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“In Violence and Epiphany”: Seamus Heaney’s *North*

In his 1975 collection of poems, *North*, Seamus Heaney addressed the problem of conflicts in Northern Ireland by looking at the traumatic events through the lens of myth and history. The poems draw numerous parallels between the past and the present, and the power of such parallels often consists in conjuring up images that – though often ambiguous or blurred – speak the language of epiphany or catharsis. While the collection’s title, *North*, is a direct reference to Northern Ireland, and the difficult political situation in the region along with the impact of the conflict on the Irish people are recurring motifs in the majority of poems in *North*, this short, concise title is also an allusion to Ireland’s violent past, especially to the Viking invasion of the Celtic Ireland that took place between the eighth and the tenth centuries.

My main concern here is to focus on three of Seamus Heaney’s poems, “*North*,” “*Funeral Rites*” and “*Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces*,” and analyse the way in which Heaney’s Norse or Norse-inspired “fearful presences” help find a dynamic and effectual way of dealing with the trauma of the recent past (“*Funeral Rites*”) or make it possible for an individual to discover and accept one’s inner strength and creativity (as in “*North*” and “*Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces*”). Also, I would like to look at the way in which the masculine spirit of the North evoked in the poems has an effect on their development and diction: the poems contain numerous allusions to Norse mythology, culture and history, and two of them, “*North*” and “*Funeral Rites*,” end with potent epiphanic images. These final insights are inspired by what may be seen as Heaney’s version of the sublime: this “Norse” sublime is inspired by austere landscapes of whole histories. Conflicts, fears, oppression and violence so often associated with Viking conquests are here – at times ironically, but always effectively – juxtaposed with other elements of the northern ethos, such as honour, courage, composure and self-

control. Heaney’s Viking heroes might be legitimately seen as ghosts, the awe-inspiring *draugar* of the Norse mythology – yet, at the same time, those seemingly dreadful forms are transcended by the sound of “their own” voices, “lifted in violence and epiphany”¹ and contributing to a better understanding of the here and now.

The connection between the painful experience of the Troubles and the violence present in the ancient rituals and communal practices of Germanic tribes is explored in the majority of the poems in *North*. Writing about his well-known “bog poems,” Seamus Heaney notices how the photographs of bodies found in the bogs of Jutland became imprinted on his memory: “The unforgettable photographs of these victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles.”² However, while in the “bog poems” the primary focus is the innocence of the victims as shown against the violence of the community, and the prevailing emotion is the compassion or astonishment of a usually passive observer, the poems inspired by the Norse invasion of Ireland offer a more dynamic, “masculine” strategy of dealing with the wounds of the past. The drama of “coming to consciousness” through becoming aware of one’s difficult past is explored here by evoking images portraying Ireland’s very distant past – especially the upheavals of the Viking Age. The recurring motif in the “Viking poems” is a winding line that is usually evoked in the context of the Norse conquest, becoming a tiny archaeological artefact – a “trial piece” crafted in Dublin, an outline of a longship, or a “hammered shod” of a bay that once witnessed the arrival of the Viking drakkars. However, and tellingly, this symbol of the Viking Age is appropriated in the poems by speakers struggling with their present situations: in “North” the serpentine line is evocative of the complex process of artistic growth, and in “Funeral Rites” it is the winding funeral cortege that symbolically points to the necessity of a cathartic experience that could finally bring healing to the long-suffering community.

Paradoxically, the fierce Norse invaders of the myth and the fear-provoking images they conjure up in the vision-like moments in the poems are capable of bringing hope to all those afflicted by the conflict in Northern Ireland, to both individuals and communities – the communal aspect of healing is often stressed. In her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Judith Lewis Herman argues that

clinicians know the privileged moment of insight when repressed ideas, feelings, and memories surface into consciousness. These moments oc-

¹ Seamus Heaney, “North,” in Seamus Heaney, *Poems 1965–1975* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 174.

² Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations. Selected Prose 1968–1978* (London: Faber, 1980), 57–58.

cur *in the history of societies* as well as in the history of individuals³ [emphasis added].

In “Funeral Rites,” where evoking the past helps one to get over bereavement, mourning unites the whole Irish nation, as Heaney envisages the serpent-shaped cortege moving in both time and space: a funeral procession which “drags its tail / out of the Gap of the North / as its head already enters / the megalithic doorway.”⁴ In contrast, “North” features a persona who is an individual, possibly a poet pondering the brutality and violence of the Viking Age and granted an insight concerning his own art at the end of the poem. Nevertheless, “North” is an exception here, as both in “Funeral Rites” and “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” the collective aspect of experience is highlighted by a constant switching between first person singular and first person plural. For example, the first part of “Funeral Rites” features one speaker “stepping in to lift the coffins / of dead relations,” while the second part focuses on the emotion expressed by the whole Irish community affected by the difficult experience of the Troubles: “we pine for ceremony, / customary rhythms.” Heaney then switches to first person singular once again when an individual speaker voices his intention to unite the Irish people in one, all-encompassing act of mourning: “I would restore / the great chambers of Boyne / prepare a sepulchre / under the cupmarked stones.” The last part of the poem is again spoken as if by the whole nation, people urging one another to “drive north again / past Strang and Carling fjords.” A similar switching occurs in “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” where the speaker does not hesitate to summon the Norsemen by saying “Old fathers, be with us. / Old cunning assessors / of feuds and of sites / for ambush or town,”⁵ yet, at the same time, a speaker-individual is introduced, possibly a Catholic resident of twentieth century Ireland, one clearly fascinated by the Norse heritage, but still deeply afflicted by the conflict:

I am Hamlet the Dane,
 skull-handler, parablist,
 smeller of rot
 in the state, infused
 with its poisons,
 pinioned by ghosts
 and affections,

³ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 2.

⁴ Heaney, “Funeral Rites,” in *Poems 1965–1975* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 172.

⁵ Heaney, “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces,” in *Poems 1965–1975*, 179.

murders and pieties,
coming to consciousness
by jumping in graves,
dithering, blathering.⁶

Heaney’s “Hamlet, the Dane” is then one of many – collective and individual – voices in *North* that hope to discover their identity or understand the confusion and hurt of the Troubles and be finally healed. Such “coming to consciousness” may become possible through summoning the “ghosts” of the distant past (even though the speaker sees himself as one “pinioned” by the “ghosts” of current events), and also by becoming an artist instructed by voices of the past (“dithering, blathering”). In “North” and in many passages of “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” both the process of growing up as an artist and the individual aspect of the process of healing are stressed, while the communal aspect of the healing process is the main theme in “Funeral Rites” and loudly echoes throughout the majority of *North* poems. “Coming to consciousness / by jumping in graves” may sound horrifying, and the possibility of healing is unquestionably made ambiguous and uncertain by the ironic presence of Hamlet (and also by the self-mocking attitude of the speaker himself), but the trying is nevertheless shown to be necessary; otherwise the afflicted individual may be trapped in a vicious circle of repression and suffering. To quote Judith Herman again,

the knowledge of horrible events periodically intrudes into public awareness but is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level. Like traumatized people, we have been cut off from the knowledge of our past. Like traumatized people, we need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future. Therefore, an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering history.⁷

The speakers in the poems struggle with their complicated sense of identity in many different ways. They not infrequently find the spirit of the North terrifying and alien, but sometimes they wilfully appropriate it for the purpose of being healed or growing stronger. In “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” the exploration of this ambivalent mind-set has a powerful impact on the reader, as the speaker acknowledges the cruelty of the Vikings yet, at the same time, – paradoxically – convinces the listener to join him and to “sniff the wind / with the expertise of the Vikings”:

⁶ Ibid., 178.

⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 2.

