

Mainland Hellas: Seamus Heaney's Peloponnese and Delphi

The genesis of Seamus Heaney's "Sonnets from Hellas" (*Electric Light* 2001) borders on the mysterious, miraculous or even mythical. Heaney learnt about his Nobel Prize for Literature while on holiday in Greece in October 1995, and journalists had great difficulty tracking him down at that particular moment. "Mystery of the missing poet," announced the headline of the *Irish Independent*; "End of an odyssey as Heaney flies home," *The Sunday Times* declared after his successful landing in Dublin. While the lack of connection with the outside world can be notorious when touring the Greek countryside, especially in the years when cell phones were still a rarity, the challenge in researching the circumstances of the sonnets twenty years later owes much to the mythical aura surrounding the events, further intensified by Heaney's personal account and its metamorphosis in writing. Added to this is the extraordinary publication history of this cycle of sonnets, which first appeared in book form in Greek translation (2000) with three poems eliminated from the later canonical 2001 Faber publication of *Electric Light*.

Seamus Heaney travelled to Greece quite late in a career marked so profoundly by the Classics, but the condensation of his visits is noteworthy: within nine years (1995–2004) he completed at least five trips. That first memorable journey took place in October 1995 in the company of his wife, Marie, and a couple of friends from Harvard: the Greek-American artist Dimitri Hadzi and his wife Cynthia. Their itinerary included Athens, Corinth and the Peloponnese: Epidauros, Nauplio, Asini (Asine), Mycenae, Tiryns, Sparta, Mystras, Kalamata and Pylos (Hadzi "Where in

Hellas..."). Interrupted by the news about the Nobel Prize, the trip was continued in the same company in May 1997, when they started where they had left two years before, in Pylos again; from there, they headed to Bassae and Olympia, and, leaving the Peloponnese, travelled to Delphi ("Itinerary of Greek Trip—1997"). Meanwhile, Heaney's first collection appeared in Greek as *Τα ποιήματα του βάλτου* [The Bog Poems] in Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke's translation (1996). The poet was also invited by Manolis (Manuel) Savidis¹ to his house on Poros, the island famous for having inspired George Seferis's *Thrush*. Savidis became Heaney's translator and publisher in Greece, releasing two volumes of translations, *Το αλφάδι* [The Spirit Level] (1999) and *Αλφάβητα* [Alphabets] (2000). To promote both books, the poet travelled to Athens for a few days in May 2000, again in the same company; after the reading at the Old Parliament on 5 May, they were all invited by Savidis to his house on Paros in the Cyclades. This Cycladic trip lasted either one or three days, according to Stratis Haviaras and Savidis respectively.²

Heaney returned to Greece twice in 2004, in February and June, for two symposia in Delphi. On the first visit, he gave a poetry reading (4 February) organised by the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens, and on 6 February delivered a speech at the *Greek Experience* International Literary Symposium held at the European Cultural Centre of Delphi. Between his two visits, in April, the poet became an honorary member of the Greek Writers' Society ("Εταιρεία Συγγραφέων..." 25), and delivered a speech "Title Deeds: Translating a Classic" at Harvard about his version of *Antigone* entitled *The Burial at Thebes*. In June he attended the 12th International Meeting on Ancient Drama "Sophocles: 2500 Years since his Birth" at Delphi (25 June–2 July), where he read excerpts from *The Burial at Thebes*. The fruit of Heaney's Greek journeys is a series of poems published in journals and *Electric Light*, mainly the sequence "Sonnets from Hellas" (based on the 1995–1997 trips), as well as the "Greek Experience" speech published in Greece and in Greek: "Αρχαίοι μύθοι και σύγχρονη ιστορία [Ancient Myths and Contemporary History]."

As we have argued in Chap. 1, Heaney's travels in Greece could be aligned with David Roessel's "old philhellenism" and the tradition of the Grand Tour. Quite consistently, the object of Heaney's pursuit was the ancient world in geographical and poetic terms. In his application of the pastoral mode—understood both as a genre and a manner of perception—the poet

seems to be reading “the aesthetics of repose ... into the Greek landscape” (Roessel 18) much as an Apollonian, Romantic philhellene of the nineteenth century. The Irish poet approaches Greece with preconceived ideas, intent on reading the signs: “it was our first time there, and yet it was as if we had known the place ahead of time” (Heaney “Sonnets from the Peloponnese” 14). His response to the Greek landscape is mainly a response to antiquity: “The ruins, the rocks, the earth, the very air³ consolidated that heritage within us” (14). Founded on a belief in the superiority of the ancient world over modern Greek life, his stance also expresses the philhellenic *traveller’s* sense of elitism towards *tourism*: “Everywhere was backlit with associations, so that no matter how many tourists crowded the ramparts of Agamemnon’s palace or how many drab tavernas lined the main street of Sparta, it was impossible not to feel connected to the classical world” (14). This emphasis on antiquity comes hand in hand with the emphasis on the canon (discussed in Chap. 4) and on the mainland as opposed to islands. Although in geographic terms the Peloponnese is a peninsula, in Heaney’s work it emanates stability, just like the mainland Στερεά Ελλάδα [Stereá Ellada] where Delphi is located, while his literary narrative does not mention the two islands he visited (Poros and Paros). The exclusion of Poros especially may be surprising when viewed in the context of Heaney’s allusion to Seferis: it was on Poros that Seferis wrote his Cavafy chapters (he was planning to write a book on Cavafy), and the name of the island marks the beginning of the Cavafy fragments in Seferis’s 1950 diary from which Heaney kept quoting in his Oxford lectures.⁴

In the spirit of historical reconstruction, Heaney’s poems mark the trail of ancient sites he visited on the Peloponnese and around Delphi. The *Electric Light* version of “Sonnets from Hellas” evokes Arcadia, Sparta, Pylos, Olympia, Delphi and its surroundings; in the same volume, “Out of the Bag” remembers the sanctuary of Asclepius⁵ at Epidaurous. Bassae was epitomised in the sonnet eventually deleted from the *Electric Light* sequence, and so was Mycenae, removed most probably because Heaney’s earlier poem, “Mycenae Lookout” (*The Spirit Level* 1996) remaining from the intended translation of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* and composed before he first travelled to the real location,⁶ revives the place so hauntingly. Similarly, writing a poem about Asini after Seferis’s powerful “The King of Asine” would feel like trying to live up to Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium.” The intensity of these two poems, “Mycenae Lookout” and “The King of Asine,” translates into the final elimination of the “Mycenae” sonnet, which in some aspects echoes them both. Another ancient site in Heaney’s

itinerary circumvented in the sonnets, Corinth, may represent a similar case: Odysseus Elytis in “Drinking the Sun of Corinth”⁷ renders the natural and historical features of the place in a manner very much akin to Heaney’s own.

Beyond the most obvious reasons related to the lack of space and the search for the cycle’s integrity, the Acropolis may have been eliminated for other reasons. Its iconic status and location within a municipality contrast sharply with Heaney’s pastoral vision dominated by the countryside, just as they would contrast with Derek Mahon’s consistently insular Greece (Mahon’s visit to Athens has left no trace in his work, either). Other visited places are not fertile enough for poetic imagination in comparison with ruins, which have a long tradition of the picturesque in literature; only Kalamata airport, for that one historical moment of Heaney’s arrival from the Greek “interior,” has come into the focus of the Irish press.

While in Greece, Heaney did not “sail to Byzantium”: passing through Mystras, one of the major Byzantine sites in Greece, he chose not to see it. This decision, though dictated by physical conditions—the steep climb in the heat (Hadzi “Where in Hellas...” 28)—may also resonate with the spirit of Byronic philhellenism underrating this period of history as the Dark Ages of Greece. However, the omission, in the sonnets, of the Greek War of Independence in reference to Pylos, and leaving out the place crucial for the making of the modern Greek state (Nauplio) contradicts the line of old philhellenes committed to the political idea of Greek liberation. Although the two regions in which Heaney travels in Greece (Peloponnese and Sterea Ellada) match the twin shape of modern Greece as it was reborn in the nineteenth century, this fact does not bear on his emphasis on antiquity. Nikos Kazantzakis’s observation in his *Journey to the Morea* (Morea being the alternative name for the Peloponnese) may be of relevance here:

For a foreigner the pilgrimage to Greece is simple, it happens without any great convulsion; his mind, liberated from sentimental entanglements, leaps on to discuss the essence of Greece. But for a Greek, this pilgrimage is fraught with hopes and fears, with distress and painful comparison. (8)

Although it expresses Greek writers’ wrestling with their history including antiquity, Kazantzakis’s words may be applied especially to Part III of Heaney’s cycle, “Pylos,” which distils the ancient “Greek” character of the place⁸ and bypasses its iconic status in modern Greek history. Yet Part IV, “Augean Stables,” just as the preceding “Mycenae Lookout,” gives voice

to the “distress and painful comparison” with the reality of Heaney’s home ground, that is, the Northern Irish conflict.

In a 2000 interview, the poet expresses awareness of the idea of Greece being a construct of the nineteenth century, or of “old philhellenism” to use Roessel’s term. As reported by Vatopoulos, Heaney answered the question about mechanisms behind the myth of Greece as follows:

...[M]y sense is that 19th-century Romantic artists and poets invented modern Greek ideology. The gap between the re-emergent patria and the first mythological place is large, but it hasn’t prevented a feeling of belonging to this first mythos. In between, of course, there has been a lot of confusion. (Vatopoulos 6)

(One can certainly notice an analogy with a shorter historical gap, between the Celtic and nineteenth-century Ireland.) In “Sonnets from Hellas,” Heaney’s awareness of “old philhellenism” makes him follow the Romantics’ steps and occasionally explore the “in between” with “a lot of confusion” in linguistic terms (“Desfina”). In the 2000 interview quoted above, Heaney also relates to Greek poets’ “pilgrimage ... fraught with hopes and fears” (Kazantzakis *Journey* 8) in relation to his own poetic self: “I love going to Mycenae and Delphi. I think of Sikelianos and this is one way of going back to the past. But then I look at Seferis’s modern touch. ... There is no way for the great escape” (Vatopoulos 6). In Heaney’s understanding of the tension between Greece’s modernity and its inescapable past, the latter seems to be limited to antiquity and its repercussions: the Irish poet refers to Sikelianos’s idea of reviving ancient drama in Delphi, and, in “To George Seferis in the Underworld” (*District and Circle* 2006), to Seferis’s quote from Plato.

Manolis Savidis commented on Heaney’s philhellenism as follows:

A lot has been written about the “philhellene” Seamus Heaney in the Greek press (and so little about the “philamerican,” although he spent many years of his life across the ocean). It’s not completely inaccurate, if we bear in mind the older philhellenes of 1821 who had no idea about modern Greece and for whom the meaning of Greece ended with the Battle of Corinth in 146 B.C. Heaney knew History, but his own Greece was mainly the ancient one, with myths and legends he learnt as a child, with the epic poems and the tragedies he studied, translated and adapted.

(“Seamus Heaney: ωραίος...” 57)⁹

Strikingly, the author puts the “philhellene” in inverted commas and deems it “not completely inaccurate,” though he rightly aligns Heaney mainly with the “old philhellenism.” Mary McKenna, president of the Irish Hellenic Society, cites Heaney’s letter: “1995 was our first visit to Greece last October. If every future visit ends as splendidly, I’m going to become even more of a Hellenist than I am already” (in Dillon “Hand in Hand...”). This humorous understatement adheres not only to the rapture over the “Greek miracle” (which was as Greek as it was Swedish, in terms of the Nobel news) but also to the extensive creative dialogue with classical Greece which Heaney maintained in his work throughout his career—the dialogue whose impressive scope can be measured in *Stone From Delphi*, an anthology of Heaney’s antiquity-inspired writings compiled by Helen Vendler; or in John Dillon’s lecture “Hand in Hand with the World: Seamus Heaney and the Heritage of Greece.” Heaney’s education and his practice of translation influenced his perception of modern Greece even more than Savidis implies in his article. As for “philamericanism,” I would be very cautious applying this term to the Irish poet on whom the Harvard tenure did not exert the influence some critics would imagine. The poet himself corrects these views in *Stepping Stones*, attributing more influence to Polish poetry as contrasted with the American one, in terms of world-view, approach and poetics (281, 283).

Heaney’s Harvard years (1979–2006), however, may have been an important step in his “career of the Hellenist.” It was there, in 1979, that the poet met Robert Fitzgerald (*Stepping Stones* 268), translator of Homer, Sophocles and Virgil; the last two authors have also been adapted or translated by Heaney, and it seems ominous that Fitzgerald’s and Heaney’s last translation was the *Aeneid*. While Fitzgerald is the addressee of the third sonnet from Hellas, “Pylos,” a large part of Heaney’s first Greek journey was apparently conducted under the aegis of Homer: “Everywhere we went we had a tremendous sense of the literary and the legendary past: just saying the names of the places we visited was like speaking lines from Homer,” Heaney recalls (“Sonnet from the Peloponnese” 14). Later in 1992, after Fitzgerald’s death, Heaney wrote an introduction to his friend’s translation of the *Odyssey* where he refers to Homer in the following words: “the great bard of survival, the memory keeper and the vision speaker, who shaped the trace elements of a lost world¹⁰ into the foundation art of a new one” (xiii).

Three Greeks whom the Irish poet befriended at Harvard became his guides to the modern Greek world. Dimitri Hadzi, the artist working for

Harvard as well, will accompany Heaney in his Greek journeys and illustrate his Greek poems and their translations. Stratis Haviaras, founder and editor of *Harvard Review* (among many other positions he held at that university) and translator of Cavafy's *Canon* to which Heaney wrote an introduction, stimulated the Irish poet's interest in Cavafy's poetry and helped him with his own translations from the Alexandrian's oeuvre. George Savidis, editor of Seferis and Cavafy in Greek and English, as well as Sikelianos, Karyotakis and other poets, holder of the George Seferis Chair of Modern Greek at Harvard in 1977–1984, may have preceded Haviaras in the role of Heaney's Modern Greek poetry guide. After Savidis's death in 1995, Haviaras contacted his son, Manolis Savidis, to host Heaney on Poros. The visit gave the incentive to Savidis to become Heaney's publisher in Greece. In this way, the Harvard story came full circle, crowned by two volumes of Greek translations from Savidis and Haviaras, *Το αλφάδι* and *Αλφάβητα*, the latter volume providing the missing link: a translation of a Heaney poem by George Savidis ("Λιθοτρίφτης" ["The Stone Grinder"]).

The last Harvard link to Heaney's Greek experience is Stanisław Barańczak, Polish poet and translator, lecturer at the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, who will recur in Heaney's first Delphi speech of 2004 ("Αρχαίοι μύθοι...") as another, after Zbigniew Herbert in "Sonnets from Hellas," "Hyperborean" in Heaney's output. Importantly, Barańczak was a specialist on Herbert's poetry, author of the crucial study *A Fugitive from Utopia: The Poetry of Zbigniew Herbert* of 1984. Its American edition appeared from Harvard in 1987 and converged with Heaney's *The Haw Lantern*, which is influenced by Herbert. A few years later Heaney and Barańczak collaborated on a translation of Jan Kochanowski's *Laments* (1995). By no means indebted to Barańczak's poetry, Heaney in his "Further Language" and "Greek Experience" essays uses Barańczak's notion of culture, "so complementary to Heaney's [own] thought," as John Dennison remarks (199).

Heaney's introduction to more recent Greek history seems to have happened on his travels thanks to his Greek friends. Out of all places visited on their way, Hadzi, in his brief account of their first journey, provides a more detailed description of only one site: the Byzantine Mystras. Savidis in 1997 on Poros started to inform Heaney about modern Greece "για να καταλάβει που έχει έρθει [so that he understands where he has arrived]." They would keep up these conversations in the following years.

He showed particular interest in the Greek Civil War and its problems ('wherever I see stony ground and women dressed in black I feel at home'), though we did not manage to go to Cyprus so that he could see another divided island and another occupied territory.

(Savidis "Seamus Heaney: ωπαίος..." 57)

In 2000, however, Savidis introduced Heaney to the Cypriot poet Theodosios Nikolaou who translated a number of Heaney's poems (in *To αλφάδι*). During an interview for the main Greek newspaper *Kathimerini* the same year, Heaney reveals he was aware of the recent Greek past during his first visit. Characteristically, the slightly different versions of this interview bear different titles: the English edition title underscores this consciousness as "Seamus Heaney in Arcadia: An eloquent sense of awareness" (Vatopoulos 6), while the Greek title relates to antiquity again as "Η κληρονομία είναι σαν το στρώμα του όζοντος" [taken from the original quote, "The cultural inheritance is like the ozone layer"] (Βατόπουλος 51), as if a different facet of the poet's account of Greece was presented to Greek and English readers. The poet recalls their drive from Sparta to Pylos comparing the Greek and Irish wars of independence as well as other historical experiences. As reported by Vatopoulos, Heaney said:

One of the things I remember are the memorials of the guerrillas fighting for freedom, which is quite like the countryside in southwest Ireland – there was a lot of guerrilla fighting there in the 1920s. ...Also the experience of occupation. Of course we lost our language. ... (6)

Another unnamed war coming within the temporal scope mentioned above is the Irish Civil War, evoked later in the interview in relation to the freshly translated *Beowulf* as the poem with "the knowledge that the world is a shaky arrangement," wise to reality like "the Irish Civil War, to put it brutally, the world of intimate, face-to-face massacre..." This context is valid for yet another war unnamed in the interview: the Greek Civil War with its "intimate, face-to-face massacre."

