual understanding to dissimilar modes of existence.

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I thank Mr. Seamus Heaney for finding and making available to me the unpublished text of a lecture he gave at Oxford several years ago.

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Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the members of Tri-Town Baptist Church who have prayed for me regularly since my first day of college classes. And above all, I wish to thank my God who answered those prayers.

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Wilson Clement

Wednesday, December 20, 2006

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF LITERARY EXCELLENCE

“What can it mean to seek a *useful* language for talking about a story, about its plot, about its ‘essence’ or ‘unity’ or ‘soul?’ Useful to whom? well, why not useful to everyone?” (Booth xvii)

Some modern critics have continued this quest for a useful language, arguing against absolute standards by which literature might be judged “good.” Their eclectic view of what constitutes quality forces them to consider modes of critique which perhaps even they themselves did not foresee. Within this critical arena, the poets labor. Their effort to locate, describe, and justify a unique definition, work, and experience for poetic effort tends to be more than vaguely philosophical and corresponds with the thinking of writers commonly read as philosophers but not as poets.

These philosophers often address multiple realities and even the very nature of this multiplicity that makes each a reality in itself. “Betweenness” is one reality so addressed. For the most part, philosophers grant an implicit recognition of this reality in their writings of other, related, issues. In a few cases, they openly acknowledge its existence. Only on rare occasions do they directly address “Between.”

Though often indirectly, poets too admit that Betweenness exists as an alternate reality. They also give it descriptive names and describe their labor and responsibility as poets within it. Of those poets who do not write of Betweenness, it is probably less true that they deny its existence than that it has not become foregrounded as their primary interest. It is often evident in their work despite this apparent lack of attention.

A poetics which gives poetry the duty of making connections that offer understanding from between connected realities is not the critique to end all critiques. It is one among many possibilities for describing a basis for understanding. In any search for understanding of multiple realities, we should expect disagreement, for “there are always those who say that all reality is an illusion” (Fatalist 16).

The realities we come between are not immovable. In *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins presents a series of arguments against the relatively modern critical position “that literary values are fixed, independent, and demonstrably present in certain master-works” (Tompkins 196) and that these values are demonstrated by a work’s “stylistic intricacy, psychological subtlety, epistemological complexity, . . . philosophical concerns, [and other] formal criteria” (Tompkins 126). Her generously tolerant approach to literature, recalls authors such as Edmond Holmes¹ who says, “What is poetry? There are as many answers to this question as there are minds that take an interest in it” (1).

Tompkins compares the “questions which have recently concerned modern critics—questions about the self, the body, the possibilities of knowledge, [and] the

¹ circa 1900

limits of language” (xiii) to the questions embraced by the criticism of the 1830s which was “rooted in beliefs about the sanctity of the home, the spirituality of children, the purifying effects of nature, the moral influence of art, and the relation of material to spiritual essences” (Tompkins 16). As an author illustrative of her argument that certain texts or authors cannot be said to possess inherently the trait of classic greatness, Tompkins chooses Nathaniel Hawthorne whose early literary reputation, she argues, was largely a function of his network of friends, the self-interest of his publishers, the posthumous publication of his work by surviving relatives, and the academic community’s ultimate acceptance of his work as worthy of critical study. She points out that, in general, the works he is now respected for are not the same ones which originally made him part of the literary scene, and that the few of Hawthorne’s works which have remained continually in critical favor are no longer read for their moralizing on domestic topics. Modern critics read Hawthorne for his “symbolic complexity, psychological depth, moral subtlety, and density of composition” (11). Hawthorne’s early published work, says Tompkins, was indistinguishable from the many works by authors who have been forgotten.

Tompkins says that modern novelists value the “carefully crafted, intellectually dense, stylistically polished exploration of some enduring moral, psychological, or philosophical problem” (42). She then denies these modern novelists the right to demand that their values be universally accepted by showing examples of works which rely upon the very opposite literary traits. She argues, for instance, that though James Fenimore Cooper is now commonly thought “to cater to a popular taste for melodrama rather than to serious-minded speculation on the national good”

and to fill his work with “storybook savages and cardboard heroes” (95), he is in reality, “a profound thinker, one who [is] obsessively preoccupied not with the subtle workings of individual consciousness, but with the way the social world is organized” (99). She believes that Cooper replaces complexity and emotional exploration with the repetitive failure of social relations in order to teach that a nation with a broad spectrum of often contradictory social norms cannot exist without internal strife. Tompkins recognizes Cooper’s response to a critical tradition which believes that literature’s main purpose is edification.

Jane Tompkins considers her arguments particularly strong for the following reasons:

- 1.) No previously held notions can be used to attack her claims because these notions are the very ones in question.
- 2.) Her opponents cannot use examples as standards of comparison because these examples represent the critical tradition she is attacking.
- 3.) Basic standards of literary excellence are useless because:
 - a.) They are the very ones she is attacking.
 - b.) They are demonstrably not timeless.
 - c.) Editors do not simply record, they alter, the canon.
 - d.) Entire genres, as well as authors, vanish as anthologies change.
 - e.) We are predisposed to agreement with present day critics because we have been trained under the critical tradition they represent.

The reception, however tentative within the critical community, of books like *Sensational Designs* has not only opened the way for the particular genre (Sentimentalism) and critical stance (accepting a work based upon the cultural work it performs) that Jane Tompkins is arguing for at the moment, but it has also guaranteed a hearing for any number of other critical stances because Tompkins and her peers have successfully challenged critical hegemony. Tompkins believes that “‘the true nature’ of a literary work is a function of the critical perspective that is brought to bear upon it” (16).