Come fly with me,
 come sniff the wind
 with the expertise
 of the Vikings –
 neighbourly, scoretaking
 killers, haggers
 and hagglers, gombeen-men,
 hoarders of grudges and gain.

With a butcher's aplomb
 they spread out your lungs
 and made you warm wings
 for your shoulders.

Old fathers, be with us.
 Old cunning assessors
 of feuds and of sites
 for ambush or town.⁸

The “warm wings” that make the flight possible are a reference to the cruel practice of *blood-eagle*, a torture attributed to the Norsemen. This attribution is possibly the result of a mistranslation of a verse written by the skaldic poet Sighvatr;⁹ nevertheless, the allusion is a fitting metaphor for the cruelty of the Viking invaders as perceived in popular culture. Those mythic Norsemen of “Viking Dublin,” who according to Neil Corcoran amount to “the most *terrifying* and most *scandalous* exemplary community in Heaney’s work,”¹⁰ portrayed here as “haggers and hagglers, gombeen-men, / hoarders of grudges and gain” evoke fear, but simultaneously they attract with their animalistic strength. The animal “nostril” of a Viking ship “sniffing the Liffey”¹¹ may be a portent of an immediate attack, but the ship is cunningly “dissembling itself / in antler combs, bone pins, / coins, weights, scale-pans.”¹² Heaney’s Norsemen seem to live in an alluring world of senses and sensations, all of them driven by their animal instincts. The curves and ornamentations of the “trial pieces” found centuries later in one of the sunken ships in Dublin become emblems of the Viking empire. The lines

⁸ Heaney, “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces,” 178–79.

⁹ Roberta Frank, “Viking Atrocity and Skaldic Verse: The Rite of the Blood-Eagle,” *English Historical Review* 99, no. 391 (1984): 334. [“It is solely on the strength of this half-stanza, twelve words in all . . . that the blood-eagle sacrifice of the sagas has kept our credence.”]

¹⁰ Neil Corcoran, “Seamus Heaney and the Art of the Exemplary,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* Vol. 17, British Poetry since 1945, Special Number (1987): 121.

¹¹ Heaney, “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces,” 177.

¹² Ibid.

represent “the netted routes / of ancestry and trade,”¹³ but they also embody the undying spirit of the Norse. The curved edge of a mysterious artefact becomes the backbone of a serpent-like animal that transforms itself, becoming successively “an eel swallowed / in a basket of eels,” a line that “amazes itself / eluding the hand / that fed it,” “a bill in flight,” and a “zoomorphic wake, / a worm of thought,”¹⁴ and finally reveals itself as the “swimming nostril”¹⁵ of the longship approaching the Irish coast. The “swimming tongue” of the longship reappears in “North,” where it instructs the speaker to “compose in darkness.” The “tongue” of the Viking vessel is here “buoyant with hindsight”¹⁶ and the adjective “buoyant” is also used in “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces,” where the curve of the ship is alluded to as “a buoyant, migrant line.”¹⁷ While “migrant” connotes the vitality of animals that often change their home range and therefore produce healthy offspring, “buoyant” implies floating, ships and water and suggests images of resilience and joy. The flourishes of Norse ornamentation and the snapshots of everyday life in Dublin during the Norse invasion are laden with an ambiguity that reflects the ambivalent attitude of the speaker, who seems at times frightened, at time seduced and fascinated, by the turbulence and uproar of the Viking Age. This ambivalence seems also a consequence of the speaker’s shifting sense of identity: “Old fathers, be with us” never becomes “Our fathers, be with us,” but the speaker’s suggestion of a distant yet possible kinship between him and the Viking invaders is sometimes prominent. The invocation to “old fathers” and the persona’s call to join the Vikings in their restless enterprise of “sniffing the wind” are among the most unsettling passages in *North*. Neil Corcoran observes that “the prayer recalls Stephen’s prayer to Daedalus at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist*, ‘Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead’”¹⁸ and, commenting on this allusion, concludes that “Heaney’s location of the Irish paternity theme in this Viking source is exhausted and despairing.”¹⁹ Still, what is striking is not solely the despair (there is certainly despair, but also hope), but the bitter irony noticeable in the juxtaposition of the mythical torture of carving wings out of the human body (a “gift” of the Viking “fathers” for the victim) with Daedalus’s gift of wings for his beloved son, a gift of freedom. Nevertheless, this irony of calling the cruel invaders “fathers” is immediately followed by another ironic realisation: Icarus, attracted to the warmth of the Mediterranean sun, perishes, while the internalized, altered voice of the North, now “buoyant with hindsight”²⁰ and conscious of the futility of bloodshed, brings the hope of

