

Oceanic Connections: The Sea and Island Spaces in Irish and Caribbean Poetry

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the in-text citations of this thesis to refer to primary texts. They are listed here by author.

Lorna Goodison

CP *Collected Poems*

FHR *From Harvey River: A Memoir of my Mother and Her Island*

RG *Redemption Ground*

Seamus Heaney

DD *Door into the Dark*

EL *Electric Light*

FK *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose, 1971-2001*

HL *The Haw Lantern*

HC *Human Chain*

OG *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*

WO *Wintering Out*

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

AM *Acts & Monuments*

BB *The Boys of Bluehill*

MH *The Mother House*

SV *Second Voyage*

SP *Selected Poems*

SF *The Sun-Fish*

Derek Walcott

CP *Collected Poems 1948-1984*

O *Omeros*

PDW *The Poetry of Derek Walcott*

WTS *What the Twilight Says: Essays*

Abstract

Ellen Howley

Oceanic Connections: The Sea and Island Spaces in Irish and Caribbean Poetry

This thesis examines the work of four major poets from Ireland and the anglophone Caribbean, connecting their work through a shared interest in the sea and island spaces. Employing the theory of the synaptic sea and informed by ideas from across the Blue Humanities and oceanic studies, it compares the work of Lorna Goodison (Jamaica), Seamus Heaney (Northern Ireland), Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (Republic of Ireland) and Derek Walcott (St Lucia). The growing field of Irish-Caribbean Studies demonstrates the common outlooks between these regions and this thesis engages with this research, with a particular interest in the sea as a space which challenges and disrupts landed ideals.

The island space prompts a consideration of the interaction of land and water and this thesis begins by assessing each poet's attitude to their unique island space, revealing the points of connection between the islands of the Caribbean and the island of Ireland. This pushes the gaze out to sea as Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott look to the sea to find a poetics with which to write. This poetics, in turn, allows each poet to contemplate their contemporary moment and this thesis examines how the distinct but interrelated ideas of nation, gender, and mythic time are fruitfully examined by these poets through writing with and about the sea. The position of sailors within the nation, the gendering that takes place on and of the sea and the literary and historical connections forged on the mythic sea are all at stake in this discussion.

In its focus on the sea, this thesis demonstrates the importance of expanding the gaze of the environmental humanities towards non-landed concerns, while also offering new perspectives on the poets considered here. The sea's connective powers make it a fruitful site of comparison, drawing attention to lines of transatlantic connections across the unique but related poetic traditions of Ireland and the Caribbean.

INTRODUCTION

Navigating Oceanic Connections

*Look, stranger, on this island now
The leaping light for your delight discovers,
Stand stable here
And silent be,
That through the channels of the ear
May wander like a river
The swaying sound of the sea.*

(W.H. Auden, "Look, Stranger", 43)

*I am weary of words and people
Sick of the city, wanting the sea*

(Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Exiled" 21)

The sea is deeply intertwined with the act of poetry. As Auden's "Look Stranger" suggests, the stillness of the island scene offers a poetry derived from contemplation of the sounds and images of the seascape. In this way, the sea releases the imaginative potential of language; at the same time, the sea is beyond language, beyond our understanding of human interaction, as Millay implies. Poets who attempt to write about the sea confront the task of "putting into words an immensity that only the imagination can contain" (McClatchy 12). It is in this undertaking that poets, and particularly island poets, are united by common opportunities and obstacles encountered in the sea's waters. Poetry about the seas and oceans reveals much about a writer's outlook, condition and interests, the waters acting as, "a mighty mirror, reflecting the anxieties and astonishments of the poets themselves" (McClatchy 12). Such reflections in the waves also refract beyond the self, prompting poetry that is engaged with collective and societal concerns.

This thesis argues that anglophone poets from Ireland and the Caribbean turn to the sea as a space of engagement with the world around them. These regions are linked by the expanse of the Atlantic that lies between them, but also by the peculiar prominence and significance of poetry within their respective cultures, as intimated by Laurence A. Breiner in his introduction to Caribbean poetry:

It is frequently observed that poetry seems to play an unusually prominent role in West Indian society since Independence. The implied comparison is with the English-speaking world, and perhaps underestimates the role of poetry in Ireland or Anglophone Africa, but the observation remains valid. (13)

The comparative possibilities Breiner suggests are taken up by this thesis, which argues that Irish and Caribbean poetry demonstrate a remarkable commonality of outlook on the sea and island space.¹ Through an exploration of the sea in anglophone poetry from these regions, commonalities surface, even as the particularities of each poetic tradition transpire, particularly in relation to conceptions of islandness, the act of writing and ideas of nation, gender and time. In order to focus these discussions, this thesis examines the work of four anglophone poets from across Ireland and the Caribbean: Lorna Goodison (Jamaica), Seamus Heaney (Northern Ireland), Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (Republic of Ireland), and Derek Walcott (St Lucia). These poets are selected primarily for the interest

¹ "Space" is employed throughout this thesis to refer to the sea and island. In part, I use this term informed by Yi-Fu Tuan's assertion that "From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa" (6). Notably, Tuan himself describes "the limitless horizon and unrestricted space of the seashore" (3-4). Poets write from a sense of place, investing significance in their surroundings, but the sea transcends any intimate interaction with place because of, not only its vastness, but also the inability to *be* in or on the sea in any continuous, unmediated capacity. As, I have written elsewhere, in reaction to Heidegger's understanding of place through the concept of dwelling, "one cannot dwell on the sea" (Howley, "Like Poetry" 251). Space here, however, rather than signalling emptiness, is invested with potentiality. Nevertheless, rather than affirming these divisions of space and place, the tensions between the two terms unfold throughout the thesis' shift away from the land to a focus on the sea.

that they display in the sea and island spaces that they inhabit.² They are drawn together here through the use of Ian Baucom's theory of the synaptic sea, which provides an apt methodological tool with which to reconcile the interest these poets have in the sea. In particular, the synaptic sea as a site of resistance is the outlook that drives this thesis, demonstrating, through close reading, the shared concerns of sea-based writing.

Poetry and the Synaptic Sea

For Baucom, the sea is a space of interconnected histories, cultures and narratives. His work draws particular attention to the drowned African men, women and children of the Middle Passage – the triangulated sea-journey between Europe, Africa and the Americas of Africans forced into slavery – and the “haunting [...] image of slaves drowning” in Caribbean literature (*Specters* 309). Notably, in an early essay, “Charting the ‘Black Atlantic’”, he calls for a comparative outlook based in the sea, urging scholars to “turn [their] attention from these national spaces of belonging to the waters that separate and join them” (“Charting” par. 1). In doing so, Baucom draws on the field of physiology and points to the functions of the synapse as a way of understanding the sea and its exchanges. In this vein, it becomes a connected space, transmitting goods, people and ideas from place to place or neuron to neuron, across the synaptic gap that is the sea. Extending this metaphor, Baucom argues,

allows us to identify the Atlantic as the nervous system of empire and to describe the submarine currents tumbling [Édouard] Glissant's drowned slaves as the synapses coupling the neural densities of metropole and colony. In this

² The use of Auden's poem as an epigraph to this chapter was, in part, inspired by Heaney's love of the poem. In the documentary *Seamus Heaney: Out of the Marvellous*, Heaney declares it is one of his “favourite Auden poems” (qtd. in McCarthy).

description, the submarine emerges as neither European nor Caribbean, neither metropolitan nor colonial, neither within the “West” nor without it. Instead, the submarine locates the system of exchanges which at once acknowledges the distinct character of such “unities” and makes such distinctions meaningless. (par. 13)

As a site of exchange, the sea both is and is not European and Caribbean, holding the histories of both spaces but ultimately belonging to neither. The sea dissolves distinctions into one another while retaining the uniqueness of each. As Baucom explains, the submarine is a “place [...] of the ‘either/or and both’” (par. 12). The sea is a colonial space, a space of invasion, emigration, slavery, home. It is all of those things, and of course, none distinctly. The synaptic formulation informs the readings undertaken in this thesis, as it is brought into new use not only to elucidate the sea in poetry beyond the Caribbean, but also adapted as a site of transnational connection, which challenges ideas beyond notions of empire.

For Baucom, the synaptic frame presents the sea as an interstitial, hybrid, connective space without a hierarchy. In this way, I envisage the synaptic sea gap as one that resists what Maeve Tynan describes as “the dualistic structures of Western Imperial logic, which privileges *terra firma* over the lacuna of *aqua nullius*” (145), challenging a colonial, binarized configuration of place as invested with value (both cultural and economic) and space as something to be traversed or dominated. The sea contains the histories of Europe, the Caribbean and Africa, at the same time that it disrupts and overrides these histories, as the Caribbean fisherman Achille discovers in Walcott’s *Omeros*. In book three, he encounters the Middle Passage and his African ancestors through sea journey, “skipping centuries, oceans and rivers, and Time itself”, God sending “the sea-swift as pilot” (*O* 134). Here, the sea contains the set of historical

exchanges of colonialism and slavery that led Achille to be in the Caribbean but can also elide those distinctions to allow Achille to meet his ancestors. Thus, the synaptic sea offers a productive lens through which to delineate the sea's impulses, while also recognising the reality of the sea's flows and currents and their ability to blur.

Baucom acknowledges that much of his theory of the synaptic sea aligns with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of the rhizome, as outlined in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Nevertheless, while the "nervous system and its synapses exhibit the topography of the rhizome" (par. 14), Baucom makes a crucial distinction between the rhizome and the synapse:

The rhizome has neither a history nor an environment. The synapse has both. [...] they bear the traces of both a collective and an individual history. The consequences of this difference are immense. If we conceive of a culture as rhizomatic assemblage, then we must construct a philosophy of culture which has no use for memory. (par. 14-15)

To think of the sea as synaptic necessitates a consideration of its history and the memories it carries. Baucom's theory of the synaptic sea thus emerges as a two-pronged idea. Firstly, the sea contains multiple histories that are both distinct and blurred by the workings of oceanic currents. Secondly, the specific location of the sea – its history and environment – is fundamental to the memories held there, as well as how they are remembered. For Goodison, the Caribbean Sea's burnt shells are "Markers of Atlantic Graves" (*CP* 477), while the memory of the Middle Passage is a communal one, with the word Atlantic carrying particular potency in the Caribbean: "we reached Atlantic. / Then we suffered sea change [...] Atlantic, as if wooden pegs / were forced between our lips (393). Distinctions between those who experienced slavery directly and those in a

contemporary Caribbean setting are blurred, as Goodison's work assumes a collective voice through the sea. For Baucom, the work of Édouard Glissant underpins his theory, describing the drowned body in Glissant's work as "an unrepressible object of dread at the heart of this tidal wandering" (par. 6). Nevertheless, the synaptic has been critiqued as a metaphor that "brackets the experiences of those who did not survive the Middle Passage, as well as those whose histories have been erased, hidden, or not passed on", because of its focus on lineage and connection (Pinnix 430).³ While the individual histories of enslaved peoples are difficult to recover, the synapse still allows for a collective history that has the potential to remember those lost stories.⁴ In a similar way, Goodison's poem fosters a unity with those who did not survive the sea journey, envisaging "our small bodies borrowed / by the long drowned" (CP 393).

Baucom's theory is informed by the very real histories of the Atlantic as well as the sea's currents and movements. In employing his work, I note the theory's emergence from a line of thought that focuses on transatlantic slavery. Accordingly, the use of the synaptic sea in forming a lens through which Ireland is viewed presents problems, as a Caribbean synaptic sea is not an Irish synaptic one. It is in this way that Elizabeth DeLoughrey's ideas of a localised interaction with sea space through tangible place can be deployed, so as both to modify and specify the theory's use. For her "the ocean is

³ As an alternative, Pinnix posits a turn towards the rhizome-influenced idea of sargassum seaweed, as an organism that "wholly inhabits the churning fluid materiality of the ocean" (425). Yet, as discussed, poetic understandings of the sea are facilitated by an interaction with the local and tangible. While sargassum is a tangible plant, the floating, "in-the-sea" qualities Pinnix emphasises are somewhat removed from island-bound experiences of the sea.

⁴ One such attempt at recovery in this way is M. NourbeSe Philips' *Zong!*. Pinnix argues that in the poem, "The history within the sea is not history at all, but rather presence always about to resurface. The effect is a construction of meaning that has no clear lineage, and yet the past and present, as well as disparate transoceanic locations, are revealed as entangled" (439). Yet, the poem, I have argued, can be read synaptically as "the memory and remembrance of *Zong* is inextricably linked to the environment in which it took place. [...] The poem's interaction with the sea demonstrates the slipperiness of memory and the inability to grasp those lost voices while also demonstrating that we must try to hear them at the same time" (Howley, "Sea").

allegorized from abstract space to local place by three key figures: the vessel (canoe, ship, or ark), the shore, and the body, particularly of submarine creatures” (*Allegories* 142). These local interactions mean that “the totality of ocean space is necessarily rendered in its smaller allegorical parts” (166). Thus, the synapse of the sea contains the histories of both regions but these are received at a local receptor level with different meanings. For example, the interactive relationship with the sea evident in Ní Chuilleanáin’s work foregrounds history and memory, as “through the long gap in the story / A stiff breeze whistles up off the ocean” (*SF* 42). Yet as “the wave [...] arrives / To listen for that same voice” (42), the voice that emerges is inflected with impulses of space that are different to those prompting the voices of Walcott’s or Goodison’s poetry.

Accordingly, DeLoughrey cautions that “ocean space is conceptually replete with contradictions”, reminding us of the difficulty of dealing with “the vastness of the ocean, a place of ontological limitlessness and fluidity” (*Routes* 76-77). The sea’s properties are distinguished from those of the land: “Unlike terrestrial space – where one might memorialize a space into place – the perpetual circulation of ocean currents means that the sea dissolves phenomenological experience and diffracts the accumulation of narrative” (DeLoughrey, “Submarine Futures” 33). The synaptic sea is constantly in flux, challenging traditional remembrance at the same time that it facilitates the holding of collective history. Because of the sea’s vastness and its rejection of narrative, DeLoughrey argues that the sea is often approached through ideas of the local. The process of blurring and distinguishing that occurs in Baucom’s theory finds resonance in DeLoughrey’s insistence that the sea dissolves and diffracts. Nevertheless, DeLoughrey underscores the importance of conceptualising a space that is tangible to the human. These ideas around memory and cognition of the sea are key to my thesis and underpin much of my analysis.

Oceanic Connections: The Sea and Island Spaces in Irish and Caribbean Poetry

investigates how Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott think and write about the sea through the lens of the synaptic gap. Baucom's theory acts as a key model in this work, as impulses are transmitted back and forth across the sea and picked up by these poets in unique ways, which are informed by their local interaction with specific seascapes on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. The novel use of Baucom's theory, adapted to reveal the sea's synaptic intentions from a comparative perspective, seeks to reveal the shared sea-based disrupting elements of these poets' work. This frame works in particularly productive tension with my choice of poets, who can be considered canonical and firmly established within their poetic milieus.⁵ All share a commitment to capturing and depicting their environments – Walcott notes in "Oceano Nox" that in school, "what I read / sank in like surf reopening the wet / pores of sand", realising that "centuries later, I mutter the sea's lines" (PDW 387) – as well as engaging with contemporary concerns, evident, for example, in Heaney's contemplation of the violence in Northern Ireland and Goodison's consideration of the gender politics of Jamaica. Yet, the twinning of these commitments within the synaptic sea can allow for the unsettling of writers whose work might be in danger of appearing monolithic. Moreover, the consideration of this group of roughly contemporaneous poets also ensures a balance of perspective across the important axes of location, gender and generation, nuancing each chapter's thematic explorations through a focus on individual poetic interactions with the sea.

⁵ Both Walcott and Heaney stand respectively as key figures in the poetry of the Caribbean and of Ireland, while the global stature of both was affirmed through their receipt of the Nobel Prize in 1992 (Walcott) and 1995 (Heaney). Similarly, both Goodison and Ní Chuilleanáin have occupied important poetic positions within their national cultures. In 2017, Goodison became Jamaica's second Poet Laureate, the first woman to hold the position, while in the same year Ní Chuilleanáin was appointed Professor of Poetry of Ireland.

Connecting Ireland and the Caribbean

As a field of research, connections between Ireland and the Caribbean have been explored in a consistent manner since around the early years of the 2010s. Since then, there have been important events, including two interdisciplinary conferences on the theme: a 2012 conference held in Barbados led to the publication of the edited collection *Caribbean Irish Connections* in 2015; in 2016, a subsequent conference took place in Cork, leading to the publication of a *Caribbean Quarterly* special issue in 2018. A 2017 conference, “Ireland, the British Empire and the Caribbean; Comparative Perspectives” took place at University College Dublin, as part of the ongoing research project, “Ireland and the Caribbean; Comparative Perspectives”, with an edited collection forthcoming (O’Kane Crimmins and O’Neill). These gatherings reflect the developing network of researchers working on and interested in this area of comparison, with multidisciplinary publications including work from scholars engaged in fields such as history (Nini Rodgers, Ciaran O’Neill), architecture (Finola O’Kane Crimmins), and archaeology (Laura McAtackney).

Yet, what is striking both within these particular advances to the field and beyond, is the prominence of literary scholars. The work of, among others, Lee M. Jenkins, Michael Malouf, Maria McGarrity, Evelyn O’Callaghan, Alison Donnell, Peter D. O’Neill, Alison Garden, and Dawn Miranda Sherratt-Bado is of particular importance to the topic, as well as to this thesis more specifically. Publications such as Malouf’s *Transatlantic Solidarities* (2009), McGarrity’s *Washed by the Gulf Stream* (2008), O’Neill’s edited collection with David Lloyd, *The Black and Green Atlantic* (2009), and *The Irish in the Atlantic World*, edited by David T. Gleeson (2010) are among the key texts from the inchoate stages of the field. They attempt to trace influences between these

regions, and have opened up new routes of enquiry for scholars in this area, providing foundations for the advances of the field in the 2010s. Later interventions, such as Eve Walsh Stoddard's *Positioning Gender and Race in (Post)colonial Plantation Space* (2012), Abigail L. Palko's *Imagining Motherhood in Contemporary Irish and Caribbean Literature* (2016) and Stephanie Pocock Boeninger's *Literary Drowning: Postcolonial Memory in Irish and Caribbean Literature* (forthcoming 2020) reflect the continued interest in drawing the literature of the region together.

Comparative critical work on the four poets examined in this thesis varies depending on the permutations of poets. Critics such as Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Sam Smith and Lorna Hardwick are among those who examine the work of Heaney and Walcott comparatively. Ideas about language and interaction with classic authors are some of the themes that have framed discussion of their poetry. Significantly, their approach to the environment has not traditionally been a feature of comparative work, as postcolonial concerns come to dominate discourse in the wider field.

This is perhaps spurred by the prominence of Walcott's assessment of the central role Irish poetry played in his own literary upbringing. In a comment which has now become almost canonical within the field of Irish-Caribbean connections, he declares:

The whole Irish influence was for me a very intimate one. When the Irish brothers came to teach at the college in St. Lucia, I had been reading a lot of Irish literature: I read Joyce, naturally I knew Yeats, and so on. I've always felt some kind of intimacy with the Irish poets because one realized that they were colonials with

the same kind of problems that existed in the Caribbean. (qtd. in Hirsch and Walcott, “Interview” 288)⁶

These lines demonstrate, as the wave of publications on Irish and Caribbean literature reflects, that Irish literature has influenced poetry of the Caribbean in a substantive way. Furthermore, Walcott’s outlook also sanctions a postcolonial frame when comparing work from these regions. Indeed, the writers to whom he was exposed, Joyce and Yeats, may be read more straightforwardly from a postcolonial perspective because of their particular oppositional attitudes towards British rule in Ireland. Yet beyond this, Walcott does little to clarify these colonial resonances.

Evidently, in drawing these two regions together, the place of Ireland and the anglophone Caribbean within British colonial expansion cannot be ignored. At its height in 1920, the British Empire extended across almost a quarter of the globe and islands were a particular source of attraction for the colonising force, comprising 70% of the Empire’s lands (Wightman 164). While the island of Ireland and the islands of the Caribbean had vastly different experiences of colonisation, they remain connected in various ways through the after-effects of this period. Yet, a facile linking of Ireland and the Caribbean through a postcolonial lens would be problematic and this thesis, in drawing their similarities out, does not wish to elide the different positions that these islands occupied within the British Empire.

Notably, Ireland occupies an uneasy position within ideas of the postcolonial, with many debating its inclusion in such a framework. Ireland’s predominantly racially white make up (Howe 229), as well as its own participation “in the process of

⁶ These lines are quoted or referenced in several publications on connections between the Caribbean and Ireland, by scholars such as Donnell, McGarrity, and O’Callaghan (4), Palko (4), Malouf (130), McGarrity (*Washed* 81-82), McGarrity (“Cataloguing Ireland” 142) and Jenkins and Otto (381).

colonization around the globe” (Carroll 4) are among the problematics of a postcolonial Ireland. Moreover, Ireland’s close relationship to Britain, especially following the Act of Union in 1801, raises questions as to what extent Ireland “can be regarded as a colony from this time onwards” (Cleary 39). As such, scholars such as Stephen Howe have questioned the appropriateness of applying a postcolonial lens to Ireland, not only from a historical perspective but also from a literary one. At the same time, however, Howe acknowledges that British colonial rule across the world was “a patchwork quilt, an enormously varied set of forms of rule and domination” (110). Indeed, colonial exploits in the Caribbean and in Ireland vary enormously.⁷ As Joe Cleary argues, it is folly to presume that “there is such a thing as a typical colony and a standard or one-size-fits-all colonial experience against which Ireland’s claim might be measured” (29). Moreover, for Clare Carroll, “with the interconnectedness of all parts of the world in global economic, military, and political conditions, it would be naïve to claim that any part of the world is untouched by the consequences of colonialism and postcolonialism” (2). This heterogeneity is an important background to this thesis, as it seeks to take into account the implications of colonisation, informed by lenses of postcolonialism.

Indeed, there is a sense among those working in this area that postcolonial sites are “undergoing complex and profound changes that cannot be accounted for in terms of colonization and decolonization” (Munkelt et al. xiii). As the globalised world shifts in

⁷ While attempts to argue that one colonial state “had it worse”, as it were, are perhaps unhelpful, it is nonetheless important to signal the differences in experiences of these islands. A full historical comparison goes well beyond the remit of this thesis but notable examples include: slavery, whereby the Caribbean was a major site of enforced slavery from Africa, sometimes at the hands of Irish masters (See Nini Rodgers’ *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612–1865*); language, in the sense that attempts to obliterate the Irish language were essentially unsuccessful as the language still survives today, while in the Caribbean native Arawak and Carib languages were eradicated through imperial massacre of native peoples (Torres-Saillent 78); independence struggles, while Ireland was among the first British colonies to gain some independence, the partition led to a unique relationship with Britain, whereas the anglophone Caribbean is scattered with states of varying independence from Britain with some fully independent islands such as Jamaica, St Lucia and Barbados and others as British Overseas Territories such as Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands and Montserrat.

its concerns, and writers attentive to this react to and reflect upon those changes, the relationship of the coloniser to the colonised and *vice versa* is no longer the sole focus of a postcolonial lens. The poets considered in this thesis are attentive to the repercussions of colonisation, decolonisation and postcolonialism in various ways. From the implications for language to historical and contemporary realities that have influenced society and politics, the effects of colonisation are profound. As such, postcolonial writing not only portrays these issues (among others) but is “a mode of reflecting creatively and critically upon them” (Boehmer 10). Postcolonial poetry, in particular, is “responsive to internal histories of form and language, lifting off from current realities even as it answers them, playing in the gap between its linguistic surface and the world it engages” (Ramazani, “Introduction” 6) and its mobility and ambiguity make it an aesthetic genre that lends itself well to the problematics of a postcolonial comparison.

For this thesis, the gap Ramazani identifies is Baucom’s synaptic gap, as likeness and difference is palpable in the waves of the sea. As the synaptic sea framework directs, the postcolonial can be understood as both located and without place, Baucom suggesting “that it is both not possible to speak of the space of the postcolonial [...] and that it is possible to do so” (par. 1). For him, the postcolonial is both in the sea and not, at once, and as such in this thesis, the postcolonial operates as an interrelated set of influences that have profoundly affected Ireland and the Caribbean in different ways. A comparative framework in this vein recognises the perspectives outlined above in relation to the diverse and dispersed nature of the term “postcolonial”. It crucially acknowledges the various ways in which regions can interact with one another both within and without the colonising force, particularly through the sea. This is complemented by Katie Trumpener’s assertion that the British Empire gave rise to

translocal and transperipheral circuits of influence [...] as disparate cultures find themselves connected not only by their parallel modes of subordination within the empire but also by a constant flow of people [...] back and forth between different imperial holdings. (xiii)

These connections are central to comparative postcolonial work. Edward Said echoes this view when he reflects on the field's turn towards an investigation of "the capacity for cross-colony identification" ("Afterword" 180). As noted, it is this capacity for cross-cultural identification within the postcolonial sphere that has led to much of the transatlantic comparison of Irish and Caribbean literature to date. Given this dominance, ideas of the postcolonial help to shape the work of this thesis. Notably, these poets also demonstrate concern with the after-effects of colonialism in their work, from Heaney's recognition of his poetry's "Moyola-breath" inflected "by Thames's 'straunge stronde'" (*EL* 81) to Goodison's assertion that she comes from a land "Where the port of St Mary / is inscribed in Spanish / and called in the tongue of Twi" (*CP* 439).

Finally, to return to Walcott's comments on his interaction with Irish poets, it is important to note that their prominence in the field of Irish-Caribbean studies has also directed critical attention towards connections founded on influence, particularly the influence of Irish literature on that of the Caribbean. Accordingly, resonances of writers such as Synge, Beckett and Joyce in Walcott's writing have been explored in the work of Leif Schenstead-Harris, Jean Antoine-Dunne and Aaron C. Eastley. Malouf, who likewise examines Walcott's Joycean connections, also looks to the influence Irish writers such as G.B. Shaw had on the Jamaican poet Claude McKay, while Jenkins

outlines Goodison's interaction with Yeats' poetry ("Water").⁸ These are significant studies that shape perceptions of Caribbean literature, while also reflecting back on Irish literature to demonstrate its transatlantic resonances. Furthermore, they provide necessary grounding for the work of this thesis as they lay the foundations of the field and, as such, are important touchstones for the work undertaken here.

Within this thesis' focus on Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott, prior comparative studies outside of the Heaney-Walcott axis likewise focus on influence, while also remaining constrained by regional boundaries. Irene Glisenan Nordin and Hugh Haughton have to some extent explored Ní Chuilleanáin's poetic relationship to Heaney, with Glisenan Nordin detecting a shared trait in certain poems where "water is associated with clarity of perception" ("Like a Shadow" 111).⁹ These perspectives are concerned with influence and no major comparative study exists in this space. While Goodison acknowledges her relationship with Walcott, recalling "he told me I was a poet and I knew I could believe him" (RG 90), there has been little comparative investigation of their work, with the exception of Marija Bergam's study of vegetation in Walcott's and Goodison's poetry. Interestingly, Bergam's and Glisenan Nordin's examinations spotlight the place of the environment in the work of their pairings. This thesis develops this orientation by offering a comparison of the work of Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott through the unique and under-discussed perspective of the sea.

⁸ McKay, much more explicitly than Walcott, aligns himself with an Irish outlook in his essay "How Black Sees Green and Red", claiming, after attending a rally of Sinn Féin nationalists in London, "For that day at least I was filled with the spirit of Irish nationalism – although I am black!" (17).

⁹ Haughton's contribution on Ní Chuilleanáin is one of just four female poets considered in *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets*. Upon its publication in 2017, the collection, edited by Gerald Dawe, was criticised for its lack of attention to Irish women poets. Haughton outlines the resonances of Heaney's poetry that Ní Chuilleanáin acknowledges in her own work (323, 324), as well as their differences, signalled by her "refusal to act as a critical mediator of [her oeuvre] along the lines of Seamus Heaney" (326).

Notably, the inclusion in a comparative framework of these poets alongside one another is exceedingly rare, and a substantial study of all four together is unprecedented.

Crucially, this thesis aims to outline key points of intersection and divergence, rather than influence. It views poetry in dialogue, attempting to delineate shared outlooks, perspectives and attitudes at the same time that it reveals the unique nature of each writer's work within the inheritances of their poetic tradition. In this respect, my research takes its place in a smaller but growing body of work that attempts to read these literatures concomitantly. It echoes work such as Palko's, who takes the theme of motherhood as the frame for her comparative, "gendered reading of novels that respond in important ways to the nationalist movements in Ireland and the Caribbean" (Palko 13). Similarly, Kate Houlden and Sorcha Gunne turn their attention to Young Adult literature from the early 1990s to examine similarities between treatments of the Famine and slavery in Irish and Caribbean literature respectively. From the perspective of poetry, Stacy J. Lettman compares the language of Irish poet Eavan Boland with that of Tobagan NourbeSe Philip. Yet, it is Elaine Savory's work on Medbh McGuckian's *Shelmalier* and Dionne Brand's *Inventory* that more closely aligns with the outlook of this thesis: as Savoury suggests, "It is not only new, oddly, to think about Irish and Caribbean poetry together, but even more so to frame that thinking by ecocritical concerns – the history of poetics in a particular environmental space" ("Medbh" 236). In this, she highlights, not only the innovation of examining contemporary poetry together – *Shelmalier* was published in 1998, while *Inventory* was released in 2006 – but also the novelty of doing so through the lens of the environment. She moves away from the colonial concerns of some of the other work here and, indeed, of Walcott's comparison, and demonstrates that poets of these regions share much in terms of their outlook on their environments. While she perhaps underestimates the ecocritical eye of previous work in the field, Savoury's

outlook is, nonetheless, an important one within the context of this thesis as it directs attention to ecocritical concerns and their relative paucity within research on Caribbean-Irish connections.

Hydrophasia and the Problems of an Ecocritical Postcolonialism

In this thesis' focus on the synaptic sea, the influence of ecocritical work is partly at stake, particularly given the field's instance on the importance of a turn towards the "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii). Baucom's theory of literature is built with the realities of the physical environment in mind, noting that as "ocean currents do not move at random [...] its submarine flows exhibit a synaptic intentionality" ("Charting" par. 13). His method centres the sea and its movements, correlating with the assertion that "ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty xviii). Yet this instance on an *earth*-centred approach turns out to be just that, as, in an act of what Margaret Cohen terms "hydrophasia" or the forgetting of the sea ("Literary Studies" 658), considerations of the world's oceans have been largely absent from the ecocritical field. For example, a review of Greg Garrard's index to the introductory study *Ecocriticism*, contains 24 separate instances of the heading "earth", while headings such as "water", "sea", or "ocean" do not appear at all. One might be inclined to believe that the Earth was made up of just that, rather than the waters that cover over 70% of the planet.

Ecocriticism's hydrophasia is all the more curious given that early ecocritics, with their involved, activist position, often cite rising sea-levels as one of the world's most pressing ecological problems. Although some instances of attention to the sea do exist, often when the sea is mentioned, critics quickly substitute the land in larger discussions

of literature and the environment.¹⁰ The colonial divisions of *terra firma* versus *aqua nullius*, outlined by Tynan, as well as more traditional associations of the word “nature” with landed-images, seem to be at stake in this hydrophasia, as the sea is not invested with the same critical valences as concepts such as pastoral, wilderness and apocalypse.¹¹ As Steven Mentz writes, “in our cultural moment of ecologism, environmentalism, and ecocriticism, what seems surprising is not a new interest in the sea, but that maritime concerns have taken so long to penetrate literary ecologies” (“Toward” 1000). Yet, work which positions itself as combining a postcolonial and ecocritical perspective is not exempt from hydrophasia, although there have been more tangible references to the sea. For example, DeLoughrey and George Handley gesture towards a need to consider the ocean: “The land and even the ocean become all the more crucial as recuperative sites of postcolonial historiography” (8). Similarly, Alex Hunt and Bonnie Roos make note of the suggestion that “black Atlantic studies may provide an excellent starting point in developing a postcolonial and environmental ethic” (6). Neither of these works, however,

¹⁰ For example, Glen A. Love laments that American colleges have neglected the environment in literature noting that Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* is much more frequently studied than *The Old Man and the Sea* (230), yet the ensuing argument returns to ideas of the pastoral and the American West (234, 236). A smattering of publications under the heading of ecocriticism does indeed exist, particularly in recent work from Laurence Buell as well as Stacy Alamino: Buell’s *Writing for an Endangered World* devotes a chapter to the examination of oceans and whales, considering the otherness of the sea and reading *Moby-Dick* as breaking down boundaries between the human and the non-human (203, 207); Alamino’s contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* examines how we encounter the sea and its depths through photography and film and relates this “ecoporn” to the fetishisation of women, which feminist scholars and activists have resisted (198).

¹¹ As with the ideas of space and place, comprehension of the term “nature” is an academic issue that troubles the work this thesis, without being its principle concern. The hydrophasia evident in ecocriticism is reflective of the sea’s absence from the immediate connotations of the word nature itself. Likewise, those confining divisions of space and place, touched on above, are indicative of the tensions around “sea” (which has been considered as without *meaning*) as part of “nature” (which is conversely invested with intellectual and emotional values). As such, nature is not a term that I return to in any significant way. At the same time, given my focus on the physical environment of the sea, it is worth clarifying my understanding of “nature”, as it appears in this section within the context of a discussion of the nature/culture divide. The work undertaken here recognises “the ways in which ‘nature’ is always in some ways culturally constructed, and [...] the fact that nature really exists” (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 10) as a basis for its attempt to elucidate a frame through which seascapes can be viewed throughout the thesis.

expand significantly on the sea and the role that it plays in a postcolonial outlook that adopts ecocritical concepts.

This is, in part, due to wider tensions between the two fields, with ideological clashes between postcolonialism and ecocriticism well documented.¹² DeLoughrey, for example, denounces the “body of ecocritical work that upholds a nature/culture divide by seeking to protect the purity of wilderness areas” (“Postcolonialism” 325). To postcolonialists, the totalising power of some of ecocriticism’s outlooks is problematic:

Since hierarchical notions of nature were key to justifying colonial expansion and the repression of nonnormative others, postcolonialists have been understandably wary about calls to ‘return to nature,’ or attempts to collapse the concern with human inequalities that resulted from colonialism into a universalizing focus on the future of the nonhuman environment. (DeLoughrey and Handley 21).

Far from being neutral, discourses around nature hold significant power and postcolonial scholars are justified in their continued caution towards views to the contrary. The tensions that emerge between postcolonial studies and ecocriticism stem from a lack of acknowledgement of imperial ideologies about nature and their implications for indigenous peoples on the part of some ecocritics. While Susie O’Brien notes that “the explicitly poststructuralist bent of postcolonialism [...] is part of what makes it difficult to reconcile with the concerns of ecocriticism”, she also points out that postcolonialism is distinguished from other postmodern theories by its “strong materialist impulse” (143).

¹² Rob Nixon’s “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism”, published in 2005, is one of the earliest attempts to bring these two fields into dialogue by assessing where their differences lie. He argues, “the isolation of postcolonial literary studies from environmental concerns has limited the field’s intellectual reach. Likewise, ecocriticism’s predominantly American studies frame has proven inadequate, not least because we cannot afford to stop seeing the broader connections” (247). Hunt and Roos summarise Nixon’s work through a series of oppositions: “postcolonialists emphasize hybridity, while ecocritics emphasize purity; postcolonialists study displacement, ecocritics focus on place; postcolonialists tend towards cosmopolitanism, ecocritics towards nationalism; postcolonialists work to recover history, ecocritics seek to sublimate or transcend history” (4-5)

Not only does postcolonial studies demonstrate an interest beyond the textual world in terms of human relationships, since its inception, the environment has been an important part of the field. In fact, DeLoughrey and Handley argue that postcolonial studies have been focused on the land and space from the outset, citing both Frantz Fanon's and Edward Said's interest in space and place (3-4). For them, affinities exist between the fields and significant opportunities are presented by a joint methodology, including a recognition of the ways in which geography has been and continues to be altered by colonialism and an ecocritical questioning of anthropocentrism, which they see as essential in current postcolonial studies to push readers to rethink *both* social and environmental issues (24-25).

Yet, in this desire to work from a shared perspective, the fields' particularities should not be erased. O'Brien cautions against the creation of a unified theory of ecocritical postcolonialism:

The danger as I see it, in the attempt to merge the concerns of ecocriticism and postcolonialism in a new 'world' literary theory, is that the ethical commitment of both to the articulation of complexity – of expression, of culture, of communications, of life – will be sacrificed to the compulsion towards economic and/or aesthetic resolution and conquest. (154)¹³

The need to remain cognisant of ideological clashes would seem to be reflected in much of the current conceptualisation of these two fields. Indeed, as Roman Bartosh argues, "aesthetic responses to [ecocritical postcolonialism] transcend the broad-brush portrayal

¹³ For O'Brien, trends in globalisation have been useful in bringing the fields of postcolonialism and ecocriticism together, as we live in an increasingly interconnected world. However, she also acknowledges that under globalisation, most aspects of life have been commodified. Particularly in relation to academia, she laments that research is often conceived of in the language of funding agencies, which encourages neat resolution of complex issues. It is with this in mind, she argues, that postcolonial studies and ecocriticism should approach with caution and scepticism the notion of a unified theory (154).

of ecocriticism as being concerned ‘with nature’ and postcolonial studies ‘with the human’ only” (79). In this sense, the work of this thesis subscribes to an approach that Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin characterise as “broadly materialist” but continuously involved in the “cultural politics of representation” (12). Despite the hydrophasia of ecocritical postcolonialism, this thesis is indebted to the idea that the physical environment can be viewed as “both material reality *and* ideologically charged concept, as representable object *and* discursive function” (Gersdorf and Mayer 17; emphasis in original).

Taking an approach which attempts to reassess writing about nature in postcolonial spaces, this thesis is attentive to the material realities of the environment encountered by the poets under discussion, while also recognising the cultural and metaphorical resonances of these environments. Garrard suggests that “the mission of the environmental humanities, of which ecocriticism is a key part, [is] [...] the *historicization of ecology* and the *ecologization of history*” (“Introduction” 3; emphasis in original). In this vein, it is important to recognise that the sea is a space of history and non-history, of human experiences and non-human habitation, Ní Chuilleanáin, for example, acknowledging, in the sequence of poems “The Rose-Geranium”, birds “of whom / No history of shapes transformed / Or grief outlived is ever told / They flourish there, by the subterranean sea” (*SP* 46). In a consideration of the island spaces of Ireland and the Caribbean, it is not enough to work from an ecocritical postcolonialism that offers neat resolution. Instead, ideas of the sea, including the metaphor of the synaptic sea as a theory that allows for a certain volatility of direction, should be foregrounded to examine the realities of clashing ecocritical and postcolonial impulses.

Sealing the Environment: Blue Humanities and Oceanic Studies

The theory of the synaptic sea is informed by a postcolonial background, as well as a Blue Humanities perspective, as evinced by Baucom's desire to "represent the postcolonial as a marine geography, as a geography of trans-oceanic and submarine passages" ("Charting" par. 17). His work counteracts ecocriticism's landed concerns by drawing attention to water and resonates with the subfield of oceanic studies, which thinks about the sea. Oceanic studies fundamentally informs this thesis' attempt to reframe discussion on the island poetics of Ireland and the Caribbean, directing focus out from inland spaces to "the ocean on one side [...] wild / With foam and glitter" (Heaney, *OG* 444). Engaging with physical and social geography, anthropology, history and literature, oceanic studies shares many concerns with ecocriticism, but provides a more generative outlook to inform readings of poems in this thesis.

Key works such as Alain Corbin's *The Lure of the Sea*, originally published in 1988 as *Le territoire du vide* and translated in 1994, and Philip Steinberg's *The Social Construction of the Ocean* published in 2001, begin to draw attention to the sea, with Christopher Connery commenting in 2006 that "The scholarly turn to the ocean, still nascent, hardly dominant in any field, but featuring important innovative work [...] is part of the broader effort of reimagining the spatial character and coordinates of human history and culture" (496). Mentz includes a comprehensive bibliography of what he calls "New Thalassology" at the end of his 2009 study, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*. Thalassology, coming from the Greek for sea, *thalassos*, for Mentz, is a growing

field at this point, and includes work from varied Humanities disciplines from history and philosophy to literary studies.¹⁴

More commonly known as Blue Humanities (by 2020 Mentz uses this term in *Ocean* with no mention of thalassology) or, more specifically on work on the sea, oceanic studies, the critical turn towards the sea offers refreshing perspectives and appealing routes of enquiry. Informed in part by Atlantic Studies – of which Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* is a key text – Blue Humanities and oceanic studies develop from a need to move away from confining land-based perspectives. As later chapters of this thesis demonstrate, landed ideals around the nation and gender, for example, are disrupted by contemplation of the ocean. From a literary perspective, Mentz’s study of Shakespeare stands alongside work such as Margaret Cohen’s *The Novel and the Sea*, Joanna Rostek’s *Sea through the Past: Postmodern Histories and the Maritime Metaphor in Contemporary Anglophone Fiction* and the edited collection *Sea Narratives: Cultural Responses to the Sea 1600-present*. Hester Blum’s work is likewise notable for its attempts to define the field from a literary outlook.