CHAPTER 2

POETIC LABOR BETWEEN: THE ARGUMENT

As a poet, Seamus Heaney introduces an interesting alternative to the narrow view of literary quality Jane Tompkins attacks. He asks that poetry work to set things right, restore them to their former glory, reinstate their moral purity, or redirect them to the proper course. But a close examination of his poetic practice reveals that all redress, for Heaney, occurs from a position between otherwise disconnected realities and that each of these forms of redress can be generalized so as to be viewed as an increase in the world’s total stock of mutual understanding. Poetry works within a unique connective reality of jointures between realities. These are joinings in which understanding can occur. “[Poetry] must undergo, in order to convey” (Hunt 3).

Heaney's view of poetry and its responsibility is much like that of Edmond Holmes, who believed that "it is the mission of poetry to express and reveal the inward and spiritual feelings" (13) found in the buried life of "dormant passions and unformulated thoughts which seem to be potentially common to all men" (65). Holmes suggested that "to discern this buried world through the medium of his abnormal sensibility, and to reveal it to other men through the medium of kindled emotion, is the true function of the poet" (17). That is, the poet creates a poem, a connection, a point of comprehension, an attentive understanding between a man and his inner life. Poets help people to understand themselves.

In the introduction to *The Redress of Poetry*, Seamus Heaney says that art has a responsibility to respond. His failure to cite a particular object to which this response should be directed does not appear to indicate a lack of focus for the response but rather the universal nature of responsibility. Using George Herbert's "The Pulley" and his own "Squarings" as examples, Heaney says that poems can be "about the way consciousness can be alive to two different and contradictory dimensions of reality and still find a way of negotiating between them" (xiii). He then reveals his trust "that a reliable critical course could be plotted [between them] by following a poetic sixth sense" (xiii).

Heaney's redress of poetry is mediated by poetry itself, the authority of which is based indirectly upon its own truth, fulfilling its responsibility to respond.² In the short introduction to *The Redress of Poetry*, Heaney reveals both the method of and the authority for his critical quest for the nature of poetic redress. He follows a

² Compare Robert Pinsky's *Poetry and the World* xiv.

poetic sixth sense, intuitively grasping the inner nature of poetic expression, and he depends upon an ultimate tribunal supported by the truth of poetry (xviii).

That both the poetic sixth sense itself and the ultimate tribunal are heavily influenced by the geography negotiated by the critics' sixth sense is suggested by the need to navigate the passage "from the domain of the matter-of-fact into the domain of the imagined" (xiii). It is a contradiction to suggest a passage from reality to imagination without change, and at least one older writer wished "to impress upon [his] reader's mind the great importance of [this change from reality to] imagination in all its phases, as a constituent part of the highest poetic faculty" (Hunt 12).

A negotiation between two contradictory dimensions of reality implies a third dimension (that within which negotiation takes place). A line, which by definition has no area, is an imaginary construct. Dimensions of *reality* imply real lines as their borders. Though on very rare occasions, one might be fortunate enough to redress a wrong accidentally, the norm is for poetic redress to be done deliberately. This requires understanding the wrong as, at least in part, a lack of acknowledgement and dialogue, and accepting a between (between bordered dimensions) in which realities are made to understand by attending to each other. Neither separation (a between) nor understanding as a connection is a new idea. "The term [dilemma] comes from the Greek, *dilemmatos*, and means 'involving two assumptions,' and so we begin by proposing that the boundary is not an edge but a conjunction" (Reason 339). Typically, in concepts of the concrete and the everyday, such *navigable* (here used as synonymous with *negotiable*) areas are wider and

more well marked in some areas than in other areas, and at some times than at other times. Inter-coastal waterways are examples of this phenomenon. It is typical, in the understanding process as in inter-coastal waterways, to view some pilots/poets as more skilled or better trained than others so that what might be impossible to some becomes commonplace to others. The lines separating one dimension from the negotiable space and the negotiable space from a second dimension then are not without area but are themselves imagined areas within which navigation is possible under some circumstances and not under others.

Rather than simply avoiding obstructions between these dimensions of reality, an exceptional pilot/poet will cross the navigable area, passing completely from one dimension into its opposite, contradictory dimension. This seems to be what Seamus Heaney refers to as he discusses his “poems and parables about crossing from the domain of the matter-of-fact into the domain of the imagined” (Introduction xiii). Seamus Heaney’s definition of “line” and of “frontier” seem similar, for although Heaney refers to “the frontier of writing” as “the *line* that divides the actual conditions of our daily lives from the imaginative representation of those conditions in literature, and divides also the world of social speech from the world of poetic language,” (italics added) (xvi) it is not so much the border as it is the frontier itself that interests Heaney, a frontier being an unexplored space, and a borderer working as a line of demarcation. This frontier is represented by the combined boundaries of understanding between realities.

In *The Redress of Poetry*, Seamus Heaney implicitly refers to at least five separate realities: two contradictory dimensions, the unexplored frontiers that border each,

and the channel that connects these frontiers. Navigation through these realities is difficult or easy according to both its own nature and the more or less accomplished practice of the poet.

