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A NATION FOUND: THE WORK AND VISION OF JOHN HEWITT

The Ohio State University

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A NATION FOUND:

THE WORK AND VISION OF JOHN HEWITT

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Gordon John De La Vars

*****

The Ohio State University

1985

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To my parents
I wish to thank the members of my Reading Committee for their kind and patient guidance during the writing of this work: Professors Morris Beja and John Muste, Department of English, and Professor Martha Garland, Department of History. My gratitude, also, to my wife Lauren for her loving support.
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INTRODUCTION

John Harold Hewitt was born in Belfast, Ireland, on October 28, 1907. The son of Robert Telford Hewitt, a teacher and later principal of a Methodist Church school, and Elinor Robinson, a former teacher, Hewitt grew up in an environment that stressed both a formal and liberal education, and encouraged the ability to challenge established traditions and rules of behavior. His ancestors on his father's side came from Kilmore in the rural county of Armagh, and on his mother's side from the small village of Wolfhill near Belfast; as a result, although essentially an urban man, Hewitt can trace his family roots back to a rural society, and he moves in that natural setting with ease and excited pleasure. Moreover, while his name is English in origin, the poet's father was born in Glasgow; so Hewitt can proudly claim a link with the great Scottish migration which resulted in the establishment of the Ulster Plantation under James I in the seventeenth century.

On both sides his ancestors were devout Methodists, a fact that helped produce in Hewitt, especially through his father, a liberal identification but also some rigidity in temperament and moral outlook. Considering his nonconformist Protestant background, there was an element of anti-Catholicism in his upbringing; yet, while Hewitt himself is unsympathetic toward the Catholic faith, his
youthful contacts with Catholic children, and later in college with Catholic friends and colleagues, have given the poet a tolerance and genuine empathy with which he views the historically oppressed minority in Ulster.

Hewitt's education and career have included the fields of English literature and art history and criticism. His M.A. Thesis at Queen's University in Belfast, "Ulster Poets, 1800-1870," confirmed an already active interest in writing poetry and provided material for a subsequent study of the early nineteenth-century weaver bards of Counties Antrim and Down. Also, with a strong natural interest in painting and the arts in general, in 1930 Hewitt took over the duties of Art Assistant at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery; he later became Deputy Director, a post which he held until 1957. Perhaps most important to the substance and direction of his writing, during these early years of his career Hewitt became re-acquainted with the works of such English radicals as Thomas Paine, William Cobbett, and William Morris, to whose influence was eventually added that of Karl Marx. The dreams of social justice expressed by these thinkers, especially Morris, appealed to Hewitt, as did their healthy human scepticism. Their ideas became translated by his own work into a tempered yet abiding hope of creating a more equitable society, one free of both prejudice and avarice, where the aesthetic and the useful together would be seen to enhance people's lives.

In 1934 Hewitt married Roberta Black, also from Belfast, who shared both his political and social sympathies. Together they campaigned for Catholic civil liberties in Northern Ireland, and during
the 1930s and 1940s were active in several organizations urging greater power-sharing and the curtailment of oppressive legislation. At this time, too, Hewitt began publishing poems in various periodicals, and settled on poetry as a necessary part of his life's work. This decision led in turn, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to interest in the concept of Regionalism, in the belief that meaning and significance can be encountered in a limited geographical area such as Ulster, one where the local history, ancient traditions, and unique characteristics appear attractive and representative of the larger world context.

During the 1960s Hewitt and his wife moved away from Belfast so that he could take a post as Art Director of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry, in the English Midlands. During this time, which saw the advent of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, they traveled extensively throughout western and central Europe. In 1972 they returned to Belfast where Roberta Hewitt died in 1975. Hewitt resides there alone in retirement, continuing to write and publish books of poetry. In 1974 he received an honorary Doctor of Letters Degree from the New University of Ulster, and between 1976 and 1979 he was Writer in Residence at Queen's University. Now in his seventies, Hewitt regards old age with an intriguing blend of curiosity and dignity, ever possessed of the kind of self-respect and compassionate devotion to life that explains the poignant charm of his preface to an earlier collection, Out of My Time. There he speaks of the subjects of his work as involving "my travels abroad,
the impact of the troubled times in Northern Ireland, and my life as an older man in my native land."

Two of these subjects—the Northern "Troubles" and his Irish "nativeness"—have occupied Hewitt's mind almost exclusively, producing in his work themes that speak of a profound longing to understand his divided and complex heritage. So, much of Hewitt's poetry confronts the essential issue of his Irish identity, as well as the need for cultural and spiritual union between Ulster's two communities and between Northern and Southern Ireland. While he is unwilling to embrace the selective political doctrines and myths of the nationalist cause, and is silent on the actual prospect of an all-Ireland Republic, the poet nonetheless asserts his nativeness by recalling a family heritage in which at least one ancestor sacrificed her life to feed a famine-stricken countryman, and an overall legacy in which time and labor have instilled feelings of trust and honor, of a patient while determined love.

Hewitt recognizes, of course, that many do not accept the tenets contained in this national vision, and that the consequences of his honest pursuit in a place such as Northern Ireland include a dangerous isolation, the fate of one who disavows both sectarian and regional conservatism with their passionate tribal rituals and demands of blind loyalty. This isolation, however, has led him to a more intense celebration of the Irish landscape as a source of strength and measure of his identity, to a whole spiritual environment missing from the political and religious spheres. In many poems, Hewitt's sense of kinship with the land and those who steward it—of Ulster
first, but ultimately of Ireland itself—transforms into, and is expressed as, a proclamation of nationality. Hewitt contends that through the arduous yet loving communion of human with earth, generations of "planted" settlers and their progeny have become an indigenous part of the land, taking on its ways, understanding and marking its physical and spiritual seasons. Without denying sympathy for the historically displaced native population, the poet affirms his right to speak in the name of those who have been thus changed by their adopted country. He admits certain cultural and linguistic deficiencies, but in the end relies on the ever-present power of the land to shape the rhetoric of his pride and devotion. Moreover, this reverence for the land, for its beauty and possibilities of healing influence on human relationships, carries with it a desire for unity as well as a sense of personal allegiance.

John Hewitt's discovery, identification, and development of this vision of nationhood, in a career as poet, essayist, editor, and art historian spanning over fifty years, is the subject of this study. Although I consider several of Hewitt's non-poetic works, my primary focus is his verse. My first chapter, "An Ulsterman of Planter Stock," examines this work in the context of the Ulster Protestant tradition into which Hewitt was born and from which he received his education and early values. In a related second chapter, "Tradition and Influence," I explore the literary history of his province—concentrating on Hewitt's two academic interests, the Ulster folk poets and the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish poet William Allingham—with a view to defining the social, cultural, political,
and psychological "climate" inherited through the literature and responsible for Hewitt's views and rhetorical stance, especially as these concern identity and the sense of place.

With this general personal and literary context established, in the third chapter, "City and Country Worlds," I look at the two Northern Irish settings which figure most prominently in Hewitt's poetry, and elicit from him both outrage and love: the city of Belfast where he was born, and the surrounding countryside of County Antrim. For the poet, Belfast is a place that he remembers most nostalgically yet one also, since the outbreak of communal violence, where he feels morally isolated and less certain about his identity and acceptance among his co-inhabitants. In contrast, although he has sometimes felt as an indulged stranger among country people, as already noted Hewitt is devoutly drawn to the Northern Irish land and to those who work and cherish it. Reflecting his Planter background with its biblical overtones about the land's inheritance and possession, yet with no feeling of territorial defensiveness, the poet finds in the natural setting the solace, strength, and direction which help refine his vision of nationhood and restore his faith in the human condition.

Such vision and faith have been sternly challenged in the wake of recent events in Northern Ireland. So Hewitt's poetry about the Troubles—the subject of Chapter IV, "'My Heritage Is Not Their Violence'"—reveals a self-effacing, confessional attitude, one through which the poet, usually speaking from abroad, regrets his former reticence about the injustices in Ulster society which have
led to the violence. Yet the scrupulous honesty and humane temperament, free of private hatred or bitterness, which this attitude connotes permits Hewitt to vent his righteous anger at those who have actively promoted the bloodshed and to criticize those who have acquiesced to it. However, unlike other contemporary poets whose works I also discuss, for Hewitt personal culpability matters little; reparation will come only through bold generosity and unquestioning forgiveness. Thus, with often ringing homiletic clarity, and certain of his identity and role, the poet expresses positively his designs for peace and spiritual prosperity, sentiments which Hewitt's calm yet earnest rhetorical strength rescues from any danger of emotional excess or naive abstraction. The vision finally of a stronger, saner, freer nation, tempered while somehow never altered by the reality of the past and the current turmoil, is always a secure feature in Hewitt's work. This is true of the poems in his most recent volumes which I examine briefly in my conclusion.

My design finally is to chronicle such distinctive affirmation by Ireland's most respected senior poet. In the process I hope to demonstrate how one man's exemplary integrity and open-minded humanism, maintained against a tremulous background, has allowed him to discover the warmth and certainty of national kinship—to find that "glove" which is one's country, as Yeats asserted, with which we reach out to the infinite and touch, if only for rare moments, previously hidden, universal truths. At the very least, it is my privilege to help fulfill the humble request that John Hewitt himself makes at the end of one of his poems; that others come to understand
the place he holds and the meaning of his life:

the man he was,
intending kindness, trying to be just
in thought and act, desiring that the years
should yield his quiet verses some applause
before they end in radiated dust.
NOTES


The sources for my biographical information on Hewitt are the entry on Hewitt in Contemporary Authors, Vols. 97-100 (Detroit, 1981), p. 242; Alan Warner's Introduction to The Selected John Hewitt (Belfast, 1981), pp. 1-11; and Terence Brown's article on Hewitt in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 27 (Detroit, 1984), 149-155.

CHAPTER I

AN ULSTERMAN OF PLANTER STOCK

In an often-quoted "hierarchy of values," John Hewitt has described his first national loyalty as belonging to the province of Ulster, specifically to the Planter tradition to which he is culturally, religiously, and politically heir. Hewitt goes on to state: "I was born in the island of Ireland, so . . . I'm an Irishman"; yet he admits this loyalty is secondary. He concludes his list with a sense of widening geography:

I was born in the British archipelago, and English is my native tongue, so I am British. The British archipelago are offshore islands to the continent of Europe, so I'm European.

Although he composes this list in what appears a descending order of personal identification, Hewitt nonetheless cautions that "anyone who omits one step in that sequence . . . is falsifying the situation."\(^1\)

This outline shows both Hewitt's struggle over and movement toward resolving his Irish identity, a conflict which his contemporaries as well as the succeeding generation of current Irish writers have faced, especially those from the north of Ireland confronted by extreme social and sectarian divisions. The statement reaffirms Hewitt's strong regional attachment, reflecting a perspective shaped
by his life-long celebration of that "Ulster clay"² as a source of inspiration and peace. Yet it also shows Hewitt's attempt to protest Northern Ireland's injustices and violence—products, in his view, of unyielding regional association and narrow political concern—by seeking a wider range of knowledge, experience, and hence loyalty. Moreover, the discursive, dispassionate tone of his words reveals the need to impose order and reason on the complex issue of identity. In all, this explanation characterizes well the thrust of nearly all of Hewitt's work, highlighting, as Terence Brown has described, "a distinctive vision of the world," one which transcends the writer's locality, frees him from entrenched prejudice, and thereby "commands interest and respect."³

This enlarged vision does not diminish, of course, Hewitt's abiding devotion to Ulster, particularly to the county of Antrim which includes the city of Belfast where he was born. Although a world traveler familiar with other lands and peoples, Hewitt continually returns in spirit to his home, a place which has formed his intellectual and artistic life. In an autobiographical sketch, "No Rootless Colonist," he explains:

I have experienced a deep enduring sense of our human past before the Lion Gate at Mycenae and among the Rolright Stones of the Oxfordshire border, but it is the north-eastern corner of Ireland where I was born and lived until my fiftieth year, where the only ancestors I can name are buried:

Grain of my timber, how I grew,
my syntax, cadence, rhetoric,
grammar of my dialect.

So for the poet, too, creative energy can best be maintained with an
imagination and speech inspired by native soil and air. In his poem "The Glens," while Hewitt acknowledges the "savage history of wrong" visited on the indigenous population and desires to "lend an eager voice, / if voice avail, to set the tally straight," he still proudly contends that

no other corner in this land
offers in shape and colour all I need
for sight to torch the mind with living light.  

Not merely a poem celebrating place, however, "The Glens" is also significant for the distinction Hewitt draws between Protestant Planter and Catholic Gael, one which betrays the kind of suspicion which the English and Scottish colonist has invariably felt of Ulster's colonized Irish. Thus, while expressing compassion for his Irish neighbors and their dark past, Hewitt is at times condescending, his tone suggesting a cultural and religious distance that is never entirely bridged:

Not these my people, of a vainer faith
and a more violent lineage. My dead
lie in the steepled hillock of Kilmore
in a fat country rich with bloom and fruit. . . .

I fear their creed as we have always feared
the lifted hand between the mind and truth.

Hewitt echoes this last sentence in a subsequent poem, "The Dilemma," in which he relates how "logic steered me well outside / that ailing church which claims dominion / over the questing spirit." Ultimately, this same "logic" that caused Hewitt to reject Irish Catholicism also forced him to deny "all credence to the state by rebels won / from a torn nation, rigged to guard their gain"—a moral
abjurance of conservative Protestant Unionism that he still maintains. Nonetheless, Hewitt's identifying reference to Ulster's Protestants—in his use of the pronoun "we"—denotes an outlook traditionally shared by other descendants of the Planter class. This class evolved from an English plan, inaugurated under James I in the seventeenth century, to uproot the hostile native population and replace them with loyal Protestants from England, Scotland, and Wales, among whom were members of Hewitt's family, who settled in County Armagh. In practice, however, the "undertakers" responsible for most of the Plantation accepted Irish tenants; so Ulster became, as Northern Ireland remains today, not a solidly Protestant province, but one with two antagonistic populations living side by side, a "tribal society," as Hewitt himself admits, with religious animosity overlaying the bitterness of a dispute over land. Moreover, early massacres by Catholics, followed by a century of incessant warfare—culminating in the siege and relief of Londonderry in 1689 and the Battle of the Boyne in 1690—helped establish in the Protestant memory a pattern of mistrust and fear, a "siege mentality" reinforced by annual commemorations and secret societies, heightened by the militant cadences of a Reformation religion.

Hewitt characterizes this fierce history and his own response to it in a moving allegorical and ironic poem, "The Colony," in which he compares the development of the Ulster Plantation to that of a colony under the Roman Empire. As in other poems that speak of his province's past, Hewitt—through the voice of a biased yet inquiring Ulster colonist—extols the merits of his people's way
of life while echoing, as in "The Glens," the superior feeling of
the settler when observing native ritual and behavior. It is a cul-
tural stereotype of the Irish which many Ulstermen still carry:

They worship Heaven strangely, having rites
we snigger at, are known as superstitious,
cunning by nature, never to be trusted,
given to dancing and a kind of song
seductive to the ear, a whining sorrow.

Also reflecting the colonist's ever-present fear of being finally
overpowered and destroyed once the "garrison" leaves, Hewitt concludes
the stanza:

. . . they breed like flies. The danger's there;
when Caesar's old and lays his sceptre down, 'll
we'll be a little people, well-outnumbered.

Such cultural chauvinism and public fear slowly give way,
however, to a desire for understanding, a desperate hope that accom-
modation, at least, may be made and catastrophe averted. Against
the "one or two loud voices" of those who "would restore / the rack,
the yellow patch, the curfewed ghetto"—those "creed-crazed zealots"
whom Hewitt detests\(^{12}\)—the poet strikes a conciliatory chord,
recognizing, among other things, that his is a usurping people, and
that survival requires making "common cause with the natives, in
their hearts / hoping to win a truce when the tribes assert / their
ancient right and take what once was theirs."\(^{13}\)

Yet Hewitt, through the poem's persona, attempts to avoid this
apparent expediency, having, he contends, "a harder row to hoe."
Disparaging judgments about religion and culture remain; he thinks
the natives' code
though strange to us, and farther from the truth
only a little so,—to be redeemed
if they themselves rise up against the spells,
and fears their celibates surround them with.

In the end, however, it is the role of genuine peacemaker that the
speaker chooses, despite his prejudice, a role that Hewitt has tried
to live throughout his public life,

hoping by patient words I may convince
my people and this people we are changed
from the raw levies which usurped the land,
if not to kin, to co-inhabitants,
as goat and ox may graze in the same field
and each gain something from proximity.

The poet then reveals the final lesson which his history has
taught him: that time and work and a deep love of place change men,
tempering their original stern designs, even dulling their fears,
ultimately making them, if they allow, full sharers in their
adopted country's heritage and future:

for we have rights drawn from the soil and sky;
the use, the pace, the patient years of labour,
the rain against the lips, the changing light,
the heavy clay-sucked stride, have altered us;
we would be strangers in the Capitol;
this is our country also, no-where else;
and we shall not be outcast on the world.

Hewitt returns to this theme, in often the same urgent language,
in poem after poem, expressing again the need for the Ulsterman to
direct his attention outward and engage his "co-inhabitants" not
with disdain or dread but with a real, deep sense of shared national
pride. More than just artistic expression, then, his work becomes
his social duty; as Terence Brown reminds us, the poet "examines,
records, seeks explanation for present reality in past events,"
finally with the purpose of "explaining the Ulsterman to himself, to Ireland and to the world if it cares to listen."¹⁷

Part of this explanation entails, as Seamus Heaney has observed, Hewitt's continuous "coming to terms," his "measuring the self" against the circumstances of an Ulsterman living within the context of the whole of Ireland. Hewitt's motives, of course, are not merely academic, nor are his poems the result solely of historical curiosity. Rather, they reveal an often anguished quest for personal identity which in turn, according to Heaney, displays "a stubborn determination to belong to the Irishry" while at the same time remaining "tenaciously aware of a different origin and cast of mind."¹⁸ Indeed, Hewitt's work is more than interpretation of varied backgrounds; it demonstrates a steady movement toward reconciling the two conflicting Irish traditions—Protestant Unionist Planter and Catholic Nationalist Gael—and proposes, much as does the enlightened speaker in "The Colony," a spiritual union of Ulster's divided population, with the hope of learning "something from proximity." As the current disastrous conditions in Northern Ireland attest, however, the role of peacemaker is an arduous, frustrating, and perilous one. It is also a lonely pursuit, and Hewitt accepts the knowledge that his words will be misunderstood or go unheeded, his intentions suspected by both sides. Moreover, his involvement "from a very particular vantage point" isolates him further; for, as Terence Brown describes, the Nonconformist Ulsterman who turns in sympathy to the whole history of the Irish people "does so not only in an environment which actively discourages such an
exercise but also without any assurance of his acceptance within the mainstream of the country's culture." Still, Hewitt trusts that there are a few who will listen, persons like himself—circum­spect, sensitive, free of societal tyranny and the burdens of political mythmaking—his "own kind" as he calls them in one poem. For these he writes; for the others, he provides both an explanation and admonishment:

I do not pitch my voice
that every phrase be heard
by those who have no choice:
their quality of mind
must be withdrawn and still,
as moth that answers moth
across a roaring hill.