¹³ Ibid., 177.

¹⁴ Ibid., 177–78.

¹⁵ Ibid., 176.

¹⁶ Heaney, “North,” 178–79.

¹⁷ Heaney, “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces,” 178.

¹⁸ Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 111.

¹⁹ Heaney, “North,” 175.

healing to the speakers, who recognize there will never be – and cannot be – a history other than one's own experience, on both the individual and the collective level. Thus the apparent fatalism associated with the impossibility of discarding one's heritage that is detectable in so many passages in *North* is finally transcended by the subsequent cathartic (though painful) act of “coming to consciousness” through accepting and, to a certain extent, reliving the past.

On another level, the fierce strangers from the North become “fathers” – teachers or instructors – because they represent an attractive, though illusory, idea of an ever-triumphant self which is never subjugated to another. One of the tactics used by speakers struggling with the feeling of victimisation in the Viking poems is the appropriation of certain features that characterise Norse – or Danish – heroes and antiheroes. The “manly” virtues and vices of the fear-provoking raiders become desirable because they promise liberation (as in “Funeral Rites”). Even the idea of a revenge is not entirely absent from the poems inspired by the Viking conquests; in fact, the speakers are aware that they might become as capable of violence as the aggressors the moment they realise they are no longer victims and are fully capable of acting for themselves. The impersonation of Hamlet in “Viking Dublin” (“Hamlet, the Dane”) might also be an example of such a subversive tactic employed by the persona: here is a Celt wishing to triumph over the invaders by adopting their own tactics, or, even assuming their (Danish) identity. Similarly, the procession in “Funeral Rites” is envisaged as a giant serpent that frightens bystanders and may initially suggest a pitiless retribution. The cortege resembles the terrible destroyer Jörmungandr, the sea snake of Norse mythology: it is “Quiet as a serpent / in its grassy boulevard.”²⁰ The procession’s “slow triumph towards the mounds”²¹ creates a sense of fear, yet “the megalithic doorway”²² of Newgrange, built during the Neolithic period and the destination of the cortege, is to become a place where the cycle of violence is to be broken, not the site of a revenge assembly.

Still, such “acts of impersonation” are to a certain degree legitimate and historically justified, and repeatedly point to another significant aspect of the therapeutic endeavour, namely, the difficult process of coming to terms with the speakers’ unsettled sense of identity. Although the Vikings were alien invaders to the mainly Celtic inhabitants of Ireland in the late eighth century, and to this day the majority of Irish natives would consider themselves descendants of the Celts, the persona reveals himself as an inhabitant of Ireland (in “North” and “Funeral Rites” possibly also a Northerner) who has been inevitably shaped by the ascetic spirit of the North and who realizes the enormous significance of Germanic heritage for his country. In “Funeral Rites,” on its way back from the