It is entirely possible though, that the two contradictory dimensions should also be viewed as more or less navigable. This is a likely reason for Heaney's calling attention to "two different and contradictory dimensions," (xiii) rather than to "dimensions," or simply to "realities." If there were only two, or even three, dimensions of reality under consideration, there would be no need for Heaney to use modifiers in order to identify the realities to which he referred. He is calling attention to specific, conflicting realities which require a mediating understanding between them. Heaney's poetic vision differs from that of Edmond Holmes in that Holmes knows "well that there are not two orders of things only, but many orders and that the movement from the pole of appearance to the pole of reality is as continuous as any other natural movement" (17) while we should understand Heaney's world to be an archipelago of hostile realities divided by uncharted shoals and reefs and connected (rather than separated) by a complex network of semi-navigable channels.

One may discuss any number of realities; the principles do not change. There are divisions without sharp dividing lines, there are knowable unknowns, and there are various levels of skill involved in discovering, navigating, and charting these unknowns. Until navigation that brings understanding between realities becomes so commonplace that the existence of borders is without meaning, and each dimension of reality is completely intelligible to all others, poetic redress will still be required

“between.” It is the job of the poet to navigate the channels between realities. The charting and exploration of “the frontier of writing” which effects the reaching out of one reality toward others is done by these poets in *Betweenness*.

This suggested standard of poetic excellence is hardly indisputable. But, it does seem as valid as the idea “that literary values are fixed, independent, and demonstrably present in certain master-works” (Tompkins 196) and that these values are demonstrated by a work’s “stylistic intricacy, psychological subtlety, epistemological complexity . . . philosophical concerns, [and other] formal criteria” (126). It also seems as valid as arguing only for the position that quality literature is “rooted in beliefs about the sanctity of the home, the spirituality of children, the purifying effects of nature, the moral influence of art, and the relation of material to spiritual essences” (16). In the midst of conflicting realities, poetry may initiate understanding.

The idea that the major work of poetic reality is its connective function is supported by Allen Grossman who says, “Insofar as metaphor is a fiction of relationship, [between things] its function in closure is to establish a relationship with other beings subject to the qualifications inherent in statements of similarity” (331). More than one being in a relationship of similarity with a poem makes that poem a place of connection—often for otherwise dissimilar beings.

This exploration of the said and the unsaid in what Seamus Heaney said illustrates our belief that the work of poetic redress is the facilitation of understanding and that this facilitation is done in the betweenes. That is, in the channels and on the frontiers.

This work is done within Betweenness for the benefit of other, often contradictory, realities.

“Not all poets have an interest in poetics, and those who do hold very diverse notions of what such an interest might involve, what its scope and concerns might be, how much and what type of territory it might survey” (Inquiry 2), but throughout the ages, although their agreement has not always been explicit, poets and thinkers alike have shown a surprising level of agreement in their belief in and understanding of Betweenness.

Consider the beginning of Western philosophy. Nietzsche’s translation of “The Anaximander³ Fragment” as quoted by Martin Heidegger reads: “Whence things have their origin, there they must also pass away according to necessity; for they must pay penalty and be judged for their injustice, according to the ordinance of time” (Fragment 13). Heidegger says that “Only in thoughtful dialogue with what it says can this fragment of thinking be translated” (Fragment 19). A dialogue exists between, in this case between the fragment and what we translate it into as what it says. A dialogue is a “literary work consisting of a conversation *between* two or more people” (italics added) (Etymology). There are at least two reasons “between” must separate in a dialogue. One is that each person occupies a reality not shared by the other. Personal individuality is unique, and a connection between two such realities implies a third, separate reality as connector. The second reason, an etymological one, is that the word dialogue comes from the Greek “dia – across” and “legein – speak” (Etymology). So that, very literally we might say that a dialogue is a “speak across”—across whatever is between those who are in

³ Anaximander is reported to have lived from the end of the seventh century to the middle of the sixth B. C.

conversation. Heidegger finds Betweenness in the paired realities of the fragment and what the fragment says. His mention of these realities under two separate names and his dialogue with what the fragment says but not with the fragment itself indicates that he sees a clear separation between two realities—between the fragment and what the fragment says. It seems he must see the saying of what is said between the fragment and what the fragment says.

Anaximander's fragment bears an interesting relationship to the lost, but necessary, whole of Anaximander's philosophy. The whole loses nothing through the fragment's survival, but the fragment gains an emphasis, an importance, and a centrality in its author's writings which would be wholly unknown to it if it were still available as an element in a larger body of work. But only the fragment remains, an alteration in both the fragment and the philosophy as a whole through the fragmentation process. Here too the fragment and the whole occupy separate realities. In this case, the connection between turns out to be fragmentation itself. An identical argument would hold for translating being the connection between the original and the translation. In these instances it turns out that "between" is an action. This "between" acts historically. Heidegger says that the Anaximander Fragment "speaks of the *origin and decay of things*" (italics added) (20), and that "where we can speak of the Same in terms of things which are not identical, the fundamental condition of a thoughtful dialogue *between recent and early times* is automatically fulfilled"(italics added) (23).

One might say that the Anaximander Fragment exists *between* Anaximander and Heidegger and that it highlights the between in which it exists. The same might be

said of Heidegger's philosophy. The clearest suggestion that Heidegger accepts not only the existence of Betweenness but also its place as the peculiar realm of poetry lies in his celebration of Hölderlin's poetics. Hölderlin says, "It is only language that affords the very possibility of standing in the openness [between various aspects] of the existent" (Hölderlin 300). And Heidegger says, "The poet himself stands between the former—the gods, and the latter—the people. He is one who has been cast out—out into that *Between*, between gods and men. But only and for the first time in this Between is it decided, who man is and where he is settling his existence. 'Poetically, dwells man on this earth'" (Hölderlin 312). And Heidegger adds, "always more simply, did Hölderlin devote his poetic word to this realm of between. And, this compels us to say that he is the poet of the poet" (Hölderlin 312-13). But what Heidegger finds in Hölderlin, he also finds in Plato.