In a 2010 issue of *PMLA*, which devotes particular attention to theories of oceanic studies, Blum advocates for “a new model for oceanic studies, one whose prospect moves beyond methodologies and frameworks imported from existing discourses and takes the sea as a proprioceptive point of inquiry” (“Prospect” 671). In a 2013 special issue of *Atlantic Studies* on the same topic, Blum goes on to argue that the sea “provides a new epistemology – a new dimension – for thinking about surfaces, depths, and the extra-terrestrial dimensions of planetary resources and relations” (“Introduction” 151). Her

¹⁴ The chapter “Reading the New Thalassology” provides a useful overview of the field until 2009, with Mentz’s bibliography mainly citing work published at the beginning of the new millennium. In a later article, “Toward a Blue Cultural Studies: The Sea, Maritime Culture, and Early Modern English Literature”, the field is explored in more depth as Mentz attempts to define a Blue Cultural Studies.

work is central to this thesis' understanding of approaches to the sea, as she draws attention to the materiality of the sea around, as reflected in ecocritical work. For her, oceanic studies interrogates the impulse to view the sea purely as a symbol or only there to be crossed by humans. Instead, Blum offers a polemic:

The sea is not a metaphor. Figurative language has its place in analysis of the maritime world, certainly, but Oceanic studies could be more invested in the uses, and problems, of what is literal in the face of the sea's abyss of representation. [...] I advocate a practice of oceanic studies that is attentive to the material conditions and praxis of the maritime world [...]. This would allow for a galvanization of the erasure, elision, and fluidity at work in the metaphors of the sea that would better enable us to see and to study the *work* of oceanic literature. ("Prospect" 670; emphasis in original)

For Blum, the reality of the sea and of the lives of those who live and labour on and by it is essential to understanding the element. Like ecocritics before, Blum does not wish to retreat to a purely textual world but is, instead, invested in the sea's materiality. For her, this focus furthers an apprehension of sea-based metaphors. Without denying the role metaphor plays in an engagement with the sea, Blum argues that a more fruitful line of enquiry is to understand the physical, historical and social realities of the sea. In this, her work echoes that of Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun who argue that "the ocean itself needs to be analysed as a deeply historical location whose transformative power is not merely psychological or metaphorical [...] but material and very real" (2). While metaphor is not entirely ignored in research that follows this outlook, its position is marginal and, for the most part, inconsequential. This thesis places an important emphasis on the sea's materiality, as Baucom's theory of the synaptic is an explicitly materialist reading of the space, accounting for the reality of the ebbs and flows of oceanic waters.

Moreover, its highlighting of the sea's spatio-temporal specificities demonstrates a consciousness of the role of the human and human history.

Yet, within oceanic studies this focus on the sea's history and relationship to society has been critiqued, with Philip Steinberg noting that,

While the sea is a social (or human) space – a “social construction” – it is not just a social construction. Indeed, human encounters with the sea are, of necessity, distanced and partial. [...] we need to develop an epistemology that views the ocean as continually being reconstituted by a variety of elements: the non-human and the human, the biological and the geophysical, the historic and the contemporary. (“Other” 156-57)

Thus, to Blum's work, Steinberg's attitude adds the non-human perspective. With the vastness of the seas and oceans, both in their depth and breadth, human interaction with the sea can only ever be a limited one. As Goodison reminds her readers, “others say ... But the sea / is not our territory” (*CP* 40). It is crucial that work on the sea remains mindful of this. In later work Steinberg and Kimberly Peters argue that, in thinking “*with* the ocean as a theoretical tool, we do so with the particular attention to its materiality, which can never be separated from either the experiences of the ocean or the meaning that we attach to oceanic experiences” (256; emphasis in original). Heaney's immersion in the ocean in “Vitruviana” from *Electric Light*, is indicative of such meaning. Recalling a childhood trip to the beach, he remembers how he “waded in / Up to the chest, then stood there half-suspended / Like Vitruvian man” (*EL* 53). In his partial, “half-suspended” interaction with the sea, Heaney, nonetheless, makes cultural associations. Thus, Steinberg's work is important to readings such as this as it allows for the role of cultural meaning and metaphorical thinking while, at the other extreme, it also advocates

for a focus on the materiality and non-human elements of the sea. As a concept, the synaptic allows for the transmission of impulses by the sea that may not be understood by the poets themselves and stand beyond human comprehension.

The approach of this thesis challenges the human position at times but never fully does away with it, recognising the tension Blum's and Steinberg's work releases – that of the role of metaphor and the balance between the sea's materiality. Notably, language is a significant part of human experience with the sea, especially when discussing literature. As such, laying out the position of literary scholars within oceanic studies, Ashley L. Cohen argues that, alongside a materialist outlook, “we need to supplement this approach with one that moves in the opposite direction: we need to attend to the active role played by the literary and the imaginative in generating global connections” (13). Indeed, as noted, poetry's specific use of form and language is central to revealing the challenges of comparative work. Language and metaphor play an important role in conceptions of space and surroundings, as well as in forging intercultural associations. For Walcott, metaphor and the sea are intrinsically linked as his love for language is “wide as the Atlantic is large” (*PDW* 436). Although attempts to comprehend the seas and oceans challenge language use for all – for Mentz, “moving offshore reshapes our vocabulary” (*Ocean* xv) – they also offer new ways of thinking and particularly so in literature.

Notably, Samuel F. Batchelder suggests that “no language is so replete with nautical terms” as English (625). The sea presents the anglophone world with a way of thinking through metaphor. Metaphor as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson point out, allows us to imbibe the world around us:

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them – and, by this means, reason about them. (25)

In interacting with the sea as a metaphor, new routes of enquiry and challenges surface. However, when the sea, as the site of the metaphor, is examined in its reality, a fuller picture emerges. It is not a vast void, especially to poets of islands who are enticed by the coast and regard it as a space of material reality too. Its flows are not merely the stuff of allegory but have real effects on the islands of the poets of this thesis. This attention on the one hand to what is unknown, unknowable, and non-human and, on the other, to the importance of literary interactions with the sea, shapes the outlook of this thesis. In this way, it can read the metaphorical invocations of the sea Ní Chuilleanáin makes in “Permafrost Woman” to conceive of a “landscape energized by [the] female sexuality” of the *sheela-na-gig* figure (Boyle Haberstrohb 117-18) in a unique way.¹⁵ Juxtaposing the sea’s wetness with the desert and its liquid form with ice, Ní Chuilleanáin views the figure’s environment thusly: “through linear deserts // Unfolds among peaks / Of frozen sea, the wave” (*SP* 51). In turning to an oxymoronic image of the sea, Ní Chuilleanáin links a sense of exhibited but repressed female sexuality with the overwhelming vastness of the ocean, which, as DeLoughrey notes, is likewise replete with contradictions. Recognising as Gersdorf and Mayer do that nature is both cultural construct and material reality, and that one informs the other, prompts an attention to metaphorical invocations of the sea. As this study is centred on the work of poets and their human interaction with

¹⁵ As Boyle Haberstrohb explains, the *sheela-na-gig* figure is “found in ancient stone carvings” and “predominantly displays her sexual organs” (118). These carvings are most often found across Ireland, Great Britain and France.

the oceans, metaphor cannot be ignored. It is for this reason that Baucom's metaphorical invocation of the synapse is apposite here. The sea, in its vastness, its unknowability and mutable nature, can also function as a metaphor for the concerns of these poets.

Finally, the synaptic sea, informed by postcolonial studies, is attentive to anti-imperialist and decolonising histories, while for DeLoughrey the local reality of a location informs interactions with the sea. Significantly for this study, ideas of the postcolonial have been central to the work of oceanic studies from early on, in part because of the principal role the sea played in imperial expansion. It has also been a key element for postcolonial sites, with Bill Ashcroft, positing at the 2019 *Postcolonial Oceans* conference that the sea offers hope as "the colonised site of a reimagined future" ("Oceans"). In this way, "the sea has always been a space beyond empire and at the heart of imperial struggles" (Price 46). Baucom and DeLoughrey, among others, demonstrate the role the sea has played both in the expansion of empires, as well as the significance it holds for colonised people of island spaces, whether through slavery, trade, resistance and hope. For, as Isabel Moutinho suggests,

considering the sea-born nature of the great majority of imperial ventures that gave rise to colonialism and to the historical circumstances in which so many peoples saw their sense of individual and collective continuity disrupted for centuries, it is particularly appropriate to investigate the extent to which the sea has shaped or continues to shape a feeling of cultural identity in countries with a colonial history. (246)

The focus on the material reality of the oceans and, particularly their history, has meant that the field has been attentive to the role of empire and colonisation. It is an element that has led to profound reconfigurations of places, people, environments and identities.

As such, the oceanic frame is a useful one here within these postcolonial settings. In Goodison's oeuvre, for example, Christopher Columbus is a recurring figure, his desire to "set sail again / in pursuit of elusive gold fields" (*CP* 538) evident in "The Two Sisters Cave" from *Oracabessa*. Yet, that same sea, which transports Columbus, also becomes the site of an alternate history in the poem, as Ashcroft suggests, when the "half-remembered Taino legend" of two sisters who hid from the conquistadors in a beach-side cave becomes a hopeful image for the speaker.¹⁶ Declaring, "I like to imagine the two could have / been me and my sister", the speaker views the sea as their escape from the violent history that ensued, as she and her sister "might have projected [them]selves to the shore / and stopped up the holes in Columbus' / rickety old boats" (538). As a result, she imagines the conquistadors, "leaving us in peace. My sister and me. If we'd made peace in that cave / who knows how our people's story would now read" (538).

Such an acknowledgement of the sea's potential returns throughout the readings undertaken in this thesis. It is important to note, nevertheless, that the field of oceanic studies has been critiqued as it "remains an often hegemonic Anglophone (North) Atlantic studies" (Bystrom and Hofmeyr 1). Recent work has drawn attention to, in particular the Pacific, as well as other oceans, yet, the dominant place of the Atlantic should be noted.¹⁷ While this thesis does not challenge this dominance, it does form part of an ongoing conversation around the seas and oceans in colonial and postcolonial spaces.

¹⁶ The Taino people were a group of Arawak people whom Columbus encountered in the northern Caribbean islands. The Taino population was almost eradicated completely and the language lost entirely. That the legend is "half-remembered" is particularly telling in this regard.

¹⁷ Fijian writer Epeli Hau'ofa has been one important non-Atlantic voice present early on in the field. DeLoughrey too works on Pacific literature with increasing focus on writers from this oceanic space. Alice Te Punga Somerville's work on Pacific literature and Craig Santos Perez's work focusing on Guam stands alongside the edited collection *Oceanic Archives, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Transpacific American Studies* (Shu et al.) in their attempts to rebalance the field's focus.

Since the earliest thinking in oceanic studies, “The ocean as connector is a motif common to much of the new maritime perspective, and promises in many cases a way out of the older ideological or civilizational divides” (Connery 496). In this way, it is a fruitful site of comparison between the islands of the Caribbean and the island of Ireland. The sea, and the Atlantic particularly, is a key site of linkage between postcolonial sites that does not need to flow through a colonial centre, as Trumpener suggests of the translocal movements of recent postcolonial thought.

The Sea in Irish Studies and Caribbean Studies

This thesis is not alone in its recognition of the productiveness of the sea’s connective currents as a frame. Within research on Irish and Caribbean connections, a notable number of scholars observe the sea’s associative properties. Ireland and the Caribbean, although valuing the environment in unique ways, nonetheless often share cultural outlooks on their surroundings, as identified by some of the work already introduced above. Notably, McGarrity’s *Washed by the Gulf Stream* is alert to geographical considerations and engagement with the sea, as she employs the Gulf Stream, “a forceful maritime circuit suggesting distance and wandering with an ultimate return to the point of origin”, as a means of contact between the two traditions (25). Her work attempts to push “the Caribbean collective beyond its marine borders and asserts that Ireland’s irregularity can also reach outside its immediate archipelago” (18). Ideas of borders, archipelagos and the marine are central to this thesis, but McGarrity’s vagueness points to the dangers of accepting the sea a unifying connector; Ireland’s “irregularity” is never fully explored, while the notion of marine borders is somewhat puzzling – particularly in the Caribbean, a region characterised by inter-island exchange via the sea. Such an

approach “homogenises islands, blurring rather than bringing out their own internal diversities” (Jenkins, “Review” 210). While this thesis uses the terms Ireland and the Caribbean, its focus on the work of Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott, each of whom brings a unique perspective to their relationship with and portrayal of islandness and seascapes, brings the particularities of parts of these spaces into sharper relief. Goodison’s Jamaica is not Walcott’s St Lucia, although there may be similarities, nor is Ní Chuilleanáin’s Ireland Heaney’s one, despite writing during roughly the same period. Nonetheless, McGarrity’s work is important in directing attention towards the role of the sea as a connector of these two regions.

Malouf’s *Transatlantic Solidarities* similarly links Ireland and the Caribbean by their Atlantic positions, in particular, employing Joseph Roach’s theory of circum-Atlantic connection, a “region-centred conception, which locates the people of the Caribbean rim at the heart of an oceanic intercultural” (Roach 5). For Malouf, Roach’s approach is particularly useful in “trying to conceive of a transatlantic studies that might be neither U.S.-centric nor unidirectional” (5).¹⁸ This positioning is of particular interest here, as this thesis opens up fruitful lines of dialogue between the poets of these regions, while also decentring the metropole. It takes up Malouf’s call for a multidirectional exchange by suggesting that the poetry here is not so much influenced by one or the other culture but rather by ideas that circulate in the shared sea space. This perspective resonates with Jenkins and Otto’s assertion that comparative work on the Caribbean and Ireland prompts an “interdisciplinary and inter-archipelagic re-mapping realised in the historical, cultural and imaginative crosscurrents of the Black and Green Atlantic”

¹⁸ It is important to recognise, however, that both Walcott and Heaney lived and taught in the United States for long periods of their life, while Goodison continues to teach there. A substantial part of the Heaney archive is held in Emory University in Atlanta. As such, these writers are not entirely outside of the sphere of US influence.

(Jenkins and Otto 380). As a developing field, comparison between literature from Ireland and the Caribbean is rewardingly enhanced by a turn towards ideas of the island space and the sea. This thesis, with its oceanic eye, is also interested in the element itself, beyond its metaphorical resonances as a connector. While Malouf and McGarrity recognise the sea itself, their approach is more rooted. The work undertaken here attempts to contribute to this body of literature by integrating a materially-based reading of the sea.

Separately, critical theory on Ireland and the Caribbean is attentive to the sea, although within Caribbean studies, this perspective has a longer tradition than in work on Ireland or Irish literature. Indeed, as Roberta Gefter Wondrich notes, “among the many contradictions and contrasts of Ireland, its relation with the sea and maritime culture is perhaps one of the least investigated by critics” (139). Similarly, Kristin Morrison laments that “despite her ancient nautical heritage, contemporary Ireland is not thought of as a significant seafaring nation” (111). She also points to the work of maritime historian, John de Courcy Ireland, who argues that since the inception of the Irish Free State, Ireland “absolutely turned its collective back on the sea” (de Courcy Ireland 44). By contrast, “leaders concentrated their minds largely on the countryside and forgot [the] coast and the waters washing it” (44). This turn towards rural land profoundly affected the conception of Irish marine identity and islandness. Accordingly, there is a wealth of literature that is rural and inland in its outlook, with “the marine geographies of Ireland in their wealth of cultural significance [...] superseded by the primacy of the rural and urban dimensions” (Gefter Wondrich 140). In investing in Ireland’s rural and urban centres, the Free State government were perhaps cognisant of the central presence of the sea within British patriotism, “with the navy as its most prestigious and democratic institution”, as well as “the subaltern role of Ireland in the history of British maritime and

imperial supremacy” (Gefer Wondrich 141). This trend for celebration of the land is undoubtedly evident in literature, but has also lead to a lacuna in critical attention on the sea. Alison Garden and Muireann Crowley note Ireland’s exclusion from Atlantic studies due to isolationist and island-centric views of history and literature, lamenting the “only sporadic attention from Transatlantic Studies scholars” to cultural exchanges across the ocean (120, 118). The sea, however, does appear in Irish literature, with Heaney reminding his readers that even within a familiar inland landscape, the sea may be discovered: “The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage. / The wet centre is bottomless” (*OG* 41). Moreover, the features associated with Ireland’s geographical relationship to the sea – coasts, beaches, harbours, bays, peninsulas – impact upon the conception of Ireland’s islandness, as Heaney’s and Ní Chuilleanáin’s island poetry demonstrates.

A reconsideration of the Ireland-island-sea dialectics is surfacing in Irish literary studies. Notable work from Nicholas Allen and from Alison Garden attempts to locate Irish literature within the ongoing conversations around Blue Humanities and oceanic studies. The voids outlined above are addressed in part by a collection of essays edited by Allen, Nick Groom and Jos Smith, *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*. While primarily focused on connections across the so-called British Isles, this collection nonetheless draws attention to the coast “as a site of open-ended cultural inquiry, and especially as a site from which to reflect on and reappraise certain geographical meanings and spatial relationships over the Irish and British archipelago” (Allen et. al 2). Allen himself goes on to argue that “Ireland was an island shaped by the sea, and its coast is still the permeable barrier through which a series of cultural exchanges, literary, historical, political, and environmental, take place” (“Ireland” 63). Garden too has written of the “Atlantic intertextuality” of Irish poetry (92). This thesis, in highlighting the role of the sea in the work of two prominent Irish poets, works to further address these

lacunae, uncovering the importance of sea spaces to Irish literature within Ní Chuilleanáin's and Heaney's poetry.

In contrast, Caribbean thinking on the sea has a major impact on the outlook of this research, as it is from this field that Baucom's idea of the synaptic emerges, as well as DeLoughrey's work, which not only notes the importance of the local but also points towards the relevance of the sea to island-island connections in her comparative study of Caribbean and Pacific literature, *Routes and Routes*. Indeed, there exists a longer-standing body of work on the sea in Caribbean literature, with Antonio Benítez-Rojo characterising the people of the Caribbean as "People of the Sea" (16) in his seminal work, *The Repeating Island*. In later work, he argues that Caribbean literature is best understood alongside a recognition of the consequences of its location in "the geographical space that [...] was the Atlantic, all the immensity of the Atlantic, from north to south and east to west" ("Caribbean" 200). In this, Benítez-Rojo echoes Glissant, who posits in *The Poetics of Relation* that the sea in the Caribbean is both a site of memory and "a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. A sea that diffracts" (7, 33). Baucom's indebtedness to Glissant's emphasis on the lives lost to the forced transatlantic crossing has already been noted. In a similar way, Brigit Neumann and Jan Rupp observe that the sea in Caribbean poetry is both "a site of the Middle Passage and a trope of local experiences, which informs and transforms an inherently contradictory and shifting poetics of space" (473). Poets and writers from across the Caribbean recognise the sea's doubleness and it is perhaps this literary instance on the role of the sea that has prompted critical work in this direction. Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite suggests that "the unity is submarine" ("Caribbean Man" 1), while Walcott, famously writes that "The sea is History" (*PDW* 253). Indeed, so influential is Walcott's pronouncement that his poem has been a departing point for many scholars working on

the sea, either generally or in a Caribbean context.¹⁹ The ubiquity of the phrase prompts Guyanese author Fred D’Aguiar to open his novel *Feeding the Ghosts* with the proclamation, “The sea is slavery” (3). Critical outlooks on the sea have, as such, been entangled with literary perspectives on the role of the element in a cultural perception of the Caribbean.

It is in these theories that the sea emerges as a space that resists easy definition and as such is a fruitful site wherein to combine the ecocritical and the postcolonial. This is particularly evident in Brathwaite’s conception of “tidalectics”. Instead of a Hegelian dialectic, which results in a synthesis, a Caribbean sea-based setting engages in a tidalectic that is cyclical. As DeLoughrey clarifies,

The ‘tidal dialectic’ resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel’s dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean. Tidalectics also foreground alter/native epistemologies to western colonialism and its linear and material biases. (*Routes* 2)

The sound and metre of the ocean are foregrounded in tidalectic thinking, as connections across the ocean are emphasised. While remaining in motion and open to renewed interpretation, the sea’s cycles challenge colonial narratives, for Brathwaite. Accordingly, the concerns of tidalectics echo in the theory of the synaptic sea, as both reveal the tensions that continue to exist in work on the sea. In particular, both theories set forth the ways in which the sea is a space of resistance to unity and resolved praxis. The sea presents challenges to those who encounter it and while the synaptic sea is a useful framework for this thesis, the sea always goes beyond any human conceptions of

¹⁹ Notable examples include, Baucom (*Specters* 309), Neumann and Rupp (474), DeLoughrey (*Routes* 4, 20) and Klein and Mackenthun (1). The poem appears both as epigraphs and quoted material to justify a turn towards the sea.

it, as DeLoughrey notes. It is in this way that Susie O'Brien's comments on the need to resist a unified theory of ecocritical postcolonialism are of particular resonance to this thesis' framework. The sea is not a unified space and while human constructs can be helpful in understanding it, it always extends beyond these understandings in its unknowability. The sea, as Brathwaite notes, defers a Hegelian synthesis and the idea of resolution. In this way, it is a resistant space. The synoptic sea diffracts, rearranges and reconfigures unities until they are uncanny resemblances of their former being. For the poet, then, the sea is a revitalising site of thought.

Oceanic Connections: The Sea in Irish and Caribbean Poetry

From the above discussions, it is clear that attention to the sea is a fruitful and growing site of inquiry, in particular as a way to more effectively draw in the concerns of postcolonialism, ecocriticism and, necessarily, oceanic studies to this comparative study. The theory of the synoptic sea, as it is deployed in the following chapters, draws on the work outlined in this introduction, which traverses several academic fields. As such, this thesis asserts that such cross-disciplinarity is fundamental to a comparison of the sea and island spaces in Irish and Caribbean poetry. From a Caribbean studies perspective, the sea has long-featured as a central site of investigation, while a more inchoate attention in Irish studies has begun to open up interesting routes of enquiry. Centrally, the importance of the sea to Irish-Caribbean connections is noteworthy, as key studies turn to the waves to draw these two traditions together. The work explored thus far provides the crucial context for my thesis. Taking up Goodison's assertion in "Ocho Rios II", "Today I again I forward to the sea" (*CP* 31), this thesis pushes attention to sea in the work of Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott, revealing their interaction with their islands'

boundaries and the sea that surrounds them. The poets of this thesis are drawn to the sea's resistant qualities, and using the synaptic sea as a tool reveals the ways in which hegemonic ideas of the island, writing, nation, gender, and mythic time can be critiqued, challenged and reformed.

At the same time, in this comparative work, the localised specificities of an interaction with the sea must be considered. The sea is a connector, but the synaptic site can be overwhelming at times and it is for this reason that DeLoughrey draws attention to the local. In particular, when discussing two such different regions as Ireland and the Caribbean, the reality of the experience of seascapes must be taken into account. This is not to revert to a nostalgic provincialism but rather to emphasise the comparative lasting hold that these seascapes can have over a poet, as these writers tug up from the sea's depths its material realities and its forceful, metaphorical valences. In drawing four poets from across these regions together, I do not wish to suggest that they are all part of an idyllically hybridised world, in which writers from Ireland and from the Caribbean completely share one outlook on their interaction with the sea. Instead, the localised interaction with the sea's currents, colours and caprices reveals what is unique to each region and, indeed, to each poet.

Comprised of five chapters, this thesis explores facets of writing informed by sea-based perspectives. It begins in chapter one with an exploration of islandness, drawing on the field of island studies in order to elucidate how these poets conceive of the island space. The interaction between land and sea plays a key role here and the varying perspectives on islandness from Ireland to the Caribbean are also explored, revealing the tensions of island writing. Not only does the human encounter with the sea necessitate an in-depth consideration of what islandness means, it also becomes increasingly important for each writer as a space in which to examine the tensions of islandness. In this way, it

retains elements of a post-/de-colonial discourse, although this discourse no longer operates under a simple coloniser-colonised binary. From Heaney's "Parable Island", which explores the fact of Ireland's partition, to Goodison's "My Island Like a Swimming Turtle", which grapples with Jamaica's physical and cultural presence in the world, the poems of this section demonstrate the varied perspectives on islandness. Here, the synaptic powers of the sea are contingent on an understanding of islandness, as interrelated ideas of the island's boundaries and edges are explored alongside the creative impulses of each poet considered here. By the chapter's end, the synaptic sea more fully emerges as central to understandings of islandness for these Irish and Caribbean poets.

Accordingly, chapter two moves the thesis out to sea, demonstrating how Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott locate their artistic craft in the sea. Learning from its sounds, its flows and its colours, these four poets conceive of writing in watery terms. As already hinted from the brief exploration of the sea in these writers' poetries, the sea has a relationship with language and writing and, as such, this chapter explores its importance to the poetic voice. The sea is not merely a metaphor for liminality but rather an active agent in the writing process and in critique, for these poets. With attention to both their poetry and their non-fiction writing, chapter two is the only chapter to take a poet-by-poet approach, in order to elucidate the specificities of each writer's work. Yet, the shared Atlantic space allows for cross-cultural connections to be elucidated at the same time, revealing what it means to write about island and sea spaces, as readings of poems such as Goodison's "Trident", Heaney's "The Peninsula" and Walcott's *Omeros* will demonstrate. Ní Chuilleanáin's discovery of the sea's linguistics, for example, stands alongside Heaney's poetic clarity, while Walcott's sea-based poetics resonate with Goodison's spiritual feminine voice. In these explorations, the chapter also

builds on the suggestion that in the close relationship between poetry and the sea lie the resistant qualities outlined in this introduction.

The remaining three chapters take a lead from the first two, more fully demonstrating the poets' interaction with the sea's tensions, resistance and challenging nature. The theory of the synaptic sea, complemented by the work of DeLoughrey and the perspectives of oceanic studies, usefully demonstrates the ways in which the seas and oceans are ungraspable spaces. Nevertheless, within this unknowability exists a potent force, which allows for unique comparative considerations of a varied set of critiques. Chapter three focuses on ideas of the nation, examining how the sailor figure in poetry presents unsettled notions of belonging and as such serves to undercut ideas of nation. It relies on the theoretical impulses laid out in this introduction, alongside broad understandings of nation, nationality and nationalism, to demonstrate how these four poets understand the nation and its strictures. The poets considered in this thesis are aware of both the sailor's reality and cultural resonances, made evident through an investigation of works such as Walcott's "The Schooner *Flight*" and Ní Chuilleanáin's "Manuscript in a Bottle". The fact of working on the sea and its waters presents a unique relationship to belonging, making of the sailor an important figure for investigation.

In chapter four, attention turns to ideas of gender. With its fluid and changeable nature, the sea has traditionally been characterised as feminine. This chapter examines to what extent these poets subscribe to this idea and how the sea may provide a resistant site to this characterisation. Although not divided strictly down gender lines, Walcott's and Heaney's tendencies to render the sea as symbolically female are explored here, while Goodison and Ní Chuilleanáin are shown to find a more productive feminine discourse in the sea. Nevertheless, sexuality at sea is revealed to open up a more fluid space to all poets, with Heaney's "Lovers on Aran" a key poem for consideration in this respect.

Finally, chapter five demonstrates how the mythic resonances of the synaptic sea prompt a reconsideration of temporality. This cultural reality of the sea allows for a sharp reflection on ideas of origins, artistic time and the simultaneity of the sea's mythic voices for these poets. Walcott's *Omeros* is obviously a key text here but this turn to myth resonates across the work of all poets, from Goodison's "The Mulatta as Penelope" to Ní Chuilleanáin's invocation of Irish and Greek mythic seafarers in "Voyagers". At the same time, local myths such as Ireland's Voyage of St Brendan, reimagined in Heaney's "The Disappearing Island", are important touchstones in this discussion. This final chapter reveals that not only do the metaphorical myths of the sea reflect alternate conceptions of time but also that the sea remains, in the various guises we place upon it, a site of contemplation, critique and challenge.

Baucom endeavors to "map the postcolonial by charting its submarine flows", noting "the synapses I wish to trace are constituted less as a sequence of relays within the body than as a series of transatlantic lines" ("Charting" par. 17). The thematic concerns of these chapters are latent in the sea and through the immersions of the following work, those transatlantic lines begin to be defined and stitched together. Indeed, for Baucom, the sea is a connective site and "To refuse to read these linkages [...] is to refuse to read" (par. 9). Beginning on the island, this thesis turns to the site where land meets water, looking out to the poetry of the waves in its attempt to discover these associations.

CHAPTER ONE

“Poetry is an Island”: Poetic Approaches to Islandness in Ireland and the Caribbean

*An island is one great eye
[...]
When it comes to outlook & point
of view, a figure stands on a rocky ledge
peering out toward an archipelago
of glass on the mainland, a seagull's
wings touching the tip of a high wave,
out to where the brain may stumble.*

(Yusef Komunyakaa, “Islands”)

Islandness is paradoxical. It changes depending on outlook and viewpoint. As such, attempts to define it have grappled with tensions, parallels and oppositions, often concluding, as Glissant does, that the island is “above all a conjectural place” (37).²⁰ This assertion that the island is a space of guesswork, inexplicableness and supposition is a useful conceptual approach for this chapter, as it seeks to understand how Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott conceive of their island spaces. Recognising what islands mean to these poets is central to a more robust understanding of the synaptic sea, as Baucom only hints at their importance in the metaphor: “the neurons are the various headquarters of the nervous system, [...] the neurons are the scattered islands in the archipelago” (par. 13). Thus, this chapter furthers my enhancement of the synaptic frame in its detailed focus on islandness as the point of departure for transatlantic interrelationships.

²⁰ Glissant arrives at this description through an exploration of the work of Guadeloupian writer Saint-John Perse. He describes Perse’s poetics as a rooted errantry, as Perse finds a home in the French language, while cognisant of his Antillean birth (37-42).

The introduction's theoretical discussions of the sea provide important context to an examination of island spaces in Ireland and the Caribbean, not least because the island is most readily defined in terms of its relationship to water: Islandness "resides in a shifting tension between the definition of island as 'land opposed to water' and the countervailing definition as 'land identical with water'" (Shell 1). This dialectic, or more accurately, tidalectic, sees the traditional conception of the island, as a landmass in the water, and an etymological understanding of the word "island" coming from the Norse to mean "water-land", brought into contrast with one another (18). The synaptic tidalectics of this definition are exposed as these tensions are never fully resolved, both relationships with the water – an opposition to or consolidation with the sea – remain relevant to the island's configuration. For Rajeev Patke, it is this shifting interaction that leads to the creative impulse as a site of communication beyond the island: "the collision of land and water [...] is linked to how humans use words, images, and sounds to make sense of how they live on land and water. That is where poetry comes in" (*Poetry* 6). Echoing Walcott's pronouncement that "Poetry is an island that breaks away from the main" (*WTS* 70), Patke suggests that to understand islandness is to understand poetry, as poetry emerges from land/water tensions as a powerful tool in coming to a discernment of place.

In beginning on land, this chapter seeks to understand how these poets view islandness, with particular attention to the local space of the island's edge as the site of interaction with the water. Firstly, it draws on key ideas from island studies, which resonate with the debates, investigated in the introduction, around the environment and poetry, in order to establish an approach towards this landform more specifically. Secondly, given the relationship between islandness and water, ideas of boundaries and borders are shown to be important for the poets of this thesis in writing about their islands.

Related to this is, thirdly, the concept of the island edge. Finally, from an exploration of the interconnected issues of boundaries and edges, the creativity of the island space is uncovered. This tripartite framing of islandness, through an exploration of boundaries, edges and creativity, is informed by the theoretical directions of the first section and guides this chapter's approach to the work of the poets under consideration here, reading their poetry through these lenses in order to elucidate their similarities and differences.

Conceiving of the Island

The island can be understood as both reality and discourse, as the "island form has traditionally oscillated between geographical and aesthetic registers" (Balasopoulou 9). Indeed, "the nature of the cultural object *island*" (Péron 338; emphasis in original) is an important site of inquiry here and the island as an object has been constructed across time periods, acquiring varied associations and connotations.²¹ This argument gains particular focus on postcolonial islands, attractive to colonising forces "not only because of the desire to possess what is paradisaic or utopian, but because islands, unlike continents, look like property" (Edmond and Smith 1). Accordingly, concern about gazes on the island is a key feature in working through a sense of what an island is. Notably, Godfrey Baldacchino foregrounds the importance of valuing the perspective of islanders themselves, which can offer new ways of thinking about an island (49). For the islands of the Caribbean and Ireland, the tropes generated by European and colonial eyes have to different extents shaped deep-rooted understandings of these spaces and, as such,

²¹ Within literary discourse the island has been a key feature of poetry and storytelling from the earliest ages. Seminal texts from across the Western canon, such as *The Odyssey* and *Robinson Crusoe*, rely on islandness not only as a key plot device but also in metaphorical senses to convey among other things isolation, travel, and self-sufficiency. Simone Pinet's *Archipelagoes: Insular Fictions from Chivalric Romance to the Novel* offers an analysis of how islandness was a key feature in the development of narrative style from *Don Quixote* to modern fiction.

turning to the voices of those who live on these islands reveals much about shifting perceptions.

In redressing the balance towards the reality of island perspectives, it is important to note that islands, linked by the synaptic sea through their local coastal spaces, are key sites of connection, with Peter Hay arguing that “Connectedness describes the island condition better than isolation” (23).²² Despite perceptions of the island as a space of remoteness and seclusion, Hay suggests,

rather than constituting movement-constraining barriers, island boundaries invite transgression; inspire restlessness; demand to be breached [...] Perhaps the island edge is more than just permeable; perhaps it is actually the portal to roads and sea-trails fanning out to other (is)lands, a natural bridge to the world beyond. (23)

In their reliance on travel to and exchange (both economic and cultural) with other places, islands necessitate a relationship with others. The island’s edge generates the transatlantic lines of connection Baucom detects within the ocean. In this way, islandness in Ireland and the Caribbean can be related through what Jenkins and Otto term a “comparative, archipelagic framework” (378).

Physically, the edge is permeable, as the always shifting beaches, and erosion and deposition of coastal spaces create an ever-changing, impalpable limit between water and land. At the same time, while the island margins invite transgression and demand to be breached, they do not disappear in this conceptual shift; rather, borders of the island are there to be challenged, opening out to the resistant synaptic sea. Thus, the island’s

²² Likewise, Epeli Hau’ofa writes of Pacific islanders’ ancient traditions of mobility and their return to these traditions in a postcolonial era: “Islanders have broken out of their confinement, are moving around and away from their homelands, [...] because they had been unnaturally confined and severed from much of their traditional sources of wealth, and because it is in their blood to be mobile. They are once again enlarging their world, establishing new resource bases and expanded networks for circulation” (11).

conjecture is felt at the actual, permeable, changing edge of the island, the very edge that, on the one hand, defines it and, on the other, opens it out.

In spite of this focalisation on the island's boundaries and edges, Gilles Deleuze argues that "humans can live on an island only by forgetting what an island represents" (9). They must disregard the precariousness, the conjecture, the isolation and the shifting borders in order to continue to reside on an island. Security is gained by the assumption that "the active struggle between earth and water is over, or at least contained" (9). Much like the sea's vastness, with which humans can only ever partially engage, there is a sense that a complete recognition of the island space and its conjecture would be overwhelming. Like Hay, Deleuze places islands in relation to the sea, as he delineates two island types: continental and oceanic, the former materialised when land broke from a larger continental landmass, the latter formed variously from coral reef or volcanic eruptions. For Deleuze, both island types produce different significations:

continental islands serve as a reminder that the sea is on top of the earth, taking advantage of the slightest sagging in the highest structures; oceanic islands, that the earth is still there, under the sea, gathering its strength to punch through the surface. (9)

Deleuze's work is useful here for its elucidation of the psychological effects of thinking of and with the island, while his differentiation of island space, which exposes islands' peculiarities, is an informative point of departure for Irish-Caribbean connections. Ireland's geographical reality as a continental island that is still connected to Britain via deep underwater land bridges inflects theoretical and poetic thinking on the island. Moreover, the actual partition of the island space presents vast complications to

understandings of islandness.²³ The Caribbean on the other hand, is made up of mostly oceanic islands.²⁴ The sense of an originary force in or under the sea is one that is key to Caribbean cultural production for several reasons, as will be seen throughout this thesis. As the poets of this thesis are attentive to their islands' geographical realities as well as the philosophical outlook geography can imply, the distinctions between continental and oceanic islands reflect the actual variance of island realities in Ireland and the Caribbean.

Boundaries: Colonial Maps and Neo-colonial Gazes

The island is bound by the sea, but Ireland and the Caribbean islands encounter many boundaries that delineate and often fortify a sense of islandness. In Ireland, the complexities of Ireland's islandness coalesce in poetry, as the island sees the continued "struggle for political as well as cultural autonomy" (Patke, *Poetry* 44). These tensions are explored by Heaney and there is a sense in his oeuvre that the divided island of Ireland necessitates a poetry that investigates the island's boundaries. This is clearest in "Parable Island" from *The Haw Lantern*. Depicting an island that resembles the Ireland of the late 1980s, Heaney's poem challenges linguistic, cultural and colonial legacies, using ideas of naming and narrative to dismantle notions of fixity. From its opening, the issue of dividedness is foregrounded in a setting that bears a strong resemblance to the Northern Irish border:

²³ Although less central to the poets of this thesis, it should also be noted that Ireland's geographical location at the "centre" of the world is as a result of colonial mapmaking. This has a real-world effect. Historically speaking, Ireland's prominent position in the Atlantic world was predicated on its relationship to Great Britain (Gleeson 2), while as Europeans ventured to the Americas, Ireland "was no longer a rugged outpost on the outer edge of the known world; it now lay astride the main routes to and from the colonies in North and Middle America" (W.J. Smyth 3).

²⁴ One notable exception is the island of Trinidad, which was once part of the South American landmass.

Although they are an occupied nation
and their only border is an inland one
they yield to nobody in their belief
that the country is an island. (Heaney, *HL* 10)

While this opening displays parallels with Northern Ireland, there is much in these lines of which to be cautious. Paradoxical turns of phrase here indicate a shiftiness in the sense of islanders' attitudes towards the border. On the one hand, the lines can be read with nationalist overtones, which assert the wholeness of the single-state island, defying a border imposed by a foreign power, that is: the whole of the island is a nation, regardless of the border. In this sense, the use of "occupied nation" and "country" are particularly loaded and resonate with the earlier poem "Traditions", which sees the island as bedded "down into / the British Isles" (*WO* 21). Yet, there is much in Edna Longley's suggestion that "Parable Island" "turns on language questions: on the endless ways in which an island can be construed or constructed" (158). Thus, on the other hand, the lines could indicate a more dismissive and nonchalant attitude as the border is detachedly described as "their only border". Here, its existence does not affect islandness as ideas of the whole are not equated to the nation-state as explicitly. Significantly, the "country" of the final line is never named.

As Gerry Smyth outlines, there is continued debate around ideas of the *wholeness* of Ireland with vacillation between a past idyll of a primal relationship between islanders and the entire island and those who would call this approach revisionist with strong nationalistic connotations (21). Whether fact or fiction, revisionist or not, the border that divides the island creates a boundary, one which serves as a reminder of the difficult relationship to islandness in real and concrete ways. Nonetheless, the still somewhat conflicting association of "country" and "island" in Heaney's poem demonstrates

complications in both interpretations due to the reality of partition. In this way, it continues the work of the earlier “Traditions”, which vacillates between “our Elizabethan English” and the declaration by “the wandering [Leopold] Bloom”: “I was born here. Ireland” (*WO* 22).

Significantly, a sense of division is maintained throughout “Parable Island”, played out in pairs of oppositions. The people from the east have a different name for the partitioned area to the people of the west, while the locals are described as “forked-tongued natives” (Heaney, *HL* 10). Further images of division include the archaeologists of section three who clash on how to interpret the island’s stone circle patterns and “the subversives and collaborators” whose major battle is “the right to set ‘the island story’ straight” (11).²⁵ The desire to “set ‘the island story’ straight” not only suggests that the factions believe there is one “truth” to the island story but also conjures a feeling of oneness: the forked tongues no longer bifurcated, the nomenclature no longer contested. Nonetheless, as with the poem’s opening, the speaker remains sceptical and somewhat distanced through the use of quotation marks around “the island story”, which serves to undercut the notion that there is one name, one story, one truth.

The idea of naming is central in the poem as the mountain range in the north of the island is called variously by islanders and occupiers alike, “Cape Basalt”, “The Sun’s Headstone”, or “The Orphan’s Tit” (Heaney, *HL* 10). Although this location is not easily defined by any of the poem’s various groups, the reference to basalt recalls the Giant’s Causeway in Co. Antrim. As this is not a location which has traditionally had multiple names, Eugene O’Brien reasons that the alternate monikers in the poem “parallel the

²⁵ In a parallel to this, Anna Burns’ *Milkman* uses similar language, referring to loyalist and nationalist groups as “defenders-of-the-state” and “renouncers-of-the-state”, terms, which like Heaney’s, are ambiguous in their application and similarly demonstrate the tensions around language on the partitioned island.

shifting names of ‘Ulster,’ ‘Northern Ireland,’ the ‘North,’ the ‘Province’” (287). Notably, Graziadei et al. argue that language plays a significant role in “the sensory and embodied construction of the island” (260) and Ireland’s uneasy relationship with language is evident in multiple ways. The “political implications” of its inclusion in the phrase “British Isles” (Andrews 2) are hinted at in “Traditions”, while legal documents such as the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, which used “Ireland” to refer to the whole island with its political instability, “rendered the linguistic and political distinctions between island and Ireland(s) a continuing problem” (Wightman 173). The naming of the island has been fraught, with the 1999 Belfast Agreement leading to the removal of claims in *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (The Irish Constitution) that the Irish nation encompassed the whole island. At the same time, Ireland (as the Irish State) remains the name of the island, and while prefaced in the Belfast Agreement and the Constitution with “island of Ireland” when referring to the island, both terms can overlap in confusing ways. The lack of clear linguistic distinction between island and state is indicative of the complex relationship to islandness, underscored by terminology that renders estimations of either wholeness or separation difficult.