Besides history, a crucial element of Heaney's comparison between the two countries relates to landscape and people:

...[A]mong that open up-country, among the elders with their black shawls, I was at home anthropologically. I don't mean any ethnic picturesque, this is where our species were together at a certain point. The landscape, the bareness and the sense of endured wisdom. We are always weary of making

links like this and being too picturesque, but there is sufficient cultural reality and equivalence. (Vatopoulos 6)

Interestingly, however, "Sonnets from Hellas" express the communication gap with these people rather than understanding, transferring them into the realm of myth; while the landscape, instead of bareness, offers opulence of crops (displaced from other regions) and abundance of water (in a country where water is scarce).

This cycle of sonnets, with the alternative titles of "Sonnets from the Peloponnese" and "Sittings from Hellas,"¹¹ has a very engaging history, too extensive to be discussed here in more detail, although references will be made to early versions, which I have consulted at the National Library of Ireland (Seamus Heaney Literary Papers). *Electric Light* includes a sequence of six poems ("Into Arcadia," "Conkers," "Pylos," "Augean Stables," "Castalian Spring" and "Desfina"), while three other sonnets ("Bassae," "Hyperborean" and "Mycenae") have been written and published either in different variants of the sonnet sequence, or separately, in journals before the Faber 2001 publication. The fascinating case is the first world publication of Heaney's sonnets in book form. It did not happen in London or New York, but in Greece, and in Greek translation, not in the English original—a fact which Heaney would surely call an omen. This most extensive sequence—of seven sonnets, including the three that were finally excluded from *Electric Light*—appeared in *Αλφάβητα* [Alphabets] of 2000, a selection of Heaney's most recent poetry up to that date, in Manolis Savidis's translation. In corresponding English titles, this sequence has been organised as follows: "Into Arcadia," "Conkers," "Augean Stables," "Hyperborean," "Desfina," "Mycenae" and "Bassae" (*Αλφάβητα* 73–80).

Some versions of Heaney's original sonnet sequence in the typescripts at the National Library of Ireland, as well as the versions in the *Cara* magazine publication (Sept.–Oct. 1998) and Savidis's Greek translation, include "Hyperborean," the sonnet about Zbigniew Herbert, while omitting "Pylos," the one about Robert Fitzgerald. This would suggest that Heaney considered the Polish poet his primary guide to Greece before he finally, in *Electric Light*, alluded to Fitzgerald in "Sonnets" and decided to publish the trimmed Herbert poem separately. Instead, he creatively uses the original title and concept of "Hyperborean" in two other sonnets, those situated in Delphi: "Castalian Spring" and "Desfina."

The analysis below follows the *Electric Light* sequence first, and then moves on to three sonnets that appeared in other publications.

1995–1997: “SONNETS FROM HELLAS”

In the *Intelligent Life* survey about “Seven Wonders,” the top of Seamus Heaney’s list is taken up by “Journey: Around the Peloponnese”:

I first visited the Peloponnese in 1995, and as we drove through places with mythic names – Argos, Nemea, where Heracles wrestled with the lion – I could hardly believe they were real. As we entered Arcadia, the road was covered in apples – they must have fallen from a lorry – and we drove over them, crunching. Such sense of omen, good omen, and benediction – and in Arcadia! ...
(“Seven Wonders” 132)

Throughout his literary career, Heaney has been exploring the miracle of the everyday, including nature’s details. In the collection immediately preceding his first Greek journey, *Seeing Things* of 1991, he famously formulated a sense of believing and trusting the marvellous: “Me waiting until I was nearly fifty / To credit marvels” (“Fosterling”). In 1995, in the fifty-sixth year of his life, the poet embarks on a Greek journey full of mythical coincidences, the “omen and amen” (in one of the manuscripts of “Into Arcadia”) and “miraculum” (the initial title of “Out of the Bag”).¹² The experience as interpreted by the media, his friends and the poet himself challenges human perception:

For a full day, neither his children nor the scores of reporters seeking interviews could find him. ...“It was entirely bewildering,” he said in an Irish television interview before he left the Greek port of Kalamata, “and still a bit incredible. It’s an awesome dimension.”
(Clarity)

Asked about his reaction to the award, Heaney says: “It was a bit like being caught in a mostly benign avalanche. ...Nothing can prepare you for it. Zeus thunders and the world blinks twice and you get to your feet again and try to keep going” (“The Art of Poetry No. 75”). As we will see, this is just one of the Greek gods at work with Heaney’s “Nobel circumstances.” The Nobel Committee bestowed the honour for “works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past,” and the last two phrases of this verdict could indeed serve as an epigraph to

Heaney's Greek journeys dominated by antiquity and a sense of wonder. "The Greek imprint was very strong. It was the perfect moment to arrive," Heaney later added in an interview (MacLellan). That Greek imprint had to do with his previous excursions into ancient Greek literature.

On 7 December 1995, Heaney delivered the Nobel lecture entitled "Crediting Poetry," paraphrasing his crediting marvels. The speech was devoted to Ireland, but one particular phrase refers to Heaney's Greece as much as it does to his native land: "I began a few years ago to try to make space in my reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as for the murderous" (*Crediting Poetry*). Before his first visit to Greece, Heaney published a version of Sophocles's *Philoctetes* (*The Cure at Troy* 1991) as well as one of his most violent poems ever, "Mycenae Lookout" (published in parts in the press of 1994–1996 before its final 1996 publication in *The Spirit Level*). After his second visit to Greece, he followed with a version of *Antigone*—all of which make space for the murderous. The majority of "Sonnets from Hellas" make space for the marvellous, while the fourth sonnet of the cycle, "Augean Stables," accommodates both dimensions. While the murderous is mainly vested in Greek antiquity and mirrored by Irish contemporaneity, the marvellous dominates Heaney's Greek travel narratives: the sonnets and the "Greek Experience" speech, although some of these sonnets, especially in their first versions, concealed violent premonitions.

The whole search for Heaney in Greece in October 1995 resembled a detective story. The press called his trip an odyssey (in anticipation of the Homeric touch in "Sonnets"), describing the elusive poet as if he was a knight errant, a wanted man, a fugitive, a missing person, a ghost even. *The Sunday Times* related

the end of an odyssey that had involved police, reporters, the Swedish embassy and the Nobel academy, to say nothing of the expectant nation waiting for the wandering poet.

The search for Heaney was called off yesterday after he telephoned his family to say he was on his way to Athens by helicopter from the island of Kalamata [sic]. ...

For the Greek police, finding the missing Irishman has been an urgent priority. "This is a matter of honour for Greece. We must find the man," said the police chief in charge of the island of Spetse [sic], which was searched yesterday after the reported sightings of the poet. (Byrne 1)

Two days before this report, the *Irish Independent* still wondered about the “Mystery of the missing poet...,” subtitled “They seek him here they seek him there”:

Seamus Heaney was on a Greek holiday island [sic] last night, apparently unaware he had won the Nobel Prize. Neither the Swedish Academy ... nor Irish diplomats could locate the poet. ... ‘We think they may be on one of the Ionian islands’, said the manager of the hotel last night.

(“Mystery...”)

One of Heaney’s friends and publishers, Peter Fallon, remembers the phone call he missed, recorded on his answerphone,

one of a handful from that “secret destination” in the Peloponnese in the breathless high of his new circumstances. In that jubilant effusion he voiced gratitude for kindness and trust and said what they ... would mean as he faced into the glorious mystery ahead.

(Fallon “On Seamus Heaney”)

In terms of the factual “secret destination” or “a remote hill [sic] of the Peloponnese” (“Voices from Greece”), Hadzi recalls they were touring the Greek countryside and switched the radio off for the whole day because of interference. After hearing the news, they “had a crucial half-day to ourselves, in a place where nobody knew us,” Heaney recalls in *Stepping Stones* (369). The Heaney party had been eventually located by the Greek newspaper *To Vima* in a detective story fashion again. Its editor in chief, who originated from Pylos, learnt from a local acquaintance that “a person shown on TV stays at a small hotel in Pylos” registered under the name Δημήτρης Χατζής [Dimitris Hadzis]. Their journalist travelled the whole night to be there at the break of dawn and found the small group of friends at breakfast; thanks to Hadzi’s intercession, he was granted the first interview, as he claims (Lalas in Hadzi “Ο Δημήτρης Χατζής...”). Heaney offers a different version of this moment; having promised the first interview to RTÉ, “that [preceding] evening [in Pylos] on the quayside a television crew came sidling up, just as we were finishing our coffee—a local Greek station that I couldn’t very well send packing” (*Stepping Stones* 371). According to him, they were the first to speak to him though withheld the footage until RTÉ broadcast theirs. Flying back home over Epidauros,

which Heaney had visited a few days earlier, was “an unforgettable end to a journey that had started with another marvellous omen the previous Wednesday”: the scene with apples on the road forming the backbone story of “Into Arcadia.”

“Into Arcadia”

“At the time [the apples] appeared like the bounty of Ceres,” the poet says (*Stepping Stones* 372), echoing the Yeatsian “bounty of Sweden” in the same interview (369). The Arcadian cornucopia clearly reflects the immaterial and material wealth of the Nobel Prize recognition, especially since one of the manuscripts of this sonnet is entitled “October 5 1995.”¹³ Notably, the poet uses the Latin name Ceres instead of the Greek Demeter, and in another version of the sonnet hesitates between the two. This latinising tendency is one of the dominants of his Greek narratives (both travel accounts and some of his Cavafy translations) alongside the archaising process, which starts with the title, where “Hellas” puts modern Greece in the ancient perspective. For the contemporary Greek ear, the term *Ελλάς* (Hellas) connotes the years of the dictatorship of the Colonels (1967–1974) who delighted in the use of purist *katharevousa* based on forms of ancient Greek and made it the compulsory language of education. Greek citizens use the demotic term *Ελλάδα* (Greece), and characteristically, Manolis Savidis in the first book publication of Heaney’s “Sonnets” in *Αλφάβητα* (2000) translates “Hellas” into “Ελλάδα,” ending up with “Sonnets from Greece.”

The pastoral “Into Arcadia” opening the sonnet cycle is preceded by “Glanmore Eclogue,” and, in general, *Electric Light* notably makes extensive use of the pastoral genre. In the volume, the author consistently applies the term “eclogue,” derived from Greek *εκλογή* (“selection”) but introduced by late Latin grammarians to designate Virgil’s bucolics and ever since associated primarily with Virgil. Frequently in his Greece-inspired work, Heaney relies on his Latin education as a lens for Greek antiquity; as John Dillon observes, “Alphabets” in *The Haw Lantern* (1987) clearly offer “glimpses ... of old-style Latin teaching in St. Columb’s College in Derry” followed by “the shades of lambda, delta and omega ... gracefully worked into the rural landscape” (“Classical Allusions” 55); we may add that this process is conducted in the *dinnseanchas* vein known from Heaney’s use of Gaelic in other poems (“Anahorish,” “Broagh”). The “eclogue” replaces Theocritus’s “idyll” (Greek *εἰδύλλιο*) even in Heaney’s translation of Cavafy’s “The First Step,” which recounts a dialogue between Theocritus

and a young poet. In *Electric Light*, “Glanmore Eclogue” is preceded by “Virgil: Eclogue IX,” and Virgil’s Eclogue IV emerges a few pages earlier. Quoting from it, “Bann Valley Eclogue” (similarly to “Glanmore Eclogue”) is set in the Irish landscape, where the Poet prays to the Muses: “Help me to please my hedge-schoolmaster Virgil” (*Electric Light* 11). In his translation of *Aeneid Book VI* published posthumously in 2016, Heaney claims that this translation “is more like a classics homework, the result of a lifelong desire to honour the memory of my Latin teacher at St Columb’s College, Father Michael McGlinchey ... who first turned my ear and temperament to Virgil” (“Translator’s Note” vii). Greece seems to fall into the range of Heaney’s classical interests overshadowed by Rome. A few exceptions to this rule include the change of Greek heroes’ names from their latinised form into ones based on the Greek original: hence, Telemachos (“Pylos”) replaces Telemachus, and Heracles (“The Augean Stables”) replaces Hercules who had appeared in Heaney’s previous collections (“Hercules and Antaeus” in *North*, for instance). Heaney commented on that opposition between Rome and Greece in his oeuvre as follows:

With the Greeks, you’re hand in hand with the world: much of the Roman stuff was texted to them, whereas the Greeks turfed it all out on their own. ... I sense a far greater closeness between the lived life and the official pomps in Greece than in Rome. It’s the vitality of that ritual and romance at ground level that attracts me as much as the big earth-moving machinery of the literature and the myths.

(*Stepping Stones* 294)

Virgil presides over Heaney’s pastoral, but the pastoral sonnet genre in English has been associated mainly with the Elizabethans such as Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney; hence a (post)colonial context comes into the orbit of Heaney’s Greece and will make itself felt in “Desfina.” Oona Frawley in her *Irish Pastoral* refers to Heaney’s poetic persona of Sweeney who “struggles to balance culture and nature, living both within and without” and compares this situation to “Heaney’s struggle ... against pastoral models which he recognizes to be a part of the colonizing tradition in Ireland: Spenser, for example, makes an increasing appearance in his poetry through allusion and by name.” The poet contrasts him with Irish writers such as J. M. Synge or Patrick Kavanagh, “whom he identifies as working on what he tentatively calls ‘frontier pastoral,’¹⁴ a phrase which ... indicates an awareness that Irish pastoral forms are somehow on the border

of other pastoral traditions" (146). Frawley points to Heaney's pair of sonnets most famously presenting Irish landscape in terms of its colonial history, "Act of Union," and concludes: "The pastoral remains, to cite an essay of Heaney's out of context, an 'imagined realm ... a placeless heaven rather than a heavenly place'¹⁵" (147–148). The majority of Heaney's Greek sonnets, however, approach "a heavenly place" rather than "a placeless heaven," with the notable exception of "The Augean Stables."

In "Into Arcadia," the opulence of nature (walnuts, apples), the lorry-cornucopia, the farmer and the goatherd all strike an idyllic note, while the poem bursts with positive energy and serene tone. One of the manuscripts of this sonnet begins with the variants alluding to the goddess of nature's fertility, Ceres/Demeter. Yet in the midst of the idyll, in the middle of the sonnet, Argos haunts Arcadia with the connotation of the Trojan War; while the apple imagery¹⁶ in Greek mythology, apart from the Garden of the Hesperides possibly located in Arcadia, relates to the beauty contest that resulted in the abduction of Helen. In the Ceres/Demeter manuscript of "Into Arcadia," Heaney included an unsettling reference: "Our tyres scrunched them/ And the affront to plenty in that midst/ Was like Nazi ...," the line left unfinished.¹⁷ If we look at some verbs and phrases employed in "Into Arcadia," such as "burst open," "raunched and scrunched" or "fleshed and spattered," compare them with "Trampling the burst shells and crunching down" in "Conkers," or with "gravel crunching" in "Bassae," we notice the violence or destruction hidden in the protagonist's actions, as if he was intruding upon the paradise, performing the real "affront to plenty."

The figure of the farmer who returned from Melbourne relates, in Heaney's sonnet, to the opulence (walnuts), Greek inventiveness (irrigation system) and Hesiod (the poet farmer), with whom Heaney strongly identified in his "Greek Experience" speech. Perceived through this pastoral and historical lens, the farmer figure would probably be interpreted differently by contemporary Greeks. As a result of the economic migration, Melbourne hosts one of the largest Greek diasporas in the world. With his dated farming methods unaided by machines, the farmer's return to his native land evinces homesickness rather than prosperity achieved abroad. This incongruity of the poetic representation with the real-life background intertwines with the incompatible image of the goatherd and goats in front of the gas station, the goatherd "subsisting beyond eclogue and translation."