According to Heidegger, "the 'doctrine' of a thinker is that which, within what is said, remains unsaid," (Doctrine 155) and "what remains unsaid in Plato's thinking is a change in what determines the essence of truth" (155). From this specific argument about the essence of truth, we understand the general principal that the unsaid mediates understanding between one said thing and another; here, between one definition of truth and another definition of truth. Heidegger is referring to the Cave Parable, and the cave parable itself is an allegory of passages *between* places or things rather than *of* places or things. It is "a story of passages from one dwelling place to another" (168).

Irigaray agrees with Heidegger when she says that Plato speaks "of the path *between*. Of the 'go-between' path that links two 'worlds' . . . [which is] neither

outside nor inside, that is between the way out and the way in, between access and egress” (246). This path up to the surface and sunlight is “between the ‘world outside’ and the ‘world inside,’ between the ‘world above’ and the ‘world below.’ Between the light of the sky and the fire of the earth. Between the gaze of the man who has left the cave and that of the prisoner. Between truth and shadow, between truth and fantasy, between ‘truth’ and whatever ‘veils’ the truth. Between reality and dream. Between.... Between.... Between the intelligible and the sensible. Between good and evil. The One and the many. Between anything you like” (246-7).

CHAPTER 3

THE SPECTRUM OF AGREEMENT

What we find in Heidegger and Irigaray reading Plato, or in Heidegger reading Hölderlin or Anaximander, however, is common to a range of ancient and contemporary thinkers. Let us chart a range of instances:

1.) When Aristotle describes poetic metaphor with, “the cup stands in the same relationship to Dionysus as the shield to Ares,” (Aristotle 57) he is speaking neither of shields nor cups, Dionysus nor Ares, but of relationships—relationships *between*.

2.) In his discussion of sense-certainty, Hegel acknowledges a mediating reality by saying, “each is at the same time *mediated*: I have this certainty *through* something else, viz. the thing; and it, similarly, is in sense-certainty *through* something else, viz. through the ‘I’” (sic) (Hegel 59). And, “Sense-certainty thus comes to know by experience that its essence is neither in the object nor in the I” (62).

3.) When Jacques Derrida says, “Difference is neither a *word* nor a *concept*. In it, however, we shall see the juncture,” (Differance 130) difference is not a separation but a reality in which connections are made between other realities. And, certain differences (those between superior and inferior positions) produce a gap, when inverted, through which communication can take place (Positions, 36).

4.) John Cage, in explaining his belief that “there is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time” (Silence 8), notes that the silences written into music are filled with naturally occurring, random sounds. These sounds between sounds, he says, although they are unintended and uncontrolled by the musician, are as real and influential as are the intended sounds written into the musical score. They are therefore as important as the intended sounds. It is clear that Cage does not confine his disbelief in empty spaces to music. He says, “This openness [such as the openness of music to unintended sounds] exists in the fields of modern sculpture and architecture” (8).

5.) Geoffrey Hartman argues “that whatever literary structure is in itself, it must be spatial to the critic” (Structuralism 13). This invocation of space allows for spaces between. Hartman presents a direct argument for Betweenness’s being the special realm of poetry when he says, “Great art is always flanked by its dark sisters, blasphemy and pornography” (23).

6.) Without giving its location, Laura Riding describes this workshop of poetry by saying, “I accepted poetry without reservation as having demarcated this area as potentially occupiable in distinct forms of consciousness, real functions of being, exactly congruous translation of the occupancy into words” (The Poems xxx). Her description is approximately parallel to Seamus Heaney’s “figure of the marked off area . . . of the differentiated place which a poem occupies in language” (Talking 10)⁴.

7.) When poets make reference to Betweenness, it is often less than perfectly clear whether they are speaking of the reality itself or of the work they see happening there. Seamus Heaney and Robert Pinsky name such basic realities as the subject, the cultural imagination, the utterly different, the imagined reality, the prevailing conditions, the area of free play, and the locus of potential. Each one should be considered an example of Betweenness. Heaney calls the poetic reality between realities, “the thrill of poetry,” even though the thrill of poetry is “a reality which can only be imagined” (Redress 3, 8). The reality between temporal, actual, historical situations is the feeling of readiness, the thrill of poetry, or the reality of

⁴ Quoted with permission

imagination (3, 4). Within what we have chosen, to call “Betweenness,” Heaney’s “creation of places,” Seamus Heaney engages in “a moving across the frontier of writing” (2, 10).

8.) Carolyn Forché speaks of “postcards, letters, and reports on the news—all these are communal forms, ways of writing that stress the interpersonal [between persons] aspects of poetry” (36). Carolyn Forché sees poetry in the reality of “a trace,” or in “a real tangible evidence between the living and the dead” (32). She sees the realities of “poems,” “complacency,” and “claims,” (32) of “a particular event,” “a letter to a spouse,” and “a connection” (33). She speaks of Zbigniew Herbert’s “Report From the Besieged City” (36) and Ariel Dorfman’s “Let them Speak for Themselves” as though they describe independent realities (37).