Heaney’s poem, although published in 1987, before the Belfast Agreement, nevertheless reacts to this debate around naming by shifting the focus of that naming to the multi-named mountain at the island’s edge. While its name is contested, this mountain is clearly situated in “a region / every native thinks of as ‘the coast’” (Heaney, *HL* 10). This space, which is supposed to help define the island, becomes itself undefinable due to the linguistic variances among groups. Perhaps reflecting this complexity, Heaney again uses quotation marks around “the coast”, the only other instance of this in the poem being around “the island story”. As recurs through much of the poetry discussed in this thesis, the coast is an inherently shifting space. Just as *the* island story is almost non-

existent, neither is *the* coast a fixed entity. It is dependent on the coming-and-going of the waves. Thus, even naming something as “the coast” may be as nugatory as trying to find one name for the island’s mountain and, by extension, for the island itself.

While the poem stresses this inadequacy of naming, the islanders have some faith in the belief that this mountain holds the potential for truth; that there is

a point where all the names converge
underneath the mountain and where (some day)
they are going to start to mine the ore of truth (Heaney, *HL* 10)

This “truth” is deferred, as the parenthetical “some day” intimates that this mining may never happen. That the names converge under the mountain, however, is noteworthy because, given the mountain’s coastal location, the “truth” would be found at the very edge of the island. Significantly, obsolete definitions of “ore” relate the word to the edge, the coast, the shore (OED n.4, n.8). Locating the truth at the island’s edge emphasises the centrality of the relationship with water and the particular landscape of the coastline. Moreover, given that the poem works to continuously undercut ideas of one truth, the “ore of truth” may actually be the ever changing coastline and a reassurance in its constant changing.

“Parable Island” ends on a note of impossible change, but one that, nevertheless, prompts reconsideration of islandness. Turning to the island’s elders who “dream of boat-journeys and havens” (Heaney, *HL* 11) – not an insignificant dream given the poem’s subtle turn towards the coast and out to the sea – the poem ends with their stories and, in particular, the story of one man who

died convinced

that the cutting of the Panama Canal
would mean the ocean would all drain away
and the island disappear by aggrandizement. (11)

While the notion that the Atlantic Ocean could be drained by the cutting of a canal through Central America is absurd, this *story*, reported to the speaker and told to the reader, underscores the shiftiness of repeated narrative. If there were indeed an “island story” it would perhaps too be rendered absurd eventually. The lesson of this parable island may be to question all stories, even the one presented in this poem; to not assume that there is an “island story” to be found within. Indeed, islands such as Ireland form part of “less studied [...] large island or archipelago states where islandness may be more taken for granted” (Mountz 643) and Ireland’s sense of islandness is significantly complicated by its relationship to Britain. Certainly, the very notion of islandness is destabilised by the final phrase “disappear by aggrandizement”. What at first glance may appear paradoxical actually returns the reader to the physical reality that Ireland is a continental island, at the mercy of the sea that sits on top of the earth, as Deleuze observes. The poem acknowledges the sea as the dominant feature, with land, and associated ideas of islandness, subject to its changes. Yet, for Heaney, it is what is revealed by the sea’s disappearance rather than what the sea might submerge that is most provoking. The revelation of this land bridge would not only complicate islandness by showing a connection to a larger landmass but it would also reveal the connectedness of Ireland to its larger neighbour and coloniser, formerly connected by land as continental islands. As such, the boundary is not only an unseen line on a map but a very real landmass that predates the border. While, for Deleuze, the island inhabitants may wish to forget this, Heaney purposely draws attention to this connection to confirm the shiftiness detected in the poem’s first lines. With this final image, Heaney suggests that it is folly

to rely on stability in islandness as a way to think about the nation and to find a sense of place. Instead, the poet moves towards the edge, approaching the space where, as Patke puts it, poetry is born.

Mapping and naming are equally important for Walcott's conception of an islandness that seeks to challenge mapped boundaries and colonial stereotypes. "Map of the New World" from *The Fortunate Traveller* displays Walcott's urge to remap the contours of the Caribbean in the poet's own language. As Baldacchino notes, the anglophone and francophone Caribbean islands are "amongst the best known producers of island scripts; island stories on their own terms" (46). The three-part sequence of the poem – "I Archipelagoes", "II The Cove" and "III Sea Cranes" – redraws colonial mapping from a Caribbean perspective, invoking an archipelagic mode of thinking, which sees islands as "autonomous but at the same time part of a larger unity of islands, therefore suggesting interconnectedness" (Dautel and Schödel 235). Using a theme familiar to readers of Walcott, the Fall of Troy just as "the ten-years war is finished" (Walcott, *PDW* 292), the first poem recalls Odysseus' journey from Troy, emphasising the specific coastal location of the city:

Slowly the sail will lose sight of islands;
into a mist will go the belief in harbors
of an entire race. (292)

The fact that these islands are not defined here draws a connection between the Greek islands around which Odysseus sailed and the islands of the Caribbean. Unlike Heaney's island inhabitants, who remain hopeful of truth at the island edge, the people of Greece, or the Caribbean, or both, have lost faith in the safety of the island's harbours, and perhaps by extension the islands themselves. Nevertheless, the harbours, as littoral spaces, reach

out across the oceans and across time, as the Greek and Caribbean archipelagos become conterminous islands. Their archipelagic connection is significant, for, as Elaine Stratford contends,

the archipelago invites significant productive thinking about island relations [...] thinking with the archipelago may reveal multiple emancipatory narratives that enunciate exceptions to colonizing grammars of empire that rendered islands remote, isolated and backward. (3-4; emphasis in original)

“Archipelagoes” further establishes the presence of Walcott’s work in this cross-island thinking through the poem’s circularity from first stanza to last. The speaker states at the outset, “At the end of this sentence, rain will begin” and in the section’s final lines, “A man with clouded eyes picks up the rain / and plucks the first line of the *Odyssey*” (Walcott, *PDW* 292). Linked by the islands and harbours, the Caribbean and its literature are placed in dialogue with Ancient Greece and its texts, as Walcott seeks to redraw maps of literary influence.

As Christian Depraetere notes, “already in ancient times, a key question deals with how the knowledge we have of the world-archipelago [...] influences our way of feeling part of the *ekumene*” (9). With this in mind, it is curious that when “Map of the New World” was first published in *The Kenyon Review*, it was a two-part poem with no mention of Greece, the *Odyssey*, or archipelagos. The first unnamed section begins:

Dragons once, with webbed hands, serrated fins,
circled this unknown sea. Their scales
flake now like scurf, their skins
aged with this wrinkled chart. (Walcott, “Map” 88)

More overtly than the later version, these lines recall archaic mapmaking styles, which included illustrations of sea monsters in the unknown spaces of the ocean. The speaker continues, “as new islands grew, dragons were gone / reduced to symbols” (88). The unknown and likely feared dragon-islands are fixed by colonial mapmaking. As with Heaney’s enigmatic coastal mountain, the dragons-turned-islands appear as mysteries and are, as such, mapped in order to fix them, becoming not real spaces but symbols on a page. Walcott’s removal of any reference to dragons in the version of the poem published in *The Fortunate Traveller* reveals his interest in the archipelagic outlook. Rather than a reactive tone that recalls how islands were problematically fixed by maps, Walcott instead offers a vision of connectedness that places the Caribbean and his poetry into relationship with other world literature. In “Archipelagoes”, the new world map sketched by Walcott emphasises water’s connective properties as rain, sea and mist are not confined to the boundaries of an island but connected by literature, geography and travel.

Indeed, movement is central to the revised poem as the sails of “Archipelagoes” become a “bleached prow, rustling shoreward / to white sand” (Walcott, *PDW* 292). Encountering “the legend of Yseult / in languorous detonations of your surf” (292), the speaker finds solace in an inlet that allows him, nonetheless, to remain connected to his place in the world in the second section, “The Cove”. The final section remains almost unchanged from the early publication, referencing the poet Robert Graves, and sees the sails and prow of the earlier sections as “magnificent frigates” (293). In “Sea Cranes”, Walcott uses the sea to cross time and space, mapping his movements through language rather than the static renderings of the map. The changes from the earlier poem move away from explicit critiques of colonial mapmaking and comparison of these alterations demonstrates Walcott’s desire to deviate from an assessment of the results of island

mapping, which demonises these spaces before fixing them as symbolic possessions. In moving across time periods, he also challenges conceptions of the “New” World, placing the Caribbean into contemporaneous conversation with other cultures – this aspect of time is discussed in more detail in chapter five alongside an analysis of Walcott’s interaction with the myths of the synoptic sea. Here, “Map of the New World” plays with boundaries through a series of movements away from and towards the shore, as Walcott shifts a perception of Caribbean islands as siloed places of no history and instead sees his archipelagic islandness as part of a world *ecumene*. In doing so, he implicitly challenges the boundaries of colonial mapmaking, made explicit in the poem’s earlier version.

In the contemporary Caribbean, it is not only the remnants of colonial mapping that serve to fix the island but the external gazes of foreign powers that obscure the reality of the islands. Goodison’s “My Island Like a Swimmer Turtle” from *Travelling Mercies* mixes metaphor and historical reality with personal experience to present internal and external views on the island, as well as the conflicts felt by the speaker about these perspectives. The poem’s title is a reference to the shape of the island as viewed on a map or from above and in the first stanza this island-turtle “surfaces in the fishtank / of the television” (Goodison, *CP* 348). On the one hand, this image reflects the physical and geographical make-up of the island and the desire to define this shape in a tangible way. The metaphorical naming of the island reflects Heaney’s focus on naming in “Parable Island”. It is also indicative of Deleuze’s claim that island-dwellers must forget what the island itself represents, as the speaker cannot conceive of the island as an island alone but instead must imagine it in another way. Unlike Walcott’s references to dragons in the early version of “Map of the New World”, however, Goodison’s turtle is a more intimate image. It is linked to the island’s creation in the sea, with the poet musing in the later “Creation Story: Why Our Island is Shaped Like a Turtle” that the island is shaped thusly

when the “Turtle implores Creator, leave me here” (Goodison, *CP* 379). On the other hand, the metaphorical implications of a swimming turtle, submerged until recently and almost surreptitiously caught on camera, speaks to the ways in which the island is both a shifting site and a location relativity forgotten about or unknown to external gazes. This language, which mirrors the discourse of the nature documentary, turns the island into something to be studied and analysed, a feature implicit in the following stanzas. However, from the speaker’s perspective, it is the ability to see the island and convert it into something recognisable that is key in grasping the place where she lives.

As the poem progresses, it becomes clear that the emergence of this island-turtle onto the television screen is due to ongoing violence there. Images of “black rubber tire smoke”, “machete chops / and gunshots” (Goodison, *CP* 348) are what have drawn the attention of the cameras. The poem reveals the media’s fish-bowl-gazing attitude, levelling criticism at a tunnel-vision attraction to violence:

War correspondents
come with seeing eye
cameras to show dirty
turtle laundry to the world (348).

The island in times of violence is something to be examined, discussed and broadcast around the world. The mocking tone of “seeing eye / cameras” insinuates that the speaker does not believe that the cameras are capturing the island’s reality. The dominance of this gaze, which can be understood as neo-colonial in its impulse to stereotype and obscure island realities, is a source of anguish for the poet and this is keenly felt in the poem’s final words, a standalone line with elegiac resonances: “Cry out O terrapin” (348). Goodison invokes a high, formal register to confirm her lamentations for the islands.

However, the register also evokes a distance created between the speaker and her island by the cameras that come to gaze upon it and its people. In contrast to the opening's more relaxed phrasing and lexicon, the final line reads as mocking and contrived.

This opposes the language used elsewhere in the poem to create a collective identity on the island. Phrases such as “Ben Johnson day” (Goodison, *CP* 348), which refers to the last day before payday (Cassidy and Le Page 39), or “mannish” (Goodison, *CP* 348), used in Jamaican English to mean impertinent or “uppity” (OED), confirm the poet's island-perspective as a local. Moreover, Goodison affirms both the collective unity of the island and the island's generative properties noting “We suck our turtle children / unformed out of our eggs” and “Feastdays, we suck salt” (*CP* 348). These particularities not only contrast the violence being shown on the television but also the inequitably privileged lifestyle of the “bigman fat posse” who eat beef Wellington, even on Ben Johnson day (348). Although the poem presents a vision of community, it is evidently a community that knows hardship and poverty. Depicted metaphorically as turtle-people, the local community are shown to be connected to the shape of the island, which in the Caribbean becomes “the site of a double-identity – closed and open” (Bongie 18). Counteracting the fetishized gaze often directed towards island inhabitants, the poem shows them to be defiant and loving, but also prone to adversity and stigmatisation by the media's cameras. Goodison here acknowledges the ongoing difficulty for not only Jamaican but Caribbean writers more generally to write their island in the face of continuing stereotypes. The island cannot hide from the gaze, its volcanic nature destined to emerge from the water, yet it is bounded and fixed by the world's cameras, which impose meaning on the island itself and cannot see the beauty Goodison finds in her turtle island and its people.

Edges: Viewing Islands from Shifting Perspectives

As island poets begin to question borders, boundedness and external gazes, they often turn to the edge, a space that most starkly reveals a place's islandness. This edge, where land meets sea, clearly reveals islandness to these poets, as work in island studies signposts. It is also a key site of connection, as M.N. Person posits that "there is such a thing as littoral society, that is, that we can go around the shores of an ocean, or a sea, or indeed the whole world, and identify societies that have more in common with other littoral societies than they do with their inland neighbors" (353). Analysis of Heaney's "Parable Island" demonstrates the poetic desirability of the island edge, a pull visible elsewhere in Heaney's poetry, and which echoes in the work of Walcott and Ní Chuilleanáin.

Certainly, Ní Chuilleanáin's first collection, *Acts & Monuments*, reflects a deep consideration of what islands might mean. A sequence of three poems, "Letter to Pearse Hutchinson", "I Saw the Islands in a Ring All Round Me" and "More Islands", all establish this concern and, placed beside each other in the collection, demonstrate a widening consideration of island space. In contrast to the fixed islands of the previous sections, the islands of these poems are in constant movement, as "the headlands / crept round the rim of the sea" and "shuffled and swam" (Ní Chuilleanáin *AM* 14, 15). Through Ní Chuilleanáin's illustrations of travelling landforms, these islands are placed in newly imagined relationships with the sea that surrounds them. As Deleuze suggests and Heaney also recognises, changes in the water may profoundly affect ideas of islandness for a continental island. "More Islands" follows a child "afraid of islands", particularly fearing the islands' sharpness, "their dry / Moonlit shoulders" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 16). As Patke notes, the island's mysterious separateness makes it a site of "desire and dread" (*Poetry* 31). Here, the coldness of the moonlight contributes to an eerie atmosphere

whereby the island's edge, presented in its seeming severity against the water, is a source of anxiety. This fear is subsequently linked with the stanza's proceeding images, as she

sees in a deep gutter

A stone, a knot in the stream.

She feels the gasping of wrecks,

Cormorants and lighthouses. (16)

The stone in the stream stands as a microcosm of the island, viewed from a bird's-eye perspective. Accordingly, the child becomes fearful in her realisation of the island in its entirety and the reality of its isolation. This, Deleuze would argue, is inevitable. The stone in the stream, in its tangible definitiveness and relationship to the image of the island in water, focalises this fear and Glisenan Nordin argues that these lines "suggest an element of the fear of the unknown, a sense of estrangement experienced by the speaker" (*Reading Eiléan* 118). The island's harsh shoulders, signalling the constant struggle between land and water, resonate in the stone. While Glisenan Nordin posits that the stone "suggests a sense of solidity, a point of reference" (118), its comparison to a knot implies a less reassuring view. In a way, it recalls Yeats' stone, there to "trouble the living stream" in "Easter, 1916" (*Selected Poems* 120) and is transformed into a similar symbol of anxiety. As an adult, the poem's protagonist "knows there are some islands the sea avoids" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 16) implying that fear of the island continues and that the speaker's understanding of them remains distanced. The struggle between land and water persists at the island edge. Significantly, the lighthouse, although read as a "contrasting element of rescue and light" (Glisenan Nordin, *Reading Eiléan* 118), reveals with its beam this chilling edge as the moonlight did in the previous lines.

Elsewhere, the condensing of the large island into the image of a stone in a stream is subsequently reflected in the second stanza when the now-adult protagonist “feels the sea in the waves of her hair / And icebergs in a storm of lemonade” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 16). The wave-like hair touches the island’s cold shoulder, as Ní Chuilleanáin projects a bodily metaphor onto the island’s edge, where hair and shoulder meet.²⁶ Here, she plays with ideas of bigness and smallness, aware of the notion that the aesthetic heritage of the island has led to a physical understanding of the island with “attributes of small physical size and warm water” (Baldacchino 40). However Ireland, as a northerly island and twentieth largest in the world, is neither a small nor a warm island. Moreover, it “suffers some loss of ‘perceived’ insularity by being easily visible from Britain”, while its “size is psychologically diminished by the nearby presence of an island [...] about 2.75 times as large” (Andrews 1-2). Ní Chuilleanáin reflects the shifting perceptions of Ireland’s size, seeing icebergs in her lemonade, as the stone becomes the island. In all of this, there is the attempt to circumscribe the island, to see in and understand it as a whole by imbibing the large in the small.

The poem’s final stanza moves closest to the island edge itself and shifts from a bird’s-eye perspective to an island-level view, to end at the coast with the image of “the first fire / Lit by a castaway [that] cuts the darkness / Liberating silence” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 16). This figure acts not only as a symbol of human fears of isolation and loneliness but also as a reminder of literature’s relationship with the island, whereby castaways are often the focus of island narratives. Yet, even in these fears and stereotypes, Ní Chuilleanáin implies a freeing on the island, finding the poem’s vision in the silence created by the fire. As Suzanne Thomas posits, part of the attraction of an island “is this

²⁶ This image relies on the trope of connecting islands and human bodies. The common association of island and female body is discussed in more detail in chapter four on gender and the sea. Here, however, Ní Chuilleanáin does not explicitly gender the island.

suggestion of empty spaces, waiting for any conceivable human thought, act, or creative impulse” (23). Ní Chuilleanáin’s communicative silence is aptly located on the island’s edge, as the feared moonlight transforms into the more ambiguous lighthouse and finally here is the light and heat of the castaway’s presumably beachside fire. For Borbála Faragó, “More Islands” is one of several poems by Ní Chuilleanáin that “strive to impart the knowledge that information cannot be transmitted, only intuited” (75). Indeed, the word “feels” is used twice in this short poem and it is the feeling of dread towards islands this woman has retained since childhood that allows her to “know” that there are some islands that are avoided by the sea. The psychological ramifications of the precarity of a continental island are evident here. Eventually, from the fear and desire connected to the castaway’s fire comes a revelation, the “liberating silence”. The island the girl feared at the poem’s beginning can only begin to be approached from its edges and it is at this edge that Ní Chuilleanáin places her intuitive act of communication.

It is the edge that also persists as the significant feature of the island in Heaney’s “Station Island”. In this long poem, Heaney recounts a pilgrimage to the island in the middle of Lough Derg. Just like Ireland’s offshore islands, which “have had the same fascination for Irishmen [*sic*] that the whole of Ireland has had for foreigners” (Andrews 15), the lake isle of Lough Derg holds a similar sense of mystery for Heaney in this poem. Not an offshore island, admittedly, Station Island is, nonetheless, an island of Ireland and an exploration of Heaney’s attitude towards the island is revealing. Patke suggests that “Islands are to oceans the converse of what land is to lakes” (“Islands” 177-178). For Heaney, the significant number of lakes present across his poetry perhaps reflects a turn towards the island’s interior in order to avoid those questions he poses, untypically, in “Parable Island”. To understand islandness on this smaller, politically uncontested scale

is a more palatable experience as he appears “caught between politics and poetry” (Patke, *Poetry* 38).

Indeed, on Station Island, poetry flourishes, becoming to Heaney a site of atavistic culture as great figures of Irish literature, such as Joyce and Kavanagh, appear to him while there. The island-within-an-island is a part of the island of Ireland but also separate from it. Notably, Ireland’s islands have been called alternately “icons of true Irishness – the dwelling places of a Gaelic people; pure, clean-living and timeless” (O’Sullivan 175) and “the ultimate repository of an atavistic culture, alien and refractory to modernisation [...] a cultural myth of sorts” (Gefter Wondrich 151). In this oxymoronic view, offshore islands become “sites of innovation and traditions; landscapes of worry but also creativity” (Ferriter 11). This shifting sense of Ireland’s other islands is present in “Station Island”, although it is not an offshore island in the same way. The island appears to hold revelatory power at the same time that it stands apart from Heaney’s Ireland.

Significant to this particular discussion is the way in which the island is circumscribed by the speaker. In section III, for example, the imaginative power of visualising a small island renders the space a creative and inspiring one.

I thought of walking round
and round a space utterly empty,
utterly a source, like the idea of sound

or like the absence sensed in swamp-fed air. (Heaney, *OG* 248)

Pilgrims to the island walk around stone circles, thought to be the remains of huts, yet the desire here to walk the circumference of a space can also be extended to the island itself. The circular movement extends from the island’s stone circles to the island’s edges, itself encircled by the lake, surrounded again by the island of Ireland, surrounded by

water. This intense focalisation seems to provide a purer sense of islandness, the “idea of sound” discovered therein perhaps a sign of the ungraspable truth longed for in “Parable Island”. Yet, the emptiness felt there is not unspoiled, given the reference to “swamp-fed air”. As with the previous “Parable Island”, however, it is at the edge that the poet finds clarity, writing in section VII,

I had come to the edge of water,
soothed by just looking, idling over it
as if it were a clear barometer
or a mirror. (255)

Here, the water becomes a reassuring presence and indeed, it is the “edge of water” to which he comes, rather than the edge of land. As a continental island, Ireland’s landmass is governed by the changing of the tide, which, for Deleuze, leads to a sense of land fearing the sea’s changes. On Station Island, however, the risk of shifting borders feels reduced and, as such, Heaney can begin to define the island through an interaction with the edge. There is an uncanny sense of place throughout the poem as Heaney is aware of the island’s connection to the island of Ireland, its culture and politics, but Station Island is an island that is much easier to comprehend. This is further signalled by the poet’s “alien comfort” (266) upon his return to the mainland. Although interaction with Ireland’s islands may “lead perhaps to insights regarding ‘the difficulties of being Irish’”, they are at the same time distinctly “different from Ireland, not really the same country” (K. Morrison 120, 117). The perceived purity of these islands often stands in opposition to the fractured nature of the Irish mainland. Yet, they are susceptible to the same sense of conjecture as their larger neighbour. The “island story” Heaney sought in “Parable Island” is clearer on Station Island and while this may present the poet with a definition

of islandness, it does not translate to the larger island, troubled by its political border. This story, for Heaney, is one that is fraught with linguistic and political complexities. In denying *one* story, Heaney's work throws all stories of islandness into question, interrogating also the physical, geographical determinants upon which islanders are keen to base knowledge of their space and place in the world. Ireland's other islands may offer escape from these complexities but, as in the case of "Station Island", this is only a temporary escape, which can revitalise a relationship to islandness but cannot overcome the realities of Heaney's Ireland. And yet, as Heaney's work becomes bogged down in the complexities of islandness, he seems to move to the edges and begin to look towards the sea as a space in which to think.

Finally, the edge also becomes a way for Walcott to understand his own island of St Lucia, particularly given that the island's interior is mountainous and covered with thick forest in parts. Accordingly, the majority of the island's towns and villages are situated at the coast, which is more densely populated. His penultimate collection, *Tiepolo's Hound*, paints a vivid picture of island life. Either as a place of desolation as in *The Tempest* or *Robinson Crusoe*, or as a thing of beauty to the coloniser or tourist, the islands of the Caribbean have been subjected to limiting powers of an external gaze, Brathwaite highlighting how these islands are viewed alternately as "the sun's / slums: if you hate / us. Jewels, / if there is delight / in your eyes" (*Islands* 47). Additionally, the colonisation of the islands of the region by European powers such as the British, French, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese profoundly changed the populations of the islands of the Caribbean. Most significantly, colonisation "virtually obliterated" the islands' earlier populations (Higman 97). Accordingly, their civilizations, languages and cultures were also decimated and, as native Arawakan and Carib languages are no longer in existence, Caribbean writers "cannot regard the European tongue as a second language" (Torres-

Saillant 78).²⁷ In contrast to these histories, Walcott attempts to portray his island's beauty through an interaction with the island's edge. A section from chapter three captures the island in its physical, historical, linguistic and cultural realities. The poem acts as an imagistic, visual map of the island as the speaker follows the "village churches" and "provincial cathedrals" (Walcott, *PDW* 477) that punctuate the coastline:

[...] Rounding a mountain

road they held their station by a sea

of processional crests, saying their Rosaries

to the brown lace altars of Micoud and Dennery,

then, to leeward, softly, at Anse La Raye, Canaries,

Soufrière, Choiseul, Laborie, Vieuxfort, that were

given echoes drawn from the map of France (477).

The naming of islands may be prosaic but here the act of speaking out the locations around the island takes on spiritual connotations, as the repetitive structure of the rosary is mirrored in the naming of parts of the island.²⁸ Moreover, the rhyming of sea/Rosaries not only confirms the spiritual elements of the lines but also aids the poet in his attempt to map the island in a unique way. The surrounding sea acts as the ring of beads, helping him to envisage the interaction between land and sea as a profoundly spiritual one. That the /i:/ rhyme continues in the following lines with Dennery/Canaries provides a sonorous sectioning off of the island as the poem moves along the coastline. Unlike Heaney in

²⁷ This loss of language has been highlighted by Caribbean writers such as Grace Nichols, who signals language loss and the accompanying fractured identity in "These Islands" from *i is a long-memoried woman*: "these Carib bean /Arawak an / islands" (35).

²⁸ Although Walcott was a Methodist, he often wrote about St Lucia's large Catholic population.

“Parable Island”, Walcott finds clarity in naming his island, its edge plotted by the line endings, which circumscribe the island.

These sounds that help define the island, however, do not render it isolated. Instead, they echo across the synaptic sea, most obviously in the colonial history whereby these French names were given by colonisers but also for the poet who finds similarities in his landscape and those of impressionist painters working in the South of France. Thus, Walcott reflects the reality of his island’s French-inflected language without routing through the history of colonisation itself here. For him, the French names of St Lucia resonate with the topography of the French Côte d’Azur, as “All was paint / and the light in paint, in the dusty olive / of Cézanne’s trees” (Walcott, *PDW* 478). The care with which Cézanne captured the light in the olive trees and the coast that he so often painted chimes with Walcott’s desire to paint his island. Just as earlier poems claim the archipelagic connection with Ancient Greece to demonstrate the place of Walcott’s literature, here the link with French painters is indicative of the craftsmanship Walcott brings to his work on islands. In a similar way, *Station Island* opens up to Heaney as a space of paternal creativity. Significantly, it is this aesthetic connection on which Walcott chooses to end the section: “our landscapes emerging in French though we speak / English as we work. My pen replaced a brush” (478). His work places the beauty of the Caribbean in dialogue with impressionist painters, using his pen to paint the island. Cézanne’s Post-impressionism, notably, is a style that does not seek to provide definite borders or representation through realism. Similarly, Walcott’s writing on islands is representative of a truth of the islands without attempting to bound these islands to a definitive explanation. Patently, the fluid relationships of an archipelago are key to this post-impressionist view on which Walcott focuses in *Tiepolo’s Hound*. While he seeks a quality of language that can be true to the islands he describes, it remains at a distance

from them. Through this act of writing Walcott demonstrates his love for the islands of the Caribbean: love for what he finds there and love for the connections he can make with other times and other spaces. His use of sound patterns to create the island's edge indicates the creativity located at the site of land's and sea's interaction.

Creativity: Island Aesthetics

In this contemplation of boundaries and a move to the edge, it is clear that the island is a place of poetry, aesthetics and creativity. Indeed, as explored in the opening section of this chapter, the edge becomes a space of creativity for Patke. It is clear in *Tiepolo's Hound*, in "Station Island" and in "More Islands" that a communicative, creative power exists at these islands' extremities. As such, these poets explicitly locate a creative impulse at the island's edge and note the importance of the island space to their writing. This is particularly evident in the work of Goodison, Walcott and Ní Chuilleanáin.

While, as seen in the discussion of "My Island as a Swimming Turtle", ideas of islandness are important to Goodison's poetry, it is in her collection of essays, *Redemption Ground*, that she provides a comprehensive view of islandness and asserts a creative relationship with her own island. In "I-Land", Goodison recounts her personal interaction with islandness, indicated by the title's play with the word "island". As Gillian Beer notes, the island is a space of "self-enquiry", adding "it is no accident that first-person narrative is so frequent in [novels and short-stories] of the island" (10). Goodison's work takes its place amongst a body of thought that links the self with the island. Yet, her essay is distinctive in the way it also locates her poetic outlook within the tidalectics of the island. The personal essay, both in Goodison's use of it and as a form more generally, demonstrates a desire for exploration both of the self and of the island.

It is interesting that Goodison begins by noting, “As a small child, I did not really have a very strong sense of being on an island” (*RG* 43). Yet, she concedes that physical descriptions of the island were one of the few things that allowed her to have a sense of islandness and, notably, that it was her mother who showed her that “on the map of the world, Jamaica is shaped like a swimming turtle” (44). As with “My Island Like a Swimming Turtle”, the child can only understand the island as something else, a trope identified by Delueze and reflected in Ní Chuilleanáin’s “More Islands”. Here, the island is also a space of familial connection, as it is Goodison’s mother who tells her about the turtle-like shape of the island.

The essay catalogues features that both hindered and confirmed her perceptions of the island of Jamaica. Centrally, her upbringing in the island’s capital, Kingston, could not be reconciled with her vision of islands as a child. It was not at all the “sleepy island outpost” (Goodison, *RG* 43) associated with islandness, its cosmopolitan hustle-and-bustle anathema to literary constructions of what an island appeared to be. Painting an honest picture of the island, she admits in the essay that life “can be very limiting: circumscribed, provincial, petty, tribal” and suggests that in big countries (both in terms of landmass and in terms of cultural and socio-economic power) such as “the USA and Canada [there] is the sense of possibility [...]. This sense of possibility is not as available to people in island societies” (45). Indeed, the essay is filled with the sense of the need to leave the island, that its confined space can feel limiting. Conversely, Goodison expresses immense pride in the islands of the Caribbean archipelago, which “have shared characteristics” (46).

Antonio Benítez-Rojo terms this Caribbean phenomenon one of repeating islands. For him, as for Goodison, there is a sense of connection in the region, conceived as “a cultural meta-archipelago without center and without limits” (*Repeating Island* 9). The

emergence of volcanic islands from the sea inspires Benítez-Rojo's theory, as he argues that the diversity of the Caribbean, alongside a chaotic and violent history of colonisation, have influenced understandings of islandness in the region, until "one can sense the features of an island that 'repeats' itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs" (3). These relations redraw maps of old, as Walcott does in his work, seeing a fiercely connected synaptic seascape of shared experiences. Each island space is open to the myriad of influences of the sea and these "common dynamics [...] express themselves in a more or less regular way within the chaos" (24). Indeed, Goodison's "engagement with the sheer beauty and the chaos" of Jamaica "drives a great deal of [her] work" (RG 44).

Yet, she also emphasises each island's uniqueness, having to "explain to students in North America that Caribbean island nations are far from being homogenous" (45-46). Indeed, within Benítez-Rojo's theory, there is space for variation due to an *almost* regular repetition across the islands. It is not, as Jonathan Pugh points out, an issue of "mimicry" (10). Rather, "island-island *movements* and middle passages are cognitive spaces of metamorphosis in their own right" (Pugh 10; emphasis in original). It is not only the fact of repeating islands across the archipelago but continued movement and interaction between these islands across the synaptic gap of the sea that defines the interconnected islandness of the Caribbean region. Thinking within and about the archipelago highlights "fluid island-island inter-relations rather than the binaries of mainland/island or sea/island" (Pugh 11). Goodison's outlook, that each island is unique, opposes a procrustean viewpoint prone to stereotyping islands, as is nascent in "My Island Like a Swimming Turtle". In "I-Land", her resistance goes further, presenting a range of views

on what it meant to her to live in Jamaica but also what islandness in the Caribbean signifies more generally.

Crucially, for Goodison, the act of writing is deeply connected to her island. It is in all the complexities and uncertainties of island life, “the point about being surrounded by water” (Goodison, *RG* 44), the lack of a sense of possibility, and pride in the island’s differences that she must find the crux of her work. Referencing the commitment of Jamaican musicians, such as Bob Marley, to singing out “Truth and Right”, Goodison posits that

this concern for justice is born out of an island mentality; you are there in this cut-off place, you might not be there of your own volition, but you are surrounded by the sea, marooned, so to speak, and you are going to have to stay there and actively try to work it out. I believe that is what I am also trying to do in my work. (46)²⁹

In the seclusion of an island and in the desire to do right in the world, Goodison finds the inspiration for her craft. As with Heaney’s “Parable Island”, it is during the island’s most demanding moments that the poet is forced to reckon with what islandness means and how to approach it in her work. Ultimately for Goodison, as with the other poets mentioned here, it is the turn towards the sea that is most helpful in cognising islandness without defining it in a way that serves to disempower. The sea surrounding the island is a reminder to be “constantly aware of this great force that cannot be controlled by humans” (Goodison, *RG* 47). It is “a force both benign and dangerous, it feeds you and it kills you and it is all around you” (47). These lines shift the poet’s concerns outwards in the direction of an element that is central to an island landscape but that allows for more fluid possibilities. Goodison’s poetry provides a personal perspective in a similar

²⁹ The resonances of Goodison’s title *Redemption Ground* with Marley’s most well-known song of “truth and right,” “Redemption Song”, should not go unnoticed here.

way to some of Walcott's poems, while at the same time remaining acutely aware of the literary, cultural and historic attributes that affect understandings of islandness. With deep consideration of her Jamaican home, she writes about islandness as an important aspect of her work. It is necessary for Goodison to engage with the dilemmas of being on an island because they reveal imaginative possibilities. For her, the island's boundaries have real implications but the recurring metaphor of the swimming turtle reveals a more shifting perspective. Moreover, these boundaries, as in the work of the other poets mentioned here, must be considered and even challenged. Realising that the island is surrounded by water is key to all of this as its presence should not be forgotten. It is the source of life and of death and as such holds power over her words.

For Walcott, who declares that poetry is an island, the island is undoubtedly a creative space. As in *Tiepolo's Hound*, the naming of the island becomes poetry in itself, delineating the island's edge. Yet, his poetry also demonstrates archipelagic thinking, attempting to connect the repeating islands of the Caribbean through a shared relationship to the sea and love of language. As Breiner remarks, "literary self-consciousness unfolds at different times in different islands" and yet "common external pressures induced sometimes strikingly parallel – though not simultaneous – patterns of cultural development across the board" (25). The pan-Caribbean archipelago remains a space of intense communication in many respects and despite linguistic differences, there exists deep communication across all sites. This is particularly evident in Walcott's "A Sea-Chantey", a poem from his first major collection, *In a Green Night*, where the islands are joined by "strait-stitching schooners [...] that thread archipelagoes" (Walcott, *PDW* 49). The poem traverses the islands of the Caribbean from Grenada to Anguilla and reflects, as other poems do, Walcott's "undying love for islands and people that has been a

constant throughout his career” (McWatt 1615). The islands are joined together through language as the speaker describes,

Anguilla, Adina,
Antigua, Cannelles,
Andreuille, all the I’s
Voyelles, of the liquid Antilles (Walcott, *PDW* 49)

The islands’ names begin to speak, creating a pan-Caribbean approach to island creativity. Walcott signals the connection that exists between the islands of the Caribbean and through poetic inter-island movement a creativity emerges that is specifically Caribbean in nature, as Benítez-Rojo and Pugh suggests above. Sea and land form part of this community of islands, connected by the sounds of a language, which although neither strictly indigenous nor chosen, are fiercely claimed by the poet nonetheless. Walcott, for example, recognises “the soft vowels of inlets”, “the titles of portages” and “the alphabet of church-bells” in his depiction of the archipelago (51). As in *Tiepolo’s Hound*, Goodison’s “I-Land” and Heaney’s “Station Island”, a sense of spirituality is found here as the islands are joined by “the rosary of archipelagoes” (51). The rosary in this poem represents a larger scale edge of creativity than in *Tiepolo’s Hound* whereby the beads are islands, rather than towns, and the string joins the Caribbean together in the sea. At the same time, however, these islands are various and, while they may share characteristics and a sense of creative impulses, they are also differentiated, for example “acrid Saint Maarten” or “stone-white Grenada” (Walcott, *PDW* 50, 51). It is in the thrice-repeated “amen of calm waters” (51) that Walcott finds a vision of an archipelagic islandness that is in itself a creative space. This spirituality is echoed in Goodison’s and Heaney’s island poetics. For Walcott, as with *Tiepolo’s Hound*, the connective sounds of the Caribbean islands place a poetic creativity at the interaction between land and sea,

which demonstrates the love Walcott expresses for his region. This dominance of archipelagic thinking in his work reveals a Caribbean locality that is complex, beautiful, painful and creative, one that is far removed from the island tropes that have romanticised the region in the past.

As with Goodison and Walcott, Ní Chuilleanáin sees the creative potential in considering the island. “More Islands” already demonstrates the important nature of the island’s communicative ability at the edge. In two poems, “The Last Glimpse of Erin” from *The Rose-Geranium* and “From Up Here” from *The Boys of Bluehill*, perspective is manipulated to establish routes towards poetic expression at the interaction between land and sea. “The Last Glimpse of Erin” is the only poem discussed here that mentions an island name in its title and although not repeated in the poem itself, it serves to locate the island as Ireland.³⁰ The poem introduces the reader to this shifting perspective early on, as the first stanza is a shifting scene of views: “The coastline, a swimmer’s polished shoulder heaving / On the edge of sky: our eyes make it grow: The last glimpse, low and smooth in the sea” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SP* 41). Like “More Islands”, the poem plays with size as the speaker follows the swimmer’s trajectory. The island is recognised as such only by its coastal edge and is once again related to the hard edge of a shoulder. The island is both glimpsed and also viewed long enough to let it grow, as the viewer attempts to understand it. In the poem, “surfaces flow together, uniting the speaker in a web of interconnectedness” (Glisenan Nordin, “Like a Shadow” 98) as “one long line is growing / like a spider’s navel cord” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SP* 41). There is a connectedness here that is reflective of Benítez-Rojo’s perspective, although Ní Chuilleanáin does not connect Ireland to other islands specifically. The cord begins to form a web that has “depths and

³⁰ It also calls to mind the Thomas Moore song of the same name. A lamenting tune, the song tells of an exile forced to leave the island.

cadences” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SP* 41), demonstrating that Ní Chuilleanáin’s island-perspective is an aesthetic one. Indeed, Katharina Walter suggests that the references to spiders and spiders’ webs in the poem reveal that the image of the island is “constructed and contingent like the precarious product of the spider’s subtle craft” (320). In the poem, the swimmer breaches the island edge. In doing so, his restlessness at the border reveals an island poetry that is invested in ideas of depth and musicality. Fully entering this creative sea-space, the final lines of the poem see that “The island trimmed with waves is lost in the sea, / The swimmer is lost in his dream” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SP* 41). Like the final dream in Heaney’s “Parable Island”, the swimmer’s reverie feels revelatory. In this transgression of boundaries, the island opens up its creativity to the poet, while also demonstrating the island’s connectivity.

Ní Chuilleanáin returns to an otherworldly perspective on the island in “From Up Here”, a poem that manipulates notions of perspective, boundaries and firmness as “Last Glimpse of Erin” does. The poem begins

The forest floats over the land,
the island slides across the sea;
they appear less firm than the shadow
cast by the plume of steam
voluminous over the power station. (Ní Chuilleanáin, *BB* 18)

The voice is at a high vantage point and from this viewpoint, it is clear that natural phenomena are behaving in ways that they would not normally. This new height prompts a reconsideration of things that seem to be stable, a feeling that continues across the first and second stanzas. The forest and island are no more fixed than the steam that comes from the power station and are equally moving and ungraspable. Just as the mountain in

“Parable Island” with its shifting names does not provide clarity, here, viewing the island from above does not aid the poet in an insight to islandness. In the poem, as with “More Islands”, it is the island’s lighthouse that provides a stable reference point and its beam extends across the whole island, just as Ní Chuilleanáin extends its light across the lines of stanza two and three.

speaking directly as the sun
to the eye it beckons, its brief
slanted tale of deep distance
surfacing for the instant: this
is real, it says. (Ní Chuilleanáin, *BB* 18)

The beam of light draws the viewer’s eye to it in attempted communication of its “slanted tale”. It is a tale that reveals the realities of the island. Implicitly, the beam shines light on the coast, calling the viewer to follow its light, and explicitly, the lexicon of time and space in these lines serves to widen out the momentary view. “Brief,” “slanted,” “deep distance,” “surfacing” and “instant” speak to the transitory nature of the light but at the same time its extension into spaces beyond what one can see and/or imagine. Yet, these lines lead the poet to conclude the scene’s reality. It is the light from the lighthouse that confirms this, in a similar way to the castaway’s fire in “More Islands”. In contrast to the surreal nature of the poem’s opening, these lines confront the island’s edge and look out towards the sea, allowing the poet to find some stability in the constantly shifting island. The poet’s interaction with the island’s edge confirms her authority to write both the surreal opening and also open up a sea-based time that prompts creativity. To her, both are real. As if answering the question she poses in the earlier poem sequence “The Skelligs” (note the island perspective again) “*and where is truth*” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *BB*

14; emphasis in original), “From Up Here” affirms that the island is real in its shifting nature and in the story-telling abilities it inspires. Thus, when Heaney asks to set the island story straight, Ní Chuilleanáin responds by presenting a moving island and a revelatory lighthouse at island’s edge that offers its tale to the poet.

In her treatment of islandness, Ní Chuilleanáin, like Heaney, makes reference to Ireland’s islandness but deals with questions of islandness more consistently throughout her oeuvre. Fear of definitions, an incomplete and shifting understanding of islandness and a view towards the sea characterise these poems. Moreover, the shining light in each poem speaks to the desire to communicate beyond the confines of the island. Thinking through the interaction between land and sea, her poems reveal islands to be creative spaces that are nonetheless replete with silence and most of all they demonstrate a tendency towards the sea as a space of possibility.