For Hewitt personally, "choice" and "quality of mind" have been essential matters in understanding his identity as well as in appreciating the need to establish a more just environment in Northern Ireland. In large measure, Hewitt's determination to pursue the latter goal is the product of his upbringing in a tolerant, liberal home. His father, especially, instructed his children (John and older sister Eileen) in "the stubborn habit of unfettered thought," so that, as the poet recalls in "The Dilemma," "I dreamed, like him, all people should be free." Indeed, Robert Hewitt, a teacher and principal of St. Agnes Street Mixed School in Belfast, seems to have imparted to his son a selective intellectual spirit which would later compel Hewitt to reject the blind adherence to religion and class so prevalent throughout Ulster's recent history. "We talked of everything," Hewitt remembers in "Those
Morning Walks," from religion to politics to the weather so that, he concludes, "walking with my father every day / gave me a striding mind." So strong is the admiring memory that, in another poem, Hewitt refers to his departed father as "the prince of my dead," remarking at the end with a tone of gratitude, "if he haunts, he haunts me from within." 

His father's independence, in fact, affected Hewitt even more directly. Although he was a devout Methodist, Robert Hewitt's quarrel with the local minister resulted in his son's escaping baptism, a rite to which in any case the father seems to have attached little importance. Alan Warner remarks how Hewitt later "appreciated the symbolic freedom from church and creed that this omission gave him." Thus, Hewitt records in an early essay on his life, "I have felt myself to be my own man, the ultimate Protestant." This idea of himself as a true "Dissenter"—distinct from his co-religionists who, even as "Nonconformists," adhere in his view to unbending laws—is echoed in the revealing personal essay "The Family Next Door." Specifically, his father's stories of Catholic teachers' vulnerability to clerical influence and exploitation became, Hewitt contends, "one of the factors which activated my mistrust of all organized religions and their employees which has remained a vigorous element in my dissenting attitude." He further reiterates, "I inherited a temperament that finds no difficulty in dissenting from the accepted majority opinions." 

Before he was aware of the exact dimensions of this inheritance, however, Hewitt responded as any other Protestant boy ignorant of what
Ulster's religious and social distinctions mean, yet recognizing that somehow he belonged to the preferred and dominant group. In "The Family Next Door," Hewitt recalls a youthful ritual which, though he never quite understood it nor often performed it, served to reconfirm the security of the Protestant position:

... if a priest passed you on the pavement you took off your cap and flung it on the ground and stamped on it. The full rite required spitting also, but this I never did.27

In the poem "The Green Shoot," Hewitt again recounts this practice, as well as how he would taunt a Catholic errand boy—"my enemy"—admonishing him "first to admit his faith, and when he did, / repeatedly to curse the Pope of Rome." The narrative softens, however, when Hewitt remembers "one Christmas Eve" slipping in from play after having been "schooled in such duties by my bolder friends." Safe at home, he and his mother watch while carolers perform in front of their door, "singing a song I liked until I saw / my mother's lashes were all bright with tears."28

From this episode, the poet has admittedly drawn "ready sentiment," feelings nonetheless "gritty with threads of flinty violence" that have marked his growth. Yet he closes with characteristic affirmation—and with an emphasis on the color green, ironic given its negative symbolism among Ulster's Protestants—voiced like a plea for reason and tenderness in the midst of a bleak reality:

I am the green shoot asking for the flower, soft as the feathers of the snow's cold swans.29
Hewitt's ability to make such a plea is attributable not only to his father's influence, but also, as he narrates in "The Family Next Door," to the friendship of a Catholic boy named Willie Morrissey who lent him back issues of such magazines as Our Boys and Art Teacher's Monthly. These publications—Catholic and Nationalist in perspective and thus generally suppressed in Protestant families—inspired Hewitt's interest in Irish mythology and history, in a national heritage older and richer than that presented by Ulster's segregated enclaves:

\[
\text{They carried exciting stories of Cuchullain and Colm Cille and Red Hugh O'Donnell and Owen Roe O'Neill and the Famine... So began my fifty years' involvement in the story of our country's past and the rights and wrongs of it.}^{30}
\]

Later, in a poem appropriately titled "The Irish Dimension," Hewitt again acknowledges the importance of this friendship, expressing appreciation for that chance meeting which, as Terence Brown remarks, "must bless a man if he is to be a poet."\(^{31}\) The last line reads simply, "I am still grateful, Willie Morrissey."\(^{32}\)

Evaluating his education which, despite this fortunate acquaintance, encouraged near-total social and religious division, Hewitt asserts bitterly in "The Family Next Door":

\[
\ldots \text{it is in ourselves and how we were allowed or compelled to grow up that the root of the error lies, in the segregation of children into distinct communities in their schools and playgrounds, a segregation so complete that misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and fictions must inevitably persist and proliferate.}^{33}\]

These "fictions" the poet finds particularly troubling—the
debilitating myths which nourish the violence and falsehood, further polluting what he calls in "An Irishman in Coventry" a "poisoned memory" of wrongs. Indeed, among all the wounds the Irish have suffered throughout their history Hewitt includes one that has been recurrently self-inflicted: betrayal by "glittering fables / which gave us martyrs when we needed men."34

Although in this poem Hewitt is critical of his countrymen, the fact that he, a Protestant Ulsterman, is able to encompass the larger Irish experience is significant. So the pronoun "we" which in "The Glens" referred to members of his Northern class and culture, here shows his impassioned identification with the collective national memory; as the title denotes, no longer is he an Ulsterman alone, but an Irishman who, when he lists the tragedies of Ireland's past, does so in the voice not of the Planter but of the Gael, representing the oppressed native, not the usurping colonist:

This is our fate: eight hundred years' disaster crazily tangled as the Book of Kells; the dream's distortion and the land's division, the midnight raiders and the prison cells.

Nonetheless, as at the end of "The Green Shoot," the stern moral tale the poet recites suddenly gives way to a slender but sustaining Romantic prospect:

Yet like Lir's children banished to the waters,35 Our hearts still listen for the landward bells.

The discovery of national identity which precedes this kind of dark celebration has been for John Hewitt a gradual process, not a sudden need or burst of insight. Indeed, in his early long poem
"Conacre," the poet seems not at all anxious to establish any further
kinship than that drawn from the admired physical landscape, from
the glory of Ireland's land whose beauty ignores boundaries charted
by a bitter history. With characteristic earnestness, and with
warm delight, Hewitt explains:

This is my home and country. Later on
perhaps I'll find this nation is my own;
but here and now it is enough to love
this faulted ledge, this map of cloud above,
and the great sea that beats against the west
to swamp the sun.³⁶

In fact, "later on" Hewitt does embrace his country as his
nation, significantly at a time of social and political upheaval
in Northern Ireland—the late 1960s when, it would seem, neither
silence nor equivocation was an appropriate answer to the recrimi-
nating violence. In the poem "The Scar," Hewitt responds to the
symbolic circumstances of his great-grandmother's death in 1847
from famine fever contracted, he mentions earlier in "The Family
Next Door," "over the half-door from a wandering beggar."³⁷ In the
poem he relates how knowledge of this event, told to him by his
grandfather, confirmed a unifying personal identity, permitting
a psychological joining not merely of his Planter class with that
of the Ulster Gael, but more importantly of his native province with
the rest of Ireland, with all that that region and country have known
through eight centuries of struggle and torment. As with so much
of Hewitt's poetry, the narrative becomes a moral tale, a parable
which, while emotionally moving, ultimately expresses that "paced
thought" (to paraphrase lines from another poem³⁸) of reason and
conviction which is a feature of his most memorable work:

There's not a chance now that I might recover
one syllable of what that sick man said,
tapping upon my great-grandmother's shutter,
and begging, I was told, a piece of bread;
for on his tainted breath there hung infection
rank from the cabins of the stricken west,
the spores from black potato-stalks, the spittle
mottled with poison in his rattling chest;
but she who, by her nature, quickly answered,
accepted in return the famine-fever;
and that chance meeting, that brief confrontation,
conscribed me of the Irishry forever.

Though much I cherish lies outside their vision,
and much they prize I have no claim to share,
yet in that woman's death I found my nation;
the old wound aches and shews its fellow-scar. 39

While clearly unwilling to espouse the nationalist doctrines
held by many Ulster Catholics—the apparent "they" of the closing
section—and acknowledging their inability to appreciate his views,
Hewitt nonetheless resolves the insecurity imposed by his history and
the colonist's legacy of intransigence, suspicion, and guilt. In
effect, he assumes his "nativeness" and national identity by virtue
of his ancestor's charity—another gift of family that has proven
invaluable—through recourse to the rich heritage of compassionate
energy and sacrifice which her act has come to represent. As the last
line movingly suggests, even now the ancient sorrow remains deeply
shared; the "wound" reveals "its fellow-scar." For the poet, then,
distinctions of birth or religion or background no longer hold sway.
In language which recalls his message in many poems and the title of
one early work, "Once Alien Here," Hewitt asserts that his land is no
longer adopted; his people are no longer strangers.
It seems appropriate, finally, that such a revelation of identity should come from remembrance of a sacrificial act of kindness. For to Hewitt the discovery of who he is may actually be less important than the satisfaction, and justification, experienced from recalling a simple humane response. Indeed, Hewitt's acceptance of nationhood, as well as his vision of a stronger Ireland, have always revolved around a central and firmly-held understanding that before political or social change can take place, his countrymen, in essence, must become better human beings. In Hewitt's view, this is imperative not because religion dictates it, but because its adaptation to daily existence may be the only way to live decently and, if not free from fear or turmoil, at least sufficiently prepared to meet inevitable conflicts presented by a stricken world. So, in a powerful poem, "The Habit of Mercy," Hewitt defines what for him might be termed a spiritual nation—one which deserves his primary loyalty, over and above any attachment to land, province, country, or political dogma (despite his stated "hierarchy of values"). With shocking frankness, Hewitt questions the nature and impact of the Crucifixion, an underpinning of Christian belief, then once again tempers his intensity to a desperate yet tender call for unity, here based on a sense of common danger inspiring common action:

Suppose, for argument's sake, that Calvary was a defeat; God faced the permitted evil and found it too much, not merely too much for his creatures, too much for himself—Man's honesty kept the forsaken cry in the record—then there's no hope save in enduring and trying by small gestures of love and pity to publish the habit of mercy from man to man. For the great world beyond us has terror and horror enough to be faced and accepted.
Not simply a reflection of a personal attitude, this skeptical, broadminded approach is well in the tradition of other Northern poets such as Samuel Ferguson, William Drennen, and William Allingham. Like the work of these literary ancestors, especially Allingham, Hewitt's essays and poems are, as Terence Brown concludes, "the work of a humane, serious man" who has sought to fulfill what he conceives as his duty by attempting "to embody and blend the best of Ulster tradition in his own writing." So, less concerned with expressing Romantic nationalism as did Thomas Moore and James Mangan, or with re-establishing in English a submerged mythical world as did W. B. Yeats and Austin Clarke, Hewitt emphasizes descriptions of particular persons and places. Parable-like while never didactic, his is a poetry "of minute personal observation and topographical reference" which expand to evocative portraits of family, friends, and location. As he cares less about the rare celebration than about the daily round, so he cares less about form than about content. Never an experimenter with poetic approaches, Hewitt produces verse that has remained for the most part conventional in meter, diction, and rhyme scheme, a continuation of late Victorian neo-Romantic taste and style. Nonetheless, his often spare, strong lines—especially of his later verse—reflect his Nonconformist upbringing, through which Hewitt underscores the need to maintain reason and compassion in the wake of social segmentation and sectarian warfare.

It is the life-long process of affirmation and hope revealed in this work that distinguishes John Hewitt as Ireland's most respected senior poet. Through his writing he has made the Ulster background
not a stumbling block to a wider national vision, but rather a valuable perspective by which to view more objectively, and thus more truthfully, the "rights and wrongs" of his country's history, past and present. And it is with this perspective, demonstrating what Seamus Heaney has described as "the kind of authority without dogma" which poets stand for, that Hewitt produces his most compelling poetry, recording "those accurate, painful quests toward self-knowledge that at once rebuke and reward us."
NOTES


6 Ibid.


14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 79.

16 Ibid.

17 Brown, Northern Voices, p. 88.

19 Northern Voices, p. 87.


25 Ibid.


27 Ibid.


29 Ibid.


31 Northern Voices, p. 87.

32 Hewitt, "The Irish Dimension," Kites in Spring, p. 56.


35 Ibid., p. 112.


41 Northern Voices, p. 91.

42 Ibid., p. 90.

CHAPTER II
TRADITION AND INFLUENCE

In a poem from his most recent collection, *Loose Ends*, John Hewitt recalls his attendance at the re-interment of W. B. Yeats in 1938, and reaffirms the debt that he and other modern Irish poets owe to the nation's greatest poet. Yet Hewitt also draws a clear distinction between the views of art and nationhood which Yeats held and those which he himself has espoused. In "clenched homage" the young poet had then "knelt to cross and tower" and
to those dark famous hills which, till time ends,
must wear the shapes conferred by vatic power,
the power that fleshed our legends and his friends.¹

While thus acknowledging that both the physical and spiritual landscapes—the features of Irish earth and myth—have been recreated through Yeats's "proud imagination," Hewitt admits that he never shared Yeats's thoughts, choosing instead "a faith in man's progressive range, / finding his stance and temper alien." What he does retain, however, is the sense of the power of words in an Irish rhythm, their "chanted cadence," as well as "the right to change / the masks with which I face my fellow-men,"² based on Hewitt's own need to define and inhabit several social, intellectual, or artistic worlds.
Hewitt's revelation of what he has accepted and rejected in Yeats is significant in that it distinguishes the Northern Nonconformist tradition with, as we have seen, its own history and heroes, sets of attitude and methods of focus, from that of Yeats and the Anglo-Irish writers of the Southern literary revival. For one, Hewitt's avowed democratic socialism has prevented him from accepting the political vision of Ireland suggested by Yeats's later writings: that of a benign oligarchy of enlightened gentry, supported by a "noble" peasantry conscious of and well-versed in its rich mythic past. That predilection aside, Hewitt's cultural and artistic sensibilities—influenced by a background and outlook wary of emotional or verbal excess—has compelled him to take a more skeptical, though nonetheless compassionate, view of his countrymen and their human capabilities. For instance, the sturdy Ulster farmers whom Hewitt admires are neither Ossianic kinsmen nor scholar peasants, those passionate while naive inheritors of their nation's treasures. Similarly his Northern landscape does not reflect a "mystical brotherhood / Of sun and moon and hollow and wood," a setting in which nature and nationalism are wondrously joined, in which still looms a secret heroic world of magic and memory.

In Hewitt's poems, the Northerners' relationship to nature is a much more rudimentary one than in Yeats's work; it is a connection governed by necessity. More than once, the poet speaks of man's giving the land "the shape of use." Indeed, rather than a reminder of any mystical past, this useful earth remains as a defining presence for any immediate, yet always practical, devotion. In the
poem "Landscape," for example, Hewitt chronicles this presence in very concrete and unsentimental terms. While he recognizes that it is "a map of kinship at one level," to a country person the living landscape is also "a chart of use, / never at any level a fine view."

For Hewitt the land and its people need no more exalted or symbolic stature than that which they provide of and by themselves—in the daily, often grudging, round of nurturing labor—by physically what they are. Thus he writes with certain feeling:

landscape is families, and a lone man boiling a small pot, and letters once a year; it is also, underpinning this, good corn and summer grazing for sheep free of scab and fallow acres waiting for the lint. So talk of weather is also talk of life, and life is man and place and these have names. 5

In similarly colloquial language, Hewitt begins "Homestead," a discursive poem which further accents the differences between Yeats's vision and his own and, by association, between the two traditions. Here a farmer's voice announces:

It is time now for me to build a house to be a shelter in the rough days, with a bare hearth where one could kindle a fire and dry his duds and boil a small pot. 6

Later in the poem Hewitt, in the poet's voice, mentions specific names of country people and connects them with the name of Ireland's (and the early Yeats's) most celebrated mythic hero:

Oisin, I said, is my symbol, that shadowy man, warrior and bard returning again and again to find the Fenians forgotten and unforgotten,
rising when bidden on the young men's lips
to face defeat and go down and sleep in their cave.7

Having reflected the spirit, if not the lyricism, of such poems as
"To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time," Hewitt then alludes to a
conflict that Yeats would have appreciated, an "old dispute / of
big Dan Lavery with Gillwrira MacCartan, / the flat-footed, red-
necked farmer, the reed-voiced bard."8 For Hewitt this dispute
seems to evolve from the old distinction between art and utility,
between that which disregards the "shapes of use," celebrating
instead the aesthetic meaning of objects and events, and that
which accepts these patterns of life for what they are, at face
value.