²⁰ Heaney, “Funeral Rites,” 172.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

mound of Newgrange, the cortege moves confidently “past Strang and Carling fjords,” places named by the invaders, as if acknowledging the nation’s complex legacy and yet recognizing the places as Irish. To a certain extent, then, rather than appropriation of the Viking identity for the sake of revenge or frightening one’s enemies, this is an act of legitimate recognition of this distant kinship and of acceptance of the complex, rich heritage (genetic, cultural, and linguistic). The Dublin of “Trial Pieces” is not a random choice: it is a place on Irish soil particularly marked by the presence of the “Viking gene.” Celtic Dublin was one of the settlements invaded by the Vikings in the middle of the ninth century, at the time when the invaders established their kingdoms along the Irish coast. Later the Norsemen and the Celts intermarried and a new population of Norse-Gaels emerged. The Viking aggressors brought violence and terror, but they also brought their culture: in “North” the “buoyant tongue” of the longship confirms there are two different aspects of the Norse invasion, positive and negative:

It said Thor’s hammer swung
To geography and trade,
Thick-witted couplings and revenges²³

Thor, who becomes the figurative prime mover behind the Norse expansion in “North,” similarly represents contradiction and ambiguity: he is the god of thunder and destruction, one to be feared, but is also associated with healing, fertility and the protection of mankind. The “netted routes / of ancestry and trade”²⁴ imagined by the speaker who scrutinizes a carving in bone in “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” also accentuate the stimulative aspect of the Norse invasion. The serpentine line is an emblem of the Vikings, but it symbolizes this invigorating, changing force as well. The tiny “trial piece” is an item of Scandinavian origin, one “incised by a child,”²⁵ yet this alien artefact becomes a part of the vast cultural legacy that, to a certain extent, will shape the Irish identity. Paradoxically, although the invaders plundered and destroyed Irish monasteries and churches, they also contributed to the creation of a new style in Irish art. The perfect incarnation of the process of gradual blending of the Scandinavian ornamentation with the Celtic essence is the famous Cross of Cong, the early twelfth-century Irish relic in which the Urnes-style decoration of Scandinavian origin combines with the features of the older, Celtic Insular, style.

In “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” the persona’s rediscovery and acceptance of this heterogeneous self is facilitated by the study of linguistic heritage. Once again the Norse severity and harshness are evoked, this time by the careful choice

²³ Heaney, “North,” 175.

²⁴ Heaney, “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces,” 177.

²⁵ Ibid., 178.

of words that seem to mimic the terrifying deeds of the raiders with their terseness and abruptness:

Like a long sword
sheathed in its moistening
burial clays,
the keel stuck fast

in the slip of the bank,
its clinker-built hull
spined and plosive
as *Dublin*.²⁶

The short, one-syllable words in the phrase “the keel stuck fast” are all of Old Norse or Old English origin, all of them representing the family of Germanic languages. The imagery in the passage suggests aggressive male sexuality or even rape, yet simultaneously it is the treasure-carrying ship that appears to be held hostage for years to come.

To emphasise the impact of old Germanic languages both on literature and language, Heaney does not hesitate to allude to alliterative poetry and Old Norse kennings. Alliteration is frequently used in “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces,” for instance, when the Norse incomers are tersely characterised as “killers, haggers / and hagglers, gombeen-men, / hoarders of grudges and gain.”²⁷ The harsh-sounding consonants in the passage add to the overall appeal of the description, mimicking the content, rendering the Vikings antiheroes even more fear-provoking. Moreover, to illustrate the legacy of the Viking Age more precisely, words of Old Norse origin such as *scale*, *haggle*, *keel*, *skull* and *wing* are used throughout the poem. While *haggle*, *skull* and *wing* are in their contexts evocative of the mythic Viking vices, the archaeological finds of *keel*, *scale-pans* and possibly also *skull* suggest figuratively, though not without a touch of irony, the survival of certain elements of Scandinavian culture on the British Isles, including literary and linguistic legacy. In “North” the wealth of linguistic heritage is described by the prophetic voice of the Viking longship as “the word-hoard,” a kenning for language:

It said, “Lie down in the word-hoard, burrow
the coil and gleam
of your furrowed brain.”²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Heaney, “North,” 175.

As the instruction is given to a speaker who is presumably an Irish poet writing in English, the “word-hoard” may not refer to Old Norse exclusively, but rather to the literary and linguistic legacy of old Germanic languages and, ultimately, to the modern-day English language.