Leaving the Island: Poetry Sets Out to Sea

The island is a space of conjecture, argues Glissant, and the work of these poets confirm this belief. Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin, Walcott and Goodison are poets raised on islands and their work demonstrates a shared and continued exploration of the idea of islandness rather than any confirmed view of what this might mean. The remnants of various island discourses, from colonial to literary, shape general understandings of islandness and have influenced the work of the poets discussed here. This leads to an exploration of three interrelated facets of the island across their work: boundaries, edges and creativity.

The island’s boundaries and boundedness are features that Heaney, Walcott and Goodison touch on with colonial and neo-colonial histories in mind. For Heaney, Ireland’s violent relationship to its larger island neighbour is a factor in his consideration

of the island and Ireland, and the island's partition plays a significant role in this. Walcott too attempts to refute the colonial outlook that has devalued the islands of the Caribbean through archipelagic thinking that allows him to place his Caribbean within the world *ecumene*. Finally, Goodison shifts to a more contemporary setting to reflect the way in which an external gaze prone to stereotyping can fix the island and its inhabitants. In Goodison's and Walcott's cases, the bird's-eye and map view are important features that signal this boundedness. Yet, these poets do not blithely accept these boundaries and, instead, move to the island's edge to confront them, offering different perspectives. For Heaney and Walcott, the ability to circumscribe the island allows them to understand it better. For Walcott, this translates as a loving picture of his home, St Lucia. For Heaney, Station Island, while offering solace in that smaller island's wholeness, also reveals the continuing difficulty of seeing Ireland as a whole. Finally, Ní Chuilleanáin also moves to the island edge to understand an islandness that she acknowledges prompts fear. Significantly, at this edge, as theories on the island suggest, begins creativity. Walcott, Goodison and Ní Chuilleanáin all find inspiration to write their island and reflect its truth, recognising its imaginative possibilities.

While it is clear from the poems explored here that island life, whether on a divided or repeating, archipelagic island, is not without its anxieties – shifting names, shadows of history, feelings of isolation – island topography nonetheless prompts a generative set of values. In contrast to purely metaphorical or formulaic renderings of islands detailed in the first section of this chapter, these four poets write about islands with a deep recognition of their actuality; their conjectural nature, the hybridity of the Caribbean, the division of Ireland. The tension Deleuze identifies between what an island is and the desire to forget this, as well as the different valences of oceanic versus continental islands, are felt uniquely in the work of these poets. In this way, the neurons

of the synaptic sea are already charged with the debates and innovations of islandness, waiting to release these impulses into the synaptic gap and also accept back the blurred and redefined impulses present in the sea.

As the island is a creative space, by writing about islands, these poets also touch on their vision of poetry, reflecting that, as Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel note, literary conceptions of the island “can unfold [...] on a textual level by turning the insular into a structural feature hinting at specific re-conceptions of (linguistic) islands through aesthetic constructions or referring to the process of writing itself” (299). Returning to the title of this chapter, Walcott’s suggestion that poetry is an island, these poets’ interaction with islandness, which increasingly moves towards the island’s creativity, reveals much about their conceptions of poetry and the work they do. For Heaney, the challenges that political and linguistic complexities present are remedied through the potential of truth found in language, even if this ultimate truth is never achieved. Ní Chuilleanáin’s work finds in the inability to understand islands the liberation of listening and communicating through arcane language that forces the reader to shift and change perspective. Walcott’s work on islands indicates a poetics of love of language, as his poetry continuously works to match places, ideas and things with apposite language through well-crafted verse. Finally, for Goodison, it is the island life which inspires the ethics of her poetry as a search for what is right. Thus, these poets’ islands become islands of poetry, breaking away from easily defined poetics to both create and challenge.

As they continue to break away, their poetry moves out from the island-neuron towards the synaptic sea. In almost all critical and creative work mentioned in this chapter, it is sea that recurs most often as an indicator of islandness. In a similar way, it is the neuron’s relationship to the synaptic gap that defines its function. The space where land meets water is a feature of all the poems analysed here. As these poets try to

understand their conjectural surroundings, they move out towards the sea, finding in its synaptic flux and fluidity a space that inspires their poetry and prompts unique ways of seeing and writing the world.

CHAPTER TWO

Sea Craft: The Watery Poetics of Ireland and the Caribbean

*I have seen it over and over, the same sea,
[...]
It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
drawn from the cold hard mouth
of the world, derived from the rocky breasts
forever, flowing and drawn, and since
our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown.*

(Elizabeth Bishop, "At the Fishhouses" 63-4)

The synaptic sea is a space of literature with its own poetics. It bestows to poets a method of writing that is influenced by the ebbs and flows of the disruptive waves. Just as Heaney, Walcott, Ní Chuilleanáin and Goodison contemplate the permeable border between sea and land on the island space, they also turn to that more unknowable element, the sea, to conceive of their poetic craft. Likewise, poetry is itself considered a disruptive act, as the poet "wants to make language perceive what it doesn't want to say" (Kristeva, *Desire* 31). In the synaptic sea's surface and depth, proximity and distance, calm and storms, these poets recognise their own interaction with language. Although little discussed, these poets' contact with the sea and water is an important element of their writing processes. This chapter explores the ways in which the sea is a site of poetry and of poetic development for Ní Chuilleanáin, Goodison, Heaney and Walcott and how each poet's work progresses and matures through an interaction with the sea.

Critical work in this area varies in relation to the four poets examined here. It is in Walcott's work that a sea poetics has been more readily identified, with the resulting situation of an emergent body of work on the topic. For Pocock Boeninger, Walcott's sea is "a fluid site for the Caribbean artist to create both individual art and a shared sense of

cultural identity” (“I” 490). Lara Cahill-Booth further suggests that his “poetic ethos has been shaped by his immersion in the seascapes of the Caribbean” (348). From early on, his poetry displays a sustained interest in a sea-inspired poetic voice. This work on Walcott is crucial in directing approaches to the other poets of this thesis, as critical attention to the sea in their poetry has been less sustained. That is not to say, however, that the presence of the sea and/or water in the poetry of Heaney, Goodison and Ní Chuilleanáin has gone unnoticed. Rather, it is often more obliquely referenced, with critical work in this area best described as uneven. For example, with a tenuous reference to water, Goodison’s poetry is described as invoking “a fluid polyphonic voice” (deCaires Narain, “Delivering the Word” 435). More obviously, certain of Ní Chuilleanáin’s poems map issues “onto the ocean, [...] lines are diffused into indistinguishable moving waves” (Meaney 112), as the sea becomes a space in which to write and rewrite. Finally, moving away from the sea, water in Heaney is “a metaphor for changing states and liquidity a mode of transition, the many varieties of rain one sign of the writer’s flexibility in writing about place” (Allen, “Seamus” 174). Whether fluid, liquid, at one with the waves, or inspired by rain, the work of poetry undertaken by these four poets has a relationship with water and critics have begun to take this into account in their examinations.

While attempting to reveal the ways in which the sea influences the poetic craft of these writers, the connections that link these four poets becomes evident. Throughout this chapter, the poets’ own conception of the writing process and their attitudes towards their craft are explored. That is to say, it is not only the poetry itself that illuminates the importance of water and the sea in their work, but also the prose and non-fiction writing in which they contemplate what it is to write. The chapter begins by asserting that, to paraphrase Walcott, the sea is literary, as the links between the sea and poetry, in particular, are established. This meta-textual investigation turns to conceptions of the sea

and poetry as spaces of freedom, which enable new perspectives to emerge. The outlook of this work is informed by the synaptic sea, which contains multitudinous impulses that are defined and blurred in the waves, received by the poets on their shifting island spaces. Following this, the chapter examines the work of each poet and the implicit and sometimes explicit ways that the sea is presented as a space of poetry. Building on the work of previous critics, it describes the various ways in which these island poets not only write about the sea but also attempt to write with the element, to find in its currents a sustaining method for writing about their contemporary moment and environment.

The Freedom of Poetry and the Freedom of the Seas

The sea, as Bishop writes above, is “utterly free”, offering language and knowledge, “drawn from the cold hard mouth / of the world”. In turning attention to writing the sea, it is important to note that the link between the elemental sea and language has been made in various domains. Notably, Carmen Balzer uses the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty to argue that “the sea is already a language in a certain sense” (174). Balzer argues that Merleau-Ponty’s conception of nature points towards “the solidarity existing between what is expressed by the language of the sea, or nature, and that which the poet says about them” (174).³¹ Due to our distanced interaction with the element, “The silent language of the extralinguistic signs of the sea” (Balzer 175) may be imbued although it is not entirely comprehended. Yet, for Bishop and for Balzer, the sea’s freedom contains a silent language, one not overtly detectable but rather revealed through an immersion in the synaptic sea’s signs. These signs resonate with poets, as seen in both

³¹ Balzer bases her understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological encounter with nature on the work of Theodore F. Garaets. Garaets evokes “the truly original contribution of Merleau-Ponty who conceived of nature as demanding the human being’s total response” (Balzer 174).

the primary material of this thesis and the epigraphs of each chapter. Elsewhere, Auden's *The Enchaféd Flood* makes a case for the centrality of the sea to Romantic era poets (2). These connections are found across poetry and have also been observed in both Irish and Caribbean writing. For example, Lucy Collins notes that, "For contemporary Irish poets in particular, the representation of marine environments calls attention to the organic nature of language and to its capacity for endless imaginative recreation" (175-6). In a similar manner, Maeve Tynan remarks on Caribbean poets' use of "aquatic models and metaphors" to examine both cultures of origin and the "creative interaction" between all cultures in the region (152). Clearly, the sea has not only a strong relationship to language and literature generally but also a specific link to writing from Ireland and the Caribbean. The sea has a language that has attracted poets across time and places. It has inspired, and continues to do so, imaginative thinking and creative approaches to language.

For these island poets, water is a constant presence and, as sociologist Franco Cassano notes in his 1996 work *Il Pensiero meridiano* (translated to English in 2012 as *Southern Thought*), "the sea gives itself freely to all" (11). For Cassano, this openness results in a site that stands apart from the world as it is. He continues, "Rather than being a commodity, rather than being for us, the sea is for itself, it is a different form of life" (12). The sea comes to embody a knowledge with which we are perhaps unfamiliar, teaching these poets a craft that stands outside of land-based knowledge. It is an unpredictable element and it is for this reason that Cassano sees it as exempt from prevailing commodity culture. For Cassano, "the opening in the horizon caused by the sea ensures [...] that no knowledge can be condensed to one final thought, and no power can become fixed in the immobility of personal ownership" (19). The disruptive sea opens up a freedom and a way of being that is constantly reconstituted. As the introduction to this thesis indicated, the synaptic sea does not offer resolution and cannot

be owned or possessed by an individual. Its powers are open to all. As such, Cassano's suggestion that the sea is not a commodity is an attractive one, particularly when viewing the sea as a site of poetic learning.

Poetry has similarly been viewed as a space of freedom, with particular attention to the role poetry plays in a commodified world.³² Like Cassano's vision of the sea, poetry stands outside of a commodity culture and presents challenges to single, unified interpretations, personal ownership and commodification. Charles Bernstein argues in "The Dollar Value of Poetry" that writing is "an instance broken off from and hence not in the service of this economic and cultural – social – force called capitalism" (492). For him, poetry is "an experience (released in reading) which is non-commoditized, that is where the value is not dollar value (and hence transferable and instrumental) but rather, what is from the point of view of the market, no value (a negativity, inaudible, invisible)" (429). Language is used in such a way that it resists the impositions of the capitalist world. In poetry, it provides neither neat nor unified meaning and as such does not translate into dollar value. In denying that poetry has a monetary value, Bernstein's work echoes the earlier work of Cleanth Brooks who argues against

the heresy of paraphrase. If we allow ourselves to be misled by it, we distort the relation of the poem to its "truth," we raise the problem of belief in a vicious and crippling form, we split the poem between its "form" and its "content" [...] In short, we put our questions about the poem in a form calculated to produce the battles of the last twenty-five years over the "use of poetry". (184-85)

³² Poetry offers freedom in its disruptive abilities, with Kristeva suggesting that "a (any) society may be stabilised only if it excludes poetic language" (*Desire* 31). This resonates with Deleuze's assertion in the previous chapter that island stability is obtained by forgetting the sea's relationship to the island, a fact that the poets of this thesis, nevertheless, confront in their work. Yet, it is also important to note, that this poetic freedom can come with a cost. For his/her attempt to write a disruptive language the poet has, across history, been "put to death" (Kristeva, *Desire* 31).

To suggest that poetry has a specified use is to place it within the commodified world that Bernstein rejects. In this instance, it can be codified, instrumentalised and hence valued monetarily. Yet for Brooks, as for Bernstein, poetry cannot be easily commodifiable as it cannot be ascribed one ultimate truth. In its use of language and particular relationship between form and content, poetry presents an alternate way of living and of understanding the world. Bernstein and Brooks envisage poetry as a literary genre that allows for an experience that is freed from the restrictive controls of a capitalist economy. As Eli MacLaren puts it, “an anti-commercial attitude seems essential to poetry [...]. No amount of money can guarantee the creation of a good poem. No economic inquiry can ever really get at what it is” (14). This could similarly be said of the sea, as no economic inquiry can really provide a complete understanding of what the sea is.

However, there is a danger here of presenting a utopic view of both the sea and of poetry. Rightly, MacLaren continues by pointing out that, in spite of denunciations of capitalism made by those such as Bernstein, poets require an income and he emphasises the importance of financial security in order to write poetry (14). The poem itself may not be a commodity but poetry has its position in the marketplace and must do so in order for poets to continue writing. Similarly, Cassano cautions against placing too much hope in the sea’s freedom, which for him always poses “the risk of nihilism” (36). If the ocean allows the total freedom of thought, identity, and being, then “pluralism becomes an incurable relativism, whereby the coexistence between those who are different becomes universal extraneousness and uprooting” (36). In such a space of chaotic relativism, no substantial interaction of ideas can occur. It becomes impossible to find commonalities if constant flux is not conceived of in a communicable way. Elsewhere, the English translators of *Southern Thought*, Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme, point out that Cassano is attentive to the dangers of the sea’s total freedom, noting how this sense of

freedom has led to Western colonial and neo-colonial policies (xv).³³ In a contemporary setting, a reliance on the sea-as-freedom model is also problematic. The passage where the notion that the sea is not a commodity is introduced argues that, despite attempts to commercialise the seaside through construction, attractions and management of the sea, the ocean remains of and for itself, open to all who wish to experience its waters (Cassano 11-12). Nevertheless, more than 90% of the world's trade is moved via sea (UN), while DeLoughrey has highlighted the increasing "militarization of the ocean" ("Heavy Waters" 23). In this way, the sea may give itself freely to all but it may not be accessed freely by all in return. Thus, it is not the case that the sea and poetry are totally separate from dominant economic ideals. They both, to various degrees, form part of the capitalist system. The straightforward way in which Cassano views the sea as a non-commodity prompts this reflection, as Blum cautions against "The ready availability – and undeniable utility – of fluidity as an oceanic figure" ("Prospect" 670). The realities of the sea must be taken into account in order to fully approach and understand it.

Nonetheless, it seems the sea – like poetry – still retains a resistant element. While it is a part of the capitalist sphere and has a role in the world of commodities, the fundamentals of Cassano's argument remain pertinent. The synaptic sea continues to (re)present a different form of life and living. As the introduction explored, the sea is viewed as a space that has human and non-human elements, which can be reconstituted and reinterpreted but it remains distanced from the human world and by extension a system of capital and commodity. The sea can and, indeed, must be viewed from a multiplicity of angles. If scholars are to appreciate the ocean, they must approach it as a forceful space that is constantly regenerated by our encounters with it. In this way, the

³³ Here, it could be suggested that Cassano also anticipates the exploitation of the sea seen in practices such as offshore drilling (Cordes and Levin 719) in the capitalist system, although it is not something he addresses directly.

sea can be taken both, as Cassano suggests, in its own unknowability and anti-capitalist position, as well as an often highly militarised space that is also central to commercialism. In a similar way, poetry is neither wholly divorced from the marketplace and indeed, for poets who wish to continue writing, this must be the case. Nonetheless, a contemplation of both the sea and poetry allows for an alternate experience of the world around. On the whole, poetry is rarely written explicitly for commercial gain. Similarly, the sea, while a space of commerce, also has the potential to disrupt a commodity economy. In this way, the synaptic sea and poetry overlap in ways beyond those mentioned at the outset of this section in that they are spaces of new thought, resistance and continued reconstitution.

These commonalities become important to a discussion of the role the synaptic sea's impulses have to play in the writing process of the four poets under discussion here. Both the sea and poetry are sites of freedom, which offer a way of thinking that may resist the constraints of a commodity culture and capitalist world. Although neither should be read as entirely separate from these ideas, there is potential in poetic writing with and of the sea to produce new perspectives and approaches. Beginning with Walcott's work, the following sections explore the relationship between the sea and the writing processes of these poets, keeping in mind the resistant and complex nature of both the sea and poetry. In turn, this work becomes the basis for the thesis' subsequent three chapters, as the sea poetics revealed here provide a way to think through the major concepts of the nation, gender, and time and myth.

Walcott: "what else is there / but books, books and the sea?"

Walcott's poetry has been characterised as attempting to both write the sea and write with the sea. He is attentive to the language of the sea that Balzer identifies through Merleau-

Ponty's work and his work engages with the local Caribbean environment, endeavouring to write with it as he also represents its actuality. Discussing his poetics in the 1973 essay "Isla Incognita", Walcott declares, "The noise my leaves make is my language. In it is tunneled the roar of seas of a lost ocean. It is a fresh sound. Let me not be ashamed to write like this, because it supports this thesis that our only true apprehensions are through metaphor" (57). Several elements of these lines merit discussion as key terms from this statement appear time and again in Walcott's verse and in the consideration of his poetics. At the outset, there is a deliberate focus on the sounds of the island and, in particular, the seascape. These sounds are his poetic language. In asking for a shameless attitude towards his way of writing, Walcott recognises that poetry has not traditionally been found in these Caribbean sound- and seascapes. Nevertheless, his commitment to his belief in metaphor must outweigh these literary expectations. Indeed, as explored in the introduction, Lakoff and Johnson note metaphor's power as a tool with which to reason out human practices. By likening his process to the sounds of the seascape, Walcott confirms the centrality of the coastal environment to the poetic effect of his work. His craft must be approached with metaphorization in mind. Poetry becomes the sea and the sea becomes poetry, as neither can be understood on its own.

Moreover, Walcott's poetry, as it writes with the sea, also acknowledges that that very same sea has been co-opted by the tourist industry, images of its blues and greens packaged and sold around the world as a key attraction of the region. He levels criticism against the homogenising effects of Caribbean tourism, which imagines "the Caribbean [as] a blue pool" (WTS 81). For him, "This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves" (81). Unlike the shame he attempts to shake from his writing, this "shame of necessity" is a tangible economic need for many of the island. When Walcott asks to be unashamed of his poetics, his endeavour is to write the truth of the islands,

unencumbered by these images. The counter to this attempt to present the region as a paradise of blue seas, for Walcott, is to affirm that “there is a territory wider than this – wider than the limits made by the map of an island – which is the illimitable sea and what it remembers” (82). This sea, for Walcott as for the other poets discussed here, is one which challenges commercial attempts to render it a flat, blue surface, sold as an attractive feature of the region. Instead, it bestows a poetics, which, like poetry itself, cannot be easily commodified or utilised for commercial gain.

These sentiments are evident from early on in Walcott’s career and in “Islands” from *In a Green Night*, the desire to write with the sea is made explicit in this poem, which also reflects back on the island poetics of the previous chapter. His poetic mission, he declares, is

[...] to write

Verse as crisp as sand, clear as sunlight,

Cold as the curled wave, ordinary

As a tumbler of island water. (Walcott, *PDW* 54)

Walcott explicitly outlines his poetics as a style that attempts to find its language in the sea around him. Importantly, this language already exists and it is the poet’s wish to reproduce it; the sand is crisp verse, the sunlight and the wave, clear, cold poetics. His work seeks to unify with the poetry of the environment. In this way, it is clear why metaphor is so central to Walcott’s conception of his poetry. His verse is not “like” the environment, it *is* his seascape. As Rowan Ricardo Phillips observes, “Walcott frequently turns objects of nature and the very landscape of his surroundings into metaphors of print, writing and erasure” (122). Similarly, writing here is seen through metaphors of nature,

a symbiotic relationship existing between both the coastal space and the act of writing. The sea, for Walcott, is a literary force (St. John 1024).

The sea enters into a relationship with his poetry, as Walcott seeks to write in a way that unifies the literary and the marine. Maria Del Carmen Quintero Aguilo views this interaction in *Omeros* in terms of Brathwaite's tidalectic relationship between land and sea. Aguilo suggests,

Not only is the poem a tidalectic between land, sea, and beach, it is also a parallel tidalectic between nature and culture with the beach once again serving as the synthesis between these seeming opposites. The sea serves as the poetic embodiment of nature and its relationship to the land – in this case culture – finally to hit landfall on the beach where both realms are reconciled and reconfigured.

(3)

While there is merit in her assertion that the sea is a space of poetry, the way in which she views the beach – and by extension the poem – as reconciling a nature/culture binary through tidalectics presents some difficulties. Firstly, Aguilo problematically reinforces this binary by suggesting that the sea *is* nature and land *is* culture and this formulation fails to recognise that the sea is also a cultural space for Walcott. As seen above, the sounds and poetics of the sea and beach become part of the textual world of Walcott's poetry, suggesting that nature and culture are not so much opposites but inform one another in turn. Secondly, related to this is Aguilo's use of tidalectics to describe what she characterises as a synthesis between a binary rather than a continual engagement with nature and culture through poetry and the sea. Her ideas point towards the beach as a resolved synthesis rather than a space of engagement. Finally, the sea and poetry seem in service to something else here, which the disruptive synaptic sea is not. For her, the sea

represents poetry rather than an interaction characterised by metaphor as Walcott desires. Poetry also becomes the synthesis of the divide rather than a thing in its own right. Aguilo's argument contrasts ideas of the sea and poetry that underpin this chapter and the thesis as a whole and serves to present both as utilities, symbolic representations of nature and culture rather than metaphoric interactions. This attempt to create a singular meaning is a feature of the landed, commodity-based world Cassano critiques. Similarly, Walcott's poetry endeavours to form a more symbiotic than oppositional relationship between poetry and the impulses of the synaptic sea.

This is particularly evident in the long, autobiographical poem, *Another Life*, first published in 1973, the same year as his "Isla Incognita" essay. The writing process is envisioned as beginning in the sea itself from the opening lines.

Verandas, where the pages of the sea
are a book left open by an absent master
in the middle of another life –
I begin here again,
begin until this ocean's
a shut book, and like a bulb
the white moon's filaments wane. (Walcott, *PDW* 122)

This opening stanza affirms Ben Thomas Jefferson's assertion that "Walcott's poetry is not only created in the sea, it is also created *of* the sea" (291; emphasis in original). The sea is a book. It has been written upon and about but it allows for a re-beginning – the "begin here *again*" (emphasis added) – and is cyclical in its motions. The moon becomes the writing desk's lamp in this scene as the act of writing is located in the sea. The importance of this image is emphasised as these lines reappear in the penultimate section

of the poem's final chapter, slightly modified: "I looked from old verandas at / verandas, sails, the eternal summer sea / like a book left open by an absent master" (Walcott, *PDW* 192). The reappearance of these lines signals the cyclical nature of the synaptic sea at the same time that the verandas, as well as the poet himself, are ageing. The use of the word "master" at this poem's opening intimates the island's colonial history. Yet, upon the lines' return the master is still absent, making the term less loaded, reflecting the ebbing past. These repeated lines do not so much present a synthesis of a nature-culture divide but rather allow both elements to exist in tandem in the sea. The sea goes on regardless of the presence of the book, yet the book still exists within the sea and, so too, in some ways feels eternal. This is mirrored by the final lines of *Omeros*. A work in which the poet-narrator declares, "the love I was good at seemed to have been only // the love of my craft and nature" (Walcott, *O* 241), *Omeros* is attentive to the combination of language and landscape. Thus, it is fitting that the poem should end with one of the main characters, Achille, on the beach, with the final line reading, "When he left the beach, the sea was still going on" (325). For the poet, the sea and the text are the essentials, highlighted in *Another Life* by the questions posed towards the end of the text:

[...] what else is there
but books, books and the sea,
verandas and the pages of the sea,
to write of the wind and the memory of wind-whipped hair
in the sun, the color of fire? (Walcott, *PDW* 188-89)

The world of the poet is one of seascapes and text, as in *Omeros*, and these two are combined throughout the poem. This deep connection displayed across Walcott's oeuvre between his poetics and his surroundings can be characterised by the lines from "Exile", in which the poet describes his younger self's coming to poetry as the moment when "a

world began to pass / through your pen's eye" (Walcott, *PDW* 92). There is a sense of unity here as the language of his milieu becomes the text of his poem, flowing through his pen.

This commitment to a sea poetics is evident throughout Walcott's career and can be seen even in the final poem of his last collection, *White Egrets*. In the poem, titled only as "54" in the collection's sequence, the speaker proclaims, "This page is a cloud between whose fraying edges / a headland with mountains appears brokenly" (Walcott, *PDW* 606). The page has a direct relationship with the clouds that give way to the "grooved sea / the whole self-naming islands" (606). The sea may not be the pages here but readers of Walcott are well-enough acquainted with the imagery to sense a relationship. Approaching the town, "its streets [grow] closer like print you can read", as the poem's final lines reveal the whole scene to be part of a textual world: "a cloud slowly covers the page and it goes / white again and the book comes to a close" (606). If the poet's desire in *Another Life* is to begin "until this ocean's / a shut book", he seems to achieve a finality in this last poem. With the last rhyming couplet of goes/close, Walcott suggests a completion of a body of work. Yet, this finality of work does not equate to a finality of meaning. Walcott's poetics capture his world with a freedom and precision of language that is drawn from the environment, and in particular, the sea around; his collections are populated with settings that he sees as text. The sea that teaches in *In a Green Night* returns in *White Egrets* to close his career and affirm the role of sea-based metaphors in his work.

This is not to suggest that all textual renderings of the sea are the stuff of poetry, as Walcott is attentive to colonial hydrophasia. A notable example comes from a scene in *Omeros* whereby the speaker describes the fact-recording of the retired British officer living in St Lucia, Major Plunkett. "The factual fiction / of textbooks pamphlets,

brochures [...] flattening an ocean to paper diagrams” (Walcott, *O* 95). Here, the sea is not living text but rather something to be circumscribed, crossed and mapped out. This text is imposed on the sea rather than drawn from the language of the space. Thus, Walcott recognises attempts to control, commodify and constrict the sea in service of the human. Such processes do not capture the pages of the sea, the crisp, clean poetry of the poet’s Caribbean. Instead they flatten and obscure the truth Walcott finds through metaphor in his art. For, as Paul Breslin notes, in *Another Life*, it is the speaker’s painter friend – named Gregorias in the poem – who is valorised at the end of the collection.³⁴ “He is the hero of the poem because he sustains an art (and by his example, a poetry as well) grounded in St Lucia” (188). Although Walcott has grappled with his own poetic role in relation to his home, he clearly values an art that comes from the environment around, finding a poetics throughout his career that writes not simply about but with the seascapes around him.³⁵ Metaphor links the sea and poetry for him and he continues to explore this from his earliest poems to the last poem of his final collection.

Ní Chuilleanáin: “This water music ransacked my mind”

From her early work, Ní Chuilleanáin explicitly engages with an aesthetic influenced by the sea and water. Her poetry is interested in obscurity, creating “a space for the expression of a language of the tacit and the unsaid” (Faragó 80). The sea is an apposite space for the expression of what is arcane in the work that Ní Chuilleanáin produces. As the poet herself notes, her writing of a specifically woman’s poetry is particularly

³⁴ The character in the poem is based on Walcott’s real-life friend and painter, Garth St. Omer.

³⁵ Walcott was often conscious of the danger of romanticising the Caribbean in his work and, as Breslin notes, the “tension between the desire to keep the island’s cultural integrity and the recognition that, after all, much of that culture is rooted in poverty, and that to resist development for aesthetic reasons is dangerously close to wanting the ‘folk’ as a romantic backdrop” (187-88).

interested in “borderlands [...] which overlap intriguingly” (“Borderlands” 37). Her writing’s link with a fluid language is clear, with Aidan O’Malley suggesting that both water and the sea are often fundamental to Ní Chuilleanáin’s poetry (185). As with Walcott, seawater grips her poetic imagination and it communicates through its own language.

In Ní Chuilleanáin’s first collection, the fluidic elements of her work can be readily detected. The many watery poems of *Acts & Monuments* speak to an island-centric, liquid vision of the world. As the poet comes to find her voice, it is to “the twilight sea travelling past / Uneasy still” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 14) that she turns in “Letter to Pearse Hutchinson”. Here, the speaker finds that the freedom of the sea is inescapable.

This water music ransacked my mind
And started it growing again in a new perspective
And like the sea that burrows and soaks
In the swamps and crevices beneath
Made a circle out of good and ill. (14)

The sea’s music, as with the poetry Walcott uncovers there in his work, has an inevitable hold over the poet here. Just as Walcott seeks to write his seascape without shame, Ní Chuilleanáin is stimulated by the sea’s sounds. This “water music” allows the poet to see from a new perspective, as a pervasive and upheaving melody finds its way into her poetry from an early stage. The poetry itself mirrors the sea’s releasing, circular movements with the poet concluding in the final, stand-alone, one-line stanza, “Do not expect to feel so free on land” (14). The sea offers freedom in writing but also freedom to inhabit the world as she wishes, while this total freedom of the sea music cannot be confined by land-based ideas of value.

The linking of language and sea continues throughout this first collection, allowing her to find in its depths the depths of language. In “The Second Voyage”, a poem that tells of Odysseus’ return home, the sea becomes a mutable, creative space. As a sailor, Odysseus is drawn to the sea, “the profound / Unfenced valleys of the ocean” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 20). The sea remains open to him, unlike the pastoral, controlled and ordered landscape to which he returns. The poem subverts this pastoral demand to dominate the environment by emphasising the speaker’s link to his seafaring life. It becomes his point of reference when attempting to map the land, telling his oar, “I’ll plant you for a gatepost or hitching-post / And leave you as a tidemark” (20). The synaptic sea encroaches on the local and is the dominant space of this poem, as in its depths is hidden a long literary history.

Notably, the creativity that comes through in the sea is reflected in the language Ní Chuilleanáin uses to describe it. The archaic phrasing used to illustrate Odysseus’ experience at sea – “The sea was still frying under the ship’s side” (*AM* 20) – finds resonance with a passage from Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*.

Ye might have seen the frothy billowes fry
Under the ship, as thorough them she went,
That seemd the waves were into yvory,
Or yvory into the waves were sent (Spenser 210).

Read in the context of Renaissance literature, “fry” can be defined as “Of water: To be agitated, boil, seethe, foam” (OED, def. 5a). The resemblance of Ní Chuilleanáin’s phrasing to Spenser’s is striking. In Spenser’s poem, the sea makes it difficult to distinguish the waves that seem like ivory. Like Walcott, who emphasises the sea’s metaphors, Spenser accentuates the sea’s disorientating powers. In a similar way, Ní

In the simmering sea where scribbles of weed defined
Uncertain depth, and the slim fishes progressed
In fatal formation, and thought

If there was a single

Streak of decency in these waves now, they'd be ridged
Pocked and dented with the battering they've had,
And we could name them as Adam named the beasts. (Ní
Chuilleanáin, *AM* 20)

Accordingly, Odysseus displays a demiurgic desire to name the waves and sea in a postlapsarian world. For Sheila Conboy, the sea “emphasises the folly of man’s attempt to rule the world” and as such exhibits a feminine power (69). Conboy reasons that the

final image of Odysseus considering domesticated visions of water, such as fountains and boiling kettles, which order the world, presents “clear parallels to the way Adam exerts his control through naming or the way men insist on power over women” (69). While the sea has been viewed as feminine, and this trope is explored in greater detail in chapter four, that the sea is distinctly feminine in this poem is questionable. Conboy cites the poet’s description of “the ruffled foreheads of the waves” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 20) as an invocation of the feminine (69). While ruffles may be considered feminine, the subtle gendered connotations of this word do not seem enough to call Ní Chuilleanáin’s sea here feminine, especially given the historical and more unambiguous association of the sea with femininity. While Conboy’s argument about patriarchal culture as a whole and her interpretation of the Adamic impulse to name are worthy, they perhaps over-interpret the subtleties of Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem. As women remain absent from “The Second Voyage”, discerning Odysseus’ attitude towards them is mere supposition. Particularly, the implication that the category of “women” would be included in his desire to name “beasts” assumes too much of the poem’s protagonist. Rather naming becomes a way to order, a strategy to recognise the chaotic sea, to return to an ordered world of commodities with “the sugarstick of water clattering into the kettle” that appears in the final stanza (Ní Chuilleanáin *AM* 21). However, for all the order that Conboy suggests Odysseus desires, it is his ineluctable link to the sea that is foregrounded at the poem’s end. Odysseus realises that he cannot be master of the sea’s language, it will always remain at a distance from him as the synaptic sea resists unity and resolution. Instead, he relinquishes himself to its power and freedom, as “his face grew damp with tears that tasted / Like his own sweat or the insults of the sea” (21). The poem recognises a desire for linguistic order at the same time that the sea’s freedom reflects a potent but opaque linguistic force.

Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry delves deeper into water music as her career progresses, discovering the origins of language itself in many watery spaces, which are linked to the sea. This coming to language and to poetry is not an easy process, as described in "Incipit Hodie" from *The Boys of Bluehill*. In this poem, dedicated to Ní Chuilleanáin's grandson, language and water are brought together to provide a new way of communicating, not just for the child learning to speak but also for the poet and her writing. That the poem deals with language and poetry is clear early on; not only does the Latin title (the translation of which is "starting today") contribute to a linguistic mix but also the word *incipit* is used in English to refer to "the beginning or first words or lines of a treatise or poem" (OED). The watery poetics of this poem incubate language in the stream, where water also begins its journey to sea. "When you fell into our language / like a fish into water, / no wonder you were blinded by the splash you made" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *BB* 12). The reversed expression, "fish into water", paradoxically contributes to a sense of homeliness in language and a harmonious relationship with the language of the water. Although not a specifically marine setting, this inchoate language at the ocean's source speaks to the water music that permeated Ní Chuilleanáin's work in *Acts & Monuments*. Once again, it is a water and a language that is described with trepidation, the music "ransacked" the poet's mind in the earlier poem, while here, the splash of water blinds the poem's protagonist. Although the adults of the poem "wiped [their] eyes" after the splash, the speaker sees that for the child "it took longer" (12). Yet, the fall into the stream is a fall that must happen – not unlike The Fall of mankind – in order to bring the child into language, just as a fish needs water to survive. In this way, language becomes essential to survival, its value is fundamental to life.

As the poem progresses, the speaker contemplates how the child will come to understand the watery language around him:

How were you supposed
to grasp the water's flow?
But look, those flourishes are pebbles and fish.
Fish are slipping away
the water is clear and still;
when you reach for the words they will be hard like pebbles in
your hand. (Ní Chuilleanáin, *BB* 12).

The water that blinded the child in the first stanza seems impossible to grasp and the poet is aware of the task ahead of the child – a task with which she is familiar as a wordsmith. Accordingly, Ní Chuilleanáin's advice is to devote attention to the flourishes in the water, as Odysseus does in "The Second Voyage". Language is only seized by reaching into the originary waters of the stream and finding there the formed and defined pebbles. Like the child, the poet must discover and investigate the round, defined pebble-like words, feeling them in her hand. Only then can they take their place in the watery flow of poetry's language. At the same time, like the pebbles of the stream, the words form part of the flow of language and the stream's flourishes are independent of what the child or poet attempts to do with them. This suggests both a watery autonomy, which Cassano identifies in the sea, and also the poem's autonomy beyond even the poet herself.

Although Ní Chuilleanáin insists that "water has no memory" (*SP* 22) in an early poem, the communicative abilities that it holds make it a repository for our words. In "A Bridge Between Two Counties" from *The Sun-fish*, the link between water, words and remembrance is made clear. Recalling the words spoken by a friend at her own sister's funeral, Ní Chuilleanáin writes,

[...] So her words
Floated out on the water consonants

Hardly visible in the mist of vowels

Melting and the scatter of foam

Like the pebble damage

On a sheet of strong glass. (*SF* 13)

Water here helps the poet to reflect her mindset at her sister's funeral, capturing the words her friend spoke even if they do not appear whole. At the funeral, the words spoken are intended to function as solace but Ní Chuilleanáin's poem demonstrates the ineffectiveness of this. Instead, once again, words are related to hard, round pebbles which mark the water even though the precise vowels and consonants dissolve in the moment. It seems as though the water forgets. Yet, the stanza's more permanent image of damaged glass suggests that something may remain; that something may be the poet's attempt to write this poem at all. Indeed, the fact that her friend's words are reproduced in the poem "*She will live / Forever in my memory*" (13; emphasis in original) seems an attempt to capture those dissolving letters that disrupt the water's foam and damage the glass. While the water here is not explicitly that of the sea, the foam is suggestive of tidal movement and recalls not only the water cycle's advance towards the sea but also Ní Chuilleanáin's position on an island, which often must contend with the sea in one way or another. Nevertheless, this poem, once again, displays the deep links between the waters surrounding an island poet and language.

Goodison: “be measured / blue measured”

As seen in the previous chapter, Goodison is open about her writing process and the relationship between writing and the sea appears at various points alongside several other impulses that direct her work. Indeed, her voice has been characterised as fluid partly because of the many influences on her poetry. It is worth noting, however, the practice of “grounding” – a word perhaps contradictory to the watery poetics described thus far. For Christian Campbell, Goodison’s multi-voiced, code-switching poetry can be easily read alongside ideas of grounding:

Goodison always insists on grounding her work in Jamaican Creole and Dread Talk – “ground” refers to land, yard and home, and “grounding” refers to an informal gathering of Rastafarians or “sufferers” to “reason” with each other. [...] In that vein, Goodison’s grounding work has to do with consistently using inventive formal strategies in order to make her subject matter her “own”. (29-30)

In contrast to deCaries Narain, who above characterised Goodison’s work as fluid, Campbell sees it as rooted in Jamaican and Rastafarian traditions. This suggestion gains strength when recalling the title of her essay collection, *Redemption Ground*. In one essay, she writes about Redemption Ground Market in Kingston, where people meet to share their faith. Alluding to Marley’s “Redemption Song”, she concludes that in these meetings and the song itself, there is “the plea for us all to help sing, to write Redemption songs; songs and stories, for the rest of my life, this is what I hope to be doing” (Goodison *RG* 63). Thus, her poetics have a strong relationship with the physicality of her surroundings. Goodison is connected to the ground as she attempts to understand her history and her spirituality in terms of her environment. However, this spirituality, her

call for redemption and joy in song, is also affirmed by the sea and coastal spaces she encounters in the Caribbean.

A poem that recognises the stimulus of a rooted environment while also revealing the role the sea plays in Goodison's poetic process is "About the Tamarind" from *Travelling Mercies*, which, through small gestures, acknowledges the relevance of the oceanic to Goodison's writing. In this poem, the tamarind tree is anthropomorphised and speaks of its history, recalling in the third stanza that "Persian poets chanted under my shade" (Goodison, *CP* 296). The link between the tree and poetry is established throughout the poem, with Hugh Hodges arguing that "The tamarind provides a powerful metaphor for the interconnectedness of woman's roles as bearer of children, bearer of culture, and source of strength and healing" (26). The poem's final stanza acts as a reminder of the synaptic sea's history of the Middle Passage and impulses of cultural hybridity within the Caribbean, as the tree proclaims, "I came with the enslaved across the seas to bear for you" (298). The tamarind tree is presented as connected with those forced into slavery and while the verb "bear" may suggest a functional and economic use for the tree (which does indeed exist), for Goodison, the word has more spiritual and caring than economic connotations. With this, the poem ends in a Caribbean setting:

I bear. Not even the salt of the ocean can stunt me.

Plant me on abiding rock or foaming restless waters.

Set me in burying grounds. I grow shade for ancestors. (298)

The poetic power drawn from the tree continues on, despite the horrors contained in the synaptic sea's memory, and in fact, survives on those very waters. In asking to be planted in the sea, the tamarind tree acknowledges the poetic powers therein. Whether in the solid grounding already identified in Goodison's poetry or in the changeable, synaptic waters

discussed here, poetry not only survives but thrives in both locations, carrying ancestral voices forth in her work. The foaming water is a site of memory for Goodison as it is for Ní Chuilleanáin in “A Bridge Between Two Counties”, and sustains the former’s poetics as she seeks, in her writing, the stories of “a time and a history and [...] traditions lost in the great watery grave of the Atlantic” (Goodison, *RG* 37).

More generally, Edward Baugh discerns Goodison’s interest in water from her first collection, describing her “fascination with imagery of water and wetness – rain, river, sea. This water imagery signifies variously fertility, creativity, the erotic, succour, freedom, blessing redemption, divine grace, cleansing, purification and metamorphosis [*sic*]” (Baugh “Goodison” 20). In “About the Tamarind”, the tree’s relationship with the sea relates to the poet’s creativity, while also offering a blessing, cleansing and succour to the listener. Throughout Goodison’s work, the Atlantic returns, as she attempts to write the lost stories of the drowned, while also considering her place within the literature of the Caribbean. In a particularly Walcottian formulation, she writes of “the washed bones of many millions // drowned on the Atlantic side, where long-metre waves hexameter swell” (Goodison, *CP* 361) in the poem, “Dear Cousin” from *Controlling the Silver*. As a commonly used metre for epic poetry, the use of the word hexameter here not only resonates back to the Ancient world but also to Walcott as Goodison’s contemporary. The line particularly recalls his poem, “Sea Grapes”, where he writes of the “groundswell [where] the great hexameters come / to the conclusion of exhausted surf” (Walcott, *PDW* 197). Goodison, like Walcott, does not turn to hexameter in her poem – “Dear Cousin” follows a loose pentameter instead. The metrical references here, however, suggest an apprenticeship with the older poet that is fostered through the synaptic sea, as Ní Chuilleanáin’s relationship to Spenser is. Indeed, upon first encountering Walcott’s poems, Goodison remarks, “I liked [...] that they alluded to people and landscapes with

which I was familiar”, viewing the “poem as a lifeboat, anchor and safe harbour” while reading *In a Green Night* (Goodison RG 23). Marine spaces open themselves to Goodison as she locates a literary heritage there in both “About the Tamarind” and “Dear Cousin”.