Clearly Hewitt is torn in loyalty between these two views,
his admittedly "cloven nature" admiring equally "the calloused
knowledge of one, the poise of the other, / the humble regard for
the discipline of sap and frost, / the proud step in tradition of
handling words."9 Still, Hewitt does tip his hand slightly in
favor of "calloused knowledge" over dramatic "poise," the most telling
lines occurring in another recollection of Yeats's memorial when,
"to the wailing of bagpipes," the poet's body was carried "through
the wind-washed town." Referring to Yeats's celebrated place of
creativity, Hewitt comments dryly how "the dented symbols rust in
the crumbling tower / but Oisin is not there now."10 Later he uses
more colloquial expression to relate how he imagined watching Oisin—
now in the guise of a skeptical onlooker—"elbow back through the
holiday crowd, / going the opposite way as we followed the hearse."11
Oisin's spirit has since appeared, Hewitt finally explains, to stir and enrich the living landscape. Yet, returning to his stern practical farmer, the poet suggests that not great bardic music but "simple songs" are needed "to haul his tractor out of the sucking bog."¹²

The respect Hewitt displays for this utilitarian view, and his general sympathy, despite a totally urban background, for the simply-lived country existence, is in large measure the result of his uneasiness with overly symbolic or stylized treatments. It is an uneasiness, too, that by implication translates into a disaffection with the social and political mythmaking, with its sense of tragic inevitability, which he believes has thwarted moves for peace in the province and divided the Irish for centuries. This mythmaking he equates with those "glittering fables" he decries in "An Irishman in Coventry," which "gave us martyrs when we needed men." To counter this tragic view, Hewitt looks for inspiration not to the writers of Irish Renaissance nor even to such early Romantics as Thomas Moore and James Mangan, but rather to almost-forgotten Ulster weaver poets of the late eighteenth century and to a minor poet of the nineteenth century, fellow Northerner, a model for Hewitt's stance and style, William Allingham. The folk verse clearly appeals to Hewitt's feeling for the direct and unadorned, and Allingham's work, with its expressed love of native region matched with a social conscience, speaks to Hewitt's own sense of nationalism and to his liberal ideals.
Celebration of the earlier "rustic" tradition, as later we shall see with Allingham, accomplishes two things: one a matter of identity and the other of understanding. The tradition further affirms Hewitt's belief that by cherishing a varied literary past—particularly of Protestant Northerners who, like himself, are on longer alien but "native" in thought and word—the poet can better appreciate his own people and the strength and certainty of his association with them. In the Foreword to his study of these country poets, *Rhyming Weavers, and Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down*, Hewitt quotes from his Master's Thesis; his words carry the tone of compassionate resolve which characterizes nearly all of his writing:

>. . . I could not have read so many thousand lines if the forgotten and often clumsy old poets themselves had not now and then given me in stanza, couplet or turn of phrase, some sense of the humanity that was in them, and some feeling that, for better or worse, they were my own people."

The second promise which the tradition holds for Hewitt is expressed in his dedicatory poem to the same study; it is the hope that respect for Ireland's diversity, "the rich colours of each dialect," will afford tolerance and wisdom, teaching "our tense minds to unclench, and, open, reach / across the gap that sunders sect from sect."

Although Hewitt sees the folk verse as affirming the need for tolerance and reconciliation, the initial and governing attraction of this early work remains, for him, its native richness, its demonstration—as we have seen, something central to Hewitt's belief in the integrity of regional culture—that creative energy,
and the identifying love of place that inspires it, can be fostered by those planted from another country, the "colonists" as well as the "colonized." Hewitt's attraction to the rural life is not unlike that of Wordsworth who in such poems as "The Old Cumberland Beggar" and "Michael" honors the labor and spirit of noble common men, those often ignored or demeaned members of society. Like Wordsworth, Hewitt finds in them the guileless honesty, strength, and reverence missing in more sophisticated, "civilized" circles. Indeed, the weaver verse itself was part of the early Romantic movement, some of it even written in the Central Scots dialect of Robert Burns. Nonetheless, the large body of it retains a feeling and strength of its own, existing, as Hewitt asserts, in its own right, "within a sub-region of the same folk culture," indeed whose style, stanzas, lines, and themes had a footing as vernacular literature in Ulster before Burns's birth. Moreover, concerning the weavers' dialect, similar to Burns's, Hewitt contends forcefully: "This was their own language, not a borrowed garb, the trappings of imitated compositions."16

Nor were the poems of Robert Huddleston, Edward Sloan, James Campbell, Samuel Thomson, and Hugh Porter—to name a few of the men whose work Hewitt highlights—undistinctive for their style and uniqueness of language. Their expressed themes show a marked change in attitude and purpose concerning their portion of the province, a development that further supports Hewitt's claim to their native sense and attachment. Indeed, the very interest in verse-making is, in Terence Brown's view, "a valuable sign that one
section of the colony had moved from their strictly commercial, military and religious concerns towards a more inclusive, self-confident and cultivated form of life. Although most of the poems directly or indirectly deal with some aspect of the linen trade—with rigorous attention often given to spinning and to the weaving and selling of flax—the effect is not a monotonous recitation of tasks, but rather reflective of a joy in manual labor and pride of occupation, a simple moral satisfaction in one's calling.

As John Dickey of Rockfield claims:

Upon my loom I'm happier far,  
Than he who rides in mammon's car;  
Wealth never yet has been a bar  
Tween me and bliss;  
My star's the glorious morning star,--  
I joy in this.  

With this pride in work (so indicative, it seems, of the settler's background and the Protestant ethic) are love of family, respect for the seasons, the value of friendship, all the elemental daily laments and delight of those living and working close to the land and to basic existence. Joseph Carson, for example, treats one charming domestic scene:

My Bess the house trims up full-tidy,  
An' wi' her wheel sits down beside me,  
While I maun make the shuttles play,  
To crack an' wile the time away.  

With similar affection, yet in a poem not about weaving, Hugh Porter heralds "summer's sweet return," as the poet muses "Low by the brink o' some bit burn, / Or on some grassy brae." There he reclines in reverie, "delirium, deep and ween":


Still, the joys of the trade and those basic to love and life are never for long separated. Thus, in Francis Boyle's "Bonny Weaver," the poet uses the occasion of work as a means of remembering his sweetheart, his loneliness momentarily eased by the mechanical task; what results is a vibrant, winsome folk song:

When I am weaving on my loom
I think upon my darlin';
Tho' she remained in Moira Town
An' I live in Kilwarlin;
Resolved in mind for to be kind
And never to deceive her;
Then in return her love will burn
For me, her linen-weaver.

Eventually, however, the sense of private and communal pleasure expressed in the weavers' verse was supplanted by one of tragedy, as much of the linen trade was mechanized in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The somber poems that appear during this period—the early to middle 1800s, which saw emigration from Ulster due to the unemployment brought on by mechanization—while naturally expressive of Luddite sympathies, also evoke for the first time a sense of betrayal as a dimension of national sorrow, not unlike the literature of the Famine, occurring at the same time in the South. Indeed, in a poem such as David Herbison's "The Auld Wife's Lament for Her Teapot," the whole island is seen to be bereaved, not just the Northern colony, with the implication that, as with the South's
potato economy, the convenience and greed of others have conspired to destroy an entire way of life. In the manner of a dirge, Herbison writes:

The days are past when folk like me
Could earn their bread,
My auld wheel now sits silently
Aboon the bed.

And well may Erin weep and wail
The day the wheel began to fail,
Our tradesmen now can scarce get kail
Betimes to eat,
In shipfuls they are doomed to sail
In search of meat.

For that machine that spins the yarn
Left us unfit our bread to earn.
O Erin! will ye ne'er turn stern
Against your foe,
When every auld wife can discern
Your overthrow. 22

Contributing to this sense of tragedy, Hewitt remarks, is the fact that a number of the weaver poets died penniless, or succumbed to factory work; still others emigrated or, perhaps most pitifully, survived "right out of the period like Ossian after the Fenians." 23 This last comment, of course, is indicative of the heroic stature with which Hewitt invests these verse-makers who combined a valuable occupation with such earnest literary feeling. Moreover, these artisans, most of whom were well-educated, were, as Hewitt notes, part of a very broad intellectual and often politically radical movement, some, like James Orr, helping to establish rural reading clubs and debating societies, while encouraging further creative activity among fellow weavers in the towns and countryside.
Understandably, it is the rural bard's almost complete integration with his community that Hewitt sees as particularly admirable. For an artist who democratically resists the claim that art should be cultivated apart from the daily world of labor—never corrupted by those who, as Yeats's famous attack includes, "but fumble in a greasy till / And add the half pence to the pence"—the work and spirit of these "rhyming weavers" must seem to strengthen his stated "faith in man's progressive range." Still, as he certainly would share Yeats's distaste for soul-narrowing commercialism, Hewitt must admit that the sense of community itself has changed since the earlier period. Then, he explains, "The handloom in the house, the village, the reading room in the masonic lodge at the crossroads" offered for a time "a unique equilibrium for the emergence of some remarkable talents." In contrast to the present, the social environment

was altogether more organic and self-contained, not ironed flat by standardisation of education, of the instruments of opinion, not drained by railways and improved roads into, or infected with, a proletarianized urban complex.

The vehemence with which he directs this closing accusation demonstrates, almost equally, his sympathy for the vibrant character of the weaver society and his repugnance for the paucity of intellect and the social regimentation which he has witnessed in Northern Ireland. Although he recognizes, as he states in another poem, "No man can ever walk these ways again," Hewitt clearly hopes
that some lesson can be learned from the past, that the spirit, at least, of that short era of self-reliance, tolerance, and the genial pursuit of art and industry can be rekindled.

John Hewitt came to admire the Ulster weaver poets for a number of the same reasons that he grew to admire, and echo in much of his work, Ballyshannon-born William Allingham. As cited by Robert Welch, Allingham's "objectivity, his attention to exteriors, his love of common life, of detail, his political good sense, but above all, his warmth and humanity," all are, as we have seen, qualities that Hewitt displays in his own writing. Yet the earlier poet's consideration for exteriors, his desire to record experiences with the unaffected realism and genuine intensity with which they occur, perhaps links him more closely to the weaver bards, and this in turn presents a strong influence on Hewitt. As with Hewitt's poems, Allingham's work holds "the flow of life, the succession of impressions, to be a blessed thing, a thing worth celebrating." One poem indicative of this outlook is Allingham's deceivingly titled "An Evil May-Day," in which he frankly asks, "What use is the Universe itself?" Admitting that an answer to such a profound question must itself involve large, abstract—and thereby less meaningful—answers such as "Mother" or "Spirit," he further inquires, "What may these be? One thing, or separate?" In the end, he rejects all attempts at such analysis, is forced—and pleased—to acknowledge the inherent glory and mystery of a single physical life, of the tangible, reliable forms and features of nature:
I am conjoined . . .

To my bodily organs first of all;
Related strictly to the beast, the bird,
The blade of grass, the clod of earth, the cloud,
The faintest haze of suns within the sky.
That nearest fiery orb makes flow my blood;
Electric ether vivifies my brain;
And I, made up of these, also am not these,
Exist in personal being. 29

There is a richness and love, and a real confidence in such
lines that, while more artfully advanced, hearken back to the
weaver lyrics with their delight in simple activities surrounding
hearth and home, with a peace gathered from meadow and glen. There
is, too, the feeling that, secure in their own sense of purpose,
and though educated, there was for both Allingham and the early
Ulster poets no compelling need to explain deeper, more complex
truths. With something of this same feeling, Hewitt repeats the
attraction to physical nature in "The Ram's Horn"; yet the voice
in the poem is of one burdened by a life of worldly concerns, of
one resigned to live spiritually apart from humanity, turning to
the landscape, he says, "because men disappoint me." The poet is
"at ease" among these objects of natural beauty solely because they
exhibit no human traits—no capricious deceits or violences of
thought and act:

Animal, plant, or insect, stone or water,
are, every minute, themselves; they behave by law.
I am not required to discover motives for them,
or strip my heart to forgive the rat in the straw. 30

A tone of lonely rumination, not often heard in Allingham, is also
present in his "Long Delayed," a poem that begins despairingly:
Oft have I searched the weary world in vain,
And all the rest find love and peace of heart,
But I can only find a sluggish pain,
As one by one the sombre days depart. 31

Yet, as in Hewitt's poem, relief comes through recollection of the
surrounding natural order, in this case the season of spring
serving as an analogy of the soul's sudden healing. Allingham,
however, greets the restorative presence with greater assurance
than Hewitt can claim, with feelings undiluted by bitterness or
regret, with a sense even of abandoning pleasure:

O dreaming fool (I said), have done, have done!
How should a miracle be wrought for thee?
When lo, joy came, like verdure to a tree
That, long time stretching wintry arms aloft,
Replieth to a day of vernal sun
With multitudes of leaflets green and soft. 32

Although he is never fully restored by a joy in common
things, Hewitt nonetheless shares with Allingham the contention
that "We must live / In a material world, must therein work, /
Thereby be wrought upon." 33 Allingham found, as does Hewitt,
primary life—that evolving from moment to moment—both precious
and sufficient to inspire human values and vision. There was no
need either to escape from it with an overly dependent, self-con-
scious style (what Robert Welch terms "poetic ventriloquism") or
"to develop a system that would confound process in its comprehen-
siveness." 34 He wished instead to keep himself "alive to the
passage of life, to register its sounds and textures in his
writing." 35 Hewitt, likewise, desires this ability, yet laments
the fact that such attention to appearances, based on his love for
"the earth organic, renewed with the palpable seasons," has often caused him to be alone. Still, like the English thinker he most admires, William Morris, Hewitt recognizes that the outward quest for alternatives leads through confrontation and alienation into culture, to human spiritual fulfillment; that the search can prove trying, yet ultimately convincing and profoundly fruitful. A stirring poem which exposes and attempts to resolve the dilemma posed by this quest is "Because I Paced My Thought." Here, in answer to the particular charge that his retreat to the country and to natural things is but "an idle game for a cowardly mind," Hewitt responds in a resilient tone similar to Allingham's—defensive, urgent, yet finally in the manner of a creed:

I should have made it plain that I stake my future on birds flying in and out of the schoolroom window, on the council of sunburnt comrades in the sun and the picture carried with singing into the temple.

This does not mean that Allingham was blind to the duplicities and suspicious fears inherent in human society, or to the anguish of the sensitive man facing these barriers, a man who, paraphrasing Hewitt's words, "finds himself alone." While Allingham was for a long time only remembered (and still is known) for his bright lyrics celebrating the playful inhabitants of Irish myth—poems such as "The Fairies" and "Fairie-Hill, or The Poet's Wedding,"—or for nostalgic remembrances such as "Adieu to Ballyshanny," he wrote a number of poems, and one long story in verse, that expose the subtle yet prevailing corruption of human goodness. That this dark element can invade and change the most idyllic setting is seen in
the disturbing poem "George Levison; or The Schoolfellows." Into
the narrator's village world of pristine harmony and domestic peace
intrudes one day an old school comrade, George Levison, once a
promising youth--intelligent, virile, and ambitious--yet now a
decrepit alcoholic and squanderer, filled with impotent rage. While
the sympathetic but browbeaten narrator listens, George pathetically
recounts all his life's lost opportunities, chances which other
men somehow have conspired to deny him:

The dreary hours together, how he talk'd!
His schemes of life, his schemes of work and wealth,
Intentions and inventions, plots and plans,
Travels and triumphs, failures, golden hopes.

... He went, and mean'd he was a ruined man,
Body and soul; then cursed his enemies
By name, and promised punishment; made vaunt
Of genius, learning.38

"Twas all a nightmare," the narrator exclaims, "all plain wretched
truth," yet asks himself, with no satisfactory answer apparent:
"how to play the physician? Where's the strength / Repairs a slow
self-ruin from without?"39

Finally having taken advantage of his friend's generous
nature, George leaves as abruptly as he came, never to return.
The narrator notes that he has died, then comments ruefully that
"Through all the summer-time / The touch of that unhappy visit lay /
Like trace of frost on gardens, on our life."40 Indeed, George
has represented more than merely an irksome caller. He is, in
fact, as Robert Welch explains, "the darkness that must be kept out.
He is failure, debauchery, anger, lack of control. In the end he is death" as spiritually chilling to the human heart as frost is to living verdure. His character suggests, moreover, the both keening and predatory impulse which Hewitt maintains is the soul of a "poisoned memory," where poverty is "corroded into malice, / to hit and run and howl when it is hit." All this appears as an unassailable legacy, for while Allingham's narrator at last acknowledges that "heaven continues happiness and hope," and prays that his family's own "steps / Keep the good pathway through this perilous world," he still sees "the ghost of Georgy Levison," one who remains

A shifting phantom,—now with boyhood's face
And merry curls; now haggard and forlorn.
As when the candles came into the room."

Here, as elsewhere in his work, Allingham prefers evocative detail over a penetrating examination of cause or motive. The poet's reluctance to judge and thus "get too close to the centre of tension" -- a characteristic shared by Hewitt -- allows him to conclude "The Schoolfellows" with only a general moral, which he places cautiously on to this mysterious lesson of human vagary and waste:

One sells his soul; another squanders it;
The first buys up the world, the second starves.
Poor George was loser palpably enough;
Supernal Wisdom only knows how much."

Clearly there is deep regret evident in such lines, yet without condensation. There is a sense, also, of the incurable blindness humans suffer as a result of their debasement. Hewitt echoes this tragic sense in the poem "The Little House," from his collection
Mosaic. Here the presence of George Levison is felt in a tale of hatred and conflict that serves as an analogy generally of mankind's furious attraction to violence to the point of failing to recognize all grace and beauty. Specifically, it is a fable that describes Ulster's, and Ireland's, ceaseless warfare, a story of two societies trapped by their own history and heedless of anything that could enrich, strengthen, and unite them. As with Allingham's character, who is unchanged by his visit to the lovely village, the "Two" in Hewitt's poem fail even to comprehend the treasures lying, literally, outside their door, beside their "little house," their small island:

Unsleeping, each alone in time's abyss,
dealt out the hurts and shuffled them again;
in anguish clenched, what could they do but miss
day coming gently through the leaves in rain?^{46}

Hewitt's desire to describe and analyze the meaning of his nation's ancient troubles thus draws both its inspiration and perspective from Allingham. At the end of his long poem "Bridegroom's Park," Allingham states that a "man's true life and history / Is like the bottom of the sea, / Where mountains and huge valleys hide"; all exists "under the peaceful mirror, under / Billowy foam and tempest-thunder."^{47} In a similar way, Allingham came to believe, much of a nation's life and history remains obscured beneath social turbulence or the regimen of political or sectarian myth. Despite these obstacles, his willingness to explore in depth, as Hewitt describes his own intentions, the "rights and wrongs" of Ireland's present and past led Allingham to create the powerful verse narrative, Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland. By recording the
events leading up to a tenant farmer's eviction, and exposing personalities and motives of the major figures in this drama, Allingham fulfills a two-fold purpose: he presents a poem "on every-day Irish affairs" and in so doing invents a situation that contains in it all "the tensions and complexities of rural Irish life as they existed in the late 1850s and the early sixties," in the wake of the Great Famine. That he accomplishes both with skill, honesty, and compassionate insight testifies to the quality of his own humane talents and confirms the esteem in which other writers, especially Hewitt, hold him.