The two constituents of this equivocal ending of the sonnet lend themselves to various interpretations and contexts. The metaphor

“subsisting beyond eclogue” freezes the goatherd in time, imposing the eternal-present perspective. As a real man, he endures beyond Heaney’s eclogue and their chance meeting. As an “eternal” epitome, he persists in literature beyond ancient or modern eclogues. Keeping in mind the traditional dialogic form of eclogue, it is exactly dialogue that fails between the goatherd, who does not speak English, and the poet, who does not speak Modern Greek. One of the manuscripts of “Into Arcadia” ends with an even more radical line: the goatherd is “Still untranslated from his noon-day eclogue,” where the human is equated with text or language. The “translation” which ends the sonnet offers as much a linguistic as cultural and temporal dimensions, bringing forth the Latin root of *translatio* as “transfer” or “transport”. Heaney perceives the goatherd as an element of the landscape-text, similar to the landscape in Lawrence Durrell’s poem “To Argos,” where, however, it is a Greek shepherd, not the foreigner, who “Takes like a text of stone /A familiar cloud-shape of fortress” (*Collected Poems* 88–89). As Edmund Keeley observed, “the living Greeks” in Durrell’s poem “are the only substantial avenue to the ancient past ... while the foreign traveler, now with no more than a borrowed access to local history ..., will likely leave the Greek scene with a heart-breaking sense of what is beyond his reach” (*Inventing Paradise* 121).

To briefly compare the pastoral imagery of two Irish poems published within a year’s span, “Into Arcadia”¹⁸ and Mahon’s “Aphrodite’s Pool,” both poets contemplate nature in the present and in the mythical dimensions from a certain distance. Greek landscape and goats/donkeys are set against the modern world with a dose of incongruence or humour. While Heaney limits the intrusion of modernity into rural life to motorisation, Mahon figures as an urban creature on an island governed as much by nature as it is by technology. In both poems, the pastoral seems to eventually lie somewhere beyond reach: “beyond eclogue” in “Into Arcadia” and with the nymphs departed in “Aphrodite’s Pool,” although in general, Mahon’s pastoral is much more ironic than Heaney’s.

“Conkers”

The Arcadian serenity of the first poem—nature’s opulence and people’s “revelling”—subsides to the military drill of “Conkers,” the second sonnet devoted to Heaney’s visit to the archaeological site of ancient Sparta. Introduced already in the marching rhythm of the first line composed of

mostly one-syllable words and internal rhymes ("All along the dank, lank, rock-floored lane"), this spirit of Spartan ideals and discipline has been rendered in the sonnet in the series of plosives, rolls, onomatopoeia, short sentences and verbless clauses ("Rings of defence. Breached walls"). Part of the imagery interacts semantically with the preceding sonnet ("trained" and "crossed the border" in "Into Arcadia") and the following ones ("Blocked doors and packed floors" in "Augean Stables"; "roped off" in "Castalian Spring"; "besieged" in "Hyperborean"). Some of these images focus on liminality, expressed ultimately in the uncollected "Mycenae": "an illumined limen/We'd crossed ahead of time, foreshadowed bodies," suggesting that Heaney in his Greek sonnets explores the border of not only antiquity and contemporaneity, myth and reality, but also this world and the other world.

From a rather peaceful pastoral we move to a militant epic, or to borrow Sidney Burris's term, a "militarized pastoral" (66); from a long car drive to ascending the acropolis on foot between the cyclopic walls. Although in both poems Heaney employs similarly sounding words ("scrunched" and "crunching"), the "Into Arcadia" image of ecstatic revelling in being "juiced up and fleshed and spattered" by apples evolves into the protagonists' pity over their own cruelty and the lost beauty of conkers: they "couldn't help" destroying "The high-gloss horse-chestnuts." However, there is a certain pleasure in this military game: remembering conkers as a children's game, the speaker with a boyish air of conspiracy enacts a conqueror of the ancient hill, eventually "looting" the conkers. An alternative variant of this game is called "conquerors," and two early typescript versions of Heaney's poem bear this title.¹⁹

After the "looted conkers" unmask the speaker's stratagem breaking the war spell and releasing the tension, the poem continues with an unheard story by Dimitri Hadzi gesticulating vividly. The narrative takes a fairy-tale turn with the appearance of "a daylight moon" behind the storyteller, although an early version, still in the military vein, mentions his "musters."²⁰ The communication between the speaker and the rest of his company is obstructed not only by distance but also by protruding plants, namely "much thick acanthus." With the exception of the ancient acanthus (interestingly translated by Savidis as *ασπαλάθοι* [aspalathoi],²¹ a different plant alluding to Heaney's "To George Seferis in the Underworld"), nature in "Conkers" mediates rather than obscures understanding between Greece and Ireland.

Elmer Andrews in “The Spirit’s Protest” observes that “Heaney’s own poetry familiarises the remote—Dante, Virgil, Homer; and defamiliarises the ordinary—beds, boats, a basket of chestnuts, a schoolbag, a pitchfork, a game of football” (*Seamus Heaney: A Collection...* 224). The poet himself, in his 2012 essay “Mossbawn via Mantua,” credits it to the influence of the Romantics. Together with William Wordsworth’s preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, where “ordinary things” were “presented to the mind in an unusual way,” S. T. Coleridge in *Biografia Literaria* is presiding over Heaney’s “refamiliarisation,” “making a case for poetry as a matter of refamiliarisation rather than defamiliarisation,” the process further linked to reviewing “the Irish home ground ... in the light of certain European perspectives” (“Mossbawn via Mantua” 19). In “Conkers,” the refamiliarisation of objects helps in reviewing the Greek ground in the light of an Irish perspective. Inspecting the horse chestnuts, Heaney recalls his childhood and develops a chain of associations starting with the typically Irish kelp. The chestnuts looted from the Spartan “dank ... lane” resembling Irish paths become talismans, pieces of home “swinging nicely” in his bag. Breaking through the Spartan defence system, the speaker “conquers the enemy’s stronghold” with nature and language conniving in this act. “Conkers” faintly echoes the militant redress of nature and language in “To George Seferis in the Underworld”: just as “conkers” is a dialect word for chestnuts in this poem, “seggans” replaces sedge in “To George Seferis...”

In the background of “Conkers,” among its untold stories, is the narrative linking this sonnet to “Into Arcadia,” the “Greek Experience” speech (“Αρχαίοι μύθοι...”) and Heaney’s evocations of Hesiod in relation to his own rural background. While at the archaeological museum of Sparta, Heaney and Hadzi admired votive sickles from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. “I felt completely at home because, among other things, the sickle blade in its ancient Spartan shape was something which I myself had plied when facing hedges at home on our farm,” Heaney remembers (“On the Art of Dimitri Hadzi” 127). The poet declared the nexus of “art and anthropology and autobiography” to have “contrived” in bringing them all to that place,

a point of intersection between time and the timeless, something made apparent by a note I entered in my diary on the spot that morning: “Then drive round to the sanctuary of Artemis... Eucalyptus trees. Stele lying there,

beautifully lettered. D[imitri Hadzi]. says: "Any museum in America would want it." But there it lies. (127)

The prophetic elements of "Desfina" and "Castalian Spring" can also be paired with the spirit of Hadzi's work as identified by Heaney: "Half lost in work and half ecstatic, / Both down-to-earth and Graeco-vatic!" (128). This "intersection between time and timeless" presides over the poet's Greece, the intersection between the present moment (and, rarely, modern Greek history) and ancient myth and art.

Just as the goatherd in "Into Arcadia" has been endowed with such a timeless dimension, Hadzi in "Conkers" takes on the features of a centaur. Known in mythology for seducing and abducting women, the centaur-Dimitri "nodded, nodded, nodded towards the spouses" hidden behind acanthus, speaking but not heard. The centaur figure alludes to Hadzi's own sculptural work, but "Sonnets from Hellas" also evoke the Labours of Heracles and are guarded by his shade: the Heracles who on his way to the Garden of the Hesperides (the apples of "Into Arcadia") wins over centaurs.

A closer investigation into the place names and stories of the "Sonnets" reveals a constant shift of (often unexpressed) mythological and historical narratives. "Into Arcadia," "Conkers" and "Pylos" are the points of intersection between the Homeric narrative and the Labours of Heracles. "Into Arcadia" hides the premonitions of the *Iliad* (Argos; apples in Paris's judgement) on the one hand, and Heracles's labours on the other (the eleventh labour at the Garden of the Hesperides, and possibly the sixth labour performed in Arcadia). In "Conkers" the reader confronts both centaurs (Heracles) and Sparta (the *Iliad*). The passage from "Conkers" to "Pylos" reverses the order of the *Odyssey*, where Telemachos travels from Pylos to Sparta. "Pylos" focuses on Homer (Nestor) and links to Heracles (the continuation of the bow story, omitted in the sonnet). "Augean Stables" broods on Heracles (fifth labour) and the Olympic games (Sean Brown). "Castalian Spring" combines the context of the Delphic oracle (ritual washing) with the myth of poetic inspiration, which is further explored in "Desfina" (in the image of Parnassus) alongside the motif of the Delphic oracle (Pythia). One cannot forget Heracles's consultation of the oracle at the outset of his Labours, though no trace of it is to be found in the "Sonnets."

Ultimately, thinking about the Labours, another event of Heracles's eleventh task comes to mind: his winning over Antaeus on his way to the Garden of Hesperides. The Antaeus-Heracles dichotomy has been famously

explored by Heaney ("Hercules and Antaeus," "Antaeus," *Seamus Heaney's Birthday Speech*) as defining his own life and work. "Sonnets from Hellas" start at the "near-ground Antaeon level": the farmer, the goatherd, the lorry with apples ("Into Arcadia"), the damp lane of Sparta and chestnuts on the ground ("Conkers"), and evolve in the final two poems into the Heracleian poetic concerns ("Castalian Spring," Mount Parnassus in "Desfina"). *In between* ("Pylos") Heaney emerges as Telemachos in the process of self-definition. This structure of the "Sonnets" reminds one of Heaney's description of the Antaeus-Heracles tension in his birthday speech, when after calling Antaeus his poetic "guardian spirit," he makes reference to the moment of receiving the Nobel Prize:

I felt at any rate, even back in 1996, that I had better take care to remain on the near-ground level of my life. At the same time, there has been also the necessity to deal with the wider, newer world that the life of poetry had led to. ... The course which I then learned to hold, the course I was made to hold by temperament and by a decided consciousness was a *via media* ... in between.

(*Seamus Heaney's Birthday Speech*)

In the middle episode of the "Sonnets" discussed below we observe Heaney at the threshold of that decision to hold the course of *via media* despite the bounty of Sweden. "Pylos" is also a threshold poem between Heaney's first trip and his second one, and literally, the place of his departure from Greece in 1995 and arrival in 1997.

"Pylos"

Although in "Sonnets from Hellas" the weight of the Nobel news is transferred, under the guise of an omen, into the first poem of the cycle, Pylos occupies the pivotal place in the poet's personal accounts of that moment:

...[W]hen the news came there was as much shock as anything else. We were already on a high of sorts, halfway through a holiday in Greece. ...[A]fter the news reached us, we had a crucial half-day to ourselves, in a place where nobody knew us. One of the happiest moments of the whole affair was a celebration that night – squid and chips at an outside table on the harbour front. Between trawlers and tavernas. Starlight and electric light reflecting in

the water. I felt strange there as Telemachus must have felt. But Telemachus was about to get some guidance from wise old Nestor whereas there's no instructor to tell you how to handle the bounty of Sweden.

(*Stepping Stones* 369)

The final version of "Pylos" in *Electric Light* is a compilation of different circumstances of two days spent there, 6 and 7 October 1995 (Friday and Saturday), before and after the Nobel news reached the author on Friday afternoon (*Stepping Stones* 369–371). Two early versions contain a fragment of a letter Heaney was writing on his balcony on Friday morning, addressed to one of his former Harvard students, Sarah Ruden, who had just published a collection of poems dedicated to the Irish poet: "The poems are more than skilled..." Heaney writes to Ruden.²² At lunch in the same quay taverna as later that evening, Heaney was "watching the little barbounia fish scooting about in the water" (*Stepping Stones* 370). After he heard the news on the balcony ("Σεΐμους Χίvu" 12), "suddenly there were a dozen things to be done. Dimitri took another photo of me, for example, out on the little whitewashed balcony, writing out a statement that Faber needed for the press" (*Stepping Stones* 370–371). Saturday morning the company left for Athens. In the sonnet, the poet uses several elements of this original narrative: *barbounia* [red mullet], balcony, whitewash, letter, Nestor, Telemachos.²³ He moves them all to Saturday morning and centralises them around the motif of education.

Apart from the author's travel account, other narratives incorporated in this sonnet include Book Three of the *Odyssey* where Telemachos, in search of his father, visits Nestor in Pylos, combined with Heaney's memories of Robert Fitzgerald, his mentor at Harvard and "translator of all Homer." As in Homer's story, Telemachos in "Pylos" matures in the course of his quest. In Homer, Nestor, experienced warrior, paragon of wisdom and virtue, not only imparts to Telemachos advice and care, but also recognises his divine guide and mentor (Athena) and thus his charisma. Heaney in "Pylos" pays tribute to Fitzgerald as "Harvard Nestor," his "sponsor and host." Just like the "hedge-schoolmaster Virgil," the older colleague kept watch over Heaney's poetic development. Heavily tried by the demands of his own Harvard professorship, Fitzgerald was concerned about the dangers of Heaney's tenure at the university, "afraid it might interfere with the poetry work. Which is why I called him my 'Harvard Nestor' in one of those sonnets in *Electric Light*," Heaney comments in *Stepping Stones* (273). In "Pylos,"

the mentor's concern comes through as a warning on the ceiling, observed by both Telemachos and Nestor, and as the surveillance of the sea: when Telemachos enters "the mast-bending/Marine breeze," Nestor is "scanning the offing." In real Pylos, standing on the hotel balcony which performed a double function as a vantage point and a place of processing the Nobel news, Heaney seeks advice from the spirit of his experienced friend who had passed away ten years earlier. This time, the "mast-bending breeze" of Stockholm, a far stronger one than that of Harvard, threatens to interfere with his work, and Telemachos's task, in an early version, is "to grasp a helm and lean/Into contention."²⁴ Heaney seeks an "instructor to tell you how to handle the bounty of Sweden"; echoing Yeats's narrative of the Nobel Prize circumstances, he finds this instructor in Fitzgerald.²⁵ The need for spiritual care and support in this fragile moment of sudden joy mixed with a sense of responsibility is expressed via a Greek word *barbounia*, whose soft affectionate sound triggers protective reactions. The double meaning of the verb "schooled," attributed to the fish, indicates the *leitmotif* of education in this poem, which finishes with Fitzgerald who "schooled me ... not yet past caring" (in an early version, "schooling me about Harvard"²⁶).

Through his translations, Fitzgerald also rekindled Heaney's interest in Greek classics, which led the Irish poet to self-rediscovery, the aspect conspicuous in "Pylos." Asked about the prevalence of the Greek material in his earlier collection, *The Haw Lantern* (1987), Heaney responded:

It had always been there at the back of my mind, but I came round to it again when I met up with Robert Fitzgerald and started to reread his *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. The general availability of the classics in translation in the Cambridge [MA] bookshops also had its effect. I was reacquainting myself with the material, and with a part of myself.
(*Stepping Stones* 293)

This process of self-rediscovery may be encapsulated in "Pylos" also in the description of Odysseus's bow, the image borrowed from Book Twenty-One of the *Odyssey*. "The bow strung as a lyre" alludes to Heaney's earlier and later definitions of his own vocation combined with weapons: the pen "snug as a gun" ("Digging"), or "dialect blade" ("To George Seferis in the Underworld"), putting his poetic development in a temporal perspective. In Homer, Telemachos tries out the bow and almost uses it when stopped short by his father: first, he has to watch Odysseus's instructions (although right after this episode the father and the son join forces in the slaughter of the suitors). In his Introduction to Fitzgerald's translation of

the *Odyssey*, Heaney writes about Telemachos being “not sure whether or how to assert himself as master in his own house” (xii), and in “Pylos” the master’s instructions help in this assertion, while the house is a metaphor for poetry. “Pylos” may be called a prequel to an earlier poem, “In Memoriam: Robert Fitzgerald” (*The Haw Lantern*), whose second part continues Homer’s bow story. Odysseus’s arrow flies out “this time ... perfectly aimed towards the vacant centre”: the empty space after Fitzgerald’s death. In “Pylos” Fitzgerald returns as a “far-seeing shadower” to prepare the ground for Heaney’s poetic future by “scanning the offing,” though this Telemachos already knows how to use his “militant” poetic edge.

In that Introduction to the *Odyssey*, Heaney also quotes a fragment of Fitzgerald’s translation about Telemachos riding with Nestor’s son away from Pylos:

...and with streaming manes
they ran for the open country. The tall town
of Pylos sank in the distance,
as all day long they kept the harness shaking.

(xx)

The poet reads this fragment as embodying “a feeling for a world inexorably bound by its planetary motion but at the same time capable of being matched by human purpose and subdued to a human meaning” (xx). An echo of such a feeling of the planetary and the human dimensions coming together may have accompanied Heaney in Pylos on learning the news about the Nobel Prize.