Where Goodison does focus on the act of creating poetry, it is most often from a specifically female perspective. Like Walcott, she acknowledges the type of poetry she wishes to write and, while unlike him, she does not explicate a desire to write *with* the sea, the impulses that do underlie her work find resonances in the sea around her. In her second collection, *I Am Becoming My Mother*, Goodison consistently explores her relationship to writing. Jenkins describes Goodison’s “watery vocabulary”, stemming from a matrilineage that connects women through the amniotic fluid and, in the collection’s title poem, Jenkins points out, “the mother is associated with water” (*Language* 153-54). It is particularly through the figure of the Mulatta, who appears frequently in this collection, that Goodison explores her relationship to poetry, identifying in some ways with the mixed-race woman.³⁶ “Mulatta Song II” presents the poet as a coy, contented figure. When someone comes “seeking / a poem”, the speaker affirms, “this is the house of the lady poet” (Goodison, *CP* 73). The Mulatta poet, however, does not write for others, although she may be accommodating.

she offers you wine
and sometimes her smile
and sometimes herself

³⁶ The Mulatta figure appears in several Goodison poems from this period and beyond. However, Goodison is somewhat reticent about her affinity with the figure, noting in interview, “I went somewhere in Latin America once and there were these people who kept referring to me as a mulatta, which I found very funny, because I’d never thought of anything like that ... They told me I was a mulatta, and I said all right, I kind of like the sound of that” (qtd. in Baugh, “Goodison” 20).

but mostly she sits
and sings to herself. (74)

The poem ends with these lines of peace and contentedness, with the song a stand-in for the writing of the poem. Her poetry is not in the service of anything other than poetry. It cannot be requested and its value is not monetary. This is not to suggest, however, that the poet or her poetry are removed from the world around or that the song sung to herself is *for* only herself. As Jenkins points out, Goodison's "Mulatta's poems have a wider relevance and perform a social, even spiritual function" (*Language* 146). Thus, writing comes to the poet in times of calm and peace here but is inherently an offering outside of the poet herself.

Reading a poem that comes later in the same collection, "Blue Peace Incantation", alongside this, the importance of the sea to this writing process becomes clear. The poem opens "within the blue of peace, the azure of calm" (Goodison, *CP* 132). The vivid blue-green picture layered throughout the poem in the "cobalt", "indigo", "sky blue", "verdant [...] green" and "clear waters" (132) seems almost an incantation the poet sings to herself. A spiritual poem, the lines urge the listener to

be measured
blue measured
in verdant balance
of green. (132)

These lines may again be spoken by the poet to herself but are also a call to the reader. The poetic double-entendre of measured – relating to a poem's metre – implies that blue measures can be written alongside the beauty of the seascape. Poetic rhythm continues through the poem as the speaker directs her attention towards the heart, invoking it to

“beat soft now bright heart / beat soft, sound calm. / [...] heart be rocked calm now” (132). The poem’s steady beat and end-rhyme confirm the importance of the sea sounds around the poet, in addition to the beauty created at the outset. A more emotive poem than “Mulatta Song II”, “Blue Peace Incantation” suggests that the poetics Goodison writes of in “Mulatta Song II” are at one with the sea in this poem. Moreover, the Mulatta’s spiritual function is evident in “Blue Peace Incantation”, evincing a spirituality drawn from water as a sustaining element for the poet.

Water and specifically seawater as poetically invigorating elements are shown in sharpest relief in the poem “Trident” from *To Us, All Flowers are Roses*. The poem explores ideas of unity, creativity and benediction, as the poet contemplates the ocean, rejecting the map-makers’ divisions.

[...] this division of the world’s waters
into five or so oceans and seven seas
is just some cartographers divisive dream
All salt waters run without boundary
into each other [...]. (Goodison, *CP* 208)

From the beginning, the poem emphasises unity. The importance of poetic flow becomes clear through lineation as the enjambment speaks to both artificial division and a lyrical stream of language. Lines two and five of this extract begin with the preposition “into”. Yet this repetition actually speaks to opposing ideas of division and unity. In the first, the emphasis is division, as the seas and oceans are broken down *into* separate parts. In the second, it is flow and unity that are privileged, with the “into” reflecting a coming together of seas and places and language. This alternation of the signification of the repeated preposition demonstrates poetry’s ability to highlight linguistic slippage, and as

such, its opposition to an ordered world of singular meaning. Moreover, this slippage occurs here as the poet rebuffs a capitalistic or imperial logic that divides the seas and oceans in to chartable and bounded space, as Major Plunkett attempts in *Omeros*. In the face of this, the speaker's response is to turn to poetry: "I sit in Paradise, even as I write / facing this view of what I now conclude / is the world's one body of water" (208). The unboundedness of the sea prompts her to urge both the reader of the poem and herself as a writer to "sing today of the unity of all things" (208). For Hodges, this poem establishes that "Goodison's belief in the power of words is rooted in the belief that all things are mystically connected. All things are in all things, so healing in a song puts healing into the world" (20).

As seen in "About the Tamarind" and elsewhere, Goodison is aware of the synaptic sea's wounds and histories, which redound across the Caribbean. Yet, here the connectedness of the oceans provides a route to healing as she attempts to write this unity. "Trident" ends with an acceptance of her reality through a final link between poetry and the sea.

Accept the sea the salt the bread.

May the peace within this poem
stay the devils in our head.

Out of the blackbird's feathers shine
the holy peacock blue.

All things, all things work together. (Goodison, *CP* 209)

The unity of the seas and oceans, artificially and arbitrarily (to the poet's mind) divided, allows her to experience acceptance and peace in her poetry. The poem's religious and spiritual overtones are clear in these stanzas as the poem becomes the anchor and safe

harbour she once discovered in Walcott's work. This is a harbour that acknowledges the bitter salt of the synaptic sea's past, while also providing shelter from the world's evils, reflecting the hope Ashcroft suggests is contained in postcolonial oceans. The healing prayer of "Trident" and its impulse to see all things as connected solidify Goodison's poetic relationship with the sea. While her poetry may sometimes be grounded, she still turns to the sea to discover how to write poetry which remembers, embraces and heals.

Heaney: "poetry or freedom / leaning in from sea"

In a similar way to Goodison's work, Heaney's writing does not overtly present itself as a process that is at one with water. Moreover, as with Goodison's grounding, the land has played an important role in Heaney's work and is often noted by critics as a key site of poetry. Heaney's first successful poem, "Digging", which explores his decision to write, is often cited as *the* poem through which the development of his poetic voice can be detected. Heaney himself prompts this, writing in the essay "Feeling into Words" that, "'Digging', in fact, was the name of the first poem I wrote where I thought my feelings had got into words, or to put it more accurately, where I thought my *feel* had got into words" (Heaney *FK* 14; emphasis in original). This process of getting feel into words is the essence of poetry for Heaney in the way that Goodison seeks to replicate incantation through her poems and that Walcott writes through metaphor.

Yet interestingly, in the same essay, Heaney turns to watery metaphors to think about his writing process. Differentiating between craft and technique, Heaney describes both in relation to water. Craft, he says, is like lowering a bucket to a well, "until one day the chain draws unexpectedly tight and you have dipped into waters that will continue to entice you back" (Heaney *FK* 19). Technique, on the other hand, "entails the

watermarking of your essential patterns of perceptions, voice and thought into the touch and texture of your lines” (19). Finally, he references another of his early poems, “The Diviner”, to describe poetry, likening the work of a water diviner to that of a poet in their “function of making contact with what lies hidden, and in [their] ability to make palpable what was sensed or raised” (20). The day-to-day work of the poet is rendered in terms of a relationship with water, despite the fact that this culminates in the production of one of Heaney’s most readily identifiable land-based poems. Having said all of this, however, it is crucial to note that the waters of “Feeling into Words” are not only land-based (the well, the underground streams) but controlled by humans in a way that the sea is not. Here, for Heaney, water is to be collected and to be stamped on paper to claim ownership. In “Feeling into Words”, water is not the more autonomous element seen in Walcott’s, Ní Chuilleanáin’s and Goodison’s work. This water, of course, is not seawater and, unlike Cassano suggests of the ocean, there is an attempt to commodify and utilise the waters Heaney explores in this essay.

Nevertheless, Heaney does turn to the sea in his Nobel Lecture, “Crediting Poetry”, describing poetry in nautical terms: “Poetic form is both the ship and the anchor. It is at once buoyancy and a holding, allowing for the simultaneous gratification of whatever is centrifugal and centripetal in mind and body” (Heaney, *OG* 466). This discussion of poetic form implicitly signals an interaction with the sea, although it remains a human and domineering interaction. Yet, the water that buoys and holds the ship and anchor in place is an important part of poetic form for Heaney. The surface and depth of the sea allow for the tension of the centrifugal and centripetal to stand in place. Thus, a poetic form that engages with the sea, as well as a poetic craft and technique that hauls and divines water is one which allows the poet to put his “feel into words”. It is this feel-into-words process that is freeing for Heaney, granting him the ability to capture

something accurately in poetic language, without offering an ultimate meaning. This cannot be easily repackaged and reproduced, at same time that his conception of water treads an uneasy line between the human and non-human.

With these ideas in mind, it is possible to take a sea-view and trace it through much of Heaney's career and, in particular, plot an alternate route of poetic development, one that does not begin with "Digging" but instead with another early poem from his second collection, *Door into the Dark*. In "The Peninsula", the sea offers the poet a space to consider his mission, as a vision of linguistic impotence is countered by the imperative to "drive / For a day all round the peninsula" (Heaney, *OG* 21). The drive begins with an indecipherable landscape "without marks", as boundless images dominate the second stanza before the poem falls into darkness: "horizons drink down sea and hill, / The ploughed field follows the whitewashed gable" (21). The poem's first two stanzas reflect a mood of ignorance and unknowability, which is mirrored in the context of Heaney's writing of the poem. In an interview, he situates the composition of the poem in a period of discovery, noting that he was inspired by a drive with Marie (not yet his wife) around the Ards Peninsula in Co. Down when they were both getting to know one another and the countryside around Belfast (O'Driscoll and Heaney 77). Discovery is similarly taking place within the darkness of the poem.

As Ruth Macklin points out, the topography of a peninsula, both attached to and somewhat separate from the mainland, functions as a threshold space that faces the silence of a landscape without words (63). In this space, the sea and its materials are at once comprehensible and ineffable, "The glazed foreshore", a "silhouetted log", and "Islands riding themselves out into the fog" (Heaney, *OG* 21) of the third stanza are all images that simultaneously signal obscurity as they define, thus, mirroring the surface and depths of the sea itself. The foreshore, a highly specific part of the shoreline between

water and inhabited land, is a precise part of the shore, the log is self-contained, even if the reader only sees its shadow, while the islands alternately present discernible boundaries and signal the conjecture exposed in chapter one. Images dominate the poem here as the authoritative voice and movement of the car disappear. The seascape takes over and cannot be controlled by the speaker as the unending sea stretches beyond the islands that the speaker can see.

Although the poem propounds no moment of epiphany – the poet drives home “still with nothing to say” (Heaney *OG* 21) – it is in the act of seeing those shapes and writing them that poetry returns. This poem, for Ross Moore, plays an important role in the formation of Heaney’s poetic career, as it “traces the process of Heaney teaching himself where to turn ‘when there is nothing more to say’” (72). For him, Heaney hopes to “discover or ‘uncode’ truths through concentration on physical description and material actualities” (72). Suitably, the poem’s final message is that the poet will “uncode all landscapes / By this: things founded clean on their own shapes, / Water and ground in their extremity” (Heaney, *OG* 21). In the border of sea and land, the fading horizon, the islands’ coastlines, Heaney locates a poetic voice. In a similar way to Ní Chuilleanáin’s interaction with the sea in “Letter to Pearse Hutchinson”, at a key moment in the inception of the poet’s career, the sea appears to help define a landscape that the poet had not yet found the tools to describe him/herself. For Heaney, this is suggestive of a sea-based language, which Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott readily describe in their poetry. The clash of the extremities of sea and land may help, as Heaney says, “uncode” the seascape yet it remains an unknowable place. Indeed, the neologism “uncode” suggests a constant unravelling of meaning – as opposed to the more definitive “decode” – and resonates with the flux of the synaptic sea. The “at-seaness” of having nothing more to say is

countered by a turn to language which endeavours to define the shape of things in the face of this flux.

As his career progresses, Heaney's work, like that of the other poets explored here, increasingly finds a clarity in the sea, particularly in the context of his contemporary Northern Ireland, as much of his early poetry questioned the role of the poet in this context. By the time of *Field Work*, published in 1979, Heaney expresses anger that his "trust could not repose / In the clear light, like poetry or freedom / Leaning in from sea" (Heaney, *OG* 146). This poem, "Oysters", which opens the collection, demonstrates the shift to finding a clarity of poetic voice in the sea, not "bogged" down by the expectations and complexities of his home. The sea's poetic and freeing qualities are felt particularly strongly in "Glanmore Sonnet VII" from the same collection and confer poetic potency. In the sonnet, language and landscape are married as winds "collapse into a sibilant penumbra" (Heaney, *OG* 169). This displays clear parallels with Ní Chuilleanáin's work in that Heaney places his poetics in the tempestuous sea. Heaney finds inspiration for this poem in the BBC shipping forecast, in "Green, swift upsurges, North Atlantic flux" (169). For Deborah McLoughlin, the BBC warnings signal both the turbulence in Northern Ireland and the love of spoken language Heaney discovered, in part, while listening to the radio (210). Moreover, the "implicit link between sea faring [*sic*] and warfare is amplified by the list of kennings naming the sea 'eel-road, seal-road, keel road, whale-road'", connecting Ireland with its Viking past through an oceanic journey (210). In these poems, Heaney looks to the sea to inspire his language as "wind-compounded" (Heaney, *OG* 169) words blow through his poetry.

As "Glanmore Sonnet VII" progresses, the language emerging from the seascape turns to spoken language at the volta, leading to the poem's ending:

I said out loud, 'A haven,'
The word deepening, clearing, like the sky
Elsewhere on Minches, Cromarty, The Faroes. (Heaney, *OG*
169)

Once again, the idea of perspicuity originates in the seascape and in the act of speaking aloud, of having the belief to, as Heaney writes elsewhere, "credit marvels" (Heaney, *OG* 357). In "Glanmore Sonnet VII", Heaney uncovers a poetic clarity, discovering alongside of it, a lightening. He encounters freedom in the sea, one that removes him from the constraints of his contemporary setting. In the act of speaking, Heaney finds poetic power in the sea as well as pointing towards the connected synaptic outlook, even as he returns to the coastline he more regularly inhabits at the poem's end. Comparing the poems of *North* to those of *Field Work*, Denis Donoghue writes, "the new poems listen even more movingly to 'the music of what happens' and find a second music to respond to the first". "Glanmore Sonnet VII" recovers, in the music of the sea, contemporary ideas of the past and the materiality of the present in an assured way. The potent poetry latent in the seascape of "The Peninsula" is released in "Glanmore Sonnet VII" reflecting the lightening of Heaney's outlook in later collections.

Indeed, in "Settings xxiv" from the "Squarings" sequence of *Seeing Things*, the ability to reside in and write with the environment around is clear. Reflecting Goodison's "Blue Peace Incantation" in its attentiveness to writing the environment, the poem opens with a "Deserted harbour stillness" (Heaney, *OG* 373), establishing the scene as a distinctly maritime and coastal one. As the first stanza continues, there is an interesting parallel with Ní Chuilleanáin's work as the speaker describes, "Every stone / Clarified and dormant under water" (373). As in Ní Chuilleanáin's "Incipit Hodie", the water clarifies the pebbles of language as this trend towards poetic clarity mirrors many of

Heaney's other writings about the sea. For Helen Vendler, the harbour scene is "one of fullness, shimmer, equilibrium. All the elements of language, too, are in balance" (149). The balanced atmosphere in this squared poem of four, three-line stanzas culminates in the final stanza.

Air and ocean known as antecedents
Of each other. In apposition with
Omnipresence, equilibrium, brim. (Heaney, *OG* 373).

The delicate interaction between air and ocean recalls the doubleness of the surface and depth, buoyancy and holding, the centrifugal and the centripetal of the poetic form. A word Heaney rarely uses, "ocean" is specifically employed in this poem to speak to the vastness of the tension that can exist in poetry. The ocean figures here as an originary element, as often seen in Walcott's work. Although Heaney does not appear to make an overt link between ocean and poetry, the holistic view of the final line and the cyclical tension of air and water speak to the pulls on the poetic form, which Heaney has already located in the sea elsewhere in his work. In this poem, the non-social seaside landscape (Vendler 148), exists in tension with and as an inspiration for Heaney's poetic language, as he moves towards the non-human, unknowable elements of the synaptic sea at this point in his career. The balance of the scene is reflected in the poem's composition, as the more assured poet has learned from the seascapes of "The Peninsula" and "Glanmore Sonnet VII" to write the feel of the harbour into words.

Conclusion: Disruptive Seas, Disruptive Poetries

To reiterate, the sea is undoubtedly literary for these poets. This is not to say that is purely a metaphor without its own reality and history, but rather that the sea is a communicative

space, with a poetics that inspires the poets considered here. Walcott, Ní Chuilleanáin, Goodison and Heaney all demonstrate an interest in the sea as a way of writing, while the lens of the synaptic sea reveals the fluid language the sea holds and the paradoxically obfuscated clarity it provides in its colour, sounds and vastness. To various degrees, their verse reflects the seascapes around them, as they receive its poetry.

For Walcott, the environment is essential to his work and he seeks to write with his seascapes, as they help him to craft his verse. Similarly, Ní Chuilleanáin's poetic imagination is captured by the music of the sea. She charts different bodies of water to understand language and the signs and signals the element emits. For both poets, the sea is a sonorous, verbal site that directly influences how they write. Goodison's concerns are sometimes rooted but find expression in the sea nonetheless, with water playing a particular role in her exploration of matrilineage and healing. She looks to the sea to find the peace and joy to write, reflecting its powers in her work. Finally, Heaney, perhaps considered a land-based poet traditionally, on closer inspection, turns at significant points in his career to the sea. It aids in his understanding of his craft and allows for a lightening and a freedom in his verse. Close investigation of Goodison's and Heaney's work demonstrates the centrality of the sea to their craft. For all four poets, in writing with the sea they can also write more fully about the sea.

Crucially, these poets take their craft seriously and value the importance of poetry. In its healing, communicative, subversive powers, the poem becomes something the poet launches into the world. The poem itself has little commercial purpose but allows the writer and, vitally, the reader to live and experience both language and life in new ways. The sea too holds similar powers, communicating with these poets in an unfathomable signs and existing both within and outside of human relationships to language. The poem and the sea seem connected in their ability to disrupt and challenge the world around.

This is not to suggest that the poets or poems discussed here are overtly anti-capitalist but rather that in the sea's and poetry's ability to disrupt one of the world's most potent philosophies, a broader sense of freedom is also found. Although poetry and the sea cannot be totally outside of the commodified world in which we live, they open up spaces to re-think and re-examine ideologies. As the poems of the sea are released, they conjoin to take their place in the oceanic lines of the synaptic gap. Accordingly, the remainder of this thesis is interested in how the synaptic sea prompts transatlantic reconsideration of models of nation, of gender and of time and myth.

CHAPTER THREE

Sailing the Seas; Charting the Nation

*Alone, alone! – all, all alone! –
Alone on the wide, wide sea!*

(Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” 77)

*He sat upon the rolling deck
Half a world away from home,
And smoked a Capstan cigarette
And watched the blue waves tipped with foam.*

(Langston Hughes, “Sailor” 18)

In literature, the sailor is a figure that, through his nomadism and time spent on the shifting sea, prompts a reconsideration of the landed world.³⁷ Alone and away from home, as Coleridge and Hughes depict him, the sailor begins to rethink where he may belong and what constitutes a sense of home for him. Sailing the synaptic sea, with the myriad of influences from Ancient to Modern and beyond, upsets ideas of pure belonging. For the sailor in this position, a relationship to his nation is challenged by the sea’s disrupting waves and, given “the humanities’ strong interest in capacious frames for analysis beyond the nation-state” (Price 45), these sea-figures have become a source of attraction for oceanic studies. Indeed, nation building projects that determine what the nation means and who is part of a nation are challenged by the sailor figure who is both nowhere and somewhere, at home on the sea yet away from home. The local and specific pull of the coast identified in the introduction and demonstrated to various degrees in the work of all four poets in chapters one and two, is also disrupted by the sailor figures encountered in their poems, as they move farther from the reach of nation-state paradigms. At the

³⁷ In the vast majority of critical and creative literature examined here, the sailor is envisaged as male. The following chapter of this thesis undertakes a more detailed exploration of gender at sea.

same time, the sailor and his work are part of the sea's reality and not purely a metaphor for fluidity. Within the impulses of ocean studies outlined in the introduction, there is a wave of criticism that examines the role the sailor has to play (or not) within the nation. These ideas resonate with theories on transnationalism, which not only attempt to reshape understandings of the nation but also draw attention to the richness of the comparative frame employed throughout this thesis.

This chapter begins with the concept of nation in order to move towards a discussion of transnationalism and its facets. It delineates some of the difficulties involved in defining the nation, while also looking to contemporary frames of belonging as a way to approach writing that attempts to comprehend the nation. Examining seminal work on the nation in the context of debates around transnationalism demonstrates the importance of a more fluid view of both the nation and the concept of a national literature. This work is then considered in relation to ideas from oceanic studies that position the sailor as a complex figure. From this, the poetry of the four poets considered in this thesis is examined under three distinct headings. Firstly, the ways in which figures on the water destabilise binaries is of particular interest in discussions of the nation at sea. Following this, an examination of how poets turn to sailors to challenge nationalist symbols reveals the artificiality of the nation. Finally, the centrality of shipwrecks to literary understandings of the nation is studied in relation to their potential to disrupt notions of stable and fixed national paradigms.

From the Nation to Transnationalism

The nation is a shifting concept. Many theories have sought to define nationhood to varying degrees, with a consensus on the difficulty of doing so. As Benedict Anderson

notes, “nation, nationalist, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define” (3). Likewise, for Eric Hobsbawm, the definitions of nationhood are difficult due to the exclusionary nature of such groupings (5-6). Nevertheless, both Anderson and Hobsbawm, despite their acknowledgement of the complexities of doing so, attempt to define the nation in constructive ways. Anderson’s well-known formulation that the nation is an imagined community has had a profound effect on conceptions of the nation, figuring it as “an imagined political community [...] imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). Nations are distinguished from one another “not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). Responding to Anderson’s emphasis on the imaginative power of a group, Hobsbawm argues that “defining a nation by its members’ consciousness of belonging to it is tautological and provides only an *a posteriori* guide to what a nation is” (7-8; emphasis in original). This consciousness of belonging does not provide a clear definition of the nation for Hobsbawm. Yet, he recognises both the ambiguities of defining a nation in this way and the power of Anderson’s formation. Despite its critics, the dominance of the imaginative elements of the nation holds sway over later work. Notably, Imre Szeman discovers that the one point scholars tend to agree on is “an awareness of the artificiality of the nation, an artificiality that nationalisms manage to transform into ‘facts of nature’” (13). It is this process of transforming national groupings, which may be arbitrary, contested or exclusionary, into generally accepted, “natural” categories that lends nation its power as a concept. This process is so insidious that, as Anderson notes, the artificiality becomes irrelevant to defining one nation from another. Instead, the nation is accepted as a *fait accompli*.

In thinking through the nation, this artificiality must be brought to the fore to understand the ways in which nations were/are *created* entities. Anthony Smith proposes

that to do so, the classification and analysis of “key institutional and cultural dimensions of nations and nationalism” are productive from both an academic and a socio-political perspective (226, 222). Accordingly, he proposes a set of common assumptions of how the nation is signalled, from language and religion to the state and territory, with history and the celebration of rites and ceremonies also important in perpetuating the nation (226-27). In the face of contested definitions, Smith’s categorisations provide concrete parameters around the idea of nation and recognise that it is a concept that can be viewed from a multitude of perspectives. They offer windows into the artificiality of the nation by guiding towards key aspects of the creation and preservation of the nation. Enquiries into “the ways in which languages and scripts contributed to ethnic and national feelings” or the “centrality of ‘history’ and history-writing in the creation of national communities” (Smith 227, 228) expose how the nation is consolidated and allowed to become a fact of nature.

Yet, these categories are not always stable in themselves, often foregrounding instead the nation’s artificiality. For example, Smith, in outlining how a nation may be constructed around territory argues that “the nature of boundaries of both communities and polities” must be examined (226). As chapter one has already demonstrated, the island’s boundaries are shifting, permeable and challenged by their interaction with the synaptic sea. In Ireland, “geography has been one of the most commonly invoked criteria for justifying the aspiration to unity” (Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland* 3), however, to base a united Irish nation on its geography alone ignores other realities of the island of Ireland, as Heaney’s “Parable Island” and Ní Chuilleanáin’s “Last Glimpse of Erin” establish. Likewise, the archipelagic make-up of the Caribbean, where “invocations of cultural hybridity have been crucial to Caribbean nationalisms” (Puri 6), complicates ideas of national territory.

In the period of decolonisation in the Caribbean region from the 1950s onwards, the British Empire proposed a federalisation that would grant “each of the territories the self-governing status of ‘Island City State’”, along an Ancient Greek model of statehood (Highman 267). Here, islandness became a clearer delineator of statehood and this informed the basis of what became the West Indian Federation.³⁸ However, the endeavour was a failure, proving “too difficult to achieve unity of purpose over such a scattered, discontinuous archipelago” (Highman 267). Moreover, it led to a situation whereby “London was the center of the West Indies [with] no physical center to the region but empty sea” (Breiner 7). The location of this centre in the sea rejects the unity of a bounded territory, as instead of being empty, as Breiner suggests, the sea is a disruptive and synaptic space. Although Caribbean people may be, “Peoples of the Sea” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island* 16), this rejection of landed-unity does not always translate into more open models of belonging, with Leah Rosenberg arguing that the emergence of ideas of nationalism in the Caribbean was “an antagonistic and exclusionary project”, as the diversity of social, ethnic, and class groupings made ideas of unity problematic (7-8). Indeed, individual anglophone islands are variously independent from or connected to Britain, yet Franklin W. Knight suggests that “by the last decade of the twentieth century, the Commonwealth Caribbean had reached the threshold of nationhood” (224).³⁹ Both Walcott and Goodison are attentive to island variances across the Caribbean, yet also

³⁸ This federalisation of ten territories lasted from 1958-1962 and included, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, and Trinidad and Tobago.

³⁹ As one example of a “supranational” grouping, Knight cites the establishment of CARICOM, an economic bloc comprising of fifteen members (Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, and Trinidad and Tobago), as well as five associate members (Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos) and seven observers (Aruba, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, the Netherlands Antilles, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela) (Knight 225). Although Knight suggests that there has been a “marked ambivalence towards cooperative action” since the demise of federalisation (225), attempts such as CARICOM reflect a turn towards collective Caribbean groupings.

recognise a shared Caribbean community in their work. Thus, forms of nationalism as outlined by Smith and others, can be less applicable in the region. Smith himself acknowledges his work's limitations, failing to take into account the fields of migration studies, postcolonialism, and multiculturalism in his consideration of the nation (xiii).

Given these tensions around definitions of the nation in the postcolonial locations of Ireland and the Caribbean, a turn towards ideas of transnationalism can be helpful as theorists in the field of transnational studies seek to move beyond national boundaries and formulate belonging through alternate dimensions. In literary studies, Jahan Ramazani's *A Transnational Poetics* demonstrates the ways in which an unbounded perspective on ideas of the nation affects critical assessments of poetry, defying perceptions of "national" poets and "national poetry" in its understanding of both the comparative mode and the multiple, global influences of poetry. For Ramazani, poetry is a vibrant form with an open, border-crossing nature, and he asserts that "poetic transnationalism can help us both to understand a world in which cultural boundaries are permeable and to read ourselves as imaginative citizens of worlds that ceaselessly overlap, intersect and converge" (*Transnational Poetics* 49). His work seeks to break from the tradition of categorising poetry along national lines, which can box "creative expression within identitarian preconceptions" (60). This open and permeable creativity is welcome as Ramazani seeks to highlight the ways in which people, places, histories, cultures and languages can overlap – notably in postcolonial settings.⁴⁰

Ramazani's transnational work, however, is not without its critics at the same time that it may be admired. Matthew Hart, for example, in his comparative work on Scottish and Caribbean poetries, takes cues from Ramazani but suggests that his

⁴⁰ Much of Ramazani's work focuses on poets writing from or about former colonised settings as he examines the work of poets from Anglophone Africa and the Caribbean, Ireland, India.

transnationalism occludes the “nation” within the word.⁴¹ Hart argues that rather than destabilising national/nationalist outlooks, transnational readings may instead obscure aspects of the nation that affect writers. Notably, “transnationalism risks occluding how the laws and institutions that grant citizenship secure populations, make war, and guarantee rights both enable and set limits to the production of peoples and texts” (Hart 19-20). Hart stresses the ways in which the nation and its tenants, such as those outlined by Smith, can affect cultural production. These sentiments echo those of Terry Eagleton, who argues that “to wish class or nation away, to seek to live sheer irreducible difference *now* in the manner of some contemporary poststructuralist theory, is to play straight into the hands of the oppressor” (23; emphasis in original). For Eagleton, the power of the nation as a category should not be ignored as attempts to do so result only in its resilience. This is a common thread through nation studies, as nationalism is envisioned as “simultaneously obvious and obscure” (Billig 14). As such, the force of the concept of the nation lies in its subtle omnipresence, becoming a “fact of nature”, and this, for Hart, Eagleton and Billig, stresses the ineluctability of what is understood as the nation.

Yet, in recognising the importance of the nation as a category and its effects on writers, an outright dismissal of transnationalism would be unconstructive. Ramazani, for example, is explicit that his work does not wish for, nor see as possible, the removal of the idea of the nation in poetry studies (*Transnational Poetics* 12-13). Instead, he frames his work in terms of the doubleness of a “globalized locality and a localized globality”

⁴¹ Hart connects work from both poetic traditions through their use of what he terms the “synthetic vernacular” and demonstrates how poets from Scotland and from the Caribbean grapple with the various pulls of the local, national and supra-national/global influences through their particular but analogous use of language.

(10).⁴² For Ramazani, viewing the work of a poet along national lines obfuscates these influences and dialogues. As such, his work posits a localised view that is open to global influences and can recognise the importance of place, space and situated culture at the same time that it is permeable and less fixed. In this chapter, transnationalism remains an important concept in order to recognise the hold the nation has had and continues to have both in a globalised world and on the poets of this thesis.

Ramazani's ideas of transnationalism mirror the larger framework of this thesis, which recognises the sea as a synaptic site of exchange and connection with disruptive powers but at the same time acknowledges that interaction with the sea is a localised encounter. To an island state, the sea can offer a sense of unity and "enshrine the inevitability of self-possession and self-determination" yet, "the very seas that would appear to act as guarantors of separateness have always been conduits, facilitating movement and exchange between peoples and cultures" (McCusker and Soares xii-xiii). It is through cross-border interaction that exclusive notions of belonging may be challenged. As Homi Bhabha observes, "counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (149). Detangling the ways in which the global and the local interact and intersect challenges the rigidity of national boundaries and opposes the establishment of the nation as a "fact of nature". At the same time "nationality and ethnicity still need to play important roles. An updated version of the universalist 'Golden Treasury' model that erases national and ethnic experiences must be avoided" (Ramazani, *Transnational*

⁴² A key example of this doubleness, for Ramazani is the poetry of Kamau Brathwaite who gives voice to local Caribbean speech in poetry, while also noting the influence of American-born, British poet, T.S. Eliot on his work (*Transnational Poetics* 10). Moreover, as a figure, Eliot exemplifies how attempts to define a writer along national lines obscure a multitude of cross-currents, as he elides easy categorisation as a national poet and has been variously claimed as American, English, British and an émigré (28, 36).

Poetics 43). This chapter recognises the boundaries that do exist around the nation and its preservation, yet follows the work of Ramazani and Bhabha to reveal the permeability of those concepts, just as the synaptic sea both defines and opens out to other connections.

Ideas of connectedness have prompted scholars in Irish and Caribbean studies to turn towards transnationalism, which emerges as a useful lens to think through the deadlocks of the nation. For Amanda Tucker and Moira E. Casey,

transnational Irish literature is invested in the multiple points of identification and belonging that result from a writer's commitment to Ireland, to other countries, and to the world at large. A transnational approach can complement and supplement our understanding of "national literature", a concept that by definition is limiting. (2)

As with Ramazani, although more explicitly so, Tucker and Casey do not seek to dismiss the nation as a category of thought completely. A transnational approach for them is comprised of influences from both within Ireland and a sense of its place as well as from without. In this way, transnationalism can better inform understandings of the literature of a place. While they still name this a "national literature", calling for an expanded definition of the term, their understanding of an Irish transnationalism is useful here. From a Caribbean point of view, Evelyn O'Callaghan goes further than Tucker and Casey, suggesting a "remapping of Caribbean literature that returns us to 'here'; not 'here' in terms of a nation, or even a set of nations bounded by language, but in terms of connection to place, connection to landscape" (30). Her work is unambiguous in its desire to move away from the category of nation and stresses instead the sense of place, which can effectively contribute to a feeling of belonging, beyond the limiting confines of the nation. It is here that ideas of the local interaction with seascape can be useful, as

connection to the environment is seen on a smaller scale, while at the same time recognising that it links out to a larger world. This perspective responds to Hart's critique of transnationalism in that it recognises the influence of place. While this thesis does not seek to deny the concept of the nation entirely, it recognises, as Hobsbawm does, the possibility that the nation-state could become just *one* of the ways in which identity can be described (192).

Of Seas and Seafarers

These tensions between the nation and transnationalism come to the fore when taking these ideas out to sea. The perspective shared by Tucker and Casey, and O'Callaghan is central to conceptualising the nation and transnationalism in Irish and Caribbean literature but where the outlook of this thesis evidently diverges from their thinking is in its rejection of a purely land-based approach. Smith notes that "landscapes and sacred sites contributed to the generation of ideas of 'homeland' and national territory" (226). In this grounded outlook on environment, nationalisms place a weight on landed-language, a tendency which Bhabha observes in his work: "The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression" (143). In attempting to consign the artificial groupings of the nation to facts of nature, the utilisation of landscape is fitting, as the actuality of the environment around can be easily linked to ideas of "naturalness". Thus, if nationalism's goal is to consign its groupings to facts of nature, locating a sense of belonging on land may have the desired totalising effects. For Bhabha, the insidious rhetoric of belonging is absorbed by the seemingly static environment until belief in the

nation's permanence becomes unquestionable. While not all landed-belongings are inherently exclusive, this highlights the ways in which *landscape* may be problematic in examining the nation. It is to, once again, emphasise the fruitfulness of turning towards the synaptic sea, which in its instability and obvious movement, generates rarely considered forms of belonging.

In particular, in this interaction with the sea, it is figures who spend a significant amount of time at sea and on water including, but not limited to, sailors, that can reveal to readers a clearer understanding of the effects of a transnational seascape and the tensions around national markers. Notably, transnationalism is an important aspect of the sailor's life and for Blum, considered analysis of the sailor figure exemplifies "new forms of relatedness from the necessarily unbounded examples provided in the maritime world" ("Prospect" 671). In his interaction with the sea through the instability of ships, movement across synaptic space and travel from local port to local port, the sailor encounters a unique set of transnational influences. Accordingly, he has a complicated connection to nationality. As Blum continues, "the internationalism embodied by sailors abstracted them from participatory citizenship, even as they were central to its functioning. For despite the putative freedoms of nautical life, sailors seldom received the benefits of national identification" (671). In this, the tensions explored in the previous section of this chapter become evident.

On the one hand, the sailor and his work play a role in the establishment of the nation, contributing variously to a state economy, maritime culture, and consolidation of a nation's sea territory – particularly in the context of the British Empire. On the other hand, his erratic connection to the nation, his constant movement and his location on the synaptic sea give rise to less stable connections to ideas of home, either by his own doing or through exclusion by the state. For Blum, the sailor's relationship to citizenship does

not provide him the usual benefits of national belonging. In these ways, the sailor figure chimes with the transnational work of Ramazani's and Bhabha's deconstruction of the nation. Certainly, it is the "literal outlandishness" of those on water and at sea that complicates their national affiliations (Blum, "Terraqueous Planet" 27). Historically, sailors' constant state of travel may have weakened their "ties to shore communities [...]" as large ports mushroomed and became ever more diverse, and seamen spread around the globe" (Hubbard 325). They stand outside of landed forms of belonging and present a more global vision of the interconnectedness, a type of connection Ramazani envisions when he asks that we "read ourselves as imaginative citizens of the world" (*Transnational Poetics* 49). Sailors may carry with them an idea of home, at the same time that they are global travellers, the synaptic sea absorbing both sets of influences. The figure at sea or in water occupies an unstable location in which he can both speak to and complicate ideas of the nation. The water, thus, becomes a sort of third space, a site where "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 37). In crossing this third space, the sailor attains new and revised meanings as the sea's synaptic elements transform national impulses, becoming for these poets representative of the complex tensions between the omnipresence of the nation and the openness of border crossing and transnationalism, which sees the boundaries of the nation as less fixed.

Figures at sea are conspicuous in the work of all four poets of this study. Poems with outlandish, water-based figures determine how these poets begin to think through issues of nationhood, often challenging nationalist ideas of exclusive belonging that exist in Ireland and the Caribbean. In the following sections, a concentrated examination of the seafarers within the poetry of Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott will

allow for a reconsideration of belonging, looking beyond the nation-state. Poetry about sailors and fishermen from across the Atlantic Ocean demonstrates the ways in which those categories that attempt to render the nation a natural entity can be subverted on the synaptic sea by challenging binaries, rethinking national symbols and contemplating the shipwreck.

Destabilising Binaries: Walcott's Shabine and Heaney's "Casualty"

As Hobsbawm's work indicates, nations and national identity can operate on a strict and exclusive paradigm of belonging based on who fits within that paradigm and who is outside of it. The figure on water in the poetry of Walcott and of Heaney poses a threat to this binary opposition. Anderson notes that one aspect of the nation is its basis in the ideas of community, "conceived as a deep and horizontal comradeship" (7). Yet, the figures in these poems stand outside of this dynamic as neither Walcott's "The Schooner *Flight*" nor Heaney's "Casualty" presents a strong sense of community on water. Indeed, the sailor figure, as the epigraphs of this chapter demonstrate, is often seen as a solitary one in literature. The men of Heaney's and Walcott's poems are, to different degrees, placed beyond the in/out binary national identity proposes.

Shabine, the speaker of "The Schooner *Flight*", is a key figure in Walcott's oeuvre and provides an insight into the complications that revolve around the sailor and the nation. In the long, narrative poem from *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, Shabine the sailor-poet utters those lines that have come to represent postcolonial hybridity and identity:

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,

I have Dutch, nigger and English in me,
and either I'm nobody or I'm a nation. (Walcott, *PDW* 238)⁴³

On the one hand, the nobody/nation binary seems reductive, suggesting there are only two ways of belonging. On the other, given Shabine's position straddling this binary, Walcott appears to establish it in order to destabilise both elements. As the poem's poet-speaker, Shabine is crafted with an awareness of the tensions around national belonging. Sailors who wrote at sea often paid particular attention "to meter, rhythm, and tone, to a *line* that can be traced", which "offers a regulatory corrective to the drift and dislocation of nautical travel" (Blum and Rudy 190). In these lines, tetrameter partly recalls the ballad form, a structure "rooted in national traditions" (Blum and Rudy 190). Yet, Shabine uses this regular form specifically to display his distance from national structures. This, for the poet-sailor, "complicates an easy association between aesthetic form and nationalist sentiment" (Blum and Rudy 190). Indeed, Shabine evidently names two nationalities here – Dutch and English – while also stressing the disenfranchisement of his African heritage. That the repetition of a racial slur is the only reference to an African lineage is suggestive of a disconnected relationship with this ancestry. Moreover, if the nation and, by extension, national belonging can be defined by a fixed territory, as Smith suggests, the lack of reference to either the continent of Africa, or more specifically, any African nation, reflects that Shabine views his black heritage as an illegitimate national identity. This outlook is influenced by European forms of nationalism, as Dutch and English are legitimised as markers of identity and origin.

Yet, Walcott's poem plays on the misconception that nations only exist as Western thought has defined them by replicating derogatory language employed against

⁴³ Both Dennis Walder and Shara McCallum ("Either I'm Nobody") have written about how these lines elucidate a mixed identity and the complications therein.

those who do not fit those categories. The lines' doubleness act as a specific rebuttal to exclusive forms of national belonging. On the one hand, nationalism's ability to define and subsequently exclude is captured in the "nobody", while, on the other hand, the potential in the nation to be inclusive to such backgrounds as Shabine's is held in the nation half of Walcott's assertion. The reductive opposition of the two seems an impossible choice. If a "nobody" under nationalism, Shabine's colonial education and Dutch and English background, themselves, markers of national identity, are erased. If a "nation", these clashing nations, England and The Netherlands, as well as Shabine's African heritage, are obscured and homogenised. Crucially, this leads to the illogical and equally reductive idea that one man/figure can not only embody but *be* the entirety of a nation. The nation is a collective endeavour, as Anderson's work demonstrates, and as such, would not be a fitting term for one man.