9.) Laura Riding’s work can be found in “the plane of poetic discovery” (Riding 484). Riding often seems to grant a separate existence to the world of “poems” (485-7) and to “the study of the scope of poetry” (487). She deals in the realities of connection, “the present of poetry,” (491) and “the conflict in poetry between the nature of humanly perfect word-use and that of artistically perfect word-use” (495). She finds poetry happening in realities with names such as “transcendence,” (xxxii, xli) “difference,” (xxxvii-xlii) “conjunction,” (xlii) and “coinciding” (xxix).

10.) Poets do much more than give tacit admission to the existence of Betweenness, and they go farther even than naming it with a vocabulary which is in

common, daily use or which is revelatory of the function it houses. Occasionally, they attempt to locate it precisely amid a confusion of other realities. "Without needing to be theoretically instructed, consciousness quickly realizes that it is the site of variously contending discourses" (Crediting 3). Typically, poets locate Betweenness by taking bearings on other realities. While Heidegger believes that "it is always and only in the light of the 'ideas' that [people] see everything that passes so easily and familiarly for the 'real,'" (Doctrine 164) Robert Pinsky finds ideas and the human body the two most interesting things in the world for our species.

Heidegger speaks of the accepted mental pattern of body as opposed to the body itself; Pinsky speaks of the body as a physical element and of the idea as a reality of thought. Pinsky locates poetic reality, as separate from the realities of both idea and body, between the separate realities of the idea and the body (Responsibilities 84). Interest, in Pinsky's understanding is within and part of the unique reality of neither idea nor body. There is interest concerning idea in the same way there is interest concerning the individual human body. This interest, being part of neither idea nor body, is an entity unto itself, and in the form written by Pinsky (interesting) indicates, not action, but state of being (is interesting). *Interesting* is a descriptive name given by Pinsky to an occurrence in the between connecting idea (not necessarily the idea of the body) and body.

"Poetry," "body," "idea": Seamus Heaney sees this trilogy of realities with greater precision than does Pinsky. Pinsky's poetry becomes Heaney's "logic of the poet's work." Pinsky's idea becomes Heaney's "vision," "the charmed circle of artistic space." And, Pinsky's individual human body becomes Heaney's "solitary role of

the witness” (Redress 4). The parallel of Seamus Heaney’s thinking to Robert Pinsky’s is complete when Heaney substitutes “connecting” for Pinsky’s “joining” (Redress 4).

11.) While Pinsky’s use of the word “poetry” may appear (incorrectly) on the surface to make few demands upon our critical faculties, this is less true of Heaney’s “the logic of the poet’s work.” Heaney creates his own poetic worlds where “the coordinates of the imagined thing correspond to those of the world we live in and endure” (Redress 8) so that characters may become “both creatures of fantasy and suburban commuters on the train” (Responsibilities 91). Such places need not, indeed cannot, be entirely fanciful because “an imagined world, however different it may be from the real one, must have something—a form—in common with it” (Wittgenstein 7). When Robert Pinsky says, “there is a dialectic between the poet and culture,” (Responsibilities 89) he uses *dialectic* as between and as the basis of interaction. Seamus Heaney is consistent with this when he says that these contradictions are the poetic “co-ordinates and contradictions of experience” (Redress 12). Such co-ordinates fall within the “given unforeseeable thereness” (15) of poetry which is necessarily between. This between separates, or connects, a creature from that creature’s reflection.

12.) Laura Riding begins her original 1938 preface to *The Poems of Laura Riding* by placing all the reasons for poetry, and thus poetry itself, between the poet and the poem’s reader. She says: “The reasons for which poems are read ought not to be

very different from the reasons for which they are written” (482). In addition to separating the poet from—or connecting the poet to—the poem’s reader, poetry stands between the reader and the “something that one feels it is important to know” (483). Laura Riding places poetry between study and understanding rather than study between poetry and understanding. “The study of the scope of poetry is poetry” (487). Allen Grossman says that poems are between the self and the self. “The poem is first prior to the self (ahead) then posterior to the self (behind)” (216).

13.) As one might expect in an anthology dedicated to the victims of atrocities, Carolyn Forché’s *Against Forgetting* finds poetry working between the living and the murdered, between the suffering and the privileged, between North Americans and Europeans, between East and West, between the social and the political, between the personal and the political, between the individual and coercion, between language and the self, between hope and despair, between dreams and reality, and between satisfaction and pain. Though Forché believes “it is impossible to translate Celan into an accessible English,” she believes, “we might have to translate English into him” (33). Forché believes that Celan’s is a poetry which, as a particular event, can work between two languages that are brought together.

14.) A striking example of poetry’s working between geographic locations occurs when poets “use the news media as models,” as when “the polish poet Zbigniew Herbert sends his ‘Report From the Besieged City’” (Forché 36). Wilfred Owen’s “Doomed Youth” stands between the comfort of religion and the misery of war, and

the poetry of Jabès functions between limits. He writes, “I write in function of two limits. / On that side, there is the void. / On this side, the horror of Auschwitz” (38, 39).

15.) Across a broad spectrum of interest, poets tend to believe that a major purpose of poetic labor is to traverse this Betweenness in order to connect the realities it abuts. In John Newman’s statement, “that poetry is ultimately founded on correct moral perception” (14), the only alternative to correct perception is false perception so that two realities which perceive the same poem (accurately) engage the same perception and thus make the poem a point of connection through understanding.

16.) “All models productive of social cohesion are basically of one structure,” Hartman writes (Structuralism 8), and such a “social phenomenon . . . is always intersubjective, i.e., an I-Thou and not I-it relation, a relation of persons or personae, even when the thing mediated seems to have the ‘it’ character of property, money, the past, etc.” (4). Poetry “subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things” (Shelley 18). Aristotle says that the greatest of poetic gifts “is to be good at metaphor . . . it is a token of the high native gifts, for making good metaphors depends on perceiving the likenesses [between] things” (60-61).