In “North” the “fabulous raiders” of Norse mythology and “their long swords rusting”²⁹ become a sign of change, yet there is a great deal of ambiguity connected with the speaker’s attitude to the past. The raiders and their swords, “hacked and glinting / in the gravel of thawed streams” or buried, with their owners, “in the solid / belly of stone ships” suddenly become “voices / warning me, lifted again / in violence and epiphany.”³⁰ Nevertheless, in the initial stanzas the past seems forgotten: the landscape is not evocative of its turbulent history. The words confirm that the past cannot influence the present time because it is sealed and inaccessible. The “streams” where the “rusting swords” are buried also evoke a sense of passing of time. Moreover, as burials of Viking warriors and sailors often took place in ship-shaped tombs, “the solid belly” suggests death and decay. Nonetheless, the grip of the past on the present will soon be felt, as the previously “ocean-deafened voices” are revived and begin to speak the language of “violence and epiphany.” The stone ship once again becomes a Viking drakkar, a “longship buoyant with hindsight.” The dead Vikings once again become instructors, but their promises are – as always – very cautious:

Compose in darkness.
Expect aurora borealis
in the long foray
but no cascade of light.³¹

The relationship between the present and the past in the context of writing poetry is also explored in the last part of “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces.” Here, as in “North” and “Funeral Rites” the final disclosure is accompanied by silence:

My words lick around
cobbled quays, go hunting
lightly as pampooties
over the skull-capped ground.³²

The last silent epiphany in the Viking poems comes at the end of “Funeral Rites.” In the concluding lines the dynamic progression through space and time gives way to the stillness and timelessness of the final vision. To accentuate the

²⁹ Ibid., 174.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 175.

³² Heaney, “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces,” 179.

possibility of healing and ultimately of lasting peace, Heaney envisages the innocent victims of violence in Ireland “disposed like Gunnar” in the ancient tomb of Newgrange. The message of the vision is ambiguous, as Gunnar is yet another symbolic, ominous presence in *North*. One of the heroes of Scandinavian myth, he is not just a brave warrior; according to the sagas after his death he becomes one of the *draugar* – ghost-like creatures, zombies that guard their graves and may harm the living. Although he does not leave his tomb, both in the myth and in the poem he is chanting “verses about honour” and is looking at the moon. He becomes yet another mystifying “appropriation” in *North*, and perhaps the difficult struggle of the speaker in the poem may be best understood through the ambiguities of this mysterious, heroic figure. While the last image strongly suggests the end of the conflict, as Gunnar is described as one who “lay beautiful / inside his burial mound, / though dead by violence / and unavenged,”³³ it is often pointed out that the Gunnar of the sagas was, in fact, avenged. There are, however, other lines that suggest a peaceful closure: the stone is blocking the entrance to the grave and Gunnar’s face is “joyful.” Such a closure, however, may symbolise only temporary liberation from the ghosts of the past as “the cud of memory” is only “allayed for once,” and “arbitration of the feud” merely “placated.”³⁴ Nonetheless, the tranquillity of the last image strongly suggests that Gunnar’s message is about forgiveness and honour. The myth may finally be changed, the cycle of violence may finally be broken – and healing does not have to be interrupted by further traumatic events.

³³ Heaney, “Funeral Rites,” 172.

³⁴ Ibid.

Eliene Mąka-Poulain

„W przemocy i epifanii” Północ Seamus Heaneya

Streszczenie

W opublikowanym w roku 1975 tomiku *North* (Północ) irlandzki poeta Seamus Heaney odnosi się do konfliktu w Irlandii Północnej, przywołując wydarzenia z odległej przeszłości i odwołując się do mitu. Tematem wierszy jest nie tylko cierpienie niewinnych ofiar przemocy, lecz także próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy możliwe jest zakończenie konfliktu i uzdrawienie społeczności, które w tym konflikcie uczestniczą – tak na poziomie indywidualnym, jak i na poziomie zbiorowości.