Significantly, in a later section of the poem, Shabine goes on to say, "I had no nation now but the imagination" (Walcott, *PDW* 241). As Rowan Ricardo Philips notes, "Shabine attempts to empty 'nation' of its significance by wedding it to 'image.' The 'image-in-nation,' then is a reflection of the very title of this canto: 'Shabine Leaves the Republic'" (121). Clearly, there are also parallels between this and Anderson's theory of imagined community as Walcott places emphasis on the imaginative realm. Yet, the lack of Shabine's sense of community at sea would suggest that he is indeed outside of the nation. The reader rarely encounters any of the other sailors aboard the ship in the poem. To Shabine, the nation created in his imagination is a space defined by his own specific heritage. Once again, he straddles the binary of inclusion in/exclusion from the nation. Shabine sees himself as an imaginative citizen of the world, with heritage from various locations. Yet, the definition he provides of the nation is far removed from any of the conceptions outlined above and as such he stands outside of these definitions, as well as

any sense of a larger community. This inability to reconcile these opposites plays a decisive role in prompting him to leave the Republic.

Significantly, in doing so, Shabine must take to the sea that he loves, rejecting solace in a land-based interaction with the nation. The narrative mode and mostly consistent tetrameter stabilises him amongst the waves but does not align him with the nation. Instead, he creates an image of the nation, one which is imagined, but is nonetheless sustaining. It is based in the disruptive sea, which, in its synaptic abilities allows various heritages to exist without the exclusory tendency of the within/without binary of national belonging. The synaptic sea is instead “either/or, and both” (Baucom, “Charting” par. 12). Given Shabine’s isolation from a community, this image seems unlikely to become a collective mode of identification or way of being. Nevertheless, through an exploration of Shabine’s relationship to the nation, Walcott demonstrates that the postcolonial sailor-poet is one of contradictions in terms of clear demarcations of nationality. The experience of being at sea allows him to circumvent the nobody/nation binary by highlighting the instability of both categories. Reached by sea-journey, this imaginative, third space allows Shabine to go beyond the binary of inside/outside of the nation, to reject affiliation with a landed territory but also reconceive of the nation through the assertion of the remaining synaptic impulses of his heritages.

Heaney’s poetry also recognises that being at sea disturbs the sailor’s sense of place in the world, capturing in “In the Attic” the “slight untoward rupture and world-tilt / As a wind freshened and the anchor weighed” (Heaney, *HC* 84). Yet, in his work, ideas of nationalism are more obviously disrupted by writing that takes place within the context of the Northern Irish Troubles. “Casualty” from *Field Work*, presents a figure who, like Shabine, eschews binaries. Despite being a fisherman working mainly in a lough (again reflecting Heaney’s inward turn as in “Station Island”), the poem’s protagonist is

depicted in his relationship to water, displaying a sense of Blum's *outlandishness*. The poem recalls Heaney's memory of a fisherman who was killed after Bloody Sunday, his "weathered thumb" reflecting his working life on water, as he "would go / In waders and peaked cap / Into the showery dark" when the pub closed (Heaney, *OG* 155). Appearing as a strange figure within the poem's world, he occupies a watery space, to some degree outside of the "PARAS THIRTEEN [...] BOGSIDE NIL" binary, as he "broke / Our tribe's complicity" (155, 156). Although not as removed as Walcott's Shabine – this fisherman ostensibly belongs to one "tribe" – there is a sense that in his role as a fisherman, which is emphasised throughout the poem, he wants to escape this divide. It is due to his decision to ignore nationalist rules that he is killed.⁴⁴ Yet, within the poem he does not pledge his allegiance to one side or the other, "would not be held / At home by his own crowd / Whatever threats were phoned" (156).

In explaining that the reason the fisherman broke the imposed curfew was his desire for a drink, Heaney employs nautical terms, emphasising the man's deep connection with water in his life as a fisherman:

He had gone miles away
For he drank like a fish
Nightly, naturally
Swimming towards the lure
Of warm lit-up places (Heaney, *OG* 156).

These lines suggest that his outsider position is predicated not only on his drinking but also on his role as a fisherman. The two phrases of the lines are separated by the balanced

⁴⁴ While the poem itself suggests that the fisherman was killed for his defiance of an IRA-imposed curfew, in interview, Heaney later noted that it was revealed that the bomb that killed his friend could have been planted by the pro-Unionist, Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) (O'Driscoll and Heaney 214).

“nightly, naturally”, which are linked not only by their position in the poem but also by strong alliterative qualities and stressed first syllable. As such, the “naturalness” of his transgression finds resonance in the swimming fish he catches as they seek out “warm lit-up places”. In this extended metaphor, the fisherman is deeply linked to his work on water, his movements rendered as swimming here, just as he waded out into the night in the poem’s opening. While his *love* for the water is not professed as Shabine’s is in Walcott’s poem, his outlandishness is emphasised in this image. Following these lines, Heaney imagines that were he to ask the fisherman about his own culpability in breaking curfew, the question would be returned back to him:

“Now you’re supposed to be
An educated man,”
I hear him say. “Puzzle me
The right answer to that one.” (156)

With this, the fisherman confirms his refusal to engage in tribal debates, exempting himself from such concerns.

As the poem progresses, there is a sense that the fixity of the land takes over in the face of the death of the outlandish fisherman. In the pageantry of the funeral in section three, the motorcade supersedes the maritime metaphor, as mourners are depicted “shoaling out of his lane / To the respectable / Purring of the hearse ...” (Heaney, *OG* 157). The fisherman’s position outside of the binaries of the North, reflected in his connection to water, is covered over in death as the respectability and connotations of a landed funeral take over. At the same time, the disorientating tensions of the landed binary versus the fisherman’s escape to water is reflected in the scene’s pathetic fallacy with “cold sunshine / On the water, the land / Banked under fog” (157). It is to the water

that Heaney returns, recalling that “When he took me in his boat [...] I tasted freedom with him” (157). This suggests a clarity on water not found on land, free from the foggiest of the landed-conflict. For the fisherman, this is his “proper haunt / Somewhere, well out, beyond ...” (157). Emphasising once again the man’s outlandishness and figuring the water as a third space whereby the symbols of the funeral are disrupted, these lines also lend weight to the suggestion that he is “beyond” the struggles taking place in Northern Ireland. However, the morbid resonances of “beyond” and “haunt” cannot be ignored, suggesting the mortal consequences of living outside of national and/or ethnic ties. Indeed, as Hobsbawm argues, to suggest that belonging to a nation is a choice ignores the myriad of intricate ways belonging is forged (8). Significantly, the poem ends with the enigmatic, “Question me again” (Heaney, *OG* 157), as the speaker feels unresolved about tribal belonging, even at the poem’s close. Yet, Heaney’s fisherman is confined by the lough in which he fishes and suffers more serious consequences than Walcott’s sailor, who finds home on the open sea. Nonetheless, in this poem, the water figures as a place separate from the Troubles, even if it (and the fisherman) ultimately succumb to the land-based concerns of the conflict.

These poems of a poet-sailor and an outlandish fisherman demonstrate the reductive binaries of conceptions of the nation, which rather than add clarity, complicate belonging. Whether by territory, history or religion, the figures of Walcott’s and Heaney’s poems are to some extent excluded from versions of national belonging. They are solitary figures who trigger questions about nationality even as they do not benefit from it. In doing so, they move away from landed understandings of the nation, revealing them to be restrictive. The sea and water feature in these poems to demonstrate the shifting line between in- and outside of the nation. While both figures are at sea and on water, they do, nonetheless, retain a link with their local environments. Shabine

remembers his specific heritage and boyhood education. Similarly, Heaney's makes it clear that the fisherman in "Casualty" is part of one tribe despite his efforts to distance himself from it. Thus, while national belonging appears as a constructed concept, its implications are real; Shabine remains a solitary figure, caught across the binary, while the fisherman is killed for his failure to abide by the tribe's rules. As Blum's work on the sailor suggests, these figures are not entirely divorced from national affiliation, yet they do not receive benefits from their partial inclusion in national belonging. The nation appears here as ineluctable as these figures straddle a shifting line, demonstrating the complex ways national belonging is played out at sea.

Poets, Paintings and Patriots: Rethinking Nationalist Symbols

A key part of the dissemination of the nation is its constant reconstitution through signs and symbols that demonstrate its stability and longevity. As Smith suggests, there are clear parameters around the perpetuation of the nation, with cultural figures, historical events, landscapes and language variously coming to symbolise elements of the nation. The experience of being at sea in the following poems inaugurates a unique relationship with those symbols and figures that are utilised by nations to inspire solidarity and unity.

For Goodison, sailors appear across her collections, allowing her to explore both personal and collective belonging. The poem "Crossover Griot", from *Travelling Mercies* is particularly significant here, primarily for its relationship to questions of national identification and belonging, but also from a comparative perspective as one of the poem's main figures is an Irish sailor. Recalling the poet's own familial history, whereby her great grandmother had children with an Irish sailor, the poem tells of a seaman who jumped ship, to paraphrase the poem, and "took that Guinea girl" (Goodison, *CP* 339).

There are clear parallels with the earlier “Guinea Woman” in this poem (discussed in more detail in chapter four) but “Crossover Griot” reveals a complex weave of national affiliations and rhetoric. In particular, the poem shows the ways in which a seemingly “national” poet can be a mixture of transnational influences.

The five stanzas of this poem tell of the Irish sailor who abandoned ship, of the woman with whom he had a child and, eventually focuses on her life as a poet, or more specifically a griot, a travelling poet or story-teller from Africa. The poem’s middle stanza notes that both characters of the poem are singers:

“I am O’Rahilly” he croons.
She moans “since them
carry me from Guinea
me can’t go home”. (Goodison, *CP* 340)

Within the poem, this is the only place the actual voices of the characters are heard. Structurally, this stanza highlights the combining of worlds, brought together by sea travel. Despite being in the Caribbean, the draws of the two figures’ “homelands” are strong. At a glance, the typically Irish name, “O’Rahilly”, and the references to Guinea cement the pulls on each of these characters. More acutely, Kevin McNeilly reads these pulls in national terms:

Both of them sing, he the nationalistic ballads of the late William Butler Yeats (“I am O’Rahilly”), the rough public music of a cynical Romantic nationalist and self-styled bard, and she the folksy ululations [...] of popular calypso [...]. She becomes a kind of *griot*: the central African signers of national epics, a role usually reserved for men. (200)

While McNeilly misidentifies the line as Yeats' – it is instead from "Egan O'Rahilly" by James Stephens – the vivid picture he paints of the national allegiances of these two characters is telling.⁴⁵ Stephens' poem draws on the work of the Irish bardic poet Aodhagán Ó'Rathaille, anglicising his name for the poem's title. Ó'Rathaille's most well-known poems are in the *aisling* tradition (Ó'Cróinín), a poetic form in which a woman warns the poet of danger to the nation.⁴⁶ The woman is presented as a symbolic voice of the nation, a voice that is captured by the male poet, as he becomes her mouthpiece and protector. Thus, that Goodison's figure sings of O'Rahilly further cements McNeilly's claim that he is a self-styled Romantic nationalist. Stephens' poem ends with lines that are suggestive of the lamenting tone of displacement, his speaker declaring, "I am O'Rahilly: / Here in a distant place I hold my tongue, / Who once said all his say, when he was young" (Stephens 221). The wistful tone of these lines are echoed in the Irish sailor's song. More significantly, however, "I am O'Rahilly" he croons" demonstrates the transnational outlook of the work. In this short line, the sailor reveals his absorption of the sea's synaptic impulses, as he is associated with multiple influences from the poetic traditions of the Gaelic bards to Yeats' praise of Stephens' work.

Nonetheless, that the sailor relies on the *aisling* as his mode of address suggests that, despite his sea travel, his national allegiances have not been lost. While emigration from Ireland is no new theme for poets of the island, Goodison's figure instead ventriloquizes nationalist lost through his recitation of Stephens' poem and its assumption of O'Rahilly's voice. Both poems tell of exile but while Stephens' poem,

⁴⁵ Yeats does, however, reference the poem in the introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, noting that those who, like Stephens, remembered the Gaelic bards of the 17th and 18th centuries "made them symbols of our pride" ("Introduction" xiv).

⁴⁶ In addition to O'Rathaille's *aisling* poems, "Is fada liom oíche fhírfhliuch", translated by Thomas Kinsella as "The Drenching Night Drags On", is notable for its particular consideration of the sea. The poem speaks of "fragile and unsettled ties with harassed patrons" and displays the poet's contempt through his interaction with the sea: "You wave down there, lifting your loudest roar, / the wits in my head are worsted by your wails" (Ó Tuama and Kinsella xxvii, 141).

spoken in O’Rahilly’s own voice, is filled with the atmosphere of national lament, Goodison does not allow her figure such sincerity. Indeed, the space devoted to the Irishman within the stanza is suggestive of a more dismissive attitude. The verb *croon* calls to mind a less stoic recitation of the poem than Stephens would perhaps expect. On the one hand, the word has its origins in Scots (again, signalling the multitudes of influences at work here) implying a “murmuring lament” (OED def. 2b), which is befitting of the grief-filled emigrant. On the other, it also calls to mind the seductive voices of charming and overly sentimental male crooners, with associated connotations of insincerity. Indeed, this “jump-ship Irishman” (Goodison, *CP* 339) leaves his partner to tend their child all day while he goes out to croon. In this sense, the national bard is rendered a figure of show and unreliability. His recitation lacks the supposed power of a national ballad as his jump-ship attitude and daily abandonment of his child signal a loss of conviction and commitment to any ideal. His national sentiments are estranged through travel on the disruptive, synaptic sea and are instead interlaced with various influences, reducing the symbolic link with an Irish nation to a blurred association.

In a similar way, the poem’s female figure is not exempt from nationalist pulls. McNeilly notes above that the griot position is one usually occupied by males but Thomas A. Hale’s work clarifies this. Relaying the importance of the griot, Hale writes, “griots operate at the centre of society, linking ruler and subject, past and future, while serving many roles [...]. Some of these functions are gender-specific, whereas others are carried out by both men and women” (42). Hence, the griot has an important role to play in sustaining the nation through his/her close relationship to power and role in linking history to the present. Yet, Goodison’s griot is a less connected version of an official national poet than the Irishman sailor is. For her, the griot’s nomadic nature is paramount. Her forced migration makes her relationship to language strained as she “moans” her

song. The unnamed griot demonstrates that language is shifty across borders, reflecting the actual situation in the Caribbean. Like the Irish sailor, although to a greater extent, she is divorced from her language, as the Middle Passage has dissolved her affiliations with a collective language and culture. Consequently, the griot is more aware of the contradictions at play as Goodison ends the poem with enigmatic lines:

Still they ask her
why you chant so?
And why she turn poet
not even she know. (Goodison, *CP* 340)

Unlike the Irishman who quotes at will and is rendered a performative nationalistic figure, the griot recognises her unstable position. In a similar way to Heaney's questioning in "Casualty", this poem provides no explicit answers, as poetry's value is left unresolved. Nonetheless, there is a sense of both the futility and the importance of the work in the face of larger narratives that have influenced ideas of belonging. Interestingly, the woman of the poem is never referred to as Guinea-woman in the same way the Irishman is categorised by his nationality. She accepts her nomadic position and while her emigration is forced and the sailor's is not, she acknowledges the same inability to go home as her male counterpart. The Irishman, by contrast, becomes an almost ridiculous figure in his attempts to inhabit an impossible nationalist paradigm. The performative aspects of language are brought to the fore here as both characters' speech is inflected with ideas of the nation that are ultimately shown to be shifting and unstable. By turns, this suggests the unsteadiness of basing the nation or national belonging on ideas of pure and unchanging language and cultural symbols.

Notably, it is not only people that come to represent national coherence, as the human reality of a national society can be obscured by monumental signalling of the nation. Ní Chuilleanáin's poem, "The Incidental Human Figures" from *The Boys of Bluehill*, examines the relationship of society to architectural and environmental symbols of the nation. This ekphrastic poem is based, in the first stanza, on etchings by Italian painter, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, most likely of his drawings of the Greek Paestum temples in Southern Italy. These drawings represent ruined Greek temples, which take up a majority of the frame, but are also populated with local figures and animals who are often foregrounded in the scene.⁴⁷ It is these human figures Ní Chuilleanáin focuses on, who appear overshadowed by the colossal ruins. The incidental figures of the "rascals playing with dice", the shepherd and the fisherman, for the poet, "all say, / This is peace, those ruinous days are gone" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *BB* 48). In an apparent rejection of the past, they "do not care / about monks or goddesses, they are small, / and over their shoulder towers the ruinous past" (48). Smith draws attention to "the place of ancestral monuments" in his consideration of the nation (227) and, while these temples are Greek structures in Italy, they nonetheless convey a sense of historic empire. Architecture appears as a marker of the nation, the past towering over the figures of the picture. Yet, in Piranesi's images, Ní Chuilleanáin sees a rejection of this history by the human figures. The poem dwells on cultural remembrance in the face of a present that appears less concerned with ideas of religion, culture and architecture, as the poet turns to focus on the daily lives of the pictures' figures. Although the monuments are imposing within the paintings, Ní Chuilleanáin emphasises that they are mere background to the human figures.

⁴⁷ Some of Piranesi's drawings are available to view in the Sir John Soane's Museum Collection Online (for a collated selection see the link accompanying "Search Results" in the Works Consulted section).

What is particularly significant about this poem is that when Ní Chuilleanáin chooses a figure on whom to focus more intensely, she moves to an entirely different tableau in stanza two:

What about the sailor
whose fragile craft is tossed about in the oil painting
under some famous cliffs? He has been summoned
to show the scale, to suggest the grand force,
proportion, disproportion. What grand consent
invades his heart as the sublime
soaks him, and swallows him down? (Ní Chuilleanáin, *BB* 48)

Here, Ní Chuilleanáin has moved away from the Piranesi etchings that opened the poem to contemplate a more Romantic view. The sailor appears without agency, brushed by the sea and by the artist, who includes him merely for size and scale. Note here that the naming of any actual place is avoided, as the reader is orientated by only “some famous cliffs”. To return to Bhabha, here, is to note the ways in which the nation has been naturalised in the landscape. Amongst the “famous cliffs”, the sailor becomes only an incidental figure. Yet, Ní Chuilleanáin’s focus on him suggests that he is central to her thinking. Despite the lack of place names in the poem, the White Cliffs of Dover and their importance to British and/or English national sentiment could be taken as an analogous point of reference. From Matthew Arnold, who describes them in “Dover Beach” – “the cliffs of England stand, / Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay” (224) – to their symbolic sense of hope for the retreating British army from Dunkirk during World War II, these cliffs can rightly be called famous and arouse the type of landscape-inspired sentiment Bhabha outlines.

However, for the sailor, the twinned pulls of “grand force” and “grand consent” reinforce his position as an intermediary figure both within the painting and within the larger world that he inhabits. Towed between these forces, he becomes a pawn for the artist to “show scale”, just as Blum suggests that sailors are central to the nation’s functioning. At the same time, he is swallowed and submerged by the landscape around him. The poem’s switch to questioning in this stanza demonstrates the ways in which the sailor as a figure prompts interrogation of representations of the nation. He is an uneasy figure within the image and as such the poet places her focus on him. In her use of the ekphrastic mode here, Ní Chuilleanáin attempts to reinterpret the sailor and his relationship to the nationalistic landscape, portraying a conflicted positioning. In a similar way, Goodison’s subtle reinterpretation of the Irish bardic poet reveals the performativity of nationalist symbols. The sailor is swallowed by the painting’s cliffs, which inspire feelings of familiarity and connectedness to a territory, just as the figures of stanza one are dominated by the temples, which signal pride in a national history. Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem reveals how monuments and landscape seek to overwhelm the individual in order to signal national belonging. The figures are incidental in the face of these monumental images of imperial dominance. Yet, in her focus on the sailor at the poem’s end, Ní Chuilleanáin expands on the bind the incidental figures of paintings who live under the nation find themselves in, recognising the ways in which the nation utilises symbols to function but also the exclusionary ways the nation operates. The sailor is a figure of the grand narrative but can still find no place within it, becoming a subsidiary figure alongside those of Piranesi’s paintings.

The most explicit retelling of a nationalist figure, however, is to be found in Heaney’s work. The Irish rebel, Wolfe Tone, appears as a sailor in order to demonstrate the difficulties of a nationalist struggle and the humanity of the man himself. In this poem

from *The Haw Lantern*, Tone is imagined as the speaker, reflecting on his life through the central incident of a potential shipwreck. He recalls that he was “once wakened to the shouts of men / rising from the bottom of the sea” (Heaney, *OG* 318). While the metaphor here serves primarily to demonstrate the fear and chaos of drowning, the suggestion that he can hear voices from the bottom of the sea speaks to the call Tone feels in liberating Ireland. For John Hobbs, “officers seem to swim up magically from the deep, resurrected from drowning as Tone is from death for his monologue” (77-78). The sea becomes a repository for the voices of those who seek independence in the face of colonial rule. Voices emerging from the sea is a key trope of Caribbean literature. Indeed, in “The Schooner *Flight*”, the drowned of the Middle Passage return from the sea, where Shabine encounters them: “Next we pass slave ships. Flags of all nations, / our fathers below deck too deep, I suppose, / to hear us shouting. So we stop shouting” (Walcott, *PDW* 244). Although Tone’s position varies greatly from that of Africans forced into slavery, both poems establish how the synaptic sea becomes a space of history and remembrance in the face of colonial struggle. Moreover, reading Tone’s precarity alongside Shabine’s vision of ships with “flags of all nations” demonstrates the importance within established nations of what Billig terms “a continual ‘flagging’, or reminding, of nationhood” (8). As a result of the accident aboard Tone’s ship, “the big fleet split and Ireland dwindled” (Heaney, *OG* 318), tying Ireland’s fate to the chaos of the sea. Ireland’s own attempts at independence fail, as the predominance of Britain’s navy is implicitly recalled. The drowned sailors spur Tone on but the futility of his efforts are what close the poem.

The sea’s metaphorical connotations and historical realities are at play in this poem. At the opening, Tone likens himself to “a skiff, manoeuvrable / yet outmanoeuvred” (Heaney, *OG* 318). A small boat often sailed by a crew of one or two, a skiff is easily piloted. Thus, in this nautical metaphor, Tone reflects on his capabilities as

well as political forces seemingly out of his control. Just as Ní Chuilleanáin's sailor is confined to his "fragile craft", Tone sees himself as "the shouldered oar that ended up / far from the brine and whiff of venture" (318). The sea here is formidable, both in its nature and in its colonial history, as it calls to mind British sea-power, overwhelming Tone's ambitions. Indeed, historically, the failure to land in Bantry Bay for his planned rebellion in 1798 led to Tone's subsequent capture and the failure of the struggle for Irish independence that he commanded. Heaney brings together both the events of history, which took place on sea, and a personal insight to the rebel hero, Wolfe Tone, to reinforce the importance of events at sea to history and to Tone himself.

Like Goodison's "Crossover Griot", the poem also demonstrates that the transnational poetics Ramazani outlines resonate with the ideas of the synaptic sea by showing that Tone was a figure influenced by many impulses.

I affected epaulettes and a cockade,
wrote a style well-bred and impervious
to the solidarity I angled for,
and played the ancient Roman with a razor. (Heaney, *OG* 318)

There is a sense of performativity in Wolfe Tone's character here, as with the sailor of Goodison's poem. His affectations and play speak to the multiple influences and crossings both in Tone's life and in Heaney's rendering of him. Ramazani observes that "globe-traversing influences, energies, and resistances, far from being minor deviations from nation-based fundamentals, have arguably styled and shaped poetry in English" (*Transnational Poetics* 23). Similarly, Tone is shown to be shaped by a number of influences from France to the classical world. Crucially, these links are formed through the synaptic sea, with Heaney's pun on angling indicating the sea-based nature of these

transnational crossings. Heaney is keen to note the role of sea travel, if implicitly, emphasising that Tone was “out of [his] element among small farmers” (*OG* 318). Although the sea signals the failure of his rebellion, Tone also seems removed from a landed nationalism, open to a synaptic understanding of the nation, which is influenced by other places. Indeed, as Ramazani notes,

we need to remind ourselves constantly that the cultures, locations, and identities connected or juxtaposed are themselves agglomerations of complex origins – though those earlier fusions have often been naturalized in ways that occlude the surprise or irony of their convergence. (*Transnational Poetics* 47)

For Heaney, Tone’s rebellion does not play on tropes of a “pure” Irishness but instead exposes the transnational and artificial elements that exist in Tone as a character. In doing so, Heaney reveals an awareness of the artificiality of the nation, as explored above and reiterated by Ramazani here. This poem demonstrates through an interaction with the sea that Wolfe Tone has crossed boundaries and countries in a complex weave of affiliations, thus forcing a consideration of the interconnectedness of a national personage and a reassessment of what it means to be a figure of national praise and pride.

Shipwrecks in the Literary Imagination

Sailors and those at sea face the threat of shipwreck, as Heaney’s “Wolfe Tone” indicates. Shipwreck has occupied the creative mind for centuries and forms an important part of literary history. Brigitte le Jeuz and Olga Springer outline the symbolic resonances of the shipwreck, which “as an image and symbol, is intimately connected to the symbolic potential of the ship and of life as a ship voyage. The most established types of symbolic ships in European literature are the ships of life, logos, political community, humanity”

(1). The ship, as such, can function as a microcosm of the political community of the nation and as a ship is wrecked so too is the stability of those categories it comes to represent. For Walcott and Ní Chuilleanáin, treatment of the castaway and shipwreck reveals much about their understandings of belonging and positioning.

One of literature's most well-known shipwrecked characters receives treatment from Walcott as a way of understanding the position of postcolonial nations. In the aptly titled collection, *The Castaway*, both "Crusoe's Journal" and "Crusoe's Island" explore Daniel Defoe's character, at times in an unexpected way. Walcott expresses an explicitly uneasy, although only at times antagonistic, relationship with the sailor figure across these two poems. On the one hand, he demonstrates an affiliation with the Crusoe figure. According to Kit Fan, the poet's unsettled ideas of home and belonging and simultaneous desire to explore the world both at home and abroad can be characterised as "the Crusoe dilemma" (44). After all, Crusoe is a "young man with the '[i]nclination' to run away to the sea" (M. Cohen, *Novel* 60) and across Walcott's oeuvre figures such as Shabine, who are attracted to the sea, are prominent. Yet, on the other hand, Crusoe remains a symbol of colonisation, a facet that is evinced in Walcott's treatment of him in both poems, acknowledging that the people of the Caribbean have been seen as "Friday's progeny / The Brood of Crusoe's slave" (Walcott, *PDW* 81). These competing pulls are evident in Walcott's handling of the Crusoe trope and the contemplation of the implications of the shipwreck.

"Crusoe's Journal" is of particular interest here as it touches on the lasting effects of representations of the Caribbean by the colonial rulers. It is clear, as already seen in Goodison's "Crossover Griot" and more generally in chapter one, that language plays an important role in understanding one's place in the world and is pivotal in shaping ethnic and national identities, particularly in the Caribbean, given its varied linguistic make-up.

Here, however, Walcott combines this with the disruptive powers of the shipwreck and the isolation felt by the sailor landed on an unfamiliar island. The poem's epigraph is a quotation from *Robinson Crusoe*, in which Crusoe remarks "I looked upon the world as a thing remote [...] as a place I had lived in but was come out of it" (Defoe qtd. in Walcott, *PDW* 75). More extremely than the sailor, who straddles the binaries of society, the castaway feels removed from the world as he knows it. Similarly as the poem begins, the speaker drives to a beach house that is "perched between ocean and green" (Walcott, *PDW* 75), highlighting his parallel liminality and creating the link with the Crusoe figure Fan detects in Walcott's work. Yet, it is the link between shipwreck and language that is notable here. Just as Crusoe salvages the essentials from the wrecked ship in Defoe's novel, so too "The bare necessities / of style are ruined to use" (75). The poetic forms that abound aboard the ship are destroyed in the shipwreck, leaving only the remnants of poetry. Yet, Walcott recognises that it is this apparently functional language that becomes, for the people of the Caribbean, the language of poetry.

[...] our profane Genesis
 whose Adam speaks that prose
 which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself
 with poetry's surprise,
 in a green world, one without metaphors. (75)

Walcott here revises Biblical and Crusoe mythologies to tell of the coming of poetry through shipwreck. Yet, as with the doubleness of Shabine's assertion above, there is a sense that this "coming-of-poetry" could be an ironic assumption of a colonial voice. That the island is described dismissively as "some sea-rock", would seem to confirm this. As the poem approaches its end, the authority of Crusoe's journal becomes clear, as the language is fraught with colonial inheritance.

We learn to shape from [his journals], where nothing was
the language of a race,
and since intellect demands its mask
that sun-cracked, bearded face
provides us with a wish to dramatize
ourselves at nature's cost,
to attempt a beard, to squint through sea-haze,
posing as naturalists,
drunks, castaways, beachcombers. (76-77)

Many elements of the creation that is the nation can be found in these lines, alongside the externalising colonial gaze. As a result of history, the “language of a race”, retrieved from the debris of a shipwreck, is the language of Crusoe’s journals and it is shaped by those in the Caribbean. For Braithwaite, the poetic language of his Caribbean can be considered “nation language”, the use of “nation” standing in contrast to the pejorative “dialect” and demonstrating an African influenced model of language (*History* 13). It is the English “spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by the conquistadors” (1-2). The brutal sea journeys of the Middle Passage are the inception of this nation language and it is a nation language that displays its hybridity. Yet, as Braithwaite warns, this is not a nation language along the lines of official English but

rather a renewed understating of the nation. For Walcott, the language of the race likewise comes from elsewhere as it is born out of the gaps in Crusoe's journal.⁴⁸

At the same time, Walcott is critical of the performativity this inspires, as a national identity emerges that is shaped from elsewhere, as in "Crossover Griot". There is a more sinister tone contained in "mask" and "dramatize", which points towards issues of colonial mimicry. As Bhabha explains, mimicry "is the process of the *fixation* of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse, and therefore necessarily raises the question of the *authorization* of colonial representations" (90). For Bhabha, "mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse" (86) most readily involves the adoption of colonial values, forms and paradigms by the colonised person. Accordingly, the authority of the colonial as a form of knowledge is destabilised, as it is revealed to be easily adopted by non-colonial peoples. In this poem, the model is altered somewhat, the community not adopting Crusoe's own behaviours but rather imagining itself through the filter of his external, colonial gaze, as the local people mimic the behaviour Crusoe assumes them to follow. There is a recognition that attempting a beard, squinting in the sun and posing as drunks and castaways is guided by colonial representation. In portraying themselves as naturalists, the people of Walcott's poem echo Bhabha's assertion that "mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask" (88). Crusoe views these behaviours as inherent, while Walcott recognises that they are actually undertaken "at nature's cost". An identity that is connected to nature is deemed to be impossible due to Crusoe's influence, even as

⁴⁸ In relation to conceptions of language, Walcott and Brathwaite have often been viewed "as antitheses of each other" (Brown 220). Certainly, Brathwaite displays an Afrocentricity and sustained engagement with creole languages throughout his career that is not mirrored by Walcott, who writes more often in a standard English and regularly engages with European models. Yet, Bill Ashcroft suggests that they are united by the recognition of the linguistic potential in the Caribbean environment: "For Brathwaite, much more than Walcott, it is language itself that epitomises the hope for a transformed future, but like Walcott, the vision of transformation begins in the space of the archipelago" ("Archipelago" 94).

the language is inherited and made poetic. Mimicry becomes the defining feature. Indeed, as Bhabha concludes, mimicry “problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the ‘national’ is no longer naturalizable” (87). Walcott recognises that in the islanders’ mimicry, the idea of the national as Crusoe imagines it is impossible, as mimicry “marginalizes the monumentality of history” (Bhabha 87-88), a key aspect of the dissemination of the nation.

Following the shipwreck, Crusoe’s sense of place in the world is destroyed. For Walcott, Caribbean people gather the detritus of the shipwreck from the synaptic sea and use that, not to form a nation as Crusoe knows it, but rather to see Crusoe as “The second Adam since the fall” (Walcott, *PDW* 79). In interview, Walcott suggests

One of the more positive aspects of the Crusoe idea is that in a sense every race that has come to the Caribbean has been brought here under situations of servitude or rejection, and that is the metaphor of the shipwreck, I think. Then you look around you and you have to make your own tools. Whether that tool is a pen or a hammer, you are building in a situation that’s Adamic ... (qtd. in Hirsch and Walcott, “Derek” 213-14)

The world is remade in the Caribbean, in the face of Crusoe’s shipwreck. In a similar way, Brathwaite’s ideas of a nation language are removed from officially sanctified connections between the nation and language. Crusoe’s authority is undermined in the poem through mimicry, as the “naturalness” of the Caribbean nation is also destabilised; instead the Caribbean is *built* with hammer and pen. Walcott engages in an examination of the implications of the shipwreck, language and mimicry in the Caribbean as a poet engaged in what Fanon describes as essential for the creation of a national culture, “addressing himself to his people” (173). At the same time, the poem maintains a

complex weave of interrelationships and does not completely condemn Crusoe. Walcott's treatment of the shipwrecked colonial figure demonstrates that while the concept of the nation as Crusoe understands it is revealed through mimicry to be without authority, the consciousness of the people of the Caribbean is still influenced by the synaptic remnants of the shipwreck in their remaking of the world around.

Ní Chuilleanáin's work is also invested in ideas of shipwreck and this fascination can be seen in poems such as "Tower of Storms, Island of Tides" from *The Girl who Married the Reindeer*, in which a lighthouse keeper watches "sailors being blown on to the rocks" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SP* 111). Although she rarely explicitly focuses on a particular figure such as Wolfe Tone or Crusoe, her work does point towards an interconnected literature. In "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" from *The Second Voyage*, the literary links to a short story of the same title by Edgar Allan Poe reveal an interesting perspective on the nation. Although it is unclear whether Ní Chuilleanáin was directly influenced by Poe's text, the plot and lexical similarities are striking, suggesting that she had read the story. Both tell of a shipwreck, describing the incident in close detail, contain an ill-prepared captain who plays with archaic navigational tools and end on an unresolved note. In Poe's case, the narrator of the story is the one who has managed to write the message in the bottle as the shipwreck happens; owing to this, the narrative ends abruptly as he drowns. Ní Chuilleanáin's poem is also in the first person and it is only by the final stanza, as "the grey sea tilts at wind" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SV* 19), that the shipwreck is evident and the speaker faces imminent drowning. What is particularly interesting in Poe's story are the opening lines, which read, "Of my country and of my family I have little to say. Ill usage and length of years have driven me from the one, and estranged me from the other" (Poe). Thus, Poe's sailor is established as an outlandish figure, estranged from his country, as Crusoe becomes through his shipwreck. Like Shabine, Goodison's

Irishman, and Heaney's fisherman, this sailor has an uneasy relationship with the national collective and, through the enigmatic phrase "ill usage", is not part of the state. The deliberately unclear opening is indicative of the insidious nature of the nation from the narrator's point of view as he is unable to vocalise his transgressions, while also underlining the sailor's intentionally distanced position.

While Poe's story is clearly set off the islands around Indonesia and Malaysia, there is little to orientate Ní Chuilleanáin's reader. The poem begins with only "After a week at sea / They wake", while the captain's seemingly late turn to navigation, using archaic tools adds to a feeling of disorientation: "There sits our captain on the right / Beginning the study of navigation / With an astrolabe" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SV* 19). Within this uncertainty, the speaker attempts to conceptualise space in such a way as to orientate himself, seeing around him, "a dark wall", "long flat shadows like a railway station" and "grottoes and sidechapels of air" (19). Although the sailor may feel lost, these architectural images suggest more of an awareness of place and location than seems apparent at first. Blum's work provides a fresh perspective on the "at seanness" of a sailor's life by examining the ways sailors located themselves at sea:

Before global positioning systems, this could only be done by means of accurate sea clocks, sextants, and charts that allowed mariners to plot their relative position among the poles of Greenwich, the stars, and the bobbing horizon. Thus, by definition, to know one's place at sea was to know one's place on the planet – even more, in the universe. ("Terraqueous Planet" 25).

Thus, the sailor knows his place on earth because of the nature of positioning at sea. This positioning does not need to take into account the landed geographies of the nation, such as the cliffs depicted in "The Incidental Human Figures", but instead uses extra-terrestrial

bodies as points of reference. In contrast to colonial mappings, discussed in chapter one, land is subverted on the ocean, as sea and sky are given supremacy. Given the reliance on the skies, the crew's impending shipwreck in Ní Chuilleanáin's poem is rendered an eerie prospect when the stars disappear.

The polar stars have left our sky,
Here in the lap of the wind it is cold;
Not an island nor a rock to mar
The slippery face of the water – (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SV* 19)

The lack of stars and nearby land leaves the sailors vulnerable. As Walcott signals with his epigraph from *Robinson Crusoe*, the sailor and potential victim of the sea feels outside of the world. To the speaker, the polar stars may well be in another sky, but not the one upon which his crew looks, as his sense of place is disrupted. Despite the captain's efforts to use the astrolabe, the lack of stars and sun makes positioning difficult in this poem. In this way, this sailor appears to be without a position in the universe, without any sense of orientation. The chaos of the shipwreck destabilises the foundations of the nation with which it is associated, as le Jeuz and Springer note.

Returning to Poe's story, the sailor at his impending drowning writes, "yet a curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions, predominates even over my despair" (Poe). He is an eternal sailor, spurred on by the mysteries of new places and unattached from any national rhetoric. Ní Chuilleanáin's speaker is more circumspect, although there is a hint that the speaker still positions himself in relation to the sea: "... And now far below the yellow sand revolves, / Our corner is thick with a drift of brown beechleaves" (Ní Chuilleanáin *SV* 19). That this part of the sea is referred to by the speaker as "our corner" speaks to the homeliness the sailor feels at sea, as well as a rare

example of comradeship not encountered elsewhere in the poems of this chapter. As with Walcott's *Shabine*, the speaker finds home in his craft at sea, removed from a definitive nationalism that, in the case of "Manuscript Found in a Bottle", was already disrupted by the sea-based circumvention of the land in favour of the skies' alterity.

Conclusions

In the poems examined in this chapter, sailors are shown to be challenging figures. Often presented as lone men, they stand outside of a wider community, occupying the synaptic space of the sea. The nation, most of the scholars discussed here agree, is an artificial concept, constructed along modes of belonging and, in turn, naturalised. Recognising those modes and their artificiality is crucial in order to demonstrate how the nation might be destabilised by those at sea. The works of Ramazani and of Bhabha, read alongside Blum's theories of the sailor figure, reveal the ways in which fixed ideas of the nation can be destabilised. The figures of the poems discussed here imagine and/or present alternative understandings of belonging and location by destabilising boundaries and highlighting the ways in which the nation is not a pure category, not a "fact of nature".

For Heaney, a turn to figures on water demonstrates an uneasiness with strict understandings of national belonging. The fisherman in "Casualty" portrays a desire to move beyond the them/us binary of the conflict in Northern Ireland through his repeated interaction with the water. Yet, the nation drawn along historical, territorial and religious lines prevails as a landed nationalism returns. In "Wolfe Tone", however, a transnational perspective highlights that for Heaney a "pure" nation is fallacy. Tone is shown as a figure of multiple, border crossing influences due to sea-travel. This is also the case for Goodison who demonstrates how migration by sea, both forced and voluntary, to the

Caribbean leads to a mixed sense of national affiliation. In the Caribbean, this is revealed through language, as the Irishman's performative recitations are contrasted with the Guinea griot who knows not why she sings. For Walcott too, language is an issue for considerations of the nation, turning to one of literature's earliest shipwrecks as a metaphor for the detritus of language that washes up from the synaptic gap of the sea to the local space of the Caribbean beaches to form a new language, which for Brathwaite is a nation language. Elsewhere, in *Shabine*, Walcott demonstrates that, like Heaney's fisherman, to live wholly outside the nation is arduous. Concurrently, *Shabine* reveals the absurdity of the nation's exclusivity by demonstrating the ways in which he both does and does not fit into such a divide. Finally, Ní Chuilleanáin's ekphrastic poem, "The Incidental Human Figures", explores how the sailor as a symbol is used for a national purpose, but is in turn seen as unnecessary himself. Like Walcott's *Shabine* and Tone's experience of shipwreck in Heaney's poem, Ní Chuilleanáin's drowning figures reveal their attachment to the sea, despite its dangers. It becomes a way of locating oneself in the world that is unattached to exclusionary landed ideas of the nation.

As opposed to the landlubber, the sailor is confronted with interchanging ways of belonging and positioning and as such an examination of the sailor challenges the restrictive confines of a naturalised national identity in Ireland and the Caribbean. *Shabine*, Tone, the fisherman of "Casualty" and Ní Chuilleanáin's speaker in "Manuscript Found in a Bottle", all demonstrate a desire, implicit or otherwise, to live beyond strict confines of the nation. Goodison's Irishman and griot, alongside the figures of the paintings in Ní Chuilleanáin's poem, reveal the nation's artificiality and the sailor's role within ideas of the nation. Nevertheless, the nation's connotations are rarely entirely dismissed in these poems. Instead, its impulses are retained and revised in the synaptic sea. For some, nationhood is a central question, as in the cases of *Shabine*, Tone and

Crusoe. What these poems reveal, rather, is the slipperiness of the categories that come to define the nation and the possibility of an interconnectedness through the sea. Indeed, the seas and waters of the world allow one to accurately locate oneself, giving rise to more open ways of belonging and identification that reside both alongside and beyond the strictures of a landed-nationalism.