17.) Allen Grossman sees poetry as a connector between the self and the other due to the self’s “participation in the poem as a medium and occasion of the

communicability of the self (reading) [which] pitches the participant toward the others and those others toward the poem in an unending sunny round” (Grossman 286).

18.) Lyn Hejinian says, “I have argued that poetic language contributes critically to making realities sensible [to one another]” (Strangeness 137). Allen Grossman says, “Poetry can never take its medium as its whole subject. Language always means something else” (229). The something else becomes the self for Carolyn Forché who says that poetry of witness can make a connection between language and the self with an ease equal to that of the connection made by other poems. She says, “They are also poems which are as much ‘about’ language as are poems that have no subject other than language itself” (30).

19.) Celan’s poems make language a link between man and God since, in them, “Theology, poetry, and words are all bound together” (Forché 39). And, though Forché believes “it is impossible to translate Celan into an accessible English,” and believes, “we might have to translate English into him,” (33) she seems to believe, as Heaney would, that Celan’s is an example of “poetic language . . . born to pursue its own poetic function” (Talking 11)⁵ which, as a particular event, works between languages, even under the most difficult circumstances, making these languages accessible one to another. As Grossman suggests, “In poetry this finite language is inscribed on the language of another kind” (Grossman 292).

⁵ Quoted with permission

20.) In explaining his poetic understanding, Pinsky describes a distorted echo, a sort of poetic sonar, wherein a happening to “the living human body says one thing; the memorized cadence of words, without exactly contradicting that statement, answers it with another” (Responsibilities 84-5). Pinsky and Heaney believe that joining and connecting, navigating and connecting, happening and answering are brought about by poetry’s working between such realities as those of the body and the idea. And, Lyn Hejinian suggests that we “take the idea that poetry is an art of linkages” (Thought 13).

21.) Pinsky’s discussion of poetic reality, and Heaney’s parallel one depend for their existence upon the reality of Betweenness. “In some way, before an artist can see a subject . . . the artist must transform it: answer the received cultural imagination of the subject with something utterly different. This need to answer by transforming is primary” (Responsibilities 85). This transformation of these “antithetical parings” of conditions of reality in the world into imagined reality is the imaginative response of poetry (Redress 2, 10) as the poet’s mind “moves across the frontier of writing” (10). Pinsky and Heaney say that transformation happens between the subject and that which it is transformed into, between antithetical parings, between conditions of reality. The need to answer comes between the cultural imagination and that which is different. Betweenness, for Pinsky and Heaney, is an imagined reality (which is no less real for its being imagined) wherein poetry responds. It is an “imaginative truth” (Hunt 20). And, the

poet's mind navigates; by seeing, transforming, answering, responding, moving, and creating; across Betweenness while making connections to its targeted realities.

Perhaps the clearest example of Pinsky's and Heaney's work within Betweenness lies in their "poetic imagination ['s seeking] to redress whatever is wrong or exacerbating in the prevailing conditions" (Redress 1) by working within places where "the coordinates of the imagined thing correspond to those of the world we live in and endure" (8) so that characters may understand each other well enough to become "both creatures of fantasy and suburban commuters on the train" (Responsibilities 91).

22.) In "Vocabulary," Ariel Dorfman "claims he cannot find the words to tell the story [connect the reality of the reader to the realities of those who suffered] of people who have been tortured, raped, and murdered," but the poem's line, "Let them speak for themselves," (Forché 37) bridges the gap between these realities.

23.) Laura Riding sees the poetic navigation of Betweenness as an "uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth" (484). She accomplishes this navigation "starting at the hidden and begin [ning] every poem on the most elementary plane of understanding," then revealing truth by "proceed[ing] to the plane of poetic discovery" (484). The effect on the reader is "to have reality uncovered for him as it can be uncovered alone in poems" (485). Connections between realities must take place in realities governed by a system of deliberate effort because "It is in these

transitions that the activity of being is exercised These interrelated transitions form a system of perceptible effects” (Strangeness 136). Respect (which requires some understanding) of otherness of necessity involves a crossing of the boundaries in between for the purpose of revealing some element of truth. For Riding, poetry itself navigates the compatibility gap “between the creed [of poetry] offering hope of a way of speaking beyond the ordinary, touching perfection . . . and the craft [of poetry] tying the hope to verbal rituals that court sensuousity as if it were the judge of truth” (493).

Riding explains the Betweenness in which poetry works by admitting that though poems may be written for right reasons, they are frequently written for few of the right reasons, and while “a poem written for negative reasons teaches what is false, destroys the power of falsity by demonstrating that it is false,” (489) a poem’s standing between and connecting the realities of falsehood and understanding is incomplete being a connection only between falsehood and understanding and not between truth and understanding. That is; it demonstrates the falsehood of a proposition without suggesting a truthful one. And, “since the effects of falsity are few in kind; few of these effects can be removed by poems, because there are few” (489). “If one’s reasons are positive, then one has all the reasons of poetry” (489). It is not enough to expose falsehood; poets must reveal truth.

24.) When Laura Riding says that “the reasons for which poems are read ought not to be very different from the reasons for which they are written,” (482) she creates an unusual navigational issue. This poetry does not connect and make

dissimilar realities intelligible to one another. Riding gives this poetry the odd task of navigating non-difference, or at least small difference, between sympathetic and similar realities.