In early versions of “Pylos” we find different variants of Heaney’s mentoring process. One of them involves a function of “the bard as sounding board.”²⁷ The “sounding board” activates connotations not only with advice, but also with the church pulpit and the sermon; in other words, with moral judgement and care. This formulation possibly hints at another poetic authority of the “Sonnets,” Zbigniew Herbert evoked in “Hyperborean.” In *The Government of the Tongue*, Heaney analyses Herbert’s poem “A Knocker” in which a piece of board stands for the resonating force of imagination and poetic choices. Heaney interprets this image as a marriage of ethics and aesthetics, while in “Pylos” Telemachos/Nestor is expected to “judge and advise.” In other words, apart from the psychological support the poet is seeking in the figure of Fitzgerald, he may be pursuing a moral authority in the turning point of his life.

In two early variants, Heaney acts as a mentor to his former Harvard student, writing a letter about her poetic development; while doing that, Telemachos is “discovering he was Nestor,”²⁸ taking his own mentoring turn in the sequence of generations. In one of these manuscripts, Telemachos is described as “Greek” three times in different places. Although the epithet has eventually been removed, the suggestion that the poet was metaphorically assuming Greek nationality may be read not only as a sign of profound identification with the heroes of the *Odyssey*, or with the role of the student/mentor (continued in Heaney’s Cavafy translations), but also with the Greek element.

Landscape seems to mediate between Heaney and *modern* Greece in “Pylos.” In two preceding sonnets, he has archaised this landscape to a considerable degree on the linguistic, historical and mythological levels (Hellas, Hesiod, eclogue, acropolis, acanthus, centaur). Scarcely did he employ modern details of the locality and its people: even the Greek emigrant from Melbourne applies ancient methods “known ..., probably, since Hesiod.” “Pylos” also brims with classical details but opens with the Modern Greek word *barbounia*, and although Heaney possibly knew it from the taverna menu, just as in the lists of traditional Greek dishes quoted in “Desfina,” he makes it symbolise a learning process encapsulated in the maritime onomatopoeic sequence “Wave-clip and flirt, tide-slap and flop and flow” and in the “sandy” alliteration depicting the shore (“Shadows on shelving sand in sandy Pylos”). The speaker observes this yet unpolluted environment (with fish in the port, not far from the wildlife reserve of Voidokoilia) in a serene agility of the Greek light, extolled by Greek poets (Seferis and Elytis included) as the metaphysical force of the natural world. The peace of Heaney’s seascape may be disrupted by ancient references, but the depiction of Telemachos in an early version was also intended to follow nature’s terms: initially it was Telemachos, not the light, that “flashed like an early warning”; the young hero was “giddy from ozone/And skirling gulls and the sheer, marine/Strobe of epic.”²⁹ This fragment brings up the Greek seascape as a part of Heaney’s/Telemachos’s identity and poetry; while the *Odyssey* in particular (the “epic”) has been recognised as the territory of the sea and its light (lighthouse?), Telemachos flashes “to and from myself”³⁰ in self-epiphany like “the whitewashed light of the morning” on the ceiling in the final version of the sonnet.

In the “factual” layer of his sonnet, Heaney omits the more recent history of the place, also embedded in the landscape he must have been looking at from his balcony at the Karalis Beach hotel. In modern Greek

awareness, Pylos is identified with the War of Independence, remembered more as Navarino than as Nestor's seat, and in terms of landscape associated accordingly, more with the bay than with the nearby hill. The memory of the Venetian place name persists in the context of leisure and tourism: located nearby, the only luxury hotel of Messinia is called Costa Navarino, while the annual reconstruction of the 1827 sea battle used to bring crowds of Greek and foreign tourists before the years of the crisis. More than an entertainment value, however, the memory of Navarino possesses a tragic capacity, also ingrained in its landscape. The beautiful bow-shaped perspective of the harbour closes with the long, narrow, rocky island of Σφακτηρία [Sphacteria], the name derived from the verb *σφάζω*, "to slaughter." (Fig. 2.1) Its history goes back to the Peloponnesian Wars, when a handful of Spartans resisted a long Athenian siege there before they surrendered (425 BC). In 1825, a handful of insurgent Greeks and philhellenes on the island were attacked by the Turkish troops of Ibrahim



Fig. 2.1 Pylos harbour, Peloponnese: the Sphacteria islet in the background; the neon of Seamus Heaney's hotel (Karalis Beach) on the promontory, left (photo: author, 2011)

Pasha; among the victims were Dionysios Solomos's friend, the Count of Santarosa, and the Greek leader Tsamados who, as the legend has it, continued to fight on his knees even though he was shot in the leg. The bodies of the dead covered the rocky coast of the island for a long time. Two years later the Ottoman fleet lost the sea battle of Navarino to the allies in the very same bay, practically sealing the Turkish defeat. In the Peloponnese, where the Greek War of Independence started and virtually ended, and where the modern Greek state was born, events like that are still a living memory. The peninsula's major attractions beyond antiquity—places such as Monemvasia, Nauplio and Pylos—stir an emotional attitude in contemporary Greek visitors; some are a must for schoolchildren as an element of patriotic education. For the well-grounded sake of compositional and logical integrity, Heaney in the historical layer of his poem remains consistent with the ancient framework and does not compose a "militarized pastoral" (Burris 66); yet perhaps for a post-Byronic philhellene, he is not "scanning the offing" precisely enough, even though this offing is entirely blocked by the dark bulk of Σφακτηρία. One can summon here one of Seferis's French essays written during the Second World War, "Pour les voyageurs du 'Sea-Adventure,'" where the poet diagnoses: "L'étranger ignore la Grèce et il l'ignore parce qu'il la connaît partiellement." Focusing only on antiquity

n'est pas tout à fait la Grèce. Car la Grèce est une réalité vivante, et, comme toute chose vivante, elle est aussi une réalité mystérieuse. Celui qui n'a pas su sentir ce rythme de vie indiscontinue ...; celui qui n'a point su comprendre, dans son ensemble, comme une chose *actuelle*, ne pourra jamais réaliser ce que la Grèce signifie.

(Δοκιμές Γ' 56–57)

"The Augean Stables"

"The Augean Stables" marks the contextual move from Heaney's 1995 Greek trip to the one of 1997. The first part of this "bilocated" poem (Heaney's term for Mahon's poetry in "Place and Displacement") is situated in Olympia and the second in Heaney's native village of Bellaghy. The first scene opens with a bas-relief at the archaeological museum of Olympia representing Heracles's labours, namely the fragment with Athene directing the hero through the river to clean up Augeas's stables; then the poem sketches the peace and quiet of the ancient site in springtime, with the

profusion of water and vegetation. In the manuscript versions, Heaney was again hesitating over the Latin version of Heracles's name (Hercules), as well as the name of a river plant, changed from bamboo (non-existent in Greece) into the Latin *calamus* derived from the Greek κάλαμος (demotic *καλάμι*). The poet may have originally planned "The Augean Stables" as two sonnets bound together, with the second one being a kind of prayer. A version of the latter, beginning with "Miserere nobis. Papish Latin/Passed through me like wind through the calamus,"³¹ intertwines Greek landscape with the Irish context via Latin (of the Church and of Linnaeus), encapsulating Heaney's initial approach to Greek travels. Linnaeus will return in the uncollected sonnet "Bassae" and act as a Latin lens for Heaney's representations of the Greek fauna and flora. But "Papish Latin" is also an Ulster Unionist term associated with the Catholic minority, which in the context of the second part of "The Augean Stables" gains a linguistic double edge.

The second part of this sonnet is related to the sectarian murder of Sean Brown, chairman of the Bellaghy Gaelic sports club, by a loyalist gang on 11 May 1997. As Heaney states in this sonnet, he heard the news while in Olympia two days later.³² The Irish story relates to the ancient Greek site as if in anticipation of Heaney's locating "a sports day in Bellaghy" in the Greek Underground in his later poem, "Route 110" of *Human Chain* (2010). In "The Augean Stables," the two contexts overlap in the image of "cleansing by water": the hose water removing the victim's blood from the asphalt. In other versions of the sonnet, violent circumstances affect the witnesses ("Water blown back into people's faces"³³), while the cleaning-up process turns out futile ("hosed and hosed and hosed").³⁴ In the reviews of *Electric Light*, this poem received most of the critical—and emotional—attention out of the whole cycle, understandably as it follows the well-trodden paths of Heaney's established poetic patterns.

In his review of the collection, Robert Potts classifies the method of classical reference in this poem as one of Heaney's mannerisms, condemning it as "inappropriate and distasteful":

The water images are actually associated with the murder only by Heaney's fortuitous presence in Olympia.

I may be alone in finding this employment of art and lyricism inappropriate and distasteful, and I may be alone in not finding the cleansing image of the myth any help at all when it comes to the political situation. This does not

mean that I want Heaney to make a political statement, still less propose a solution; it is simply a question of how seriously Heaney took his self-accusation about "The Strand at Lough Beg." ...Heaney, mythologising himself and his subjects, thrusts a borrowed significance onto them. (Potts)

Some facets of Heaney's approach described at the end of this quote resemble Longley's hibernicising of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and his use of lists: the idea of the redress of poetry, on which the cleansing scene clearly rests. Focusing on "the employment of art and lyricism," Potts overlooks the evocative power of the word. Especially the last lines of this scene, "Hose-water smashing hard back off the asphalt/in the car park where his athlete's blood ran cold," rather than "thrusting a borrowed significance onto his subjects" may draw the reader's attention to the general practice, in Northern Ireland, of "washing away" responsibility for murders by manipulated investigations: the practice of which Brown is said to have fallen victim. Heracles's purge implies the necessity of opening congested passages of communication in the North, the "blocked doors and packed floors." Comparing Heaney's purge with Longley's motifs behind "The Butchers" (depicting the 1970s Protestant gang of "Shankill Butchers"), we notice a similar tendency for *katharsis*, though Longley's reasons are more personal:

I took the beginning of Book XXIV [of the *Odyssey*] and ... I hibernicized it. And when I'd finished, I was very frightened. I felt as though I had released something. And also, one of the things that bothered me about the poem was my hatred for various people on the Arts Council [of Northern Ireland, where Longley previously worked] – this was how I would have liked to have behaved, to clean out the Augean stables. So there was a personal emotion in it. I think I would have been less driven to express myself ... if I hadn't been angry and confused and disappointed, which was why I felt rather frightened. (Interview by Broom 19)

Heaney may feel a personal emotion of releasing something that is normally not talked about, and offering a symbolic gesture of "how he would like to have behaved" were he present at the scene in Bellaghy. Behind the waters of Olympia in "The Augean Stables" lies the spirit of fair play (with Brown as the chairman of a sports association), of "peace being talked up" in Northern Ireland in 1997 ("Glanmore Eclogue" in *Electric Light*), and

of nature's rebirth in the spring. Similarly to Longley, Heaney "hibernicizes" the place by understating a loyalist gang, and it does not matter that the poets are of different Northern Irish cultural backgrounds: they both split the wound open.

Before reading this poem in Athens on 4 February 2004,³⁵ Heaney said that among things Greece and Ireland have in common are "holy wells, holy wars and holy terrors" (Nilan "A Seamus Heaney Reading"), and this comment applies to "The Augean Stables" just as it does to "Mycenae Lookout": both poems juxtapose images of bloodshed with those of wells, springs, rivers which have the power of cleansing. Disturbingly, the ending of "The Augean Stables" with the "hose-water smashing hard back off the asphalt" reminds the reader of the "gushing taps" at the end of "Mycenae Lookout"; at the same time, the end of the latter poem recreates Heaney's symbolism of the beginning and centre of his world (the "iron pumps" echoing his "Mossbawn" essay). "The Augean Stables" revives the whole procession of Heaney's "holy wells" and healing waters in ancient Greek contexts: from the poetic well of "Personal Helicon" to that of "Castalian Spring"; from the soldiers "puddling at the source" to remove the dirt of the warfare in "Mycenae Lookout" ("His Reverie of Water" again) to the healing baths of the *Asklepeio* in Epidauros, where Heaney comments: "Sanctuaries of Asclepius... /Were equivalents ... of the cure/By poetry that cannot be coerced" ("Out of the Bag" in *Electric Light*). "Mycenae Lookout" characteristically fuses violence with the healing properties of water; "Out of the Bag" refers to the same properties and to poetry that cannot be "forced"; while the fourth and the fifth of "Sonnets from Hellas," "The Augean Stables" and "Castalian Spring," offer a diptych of both approaches.

Lorna Hardwick observes that in "The Augean Stables" "the rural watery places in Greece both resonate with and chafe against the rock-hard image of Ireland" ("Fuzzy Connections" 52). The "chafing" may be true about the juxtaposition, in "The Augean Stables," of Olympia and the Bellaghy scene, whose tone and imagery could be termed "rock-hard." Yet the juxtaposition of Greek and Irish *landscapes* leads to different conclusions. Whereas other ancient sites Heaney visited—Delphi, Acropolis, Mycenae—are located in dramatic landscapes, topping or hanging from steep rocks, Olympia is situated on a flat stretch of ground and enjoys the benefit of water. For this reason, in the spring it is covered with flowers and trees in blossom, idyllically green, *unusually* green for Greece. Hardwick's "rock-hard image" would normally be more typical of Greece than Ireland,

contrary to “rural watery places.” In comparison, Longley’s “Butchers” was inspired by the usual bareness of the Greek landscape juxtaposed with Co. Mayo:

Ithaca must have looked very like this little secret part of Mayo, which is sandy and remote. ...[I]t seemed to me that Odysseus would feel perfectly at home there – if slightly cold and damp – in that sort of an Irish scene – the smallholdings, the outhouses and the whitewashed walls. But I’ve often thought that that part of Ireland – especially when it’s in the middle of a heatwave ... looks like Greece. Or Greece looks like a dust-bowl version of Ireland.
(Interview by Broom 18)

Hardwick points to Patrick Kavanagh’s heritage in Heaney’s oeuvre, including “leaping to connect local and global” (allusion to Kavanagh’s “Epic”), and observes that in his Greek sonnets “Heaney is at home in the Greek landscape as well as the Irish” (“Fuzzy Connections” 51–52). One should make a reservation that the poet is at home mainly in the *landscape of Greek mythology*. Interviewing Heaney during one of his later travels (2004), *Athens News* noted:

Heaney’s affinity with ‘Hellas’ started long before his first visit to Greece in 1995. “As Keats said, I travelled in the realm of the gold before I actually arrived in the place in person. I had done a certain amount of preparation – all my life in one way or another. ...The Greek imprint was very strong. It was a perfect moment to arrive.”

(MacLellan)

The landscape of Greek mythology is thus intensified by Heaney’s reception of Keats’s sonnet inspired by Chapman’s English translation of Homer, while the sequence of literary works in question amounts to a quadruple palimpsest. Heaney’s first journey to Greece appears to have been conducted in the spirit of Byronic philhellenism: just as Keats’s, it is a journey of the mind, the one Edward Whittmore describes in *Jerusalem Poker*: “Greece has always been more of an idea than a place. ...An idea doesn’t die” (113). In reference to an “idea of the poem as an imaginative journey” Heaney once stated: “I am a child of Romanticism as much as anything else” (Interview with Morgan). Hence, his first Greek trip also

possesses the character of a literary voyage, with Homer as the source for Keats, Chapman and Fitzgerald. The “physical” journey of 1995 probably completed or confirmed that mental *ur*-image: it was “a perfect moment to arrive” and touch the past, the myth, the source, the word. Heaney in the 1990s could not have known that one of his literary masters in the “Sonnets,” Zbigniew Herbert, had conducted his Greek voyages in a similar spirit but with a high dose of scepticism and fear that the reality he was going to face could not live up to the myth.³⁶

Perhaps the most powerful image of the healing Greek landscape, experienced on the same May 1997 trip, is that of Epidauros and its sanctuary of Asclepius in “Out of the Bag.” It does not belong to “Sonnets from Hellas” but deserves a special mention as a counterpoint for “The Augean Stables” from the same travel narrative. Remembering friends undergoing difficult treatment, the speaker of Part Three of “Out of the Bag” feels tired and inclined to “lie down/Under hogweed, under seeded grass,” hogweed being used as a natural medicine. The real *Asklepeio* at Epidauros indeed exudes peace and quiet in the spring: it is located on a small plateau with a long vista of the ancient stadium covered with grass, and a row of broken columns remaining from the sanctuary on a slightly higher level. “I didn’t want to leave the place or link up with the others,” says the speaker, and his need for solitary contemplation of the landscape in “the precincts of the god,” as well as the need to use its healing powers to recover from fatigue, meet the favourable circumstances of the “pre-tourist sunlight” before the high season starts in June. Although in *Stepping Stones* Heaney identifies Epidauros with a “touch of Knock Shrine” (the destination of Catholic pilgrimages in Co. Mayo, similar to Lourdes) and situates the place in the context of the “clannish energy about the classical and pre-classical Greeks that feels familiar” (294), there is no trace of that “clannish energy” in Part Three of “Out of the Bag.” The speaker’s weakness and isolation are treated by the only energy present: the one residing in the landscape. Alluding to the pre-tourist era in general, the metaphor of “the pre-tourist light” continues into the primary light chasing out fatigue and inner darkness:

...to be visited in the very eye of the day
By Hygeia, his daughter, her name still clarifying
The haven of light she was, the undarkening door.