John Hewitt writes that Laurence Bloomfield served as a kind of watershed for Allingham; that in it, before leaving his customs house position in Ballyshannon for a new literary life in England at the age of thirty-nine, he "concentrated the strongest feelings and most telling experiences of his native country into a coherent statement, realising himself in the act." The potential difficulty of such a realization may be understood when considering Allingham's background. Like Hewitt, he was born into the Protestant minority and thus felt, as Hewitt notes in his Introduction to Allingham's selected poems, a "cultural isolation." Also in light of Hewitt's dilemma, Allingham's unorthodox politics "might have served as a bridge to the majority,"

but already he found that not many of them 'would readily trust a Protestant patriot, save in the belief of his readiness to join the true Church, when the proper time should arrive.'
This new equating of nationality with religion Allingham found particularly "irksome but pertinent," commenting sadly yet fondly at one point: "I love Ireland: were she only not Catholic. But would she be Ireland otherwise?" While this religious separation prevented him from participating intimately in the lives of those oppressed tenant farmers he chronicles in *Laurence Bloomfield*, his identification with Ireland's suffering and struggle, which emotionally transcended these barriers, allowed him to come closer to the meaning of nationality. As Hewitt explains, the history of the country from the Act of Union in 1801 to the collapse of the Young Irishers following the Famine "bred doubt in his mind of the possibility of a valid National Being; so for himself and for those like him, 'Ireland had ceased to be a country and England was not theirs.'"

This ultimate identity with his native Ireland gives *Laurence Bloomfield* its attraction and power as well as its direction. The setting is the mid-nineteenth century, in the district around Lisnamoy, a fictitious yet representative Irish village. Near the town is Lisnamoy House, a mansion belonging to Sir Ulick Harvey; beneath Croghan Mountain and near Lough Braccan is Croghan Hall, the home of Harvey's nephew, the local landlord Laurence Bloomfield. The action of the poem begins with Bloomfield's return to Ireland from years of study and travel on the Continent, during which time he has been influenced by various liberal ideologies, views that immediately clash with the accepted opinions of Harvey and the local agent, the efficient yet ruthless Pigot. Specifically, Bloomfield proposes (expressing
Allingham's own views) eventual ownership for the peasants, a policy that would in his view breed "diligence, content, and loyalty." However, a threatening letter from the rural revolutionary Ribbonmen, addressed to Pigot, in effect daring him to evict a district family, drowns out the voice of reason. The talk quickly turns to the time-worn formulas of oppression and control: "revolvers, informers, and evictions."54

What ensues is a course of action which leads to the last of these steps, yet not before we have witnessed from both sides the poisoned relations, entrenched positions, private hatreds, slogans, complacencies, and prejudices, as well as the integrity and earnest commitment of men like Bloomfield, who attempts vainly to separate fact from rhetoric, and honest labor from hypocrisy and greed. Given his opposition to the English system of rule in Ireland, and consequently his sympathy for the victims of that system, it is not surprising that Allingham has his main character in the poem identify with the peasant way of life symbolized by the Doran family. It is a feeling akin to Hewitt's admiration of the weaver society as something "authentic" and "rooted in real things," with "an order and naturalness attuned to the movements of the larger life outside."55 It is clear that Allingham believes that, even given the advantages which a cultivated life offers—the opportunities for education, travel, for intellectual and artistic pursuits—this harmonious picture of the Dorans reflects the texture of the life that somehow all men should live:
He's friends with earth and cloud, plant, beast and birds,
His glance, by oversubtleties unblurr'd,
At human nature, flies not much astray;
Afoot he journeys, but enjoys the way.
The instinctive faith, perhaps, of such holds best
To that ideal truth, the power and zest
Of all appearance; limitation keeps
Their souls compact; light cares they have, sound sleeps;
Their day, within a settled course begun,
Brings wholesome task, advancing with the sun.56

Allingham contends that this, moreover, is at heart actual
rural existence in Ireland, beneath the terror and dispossession
and despair. Nor is he afraid to name the forces responsible for
nervering this reality, for turning the peasant "into a fanatical
incendiary or a cringing whelp": they are the "interrelated evils
of rural agitation, vicious landlordism and historical simplifica-
tion."57 Bloomfield, for his part, attempts to remedy these ills,
his benign influence extending throughout the community, even to
the renovation of his manor house, Croghan Hall; it is a restoration
symbolic of the order, reason, and generosity that Allingham feels
an enlightened man must present to the world in order for change
to occur:

Good sense, refinement, naively reconcile
Man's work and nature's, and the genial smile
Is brotherhood's, not condescension's, here;
No bitterness flows in, but strength and cheer
From every aspect; 'tis a kindly place,
That does not seem to taunt you with its grace,
But, somehow, makes you happy, stray and stay,
And pleased to recollect it when away;
For manners thus extend to horse and field,
And subtle comfort or discomfort yield.58

Such pleasant aspects contrast sharply with the decor of the
agent Pigot's house, where the "instinctive touch of strong yet
tender skill" is "quite absent." As though to emphasize Pigot's crass bad taste, and reveal his philistine nature, Allingham describes how "harsh lights upon discordant colours fall, / Large, costly, dull engravings deck the wall"; and to underscore the presence of unfeeling authority which he maintains in the district, even his "lawn, green-house, garden, wear no magic beauty, / Shrub, flower-bed, border, stand as though on duty." Of course more than simply a lack of aesthetic sense is revealed here. As he does throughout the poem, Allingham relies on surface detail to provide signs of the inner nature of people and events, giving insight into personality, as Terence Brown explains, "by descriptions of appearances, domestic appurtenances and personal style." Indeed, the alternating garishness and coldness of Pigot's house more than suggest both the vanity and cruelty possible in his nature, in one prepared to embellish his own art-deprived life at the expense of others' lives and dreams.

This expense is finally paid in full at the eviction, an action which not even Bloomfield with his idealism and liberal plans can prevent. While the poem itself ends in the hope that justice and peace can one day be achieved through the young landlord's guidance, the picture of the eviction (with the understanding that it was one repeated again and again throughout rural Ireland) remains the most compelling image of the narrative. Amid curses and tears and tender ministering from neighbors, the tenant family is expelled from their home, their meager possessions "well-heaped." One sound dominates the scene: "the unrelenting clink and thwack / Of
iron bar on stone" as the house is demolished. A "sad procession" gradually retreats "through the slow-falling rain." With a deftness of description, Allingham concludes the piece with a touching evocation of a world in ruins, of human warmth and care suddenly and forever erased:

In three hours more
You find, where Ballytullagh stood before,
Mere shatter'd walls, and doors with useless latch,
And firesides buried under fallen thatch.

As demonstrated by this lamentable scene, Allingham was not blind to the dark forces in life. "He knew them," as Robert Welch states, "to be especially potent in the Ireland of his day"; in Laurence Bloomfield he tried to set them forth. Still, it is not finally on such images of destruction and despair that the poet dwells, although he forcefully shows that there is much to be deprecated about. As Welch concludes, "The poem eventually asserts [at least] . . . Ireland's potential for civilization, for a life lived in joy, peace and plenty." As suggested earlier, the poem turns on whether Bloomfield will or can heal the wounds and divisions he finds. That an affirmative answer is possible is felt in the short closing exchange between Bloomfield and his wife: "This Ireland should have been a noble place," he exclaims. Trusting in her husband's ability and the strength of his vision, she responds simply but eloquently, "It will be."

Inspired by William Allingham, Hewitt has delineated in his own work both the ferocity of this peril and, remarkably, the vitality of hope. Although analyzing conditions in Ireland more than a
century later, and focusing on a Northern urban instead of a Southern rural setting, Hewitt nonetheless records human deficiencies and creative energies both with equal power and insight. In the poem "The Coasters," for example, Hewitt expresses the hypocrisy and ultimate cowardice of those who, though they take no active part in the oppression, by their very inaction allow the social deterioration. Indeed, Hewitt here admonishes mincing liberal pieties and moral laziness to almost the same degree that he rejects violent political formulas. In the poem he uses searing irony to expose another form of violence—as potent as the gun or the bomb—for which even the most honorable and upright of his countrymen, his class and himself included, are responsible; this, he implies, is the violence of institutions, of indifference and slow decay; this is the root of the sickness:

You showed a sense of responsibility, with subscriptions to worthwhile causes and service in voluntary organizations, and, anyhow, this did the business no harm, no harm at all. Relations were improving. A good useful life. You coasted along.

... The government permanent, sustained by regular plebiscites of loyalty. You always voted but never put a sticker on the car; a card in the window would not have been seen from the street. Faces changed on the posters, names, too, often, but the same families, the same class of people. A Minister once called you by your first name. You coasted along and the sores suppurated and spread.
A more insidious evil, then, exists than that which possesses any villains of Allingham's poems, one born of a mind which asks no questions and is thus prey to the darkest promptings of suspicion and hatred. Hewitt ridicules the shallow man, who after listening to a Protestant preacher's diatribe, begins to criticize the views of his Catholic friends' church:

And you who seldom had time to read a book, what with reports and the colour-supplements, denounced censorship. And you who never had an adventurous thought were positive that the church of the other sort vetoes thought. And you who simply put up with marriage for the children's sake, deplored the attitudes of the other sort to divorce.67

Hewitt presents finally a judgement which will in time affect all, the "cloud of infection" that now "hangs over the city" soon, with "a quick change of wind," spilling over into "the leafy suburbs." Hewitt's stern explanation is: "You coasted too long."68

Although it speaks well for the poet's range, such an accusatory and at times sardonic tone is uncharacteristic of Hewitt's work. Ultimately, the issues are much too grave and the situation too urgent for even this hint of mockery. As with Allingham, personal culpability really matters little; reparation will come only through bold generosity such as Bloomfield can offer, in effect, through a basic humane response that supersedes the exigencies of education, religion, science, or art—those truths on which men depend to explain and resolve their troubled world. In another poem, "The ruins answer," Hewitt defines the elements
contained in such a response, what is possible even now, while "frustrations, enmities / flicker before . . . famished eyes" and while Europe "hangs" on "the poised event," with radars fanning and missiles deployed. With a feeling for what in his own life he has tried to be, and with a sense of the loneliness he has faced because of his stance, Hewitt pleads that man

build a world where one might catch a glance and pause to join the dance, sure of the proffered hand, the friendly touch, where none shall find a crooked heart, nor chide the man who walks apart because they hope by now his silence makes them rich.

What is needed in the end, Hewitt asserts, is an ordered mind which encompasses a comprehensive spirit, a "humble discipline" that "unbuckles our stiff arrogance," allowing man to "seize each proffered chance"

to grapple textures to the hungry sense, bidding the heart seek in the dream some hidden whispered name whereunder, singing, life's bright images advance.

Such hope, of course, is not readily justified when considering the "ruins" of Ulster's brutal present. Still, the legacy of reason and compassionate duty received from William Allingham and the heritage of simple joys and pridelful labor retained from the weaver bards, no less than his own steadfast belief, make Hewitt contend that there are secrets men have not yet discovered; there are truths, like "some hidden whispered name" which, when uncovered, will provide understanding and return life and beauty to a once "noble" land.
NOTES

2 Ibid.
5 Hewitt, "Landscape," Collected Poems, p. 60.
7 Ibid., p. 64.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 65.
14 Hewitt, Foreword, Rhyming Weaver, and Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down (Belfast, 1974), p. viii.
15 Ibid., p. vi.
16 Ibid., p. 4.
18 Hewitt, Rhyming Weaver, p. 21.
19 Ibid., p. 22.
20 Ibid., p. 85.
21 Ibid., p. 25.
22 Ibid., p. 28.
23 Ibid.
25 Hewitt, Rhyming Weavers, p. 34.
32 Ibid.
34 Welch, p. 180.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
39 Ibid., p. 91.
40 Ibid., p. 92.
41 Welch, p. 187.
44 Welch, p. 190.
47 Allingham, "Bridegroom's Park," quoted by Welch, p. 190.
48 Welch, p. 190.
50 Ibid., p. 18.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
54 Welch, p. 192.
55 Ibid., p. 194.
56 Laurence Bloomfield, pp. 76-77.
57 Welch, p. 194.
58 Laurence Bloomfield, p. 233.
59 Ibid., 214.
60 Brown, Northern Voices, p. 50.
61 Laurence Bloomfield, p. 144.
62 Ibid.
63 Welch, p. 197.
64 Ibid., p. 204.
65 Laurence Bloomfield, p. 289.

67 Ibid., p. 155.

68 Ibid.


70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., p. 27.
CHAPTER III
CITY AND COUNTRY WORLDS

As has been noted in previous chapters, John Hewitt's identification with the landscape as a place and idea which offer him spiritual peace has also been the source of his deepest feelings of isolation from his fellow man. "I found myself alone who had hoped for attention," he writes sadly in "Because I Paced My Thought". Yet this sense of alienation cuts two ways: not only is he regarded curiously by the land's people, the farmers who draw from the earth sustenance yet little beauty, but also feels spurned by those he would count his social and intellectual allies, "some who hated the city and man's unreasoning acts." These latter voices, it would seem, however, had wanted the poet to take a more political stand (showing, perhaps, a more identifiable, and predictable, public image), denouncing "Power and Hate" as "the engines of human treason," and had responded to his need for release with disdain, attesting that "there is no answering love in the yellowing leaf."^ Indeed, Hewitt admits that the appeal of the natural world, specifically the countryside of Antrim in Northern Ireland, is inspired by the conscious need to remove himself from the activity, responsibility, oppression, and terror which his native Belfast has come to represent. With a tone of exultation—not unlike that of Wordsworth
who in The Prelude relishes escape "from the vast city, where I long had pined / a discontented sojourner,"2 or of Yeats who in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" finds consoling strength in the memory of nature's sounds "while I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey"3—Hewitt acknowledges the decision or chance blessing (the exact cause seems unimportant) which has brought him such relief and joy. Thus, in the long poem "Conacre" he early announces "I have won / by grace or by intention, to delight / that seems to match the colours mystics write / only in places far from kerb or street."4

Hewitt's attitude toward the country, related as it is to a persistent sense of weariness with the affairs of the urban, educated, public man, suggests the traditional idea of the pastoral, with its distinction in English literature and thought between the worlds of city and country. As Raymond Williams explains: "On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light."5 More pertinent to Hewitt's divided feelings is Williams' reminder that "powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation."6 As we have seen, in works such as "The Glens," not only cultural or sectarian, but also intellectual, differences divide the poet from the life and spirit of those to whom he would turn for comradeship. In this poem Hewitt, despite his intentions, must admit that the "busy days" he owes the
world are "bound to paved unerring roads and rooms / heavy with talk of politics and art," and that he cannot spare more than a common phrase of crops and weather when I pace these lanes and pause at hedge gap spying their skill, so many fences stretch between our minds.7

In "O Country People" Hewitt more forcefully defines this intellectual distance, further dramatizing the fear of the urban man leaving, as Williams describes, "this identifiable and moving quality: the centre, the activity, the light":8

O country people, you of the hill farms huddled so in darkness I cannot tell whether the light across the glen is a star or the bright lamp spilling over the sill.9

In language nearly identical to that of "The Glens," Hewitt expresses his wary regard toward these "country people," feelings which, it seems, have suddenly altered an initial desire to join, to embrace them in human fellowship: "I would be neighborly, would come to terms / with your existence, but you are so far; / there is a wide bog between us, a high wall."10 Here different images of barrier are again used to evoke separation, as are those of space—not only width and height but also length, this latter image and idea occurring elsewhere in Hewitt's poems. This approach is explained in part by Hewitt's divided feelings when considering the established landscape of Ulster. As Terence Brown observes, "A planted countryside suggests social progress and human resource"—features which, we have seen, appeal to Hewitt. Yet, Brown continues, "the planted landscape of Ireland could not be celebrated unambiguously" with
knowledge "of the association of planting and colonial plantation."

Indeed,

In the ordered fields of the Ulster rural scene [Hewitt] could read a history of dispossession and racial grievance, and at moments ... became aware of the Irish rural world as containing darker, more primitive energies than could be easily absorbed by the principles of human order. 11

Yet distance also retains for Hewitt a dimension apart from its cultural or intellectual meanings inside the Irish country world, and is often expressive of an even deeper, more general fear: of man without society, unnourished and abandoned, struggling in profound isolation. In a poem titled "The Distances," for instance, Hewitt notices a solitary runner "in short pants pacing steadily" along a deserted road; he remarks solemnly, "I thought of the distances of loneliness." 12

This sense of distance—physical and psychological—which Hewitt experiences while in the country is felt mutually by its people. For these same farmers, the poet infers, also know a measure of separation in his presence, as he in theirs, and for the same reasons: differences in background, education, the manner and vision that have always divided country and city men. In "0 Country People" Hewitt, using imagery recognizable in the country world, sets the boundaries of this relationship:

I know the level you accept me on,
like a strange bird observed about the house,
or sometimes seen out flying on the moss
that may to-morrow, or next week, be gone,
liable to return without warning
on a May afternoon and away in the morning." 13
Repeating the rural imagery, Hewitt—and, by association through pronoun reference, his class—draws greater limits, those established particularly by family, with knowledge of the secrets attached to this most exclusive of human societies:

... we are no part of your world, your way, as a field or a tree, or a spring well. We are not held to you by the mesh of kin; we must always take a step back to begin, and there are many things you never tell because we would not know the things you say. 14

Although maintaining such reservations and limitations, Hewitt is nonetheless genuinely drawn to the landscape and devoutly records its life with characteristic attention to detail and concreteness. Not unlike William Carlos Williams, whose red wheelbarrow came to represent in the poet's mind a simple basic feature upon which "so much depends," Hewitt likewise sees the objects and daily operations of the rural life, as he does the subtle isolated motions of nature, as subjects of intense fascination, sympathy, and celebration. Even in a poem such as "0 Country People," with its tone of lonely resignation, there is still delight in the action and anecdote, the elemental richness of existence that both poet and country man recognize together (agreeable companions if not friends), though with differing words and emotions:

And so I cannot ever hope to become, for all my goodwill toward you, yours to me, even a phrase or story which will come pat to the tongue, part of the tapestry of apt response, at the appropriate time, like a wise saw, a joke, an ancient rime used when the last stack's topped at the day's end, or when the last lint's carted round the bend. 15
Well aware of the difficulties, Hewitt continues to seek in the land a sense of belonging, and of his own identity. His ventures, then, into the country serve as much as the means of discovery as of escape, ways in which he can re-record, re-examine the things he values most—a simple, bracing existence lived with honesty and integrity, free of both the mannered confines of academia and the violent intrigue and tribalism of politics.