Judith Lewis Herman w monografii *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1997) twierdzi, że powszechnie znane doświadczenie wglądu, umożliwiające radzenie sobie z traumą i w wyniku tego uzdrawienie, polega na uświadomieniu sobie własnej historii, w tym wypartych uczuć i wspomnień. Takie doświadczenie jest dostępne

nie tylko jednostkom, ale całym społeczeństiom, twierdzi Herman. W tomiku *North* jednym z ważniejszych wydarzeń, które umożliwiają poecie zmierzenie się z przeszłością, jest obecność wikingów na terenie Irlandii w VIII i IX wieku. Ten temat ze szczególną siłą powraca w trzech wierszach analizowanych w artykule: *Funeral Rites, North* i *Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces*. Obrazy przywołujące Irlandię ery wikingów są tutaj dwuznaczne, często szokujące. „Ja” liryczne oscyluje między głosem jednostki i głosem zbiorowości. Symbole odnoszące się do skandynawskich najeźdźców są przejmowane przez irlandzkich Celtów, a częścią procesu umożliwiającego zrozumienie bliższej przeszłości staje się uświadomienie sobie, jak bardzo złożona jest tożsamość każdej społeczności. Heaney ostatecznie sugeruje, że uzdrawienie jest możliwe, ale proces, który może do niego doprowadzić, jest niezwykle trudny i długotrwały. W wierszu *North* głosy przeszłości są nie tylko źródłem wiedzy określającej własną tożsamość, ale również instruują, że zrozumienie własnej przeszłości staje się możliwe również poprzez akt uzewnętrznienia historii w czynności pisania.

Eliene Mąka-Poulain

« Violence et épiphanie »
Nord de Seamus Heaney

Résumé

Dans son recueil de poèmes *Nord* (*North*) publié en 1975, le poète irlandais Seamus Heaney se réfère au conflit en Irlande du Nord tout en évoquant des événements du passé lointain et en recourant au mythe. Parmi les thèmes de ces poèmes se trouve non seulement la souffrance des victimes innocentes, mais aussi une tentative de répondre à la question s'il est possible de finir ce conflit et de guérir les sociétés qui y participent – aussi bien au niveau individuel que collectif.

Dans sa monographie intitulée *Trauma and Recovery : The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1997), Judith Lewis Herman prétend que l'expérience de l'introspection communément connue et permettant de se débrouiller avec un traumatisme, et par conséquent de recouvrer la santé, consiste à s'apercevoir de sa propre histoire, y compris des sentiments et souvenirs refoulés. Une telle expérience – selon Herman – est accessible non seulement aux individus, mais aussi à des communautés tout entières. Dans le recueil *Nord*, l'un des événements les plus importants qui permettent au poète d'affronter le passé est bel et bien la présence des Vikings en Irlande aux VIIIe et IXe siècles. Ce thème revient avec une force particulière dans les trois poèmes analysés dans l'article : *Funeral Rites, North* et *Viking Dublin : Trial Pieces*. Les images évoquant l'Irlande de l'époque des Vikings y sont ambiguës et souvent choquantes. Le « je » lyrique oscille entre la voix de l'individu et celle de la collectivité. Les symboles se référant aux envahisseurs scandinaves sont adoptés par les Celtes irlandais, et le fait de s'apercevoir combien l'identité de chaque société est compliquée devient une partie du procédé facilitant la compréhension d'un futur plus proche. Finalement, Heaney suggère que la guérison est possible, mais le procédé qui peut contribuer à sa réalisation est extrêmement difficile et exige du temps. Dans le poème *North*, les voix du passé sont non seulement la source du savoir définissant notre propre identité, mais elles expliquent aussi que la compréhension de notre propre passé devient possible également à travers l'acte d'extérioriser le passé dans l'écriture.