CHAPTER FOUR

Gender and Sexuality at Sea

*I will go back to the great sweet mother,
Mother and lover of men, the sea
I will go down to her, I and none other,
Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me*

(Algernon Charles Swinburne, "The Return" 17).

The sea has always been a space that prompts questions about gender. From male adventuring to the female-named ships on which they sailed, and from the connection between woman and water to the sea's masculine violence, the synaptic sea retains a complex mix of gender ideas and ideologies. DeLoughrey's work, in particular, explicates some of this gendering at sea, observing how it reflects larger ideologies around gender: "masculinized trajectories of nomadic subjects and capital attain their motility by invoking feminized flows, fluidity, and circulations, while the feminine (as an organizing concept) and women (as subjects) are profoundly localized" (*Routes* 5).⁴⁹ For her, the sea and sea travel have been categorised by clearly demarcated terms of gender in traditional thought. The mobile subject is masculine as he traverses the feminine sea, considered as such because of its seemingly inexplicable fluidity. As a result, the feminine is paradoxically rendered immobile and while ideas of the local at sea have been important thus far in the thesis, it can also become a site of stasis in the face of this gendering. It is of particular interest to this chapter that in this division, which

⁴⁹ This thesis relies heavily on DeLoughrey's work, as well as other prominent women scholars in the field of oceanic studies, such as Blum, and beyond. Informed by Sara Ahmed's call for feminist citational practices, I have endeavoured for, at least, gender balance in this thesis – Ahmed challenges herself to write without reference to white men (15). Despite attention to my citational practice a review of my bibliography indicates a 56/44 percentage split in favour of male writers. I have been particularly concerned that, in the need to review fields such as nation studies and myth, I have relied on seminal work, often by male scholars. In this thesis' larger frame, I have sought more balance not only from a gender perspective but also with attention to the backgrounds of the scholars on whose work I build.

sees man as nomadic and in a position of power, the sea across which he travels is depicted in feminine terms, which in turn is viewed as passive and lifeless.

These divisions are detected in literary production, whereby poets envision the sea as a symbol of “irrational femininity” (Klein and Mackenthun 2). In the case of the Atlantic Ocean, endeavours such as trade, exploration and piracy are, by contrast, consistently presented as masculine in literary production, therefore cementing a vision of the sea as a masculine space (King 28). Indeed, the previous chapter demonstrates the regularity with which sailing and fishing are cast as male activities. This chapter seeks to examine to what extent this binary manifests in the work of the four poets of this thesis, by posing the following questions: Is the sea viewed as feminine? Does this reflect on how femininity is rendered in poetry more generally? How is masculinity perceived at sea? How can the frame of the synoptic sea as a disruptive space delineate challenges to these norms within the poetry? These questions are important because, as DeLoughrey’s work invokes, there is much at stake in the way in which spaces are gendered. It has profound implications for one’s understanding of the world, as it “both reflects *and has effects back on* the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live” (Massey 186; emphasis in original).

Within the colonial and postcolonial spaces that these poets inhabit, the gendering of landscape is of particular importance as it can notably reveal much about gendered power dynamics in these settings, within the context of their particular historical legacies. Sara Mills acknowledges the colonial male impulse to feminise unfamiliar landscapes (74).⁵⁰ Yet, nationalist movements seeking various degrees of independence also tend to

⁵⁰ Mills does question whether the frequent use of the pronoun “she” to refer to these landscapes is a mere rhetorical device, while also conceding that colonial descriptions of landscape are tied up in gendered ideas (74, 100). At the same time, her work provides an interesting suggestion that narratives written from other perspectives, such as female explorers, often treat nature in a different way (75).

equate women and landscape, with Lyn Innes identifying this trend in both Irish and Senegalese fiction, for example (223). As suggested above, these equations of woman and landscape have reflected the realities of women in both contexts and “the resulting oppression of women in colonial and postcolonial regimes has sometimes been termed a double-colonization” (Innes 223). Writing about women and landscape from both colonial and postcolonial contexts has relied on the trope of equating one with the other. As such, it is of interest to explore how and why writers from these locations gender landscapes. In the case of the sea, intriguing perspectives emerge.

Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott engage with the gendered impulses of the synaptic sea. Whether it is from their own gendered perspective or in viewing the sea as a gendered space, these poets reveal much about their attitudes towards gender in their poetic interaction with the sea. Through the gendering of the sea itself and travel across it, it is clear that traditional gender norms hold sway over these poets at times, although they may interact with them in unique ways. This chapter begins by examining how the sea has been gendered as feminine, with a particular emphasis on the location of a feminine mystery at sea by Heaney and Walcott. Following DeLoughrey’s work, it then considers how these poets envision sea travel as a masculine activity and assesses this binary in the work of Goodison, Heaney and Walcott. All four poets, furthermore, locate a sense of the maternal at sea, viewing it as a space of origin, female lineage, or threatening motherhood. Through an assessment of this particular trope, present in the work of all four poets, the myriad ways gendering can occur at sea becomes clear. Subsequently, through an exploration of conceptions of sexuality at sea, the ways in which the sea is seen as a space for men and women emerge as a trope that connects the work of these poets. Finally, the sea offers itself as a space in which to challenge gender norms and patriarchal values, particularly in the work of Goodison and Ní

Chuilleanáin, and the last section examines how the sea emerges in their work as a space to contest gender ideals.

Feminine Fluidity: Gendering of the Sea

For Gaston Bachelard, fresh water “has a profoundly feminine character” (149). Resonances of this are found throughout poetry, with Heaney, for example, associating the feminine and water in the early poem “Undine”, in which the running, underground water is anthropomorphised as the female river spirit of the poem’s title. That the spirit is eventually taken (in an explicitly sexualised description) and her water diverted by the male digger seems to confirm Bachelard’s equation of a “feminine timidity” with pure waters (33). Bachelard argues that the “poetic imagination nearly always attributes *feminine* characteristics to water” (14; emphasis in original). The sea, in contrast, is a masculine space and lacks the purity of fresh water, as “it is a perversion that has put salt in the sea. Salt hampers a reverie, the reverie of sweetness” (155). This distinction between fresh and salt water is significant for Bachelard as he argues for the supremacy of fresh water.⁵¹ Yet, at the same time, much of what Bachelard has to say about feminine water is reflected in these poets’ engagement with the sea, particularly in relation to Heaney and Walcott.⁵² In their work, there is a poetic tendency to feminise the sea and spaces associated with the sea. Just as Bachelard’s assertions about feminine fresh water subscribe to gender stereotypes, such as “feminine timidity”, so too do Walcott’s and

⁵¹ In the chapter “The Supremacy of Fresh Water”, Bachelard argues that seawater is an “inhuman water”, which fails “to serve man *directly*” (152). This anthropomorphic view is significant as it places water at the service of humans, an idea that, as discussed in the introduction, ecocriticism attempts to challenge or reject to various degrees (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 176).

⁵² This chapter’s work on Heaney and Walcott is informed by Annette Kolodny’s observations on feminist literary criticism, which suggest that “when feminists turn their attention to the works of male authors which have traditionally been accorded high aesthetic value”, it is important to recognise “that aesthetic response is [...] invested with epistemological, ethical and moral concerns” in order for feminist work to “become part of an altered reading attentiveness” (2061).

Heaney's poems endorse normative ideas of gender. In reading their work alongside feminist criticism in this section, the implications of consigning woman to the sea become evident.

In Heaney's case, it is clear that sea spaces are associated with the feminine, particularly when examining a sequence of three poems from *Wintering Out*: "Shore Woman", "Maighdean Mara" and "Limbo". Heaney characterises this triptych as "poems about women in distress" (qtd. in O'Driscoll and Heaney 124) and what is striking about them is that all three see female characters engaging with the sea. The first, "Shore Woman", sets out a male/female, land/sea binary in its epigraph, the Gaelic proverb "*Man to the hills, woman to the shore*" (Heaney, *OG* 73). This proverbial division provides the foundation for gender relations at the sea and shore. Heaney writes the poem from the woman's perspective, recognising the way in which the men she encounters subjugate her. This is evinced by the poem's middle section, when, out at sea, the woman fears the porpoises that surround the boat and requests to cut the trip short: "They will attack a boat. / I knew it and I asked him to put in / But he would not, declared it was a yarn" (74). The fisherman's dismissive tone reveals a mocking attitude towards her. Although Heaney's poem anticipates empathy for the woman, the story behind the poem's creation speaks to a similar trivializing male attitude. Inspired in part "by a man in Dingle, who told how his wife panicked when their boat was surrounded by porpoises" (Heaney qtd. in O'Driscoll and Heaney 124), the poem can be seen to partake in a conspiratorial retelling of the woman's distress, with a less sympathetic tone than the poet hopes to project. The sea and its creatures are understood only by the masculine, assured sailor, as the agency of sailing is forbidden to the woman.

As per the epigraph, the shore is the only place of refuge for the woman, which the last stanza indicates.

I sometimes walk this strand for thanksgiving
Or maybe it's to get away from him
Skittering his spit across the stove. (Heaney, *OG* 74)

The shore is realised as a site of safety, its “firm margin” (74) providing solace to the poem’s speaker. Yet, the instability of the space is similarly recognised, as the poem’s protagonist is positioned “between parched dunes and salivating wave” (74). By the poem’s final lines, the shore is a mere “membrane between moonlight and [her] shadow” (74). As the discussion of island poetics in chapter one revealed, the shore is a shifting space, providing here both stability to the woman in times of joy or of need, but equally revealing itself to be fluctuating, exerting competing pulls of drought and flood. Indeed, the demarcation of the local shore is ever-changing, “usually defined as the tract lying between ordinary high and low water mark” (OED, def. 1). As such, the extent to which the shore is visible and accessible is subject to the tides. Unlike the proverbial “Hill Man” who is unaffected by tidal changes in his elevated position, the Shore Woman is beholden to an ever-changing space. The woman’s close connection to this space, in turn, suggests her own insecurity. In her final declaration – “I have rights on this fallow avenue” (74) – the woman lays claim to an identity at the shore, uniting herself with the space. However, there is a suggestion that this unification will not be a productive one as she is barred from the synaptic sea. In contrast to Heaney’s male speakers, explored in chapter two, who find creative inspiration at sea and in seascapes, this woman is left in a shifting, unproductive position. The local shore is indeed ever-changing but as this woman cannot access the sea, she cannot find growth in the sea’s disruptive, synaptic impulses. Shorelines, moreover, are generally unsuited to cultivation. The distress felt in the poem’s middle section finds no productive release. Unlike the coastal drive undertaken by the speaker of “The Peninsula”, the shore provides an unclear solace and leaves the Shore

Woman in an unresolved state, becoming passive and unproductive by her association with the site.

In the case of Walcott's poetry, his "persistent feminization of seascapes" has been well documented, particularly in the case of *Omeros* where "the sea is almost invariably female" (Pocock Boeninger, "I" 480, 478). This connection extends, in particular, to the poem's main female character, Helen, the love interest of the poem's two sailor protagonists, Achille and Hector. Both the narrator and the various male characters of the poem highlight her association to the seascape of St Lucia, known as the Helen of the West Indies. The narrator recalls, "the island was once / named Helen" (31), just as Major Plunkett, the retired British soldier for whom Helen works as a cleaner, "remembered [...] that the island was Helen" (103). As DeLoughrey points out, the island "is often represented as a female body" by colonisers (*Routes* 13). Yet, here, the native narrator *also* equates Helen with the island, signalling the double-colonisation Innes identifies. This continues throughout the poem, as Helen is also associated with the sea:

Her carved face flickering with light-wave patterns cast
among the coconut masks, the coral earrings
reflected the sea's patience. (36)

Helen figures here as a statuesque woman, embodying the island's elemental features. She stands as an homage to the feminine sea, its flickering light inscribed on her face, its patience embodied in her jewellery. This collapsing of Helen and the sea not only serves to disembody her but also renders her an object to be encountered, just as the sea is there for the poem's sailor protagonists. Indeed, later she is insulted by Achille who declares, "More men plough that body than canoe plough the sea" (115). Finally, Pocock Boeninger also reflects that Helen's eventual pregnancy is imagined by Achille "in

nautical terms” (480), as her “labouring rhythm // was a delivering wave” (Walcott, *O* 275). By this point in the poem, Helen has traversed several symbolic roles through her association with the island and its sea: she symbolises the island’s beauty and embodies the colonial desire to conquer it; she symbolises a loose sexuality that is as open to any sailor as the sea is; finally, she comes to symbolise the sea’s generative powers through the birth of her child. The male narrator and characters of the poem use the sea and island space as a way of attempting to understand Helen but ultimately fix her as a symbol of St Lucia. While, like “Shore Woman”, Helen does speak in *Omeros*, the constant connection between her and the sea suggests an objectification by the sailors, Major Plunkett and the narrator of the poem. She stands as a symbolic representation of the island nation and its sea, themselves depicted as possessing feminine traits to be protected and exploited by men as necessary.

What is striking about Heaney’s and Walcott’s feminisation of the shore and seascapes is that in linking woman and sea, both poets exhibit a sense of mystery around the idea of woman. In “Shore Woman” and in *Omeros*, the proverbial and mythical connections with these spaces are manipulated. Heaney does not challenge the division of space proposed by the Gaelic proverb, while for Walcott, the emphasis on the linguistic and historical connections between Helen and St Lucia is a deliberate choice on his part. The alignment of woman with a sense of the “natural”, “inherent”, or “unknown” is a trope that has long been critiqued within feminist discourse. For Simone de Beauvoir, a patriarchal understanding of woman relies on the myth that “the pains and the burdens that physiologically are women’s lot [...] are ‘intended by nature’” (de Beauvoir 285). The perceived innate connection between woman and nature renders her mysterious. In this regard, de Beauvoir is explicit about the hold this idea has over patriarchal structures, claiming that the myth most “firmly anchored in masculine hearts [is] that of the feminine

‘mystery’” (1268). Both Heaney’s and Walcott’s poems rely on an inherent connection between woman and sea that predates the poet himself. For Heaney it is the interestingly named “Gaelic” proverb that goes unquestioned, with the use of “Gaelic” as opposed to “Irish”, lending the saying tribal and mystical resonances. Similarly, for Walcott the elemental, linguistic connection of *mer* as mother and sea (discussed below) is reiterated at several points throughout *Omeros*. For de Beauvoir, the idea of a “feminine mystery” places women’s communication on inferior footing: “To say that woman is mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood” (286-87). Helen and the Shore Woman speak in their respective poems but remain as passive figures, beholden to their symbolic status and connection with the island and uncultivated shore respectively. Yet, this sense of mystery returns elsewhere in Heaney’s and in Walcott’s work, demonstrating a consistent attitude towards the writing of female figures, particularly when attempting to understand the feminine through the lens of the sea and folklore.

Notably, Elaine Savory, who inaugurated feminist critique of Walcott’s poetry, contends that his “treatment of women is full of clichés, stereotypes and negativity” (“Value Judgements” 110). The early poem “Anadyomene” relies on the mythical image of woman emerging from the waves, as the title recalls the birth of Venus. Watching a figure in the water, the male poet declares it a nereid (sea nymph) at first glance. Yet, the female figure appears to dissolve into the water, becoming so entwined with the sea that the speaker struggles to distinguish one from the other:

Thighs tangled in the golden weed,
Did fin flash there, or woman’s hand?
Weed dissolves to burnished hair,

Foam now, where was milk-white breast,
Did thigh or dolphin cleave the air? (Walcott, *PDW* 48).

The more the woman swims, the more ensnared she becomes in the sea, disembodied as the synaptic water claims carefully chosen parts of her body. The repeated reference to thighs, the delicate hand, the flowing hair and milky breast all perform the femininity of a woman who is never seen whole. Indeed, she is not considered so by the speaker, described as “Half-woman and half-fish, or best / Both fish and woman” (48). Her body is viewed through its relationship with the sea, as it becomes more and more difficult for the speaker to distinguish between the sea and the nereid. As disorientating as the oscillation between sea-creature and human may be for the male speaker, there is an attraction in the unknown, as he resolves to “let them keep / Their elusive mystery” (48). Evidently, the poem is inspired by myth and as such, the sense of mystery comes, at least in part, from the fact that its content is based on a fantastical story. However, at the same time, Walcott has written mythical male characters, such as Odysseus, Achilles, and Aeneas in his work with a sense of interiority and compassion. Here, the subtle sexualisation of the poem’s figure combined with the attractive sense of mystery confines the woman to little more than an image. As with *Helen and the Shore Woman*, this figure is not silent, the final lines reveal, “She to herself has taken / sea-music and sea-light” (48). Nonetheless, the notion of sea-music remains as elusive as the woman/nereid herself. Through the description of an innate oneness with the sea that highlights her feminine sexuality, Walcott relinquishes a desire or need to understand her sea-music contained in the synaptic sea, encountering her purely as an object to be surveyed.

Like Walcott’s “*Anadyomene*”, the female figure of the second of Heaney’s trio of women-in-distress poems, “*Maighdean Mara*”, is a hybrid selkie. The selkie is a woman who lives inside of a seal’s skin and as such can live in the ocean. If, when she

returns to the land to sleep under the skin, a man steals her sealskin coat, she must marry him and cannot return to the sea. Like the preceding “Shore Woman”, the poem presents a female encounter with the sea as an escape from an adversarial patriarchal context and is written from the perspective of the selkie-wife. Yet, in its description of the selkie and her total immersion in the water for parts of the poem, “Maighdean Mara” resonates with “Anadyomene”.

She sleeps now, her cold breasts
Dandled by undertow,
Her hair lifted and laid.
Undulant slow sea wracks
Cast about shin and thigh,
Bangles of wort. (Heaney, *WO* 56)

Once again the female figure is disembodied underwater, as the poet likewise focuses on feminine features; breasts; hair; thigh. Here, the synaptic sea conspires in the trappings of femininity, laying out her hair and bejewelling her with bangles. Heaney, however, demonstrates more sympathy towards the female figure than detected in “Anadyomene”, commenting that the poem is “about the kind of marriage [...] where the woman usually has to lose her magic garment before she gets married” (qtd. in Almquivst 45). Despite the man’s charms, the selkie of “Maighdean Mara” “suffered milk and birth” in her new life on land, which “drained / The tidesong from her voice” (56-7). The image of her “entering foam” is supposed to be a “homecoming” (56) but resonates with portrayals of suicide-by-drowning, as well as demonstrating how Heaney’s imagination dwells “intensely on metaphors of *nature* as feminine” (Coughlan 191; emphasis in original). Indeed, this homecoming is not a comforting one. She neither regains her tidesong, nor

does the reader hear it, as with the sea-music of Walcott's nereid. Instead, the poem traps itself in a cyclical atmosphere of despair, ending as it began: "She sleeps now, her cold breasts / Dandled by undertow" (57). The waves are gentle with the returned selkie, but the poem still leaves the final image as a cold, sexualised one. There is a more successful attempt at understanding in "Maighdean Mara" than in "Anadyomene" and perhaps also "Shore Woman", yet the sense of mystery around woman's association with the sea remains firm. Once again, the reader is left with the impression of an unheard song, as, like Walcott, Heaney does not allow the woman's voice to sing a sea-song that may contain the disruptive elements of the synaptic sea she inhabits.

Masculine Mobility: Gendering on the Sea

The sea is also a space of masculine agency, with Bachelard's work indicating that "the masculine sea calls for tales of adventure" (Stroud ix). In this sense, the feminine sea is a perilous space to be traversed. As chapter three indicated, all four poets are attentive to the importance of the sailor figure in the destabilisation of national identity and belonging. However, for DeLoughrey, the gendered nature of the sailor's relationship to the nation should also be considered:

Like the operative metaphors of national belonging that encode a semantic collapse between women and (mother)land, diasporic discourses often position masculine subjects as normative travelers who rely upon a feminized sea in order to imaginatively regenerate across time and space. (*Routes* 5)

The feminised sea is a fecund site on which the male traveller can be renewed and revised. These tropes are, to various extents, visible in the work of Walcott, Heaney and

Goodison, whether or not they are overtly attentive to the gender dynamics at work at sea.

Walcott's poem, "Landfall, Grenada" from *The Gulf*, for example, does not attempt to fashion a hyper-masculine sailor, yet it presents the life of a sailor as a male endeavour. Dedicated to the mariner, Robert Head, the poem depicts a practical, straightforward sailor who encounters the sea as unmediated material reality.

Its moods held no mythology
for you, it was a working place
of tonnage and ruled stars;
you chose your landfall with a mariner's
causal certainty
calm as that race
into whose heart you harboured. (Walcott, *CP* 125)

The sailor's stoic anti-romanticism shores up his racial identity as the interaction with the sea is one that can be calculated and measured with a rationality that contrasts the synaptic sea's unpredictability. Indeed, the speaker reminds the reader that the sea is volatile, disclosing that Head "detested" these "grandeurs" of the "tiered sea" (125). The poet appears to envy Head's interaction with the sea, asking him in the final lines,

Deep friend, teach me to learn
such ease, such landfall going,
such mocking tolerance of those
neat gravestones elegies
that rhyme our end. (125-26)

Despite the speaker's desire for an easy approach to the sea, the air of derision in "mocking tolerance" and "neat" undercuts the sincerity of the poet's suggestion. Moreover, the sea that Head envisions is without myth or mystery and as such does not open itself up to the male poet as a space of regeneration, as DeLoughrey poses. It seems unlikely, therefore, that Walcott will take up this vision of the sea. Indeed, he views the sea as a space of male creativity, with the sea in *Omeros* giving "Walcott's narrator his authorial stability" (Pocock Boeninger, "I" 480). Both the act of writing and the act of sailing are equated as brave, masculine endeavours, which shore up the sailor's identity as a member of his race and the poet's authority in his own work.

For a similar sense of male endeavours at sea in Heaney, it is necessary to turn to the poems of *North*. "Act of Union" is notable as it uses the "imperially / male" (Heaney, *OG* 127) endeavour of colonial, island conquest as a metaphor for sexual intercourse and impregnation. Here, Heaney relies on island and sea tropes to create the gendered identity of the poem's couple. The female figure is a passive one, who "would neither cajole nor ignore", and references to water are used to signal birth, as the rain causes the ground "To slip and flood: a bog-burst / A gash breaking open" (127). Her borders are there to be transgressed by the imperial male lover or the "parasitical / And ignorant little fists" of the child (127), as this island-body becomes "a space of potentially dangerous regeneration" (Alexander 221). The woman of the poem has an only "half-independent shore" (Heaney, *OG* 127), like the unstable shore that is home to the Shore Woman. In *North*, this poem appears alongside "Ocean's Love to Ireland", which imagines an encounter between Sir Walter Raleigh, a member of Queen Elizabeth I's court, and an Irish maid. As with "Act of Union", it plays on Ireland's islandness and references the sea. "Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree / As Ireland is backed to England / And drives inland" (Heaney, *N* 40). The island remains female here and the threat comes from the

ocean itself, as the poet compares Raleigh to the sea: “He is water, he is ocean, lifting / Her farthingale like a scarf of weed lifting / In the front of a wave” (40). Thus, “Ocean’s Love to Ireland” contradicts an assertion of a purely feminine sea in Heaney, as he recognises the colonial, masculinist impulses of the synoptic sea. Nonetheless, the island remains feminine in both poems, subjected to a violent conquering, which shores up traditional gender traits and colonial divisions. Indeed, Ní Chuilleanáin has criticised “Act of Union” for “treating male and female as fixed and recognisable starting points” and a “lack of ironic awareness” (“Review” 50). Despite Heaney’s attentiveness to the power dynamics of colonial relations, he does little in these poems to challenge associated traits of masculinity and femininity along a coloniser/colonised binary. “Ocean’s Love to Ireland” reinforces gendered colonial relationships, with Ireland raped by the violently masculine England. However, it does also depict an explicitly male sea, not encountered elsewhere in Heaney’s work, demonstrating the synoptic sea’s resistance to a singular gendered rendering.

Goodison’s invocation of the maleness of sea travel also turns to the colonial past, whereby expansion to the Caribbean occurred by sea. Returning at several points throughout her work to the earliest colonial landings on Jamaica, Goodison makes Christopher Columbus a recurring figure in her poetry.⁵³ Like Walcott’s interaction with the Crusoe narrative, Goodison empathises with the colonial figure at points, in a way not seen in Heaney’s “Ocean’s Love to Ireland”. For example, in “About Almonds and Ambergris” from *Turn Thanks*, she refers to Columbus as “poor thing” as his dream that “these islands would be a source of gold” was not realised (Goodison, *CP* 243). Although

⁵³ Columbus was drawn to Jamaica by of a promise of gold from the people of Cuba, although there was none to be found there. Attempting to sail to Panama in 1503, he and his crew were stranded on Jamaica for eight months where they pillaged local villages (Higman 63, 67). It is this time period that is referenced in Goodison’s “The Two Sisters Cave”, examined in the introductory chapter of this thesis, as the speaker imagines that she filled the holes in Columbus’ boats, allowing him and his crew to set sail, thus avoiding the plunder that did take place.

there is an ironic undertone to “poor thing”, Goodison’s attempt to enter into the mind-set of a figure who stands as a symbol of the inception of colonial expansion is noteworthy. Yet, in her other work on Columbus, she takes a distanced approach, revealing him to be neither a figure of sympathy, nor adventuring hero. In the later “Don C and the Goldman Posse” from *Controlling the Silver*, she turns Columbus and his crew into hapless, charlatans who “arrived by leaky caravelle taxi / and barely make it to the beach” and “buy out the bar with counterfeit” (384). Writing with Jamaican speech rhythms, the poet ridicules Don C through her use of the local voice. The gold he seeks is, as the Jamaican speaker knows, not to be found:

Hours beat, the Don C posse leave
because no gold was really on here,
except for that let off by sunset
into the sea. (384)

The sea, a space of adventuring that held the promise of fortune for Columbus, holds its own gold, but not the kind that the crew seek. As Anim-Addo et al. point out, there is a “tendency in Western thought to see the sea as a lifeless backdrop” (341). Goodison recognises this alongside the masculine impulses that DeLoughery outlines and uses the sea in this poem to subvert the very expectations it offers to the colonial invaders. Unlike Heaney or Walcott, Goodison manipulates masculine expectations of the sea within that element’s realities. To Columbus it is the route to gold. However, Goodison asserts, the sea offers its own gold, just not the type valued by the male, colonial outlook.

“*Mer* was both mother and sea”: Maternal Connections in the Sea

Walcott explicitly makes the connection between the sea and motherhood in *Omeros*, declaring “*mer* was / both mother and sea in our Antillean patois” (Walcott, *O* 14), the homophonic link suggesting an inherent connection between both. This association is found elsewhere, with DeLoughrey detecting that nationalist and patriarchal discourses often gender both the land and sea in terms of motherhood, with the former as a motherland and the latter as a womb-like space (*Routes* 13). However, it is not only male poets who subscribe to this connection. Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem “Letter to Pearse Hutchinson”, discussed in chapter two for its connotations of sea-writing, ends with an image of the womb, as “the sea-water / Nosed across the ruinous ocean floor / Inquiring for the ruinous door of the womb” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 14). Patently, this connection continues the trend of symbolic correlation of woman and sea.

Yet, the poets here also engage with a maternal sea as a unique space in which to consider motherhood and, particularly in Goodison’s case, feminine lineage. A discussion of the way in which the sea can become a space of understanding motherhood in poetry is fruitfully framed by the work that Julia Kristeva undertakes in “Stabat Mater”. She discusses motherhood from both a personal and theoretical perspective and, significantly, states

maternity along its borders destines us to experience a frenzied ecstasy to which by chance the nursling’s laugh responds in the sunlit ocean’s waters. What is the relationship between him [her child] and me? No relation, except that abundant laughter into which some sonorous, subtle, fluid identity collapses, gently carried by the waves. (146)

Kristeva's metaphorical invocation of the sea is noteworthy, as the mother's relationship to the child is explored through the sea, which, in turn, plays a key part in the mother's understanding of her own identity. This fluidity also calls to mind maternal fluids such as the mother's milk, one of, what Kristeva calls, the "metaphors of non-language, a 'semiotic' that does not coincide with linguistic communication" (143). The sea in its resistant nature and the human inability to fully encounter it reflects the non-linguistic bond that exists between mother and child, as well as the feverish search for identity. It is the work of the poet, here, to attempt to verbalise that experience. For Kristeva, the shifting identity of motherhood comes not as a tempest, but rather in the calm movement of the waves.

In Goodison's work, the sea emerges as a space in which to construct not only a sense of motherhood but also locate and encounter her female ancestors. Indeed, mothers and motherhood are central to Goodison's work, sitting in the context of an "Afro-Caribbean poetics of matrilineage, identity, and voice", which assists the development of a "collaborative feminist consciousness of struggle against multiple oppressions" (Kuwabong 105).⁵⁴ In constructing a matrilineage in the sea, Goodison's poetry enacts the fluid identity-formation that Kristeva observes. This interaction stands outside of male-dominated histories, as Goodison "does not see motherhood as a male-inspired construct that binds women to biological determinism" (Kuwabong 111). Mothers appear in her work as women with agency, a legacy Goodison attempts to carry forward in her own poetry.

⁵⁴ Although writing from an American perspective, Patricia Hill Collins' exploration of Black motherhood is particularly relevant alongside Goodison's work, as it explores the image and the reality of black motherhood from a variety of angles (chpt. 8).

Published in *I Am Becoming My Mother*, Goodison's "Guinea Woman" is a valuable example of a matrilineage located in the sea. In the poem, the speaker traces her family's female line from great grandmother to her own children through an interaction with the sea. The poem describes the poet's great grandmother as a Guinea woman, and her child, the poet's blue-eyed grandmother, before turning to the present world of the poet and her children at the poem's end. Stanzas three and four of the poem locate this Guinea woman's presence in the Caribbean Sea and tell, through the sea and its synaptic memory, the story of her great grandmother,

And when she paused
her gaze would look to sea,
her profile fine like some obverse
impression on a guinea coin
from royal memory.

It seems her fate was anchored
in the unfathomable sea,
for great grandmother caught
the eye of a sailor whose ship sailed
without him from Lucea Harbour. (Goodison, *CP* 86)

The sea is synaptic in its association with both the great grandmother's past, evident in the sea/memory end-rhyme, and a sense of the future as her "fate was anchored" in the sea. Moreover, the sea is presented as a space that is directly related to her great grandmother's character and presence. On the one hand, it is a place of reflection for the poet's great grandmother. The opening line of this stanza signals that the act of looking out to sea remains connected to the rest of her daily life through the opening "and". The

image of her great grandmother in profile, complemented by the sea, is one of strength and is given an aura of power by the regal lexicon that follows. On the other hand, Goodison's careful use of the language of empire foregrounds the colonial past and, implicitly in stanza three, the slave trade. The metaphorical connection between her great grandmother and the currency of empire is suggestive of the way in which African lives became currency under slavery. Crucially, the sea that links Africa and the Caribbean is the site of transport and death during the Middle Passage. This suggestion of enslavement is left deliberately ambiguous in relation to the great grandmother of the poem and these power dynamics are teased out in the following stanza.⁵⁵

Indeed, stanza four invokes a role reversal between the grandmother and sailor, as great grandmother becomes a sort of fisher, catching her prey who, in his powerlessness, leaves his ship to sail "without him". At the same time, despite the active nature of the phrase "to catch someone's eye", there are connotations of passivity as her great grandmother is the object of male desire here.⁵⁶ Her fate (i.e. to marry the sailor) is held in the "unfathomable" sea, suggesting that it was, and perhaps still is for those continuing on the lineage, an unclear future with depths unknown for the Guinea woman of the poem. The poet ends by asking the youngest children of the new generation to turn their attention back to great grandmother and "listen" (Goodison, *CP* 87). In doing so, they will hear the story of their ancestors in the sounds of the sea.

Unlike the "sea-music" Walcott's nereid plays and the "tidesong" of Heaney's

⁵⁵ Goodison outlines in her memoir, *From Harvey River*, that her great grandmother was not a slave but a domestic worker in the Caribbean. The passage in which she is first seen by the Irish sailor, who was to be Goodison's great grandfather, bares striking similarities to "Guinea Women" but emphasises the woman's African heritage more explicitly: "She was standing sideways when he first saw her, her face turned in the direction of the sea, standing on one leg like a Masai warrior or an egret, her other leg tucked up behind her [...] she gazed intently out to sea even as she served them" (*FHR* 40).

⁵⁶ These lines' emphasis on the characters' looks calls to mind Laura Mulvey's exploration of the male gaze and the woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness" (2088; emphasis in original). Here, Goodison plays with the dynamics of both.

selkie, the sea-stories of Goodison's female ancestors resound throughout her work, as she actively asks that the reader listen. Goodison returns to the sea in *Turn Thanks* to hear her own mother's music in "My Mother's Sea Chanty". Although like Heaney's and Walcott's characters, the female figure of the poem is a somewhat mystical one, "My Mother's Sea Chanty" does not reflect the same sense of feminine mystery. Instead, the poet writes the mother's song, which is creative and healing. In another role reversal, child becomes mother as, in a dream, the poet bathes her dead mother in the sea, who "sings slow / and [...] still breathes" (Goodison, *CP* 215). As Kristeva suggests, the sea prompts a fluid identity between mother and child and here, in the poet's grief at her own mother's death, she takes on the caring role. The "night sea" (215) becomes an otherworldly space where relationships are renewed and revised in a synaptic disruption. Later in the poem, her mother becomes a "plump mermaid" (215), a figure Goodison returns to throughout her poetry and is discussed in more detail in chapter five. In this guise, her mother dives deep, "speaking sea-speak with pilot fish, / showing them how to direct barks / that bear away our grief" (215). Her "sea-speak" is healing and is reflected in the poem's aesthetic through Goodison's use of the archaic "barks" to refer to sailing vessels, with the repeated "s" and "b" sounds reflecting the sound of water moving in the sea. Mother and child engage in "sea-speak" as the poem itself becomes the poet's balm for her grief. By the poem's end, she hopes to release her own grief and free her mother "of her residence beneath the sea" (215). As with her great grandmother before, Goodison locates a matrilineage within the sea, bringing the sea-speak of these Afro-Caribbean women to life on the page as they interact with the element around them.

Mothers appear less frequently in Ní Chuilleanáin's poems than in Goodison's and she is less concerned with ideas of matrilineage, although, as Boyle Haberstroh points out, the death of Ní Chuilleanáin's own mother influences the tone of her 1994 collection,

The Brazen Serpent (87). Yet, in a poem published in 2016, to commemorate 100-years since the marriage of her maternal grandparents, she turns to the sea to glimpse their past.⁵⁷ “Seaweed”, Ní Chuilleanáin remarks, was written to celebrate her “fond” relationship with her grandmother and her grandfather’s professional interest in “developing the chemistry of seaweed” (qtd. in Villar-Argáiz, “Poetry” 224-5). Like the sea that draws great grandmother’s attention in “Guinea Women”, the seaweed of this poem reflects the sea’s non-linguistic communication. As already noted in the discussion of seaweed in “The Second Voyage” in chapter two, the weeds in the water have communicative powers. The poem explores her family’s historical connection to the 1916 Rising, with the marriage of her grandparents Thomas Dillion and Geraldine Plunkett taking place the day before the Easter Rebellion. As the newlyweds watch the scenes of destructions in Dublin, the husband of the poem wonders

[...] would
this perch above the scene blow apart soon,
and he imagined the weeds that sink their filaments
between rocks to nourish a life in water
until all of a sudden they’re sheared away to sea. (Ní
Chuilleanáin, *MH* 50)

The precarious position of the couple is likened to seaweed, which can, at any moment, be wrenched out to sea. As the couple attempt to put their roots down, they are aware that these roots are as precarious as the seaweed’s filaments, at the mercy of the tides. Ní Chuilleanáin locates this familial history in the sea, recognising her grandfather’s fascination with this “life in water”:

⁵⁷ The poem was first published in the *Irish Times* on Saturday, 20th April 2016, almost 100 years after the wedding of Ní Chuilleanáin’s maternal grandparents, which took place 23rd April 1916.

He was thinking,
would they find a place and lose it, blown away
again, and find another, on the western coast,
as the seaweed is landed, a darkness in the dark water. (50)

Seaweed is an obscure presence throughout their relationship with the coming-and-going of the plant speaking to the insecurity of their life amidst the cyclical processes of revolution. They submit themselves to the tides, accepting that they could land anywhere as the seaweed does. Although the poet introduces the man as “obscured / by [his wife’s] shadow against the window” (50), he eventually become the major presence of the poem. Unlike Goodison then, Ní Chuilleanáin does not focus solely on the maternal figure. Yet, the poem highlights, as Kristeva suggests a sea-based motherhood does, a fluid subjectivity through the seaweed, as Ní Chuilleanáin identifies with both grandparents in this poem and family history is at the mercy of the tides. Interestingly, Villar-Argáiz reads Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem “Stabat Mater” through a Kristevian lens that sees a “motherhood based on a new model of subjectivity as dialogic, fluid, non-completed” (“Secrecy” 373). Ní Chuilleanáin’s “Stabat Mater”, Villar-Argáiz proposes, “may suggest the existence of this new multi-layered form of singularity, a fluid form of alterity that can never be completely grasped by a totalitarian social system” (373). Here, the upheaving status of seaweed demonstrates her maternal grandparents’ position within turbulent political times, with the image of “the gunboat [...] bucking and plunging, / throwing up spray” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *MH* 50) speaking to the attempted revolution at hand. Yet, they commit to living an alternate life of precarity. Ní Chuilleanáin uses the communicative seaweed to give her grandmother and grandfather a voice and, through their association with this unstable element, reflect their history. Although it is her grandfather’s interests that

dictate the link with seaweed, the poet is able to trace and retell the story of her maternal line, as Goodison does in her work.

Like Ní Chuilleanáin, Heaney has written about his own mother after her death, most notably in the “Clearances” sequence from *The Haw Lantern*. Yet, it is in the final of his sequence of three women-in-distress poems from *Wintering Out*, that motherhood is most explicitly connected with the sea. Unlike Ní Chuilleanáin and Goodison, however, Heaney turns to the sea both to express a dark maternal bond between mother and child and to speak to the realities of life for an unmarried mother in Ireland. Although Heaney suggests that “Maighdean Mara” resonates with the force of the notion of pregnancy outside marriage (Almqvist 45), he writes explicitly about it only in the final poem, “Limbo”. Set at the mouth of the river, the speaker sees the mother attempting to drown her child as the “illegitimate spawning” is “thrown back / To the waters” and is “netted [...] / Along with the salmon” by the fishermen of the poem (Heaney, *OG* 75). In this tragic act, the speaker attempts to sympathise with the mother, suggesting that the child became “a minnow with hooks / Tearing her open” (75). For Alison Garden, through this forceful imagery and position at the mouth of the river, “the violent displacement of this poem is intricately interwoven with the Atlantic” (97). Just as Goodison inverts the mother-child relationship in “My Mother’s Sea Chanty”, Heaney turns images of baptism into a scene of death, resulting in a poem that “articulates an explicit and sustained critique of Catholicism” (Garden 97). Like Kristeva’s frenzied relationship with her child, the mother of this poem takes herself to the water, as “She waded in under / the sign of her cross” (75), attempting to forge a ritual bond with her child as they drown together. As a result, she is both priest and executioner and this tension is reflected in the water, which refuses the child’s entry into heaven. Limbo becomes “some far briny zone” where “Even Christ’s palms, unhealed, / Smart and

cannot fish there” (75). The sin contaminates the water to such an extent that Jesus, who died for the sins of all, is unable to enter it to fish. This poem is sympathetic to the mother figure and the most successful of Heaney’s sequence in terms of recognising the interlaced pressures on women. For instance, unlike “Maighdean Mara” this poem does not unnecessarily sexualise the woman and it also demonstrates the gentle way in which the mother interacts with the sea, unlike “Shore Woman”, which leaves the woman of the poem in an indefinite, unknown position. Yet, at the same time, the water remains a place of violent death and motherhood’s link with the sea is shown to be a destructive force.

The sea’s destructive maternal energy is likewise detected in Walcott’s poem, “Early Pompeian”, from *The Fortunate Traveller*, which sees birth and death twinned, as in “Limbo”. For Savory, “the moon and the sea become (as in other poets ambivalent about women, like T.S. Eliot and Christopher Okigbo) convenient ways of showing abstract approval to women” in Walcott’s poetry (“Value Judgements” 115). This is often true in the case of the mothering sea, which is venerated alongside ideals of motherhood. In the title poem from *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, for example, Walcott applauds the Caribbean Sea: “she holds us all, her history-orphaned islands, [...] our mother, who suckled the islands” (Walcott, *PDW* 278). Yet, the *abstract* approval Savory detects in Walcott’s work exposes more negative attitudes towards motherhood in “Early Pompeian”. In this poem, the sea figures as a darkly maternal space as the speaker tells of the stillbirth of his child. Unlike the sympathy offered by Heaney to the mother of “Limbo”, the feeling in this poem is one of disgust and derision, the sea described as “black and salt as the mind of a woman after labour” (Walcott, *CP* 448). This attitude is most pronounced in the poem’s final section, as the speaker tells his stillborn daughter:

You had sailed without any light
your seven months on the amniotic sea.

You never saw your murderer,
your birth and death giver (450).

The sea is a dark and unforgiving womb and the mother is explicitly termed a murderer. This image of maternal, fluid darkness is felt throughout “Early Pompeian”, as the “foul breeze off the amniotic sea” (448) of the first section never wafts away from the poem. Indeed, the poet tells his stillborn daughter, “the smell off the sea is your mother” (449). The destructive, mysterious powers of the sea are continually linked to the maternal body, which has failed in its purpose in the eyes of the speaker. Rather than the consoling connection through the sea seen in “My Mother’s Sea Chanty”, here the sea reflects the male poet’s grief and transforms the maternal into something monstrous. The relationship between mother and child does not occur through soft, life-giving waves, as Kristeva suggests but instead is rendered horrific through the tempestuous and rotten sea. Although Walcott closes the poem with an acknowledgement of his own position and asks the reader to “Pardon the pride I have taken / in a woman’s agony” (451), “Early Pompeian” remains a troubling poem. The instance of “failed” motherhood is treated with repulsion by the poet-speaker and as such, the sea, which can be affirming in Walcott, turns against the woman of the poem.