Hewitt's intentions and attitudes toward the country world confirm very well Raymond Williams' observations with reference to another poet who wished, through empathy with nature's ways, to "see into the life of things." Williams writes:

Wordsworth saw that when we become uncertain in a world of apparent strangers who yet, decisively, have a common effect on us, and . . . when forces that will alter our lives are moving all around us in apparently external and unrecognizable forms, we can retreat, for security, into deep subjectivity, or we can look around us for social pictures, social signs, social messages, to which, characteristically, we try to relate as individuals but so as to discover, in some form, community.16

That his sense of community sought is also an attempt to further ally himself with a sense of Irishness can be felt in many of Hewitt's country poems, perhaps most explicitly in "The Swathe Uncut." Here the action of farmers mowing a field, and turning up a frightened hare, is described with familiar fidelity and affection as in the inclusion of rural wisdom, the belief "of old the country folk declared"

the last swathe holds a wayward fugitive, uncaught, moth-gentle, tremulously scared,
that must be, by the nature of all grain,
the spirit of the corn that should be slain
if the saved seed will have the strength to live. 17

This incident and the attendant harvest myth remind the poet of the ancient ritual of placing the "spent husk and shell" of the last swathe—"the queen, the goddess"—in "some known corner of beneficence, / lest her desired and lively influence / be left to mock the next plough's signature." Then, with widening understanding and association, typically inspired by a daily gesture, Hewitt unites the individual incident with the deeper reality of national struggle, pride, and endurance, of a whole fierce history suddenly embraced and sustained:

So I have figured in my crazy wit
is this flat island sundered to the west
the last swathe left uncut, the blessed wheat
wherein still free the gentle creatures go
instinctively erratic, rash or slow,
unregimented, never yet possessed. 18

Despite this affirmation, Hewitt's country poems remain, as Terence Brown reminds us, "ironic pastorals in which we observe the rhythms of country life through the urbanite's perplexed eyes." 19 For the most part, he is "perplexed that he finds himself stirred only to the depths in the countryside," even though he must look back several generations to encounter ancestors who lived on and exclusively from the land. Indeed, perhaps in an effort to appreciate the character of their intimate, yet utilitarian, association, he never romanticizes the country life. In "Conacre" he decries those "tweed-bright poets" who either falsify or trivialize the peasant's condition—their "foolish fancy" that
"cheats the mind of moon-faced folk incorrigibly kind, / who mouth slow proverbs and whose hands are deft / in many a wood cut-illustrated craft." 

"I know my farmer and my farmer's wife," Hewitt asserts unsparingly in "Conacre,"

> the squalid focus of their huxter life,  
> the grime-veined fists, the thick rheumatic legs,  
> the cracked voice gloating on the price of eggs,  
> the miser's Bible, and the tedious aim  
> to add another boggy acre to the name.  

Moreover, as Brown further notes, Hewitt is "well aware that any kind of life he might establish for himself in the countryside would essentially be a suburban idyll." Such a contrived environment would, of course, threaten the very integrity of the experience that attracts him, and would amount to an accommodation of falsehood and not be an honest retreat to discover deeper meanings. In the same poem, "Conacre," the poet in fact satirizes the intentions of one who would attempt to have the "best of both worlds":

> You would escape from bricks but not too far.  
> You want the hill at hand familiar,  
> the punctual packet and the telephone,  
> that you may not be lonely when alone.  

If Hewitt appears impatient with those who would shrink from starker, less compromising realities, his own feelings about the country—as about the nation of Ireland itself—have developed slowly and painfully, having grown, been altered, strengthened, only to be re-examined over more than fifty years as a poet, cultural historian, and social commentator. Some critics have contended, accurately, that this kind of frequent re-evaluation
reflects a basic insecurity, the general unease, as we have seen, of an urban Protestant Northerner who, when he considers the whole Irish experience in literature, recognizes it essentially as rural, Southern and Catholic in setting and attitude. Unwilling to share the confining view held by other Northern writers, notably Louis MacNeice and W. R. Rodgers, that Ulster is Ireland, yet wary of larger (and equally binding) allegiances, Hewitt carefully probes the limits of discovery and acceptance, remaining the man between two worlds, yet creating from and infusing in both a profound human vision of his own.

Such a poem of self-discovery and vision is his long early (1943) work, "Conacre," published separately and later included in Collected Poems. Begun as a record of a visit with his wife to the Antrim countryside, the poem evolves into a kind of dialectic, a personal debate by which Hewitt examines his views toward the country, and by expansion his relation to nature, to himself as an Irishman and as a searching mortal being. His basic intentions are stated early in the poem, announced like a creed; his avowed oneness with nature and all of history of which he recognizes man as a proud yet temporal part:

I wake to kinship with the beasts and men
who walked a younger earth, were proved unfit,
and ended as we end for all our wit.24

Then, reminded of his own scholarly profession as critic and curator, he yearns to experience life beyond the "lore I have . . . harvested with care from buckram books," and to flee direction by the "coarse machine" that bids "our pulses to beat of loom, / or find salvation
in a stuffy room." The reasons for this desire are clear in the message of the land itself and the heritage of man's organic link to it: "too many hills are calcined in our bones / for us to rest content on paving stones."\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, the affairs of civilized society—symbolized by the city—here seem to Hewitt secondary to the appreciation of treasures discovered just by existing; so that in at once a heedless and pleading tone he writes:

\begin{quote}
It's life I need and grasp, that careless speaks, 
yet offers its unnumbered means as ends;
not growth and death: together they are gne 
for all beneath the sun and for the sun.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

Plainly, as Terence Brown observes, poems such as "Conacre" are testaments of "a city man for whom the country is an area of psychic release from urban concerns, irritations, and constraints."\textsuperscript{27} Still, Hewitt cannot totally deny his social heritage; moreover, as one who values the strong traditions of family—and thus the place in which these were established and his life and character formed—such a denial would seem also a betrayal of all he has known and loved. Hewitt admits as much later in the poem when he remembers that "in a decent street / I opened eyes and found both tongue and feet"; he recalls, too, almost to parallel his earlier assertion of nature's spirit "calcined" in man's frame, that the city's "windows and . . . walls, its doors and stones / have tailored this close flesh upon my bones."\textsuperscript{28} Yet, characteristic of the poem's structure, Hewitt makes an immediate rebuttal to the "honest debt" that he owes his birthplace. Should nature, he imagines, some day reclaim the city world—"these high chimneys
tumble down / the gantries sag and fall, and nettles crown / the
festered mounds of rust above the marsh"—he would feel little re-
gret, acknowledging a simple fact that as historian, anthropologist,
poet, and concerned observer he has understood all along. The
pastoral ideal emerges in admiring, if highly colored, minute
description:

... what was good here can be better still,
the spring-gilt whin upon the blunt-browed hill
with no raw villas smoking at its foot,
the flapping leaves no longer drenched with soot,
the little stream uncoffined now of brick
clean running where it drifted black and thick
with oil and rag to carry to sea
the excreted silt of mill and factory.29

Yet this attitude, too, does not seem genuine, the meaning
strained, and out of character with Hewitt's overall theme and ap-
proach. At the end of another section in which he contemplates the
potential for leveling destruction in an atomic age ("should we
persist and split the final pod"), the poet recognizes "this way
madness or a cynic mind."30 True to the form of the country poems,
and most of his other work, Hewitt feels more comfortable, and is
more convincing, when he is recording small individual movements of
land and people, the nearly overlooked event which enlarges and
brightens in the writer's regard. Such an episode he describes at
length in "Conacre," when he and his wife rise at dawn to the sound
of "the first bird that stirs before light stirs." Together they
wait till sunrise, staring from a cliff across the North Channel;
Hewitt's language in describing the Antrim coast is both honest
and evocative:
Above cold Garron’s cape in lucid air
one star remained. The sky was high and bare,
save for that cloud bank, growing golden now,
and little scattered gusts in bush and bough
troubled the dry leaves, rasped the thistle crown
ripe with the autumn. 31

The two stand at the sea’s edge, intent (a little too self-
consciously) on experiencing the beauty of the coming day. They
are distracted for a moment by a heron’s ascending flight, soaring
overhead “as if slow missile aimed at Scotland.” Hewitt and his
wife then leave their “summit,” disheartened Romantic souls, he
suggests, for whom the “hour” of awe and vision has gone. While
returning home they nonetheless walk amid scenes of rural awakening
and activity, all which Hewitt richly and deftly records:

And then at once
we strode to where the river cuts the stones
after a lazy drift, bogbrown and slow
between steep banks where grey-leaved salleys grow,
and saw a speckled gannet poise on wing
to fall like hurtling pebble from a sling,
deadly as David, clean and pitiless
as later sparrowhawk from wren’s distress
we ran to check from havoc in the hedge
half hid by nettles at the first tee’s edge. 32

Both then realize that while their “foolish backs were turned”
the sun had risen above the ocean’s horizon: “The thing we came to
see / had happened,” Hewitt exclaims. “The cloud had lifted and
below it burned, / hot brass upon the water, a bar of sun / like
moon fantastic, and the job was done.” 33 Characteristically for
Hewitt, a moment of insight and intense pleasure occurs inadver-
tently, taking the poet unawares, yet losing none of its simple
splendor—indeed, all the more delightful for its element of
surprise. Hewitt quickly enlarges on the experience in exultant
Romantic terms:

Our little world was younger by a day,
and we paced proudly home the longer way,
aware of every freshly spiring scent
as benediction and as sacrament.\(^3^4\)

In the stanza which follows, as though at once to temper such verbal
excess and to record how such feeling can penetrate the ordinary
round of daily experience, Hewitt concludes this pivotal episode
with a wistful yet stirring journal of one life in one day curiously
ennobled, a sacred space of time which contains, despite inevitable
demands and duties, a promise of ongoing grace and shared love:

For once a day was ours, possessed entire
till a dark world should narrow to a fire
and porridge steaming and a friendly book
beneath the lamp, and one to share a look
or hear a passage read with quiet joy.
A day was ours wherein we could employ
the active senses undiverted, free
for touch of bark and taste of blackberry,
till sleep unvexed should bless the dreamless head,
until tomorrow brought the postman's tread.\(^3^5\)

More than personal satisfaction, however, is gleaned from such
experiences, as important as these feelings are to (in Brown's words)
Hewitt's "psychic release." As noted earlier, the poet's affection
for the country is closely linked to his more general love of place
and, most significantly, to the sense of identification which these
emotions bring. It seems, then, appropriate that the excitement
he feels should come as an accident, for his views toward Ireland
and his own nationality reflect the unstrained yet imminent sense
that dilemmas will somehow be resolved and truths understood in time,
while, it may be, his "back is turned." Hewitt writes with renewed confidence—though with a feeling not at all complacent—that "neither saint or fool," he is "rather a happy man who seldom sees / the emptiness behind the images / that make my heart to wonder."36 He further expands on the mood, and in so doing comes to terms with his country's troubled past and uncertain present, stating with the familiar mingled tone of assertion and pleading,

I derive
sufficient joy from being here alive
in this mad island crammed with bloody ghosts
and moaning memories of forgotten coasts
our fathers steered from where we cannot go, the name's so lost in time's grey undertow.37

His purpose, thus, is not to condemn; nor is it to diminish reality, or defer to any one view for selfish reasons, as have in his view other British writers when describing a similar subject:

It is not that like Goldsmith I recall
some shabby Auburn with a crumbling wall . . .
nor that like Crabbe I must for evermore
compulsive seek the miserable shore
or the neat laurels by the patron's door . . . 38

Rather, he seeks "God's mercy in the morning dew," desiring to present persons and events carefully, honestly, yet with unyielding compassion. So, after an admittedly "savage" description of the farmer's restricted life, he affectionately remembers "the friendly doors and hearths of Donegal."39

Hewitt returns finally to the source of inspiration, after first declaring, "This is my home and country. Later on / perhaps I'll find this nation is my own"; for the poet regarding current pleasures
it is sufficient to identify with particulars, with the contour and character of landscape—"this faulted ledge, this map of cloud above." In what seems his determination to avoid political certainties or narrow cultural allegiances so prevalent in Northern Ireland, Hewitt deliberately puts off any definition or binding acceptance. Always the man apart—the thinker, the "pacer" of his thoughts—he refuses to be prodded, while he tacitly acknowledges that some final awareness will in time occur, in the way, he suggests at last, that the truth of things is revealed to those who seek with a humble yet attuned faith, free from both arrogance and expectations. Eloquently Hewitt concludes the poem:

So in this hope which harbours all I love
as rain-chill fist slips grateful into glove,
as the soft plastic gathers from the mould
a strength by its loose atoms unforetold,
I rest content. No contradictions vex
the single mind unfriended, or perplex
the will that finds no longer life to waste
so clear the path imperative is traced;
the heart's conscripted with its plunging blood;
the place is past for wilful attitude;
so ends my passion, ends my lonely rage
hushed in perspectives of the Golden Age.

More realistically, perhaps, these "perspectives" which Hewitt's love of landscape affords may reveal less a Golden Age than a renewed and stronger Irish nation. Yet in either case his vision is just as sublime: for the poet has long felt that through interest in, and celebration of, Ireland's matchless natural beauty—the glory of the land which ignores boundaries drawn by politics over sixty years ago—his countrymen, north and south, may come to appreciate more fully their rich inheritance and consequent obligation to heal
those divisions which "sunder sect from sect." This belief inspired Hewitt's attempt, during the 1940s and 1950s, to establish in Northern Ireland a regional school from which would be produced poetry, art, music—works which would serve to accomplish, in Terence Brown's words, a "social comprehension and cultural amelioration."

That the school's success was minimal is not due, Brown adds, to "any deficiency on Hewitt's effort. The fault surely lies with the province, which by its frequent rejection of any possibility of integration in the political, cultural and religious spheres, must surely also reject the poet who encourages cultural synthesis." 42

Two related conditions, both involving point of view, help to explain more specifically the cause of Hewitt's failure. A common vision of Irish identity drawn from appreciation of the land's riches (which was the essence of Hewitt's plan) depends, first of all, on a common attitude towards the land itself. However, among the Northern writers working from a native Catholic tradition—with its history and myths quite different from those of Hewitt's planter class—among them Seamus Heaney, John Montague, and Patrick Kavanagh, the Ulster landscape carries with it another complete set of associations. For them, the fertile fields and sturdy, prosperous farms and homesteads which admires stand only as reminders of the dispossession which their predecessors suffered when the Ulster plantation was established in the seventeenth century. Indeed, their experience of landscape involves the aspect of bogs and unproductive pastures where forebears narrowly sustained a living. Thus, how different from Hewitt's attitude is Seamus Heaney's view of the land's ancestral heritage,
when, in the poem "Bogland," he writes of nature in dour, distinctly menacing language:

We have no prairies
To slice a big sun at evening--
Everywhere the eye concedes to
Encroaching horizon.44

Describing archeologists' work in excavating a nearby site, the poet notes how they, like the "pioneers" before, keep striking "only the waterlogged trunks / Of great firs, soft as pulp." So he concludes bitterly, suggesting a collective memory of hardship and loss:

Every layer they strip
Seems camped on before.
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.
The wet centre is bottomless.45

Further compounding the problem of land and unity is the Protestant colonist's view—part of the collective memory of Hewitt's class—that the eventual success of his Planter society justified (many have felt divinely) the initial usurpation. To the Planter, the native Gael in Ulster—and his conspiring brother in the South—should, given his unfitness, be grateful that more was not demanded. This attitude of complacency and condescension is echoed perfectly in Patrick Williams' poem "Cage Under Siege." As though responding to Hewitt's tender assertions of "home and country," William bristles: "This is home. This is the Irish North. / Where we endure the earth's falling away / Rivets an iron sky north and west."46 Rather than a blessing, or the reminder of the need for benign stewardship, the environment is considered as a protective enclave, a shield against native treachery and contamination:
We've pulled the sea around us like a shawl
And heaved the mountains higher. The waiting
South's bog-barbarians starve against a grand
Squiggle on our map. The sky is closed.
This is home. This is the Irish North.⁴⁷

Although Williams confronts it ironically, this view reinforces the prevailing idea of two separate nations. As previously noted, even for many otherwise sympathetic writers—some, like poets Louis MacNeice and W. R. Rodgers, contemporaries of Hewitt—Ulster is Ireland, by its mere closeness the only environment they can interpret with any degree of certainty. Thus, their identification with place, despite the intention implied in the title of Rodgers' poem "Ireland," focuses exclusively on Northern scenes without the more embracing emotional response that Hewitt offers. So, while stirring, Rodgers' vision is nonetheless limited geographically:

O these lakes and all gills that live in them,
These acres and all legs that walk on them,
These tall winds and all wings that cling to them,
Are part and parcel of me, bit and bundle,
Thumb and thimble. Them I am, but none more
Than the mountains of Mourne that turn and trundle
Roundly like slow coils of oil along the shore
Of Down and on inland. . . . ⁴⁸

Still, other Ulster writers have shared Hewitt's hopes, if not his intensity and perseverance. Even Louis MacNeice, who spent most of his writing life addressing an English audience, speaks soothingly, in his aptly titled poem "Prospect," of the defeat of "anarchic men" while he anticipates the return of trust and love in the same way that "fruit puts the teeth on edge, / . . .

In the barbed and blistered hedge." He concludes:
And though to-day is arid,
We know—and knowing bless—
That rooted in futurity
There is a plant of tenderness.

Despite its positive ending, William Trevor remarks how MacNeice's poem properly "belongs to [the] unsettled North that once was Ireland's pride," now a province of densely populated, deeply troubled urban centers. Thus, no longer responding so much from a rural setting as from a city background, modern Ulster writers have had to confront, literally and figuratively, as Trevor asserts, "the letters of incitement" which "spell murder, intolerance and cruelty"—graffiti which, even before they have appeared, "haunt the urban landscape, their ugliness resounding as Ulster people go about their lives." For John Hewitt, who like MacNeice and Rodgers was born and raised in Belfast, the steady deterioration of this once cherished "urban landscape" over nearly two decades of sectarian warfare is very personally and harshly felt. The opposite of today's view of the embattled city, Hewitt's childhood memories of Belfast are a history of close family relations strengthened by a sense of tradition and enriched by freely expressed ideas in a tolerant home. Only later as a adult did Hewitt recognize his own background as unique, and begin to appreciate the sense of paradox that Raymond Williams describes: "that in the great city itself, the very place and agency—or so it would seem—a collective consciousness, it is an absence of common feeling, an excessive subjectivity, that seems to be characteristic." As a result of this later awakening, Hewitt's poetry dealing with urban subjects reflects
another kind of conflict from that encountered in the country; there he felt estranged by his urban background; in the city of his birth powerful associations of love and community clash with the reality of turmoil and decay and the violent philosophies of those same "anarchic men" that MacNeice condemns. The tension of the city poems remains, then, essentially one created by Hewitt's alternating sense of hope and distress.