25.) Though Allen Grossman says that a lyric is “a literary genre characterized by the assumed concealment of the audience from the poet,” (211) it would be easy to assume that the realities of the poet and the poem reader are in conversation, but what this would actually assume is the poem because without the poem’s mediation between them, the realities occupied by the poet and the poem reader would require redefinition of the most fundamental nature. Without the poem’s mediation between them, the poet and the reader would occupy separate realities connectable in perhaps no way whatever. But with the poem, the reader, through poetry, in conversation with the poet, “reads [the poem] to uncover to oneself something which would otherwise remain unknown” (Riding 483). In the poem, poetry works between the poet and the reader as well as between the reader and the “something that one feels it is important to know” (Riding 483). The poem remains the center of activity as “the process of creating of human presence through acknowledgement moves through persons across time and is completed neither in the writer nor in the reader but in the mutually honorable reciprocity of both. At any moment of reading the reader is the author of the poem, and the poem is the author of the reader” (Grossman 214).

26.) Man can measure time with great precision, and though his definitions of and attachment of significances to its various realities remain matters for discussion, poetry's right to the use of temporal betweenness has been established since Percy Bysshe Shelley said, "[the poet] not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time" (3). Robert Pinsky has his own ideas. Pinsky considers the poet's position as navigator between disparate time realities so important that "We must feel ready to answer, as if asked by the dead if we have handed on what they gave us, or if asked by the unborn what we have for them" (Responsibilities 86).

27.) Seamus Heaney connects his inner personal reality to that of the world at large: "poetry can make an order as true to the impact of external reality and as sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being as the ripples that rippled in and rippled out across the water in that scullery bucket fifty years ago" (Crediting 2). Like other poets and philosophers who navigate between temporal realities, Laura Riding "need[s] to read the poems of the past to know that such conflict and relaxation have literally been lived through and that we are now literally in the present of poetry" (Riding 491). Riding, the poet, is between the past and the present, "where 'I' in the poem looks two ways, forward and back," (Grossman 235) while Yeats' "originality is to situate the viewer in the middle of the charmed art-circle, looking out from that quarantined area at a world not yet re imagined, at

what is past or passing or to come" (Talking 17)⁶. "In the poem considered as the speech of a person, language becomes the evidence across time of personhood" (Grossman 306).

28.) As an example of poetry working between the living and the dead, Forché cites "the Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti [who] was sent to a forced-labor camp in what became Yugoslavia. While there, he was able to procure a small notebook, in which he wrote his last ten poems . . . after the war . . . 'In the back pocket of the trousers a small notebook was found soaked in the fluids of the body'" (29). And, Forché quotes Desnos who wrote, "You who are living, what have you done with these treasures" (47)? In the first case, poetry stands in the place of death between the living poet and the living reader. In the second case, poetry connects the message of the dead to the living. This is in agreement with Pinsky's less gruesome assertion that, "if someone in the future wants to understand . . . our poems must answer" (Responsibilities 90).

When Allen Grossman says, "The limits of the autonomy of the will discovered in poetry are death and the barriers against access to other consciousnesses," (209) we might paraphrase him so as to make it more clear that he agrees with Forché's assessment of poetry as part of a reality that can stand between the living and the dead making connections between them. Such a paraphrase might run thus: "Death is on one side, and resistance to the access to all else is on the other. From between these limits, poetry shows that individual human agency falls between these limits also." Thus, Wilfred Owen's "doomed youth" stands between the comfort of

⁶ Quoted with permission

religion and the misery of war since, “The comforts of religion seem to have no place in this poem. They only remind us of the lack of comfort of the present” (Forché 38).

29.) The examples listed are only a few of those that could be cited since a poetics or philosophy of the between finds its subject almost everywhere. Political poetry is almost always an example. Forché believes that her peers questioned the poetic power of navigation from suffering to privilege and that they argued against her right, as a North American, to produce *Against Forgetting* or any other mixture of the personal and the political. Forché believes her peers argued that the personal and political experience of North Americans made a poetry written as witness to atrocity inaccessible to them. If Forché’s understanding of her peers is accurate, her peers, by the very vehemence of their refusal to accept poetic revelation of the East to the West or of the victimized to the privileged, argued forcefully that they understood the extremity of the separation between the realities of these groups and that therefore a navigating poetry is required. Who can navigate the space in between if not a poet who reveals the other by beginning at one extreme and traversing that between? Forché’s peers may differ with her in their understanding of the navigability of the channel, but even the fiction of this navigability seems the necessary province of poetry.

30.) According to Carolyn Forché, poetry works in and spans the difference between:

a.) The transfigured and the untransfigured: "Surrealism in this circumstance marks not only the utopian desire for secular transfiguration but also the attempt to come to terms with an untransfigured world" (40).

b.) Sense and nonsense: "That [the poetry of witness] must defy common sense to speak of the common indicates that traditional modes of thought, the purview of common sense, no longer make sense, or only make sense if they are allowed to invert themselves" (40).

c.) Progress and completion: "narrative implies progress and completion" (43).

d.) Language and home: "We find a number of poets writing in languages that are alien to the nation in which they write" (43).

e.) The self and the might have been: "'In Brief,' the unimportant man the poet could have become is compared with the poet that the man has become" (45).

f.) The social and the political: "The poetry of witness reclaims the social from the political and in so doing defends the individual against illegitimate forms of coercion" (45).

g.) Extremity and normalcy: "The poetry of witness is itself born in dialectical opposition to the extremity that has made such witness necessary" (46).