Although other parts of the poem refer to Heaney's anxieties over the health of his family, this statement more generally refers to the light of classical Greece, which the poet will talk about in his "Greek experience" speech.

Some years later, the healing process after the stroke which Heaney suffered in 2006 will make him juxtapose the image of his physiotherapy with a reference to a maimed sculpture at Delphi (*Human Chain* 16). Mirrored on the next page is the poem "Miracle" (17), reverberating with the early version of the title of "Out of the Bag," "Miraculum": as if, in the attempt to regain health, Heaney sought to reconnect with the spirit of the natural and cultural landscape of Greece.

Delphi: "Castalian Spring" and "Desfina"

The last two sonnets of the cycle, "Castalian Spring" and "Desfina," do not specify their weighty ancient location. Delphi is camouflaged as "the god Apollo's giddy cliff" ("Castalian Spring") and masquerades in "the Delphic squeal" of a kitchen hag working in a nearby village ("Desfina"). The poet describes the spring situated between two Delphic archaeological sites, a taverna at the foot of Parnassus and a village outside Delphi (Desfina), but not Delphi itself, as if the name of the sacred space remained somehow sacred. Later in *Human Chain* (2010), he revisits, in his imagination, the Delphi Archaeological Museum, devoting the third part of "Chanson d'Aventure" to the parallel between their most famous exhibit, the Ἡρώχος (Charioteer), and his own posture during a physiotherapy session after the 2006 stroke. Initially however, before *Electric Light*, the poet may have counted on different associations. In early versions the place name was misspelled as "Delsfina,"³⁷ obviously combining the word "Delphi" with the Greek suffix of a female name. The title may have thus been planned to indicate the female protagonist of the poem, a suggestion confirmed by an alternative title of this sonnet printed in *The Kenyon Review* as "Desfina: An Cailleach Feasa."

In "Castalian Spring," the poet's pilgrimage to the spring of inspiration turns out to be a challenging adventure: he has to confront a furious female guard who does not allow him to trespass the rope fencing the source. Her Homeric epithet "Thunderface" is embedded in an expletive turned into a "mythical" anathema: "to hell with all who'd stop me, thunderface!" The hero's quest is fulfilled when he finally "bows and mouths in sweetness and defiance"; an adequate Greek counterpart of this activity would be the verb

προσκυνώ meaning both to “bow before a sanctity” and “to make a pilgrimage.” Not only does the speaker’s determination invalidate the guard’s wrath but it also resembles a religious ceremony of self-anointment: Heaney “had vowed ... to arrogate/That much to myself and be the poet/Under god Apollo’s giddy cliff.” Just as in “The Augean Stables,” water possesses sacred qualities: “the inner water sanctum,” the “sweetness and defiance” recalling the “sweet dissolutions” of the “Stables.” In the sonnet, these sacred properties refer only to poetry, though in antiquity it was also the point of ritual washing for pilgrims and athletes.

Just like Delphi, the oracle itself is hardly noticeable: the only understated presence of the sacred augur, Pythia, can be detected in the taverna where the Heaney party are eating and “pretending not to hear the Delphic squeal/Of the steel-haired *cailleach* in the scullery.” Greek women in the “Sonnets” have been designated exclusively and unfavourably by ancient markers, with the female Cerberus guarding the Spring and the Delphic hag shrieking in the kitchen. Adding the ancient connotations of Greek men (the goatherd “beyond eclogue” and the farmer obeying ancient farming methods), one can conclude that flesh-and-blood Greeks have been coded under names and disguises. This “mythological” transformation occasionally affects the travelling party, in Sparta for instance where they play the conquerors of the ancient acropolis, or at the end of “Desfina” when they drive “siren-tyred and manic on the horn”; yet Dimitri the Greek, though a member of this party (Hadzi), already features as a centaur perused through the leaves of ancient acanthus.

The importance of “the Irish imprint” on “Desfina” comes through in an alternative, extended title of this sonnet published in *The Kenyon Review* of Spring 2001: “Desfina: *An Cailleach Feasa*.”³⁸ In general, this sonnet includes several layers of “translation” into and from various languages. Heaney invents Gaelic names for “Mount Parnassus” (Irish “*Slieve na mBard*,” “mount of the bard,” and “*Knock Filíocht*,” “poetry hill”; Scottish “*Ben Duan*,” “mount of the song/poem”) and follows with an English “version” (“Poetry Hill”). This linguistic game, indicative of the notion of the poetic community transgressing spatial and temporal borders, represents an instance of hibernicisation whose aim is the art of *dinnseanchas*, making words into a landscape and landscape into words. The poet also transfers Mount Parnassus into the realm of Celtic mythology, while its original Greek inhabitant, Pythia, has been metamorphosed into an Irish hag or sorceress, *cailleach*. Similar to Pythia, *cailleach* was originally veiled (as a version of its etymology indicates),

involved in rituals and difficult to “sedate” like the hag in Heaney’s sonnet. Unlike Pythia, she could harness the forces of nature to create mountains, which is Heaney’s poetic activity in “Desfina.”

The sonnet is propelled by acoustic sequences, such as the alliterative “Delphic squeal ... in the scullery” or “siren-tyred,” and reverberations, for instance “manic on the horn” resounding with *θεία μανία* [theia mania], divine madness once inspiring the ancient oracle and now the poet. An analogous auditory incantation organises an apparently Modern Greek selection of local dishes, “horta, tarama, houmos” and its rhyme “ouzos”; *apparently* Greek, as the Turkish *tarama* features in Greek cuisine, but “houmos” does not, however hellenised the transcription of the Arabic term. The second sequence of “local” dishes in the poem, containing just two Greek or quasi-Greek words (“retsina” and the hellenised Turkish borrowing of “dolmades”), already reaches beyond cultural intricacies to end with “french fries even”; but the speaker’s head is already “light” with ouzo and retsina, which sanctifies this profusion and disorder. In his culinary lists, Heaney anglicises Greek grammar (“ouzos” instead of “ouza”), but also restores a Turkish borrowing to its source (stripping “tarama” of the final “s” it possesses in Greek), while keeping the Greek plural (“dolmades,” from Turkish *dolma*).

All these lexical explorations, though conducted in a humorous tone, record the colonial history of both countries: the Ottoman occupation of Greece and the English in Ireland. While the Ottoman record in the Greek language—the issue the reborn Greece was struggling with throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—may have strayed into “Desfina” by chance, the English/Gaelic register in the poem is an act of a poetic subversion. By imposing a Gaelic matrix on his English-language sonnet, the genre whose pastoral properties were immortalised by the Elizabethan conquerors of Ireland, Heaney reclaims the native territory of his mother tongue, analogous to putting the native *bawn* into his *Beowulf* translation. He is testing the edge of the language against the Official Standard, to use Tom Paulin’s terminology,³⁹ just as he tested the edge of vernacular *seggans* in “To George Seferis in the Underworld.”

Paradoxically, the only words italicised in “Desfina,” that is, recognised as foreign, are Gaelic. Apart from the menu lists involving Modern Greek, Turkish and Arabic words, the sonnet cites an ancient Greek word “boustrophedon” at the critical final position. All of these foreign terms have been provided in roman type as if used in English on an everyday basis. The reader is thus confronted with an unusual text by an Irish poet

“at home” with ancient Greek, where native Gaelic has been defamiliarised. Why should the author choose Gaelic as a case apart? Greek words have been transcribed in the Latin alphabet for the obvious reason of their legibility for an Anglophone reader; but is Gaelic “*filiocht*” (“poetry”) less decipherable than Greek “*horta*” (“boiled greens”)? Consistently, though, the poet customises foreign words: resigning from Greek and Arabic alphabets, he also favours anglicised versions of Gaelic geography (*ben* instead of *beann*; *slieve* for Gaelic *sliabh*; *knock* for *cnoc*). This gesture affirms the postcolonial deprivation of his home ground alongside Heaney’s own status of a “linguistic tourist,” an English-language poet in Ireland, the issue he famously discussed in “Broagh,” “Toome,” “Traditions,” *Preoccupations*, *Beowulf* and many other texts. John Engle’s comment, though referring to John Montague, may be of relevance here:

Brought up in a world in which the historical threat to the indigenous language still hangs heavy, where full access to public identity is available only through what can be read as a form of linguistic collaboration, language in its many forms remains both a subject of preoccupation and a backdrop conditioning any attempt to make sense of cultural heritage. (6)

Heaney was aware of linguistic similarities between Ireland and Greece but rightly indicated the loss of Irish as a more dramatic rupture in the cultural continuity. In the interview for *Athens News* in February 2004 the poet states:

[Heaney] observes a number of parallels between the Irish and Greek cultural landscapes. Both cultures have strong pre-Christian mythologies that resonate within “the acoustic of each nation.” The Greek Heracles has its Irish counterparts Cuchulain and Fionn mac Cumhail. On top of pagan foundations both countries have built strong Christian traditions, and there is a shared experience of dominance by “imperial” powers. These inheritances have undoubtedly affected the literatures of both nations. Although the experiences are not identical, he says “it’s easier for me to posit resemblances rather than to define the differences. One of the fundamental differences in Ireland is that our language changed. You know, the Greek language is a kind of ‘ether shield’ that keeps things safe in a way. Even though there’s a difference between Greek now and Greek then, it’s the one tree sprouting its branches. ...” (MacIellan)

In “Desfina,” this rupture in the history of Irish Gaelic is symbolised by italics, as opposed to the continuity of Greek (however conditional) put in roman type, though both languages can be related to the “experience of dominance by ‘imperial’ powers.” Celtic and Greek mythologies “resonating within ‘the acoustic of each nation’” are manifest in the poem’s sound logic of the myth (the Parnassus list; the speaker’s attributes “hyper, boozed, borean”; the “squeal-*cailleach*-scullery” sequence; the kenning-like Homeric epithet “siren-tyred”). Eventually, ancient Greek as the “tree sprouting its branches” appears in “Desfina” in “boustrophedon” surviving since antiquity.

The linguistic brew of “Desfina” obviously interlocks also with the implications of tourism. In “Desfina,” beyond the Romantic traveller’s musing over Mount Parnassus, the speaker appears more of a tourist. Usually a tourist travels from his native “here” to the foreign “there,” familiarising “there” with the templates of “here,” just as Heaney playing Gaelic name games. Yet the speaker of “Desfina” also “goes local,” immersed so much in his Greek surroundings that the geographically distant Gaelic element paradoxically evolves into “there.” The homely feel of Greek mythology in the sonnet triggers the nonchalant tour of Greek modernity, while the Irish outings function as a “detour” adding some exotic colour. The speaker’s “Greek” insouciance in this final sonnet marks a stage of fulfilment when compared to the communication gap of the initial “Into Arcadia.” “Desfina” also shares some characteristics of Mahon’s “Aphrodite’s Pool” and its (mock) tourist’s stance: catalogues, linguistic tempo, light register, revelling spirit, ancient background, sea-related and other kennings (Heaney’s “siren-tyred,” Mahon’s “sea-lanes,” “star-net,” “atom-dance”), all of which suggest a pure sensual enjoyment of the moment, especially with both speakers engaging in playful activities. In an early version of “Desfina,” Heaney refers to composing the list of Mount Parnassus names as “We waxed – we vied – cod-etymological”⁴⁰ (instead of the final “We gaelicized”), clearly pointing to that child-like enthusiasm.

Situating defamiliarisation processes in “Desfina” in the wider context of Heaney’s reflection on this issue in an interview, one arrives at his analysis of exile in Irish literature:

...[F]rom the beginning to the end of the Irish tradition, there is this example of exiling yourself from the familiar in order to compose your soul – which is a parallel activity, I suppose, to composing poetry. ...If things go

well for you in an act of writing you are displaced to a distance and insulated within an elsewhere that gives you an exiled perspective on the usual. One could extend the meaning of "exile" to include that defamiliarisation or strangeness which happens in the act of writing.

(Interview by Morgan)

This opinion recalls Heaney's own position of an "inner émigré" in "Exposure." In the interview, he juxtaposes the "social persona" with the *daimon*, the definition of which involves creativity and inspiration, resonating with his own "idea of the poem as an imaginative journey." The poet traces this idea to Romanticism, Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," and Greek and Celtic mythology (the Muse "who gives you access to another stratum of your being" and Oisín travelling to the paradise island of Tír na nÓg). "You get ... 'transported' in English: those words tell you what happens when the poetic trance begins" (Interview by Morgan). We can relate these reflections to his travels "in the realms of gold" (of Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" reflected in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium") before coming to Homer's "demesne" in 1995. All the imaginative prisms of his Greek journey, combined with internal quest and defamiliarisation, may make at least part of his visit a "discovery of oneself," beside the "discovery of landscape," to paraphrase Lawrence Durrell (*Prospero's Cell* 11). Most evident in "Pylos," this approach of self-discovery can be also distinguished in Heaney's use of the term "hyperborean."

"Hyperborean"

The alliterative sequence "hyper, boozed, borean" in "Desfina," partly derived from ancient Greek ("hyper" and "borean," "above the north wind"), remains from the original sonnet devoted to Zbigniew Herbert. The noble-sounding title of this sonnet, "Hyperborean," cleft in two and separated by the slangish "boozed," has been ciphered in "Desfina" in reference to Heaney himself. The same stratagem appears in an early version of "Castalian Spring" in the phrase "come from beyond the north wind,"⁴¹ which refers to the speaker. "Hyperborean" published half a year after Herbert's death, in *The New Yorker* of 18 January 1999, addresses the Polish poet in the following manner: "You were a Hyperborean, / One of those at the back of the north wind" ("A Hyperborean"). Having

dismantled the Herbert sonnet, Heaney creatively uses its crucial formulation to define his own position towards the Greek element: in terms of the North-South divide, but also in terms of poetry. In that mythical land of happiness Pindar believed Hyperboreans to devote their time exclusively to poetry, while Apollo was to be the only Greek god worshipped there.

With the original sonnet combining allusions to Apollo and Delphi, one of the reasons for excluding it from the sequence may have lain in the proportions of the material revolving around Delphi. The remaining six-line final part of this poem, included in *Electric Light* as “To the Shade of Zbigniew Herbert,” has been stripped of Delphic references. “The inside of your head was a littered Delphi,” Heaney begins the original sonnet, with the litter hinting at Herbert’s scepticism towards mythology and his habit of transporting that mythology into contemporary dimensions. Instead of a steel-haired hag, the oracle in this sonnet is “the one thing still uncensored”: the spring of truth, the bastion of autonomy. Alluding to Herbert’s volume composed in times of the martial law in Poland (1981–1983), *The Report from A Besieged City*, Heaney situates “the god’s besieged hill sanctuary” in Herbert’s independent mind, pointing to the difficulty of guarding poetic integrity in the territory dominated by the “captive minds,” to borrow Miłosz’s formulation for writers seduced by Communism. The Irish poet follows his interpretation of Herbert’s situation and poetry already established in *The Government of the Tongue* (in two essays, “The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov’s Cognac and a Knocker” and “Atlas of Civilization”), but also points to “ruined temples,” which may also be read as Herbert’s native city of Lvov that he had to flee during the war.

“The *via sacra* a *via crucis* partly/ And partly actual stone,” Heaney continues in a tone suggestive of another characteristic of Herbert’s poetry: the deep sympathy in suffering and the attention given to the material nature as an end in itself, recorded, for instance, in “Pebble” of the early volume *Study of an Object* (1961). Before going to Delphi, Heaney himself devoted a poem to a “Stone from Delphi” (part five of “Shelf Life” in *Station Island* 1984). Although Herbert’s pebble is mute, its self-containedness (“equal to itself/mindful of its limits”⁴²) reminds one of Heaney’s “Delphic” stone talisman of restrained expression (“that I may ... govern my tongue”). While Herbert’s poem is an empirical meditation on an object with ethical implications, and Heaney’s is the prayer to escape the “Troubles,” Heaney’s longing for “the god” Apollo to speak “in my untrammelled mouth” (“Stone from Delphi”) resounds in his Herbert

sonnet with the oracle as “the one thing still uncensored.” Herbert’s pebble whose “ardour and coldness/are just and full of dignity” corresponds to Heaney’s “stone verdict” and other instances of nature’s redress in his poetry, such as Diogenes’s haw lantern, “the light by which to judge consciences” (Vendler 23).