Hewitt's recollections of a childhood spent in Northern Ireland's capital are given sentimental yet meaningful treatment in *Kites in Spring, A Belfast Boyhood*, published in 1980. While recalling an urban world, the collection (together with subsequent volumes, *Mosaic* and *Loose Ends*) encapsulates, in Terence Brown's words, "Hewitt's central concern with men on this earth, touched here with a deeply personal sense of how one man, a poet, has spent a life which now approaches its final phase." The two poems that open the collection introduce well both the circumstances generally of the poet's early life in view of present concerns and the theme which recurs throughout the volume: as suggested by Brown's comments, that of hope in the face of pain and ruin, of confidence that a whole life, lived from childhood to old age with simplicity and gentleness, with intellectual and moral strength, has not been lived in vain. So he announces at the start: "This is the story of a happy boy." It is a story, nevertheless, that also acknowledges reality as having fallen dreadfully short of the youthful expectations of more than one Belfast child who was
The poet recognizes that the present strife is the result of past sins of intolerance and prejudice, and that it may be in fact too late for full recompense; yet he feels obliged to defend his early vision which, though not embraced by society, still defines his language and actions:

This need to reaffirm his integrity is again expressed humbly yet confidently at the end of the second poem. Hewitt first admits that though "he proved a myth-maker / as most men are," he is conscious that whatever occurred "must take its share / in shaping what he hoped would best express" the "man he was," his intentions, his desires, the entrusted impact his "quiet verse" will have on future generations.

Most of the poems in the volume (all in sonnet form) are fond remembrances of family, of relatives and ancestors belonging to both his parents. This is, of course, significant in that Hewitt places so much faith in the kind of nourishing heritage and tradition symbolized by a close-knit family. As we have already seen, in at least
one instance, such recollection has led to a fuller realization of national identity, not to mention an affirmation of his own beliefs in mercy and love. What emerges in *Kites in Spring* is a chronicle of Ulster Protestant middle-class life at the turn of the century, of a placid but resolute existence, as yet untouched by—and indeed "blind" to—"the brooding of the coming storm." There are poems which speak of his family's association with the Protestant majority's concerns and perspectives: "Carson at Six Roads," for instance, recounts the time when the young Hewitt was taken to see Sir Edward Carson, the lionized architect of Northern Ireland, and remembers dimly but certainly "that famous face, / that right fist thrust in challenge or rebuke." Poems such as "The Twelfth of July" and "Eleventh Night" are uncritical accounts of memorials to Protestant victories over Catholic Ireland. Other poems, noted previously, describe the family's, especially the father's, uniqueness within that same community, the spirit of tolerance which allowed Hewitt his friendship with the Catholic boy Willie Morrissey, and of independence which prevented him from being baptized. In all it is a charming memoir evoking the private pleasures of childhood: street games, playing truant, the excitement of a tramcar ride, united by Hewitt's indefatigable sense of discovery which brightens all his work.

Hewitt's purpose, however, is to present much more than a nostalgic remembrance. By recording carefully the details of his past—with an often ironic but never rancorous tone—the poet is at once exorcising any inner terrors that may persist and, paradoxically, asserting that there are no terrors to expel. For a northern Irish writer,
particularly, such an assertion is essential if he intends to be accepted, if he himself is resolved that no rooted prejudices exist, to become part of all of Ireland's hidden history of wrongs endured and avenged. For one who has consciously attempted to reach beyond the margins of his own class, religion, and cultural heritage—while at the same time claiming pride in that heritage—this resolution has special importance. Indeed, Hewitt begins an early poem, "I have no ghosts. / My dead are safely dead," because he understands too well, as Terence Brown notes, "the spectres that haunt and threaten his province and sets about the task of exorcism with serious, intent concern." As though to underscore this intention, in the last sonnet of the volume Hewitt tells how he "took over" his grandfather's room when the old man died: "I . . . piled the mantel shelf / with books I owned, hung pictures on the wall, / which I had been allowed to choose myself, / Murillo's Shepherd print, the crown of all." In the closing stanza he writes how soon after moving in he woke at dawn and sensed his grandfather beside him in the bed. "I dared not stir," Hewitt continues, "but mused shut-eyed, how long I cannot say." As in so much of Hewitt's work, the resolution is based on love, often, as here, suggesting more than the personal level: that there is no need either to avoid the past or become servant to it; in one's own life, as in the life of a nation, it is the same. So Hewitt considers his grandfather:

remembering he loved me in his way
as I loved him. No reason now for fear.
I reached my right hand out; no one was there.
While he may declare himself free of the damaging influence which a boy's or a nation's "ghosts" exert, Hewitt does not ignore the psychic impact of past terrors. Indeed, a section of *Kites in Spring* records a series of related episodes in Belfast during the "Troubles" of the early 1920s, the time of civil war in the South and an Irish Republican campaign in Ulster, leading there to increased sectarian conflict. These few poems, intruding on the general happiness of the volume, recreate the period when Belfast first became the scene for the kind of urban warfare that still plagues its streets. The young Hewitt views the turmoil with mingled boyish interest and fear; he is fascinated most of all by the furtive black shapes of men he often sees running "across the shadowed street." In "Two Spectres Haunt Me" the image of these dark violent strangers crystallizes in a chilling encounter that is also the focus of an earlier, more discursive poem. In the later one, he reflects how once while playing football with friends—"on the paved edge of our cinder field, / intent till dusk upon our game"—he accidentally runs into "a striding man," then glimpses suddenly "the shotgun he had thought concealed." This incident, together in the same poem with the witnessing of a random bloody attack on a policeman, remains in his memory, Hewitt remarks, to "challenge yet my bland philosophy," and mar "the dream of what I hoped might be." In the earlier recorded version of the same event, however, the poet points bitterly to an even more tragically embracing significance of this single man with a gun, with symbolic echoes recurring throughout modern history:
At Auschwitz, Dallas, I felt no surprise when violence across the world's wide screen, declared the age imperilled; I had seen the future in that frightened gunman's eyes.

To Hewitt, then, the infectious violence of present-day Ulster is only symptomatic of a wider, more profound deterioration of human values and a universal proliferation of terror. Dying cities—those like Belfast being slowly strangled—provoke special concern, as Raymond Williams has suggested, for the city was meant to be a center of "light and learning," a community in which it was hoped so much promise for civilized man resided. Instead, Williams writes, an increasing list of negative effects "continue to show themselves, in a powerful and apparently irresistible pressure:

physical effects on the environment; a simultaneous crisis of overcrowded cities and a depopulating countryside, not only within but between nations; physical and nervous stresses of certain characteristic kinds of work and . . . career; the widening gap between the rich and poor . . . within the threatening crisis of population and resources; the similarly widening gap between concern and decision, in a world in which all the fallout, military, technical and social, is in the end inescapable.

Nor has suburban growth—ideally the balance between city and country worlds—prevented this decline. So Hewitt strenuously affirms Williams' bleak predictions in "The ruins answer," adding his concern that a new generation uprooted by this chaos—recalling, of course, the children of Belfast and the lost future which their plight denotes—will only continue to enforce the purposeless divisions, not eliminate them:
Our towns spill out, yet at the heart decay,
where, waking, many greet a workless day,
while signalled hopes, frustrations, enmities,
flicker before their famished eyes,
and in high flaking flat, in rotting street,
small vandals rally to engage
their hurt, their aimless rage,
while penury and age hug perilous retreat. 63

Joined to this disillusionment, finally, is a prevailing sense
of betrayal, a general feeling discerned among the northern urban
poets particularly that forces and events and men beyond their control
or understanding have conspired to rob them of their cultivated dreams
of peace, cultural discovery, and national unity. John Montague, for
instance, shares this feeling when he expresses his lament and outrage
over the social death of communities in his own county of Ulster—
"the broken / towns of old Tyrone." In the poem "Red Branch" he re-
cites a tragic ballad in the form of a dirge:

Sing a song for the people,
so grimly holding on,
Protestant and Catholic, fingered
at teabreak, shot inside their home:
the iron circle of retaliation.64

In another poem recalling his dead father's fractious life as an Irish
Republican, he remarks sternly how "no parades, / fierce medals, will
mark Tyrone's rebirth, / betrayed by both South and North"; so he
"counsels" his father, who had earlier emigrated to New York:

. . . lie still, difficult old man,
you were right to choose a Brooklyn slum
rather than a half-life in this
by-passed and dying place.65

Yet few northern poems speak of this betrayal with a stronger
tone of bleakness and finality than Hewitt's "Street Names." Written
when the most recent "Troubles" first erupted in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, the poem also follows an approach and perspective that Hewitt employs in many of his works on Ulster's current political and social strife. The poet's voice is one of the voluntary exile who looks with horror from the safety of another country, and who is at once ashamed of his security—wishing he were there to endure and personally encourage—and incensed that he must seemingly justify his nation to others and himself. Here, Hewitt's mind calls up the landscape of Kites in Spring, only to discover that the achingly familiar features have been distorted, that the past which his memory enshrines—a childhood of love and strength—has been subverted, possibly forever:

I hear the street names on the radio
and map reported bomb and barricade;
this was my childhood's precinct, and I know
how such streets look, down to the very shade
of brick, of paintwork on each door and sill,
what school or church nearby one might attend,
if there's a chance to glimpse familiar hill
between the chimneys where the grey slates end.

Yet I speak only of appearances,
a stage unpeopled, not the tragic play:
though actual faces of known families
flash back across the gap of fifty years;
can these be theirs, the children that today
rage in the fetters of their fathers' fears?
NOTES


6 Ibid.


8 Williams, p. 5.


10 Ibid.


14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Williams, p. 295.


18 Ibid.

88


21 Ibid.


24 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

25 Ibid., p. 39.

26 Ibid., p. 38.


29 Ibid., p. 39.

30 Ibid., p. 41.

31 Ibid., pp. 35-36.

32 Ibid., p. 36.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 37.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 41.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p. 43.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. 41.

41 Ibid., p. 45.

90


47 Ibid.


50 Trevor, p. 170.


54 Ibid.


60 Hewitt, "Two Spectres Haunt Me," *Kites in Spring*, p. 60.


Since the late 1960s, the conflict in Northern Ireland has tested the resilience and hopes of many Ulster writers, but none more profoundly than John Hewitt. Like Hewitt, the other leading poets—some whose works will later be examined—have expressed horror at the ongoing violence and disgust at the tribal suspicions and hatreds which spawned it. And all share with Hewitt some sense of betrayal that the "tolerant and just society" which the modern age promised has not evolved. This betrayal is mingled, too, with feelings of shame: that in one corner of so small an island, among people joined by similar cultural, historical, and—despite sectarian differences—common religious backgrounds, there should be such impenetrable divisions. Moreover, as products, and victims, of this sad heritage, their bitter attacks on the ancient animosities often reflect an unspoken need to gauge the degree of complicity for which they may be held responsible. Their poems, thus, become in part confessions through which they attempt to free their hearts and consciences from the burden of what John Montague calls "an enormous seeping bloodstain."^1

As noted in the previous chapter, Hewitt's work dealing with Ulster's recent troubles is frequently confessional; yet it is also meant to instruct. Indeed, nearly all of the poems collected in An
Ulster Reckoning (1971) were written, as the title implies, to admonish his countrymen as well as explain the roots of the tragedy. Also evident in many of these poems is Hewitt's familiar tone of self-justification, based on the continued need to demonstrate his "Irishness" to those who would doubt the sincerity of a descendant of Planter stock. Thus, in statements similar to those in "Once Alien Here," Hewitt asserts in "An Ulsterman":

This is my country. If my people came from England here four centuries ago the only trace that's left is my name. Kilmore, Armagh, no other sod can show the weathered stone of our first burying.

Recounting a private history, Hewitt also reminds his listeners that his birthplace of Belfast, though now a symbol of bloodshed, once "drew the landless in," and was, long before it became a sprawling urban battlefield, an affectionately remembered place, a "river-straddling, hill-rimmed town." So the poet still retains what was good there, the best that formed him into the man he is, as he states proudly, "I cling / to the inflections of my origin." Yet pride finally joins with indignation at those who have fashioned a hell out of their own inner terrors. His intention here seems to be to place blame squarely where it lies, while distancing his own life, past and present, from their stricken world:

Though creed-crazed zealots and the ignorant crowd, long nurtured, never checked, in ways of hate, have made our streets a by-word of offense, this is my country, never disavowed. When it is fouled, shall I not remonstrate? My heritage is not their violence.
Clearly, Hewitt's indignation marks the response of one whose native city and country (the province of Ulster by virtue of specific geography, yet Ireland by historical association) are being brutalized by those who possess no larger national, let alone human, vision than the pursuit of revenge, the perpetuation of ancient wrongs. Yet his feelings are more complex than these, more difficult to assess. They reflect the fact, previously noted, that Hewitt first confronted Ulster's violence during his sojourn in the English Midlands and while traveling in central Europe. When considering, then, Ireland's suffering at admittedly a safe distance, the poet displays combined feelings of tension, defensiveness, and guilt, his poems often taking the form of a nervous explanation or protracted debate—with others or, more frequently, with his own conscience.

A perfect example, in both title and message, of this kind of debate is another work which comments on conditions at the outbreak of civil strife in 1969. In "A Belfastman Abroad Argues With Himself" Hewitt regrets his former reticence about the injustices suffered by Ulster's Catholic minority. "Admit the fact," his memory scolds,

you might have stood your ground
and kept one corner clear for decency,
making no claims, but like a friendly tree,
offering shade to those who'd gather round."

The poet feels remorse, moreover, that he did not protest when one religious demagogue ("that evil man" perhaps referring to conservative Protestant leader Ian Paisley) first "raised his rancorous
shout" or march with "that little clan" that pushed for civil rights in the late 1960s. Yet while acknowledging his negligence, Hewitt abandons this soliloquy and in the end asserts directly his moral "right to public rage," based, as in "An Ulsterman," on history and identifying love of place. With such identification and love, however, goes also a bitter knowledge:

    This town is, after all,
    where I was born and lived for fifty years.
    I know its crooked masters well by sight,
    endured its venom and survived its sneers—
    I scratch these verses on its flame-scorcht wall. 6

Such recognition that the seeds of this violent harvest were sown generations ago echoes through many of Hewitt's poems whose subject is the Ulster conflict. "In This Year of Grace," for instance, speaks, in language very similar to that in the poem just mentioned, of those persons and prejudices that have conspired to erase any trust and hope for peace, "as mob greets mob with claim and counterclaim, / . . . when creed and creed inhospitably meet, / and each child's fate foreshadowed in its name." 7 Here Hewitt also evokes again perhaps the most tragic consequence of Ulster's divisions, the wreckage of children's lives, expressed poignantly by the grim transformation of their once innocent games into violent imitation of their parents' desperate rage. So Hewitt laments in "Bogside, Derry 1971," a poem responding to the riots that gripped the Catholic section of that city, causing destruction and death, that
Lads who at ease had tossed a laughing ball,  
or, ganged in teams, pursued some shouting game,  
beat angry fists against that stubborn wall  
of faceless fears which now at last they name.

Thus the infamous wall of Londonderry—built by planted Protestants centuries ago to exclude and contain the Catholic natives—is but the physical manifestation of more deeply hidden anxieties left unhealed for generations. For the impressionable young especially, the relentless, implacable, and finally directionless nature of their struggle is evoked again when Hewitt, in the same poem, attacks the empty values which promote violence, the "shadows" (like the forms of gunmen he confronted in his youth) which "offer stature, roles to play,"

urging the gestures which might purge in rage  
the slights, the wrongs, the long indignities  
the stubborn core which each heart defies.  

As they do in many of these poems, echoes reverberate: "stubborn" core and wall hearken back to "stubborn masters" from "In This Year of Grace"—those city leaders who "cling" to "their embattled place." These, of course, are the same "crooked masters" whom the poet holds responsible for perpetuating hate, for using it as a means to retain influence and control.

There is an obvious and understandable distress exhibited in these poems, a tremulous anger mingled, as we have seen, with alternating regret and scorn. It is also clear that the violence which Hewitt and his fellow poets have witnessed triggers a series of submerged dark memories, associations—often surrounding individual incidents—which he and they would have wished to forget.
but honestly cannot now in view of the present circumstances. None-
theless, perhaps Hewitt's most stirring poem that directly addresses
the issues of the conflict, "Neither an Elegy nor a Manifesto," is
one in which much of this bitter reflection is missing, replaced with
what for Hewitt is the more characteristic tone of forgiveness and
earnest, pleading hope. Moreover, as the title denotes, the poem
demonstrates Hewitt's equally characteristic unwillingness to shout
slogans or pronounce judgements, efforts which he has long recognized
as fruitless contributions to the already shrill level in Ulster
of condemning, divisive oratory. To avoid this kind of language,
Hewitt begins with a statement whose opening phrase is repeated
several times in the poem, words that carry, for all their solemn
simplicity, a great emotional weight: a sense of cautious warning,
of pity and honor underscored with a distraught and shaming lament:

Bear in mind these dead:
I can find no plainer words.
I dare not risk using
that loaded word, Remember,
for your memory is a cruel web
threaded from thorn to thorn across
a hedge of dead bramble, heavy
with pathetic atomies.  

Thus, as Hewitt well knows, there is danger for the Irish
even in remembering, for it is a "poisoned memory," as he writes
in "An Irishman in Coventry," that keeps his countrymen slaves to
their past. Indeed, not only memory, Hewitt suggests, but also
many other natural human responses have been subverted so that
any injunction seeking to change behavior must be made in guarded
or qualified utterances. "I cannot urge or beg you," he continues,
"to pray for anyone or anything"

for prayer in this green island
is tarnished with stale breath,
worn smooth and characterless
as an old flagstone, trafficked
with journeys no longer credible
to lost destinations.12

So, although he himself (by virtue of his father's neglect and his
own adult choice) has "stood outside the creeds,"13 Hewitt appreciates
the central, and saddest, irony in Ulster's troubles: that while the
conflict has its roots in religion, nowhere perhaps in the Christian
world is there less evidence of its practice; that through use
aimed solely at separating communities, and spoiling chances for
peace, religious ritual has indeed "worn smooth," and is a thing
now without dimension or vitality, lacking both strength and
purpose.