CHAPTER 4

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Riding's great preoccupation, effort, and work of poetry occurs in a reality between the realities of her desire "to make personally explicit the identity of [her] self" and the reality of her intensification" (496). Poetry does the work of identification between commitment to its mode of expression and commitment to exclusive preoccupation with other concerns (xxx). Robert Pinsky believes that from within the confrontational, persistent existence of poetry there are precisely locatable places in experience from which the power and importance of poetry uses reflection to force a creature to understand itself and that this is to be used as a basis for further understanding. In "Strangeness," Lyn Hejinian does more than simply observe connections happening in a Betweenness related to poetry and science. She organizes her talk according to the principles found in this particular facet of Betweenness. She says, "I derived the logic motivating the talk very much as I derived that of 'Strangeness,' out of associations between poetry and 'science' which are not themselves scientific" (135). In noting Betweenness, and the transitions happening therein as a special area of her interest, she says, "What interests . . . are not so much the things, which simple conjunction leaves undisturbed, but the transitions between them and between them and us" (136).

Poets make practical use of Betweenness. From the earliest to the most modern of times, poets have seized upon Betweenness as a place in which to put their poems to work generating ties of understanding. They use Betweenness to make their poems work, and their poems work within Betweenness. Sappho wrote:

Tell everyone

Now, today, I shall
sing beautifully for
my friends' pleasure

This fragment, number one in Mary Barnard's translation of Sappho, stands between the reader and a poet with whom there can be few other connections. It spans the distance between the reader and the Mediterranean basin. In connecting the reader to this poet and to her friends, all dead for twenty-six centuries, it reveals the pleasures of a very different time, place, and group of persons. It allows the reader to experience, vicariously, the joys which once connected this group of friends. In addition to these explicit connections, by its very subject matter and address to "others," that is to readers, the poem makes implicit comparison (and thus connection) between the then, there, and those and the here, now, and these.

In this poem, not only does the song stand between the beautiful and the indifferent and the beautiful between pleasure and ennui, the command to tell connects the people of the poem to a larger audience. This poem connects readers to memories of their own simple pleasures. It seems almost impossible to speak of it without invoking its connective function.

Sappho's fragment connects the poet to the world at large, especially to its readers. It connects the readers to the subject and people of the poem, to their fellow human beings, and to their own pasts; it connects the past to the present and the living to the dead. It connects the aesthetically pleasing to the mundane, and it connects the place in which it is read to Greece. A great work of redress between all these realities is done by this poem's revelation, within one reality, of the truths from other realities.

Because one has read this poem, and one has experienced its mediation in Betweenness, one has a slightly better understanding of Sappho, of ancient Greece, of friendship, of pleasure, of mortality, of one's fellow human beings, of art, of one's self and one's own past, of the nature of time, and of poetic enterprise itself. In fragment number 17, Sappho continues the work within Betweenness:

Sleep, darling

I have a small
daughter called
Cleis, who is

like a golden
flower

I wouldn't
take all Croesus'
kingdom with love
thrown in, for her

In the opening line of this fragment, "darling" connects Sappho's to the reader's reality by using the familiar experience of love for another in asking the reader to embrace the poem's connective reality. "I" gives the poet personal individuality,

and her having a small daughter attracts the reader's tenderness by noting the child's diminutive size, femininity, and dependent family relationship—all of which highlight the natural goodness of a parent's love for their child. Since children are often thought most lovable when they are asleep, the poem's purpose is furthered by beginning with "Sleep."

The fragment builds on this universally understood sympathetic imagery by giving this child a real personal name while at the same time beginning the vision of an alternate reality with the foreign (from the viewpoint of most modern readers) sound of that name. And, although the golden flower image is easily accepted because of its obviously poetic character, the seeming over-reliance on gold offers the suggestion of an alternate reality which is accentuated by "gold's" connection with "Croesus' kingdom." The strange (in present-day North American culture) ideas of selling one's daughter and of seeming to include the acquisition of love as little more than an after-thought completes the revelation of an alternate reality's truth and that revelation becomes the connection between Sappho's reality and a twenty-first century North American reader's reality. The fragment connects the reality of the reader to that of Sappho by first highlighting the issues they share as universal elements of the human reality, then introducing the slight differences which make them unique. This poem exists in an imagined reality which is the same as, yet different from, those of either the poet or the reader, and as a result, it makes Sappho's reality intelligible in that of the reader by performing a connective function between them, a connection that the fragmentary character of the poem (it is no longer of Sappho's time) only enhances.

A contemporary poem like Heaney's "Digging" can also be read as a texture of connections:

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

Under my window a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade,
Just like his old man.

My grandfather could cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, digging down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it. (Open 3)

While the ability of this poem to connect the reality of the reader to that depicted by the poet depends upon the poem's making, in the reader's understanding, a connection between the poet's writing and the father's digging (which in turn connects the poet's writing to his childhood home and family) the main connection Heaney wants readers to see is between verse one and verse eight where poetry, that most harmless of pursuits, makes the connection between what have been ever-present opposing realities in the writer's homeland, the violence and destruction of the gun and the peaceful, productive activity of digging.

The diagram of "Digging" (figure 4.1 "Digging" Connections) is offered as a visual a conclusion to our discussion of poetry's connective function in Betweenness. We believe that it, along with our previous discussion of poetry's connection to realities outside its own, presents one way a poetics of the between might be understood. In this diagram bold type indicates words or images in Betweenness, arrows point from realities which are connected by the realities pointed to, and numerals indicate verse numbers.

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