Herbert was one of Heaney’s “mentors” not only in the issues of the public role of the poet, of ethical and aesthetic choices, of the use of parable or the ironic distance, but also in the application of the classics to modernity, the sphere where he achieved unsurpassed mastery. It remains certain that the original plan for “Sonnets from Hellas” to include “Hyperborean” (as the fourth and last sonnet, after “Into Arcadia,” “Conkers” and “Augean Stables,” according to one of the manuscripts,⁴³ or the fourth of nine sonnets in Savidis’s *Αλφάβητα*) points exactly at this feature of Herbert’s poetry. The Polish poet was one of Heaney’s literary guides to Greece. In *The Haw Lantern*, where classical references⁴⁴ are thriving beside allusions to Polish poetry and political situation, Herbert is one of the intermediaries of this interconnection, or even an inspiration for Heaney to rely on classical allusion to the impressive extent exemplified by that volume.

The six-line poem in *Electric Light*, which has remained from the original “Hyperborean,” focused exclusively on Apollo and the Polish poet as his herald “from the back of the north wind,” has lost its original power exactly because it omits all the impurities of Herbert’s poetry: the litter, the ruins, “satellites and eagles,” the *via crucis*. In Heaney’s collection, it follows a much more personal memory of Joseph Brodsky in a stark contrast of a real man (Brodsky) with an icon or symbol (Herbert). Beyond the fact that Heaney did not know Herbert personally, in “To the Shade of Zbigniew Herbert” the Polish poet virtually emerges as an Atlas of Civilization, the epitome of poetry as represented by Apollo and his lyre. Yet knowing two of Herbert’s poems earlier analysed by Heaney in *The Government of the Tongue* the reader would anticipate something exactly opposite. Herbert’s “Apollo and Marsyas” exposes Apollo’s cruelty and strongly sympathises with the victim; while after “A Knocker” one cannot imagine an instrument further from Herbert’s “music of imagination” than a lyre. The elevated tone of Heaney’s poem is suited for its elegiac purpose but not measured to the ironic tone of Herbert’s oeuvre.

Heaney’s own 2009 commentary on Hyperborea as his “third European poetry province,” voiced in “Mossbawn via Mantua,”⁴⁵ will serve as a summary to this sonnet, and at the same time, an introduction to his

creative usage of the term in the “Greek Experience” speech of 2004 discussed at the end of this chapter, where he broadens the term to include other Polish and Russian poets. The third province seems to be an intersection of his first classical province (Greek, Roman, Judaic, Christian Celtic) and the second barbarian one (Viking, Germani, Anglo-Saxon). According to a version of the Greek legend, Heaney states, Apollo travelled from Delphi to the north in winter:

So I think of my third European poetry province as Hyperborean. And in my literary atlas, it is inhabited by different twentieth-century poets of Russia and Eastern Europe. ...What the Hyperboreans provided was comfort and example, comfort when I *read* their work, and example when I wondered how to write poetry in our own dark time. (21, 24)

“Bassae”

Yet another sonnet commemorating Heaney’s 1997 trip to Greece, published in *Cara* magazine in autumn 1998,⁴⁶ is devoted to the archaeological site of Bassae with the temple of Apollo Epikourios. Not at all an evident choice for a tour of antiquities, though erected by one of the architects of the Parthenon, it might have been familiar to Heaney from the British Museum. The Bassae frieze shared the fate of the Elgin marbles; it was removed from the temple in the Peloponnese by Charles Robert Cockerell and sold to the museum in 1815. The veristically dramatic bas-reliefs do not, however, intrude upon the peace of Heaney’s sonnet.

Its first, factual part describes the Heaney company departing early in the morning, setting out for Bassae, while the second part focuses on their visit to the temple. Perhaps because of the first part full of “mundane” details, or the fact that the temple was protected under a tent and could not disclose its grandeur, this poem has been excluded from *Electric Light*, although it has been collected in Savidis’s Greek translation in *Αλφάβητα*. One of the sonnet’s engines is sound, just as in “Desfina”; the sounds of nature in the opening and ending, and the protagonists’ steps in the second part: “We ... had our presence clinched by gravel crunching/Inside the tent acoustic.” Importantly, in the absence of vision (“we missed the sturdiness, the Doric aura” in an early typescript,⁴⁷ and the columns’ “classic ordering and aura” in the *Cara* version; in both cases the columns are covered with canvas), sound defines Heaney’s presence, proving his arrival and substantiating the reality of ancient history.

Another element that validates his presence is nature. "Bassae" is steeped in the fauna and flora of that May day⁴⁸ to a greater extent than "Into Arcadia" in the landscape of 5 October 1995. A characteristic aspect of this representation of nature is its division into the familiar (mainly fauna) and the unfamiliar (flora). Most of the animals mentioned in the poem are domestic and could be just as well situated in Ireland. The first scene opens with "goat-bells, barking dogs, an answering cock" and continues with "mayflowers and warm rocks"; in the second part, they had their presence "clinched ... by a cuckoo." This familiarity of the fauna can obviously be credited to Heaney's farming background, but it also reflects the familiarity of the place from which they departed, the village of Andritsaina. It was there where Heaney was "at home anthropologically" among women in black (Vatopoulos 6). The fact that Heaney does not mention is that Andritsaina played a role in the Greek War of Independence, as a result of which it was destroyed by Ibrahim Pasha's troops in 1826; its history could make the place even more familiar to an Irish person.

The only part of nature that escapes definition—probably wild Greek species—has been encapsulated in the sonnet's last line. In the archival typescript, Heaney in Bassae is watching "Marie and Cynthia roam and name the flora"⁴⁹; in *Cara*, he watches "Butterflies in the pre-Linnaean flora." While the first version hints at a possibility of recognition, though the act of naming also alludes to the prelapsarian days of creation, the second version clearly imposes a "prehistoric" perspective on Greek species (indeed, many "butterfly valleys" in Greece display exuberant variety). Heaney seems fascinated by the idea of native plants that existed before they were classified and "latinised." The reference to Linnaeus, understandable as his classification is honoured worldwide, again sounds a bit awkward in this element of the Greek natural world. Savidis also purges "Bassae" of this foreign name by replacing it with another allusion to Heaney's poetry: echoing the title of his first collection, the translator uses the epithet *προ-φυσιοδιδικη* [pre-naturalist] (*Αλφάβητα* 80).

"Mycenae"

Northern Ireland's "partitioned intellect" and "grafted tongue," to borrow John Montague's formulations, have made Heaney continuously probe the "lookouts," "boundary trees" and "listening posts" in his poetry, the latter phrase used in reference to his own and Zbigniew Herbert's personae

(Sweeney and Mr. Cogito).⁵⁰ The poet devoted much of his writing and translation to the passage between this world and the other world (*Station Island* being perhaps the most outstanding example in his own writing, and *The Burial at Thebes* and *Aeneid Book VI* in his translation). The liminal imagery of “Sonnet from Hellas,” culminating in “Mycenae” with “an illumined limen/We’d crossed ahead of time, foreshadowed bodies,” is no exception to this continuous search. The protagonists of this sonnet, also published in *Cara* magazine of 1998,⁵¹ descend into Agamemnon’s tomb and return, almost in the spirit of *nekya* (questioning ghosts in antiquity) surrounded by swallows like Homer’s souls or “bats out of hell or Hades.” In this dark world of stones and defence structures they “felt at home/By cairn and *tholos*, cyclopic wall and dolmen.” “Mycenae” is yet another bilocated Greek-Irish sonnet in the cycle. Something of this domestication of Agamemnon’s realm can also be felt in Durrell’s “To Argos” with its “menhir” and voices of English heroes in the Mycenae landscape (*Collected Poems* 88–89).

This homely feeling suggests that Heaney’s perception of Mycenae had been influenced, before the real visit, by the preceding “Mycenae Lookout,” together with the whole *Oresteia* context. The confirmation of this fact can be spotted in the “Mycenae” sonnet: on “that second, unplanned visit” to Mycenae Heaney “spoke the dawn speech of the rooftop watchman.” It must have been during the 1995 trip; as Dimitri Hadzi recalls:

Once we reached Agamemnon’s palace on the citadel, I asked Seamus if he would read the poem for us. Naturally, he hadn’t brought it along. But this was *the Place*, from which there was to be no escape. Promptly I produced my copy of the poem, and the poet had no choice but to read it and to thrill us.
(“Where in Hellas...” 27)

“Mycenae Lookout,” dedicated to Cynthia and Dimitri Hadzi, famously responded to the 1994 IRA ceasefire, “a genuine visitation, the lark sang and the light ascended” (“The Art of Poetry No. 75”). However, the poem did not answer with a call for difficult reconciliation, like Michael Longley’s Homeric “Ceasefire” “picked up by politicians and priests” (Longley, Interview by Broom 21), but with a contrary reaction of letting out the anger accumulated throughout the years of “the waste of lives and friendships and possibilities in the years that had preceded it.” The poet felt that “we had got no further, politically, than we had been in 1974. Had slipped back, indeed” (“The Art of Poetry No. 75”). In “Mycenae Lookout,” he intended to render

the cruelty of that Mycenaean world. ...Even though the poem was written after the 1994 cessation, the impulse was to give a snarl rather than sing a hymn. ...It wasn't a matter of what was happening just then, more a rage at what had gone on in the previous twenty-five years. "That killing fest," as the poem calls it. What brought it back and crystallized it was the situation of the watchman at the beginning of the *Agamemnon*. He says he cannot speak because there's "an ox on his tongue."

(*Stepping Stones* 349–350)

The source of his interest resided in the possibility that "the three Aeschylus plays could be a kind of rite envisaging the possibility of a shift from a culture of revenge to a belief in a future based upon something more disinterested" ("The Art of Poetry No. 75"). The image of "an ox on his tongue" vividly recalls Heaney's own "Northern reticence" evoked in "Whatever You Say, Say Nothing" with its metaphor of the Trojan horse and the "wily Greeks." Apart from "his silence and knowledge," another incentive to take up the watchman's figure in "Mycenae Lookout" was "his in-between situation"; eventually,

all this kept building until I very deliberately began a monologue for him using a rhymed couplet like a pneumatic drill, just trying to bite and shudder in toward whatever was there. And after that first movement, sure enough, the other bits came definitely and freely, from different angles and reaches. In a way, that material had as much force and underlife for me as the bog bodies.
(*"The Art of Poetry No. 75"*)

This time in Mycenae in 1995, Heaney returns moved by "fate/Or the unconscious," pronounces the watchman's speech and sees "the world he saw from his bastion" (in *Cara*, "the Aegean from his bastion"). As in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Heaney may be repeating the hero's (watchman's and Agamemnon's) deeds on entering the sacred space. The beehive structure of Agamemnon's tomb implies Campbell's "centeredness," the site which "can serve ... as a support for fruitful meditation" for someone intent "to rehearse the universal pattern as a means of evoking within himself the recollection of the life-centering, life-renewing form" (Campbell 34–35). This life-renewing process in Heaney's sonnet is the return from the realm of the dead, and the crossing of "an illumined limen ... ahead of time." The stone, tomb and threshold imagery of this particular poem also repeats the scenery of the earlier poem

“In Memoriam of Robert Fitzgerald” with its “doorway to a megalithic tomb” where “there is no last door, / Just threshold stone ... repeating *enter, enter, enter, enter.*” Heaney finally crosses this threshold in “Mycenae”; in this way, another sonnet “from Hellas,” after “Pylos,” interacts with the elegy for Fitzgerald in *The Haw Lantern* in a different chronological sequence.

Yet the first space Heaney enters in Mycenae through the Lion Gate is “the rath of Atreus,” “Agamemnon’s palace,” “the *megaron*.” In this sonnet we observe a contrary typesetting practice than in “Desfina”: words of Gaelic origin—“rath” and “cairn”—remain in roman type (however naturalised the latter is in English), while Greek terms—*megaron*, *tholos*—have been italicised. The first space on Heaney’s Mycenaean way have been marked with the Irish term (“rath,” with the meaning similar to *dun*) and indeed, the breath-taking vista from Agamemnon’s palace on the valley below resembles views from Irish cliffs and duns. Before Heaney proceeds to the Greek *megaron*, he enters the *Irish* space: this space of the “rath” is clearly the space of “Mycenae Lookout” and the Northern Irish conflict. In a more cryptic way, this sonnet is related to the “Troubles” and the difficult peace process just as “The Augean Stables” was related to them in a straightforward manner.

2000: MILLENNIAL GRECIAN SOJOURN

In 2000, Heaney with the same company (Marie Heaney, Cynthia and Dimitri Hadzi) and Stratis Haviaras visited Greece from 3 to 7 or 9 May. At the end of their trip they travelled to Paros at the invitation of Manolis Savidis, where they spent either one or three days. The initial itinerary of this trip looked as follows: three days in Athens (3–6 May), including the poetry reading on 5 May at the Old Parliament (Παλιά Βουλή) in Athens; one day on Paros (6–7 May) (“Millennial Grecian Sojourn”). This version is confirmed by Haviaras, who under the 7 May photograph of their Paros company, the “‘Cantabrigio-Greco-Hiberno’ connection,” in *Harvard Review* writes that it was a “24-hour excursion” (“The View from Lamont” 3). In Athens, Heaney promoted his volume of Greek translations, *Αλφάβητα* (Alphabets, 2000), while Hadzi had an art exhibition. “The Athenians,” Haviaras documents, “loved Seamus, who nearly suffered ‘Repetitive Stress Injury’, putting his signature not only on his Greek

editions, but on dozens of copies of titles in English as well, including his own masterful translation of *Beowulf*" (3).

Savidis, however, recalls spending three days on Paros. In his account, Heaney, though afraid of ferries, agreed to take a boat to go there. They visited the basilica of Εκατονταπυλιανή (Our Lady of a Hundred Doors), later described by Longley in "A Hundred Doors."⁵² They returned to Athens by helicopter from which Heaney took his first view of the Aegean (Savidis, Interview by Kruckowska). As far as I was able to check, this particular visit to Athens and Paros in 2000 has left no trace in Heaney's literary output (*Electric Light* with "Sonnets from Hellas" appeared in early April 2001). Later in 2000, however, on 24 October, before his poetry reading at Harvard organised under the auspices of the George Seferis Chair in Modern Greek Studies, Heaney delivered a speech "Homage to Seferis," where the nerve centre of "the Greek imprint" importantly shifted from antiquity to modernity. His next text devoted to his "Greek experience" was already based on references to ancient *and modern* Greece.

2004: THE GREEK EXPERIENCE

In February 2004, Heaney was invited to an international symposium *The Greek Experience* organised at the European Centre of Delphi. Before that, he gave a poetry reading with a commentary entitled "'Herm and Cairn'" on 4 February at the Goulandris Horn Foundation in Athens. The newspaper *Kathimerini* reported on the event: "'Like the Earth's magnetic field,' says the Irish poet, 'the Greek heritage helps us keep our bearings'" ("Past Events..."). The reading was repeated at the Oxford Literary Festival on 26 March the same year ("Voices from Greece"). The commentary was probably not printed, but the title refers to "The Stone Verdict" in *The Haw Lantern* (1987), where Heaney remembers his father in the context of the story of Hermes. His father's last judgement is envisioned like "the judgement of Hermes, / God of the stone heap, where the stones were verdicts ... piling up around him/Until he stood waist deep in the cairn" (*The Haw Lantern* 17). In *Stepping Stones*, Heaney relates this myth to William K. Guthrie's *The Greeks and Their Gods*:

That's where I read about the relationship between herm and Hermes. A herm was a standing stone – in many senses: a stylized representation of Hermes erect; and Hermes, as god of travellers and marketplaces and

suchlike, was connected with cairns at crossroads and stoneheaps of all sorts.
Through all that, I began to connect him with my father, and so you got
"The Stone Verdict."
(293)

A herm was "a squared stone pillar with a carved head on top (typically of the god Hermes), used in ancient Greece as a boundary marker or a signpost" (*OED*); its connection with Ireland's cairn as a landmark is thus clear. It is even more clear in Guthrie's book, where he explains the term as "a cairn or heap of stones. These cairns served as landmarks" (*The Greeks...* 88). In "The Stone Verdict," apart from this relationship between the Irish and Greek terms, Heaney's "cairn" alludes also to its other meaning, the one of a burial mound, the same as the "*cairn*" in the "Mycenae" sonnet related to Agamemnon's tomb. This continuation of ancient motifs in Heaney's poetry proves the staying power of his education and reading before the poet's real travels in Greece.