In all, the poem's rhetorical intention seems an earnest search
for ways to convince without employing any of the most persuasive
tools. The poet realizes that, in the maelstrom of Northern Irish
life, such employment would only run the risk of aligning the speaker
or writer with one group or another while further inflaming the
already fiery terms of political and social warfare. For writers
this dilemma holds especially true; for, as Hewitt remarks in an
interview with Timothy Kearney, "they are in many ways the victims
of people's expectations of what they should be writing about. So
they can easily have a tilt in the wrong direction in all that they
say."14 Thus Hewitt's appeal cannot be made, he admits, as one who
pounds "with the drum-beats / of patriotism, loyalty, martyrdom."
He will not, finally, contribute to those "glittering fables" he has earlier decried, whose modern inscriptions appear as revolutionary "come all ye" ballads or as imperative slogans of graffiti on embattled neighborhood walls. Indeed, he contends in a later stanza that

if we are always to continue dancing
through the same stencilled rhythms,
there will be new names, surely, and
the old names will carry
new cargoes of grief.15

What he uses instead are "careful words" of injunction that are deliberately unrhetorical and thus also "unaligned," proposing "no more than a thoughtful response."16 He repeatedly restricts himself to the phrase "Bear in mind," which he inserts like a refrain. Nor in his tendered considerations will he discriminate, when reviewing the carnage in Ulster's streets and homes, and thereby draw the battle lines tighter still. With familiar attention to detail, Hewitt includes all who have suffered, not in the way of an army's list of casualties that speaks of "ours" and "theirs"—"such distinctions are not relevant," he contends—but rather as the embracing toll of a society convulsed by a madness which does not differentiate "between / those deliberately gunned down / and those caught by unaddressed bullets." Hewitt's descriptions are at once brutal and poignant, each touching on that private human world which the poet so cherishes:

Bear in mind the skipping child hit
by the anonymous ricochet;
the man shot at his fireside
with his staring family round him;
the elderly Salvationist wife
making tea for the fireman
when the wall collapsed;
and the garrulous neighbors at the bar
when the bomb exploded near them;
the gesticulating deaf-mute stifled
by the soldier's rifle in the town square;
and the policeman dismembered
by the booby-trap in the car. 17

Yet the real horror of these deaths is not so much their frequent occurrence as it is the fact that, plainly, they are preventable tragedies. As though not to neglect the simple, obvious fact, Hewitt suggests that more sense of purpose, feeling, and hope could be engendered if Ulster were plagued by natural disasters, events which at least "will evoke / compassion for the thin-shanked survivors." Accidents of birth or disease, too—"of genetic factors or social circumstance"—each "may summon courage, resolution, sympathy, to whatever level one is engaged." 18 That this same degree of understanding should be registered among his countrymen now is expressed stirringly in the last stanza, in which Hewitt defines the responsibilities that must accompany one's yearnings or love. Not to a cause, however urgent or itself worthy, or to a nation only or way of life or religious system should one's devotion be finally subject, but rather to the assurance of a common fulfilling peace. "Patriotism," Hewitt concludes, "has to do with keeping / the country in good heart, the community / ordered with justice and mercy." He implores his countrymen to direct their energies to a course which is itself not without peril, even as it is not without reward:

These will enlist loyalty and courage often,
and sacrifice, sometimes even martyrdom.
Bear these eventualities in mind also;
they will concern you forever. 19
Yet in the end even these exhortations seem too adventurous, and out of keeping with the initial subject of the poem; so Hewitt returns suddenly and solemnly to conclude with the familiar understated chorus: "but, at this moment, bear in mind these dead." 20

Hewitt, of course, is not alone among his countrymen in voicing dismay over the bloodshed or in seeking ways, through writing, to explain the mysteries and dispel the myths in Irish history and life, thereby lessening the tension and tendencies to violence. Yet that such tensions exist in the writers themselves is demonstrated in much of Hewitt's work, and in the works of his contemporaries, most notably John Montague. It is significant to consider Montague in relation to Hewitt for two different reasons: both are friends and ostensible allies, having collaborated on a book of poetry, The Planter and the Gael, in which each explains his respective cultural traditions, at times giving vent to social and religious assumptions and perceptions about the "other side"; yet both are potential enemies precisely because of these respective views, distanced not only by separate traditions—one Protestant Planter, the other Catholic Gael—but also by birth and geography. John Montague's experience is essentially that of rural, small-town Ulster, he having been raised in Garvaghey, County Tyrone. Moreover, unlike Hewitt's history of a tolerant, liberal home life, particularly of a father's independent and patient character providing his son with a "striding mind," Montague's background is one of bitter entrenchment, his own father carrying a nationalist's defeated ambitions to the grave. His father's unsettled spirit still, in fact, haunts the poet, calling Montague, as in
"Stele for a Northern Republican," from "stifling darkness . . . a pale face straining in dream light / like a fish's belly / upward to life."21

This poem, and others which explore Montague's own psyche and vision as well as the inner character of his province, are included in The Rough Field (1972), in some ways a counterpart to Hewitt's An Ulster Reckoning. Yet unlike Hewitt's collection, whose poems speak of a specific series of violent occurrences in the late 1960s, Montague's volume is, as Terence Brown describes it, a more ambitious and embracing attempt "to pay due respect both to the contemporary present of secular rootless cosmopolitan individualism, and to what he sees as the mythic, historical, and racial permanencies of Irish rural experience."22 Thus, in a sequence of "lyrics, extracts from historical documents, speeches, letters and tracts, confessional poems, satires, and meditations, illustrated with woodcuts,"23 Montague does not merely refer to or evoke a people's past; he actually assembles it from the echoed language and art of the living centuries. The resulting feeling is often that of a nerve being exposed; yet his purpose is that through such alternatingly sad, grim, stirring and angering confrontations, a violent present may be reviewed in light of an equally stern and turbulent past, with the hope of a clearer understanding and consequent remedy.

Plainly there is here a determined sense, as in Hewitt's work, of the poet writing for his people. Yet this is only part of the involvement; as Montague himself admits, "it is equally important for [the poet] to write out of a sense of his more interior, less tangible
wounds." Although perhaps less "tangible," these "wounds" are nonetheless more openly and bitterly pronounced in *The Rough Field* than in any of Hewitt's work. Indeed, in response to Hewitt's guarded emotion and polemical approach, Montague's voice immediately challenges that balanced view, and assaults the sensibilities with its feeling of uninsulated hurt—the response, significantly, of the native Irish tradition, with its history of displacement and repression in direct contrast to Hewitt's established, privileged background.

What is perhaps Montague's most representative poem in that it speaks of his personally received, "interior wounds" is one whose title likewise confirms its message, "The Sound of a Wound." It is, characteristically, a lament both for a people in the current throes of violent upheaval and for a vanished culture—the Gaelic world, rich and prolific, its language and thought poisoned long ago by English domination. In keeping with the spirit of *The Rough Field*, the poem begins with a declamatory and fiercely personal outcry that is not without an implied attack on the kind of well-meaning overtures that Hewitt attempts:

```
I assert
  a civilization died here;
    it trembles
underfoot where I walk these
  small, sad hills;
it rears in my blood stream
    when I hear
a bleat of Saxon condescension
  Westminster
to hell, it is less than these
strangely carved
five thousand year resisting stones,
    that lonely cross.
```
As we shall see later in the chapter, Hewitt, too, appreciates the power and meaning in Ireland's ancient landmarks, finding in them identifying measures of his own nationality; however, he expresses this association less defiantly than Montague. For his part, Montague admits that this defiance is inherited—something, as he has contended, which he cannot disavow—that in essence the bitterness of his father compels him to recite unrelentingly the ancient record of wrongs. In stark contrast, for instance, to Hewitt's stirrings of compassion and national dedication in a similarly titled poem, "The Scar," feelings inspired by his ancestor's act of charity, Montague's reaction to his inheritance forces but another attack on the English colonists' rape of the country, renewing in the poet

the
swarm of blood
to the brain, the vomit surge
of race hatred,
the victim seeing the oppressor,
bold Jacobean
planter, or gadget laden marine,
who has scatter-
ed his household gods, used
his people
as servants, flushed his women
like game.26

Another Ulster poet equally haunted by the past, and, like Montague, retaining similar ambiguous emotions about his father, is Michael Longley. He remembers, in "Wounds," his Protestant parent's "secrets"—loyalty to "King and Country," as a member of the Ulster Division in World War I ("Going over the top with 'Fuck the Pope!' / 'No Surrender'")—and sudden death—shot by a Republican terrorist
Yet, although each writer is bitterly expressive and often brutally graphic, neither Longley nor Montague makes apologies for his poetry. Moreover, Montague perceives as does Hewitt a cathartic effect in such honest exposition. Asked in an interview (which he gave jointly with Hewitt) if it were possible for the poet, seemingly so "immured by his political context," to "extrapolate himself from it," he responded familiarly, "It would be dishonest if he did—not only to his own past but to his family's past as well. What's in his blood must speak through him. He must bear witness." But, he adds, the poet must accomplish this "in a context of understanding, compassion, diagnosis, hope."*^28

Still, the damage remains apparent, and "diagnosis" which spares no savage detail must often precede, if not neglect, any sense of "hope." Such is the case with Montague's poem "A Grafted Tongue," in which the drama centers on an Irish schoolboy's anguished attempt to learn English. Although he is reviewing a former condition, it is clear how serious a crime Montague, a poet whose life and career receive direction from language, deems this historical humiliation. He naturally recognizes it as symbolic of the cultural and racial hegemony which became all but complete under English rule. Montague's description of the student's ordeal is highly colored while emotionally taut:

```plaintext
An Irish
cchild weeps at school
repeating its English.
After each mistake
```

("a shivering boy who wandered in / Before they could turn the television down / Or tidy away the supper dishes").* ^27 Yet, although each writer is bitterly expressive and often brutally graphic, neither Longley nor Montague makes apologies for his poetry. Moreover, Montague perceives as does Hewitt a cathartic effect in such honest exposition. Asked in an interview (which he gave jointly with Hewitt) if it were possible for the poet, seemingly so "immured by his political context," to "extrapolate himself from it," he responded familiarly, "It would be dishonest if he did—not only to his own past but to his family's past as well. What's in his blood must speak through him. He must bear witness." But, he adds, the poet must accomplish this "in a context of understanding, compassion, diagnosis, hope."* ^28

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```plaintext
An Irish
cchild weeps at school
repeating its English.
After each mistake
```
The master
gouges another mark
on the tally stick
hung about its neck

Like a bell
on a cow, a hobble
on a straying goat. 29

Nor does the child's painful confusion end outside the classroom, for it is transmitted finally to his home where he finds "the turf cured width" of his parents' hearth "growing slowly alien: In cabin / and field, they still / speak the old tongue. / You may greet no one."

So, Montague concludes, a generation later "that child's grandchild's / speech stumbles over lost / syllables of an old order." The conquest by division is thus complete: word and identity, memory and heritage, all are permanently erased.

As a result of this lost history, then, Montague cannot depend, as does Hewitt in "Once Alien Here," on the rich Ulster earth to "so enhance the blood / with steady pulse . . . till thought and image may, identified, / find easy voice to utter each aright." Such optimism, Montague would contend, depends for its support on the security and strength provided by membership in the supplanting Protestant Planter order. Not surprisingly, given this view, Montague is skeptical of the prospects for future peaceful coexistence between the currently warring factions in Northern Ireland, to say nothing of the dream of political unification of the island. In "An Ulster Prophecy," Montague recalls once more—in a sweeping, litany-like chronology of succinctly drawn historical moments—the continuous mad tale of poverty, dispossession, grotesque carnage and sectarian savagery, all conditions
occurring up to the present which succeed in defying, and appear here to mock, any nationalist dreams:

I saw the Pope breaking stones on Friday,  
A blind parson sewing a patchwork quilt,  
Two bishops cutting rushes with their croziers,  
Roaring Meg firing rosary beads for cannonballs,  
Corks in boats afloat on the summit of the Sperries,  
A severed head speaking with a grafted tongue,  
A snail paving Royal Avenue with a hatchet,  
British troops firing on the Shankill,  
A mill and a forge on the back of a cuckoo,  
The fox sitting conceitedly at a window chewing tobacco  
And a curlew in flight surveying a United Ireland. 32

As has already been observed, this feeling of hopeless struggle, and awareness of a corrupted, now vanished world, is expressed by a number of Northern poets in addition to Montague. On the whole, while these writers share with Hewitt the desire for an end to the violence and social division, they demonstrate little of his openness to signs of change and, in Montague's words, seem able only to "bear witness," less willing, perhaps (or little persuaded), to extricate themselves from the political and social background. It may be said, too, that the reaction of those poets from a native Catholic tradition—among them Montague, Seamus Heaney, and Padraic Fiacc—are in a sense purer, less inhibited by the doubts or conflicts over identity which characterize much of Hewitt's work. The Catholic poets, it would seem, accept their Irishness without question, as a given, maintaining a little of the undercurrent of nationalist feeling common among most Catholic citizens of Northern Ireland: that, as unwilling exiles isolated by a political boundary, they owe their first allegiance to the Irish Republic and to the dream, however elusive, of eventual
reunification. Their memories, like Montague's, may project the burden of inferiority; yet they are secure in the kind of self-knowledge that appears often hidden from Hewitt (despite his protestations to the contrary) as a descendant of the non-native Planter class.

This security also provides these same authors with a degree of freedom, a liberty to examine more forcefully—with a greater rhetorical range than Hewitt is consistently capable of—the perilous, changing life and landscape around them. Yet much of this examination centers for both groups—Planter and Gael alike—on the centuries-old religious issues which ostensibly lie at the root of the conflict. And although many political activists in the North repeatedly contend that class (and its attendant political power), not religion, explains the presence of unyielding barriers, most poets address these sectarian hatreds precisely and honestly. For them, the implication is that, like other cultural institutions, religion tends to clarify a people's perception of themselves. So Hewitt's position is inescapably defined while observing Catholic lives and rituals, as in his poem "Mass" in which, though awed by the service, he still deems it "mumble and gabble," denigrating the priest's movements as "clever" and "so habited there seems no thought." More than a reminder of place—that of privilege or repression—in Ulster, as we have seen, religion is also part of one's sense of national identification; specifically, this involves the expectations each community has of the future, based on its respective myths: for one righteous struggle and reclamation, for the other equally sacred defense and preservation.
It is no surprise, then, that when such myth-engrained perceptions, defined and fostered by sectarian identity, become threatened, emotions are feverishly aroused and the need for division becomes further affirmed. Under these conditions, bigotry and its attendant violence become commonplace, actually accepted at a deep tribal level. So Seamus Heaney describes, in his ironically titled poem "Whatever you say, say nothing":

Men die at hand. In blasted street and home the gelignite, a common sound effect; as the man said when Celtic won, 'the Pope of Rome's a happy man this night.' His flock suspect in their deepest heart of hearts the heretic has come at last to heel and to the stake.\(^{34}\)

In a more pointed reference to religious animosity, Padraic Fiacc, in the curtly worded poem "Enemies," evokes the barely submerged sectarian feelings which serve to strengthen the Protestant summer celebrations during the so-called "marching season":

Belfast makes a tall boy Bonfire for bonfirenight To burn in effigy the guy Calls himself a fellow Christian! The gall of this guy, we Burn instead of crucify Christ, the enemy . . . \(^{35}\)

And in perhaps one of the most savage, and graphic, poems on religion-inspired terror, "Christ Goodbye," Fiacc details the heinous torture and murder by Protestant dockers of a Catholic fellow worker, one who becomes for Fiacc a very human Christ—"screaming for them to PLEASE
STOP! / and then, later like screaming for death!" There is finally no sense at all of redemptive sacrifice, only a depraved, unremitting horror:

Poor boy Christ, for when
they finally got around to finishing Him off
by shooting him in the back of the head

'The poor Fenian fucker was already dead!'\textsuperscript{36}

In light of such brutality, in the midst of such madness, it is little wonder that few if any writers find in the situation more than the prospect of mere endurance, of a "grimly hanging on" as Montague relates in a previously noted poem. Similarly, Heaney closes "Whatever you say, say nothing" with the picture of reduced existence, emptied of vitality, pity, or interest, comprising only daily emotionless encounters and infrequent sustenance:

\begin{verbatim}
Is there life before death? That's chalked up in Ballymurphy. Competence and the pain, coherent miseries, a bite again.\textsuperscript{37} we hug our little destiny again.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{verbatim}

The subject of this destiny has, as we have seen, also engaged Hewitt, although it is clear that he has, by reason of distance or choice, avoided Fiacc's excruciating detail or Montague's and Heaney's caustically resigned accounts. On the whole, Hewitt's portraits of the Ulster violence tend to be detached, albeit sincere, grievings over the insupportable actions of a city or people that betray a better nature, a nobler heritage. In the same fashion, when reviewing a national destiny, he often abstracts the character of its suffering, as in the closing lines of "An Irishman in Coventry." Here he speaks
almost romantically of "fate" and "eight hundred years' disaster,"
drawing finally on myth as an analogy for his "banished" people's
hopes that "listen," like Lir's children, "for the landward bells."

Ultimately, for Hewitt it is his acknowledged distance from the
physical center of the conflict that explains in part the lack of the
shocking immediacy exhibited in Fiacc's poems; yet it is this very
distance, too, that gives Hewitt's work a greater depth, an intro­
spective and lyrical power missing from Fiacc's desperate realism.
Most importantly, this intervening emotional space allows Hewitt the
polemical, philosophical room in which to explore, as he does in
nearly all his work, the limits of resolution which the Northern Irish
problem demands: the need for a sense of community based on the recog­
nition of common identity; in essence, the respected nativeness of
both Planter and Gael.

As already noted, however, this exploration away from native
soil—part of the familiar story of the voluntary exile who discov­
er something essential in himself, something uniquely "dynamic about his
distant country—is not without its loneliness and its vulner­bi"y.
"It is a hard responsibility to be a stranger," Hewitt writes in "The
Search": "to hear your speech sounding at odds with your neighbors; / holding your tongue from quick comparisons; / remembering that you are
a guest in the house." Yet when he is obliged to speak out, to
correct perceived misconceptions or defend his nation, his race,
Hewitt finds, as in "Conversations in Hungary, August 1969," a
stronger sense of native place precisely because of his dilemma,
because of his need to correct and defend. Here the occasion is a
casual discussion he and his wife are having with Hungarian friends; it is the kind of discussion in which Hewitt is most at ease: "The eager talk ran from book to play, / to language, politics." On the subject of politics, however, Hewitt's host suddenly leans over and informs him that riots have spread throughout Northern Ireland and that the British army has been sent in.

The news unnerves both Hewitt and his wife, not only because of the nature of the message but also because of the manner in which it is given, the tone of challenge in his host's voice. This challenge is openly directed later in Budapest, Hewitt narrates, where the poet is questioned by friends who cannot comprehend why "when the time's vibrant with technology, / such violence should still be manifest / between two factions, in religion's name." They press him more earnestly, with the same tone of shaming challenge that his previous host expressed: "It is three hundred years since, they declared, / divergent sects put claim and counterclaim / to arbitration of the torch and sword." In response, Hewitt recalls for them current history, the presence of worldwide human conflict, "of Arab, Jew, / of Turk and Greek in Cyprus, Pakistan / and India." When his friends remain unconvinced, Hewitt and his wife attempt to explain the complexities and contradictions inherent in the whole of Irish history; they speak of "the savage complications, . . . raging viruses of bigotry, . . . frustration, guilt, and fear, and enmity," their mincing, helpless words unintentionally suggesting an apology. Their Hungarian hosts finally counter with reference to their own nation's turbulent history and the contrast to Ireland's. Alluding to
Londonderry's wall which has physically and symbolically separated the two religious communities of that city, they force Hewitt to accept silently the anachronism of Northern Ireland and the ludicrous character of its divisions; they remark with "ironic zest,"

Your little isle, the English overran—
our broad plain, Tartar, Hapsburg, Ottoman—
revolts and wars uncounted—Budapest
shows scarce one wall that's stood two hundred years.
We build to fill the centuries' arrears.42

This chastisement by strangers—with its stern assessment of the Irish as not building to correct but to reinforce past errors—seems to haunt Hewitt throughout most of the poems written from abroad. Whether in England (where he resided as museum director in Coventry between 1967 and 1972) or on the continent, the turmoil in Northern Ireland, and its cruel inevitability, are never far from his attention. In his poem "The Roman Fort," for instance, the poet, while observing the excavation of a military outpost in what was then the margins of the Roman Empire, notes how the fort had been strengthened, positioned and best suited "for Vespasian's legions / protecting the straight roads, the Fosse Way, / when the barbarians swarmed." To this evidence of Roman military life Hewitt, in the same vein as his allegorical poem "The Colony," attaches the significance of another outpost on the edge of empire where these English archeologists may presently discover more brutal and living evidence of conquest and resistance:

Like the Romans also, they may shortly receive further experience in a beleagured colony, for, daily, public prints and moving pictures bring evidence of the stubborn barbarians.43
Themes of alienation and barrier emerge even when the poet returns to Ireland. Significantly, in the poem "On The Grand Dublin Canal," Hewitt is in the Irish Republic's capital city, not Belfast. Here he discovers familiar associations and also curiously foreign dimensions. The poet observes clinically the "hump-backed bridge" which arches over and contains "a neat-hilly landscape / which presents no originality / in its naively obvious composition." Clearly this is not the stirring vista which his native province's glens and rocky coast afford, and although charmed by the view, Hewitt feels another kind of distance from what he felt overseas. There it had been the distinction between his hosts' country and Ireland; here it is between an Ulsterman's memories and the still alien world that southern Ireland presents. There is no doubt the suspicion, also, that his Hungarian friends may have been right, and that nothing can excuse or explain the divisions on this "little isle," maintained by two culturally and racially identical peoples. Hewitt's concluding tone is one of regret, serving to underscore the poem's subtitle—"musing on the Two Nations Theory." Still regarding the landscape, he states that the "only unusual element / is that the occasional cottage / shows the hipped, round thatch / which is traditional on this / side of the Black Pig's Dyke." His casual reference to that geographic feature—the earthen rampart and extant remains of a wall of defense erected in Celtic times that roughly coincide with the modern political boundary—which many in Ulster view as historical evidence justifying continued partition, seems to confirm Ireland's interminable dilemma of self-destroying loyalties and slavery to the past. These
continue to frustrate the poet’s attempt at healing the existing social wounds as well as his personal desire to identify and embrace the whole nation, north and south, as his own.

Ultimately, Hewitt turns away from any further confrontation with these insoluble difficulties; he turns instead inward to the private confidence and peace found not in an intense examination of the roots and meanings of Ulster’s warfare, but in the Irish land. In spite of what he has witnessed—indeed because of it—in a poem such as “Clogh-Oir: September 1971,” he can still draw power and a profound, proud national sense from place names, in identifiable, tangible scenes of familiar beauty: the elegant lines of age-old cathedrals and the rugged, more ancient, and equally sacred stones. Away from the responsibilities of politics or profession and removed necessarily from the violence, he is able, like Wordsworth before him, to “breathe again.” Delighting in the company of his wife as they roam the Ulster countryside where she was raised, in County Tyrone, he recalls with her what he has always cherished most, the memory of “unanticipated tasks”—“dishes to scour, bedmaking, hearth to sweep”—and of place associations—a “road’s turn,” a “shop-name, corner, sign-post, noted milestone.” Characteristically, Hewitt reads a whole history in these chance encounters. These scenes do not encourage merely a retreat from the turbulence of Belfast or Derry; they allow him rather a deeper, more expansive outlook, encouraging work which Terence Brown has termed “a poetry of assured vision” as opposed to “a poetry of problem” with its preoccupation with the local and immediate. Moreover, as in “Conacre,” the presence of a loved one
reflects and reaffirms his devotion to national place. Through recourse to such exquisite feelings, in the "dialectic of the heart," the poet is able to transcend the violence and peril, the uncertainty and, finally, narrowness of the present moment and discover with joy "time truant, all the past forgathered, / myth, legend, history, yours, mine, ours."\(^{49}\)

The closing scene of the poem is tenderly and resolutely drawn. Hewitt imagines his wife as a little girl—"the lonely child / with the black tossing head, the dark brows, / as intense and definite as now, / as palpable, now, musing by my side." Appropriately for one whose life and work has served to bridge the gulf that religious hatred has made in Ireland, Hewitt presents the last scene inside a church, in a pure atmosphere which for an instant joins the poet with all the legend and love he perceives moving about and in him, while he and his wife stand "close in a vivid murmuring congregation." A noble history is evoked here, of "queens, heroes, bards, kneeling peasants, / immor­tally assembled," a history that contradicts entirely the raging course of bombed cities, tortured neighbors and friends, and poisoned hope. In the end, it is this noble history and heritage that Hewitt claims, the glowing image of innocent grace and courage and love reflected in his wife's young face,

known before time struck, known forever, stuff of the fabric whereof I am made.\(^{50}\)
NOTES

1 John Montague, "Red Branch," The Dead Kingdom (Portlaoise, Ireland, 1984), p. 50.


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.


6 Ibid.

7 Hewitt, "In This Year of Grace," The Wearing of the Black, p. 76.


9 Ibid.

10 "In This Year of Grace," p. 76.


12 Ibid.


15 "Neither an Elegy nor a Manifesto," The Wearing of the Black, p. 146. These lines do not appear in the version of the poem printed in Out of My Time.
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16 Ibid., p. 145.
17 Ibid., pp. 145-146.
18 Ibid., p. 146.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Montague, "Stele for a Northern Republican," The Rough Field (Dublin, 1972), p. 38.
22 Terence Brown, Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster (Dublin, 1975), p. 156.
23 Ibid.
26 Ibid., pp. 40-41.
28 "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 725.
30 Ibid., p. 35.
41 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
48 Quoted by Kearney in "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 727.
50 Ibid., p. 42.
Moments of love and communion, such as those he has experienced with his wife, are for Hewitt still often isolated events, cherished as a relief from weariness, occurring only after much soul-searching, doubt, or bitter knowledge. Again and again in his work, the poet returns to the theme of isolation—of one who "strides apart," who in conscience and intellect must remove himself for integrity's sake, and for the sake of his search for identity as a committed, caring Irishman. Indeed, it is with this sense of apartness that Hewitt feels the most comfortable; yet such feelings are the mark of many writers like him. "To some extent," writes Alan Warner, "a poet must always be an outsider, a watcher, whether in a field or in a city street. The nature of his activity makes him an observer, standing to one side, rather than a man caught up in the life of a farm or a factory."¹ Hewitt is not untroubled by the gap between himself and other persons or events, be they the country people of his native Antrim, the cherished neighborhoods of Belfast, or all the embattled lives and tragic consequences of the Ulster conflict; as we have seen, these move and haunt and torment him. Yet, as we have also observed, for one who yearns to confirm his nationality while remaining able to "pace his thought," a measured distance is
often necessary to ensure a larger vision free from political alignment and class identification.

Thus, in this search for identity, which in his work takes the form of an explanation both of his place in an Irish world and the Irish place in the whole of human experience, Hewitt frequently attempts to defuse or contradict the fiercely nationalist view which carries with it such an insulated and violent determinism. Evoking the previously noted "hierarchy of values," in which his province and country are but stages of loyalty "ascending" to include the continent of Europe, the poet discovers part of his nation in many of the lands he has visited; and in these other lands, too, he has felt at home. So in his poem "The Search" he remarks, after having expressed a homesick yearning for the familiar and consoling, that "sometimes the thought / that you have not come away from,"

but returned

to this older place whose landmarks are yours also, occurs when you look down a long street remarking the architectural styles or move through a landscape with wheat ripening in large fields.2

Yet, never content with initial perceptions or motives, Hewitt almost immediately admits, "you may not rest here, having come back, / for this is not your dwelling place, either." Reminded that one's country is that thing, as Yeats suggested, about which we know even a little, Hewitt clearly recognizes where he belongs; still the search for security and peace which this sense of belonging provides becomes concentrated typically on small, governable vistas, on familiar objects—again, those elements on which "so much depends." Thus, in
the closing stanza of "The Search" Hewitt returns to the limiting yet knowable landscape of Irish earth. Although a somewhat reduced picture compared to the varied and far-reaching contours of the whole living world, these rugged features unite in the poet's imagination, presenting him with the probable goal of his quest:

The authorities declare that in former days
the western island was uninhabited,
just as where you reside now was once tundra,
and what you seek may be no more than
a broken circle of stones on a rough hillside, somewhere.

Both the language and focus of "The Search" recall a much earlier poem, simply and boldly entitled "Ireland." In it Hewitt chastises the Irish for their narrow provincialism, for a blinding devotion which has too often resulted in a stubborn and recriminating outlook, in defensive tribal stirrings. So Hewitt laments that if such narrow loyalty is itself debilitating, a love for such meager and unproductive farmland prevalent in most of rural Ireland is ludicrous:

We Irish, vainer than tense Lucifer,
and yet content with half-a-dozen turf,
and cry our adoration for a bog,
rejoicing in the rain that never ceases,
and happy to stride our sterile acres,
or stony hills that scarcely feed a sheep.
But we are fools, I say, are ignorant fools
to waste our wit and love and poetry
on half-a-dozen peat and a black bog.

Paradoxically, it seems—for one who himself places so much importance on this very landscape as a mark of national identity—Hewitt goes on to dismiss native associations altogether, reminding his countrymen of their history of successive immigration, and of their bereft isolation:
We are not native here or anywhere.
We were the keltic wave that broke over Europe, 
and ran up this black beach among these stones:
but when the tide ebbed, were left stranded here 
in crevices, and ledge-protected pools 
that have grown saltier with the drying up 
of the great common flow that kept us sweet 
with fresh cold draughts from deep down in the ocean.5

In language, finally, that seems to anticipate the Ulster conflict of 
the 1960s, Hewitt explains his nation's stubborn, distraught character 
by suggesting its desire to return to the ancient, elemental world 
from which it emerged:

So we are bit'or, and are dying out 
in terrible harshness in this lonely place, 
and what we think is love for usual rock 
or old affection for our customary ledge, 
is but forgotten longing for the sea 
that cries far out and calls us to partake 
in his great tidal movements round the earth.6

On the one hand, as we have earlier witnessed, Hewitt defines 
himself in the larger context, embracing a wider "nationality," a 
universal vision. For, as Alan Warner eloquently explains, "Although 
Hewitt has deep roots in Ulster rock and clay, the leaves on his tree 
of verse breathe freely in air that circulates round the world." The 
stylistic result is that "he can bring before us a local scene but he 
can also face us with a general metaphysical and moral problem."7 
Intrigued and attuned to detail though he is, the poet, in mind 
especially of the political situation in Ulster, knows the dangers of 
selectivity, the misleading character he describes in his poem "Mosaic" 
that causes one man to "objectively inherit / a role in history"—be 
he "soldier, functionary, rebel, / engaging himself as an instrument / 
of required stability or urgent change"—while
the bystanders accidentally involved,
the child on an errand run over by the army truck,
the young woman strayed into the line of fire,
the elderly person beside the wall when it fell
are marginalia only, normally excluded from documents.

One needs to experience the whole picture, Hewitt contends, to see
the more inclusive view before passing judgment or adhering to one
group, idea, or law:

Give us instead
the whole mosaic, the tesserae,
that we may judge if a period indeed
has a pattern and is not merely
a handful of colored stones in the dust.

It is interesting to note, of course, that in expressing the
need for the "whole mosaic," Hewitt must speak of the same detailed
circumstances which he chronicles in "Neither an Elegy nor a Manifes-
to." Yet this is in keeping with his complex, sometimes contradic-
tory perspective on Irish identity. So his adherence to a hierarchy
of values which will allow himself and his countrymen the freedom to
encompass a broader presence, and thus a more open, saner future, is
demonstrated by his admission that no one is native, which in turn
provides him reason to identify his heritage, that of a planted immi-
grant, with the other "non-natives" who share his history and destiny.
For while Hewitt often finds himself intellectually and emotionally
alone, he yearns for the company of others, and for the unity of the
whole nation (though he is silent on any concrete political arrange-
ment); while contesting a narrow vision of Irish nationalism, Hewitt
is nonetheless, as Warner reminds us, "inescapably a Ulsterman . . .
for whom Belfast is 'irremediably home.'" Indeed, his may sound
as a distant, solitary voice; yet he pronounces his warnings and expresses his devotion from a heritage, as we have seen, of which he is immensely proud, from within the clear (though, like Tennyson's, "forever fading") margins of a tradition which in its brightest, noblest dimension extols a warm and confident grace. In the poem "Expectancy," for instance, Hewitt anticipates eternity—and the presence of truth it will bring—as "one still engaged in the patient labors of time":

I wait here for this light in my own fashion, not lonely on a rock against the sky, but as the men who bred me, in their day, as men in country places still, have time, working in some field to answer you.

That such a spirit as this can serve not to divide but strengthen the whole nation is Hewitt's persistent theme. So while he demands that we preserve an individual's cultural, religious, and intellectual integrity, Hewitt continues to claim an Irish heritage that includes the whole of Ireland. Serving this end, in addition to the memory of his great-grandmother's sacrificial charity—the northern woman who fed a southern beggar and died from his famine-fever—the subject of his poem "The Scar," there is another apt symbol of "his sense of inheriting the older Irish traditions." The poet earlier discovered that the Planter's Gothic tower of Kilmore church, in County Armagh, the home of his ancestors, had been built on the site of a Culdee holy place, and that the later building enclosed the stump of an ancient round tower. So Hewitt exclaims with conviction and pride: "It is the best symbol I have yet found for the strange textures of my response to this island of which I am native. I may appear Planter's
Gothic, but there is a round tower somewhere inside, and needled through every sentence I utter.\textsuperscript{13}

With regard to these "sentences," Hewitt's non-conformist Protestant background, while influenced by the nativeness of ancestral place, has helped to shape the poet's language as well as his temperament and the themes of his poetry. This background is expressed, Warner describes, in an often "deliberate plainness . . . that has misled some readers into thinking [Hewitt] dull and prosaic, lacking in colour." Yet his avoidance of rhetoric and display, as we have noted, is what gives his work more authority by keeping the writer free from the embellishment of "glittering fables" or "stencilled rhythms" which he sees as a source of violent polarization and a barrier to national unity. His clear preference is "for spare, controlled statement" that nonetheless demonstrates "considerable variety and range." More often than not, "the quiet, unemphatic tone conceals reserves of power."\textsuperscript{14} Thus in the poem "Style" Hewitt acknowledges the need for a precise, honest language that identifies the most salient characters of experience:

\begin{quote}
Close woven words my care,  
I praised where praise seemed due,  
and still had some to spare  
for textures coarse and new,  
till, sated, taste withdrew  
from fashionable wear.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Hewitt admits that such reserved sparseness is a product, too, of a "sceptic heart / those rhythms which should maintain / and pace my stride apart / with a slow measured art / irrevocably plain."\textsuperscript{16} Such a definition suggests an incisive and sculptured art; so it is not
unusual that Hewitt's admiration for the craft of a headstone engraver expressed in "For stonemasons" reflects his own rhetorical craft with the same desired effects:

Select the stone. Incise the words exactly marking time of year.
Cut deep or shallow as required;
Let light or shadow emphasize.

Define with kerb the viewer's stance.
Avoid abstractions large or small.
All value judgements flake or split.
The lettered stone's the metaphor.

The "subtleties and ironies" (as Warner describes them) evident in Hewitt's plain style appear most frequently in his last two collections, Mosaic, whose title poem has been previously noted, and Loose Ends, which the poet suggests is his last book of verse. Supported by the sometimes terse, even laconic "measures" he takes of himself and the world, there is a feeling in both volumes of Hewitt reviewing the past, questioning his role, motives, and influence. He wishes, figuratively, both to fit the final bright tiles into the mosaic and tie together the stray ends of his life, so that nothing of importance is left unaccomplished as he "waits for the light" in his "own fashion." Mosaic is especially significant for in it he confronts, with the sequence "October sonnets," his wife's death, as well as the deaths of his father and sister, all three persons who have figured prominently in shaping his values, his national vision, his heart. Such poems of lamented passing and fond remembrance—works which continue to offer "praise where praise is due"—also dominate Loose Ends, whose opening poem, entitled "North
West Passage: an old man dying," is, appropriately, a portrait of aged pride and memory paralleling the poet’s own life and his attempt to create and understand. There are selections, too, which recall many other poems from earlier volumes: themes, re-evoked and re-emphasized, about folk customs, the Antrim countryside, reminiscences of wife and friends, both the advantages and fears of isolation, even the mild flattery of having dissertations written on his work.

In the end, however, these retrospectives are only furtive, futile exercises; so Hewitt admits self-effacingly in "Retreaded rhymes": "Hence my slow wits I must only spend / to phrase affection or mourn a friend." Yet despite these believed deficiencies, he is nonetheless able to affirm himself and the worth of his life’s work: "I’ve kept on target," he asserts,

and am satisfied
when I recall behind the placid verse
a man still stands whose attitude declares
his loyalty to hope, unquenched belief,
despite the incidence of age or grief,
in man’s rare-hinted possibility
of being just, compassionate, and free.

This vision of human "possibility" Hewitt naturally extends to all nations. Yet one cannot help but feel, particularly in the last stanza, with his choice of words which produce echoes returning from his earliest poems--words which speak of love of nature and physical place, respect for the land of buried ancestors, and of discovery finally of that land’s inestimable power to move and shape his life--that the dreams and destiny of his native Ireland are the primary movements that
... sing their sense forever in my head:
0 windblown grass upon the mounded dead,
0 seed in crevice of the frost-split rock,
the power that fixed your root shall take us back
though endlessly through aeons we are thrust
as luminous or unreflecting dust.¹⁹
NOTES

3. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., pp. 11-12.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 7.
16. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
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