One can find a short account of Heaney's poetry reading in *Kathimerini*:

Teasing out the strands linking Greece and Ireland, Heaney said both countries share three great moments: the pre-Christian past (Hellenic or Celtic), the impact of Christianity (in the form of Byzantium or St Patrick) and the search for redefinition and reconnection that followed independence in the modern era. The role of the poet was similarly affected by history, he claimed. When the struggle for independence was at its height, "the only role available to the poet – and forced on the poet in a way – was the bardic role of being a representative of the nation, the culture," said Heaney, citing Yeats and Palamas as parallels. And he contrasted that to the notion of "saving the poet's own soul." Greece has a special place in the poet's heart. ...

(Nilan "A Seamus Heaney Reading")

Kostis Palamas is the first of the Modern Greek poets Heaney summoned while in February 2004 in Greece: others will follow in his "Greek Experience" speech, including Angelos Sikelianos. As Konstantina Georganta notes on these three poets, "Whereas Sikelianos believed in the unity of ancient myth ... and [was] inspired by the mythical and folklore tradition in a way that echoes the Irish poet [Yeats] – and [Sikelianos] was actually considered by Seferis to be equivalent in stature to Yeats – Palamas shared with Yeats an interest in the bardic tradition represented by Homer" (80).⁵³

The *Greek Experience* symposium held on 5–9 February 2004 in Delphi under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Culture was a meeting of writers and translators from different countries who were familiar with Greece and its physical and literary landscapes. The point of the meeting was to share the experience “based on real circumstances” (Κεφαλέα “Εισαγωγικά” 9). Celebrated Greek writers and critics were invited to discuss the Greek experience with the foreigners; some of them engaged in translations of Irish poetry and prose in Greece, and in the study of the reception of Modern Greek poetry abroad.⁵⁴ The event was held in memory of Zisimos Lorentzatos who had died three days earlier, a scholar researching, among other themes, the poetry of Seferis and its famous “lost center,” the phrase he borrowed from Yeats’s “Second Coming.”

Heaney’s lecture was published together with other speeches in *Η ελληνική εμπειρία* [The Greek Experience] of 2006, edited by the organiser of the symposium, Kirki Kefalea. It was printed in the Greek translation of Katerina Schina, and first appeared in the supplement “Βιβλιοθήκη” [Library] of the *Eleftherotypia* newspaper of 13 Feb. 2004. Since neither the translator nor the organisers seem to have retained the original text, the quotes from Heaney’s text below are provided in my own translation. Apart from modern Greek references, I devote considerable space to ancient Greek references; beyond the ancient lens of Heaney’s travel narratives, the aim of this thorough treatment of Heaney’s essay is to complete the gap in his bibliography before (and if ever) the original text is published in English.

“I have to say that in Delphi I feel at home. The place tempts me to think of it as connected with my birth,” Heaney begins his speech (“Αρχαίοι μύθοι...” 13). This connection between home and Delphi relies on sound, that vital vehicle of Heaney’s writing in general and of his “Greek” sonnets in particular. His “Greek Experience” speech starts with the same point as “Mossbawn” in *Preoccupations* (1980): from the pump in their farmhouse yard and the Greek word “ομφαλός” [omphalos], interpreted by Heaney as the beginning and centre of the/his world.

I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and repeat it, “*omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*,” until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door.
(*Preoccupations* 17)

Delphi is thus considered by Heaney as the spiritual centre of his world, “prophetically” evoked in “Stone from Delphi” some thirteen years before his first visit there. The first line of that poem opens with the wish that the stone is “To be carried back to the shrine some dawn.” Heaney’s Delphic imagery of stone, light, source of water and the navel of the earth implies that symbolically he enters Greece through its landscape correlated with his native Irish ground.

Paradoxically in “Stone from Delphi” poem from *Station Island* the sunny landscape and seascape of Delphi counterbalance the Northern Irish overtones coded in the references to ancient Greek tragedy (“miasma of spilled blood,” “hybris” and the fear of gods). In his Delphic trips and speeches, these two landscapes come together: in Delphi, where in the 1920s Angelos Sikelianos and Eva Palmer revived ancient drama alongside other forms of art and games, Heaney spoke of Sophocles and Northern Ireland at the Ancient Greek Drama conference in June the same year. The “teaser” of this connection between Heaney’s two Delphi speeches is his reference to Aeschylus’s watchman from *Agamemnon* in “Mycenae Lookout” as “a writer figure trapped in the crisis similar to the crisis in Ireland in the years of bloodshed ... or in America in the era of the ‘war on terror’” (“Αρχαίοι μύθοι...” 16). This particular context forms the background of Heaney’s comments on his *Burial at Thebes* at the second Delphi symposium. The other Sophocles play translated by the Irish poet, a version of *Philoctetes* entitled *The Cure at Troy*, had been brought up in the “Greek Experience” essay in a similar context, where Neoptolemus mirrors Heaney’s dilemma to keep his integrity on the one hand, and to obey the “patriotic” duty to serve his country on the other. As Vivienne Nilan reports, Heaney called that translation a “soul-saving experience” (“Writers”). In between Heaney’s reflections on these two plays as examples of his “Greek experience” appears the following fragment: “The ‘Greek experience’ has been magical for me. All I read or wrote every so often proved to me that from the literature, art and history of the classical period one can draw great spiritual, political and artistic strength” (“Αρχαίοι μύθοι...” 16). This juxtaposition of magic and ancient Greek inspiration may be similar to Heaney’s poetic redress; in general, in Heaney’s Delphic references in poetry and prose, “the miraculous” and “the murderous” again overlap, with the miraculous vested in nature (“Stone from Delphi”) and poetry (Castalian Spring and Mount Parnassus in “Sonnets from Hellas”), and the murderous in ancient Greek tragedy.

Another point raised by Heaney in reference to his "Greek experience" is the intersection of farming and poetry. The poet feels "the poetic son of Hesiod" as a farmer's son, the author of "Personal Helicon" and an heir to Patrick Kavanagh; he even paints an image of Hesiod and Kavanagh digging hand in hand on the field while listening to the muses (13, 15), in an obvious allusion to his own poem "Digging." The poet searches for parallels between the two countries not only in literature but also in ordinary people's lives, such as peasants' superstitions in his native Derry and in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Another parentage the poet claims in this essay, the one of Hermes, has also been aligned with his father's countryside activities. Although Heaney cites various functions Hermes performed, including the motifs suggestive of his own poetry (travel and crossroads), he aligns the god with the hatted figure with a stick going weekly to the marketplace with his livestock.

The most interesting part for our discussion is the paragraph of Heaney's essay devoted to Modern Greek poets. "As the years go by, I'm more and more interested in the attempt of modern Greek poets to bridge the gap, to connect ancient Greece with the rebirth of the Greek nation after 1821" ("Αρχαίοι μύθοι..." 18), the issue he already commented on in the Vatopoulos interview in 2000. The same interview finds its continuation in Heaney's comments on his knowledge of modern Greek history (*Megali Idea*, Second World War, Civil War, the *junta*), this time through reading, possibly stimulated by his Greek travels and friends (unmentioned in the essay). The poet voices his appreciation for the manner in which Cavafy, Ritsos and Seferis (in his Cypriot volume) refract disillusionment with the contemporary world. He admires Seferis's use of apocrypha and cites the anecdote of his guiding, in 1929, a French minister of foreign affairs who dismissed all Greek history after the third century BC. Eventually, the Irish poet evokes the landscapes of Sikelianos's and Elytis's poetry; though delivered in a sketchy, synoptic manner of "Sikelianos's bear in the Sacred Way and Elytis's goat on the rocky hill" ("Αρχαίοι μύθοι..." 18), these allusions to Sikelianos's and Elytis's poems (Sikelianos's "The Sacred Way" and probably a custom reference to Elytis) interact both with Heaney's own poetry abounding in natural/farming metaphors and with his perception of Greece through landscape. Last but not least, Heaney acknowledges the contribution of Keeley to the dissemination of Modern Greek poetry in English.

Perhaps the most interesting of these modern Greek remarks is Heaney's reference to the most recent history of both countries as the opposite extreme of their ancient history:

Having lived all my life in the country whose identity draws on many elements of ancient Celtic and early Christian culture, the same country which today operates in a more and more agnostic, consumerist universe of globalised capitalism, I discern many points in common with modern Greece.
(“Αρχαίοι μύθοι...” 18)

2004 was the “Celtic Tiger 2” year in Ireland, whose resurging economy achieved the highest growth in the EU, and the year of the Olympic Games in Greece, where a fortune was spent in reorganising Athens and preparing the show. Stadia and buildings, hardly used afterwards, were erected in Athens and its suburbs, analogous to the construction boom in Dublin sprawling in all directions. Soon the crisis will put an end to this feast, and Heaney's words strike a prophetic note in this context. The crisis would not prevent further decline in Ireland's spirituality, not to mention restore it. Obviously Heaney means a broader spiritual life than just religious feelings, but in Greece the connection with spiritual life is still firmly embedded in Orthodox Christianity and the Irish poet may be mistaken about the extent to which capitalism wreaks havoc in the Greek soul.

First and foremost, though, the metaphor with which Heaney begins and ends his “Greek Experience” speech is the one of the Hyperborean: the point of his access to Greece. While in “Sonnets from Hellas” Heaney applied this formulation to Herbert (and later, humorously and evasively, to himself), at the beginning of this essay he relates it to Joseph Brodsky and Stanisław Barańczak, and at the end to T. S. Eliot. The metaphor's becoming Heaney's key to Greece can be deduced from his declaration at the beginning: “I will approach Delphi and the Greek experience – both ancient and modern – by way of Russia and Poland” (“Αρχαίοι μύθοι...” 14). Based on the image of Apollo travelling to the North each winter, the image evocative of his earlier “Hyperborean” sonnet and its trimmed version in *Electric Light* (“To the Shade of Zbigniew Herbert”), the poet quotes Barańczak, his Harvard colleague, on the function of culture. Heaney has been frequently using this quote; as he said, after the Nobel Prize, when asked to deliver speeches at universities and feeling sometimes lost on these occasions, “[W]hen I'm put to the pin of my collar, I quote my friend Stanisław Barańczak” (“On Elegies, Eclogues...” 29). One can

find the Barańczak quote for instance in Heaney's address "Further Language" delivered at Queen's University on 26 June 1995:

As a rule ... there is an intermediary between society's experience and the individual's psyche – a kind of go-between that can be called culture. If not for that, the outer world of facts and events and the inner world of feelings and thoughts would resemble two interlocutors speaking different languages with no way to communicate. It is precisely culture that serves as an interpreter – an interpreter who helps us to understand what reality tells us.
(Barańczak qtd. in "Further Language" 13)⁵⁵

Heaney interrupts Barańczak's quote in his "Greek Experience" essay here, but the rest of this sentence is just as important for his Greek narratives: culture being an interpreter who "helps us to formulate our own questions and responses in a comprehensible language of symbols" (Barańczak in "Further Language" 13). The culture of ancient Greece obviously provided Heaney with such a language many years before his first travels to the monuments of antiquity; but his "Greek Experience" speech shows that *modern* Greece has just started to provide him with a similar language of symbols, which will become manifest in his next publications: the Cavafy translations of 2005 and *District and Circle* of 2006. The ancient "Greek imprint" will nonetheless remain strong: Heaney selects those of Cavafy's and Seferis's poems that refract modern Greece through the prism of antiquity.

At the beginning of his essay, Heaney precedes the Barańczak quote with Brodsky's statement: "If art teaches us anything, it's that the human condition is private"⁵⁶; at the end, he closes the Barańczak reference with T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" ("History may be servitude,/ History may be freedom") and the function of cultural memory, which is to look at History from a new angle. This cluster of poetic authorities helps the poet come to the following conclusion: "poetry and art, and culture in general, make up a system of direct intervention"⁵⁷ which can help us when we feel trapped, hemmed in, helpless. This is exactly the way the Greek experience worked for me" ("Αρχαίοι μύθοι..." 15). This equation between culture and the Greek experience is very telling, and probably what Heaney means is still the "experience" of ancient rather than modern Greece.

In her introduction to *Η ελληνική εμπειρία*, Kirki Kefalea states that for the majority of the writers invited to the symposium "the Greek experience" meant "the mixture of ancient and modern Greece" (Κεφαλέα

“Εισαγωγικά” 9), the fact evident in Heaney’s speech; a slightly less conspicuous element of that speech is related to Kefalea’s conclusion that “much more frequently” their inspiration is “modern Greek reality, the landscape or contemporary Greek culture” (10). When describing the symposium in the journal *Δαίδαλος* [Daedalus], the Greek writer Rea Galanaki expressed astonishment at the habitual cluster of Greek associations foreign writers voiced at the Delphi event: the juxtaposition of ancient Athens (democracy, art, theatre) and Boeotia (Hesiod, the muses, connection with land, tradition). “I think,” Galanaki writes, “that this equality between Athens and Boeotia, in the way many Westerners perceive antiquity, has astonished and impressed us Greeks, for reasons which perhaps should be examined” (Γαλανάκη 8). On the other hand, the Greek writers such as Titos Patrikios spoke about the burden of Greek antiquity resting on the shoulders of modern Greek writers and the necessity of shedding it (Γαλανάκη 9). These concerns respond also to Heaney’s speech: Patrikios’s to Heaney’s reflection on bridging the gap between antiquity and modernity, and Galanaki’s to his focus on Boeotia, Hesiod and the land.

Heaney returned to Delphi in June 2004 for the 12th International Meeting on Ancient Drama at Delphi. The symposium, devoted to “classical tradition and contemporary creation” commemorating the 2500th anniversary of Sophocles’s birth, was attended by “classical philologists, distinguished scholars of classical texts, authors, translators, actors, directors, set designers and directors of theatre festivals” with the aim “to explore the surviving texts, their interpretation and the ancient representations and secondly the impact and timeliness of the Sophoclean tradition in contemporary theatrical creation” (“XII International Meeting...”). On 28 June, Heaney read excerpts from his version of *Antigone*, *The Burial at Thebes*, alongside Tony Harrison with his *Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. Some of Heaney’s comments on *The Burial* voiced on that occasion had been included in his Jayne Lecture at Harvard earlier that year, on 23 April. “Title Deeds: Translating a Classic” explored the darkness of ancient Greek tragedy and its adequacy for modern times in Ireland and in the context of America’s War on Terror. Since the essay provides a useful framework for translating the canon, it is further referred to in Chap. 4. It is interesting to note here that *The Burial at Thebes*, Heaney’s version of *Antigone* commissioned by the Abbey Theatre, was monitored by Ben Barnes, the theatre’s artistic director, who maintained correspondence with Vassilis Karasmanis, director of the European

Cultural Centre at Delphi, concerning the Abbey production.⁵⁸ This fact may indicate that Ireland cooperated with Greece on this particular staging in April 2004, barely two months before Heaney's second visit to Delphi.

In his "Eclogues *in Extremis*: On the Staying Power of Pastoral" (2003), Heaney begins with the following statement: "What keeps a literary kind viable is its ability to measure up to the challenges offered by new historical circumstances, and pastoral has been confronted with this challenge from very early on" (2). The poet supports it with the example of the eviction theme in Virgil's eclogues based on the experience of his father; one of these eclogues later appears in *Electric Light* ("Virgil: Eclogue IX"). As we have seen, in the same volume "The Augean Stables" measures up to the "Troubles" with the genre that "at its high points ... does indeed 'leave you stronger than when you came in'" (4). Heaney's diagnosis of Czesław Miłosz's "The World: A Naïve Poem" written during the Second World War, where "the emotion is certainly grounded in reflection, in ironical, even tragic reflection on the impression objects make upon him" (8), bears upon his own pastoral sonnet set in Olympia. The redress of nature and poetry in "The Augean Stables," encapsulated in the cleansing by water scene, is similar to Miłosz's "'a rather ironic operation', 'an act of magic to depict the exact opposite' of the way the world was at the time of the poem's composition" (9).

Bernard O'Donoghue points to the images of uncertainty permeating Heaney's poems in *Electric Light* and the resulting paradoxical rift between the theory and practice of this redress: "Much of Heaney's critical writing has argued that poetry can help – that it can offer 'redress', in one way or another. And yet the poetry itself seems less confident of this capacity, unsurprisingly given the era in which it is rooted" (119). This perspicacious remark pertains to Heaney's Virgilian eclogues and the only poem O'Donoghue selects from "Sonnetts from Hellas," "The Augean Stables." In reference to this 2001 volume, the critic confirms the poet's intention, formulated differently in the earlier "Eclogues *in Extremis*" on discussing Virgil,⁵⁹ to "alight on the eclogue which has the sharpest, or the most political, edge" (111). Pointing to the phrase borrowed from the Roman poet in "Bann Valley Eclogue" in *Electric Light*, *pacatum orbem* ("a world made peaceful"), O'Donoghue states:

This phrase from Virgil establishes clearly what is confirmed by several other poems in *Electric Light*: after the anger and self-justification of *The Spirit Level*, this is a volume offering a cautious welcome to peace [the Good Friday

Agreement of 1998]. ...However, in the end the function of the eclogue here proves less unequivocally positive or peaceful than this first reading suggests. (113)

Apart from other connotations already mentioned in this chapter, “the haven of light” in *Epidauros* evoked at the end of Part Three of “Out of the Bag” may embody such “a cautious welcome to peace” combined with personal circumstances. Heaney observes about that convergence of his Greek visits and translations, and the peace process in Northern Ireland:

Then again, and quite by accident, there was the Greek thing – the Sophocles translation, the visits [to Greece] and so on. So there were the circumstances of my own life and work, and there were the renewed possibilities in the political sphere, all of which equalled a kind of a letting-in of the light.
(“On Elegies, Eclogues...” 28)

Helen Vendler differentiates between Heaney’s use of the classics by arguing that “Heaney’s poems alluding to classical Latin can be elegiac, tender, dignified – and even self-mocking. ...But Heaney’s works that borrow from ancient Greek are in great part savage, cruel, bloody, and elemental” (“Seamus Heaney and the Classical Past” 18). One should add an important reservation to this statement: that his reworkings of ancient Greek tragedy are “savage, cruel, bloody and elemental,” while his “Greek” pastorals, more than “the Latin eclogue of dispossession” (Vendler 11), can be “tender” and “dignified”, with the notable exception of “The Augean Stables.” Apart from most of the “Sonnets from Hellas” or “Out of the Bag,” a striking example of such a tone is Heaney’s rendition of Theocritus’s idyll after Cavafy, analysed in Chap. 4. One can spot “even self-mocking” tone among those Greece-inspired poems, in “Desfina” taking the reader on a linguistic ride with the “hyper, boozed, borean” poet. Another interesting fact is that Heaney approaches ancient and modern Greek material through English translation, and in his versions of ancient playwrights or Cavafy he engages in intra-, not interlingual translation, contrary to Latin. Characteristically, interlingual translation (Latin in Heaney’s case, French in Mahon’s) gives a very personal access to the foreign language and culture, while intra-lingual translation (Greek for both poets) generates an approach of greater freedom to the source, which may be one of the aspects responsible for aligning ancient Greece with Northern Ireland, as in Heaney’s *Cure at Troy* or Mahon’s Cavafy.

One of the reasons for the distinctive character of "Greek" sonnets in Heaney's application of the pastoral mode, especially when juxtaposed with Virgil's eclogues in *Electric Light*, lies in the temporal circumstances of their composition. They were written in immediate reaction to the poet's 1995 and 1997 travels to Greece, *before* he started to re-read Virgil. As he states in an interview of May 2001, asked about the pastoral mode,

I read a new translation of Virgil's *Eclogues* three or four years ago.⁶⁰ ...I was reminded of the beauty of these poems and their strangeness: they came back to me. But they came back to me after I had been to Greece, after I had written a number of "Greek" sonnets which are also in this book [*Electric Light*]. In fact I had seen an actual goatherd in Arcadia. ...He was the real thing, he wasn't in an eclogue, he was "in the forecourt of the filling station" with stinking goats; and yet there was a complete continuity between this twentieth century creature and the literary figure you find in Theocritus.
("On Elegies, Eclogues..." 25)

It was the *real* Greek journey that produced the sonnets—however penetrated by a philhellenic perception of antiquity—as opposed to the mental one. This fragment of the interview clearly defines the difference in Heaney's perception of Greece when stimulated by the empirical experience and when inspired by reading, which later translated into the literary narratives composed in the tradition of the same genre: "Sonnets from Hellas" and "Out of the Bag" as contrasted with Virgil's eclogues. This identification with pastoral Greece, in contrast to the subversion of pastoral Rome, reaches deeper than the genesis of the sonnets; deeper even than Heaney's perception of Rome in terms of the British Empire,⁶¹ or Peter McDonald's commentary that the notion of Greece as "an impractical, and ultimately a conquered place of imagination and native genius" is "heavily indebted to a nineteenth-century romantic version of Greece as a cultural superior of Rome" (186). This identification may be linked to landscape. Heaney's travels have shown him, perhaps, a different face of Greece, beyond the "clannish energy" of ancient drama (*Stepping Stones* 294), beyond political comparisons with Northern Ireland: the Greece whose nature can appease, provide comfort, restore life energy, as in the poem he was "very fond of" in this collection, "Out of the Bag" ("On Elegies, Eclogues..." 25).

However fragile its balance, as "The Augean Stables" proves, this Greece remains in conflict with the Mycenaean world, also confronted on

these trips: the world whose massive architecture, dramatic landscape and war history has been written by Heaney into “Mycenae” and “Conkers.” Thus, reading “a suavity, a softness, a repose” into Greek nature perceived as “uniform” and “harmonious” (qtd. in Roessel 18) in the spirit of Byronic philhellenism is not really the intention of Heaney’s Greek pastorals. The drama of Greek landscape, so vividly described by Seferis in “In the Kyrenia District” as intolerable for English settlers on Cyprus, in Heaney’s oeuvre resides in the Trojan War and the Other World framework of the Mycenaean world. Had he visited Crete, Heaney could have agreed with Herbert’s perception of the Minoan culture as a radical contrast to Mycenaean warfare; yet if Herbert in his *Labyrinth on the Sea* finds the key to Crete in sympathy despite—or because of—its violent myths and tragic end, Heaney’s Bellaghy scene in “The Augean Stables,” contrasted with the peace of green Olympia, expresses anger rather than sympathy.

Is Heaney’s Greece “more of an idea than a place”? Is it the journey of the mind? “The Greek imprint” preceding his real Greek travels involved, alongside ancient Greek literature (and the Greek material in Virgil, as Vendler observes; 9), English Romantic poets: the approach evocative of Byronic philhellenism with its “modern Greece ... embalmed in the time of Romanticism” (Roessel 5). Heaney refers to Keats’s “Greek” sonnet (“As Keats said, I travelled in the realm of the gold before I actually arrived in the place in person”; in Maclellan), but also, indirectly linking it with the Greek context, to Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s idea of refamiliarisation. In “Mossbawn via Mantua,” the poet transfers this idea onto his own physical and literary journeys, where Ireland is refamiliarised, in a Joycean manner of “the shortest way to Tara” being “via Holyhead,” through an experience of foreign culture (19). This refamiliarisation happens partly with the mediation of Virgil (the Mantua in the title marking Virgil’s birthplace) in the spirit of the “Christian humanist inheritance,” “the Greek and Roman and Judaic past, all that came to Ireland from the fifth century onward with the arrival of Patrick and his Christian missionaries” (20). Heaney however does not quote Shelley’s “We are all Greeks” from his Preface to *Hellas* written at the outset of the Greek War of Independence; neither does he politicise his “Sonnets from Hellas” (in contrast to his renditions of Sophocles) as Byronic philhellenes did, although he draws political and historical parallels between Greece and Ireland in interviews. The sonnet closest to politicising Greece is “The Augean Stables” imposing, however, an *Irish* grid on “Hellas,” not the one of Greek history, which was the stance characteristic for Byronic

philhellenes; another one is "Desfina" with its postcolonial Greek connotations, which may have been unintended.

Nonetheless, the spirit of the Grand Tour manifest in Heaney's route of the Peloponnese and Delphi, and the exclusion of the "less evident" places in Heaney's ancient framework (such as the islands of Poros and Paros), would definitely align the poet with "old philhellenism" as opposed to Mahon's largely "new philhellenic" regard. The tendency to archaïse Greek place names, starting with the name of the country itself changed into "Hellas," and to view Greeks through the prism of antiquity also corroborates Greece as "an important place ... when it fit with other, already established ideas" (Roessel 7). If Greece as epitomised in the travel narrative of the "Sonnets from Hellas" offered Heaney "a discovery of himself," to paraphrase Durrell, that discovery was negotiated by Homer and Fitzgerald in "Pylos." Also the patron of Byronic philhellenes, Apollo, emerges several times in the sonnets: in "Castalian Spring," "Hyperborean" (and the whole area of Heaney's comment on this notion) and in the unmentioned background of "Desfina." Dionysos, presiding over "new philhellenism," is not altogether absent though: Dionysian energy rules "Desfina" and sets it literally in motion, with the company "siren-tyred and manic on the horn" and the speaker "hyper, boozed, borean," the epithet marking a self-ironic comment on the poet's Apollonian affinities of a hyperborean. A similar vitality re-emerges in one of his Cavafy translations, "Dionysos in Procession," where the Irish poet extends and indulges in the description of the Dionysian retinue when compared to the original.

Heaney's perception of present-day Greeks through an ancient lens suggests sympathy for older forms of philhellenism. Before the twentieth century, philhellenes considered "the ancient Greeks ... as sterling examples of both high civilization and noble savages, since they had reached artistic excellence without the mechanisation and urbanization of modern life" (Roessel 23). Still in 1921 the British press voiced opinions such as "The Greeks are always Greeks. These of today are the same as the Greeks of old" (qtd. in Roessel 204). Heaney's goatherd and farmer in "Into Arcadia" match these descriptions, the former of a "noble savage," the latter of the one who reached agricultural excellence "without the mechanisation and urbanization of modern life," though generally contemporary Greeks have little to do with the ancient ones, and live by, not in, their history. Fundamental barriers in the Irish poet's contacts with Greeks obviously included language, time constraints and the self-contained

travelling group, the factors hindering many tourists from getting in touch with local life; Heaney, however, was guided by a Greek (Dimitri Hadzi). In 1954, Stephen Spender introduced “new philhellenism” as the tendency which “opens on to the ‘eternal Greece’ not through politics, but through landscape and the people, and through modern Greek poetry” (“Brilliant Athens...” 78). In “Sonnets from Hellas” people seem more “eternal” than flesh and blood creatures.

Greece where “nature becomes supernatural; the frontier between the physical and the metaphysical is confounded,” as Patrick Leigh Fermor put it (*Mani* 288), comes to light in “Into Arcadia,” in the miracles and abundance of nature’s gifts. Heaney could repeat after Miller, “Marvelous things happen to one in Greece. ...Greece still remains under the protection of the Creator.” It “is still a sacred precinct” where “Homer lives on”, “the subliminal threshold of innocence” (*The Colossus* 12–13; 126). “But the new philhellenes,” as Roessel argues, “were not looking for things that had a date, they were in search for a place that had no dates, that was outside of time” (261). The Irish poet was looking for both “things that had a date” (the antiquities) and “a place ... outside time,” which they epitomised: the spirit of Greece, the origin of which, for some philhellenes, resided in the Greek landscape before it was transferred into art (Roessel 259). In line with his division of the Greek landscape into the miraculous and bright Arcadia, Olympia, Delphi, Bassae, Epidauros and the dark underground of Mycenaean tombs, Heaney’s sonnets negotiate the Mycenaean darkness and proclaim his acceptance of the Greek pastoral.

NOTES

1. Manolis Savidis is referred to below under his Greek name as I quote mainly from his Greek texts. In English-language publications, he uses the name Manuel.
2. See the section devoted to the 2000 journey in the course of this chapter.
3. It recalls Ezra Pound’s visit to Sounion in 1965, where he exclaimed: “I would give millions and millions for that fresh air!” (Lorentzatos 194).
4. See Chap. 5.
5. I am providing this name in Heaney’s Latin spelling from “Out of the Bag.” The discussion of the latinising tendency in Heaney’s “Greek” sonnets starts with “Into Arcadia” below.
6. The whole of “Mycenae Lookout” was first published in *Harvard Review* (Spring 1996): 15–21. Before Heaney’s first Greek journey, separate parts (without Part Five) had appeared in journals in 1994–1995. Alternative

titles of this poem included "Mycenae Wavelength" and "Mycenae Outlook."

7. Heaney may have been familiar with this poem as it was included in Keeley and Sherrard's *Four Modern Greek Poets* (1966).
8. "Greek" in inverted commas as it is mediated by the figure of Robert Fitzgerald.
9. All quotes from Greek, unless marked otherwise, are provided in my own translation.
10. After the decline of Greek culture in 1100–850 BC, as Heaney's text specifies earlier.
11. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers 1963–2010, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1. All excerpts from the unpublished material courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.
12. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland. All subsequent references to Heaney's manuscripts and typescripts come from my research at this archive in May 2015.
13. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1.
14. Heaney, "In the Country of Convention," *Preoccupations* 180.
15. Heaney, "The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh," *Preoccupations* 4.
16. Yet another manuscript of "Into Arcadia" opens with "We needed Rilke," a probable reference to Rilke's "The Apple Orchard" published later in Heaney's translation in *District and Circle*.
17. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1.
18. First published in *Cara* magazine (Sep–Oct 1998), though the Heaney bibliography (Brandes and Durkan) also mentions a Summer School Catalogue of July 1998.
19. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1.
20. Ibid.
21. *Αλφάβητα* 80.
22. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1.
23. In the sonnet, Heaney opts for the Greek version of the protagonist's name, contrary to *Stepping Stones*.
24. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1.
25. By contrast to Heaney, Longley, graduate of the Classics at Trinity, does not hold Fitzgerald in high regard as a translator of Homer: "seems to me like polystyrene" (Interview by Broom 19).

26. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1.
27. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 602/28, folder 2.
28. Ibid.
29. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Heaney visited Olympia on 13 and 14 May 1997 ("Itinerary of Greek Trip —1997").
33. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/117, folder 1.
34. Also removed probably because of its similarity to "noddod, noddod, noddod" in "Conkers." Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 602/28, folder 2.
35. See the section below devoted to Heaney's Greek travels in 2004.
36. Herbert's "Greek" essays appeared in Poland in 2000, and ten years later in English translation (in Herbert's *The Collected Prose 1948–1998*, ed. Alissa Valles, New York: Ecco, 2010). I have analysed his approach in "Cast out of Reality in the Labyrinth on the Sea: Zbigniew Herbert's Crete" (*Modern Greek Studies Online* 2 (2016): A 41–65).
37. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/115.
38. In my bibliography, this publication figures under Heaney "Desfina: *An Cailleach Feasa*"; in JSTOR it has been classified as "Castalian Spring" (these two sonnets have been published together).
39. Tom Paulin's use of the dialect and his political perception of the language (especially in *Minotaur* and "Ireland and the English Crisis") could be interestingly compared with Heaney's practice in this respect. See also my article "The Use of Ulster Speech by Michael Longley and Tom Paulin."
40. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 493/115.
41. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 602/28, folder 2.
42. "Pebble." Trans. Czesław Miłosz, in: Zbigniew Herbert, *Poezje wybrane. Selected Poems*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000: 39.
43. Other folders in the Heaney archive of the NLI include it in yet another three configurations.
44. Cf. John Dillon "Classical Allusions in Seamus Heaney's 'The Haw Lantern.'"

45. This essay, a record of Heaney's talk at the EFACIS 2009 conference, was published in 2012.
46. As the second of three "Sonnets from the Peloponnese" (*Cara* Sep–Oct 1998: 16).
47. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 602/28, folder 2.
48. 13 May 1997. Bassae was initially planned the day before but if the sonnet reconstructs real circumstances, it must be the following morning ("Itinerary of Greek trip—1997").
49. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 49, 602/28, folder 2.
50. "Sweeney Redivivus" *Station Island* 100; Mr. Cogito: "Atlas of Civilization" *The Government of the Tongue* 61.
51. As the last of three "Sonnets from the Peloponnese" (*Cara* Sep–Oct 1998: 17).
52. I discuss this poem in my "The (Im)Palpable..."
53. A comparative chapter of the "cultural politics" of Yeats and Palamas can be found in Georganta's *Conversing Identities* (79–111).
54. Haris Vlavianos, for instance, translated Longley's poems and Heaney's essays, and later "To George Seferis in the Underworld," while Nasos Vayenas edited an anthology of the international reception of Cavafy's poetry, *Συνομιλώντας με τον Καβάφη* [In Conversation with Cavafy].
55. The original source of the quote: Stanisław Barańczak, "Introduction," *Polish Poetry of the Last Two Decades of Communist Rule: Spoiling Cannibals' Fun*, eds. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, Evanston: Northwestern UP: 3. In "Αρχαίοι μύθοι..." this quote appears on pp. 14–15.
56. Quoted by Heaney in "Eclogues in *Extremis*" and "The Birch Grove" from *District and Circle*, for instance.
57. Vivienne Nilan quotes "an emergency power system" Heaney referred to ("Writers").
58. Seamus Heaney Literary Papers, National Library of Ireland, folder IV.ii.1 (the whole correspondence included in this folder covers the period of 5 Dec 2002 to 1 March 2004).
59. See my Introduction to this book.
60. Probably, David Ferry's: "for a while I was captivated entirely" by it, as Heaney says in *Stepping Stones* (389).
61. See for instance Bernard O'Donoghue in *The Cambridge Companion...* 100; Helen Vendler in *Stone from Delphi* (13–15); Peter McDonald quoted above.

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