The Sea and Sexuality: Rethinking the Gendered Sea

Despite the consistent gendering of the sea by the poets discussed up to this point, the exploration of sexuality at sea posits a space that is not exclusively feminine. Instead, the sea’s synaptic and disruptive impulses can allow for a more fluid set of relationships between male and female, just as Kristeva’s maternal sea posits a watery interaction between the subjectivity of mother and child. For the most part, the poets of this thesis

explore heterosexuality and this section investigates how their apperception of the sea's resistance to easy categorisation opens up a new set of relations between genders. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the binaries established at the outset of a mysterious feminine sea and the male adventurer are often still present in a sexuality located at sea. This is most evident in Walcott's "The Schooner *Flight*", whereby a threatening female sexuality is understood through the sea when Shabine describes naked women whose "spiky cunts / bristled like sea eggs" (Walcott, *PDW* 241). As a result of this, he declares, "I couldn't dive" (241). As with "Early Pompeian", the sea becomes inhospitable and repulsive to the male speaker because of a woman's actions. In contrast, poems by Ní Chuilleanáin, Goodison and Heaney that explore heterosexual relationships take heed of the sea's fluidities to rethink traditional dynamics of male/female relationships and present a sea that is not exclusively feminine.

Significantly, Ní Chuilleanáin's "Monochrome" from *Acts & Monuments* sees a reversal of the woman-as-island trope. The poem opens:

What she saw on opening
Her eyes was his darkened
Coastline slipping rapidly astern
In twilight, and the waves evenly sighing. (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM*
43)

The woman is placed in the position of active viewer, who watches the male body, which in turn is connected to both the island and the sea, as his breath is described as wave-like. Yet, this man is not entirely objectified as the woman considers his "promontory forehead" and feels "she had never been there" (43). In revealing the distance the woman feels from her partner, the poem suggests two formed subjectivities rather than the

objectification of one party by the other. In contrast to much of what has been explored to this point in the chapter, Ní Chuilleanáin defies traditional gender clichés through the nautical metaphor. The poem's female protagonist feels "at sea" in her relationship and, for Gerardine Meaney, this resonates with many of Ní Chuilleanáin's poetic personae, who appear as "a displaced person, a consciousness adrift" (112).

Notably, this drifting is reflected in the poem's structure as the nautical metaphor shifts to an entirely different image at the end of the second stanza. Despite the "darkened" nature of his body, the man's "wide eyes shuttered pale; / As cat and mouse at night are the same colour" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *AM* 43). These lines introduce a juxtaposing image, as the cat and mouse appear abruptly and without warning, while also drawing attention to the poem's title "Monochrome" through the light and dark of the man's eyes and body. The usually warring cat and mouse become equal at night time and, likewise, the divisions of the dissatisfied couple dissipate in the darkness, suggesting the sexual nature of the relationship through this image of unification. This is confirmed as the speaker's mind continues to drift from the sea to the cat and mouse, noting, "Love like a marmalade cat / Slipped out between the bars of the scullery window" (43). The distance created by the sea, despite the couple's sexual desire, is emphasised by the disappearing love between them, as the poem ends with the image of the cat and mouse, "Alert, straining night after night / Suspiciously at each other's shadows" (43). The poem speaks to a reconsideration of binary gender dynamics through the nautical metaphor, the play with colour and the images of cat and mouse. The woman's imaginative sea journey prompts a clearer understanding of their estrangement from one another, while the poem's male figure inhabits a more symbolic position through his association with the

island. The cat-and-mouse dynamic of a relationship in turmoil is reflective of shifting undercurrents of a heterosexual relationship for Ní Chuilleanáin.⁵⁸

In a similar way, Goodison's "She Walks into Rooms", from *I Am Becoming My Mother*, examines the end of a heterosexual relationship, with water and the sea having several functions in understanding both the male and female figures of the poem. The poem's central female figure carries the break-up of a romantic relationship within her as water, which seeps out at will:

Sometimes at nights
she has to change the sheets,
her favourite brown roses
on a lavender trellis
grown sodden
and that water has salt
in it and that's no good
for roses.

He left her all this water. (Goodison, *CP* 99)

Here, the ocean water figures as a reminder of the woman's loss, a loss she has embodied and releases as salt water. The protagonist attempts to deny its presence by suggesting "It's only light / playing upon my water-wave / taffeta dress" (99). Unlike the maternal and feminine sea observed above, however, the water that seeps from the woman is associated with the man; he left it to her. Yet, on closer inspection, seawater is connected

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Fallaize outlines how de Beauvoir returns "Again and again [...] to the issue of power play in the heterosexual couple, to the dynamics of sexuality itself and to an assessment of the potential of the couple to provide the breakthrough in the Hegelian double bind bedeviling all human relationships" (92). Ní Chuilleanáin's work stands alongside de Beauvoir's in its assessment of these power dynamics as outside a binarization of power.

to both the man and the woman of the poem, as the speaker emphasises the woman's "water-wave" dress. Like "Monochrome", "She Walks into Walls" presents a dialogic relationship between man and woman and between masculine and feminine. The irrational water, related above by Klein and Mackenthun with the feminine, is here not only associated negatively with the man but also strips some of the trappings of femininity, as it "overflowed onto the floors" and "took all the curl / from her hair" (99). As it is associated with the man, it simultaneously represents the overflow of the woman's emotion by presenting an elemental reaction to loss.

A shift comes towards the end of the poem when the speaker recounts the moment of the break, urging the woman, "It's time to learn to swim", as the man "departed to a dry place" (Goodison, *CP* 99). It would seem that Goodison resolves the poem by re-establishing a binary of water/dryness, female/male, yet, the man, even in leaving all this water, retains "deep currents in his / slightest motion" (99-100). The sea continues to be associated with both the man and the woman as they leave the relationship, suggesting that the synaptic sea resists a characterisation as not *only* feminine and woman-like in its nature but also related to male emotion and action. Moreover, what could have led to the woman's drowning is harnessed for strength in the poem's final lines:

She could have died of cold
waiting in the wet he left there.
But she grew full of mysteries
like the ocean. (100)

The scene here is reminiscent of a rebirth as the tributaries her lover left on her body are transformed into the sea. While aligning a mysterious woman with the sea seems to recall some of the more disempowering features outlined in earlier sections, here the woman of

the poem has agency. She is not drowned like Heaney's mermaid or dismissed as an unknowable creature like Walcott's nereid. Instead, she becomes like the whole ocean in her catharsis. Salt water no longer seeps at will but is instead a source of power in its myriad of both fathomable and unfathomable synaptic impulses.

Finally, despite the essentialising tendencies of Heaney's poetry in relation to woman and water, his poem "Lovers on Aran" opens up a more radical space to test the association of the sea and a passive femininity. The poem sets questions of gendered heterosexuality alongside questions of the island, posing existential ideas that do not, as Ní Chuilleanáin notes of "Act of Union", fix gender ideals of male and female. For Michael Parker, in this short poem from *Death of a Naturalist*, there is an evident feminine energy located in the sea (73). However, "Lovers on Aran" is less explicit about these associations than first appears. Composed of a series of questions, the poem is attentive to the power dynamics of the sexual act between man and woman: did water come "to possess Aran? / Or did Aran rush" towards the sea (Heaney, *DN* 34). For Parker, the island's hard and strong "rock" is decidedly male, while the yielding sea female (48). Yet, the gendered nature of these elements is, in fact, less fixed, especially given the interplay of dominance and submission.

On the one hand, the water surrounds the island, on the other, the island rushes out to sea. The sea can both "possess" and "yield" (Heaney, *DN* 34) and in this particular sexual interaction it takes neither role clearly, its synaptic elements reinforcing the sea's "either/or and both" (Baucom, "Charting" par. 12) status. Accordingly, it is difficult to say for certain that the sea is submissive and therefore feminine, as Parker does. Like the sea flowing from man to woman in "She Walks into Rooms", no clear gendered boundaries are established in this poem's first two tercets. This ambiguity is summed up

by the final tercet, which presents questions about both island/sea relationships, similar to those explored in chapter one, and rigid and immovable definition of identity.

Did sea define the land or land the sea?

Each drew new meaning from the waves' collision

Sea broke on land to full identity. (34)

A consideration of the stanza's opening question, both at the literal level of an island/sea tidalectic and the metaphorical level of the male/female relationship offers no clear answer. Even taking into account traditional gender roles of a dominant male and submissive female, as Parker does, it is difficult to distinguish entirely whether Heaney sees a simple land = male, sea = female divide here. Taking Heaney's other work into account means it is not unreasonable to suggest such but the poem leaves room for a broader interpretation.⁵⁹ In a similar way, the shifty borders of the island hinder its clear definition. The poem suggests that a satisfying sexual relationship is one of partnership, neither party defining the other but rather drawing identity from the act itself. That the poet is confident of this assertion is reflected in the rhyme scheme, as the first two tercets are characterised by half-rhyme in the first and third line while the final tercet is the only to have full-rhyme. This rhyming suggests the revelatory power of the sea wherein the poet finds productive meaning as a sense of (a gendered) identity is discovered through the sexual act and understood through the sea.

Nonetheless, like Ní Chuilleanáin and Goodison, Heaney does not entirely erase a division between male and female. The association of masculinity or femininity with the sea is complicated by these poems, which through their exploration of heterosexual

⁵⁹ This broader interpretation could also include a Queer reading of the poem, given its attention to, what Judith Butler calls "the denaturalized and fluid possibilities of such categories [masculine/feminine] once they are no longer linked causally or expressively to the presumed fixity of sex" (136).

relationships, reveal these interactions to be more open than the earlier sections of this chapter may reflect. Genders do not collapse entirely in the work of these poets but, through association with the sea, are revealed to have some fluidities as typical gendered traits are upended, reversed, shared, and placed into constructive dialogue with one another.

A Feminist Vocabulary at Sea

Nicholas Allen has made the case that the poems of Medbh McGuckian's *On Ballycastle Beach* offer a vocabulary that is not defined by patriarchy in their interaction with the coasts and seas of Ireland ("Seatangled").⁶⁰ As seen in the previous section, the sea can challenge traditional gender stereotypes. In doing so, it offers women writers the opportunity to discover a vocabulary that challenges patriarchal ideas and strictures using the language of the sea, explored in chapter two. For example, Margaret Cohen notes how American poets "Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop, share a fascination for the sea's symbolic depths and assert their claim to sea knowledge, historically a masculine domain" ("Feminist Plunge" 373). Binaries and hierarchies are challenged through poetic interactions with the sea as it is not a pure body of water, as Bachelard suggests. The sea, with its salt waters, its drowned bodies and objects, hidden depths and unknown creatures, as well as its connective qualities and its history as a space of transit and mingling – in short, its synaptic nature – is not a space of pureness. Yet, in its shifting waves, poets can find a voice that is aptly described as feminist in its ability to challenge patriarchal ideas. This final section explores how for Ní Chuilleanáin and for Goodison, the sea appears in their poetry to confirm a powerful, poetic female voice that defies those traditional values that oppress women.

⁶⁰ These remarks were made during a 2019 talk delivered in Trinity College Dublin, entitled "Seatangled: Ireland, Literature and the Coast".

Both the material realities of the sea and conceptual understandings of space converge here to constitute a site that allows for the defiance of grand narratives. As Theda Wrede points out, “feminist spatial readings propose that space itself can offer resistance to gender hierarchies”, as it is “multiple, shifting, heterogeneous, situational, and contested” (10). While her focus remains land-based as she attempts to highlight the existing disruptive forces within the presumed stability of landed space, Wrede’s comments can be easily read as a description of sea space. Moreover, the sea is unambiguously shifting and heterogeneous in its constant fluidity and mutability. These shifting spaces can, accordingly, “help subvert the oppressor-oppressed paradigm” (Wrede 10). Thus, while the sea may be considered feminine in a symbolic sense, it also holds a potentiality to undercut the strict gender binaries to which it seems to be beholden. At the same time, those features that prompt the poetic imagination to view the sea as feminine are harnessed by women to their benefit. Notably, Astrida Neimanis envisages a feminist subjectivity that is understood through water. Turning to the idea of *écriture féminine*, Neimanis notes that philosophers such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous make explicit links between water, the sea, and women’s writing (33).⁶¹ Moreover, the maternal elements of the sea “underline the materiality of water as *literally* creative and gestational” (Neimanis 33; emphasis in original). Similarly, Ben Heller evokes this school of thought to argue that the sea’s fluid, feminine energy “can act as the basis of new forms of expression which would challenge masculine logic and textual practice”

⁶¹ Hélène Cixous first used the term *écriture féminine* in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”. She calls for a practice of writing femininity that, to her, had rarely been present in literature by asking woman to write through her body, explore feminine desire and express her specific thought in order to break “the codes that negate her” (Cixous 1946). As Diana Holms points out “although Cixous attributes the practice of ‘feminine’ writing to certain male, as well as female, authors, the essay has the exhortatory tone of a manifesto, calling on women to invent a new language that would break through the repressive, censoring codes of a phallogentric culture” (216). *Écriture féminine* is, thus, envisioned as a radical and subversive break with the oppressive masculine canon of literature and speech, and while open to both male and female authors, it is explicitly a call Cixous makes to her fellow women writers.

(400). Feminist readings of the sea, thus, can reimagine negative stereotypes as positive, creative powers.

These viewpoints are valuable and aid in an understanding of the poems by Ní Chuilleanáin and by Goodison discussed below. However, there is also a sense that Neimanis' and Heller's invocations of the sea's feminine potentiality may rely too heavily on an essentialist discourse of womanhood and serve to reconstitute the gender binary.⁶² Indeed, this too is a common critique of the idea of *écriture féminine*. Diana Holms notes that "when feminists had struggled for centuries against the disempowering theory of a femininity that was naturally self-sacrificing, intuitive and emotional, it was disturbing to find qualities very similar to these being claimed in the name of women's liberation" (228). That "the characteristics of *écriture féminine*" are "close to the emotionalism, irrationality, and emphasis on nature and maternity traditionally attributed to writing by women" (228) is of concern to an emancipatory feminist discourse. It has already been shown in the cases of Heaney and of Walcott that depictions of the sea as feminine, which rely on tropes of mystery and maternity, can reflect negatively on general understandings on women. In exploring a feminist vocabulary located in the sea in Ní Chuilleanáin's and Goodison's work, this section does not suggest that the sea's qualities are inherently feminine, although the work of Neimanis and Heller is useful in pointing to the sea's creative powers and acknowledging the value women writers discover there. The disruptive nature of the synaptic sea is invoked to demonstrate how masculinist logic can be challenged, as Goodison and Ní Chuilleanáin open up to a space resistant to patriarchal views.

⁶² Again, Butler's work is important to the context of this argument in its rejection of an essentialised gender identity.

Nevertheless, it is notable that neither Goodison nor Ní Chuilleanáin oppose outright an associative relationship between woman and nature in their poetry and woman's bond with the physical environment can provide creative outcomes. For Ní Chuilleanáin, this is evident in "Pygmalion's Image" from *The Magdalene Sermon*, whereby the poem's female figure comes alive within the context of the landscape as "a green leaf of language comes twisting out of her mouth" (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SP* 49). Notably, "the woman comes to life without any reference to male agency" (Kidd 43). Instead, there is a generative interaction with nature that allows the woman of the poem to discover a language that is itself connected to the environment. It does not consign woman to a static part of nature (itself hardly static) but rather reflects a productive interaction between woman and her surroundings, as the woman is an active agent in the poem. Similarly, Goodison's work "suggests an affinity between nature and woman" as she "harnesses the familiar alliance of woman with Nature, nurture and healing to construct a powerful poetic voice which delivers prophetic truths in a manner more associated with the male bard" (deCaires Narain, "Landscape" 61). Goodison encounters her Jamaican landscape, history and politics in all its facets and declares "mine the task of writing it down" (Goodison, *CP* 63), channelling a healing connection to nature to assert her poetic voice. In a similar way, the sea offers these creative impulses to the female poet in Goodison's and Ní Chuilleanáin's work.

Within Ní Chuilleanáin's work, women have long drawn power from the sea, with the poems of her 2019 collection, *The Mother House*, evincing the continuation of this trope. Images of women and the sea that are found in earlier work are carried into this collection as female voices return from the sea to allow Ní Chuilleanáin to persist in her project of writing female characters that "are often isolated and in motion" (Boyle Haberstroh 107). Her characters are active, although this may be subtle. Importantly, they

are “not passive” and “often act on their own, moving beyond stereotypes” (107). Of particular interest here is “The Faces”, which resonates with the earlier “Ardnaturais” from *The Second Voyage*. The linguistic and character similarities across these poems are often striking and demonstrate the ways in which the sea flows through the poet’s work, allowing for a sustained examination of the female voice.

In “Ardnaturais”, a woman is presented “alone in the sea: a shallow breath held stiffly” (Ní Chuilleanáin, SV 20). The sea is a powerful force, threatening the speaker’s drowning as “the water / searches the branching algae and [her] hair / Spreads out like John the Baptist” (20). Boyle Haberstroh provides a useful reading of the poem, drawing out its subversive elements, particularly highlighting the ways in which the interaction with water challenges traditional ideas about gender; the woman’s decision to hold her breath demonstrates “insight”, while the comparison to John the Baptist places her as a preacher figure, speaking “revelation” (109). Moreover, it is the comparison to the often inept male heroes found elsewhere in *The Second Voyage* that is most revealing of Ní Chuilleanáin’s attitude towards gender:

Because Ní Chuilleanáin allows image to carry her message, it is sometimes difficult to see how she challenges stereotypes and traditional myths. Nonetheless, the poems in *The Second Voyage* question the value of celebrated concepts of hero and heroism, introduce images of courageous and independent women or confused and frightened men, and create figures who subvert conventional presumptions about gender. (109-110)

This comparison is particularly useful as it cements the centrality of image to Ní Chuilleanáin’s work and demonstrates that the insightful, shrewd woman of “Ardnaturais” who faces the reality of the sea’s destructive powers, is a subversive figure.

“Warm death for a jellyfish [...] I feel fear / As I see them plain; The soft anemone, / Bladdered weed, the crouching spiked urchin” (20). The detailed description of the sea highlights not only the poet’s keen eye but also the woman’s courage in the face of drowning. As the poem ends, the woman remains in the sea, as her “shadow lies / Dark and hard like time / Across the rolling shining stones” (20). She inhabits her own sense of time, a time inflected by “No pounding historical waves, / No sandribbed invasions” (20). The shifting space of the sea begins to challenge oppressive paradigms, as Wrede suggests is possible in feminist readings of space. In rejecting a patriarchal hero-worship and ideal of commemoration, the poem enacts a more resistant sense of time, at one with the disruptive waves.⁶³

Interestingly, many of these key ideas and images return in the first poem from the two-part “The Faces”, called “Woman in a Traffic Jam”. As if picking up where “Ardnaturais” left off the poem opens with a first-person voice declaring:

I still see the woman, a drowned
face rising up out of a wave,
time combing back strands of her hair.

I see her now just as clearly
as when we travelled beside her;
the man was raging at the wheel. (Ní Chuilleanáin, *MH* 42)

The flowing hair, which turned the woman of “Ardnaturais” into John the Baptist, returns here as the defining feature of the woman’s remembered face. “The Faces” repositions the woman as figure rather than speaker and she appears silently in the poem, sitting

⁶³ The ways in which the synaptic sea can disrupt time are explored more fully in chapter five, with an emphasis on the sea’s relationship to myth.

calmly “her knitting out, her face // never altered” (42). The woman removes herself from the tension and anger felt by the male driver in the traffic jam, which again places the man and woman in contrast, in order to demonstrate the woman’s unique position. The speaker soon joins this alternate time, stating by the end of the poem, “we climbed the cogged wheel of our age, / our century, side by slow side” (42). In allying the woman to herself, the speaker creates a sense of female solidarity, inhabiting the resistant sense of time issued by the synaptic waves of “Ardnaturais” and found at the opening of “The Faces”. For the poet, “It was like history, held there / in view of another lifetime” (42). Again, this is not a history of epic battles or male heroics but rather a slow, clear, hard time that opens up to female voices such as the speaker and the woman of “Ardnaturais” and “The Faces”.

For Jefferson Holdridge, in “Ardnaturais” the human interaction with the sea is “where the sacred is born from the confrontation with mortality” (117). In “The Faces” too, the image of death that opens the poem reveals to the poet the sacred nature of the time stuck in traffic and she accordingly places herself within this time. The submersion of the women of both poems releases a time and space that allows for creativity and personal testimony. The presence of the synaptic sea continues this, allowing for a reconsidering of land-based ideologies that confine the idea of woman to something static. Although both women are reserved and, perhaps even somewhat mysterious, they are also, significantly, shown to be resilient and subversive characters, as Ní Chuilleanáin proposes a keen interrelation between woman and the sea across her work.

In a more forceful way than Ní Chuilleanáin, Goodison asserts her voice as a woman poet as, in a Caribbean setting “one site of matriarchal power is the female public voice” (Shields 99). Her poetry actively seeks to write a strong woman’s voice, which in turn presents a challenge to both traditional patriarchal structures and imperial ideals. As

she remarks in interview “I think I write about women more than anything else, the condition of women” (qtd. in Baugh, “Goodison” 17). Like Ní Chuilleanáin’s, her poems carry a power in their return to familiar tropes and images, although she is more explicit in her criticism of patriarchal structures and their ability to silence women. For example, in “So Who Was the Mother of Jamaican Art” from *Controlling the Silver*, she asserts, “She was the first nameless woman who created / images of her children sold away from her / [...] She did not sign her work” (CP 369). Here, there is a clear attempt by Goodison to look back on an artistic world that excluded, ignored and eventually forgot women and their creations. In other poems, she relies on the unity of the seas, an outlook detected in the earlier “Trident”, to release her poetic potency into a world traditionally reserved, not only for men, but also for European writers. *Turn Thanks*, which is divided into four parts, explores the poet’s interaction with her mother, her father and her love of poetry before turning to a final, more personal section. It is the poems that end part III and begin part IV, “To Become Green Again and Young” and “God a Me” respectively, that demonstrate the increasing shift towards Goodison’s resilient sea-voice.

At the end of “To Become Green Again and Young”, a poem that seeks renewal and regeneration following a New Year’s Eve ritual in Rio de Janeiro, the speaker turns her search for deliverance towards the oceans:

Arctic, Antarctic, Atlantic, Indian, Pacific
Caribbean Sea, Atlantic Ocean
where our ancestors drowned

There is a spirit nation
beneath the ocean. May its citizens plead
for our redemption. (Goodison, CP 259)

Again, the oceans flow into one for Goodison, as the synaptic sea blurs and absorbs these differences, although, the repetition of Atlantic and the specific mention of the Caribbean Sea locate Goodison's poem and her spirit nation. Indeed, this spirit nation, held in the synaptic sea, again recalls the drowned African people of the Middle Passage. As Goodison writes about these souls, she reflects the woman's song in "The Living Converter Woman of Green Island", which seeks to "Cleanse the charnel house / of the bloodbath Atlantic" (Goodison, *CP* 291). In "To Become Green Again and Young", the drowned are called upon to plead for the living, as the sea figures as an unknown place. Yet, the poet, in her creative connection with the sea, can confidently assert that there is a nation there. At the same time, the eerie half-rhyme between nation/redemption presents the reader with the uneasy tension that exists between the two concepts. The nation under the sea is not a tangible nation and, like Ní Chuilleanáin's disruptive sea-time, is beyond a territorialised understanding of the concept. This idea resonates with discussions begun in the previous chapter on the nation and also calls into question the easy assertion Walcott makes between sailing, race and maleness in "Landfall, Grenada".

As Goodison's poetry "reflects a deep belief in the power of language" (Hodges 20), the new section of the collection provides answers to the tensions of "To Become Green Again and Young" in the hymn-like qualities of "God a Me". Returned to the very waters to which she calls out in the former poem, the speaker of "God a Me" says, "I was swimming in sync / so with live currents", until she left the water and was "beached" (Goodison, *CP* 260). Accordingly, she lives in an in-between state both in and out of the water. Goodison positions her as straddling two spaces in an interaction with the synaptic sea, which contains the history of the Middle Passage, and the local space of the beach. Like the woman of "Ardnaturais", who becomes like John the Baptist in the water, this woman attains God-like qualities:

Fish out of water

God a me.

Fish live on land

God a me.

Slightly amphibian

God a me.

My name itself a prayer:

God a me.

On land I breathe uneasy

but still breathe though

until the tides of mercy

pull me

back into

the flow.

God a me. (260)

Recalling the preceding poem, the waves contain spiritual power, offering redemption at first, followed by mercy. In her connection with the waters around her, the speaker discovers her godly poetic voice. Counteracting the depiction of Walcott's nereid in "Anadyomene", this poem fully explores the woman's hybrid nature, that condition employed as a strength rather than consigned to mystery or seen as an inevitable state because of the sea's feminine properties. Poetry becomes the redemption and the woman's name itself a prayer, while the refrain of "God a Me" emphasises the poet's authority. Goodison creates a poetic persona that asserts her own right to speak of and

for those oppressed by the colonial past by opening herself up to the “tides of mercy”. Moreover, the conception of a male godhead is challenged as the speaker lays claim to divine right through her ability to mediate between the sea nation of “To Become Green Again and Young” and the land onto which she is thrown in “God a Me”. While she is more comfortable in the water, she is not fixed by this association, as Heaney’s and Walcott’s female figures are, and can live on land. At the same time, she is not at one with the oceans and remains separate to its whims. It is only through submitting to the will of the tides – “until the tides of mercy / pull me / back into / the flow” – as Ní Chuilleanáin’s grandparents do in “Seaweed”, that she will be allowed to re-enter the water. Her connection to the sacred sea allows the poet to enter a profound and shifting space in an attempt to challenge the ideals and heal the wounds of the oppressive forces of colonialism and a patriarchal hold over poetry.

Conclusions

The poetry examined in this chapter confirms that the sea is a space that generates multitudinous perspectives on and questions about gender. To some degree, Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott view the sea alongside typically feminine characteristics. At the same time mobility across the sea has been conceived of as a masculine endeavour. The synaptic lens reveals, within this exploration of the attitudes towards gender of these four poets, how each interacts with a sea that can be perceived as feminine to either confirm this view, utilise it, and/or challenge it.

For Heaney and Walcott, it is a site of mystery that, in turn, reflects the mystery of the feminine. Moreover, the sea’s maternal elements are detected in these poets’ work, often as a way to fix the concept of woman as symbolic mother. Walcott’s work most

consistently depends on a connection between woman/mother and sea in a way which limits the female characters of his poems. Heaney, too, relies on well-worn tropes of femininity at sea, although his poetic persona, at times, demonstrates a more sympathetic outlook on women. For Goodison and Ní Chuilleanáin, the sea is also a space of the maternal but they turn to its waters in order to elucidate a familial heritage, otherwise undiscovered or misunderstood. Although they do associate woman and water, their poems in which men and women interact with one another demonstrate a less fixed approach to traditional gender roles and ideals and see the tropes and powers of the sea as open to the male figures of their poems. Heaney, too, recognises that in a watery, tidalectic interrelation of the sexes, gendered attitudes are deconstructed. Finally, Ní Chuilleanáin and Goodison, having identified the open nature of the synaptic sea, employ it in their work to underscore a feminist vocabulary that is resistant to oppressive structures. For Ní Chuilleanáin, the sea connects the female characters across her work, opening up a non-traditional time-space that challenges traditions of remembrance and creates female solidarity. Goodison relies on its powers to forge a womanly poetic voice that claims its own authority to speak for Jamaica's past, landscape and people.

Accordingly, the sea appears not so much as a feminine space in and of itself, but rather as a space that opens itself up to the unorthodox. It becomes for Ní Chuilleanáin, Goodison and, to a certain extent, Heaney, a place to think through gendered constraints and reimagine a productive understanding of woman in particular, but also of man. The strength of poetic and philosophical invocations of the sea as feminine (whether productively or stiflingly so) and maternal (in either its creative or symbolic associations) means that it is unlikely that poets will cease to find elements considered as feminine at sea. Nonetheless, this chapter reveals, through a synaptic reading of certain poems, that the elemental properties of the sea also make it resistant to fixed binaries. Connective

solidarities are outlined as the sea offers these poets agency to rethink, revise and reject gender oppressions within this common, shared space.

CHAPTER FIVE

Temporal Reflections in the Mythic Sea

*there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.
[...]
the sea is another story*

(Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck” 23)

The sea has no beginning and no end, challenging notions of temporality. It is a continuous story, the realities of its voyages, vessels and vacillations inspiring cultural and mythic narratives across coastal and island spaces. These tales, as such, redound in the sea poetry of island writers. For the four poets explored in this thesis, the mythic sea is employed particularly as a tool with which to make sense of contemporary existence. In the previous chapters, the sea has helped to define the physical space of the island and the act of writing while its actualities offer a space to expose ideas around nation and gender. Within these explorations, the cultural values placed on the sea have remained important, as it figures as a space in which to confront and rethink contemporary settings. Myths of the sea are some of the most enduring cultural associations with ocean spaces, as sea creatures and monsters are present in the waves’ memory alongside tales of adventuring.

These synaptic impulses are palpable to the poets discussed in this thesis, who find in the ebbs and flows eternal stories with neither beginning nor end but instead blurred narratives in constant movement. Yet within these eternal mythic associations, poets are also prompted to consider how the local sea they encounter resonates both with their contemporary moment and beyond. Myth’s continual presence prompts re-consideration of linear time, an aspect introduced in the previous chapter with Ní

Chuilleanáin's work and explored in more detail here. A turn towards the sea asks "not to make the past present but to reconceive our basic notions of temporality, periodicity, and contemporaneity" (Baucom, *Specters* 324). Each of the four poets examined is acutely aware of the ramifications of their seas' mythic cycles. They acknowledge a literary and cultural history that embeds them in their own setting and reflects more fluid understandings of time in the world around. Like the sea, which, as outlined in chapter one, helps to define the island, myth acts as a site of delineation that prompts reflection. Moreover, just as the Atlantic connects the poetry of Ireland and the Caribbean, myth can act as a way in to various cultures, as well as a reflection on the poet's own setting.

Framed by both the oceanic theories that underpin this thesis and the work of theorists of myth, the chapter seeks to examine how an engagement with the mythic sea reflects concerns about conceptions of time and the interaction with what is considered contemporary. The exploration of the poets' work begins with beginnings and re-beginnings as these poets attempt to conceive of both origins and renewals. These endeavours reveal that in poetic engagements with the mythic sea, conceptions of time as well as the contemporary moment are upended. Thus, the following section demonstrates how the resonances of Greek myth, in particular, in the synaptic sea offer a new creative time-space to all four poets. Finally, this interplay of artistic time and renewal provokes the poets to confront the mythical voices that appear in the sea in contemporary circumstances, asking how best to write with them for their own time.

Theories of the Mythic Sea

The work of Northrop Frye and of Mircea Eliade provides important conceptual foundations for a discussion of myth at sea, particularly because both note the centrality

of beginnings and time. For Eliade, myth “allows us to discover our ontological place in the universe” (Strenski 74). In aiding humans in an understanding of the origins of phenomena (Segal 54), myth, for Eliade, “is always related to a ‘creation’; it tells us how something came into existence, or how a pattern of behaviour, an institution, a manner of working were established” (Eliade, *Myth* 18). In this way, myth is viewed as a tool that directs us towards the rudiments of beginnings. Frye’s work complements this notion, nuancing it somewhat, by suggesting that the “fundamental form” of myth “is cyclical” (158). He argues that myth is organised around “structural patterns” which, for the most part, demonstrate “the alternation of success and decline, effort and repose, life and death” (158). As such, myth and an engagement with it are ongoing processes rather than “the final goal of human vision” (158). Myth is not teleological for Frye or for Eliade and is better identified as “narratives explaining not only how things have come to be but also where we are going” (Dodeman and Raimbault x). In this way, myth straddles historical perceptions of past and future.

Myth’s ongoing, Janus-like view of what has been and what is yet to come demonstrates its position outside of linear time. Gathering multiple eras under its umbrella, myth and its observance opens up to what Eliade calls sacred time. For Eliade, the ritual celebration of myth allows for the “reactualization of a sacred event” (*The Sacred* 69). In his formulation, the mythic is “indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable” (69). Sacred time disrupts ordinary time, in the same way that the synaptic sea challenges a sense of linear temporality. Just as a move towards water coincides with the opening up to a new time, it is possible “by means of rite” to “pass without danger from ordinary temporal duration to sacred time” (68). For the poets of this thesis, the poetic act of engaging with the sea becomes that rite and through their interactions with the myths of the sea they step into a sacred, sea-based time. Myth remains connected to

the present reality, as it also allows for refractions beyond what is traditionally identified as current time within its processes and patterns.

Crucially, this temporal disruption also lends myth its critical function. Paul Ricoeur argues that myth facilitates critique “because it has had to be constantly interpreted and re-interpreted in different historical epochs” (qtd. in Ricoeur and Kearney 115). The poets under discussion here are keenly aware of myth’s sharpness as a tool with which to mine the past and present but that it is, at the same time, inscribed with the many allusions, revisions and relations that have come before. As poets seek to grasp their own identities and the societal realities around them in the context of changing twentieth and twenty-first centuries, myth becomes a signpost from which to take direction. The use of similar mythic structures in disparate regions across postcolonial spaces may seem incongruous but, it is important to note the translatability of myth as well as its specificity:

On the one hand we must say that mythical structures are not simply universal any more than are languages. Just as man is fragmented between different languages so also he is fragmented between different mythical cycles, each of which is typical of a living culture. [...] On the other hand, however, we must say that just as languages are by principle translatable one into the other, so too myths have a horizon of universality which allows them to be understood by other cultures. (Ricoeur qtd. in Ricoeur and Kearney 116)

Ricoeur reaffirms the work of Frye and Eliade by noting the importance of the cyclical nature of myth, its relationship to time and its ability to reveal something specific about a set location. At the same time, however, he also implies that myth opens up to all and maintains a degree of universality. Myth is a continued presence in the synaptic sea, its

impulses generalisable across the world's littoral spaces. Yet, it is interpreted at a more intimate and local level, prompting reflection on immediate concerns.

Indeed, a place's topography is heavily linked to the types of myths found there, with island spaces, for example, giving "rise to myths involving overseas travel, crossings of liminal spaces and even deluge stories about how remote lands had disappeared into the depths of the ocean" (Dodeman and Raimbault xi). In Greek myth, a key influence on all poets of this thesis, the geographical reality of the country and its islands gives rise to an abundance of sea-based myths. What Homer called "the divine sea" was a crucial feature of Greek life and literature (Beaulieu 1). In relation to Ireland and the Caribbean, sea-based myths have been shown to have a major influence on the literary world. Richard Kearney, for example, finds "a recurrent motif of sea voyage in Irish myth and legend" ("Myth" 59), while much has been written about the importance of the mythic sea in the Caribbean. For Benítez-Rojo, the culture of the Caribbean "Peoples of the Sea" (*Repeating Island* 16) is best studied not through Western modes of historiography but through the patterns and parallels of myth ("Caribbean" 199). Thus, the sea is an important site of myth for Ireland and the Caribbean as it offers unique and non-hierarchical modes of cultural thought and also non-linear and cyclical conceptions of time.

The four poets of this thesis turn to a myriad of sea-based myths in different ways to rethink and critique their present. As such, the mythic sea draws attention to conceptions of time, reflected in beginnings, origins, cycles and the specificity of island location. Myths, both local and transnational, are interpreted and reinterpreted, revealing the sea's synaptic, resistant nature.

Origins and New Beginnings in the Sea

Myth, as Eliade suggests, is a significant way of cognising and appreciating origins and the poets discussed here turn to the myths of the sea in order to unpack ideas of beginnings and renewal. As the synaptic sea has a memory, the mythic cycles of the sea become a space of sacred time, re-actualising origins so as to re-evaluate them in the present. This is particularly prevalent in the Caribbean, where what Deleuze calls oceanic islands, provoke consideration of origin in and emergence from the sea.

In this vein, Goodison turns to myth to come to some understanding of her island's place in the world, as well as of her contemporary spirituality. In "The Geovangelist", she does this through the mythic sea, as her poetry comes to align nature with "a notion of spirituality that eschews religion in its institutional forms in favour of a faith in the possibility of collective – and humane – action" (deCaires Narain, "Landscape" 54). The synaptic mythic sea here allows for the combining of the Atlantis myth with Christian undertones, evident from the outset in the title's neologism. The poem tells of "the geologer-evangelist / come to [the speaker's] village" (Goodison, *CP* 382) His title is a strange one, mixing the archaic "geologer" (in place of the more common "geologist") with the religious "evangelist". According to the speaker, "He came / bearing news of a new religion" (383). Somehow drawn to the "obsidian rock wall / behind [the speaker's] ancestral home" (382), the geovangelist declares:

Molluscs, there are seashells
in this ancient rock's face,

people this rock was once
under the sea. I believe it may be
rock of the lost continent Atlantis. (383)

In mixing the scientific, the mythic and the religious, Goodison grants the poem an air of mystery. The volcanic, obsidian rock mentioned at the poem's opening is given oceanic heritage, recalling Jamaica's geological beginnings. Goodison blends and synthesises myth and reality in the character of the geovangelist, through his conviction that the rock has truly come from Atlantis. Not only does this allow the poet to reconceptualise time by linking the island's origin to that mythic time of Atlantis, but it also demonstrates the sea's synoptic qualities. There is an implicit rejection of hierarchy, presenting origins as mysteriously unknown and paradoxically of fire and water. At the same time, the speaker of this poem witnesses a theory of origin which is never resolved. Notably, Lilian Feder highlights that myth is often "considered both truth and falsehood by some of the very poets who employ it" (27). Accordingly, the poem's final lines emphasise ambiguity as myth and science remain in the same sphere: "That was his theory, which as far / as we know was never proven" (Goodison, *CP* 383). The truth expressed through the mythical sea in this poem is not one of fact but rather of belief. Invoking a myth such as Atlantis, Goodison demonstrates the ultimately unknown nature of belief despite the temporal signs of the fossils that may confirm the geovangelist's theory. This unknowability leaves the possibilities of origins open, as the speaker and her family take solace in a myth which they do not know to be true but which, significantly, they do not know to be untrue either, engaging in a blurring of myth's truth and falseness.

Similarly, Walcott's early poem, "Origins", acknowledges several versions of beginning as the poet attempts to establish his own voice in the midst of a myriad of influences from European, African and Caribbean cultures. Alexander Irvine ascertains that "Walcott reclaims a heritage from the same sea that has been a device used to erase memory and history" (129), yet the mythic qualities of this sea have not been extensively explored. This is in spite of the fact that the poem's translated epigraph, "narrow part of

the surge in the blur of fables” (Walcott, *CP* 11), is borrowed from Martiniquais writer, Aimé Césaire, and establishes the sea as a synaptic site of mythic influences. In “Origins” the mythic sea affords the poet strategies to interrogate the past and present but these pasts are sometimes shown to be incompatible with the poet’s vision of the Caribbean subject. As such, Walcott accentuates the speaker’s newness at the beginning of the poem. Materialising from the waves, he declares, “I remember nothing” (11). This amnesic speaker learns “of Hector, [...] Achilles, Aeneas, Ulysses” from the “annals of ocean” (11), heroes who will later become central figures throughout Walcott’s oeuvre, but laments that of indigenous Caribbean populations, the annals record nothing. In their place, there is only the colonial voice that describes their “primitive minds” (11). In this opening stanza the sea is, thus, not only the birth-site of this new Caribbean man but also the scene of colonial arrival.

Subsequently, this European arrival by sea leads to another arrival, that of multiple African populations forced into slavery. They travel as part of “the Guinean odyssey”, requiring the speaker to negotiate “between the Greek and African pantheon” (Walcott, *CP* 12). It is in the poem’s fourth section that the sea figures as a point in which the speaker can situate himself, acting as a link between Western and African pulls:

[...] O sea,
The retching hulks of caravels stitching two worlds,
Like the whirr of my mother’s machine in a Sabbath bedroom,
Like needles of cicadas stitching the afternoon’s shroud. (14)

The sea is the poet’s muse here and is invoked as the Greek poets invoked the gods. The ship is the seam, situating the sewing together of these two locations. Although this act of sewing is characterised by the violent “retching” of colonial Portuguese ships, the

proceeding similes counter this violence, presenting instead cycles of stitching. The suggestion that domestic sewing takes place each Sabbath presents a short cycle, infused with matriarchal heritage and lends the sea a maternal quality. Moreover, the invocation of cicadas, an insect that emerges every 17 years and has been linked with ideas of immortality since Greek times, also speaks to an unending cycle.⁶⁴ These lines underscore the coming of ships and fusion of cultures in the synaptic gap of the sea, creating new transatlantic lines, as a significant and ineluctable moment. The speaker must continue to contend with these diverse influences, as the sea and myth renew throughout. Indeed, Walcott's own oeuvre seems to support this as he returns time and again to these mythical impulses.

In a continuation of this sea expedition, the narrative returns to the speaker on the beach, who, in contrast to Goodison's acceptance of ambiguity in belief, seeks the stability of a name:

The mind, among the sea-wrack, sees its mythopoeic coast,
Seeks, like the polyp, to take root in itself.
Here, in the rattle of receding shoal,
Among these shallows I seek my own name and a man. (Walcott,
CP 14)

The speaker searches for his *own* name, a name not among those of Ancient heroes and unrecorded in the annals of the ocean. The coast appears to be the site in which to seek as these lines place emphasis on the sea through repetition of the /si:/ sound in "sea-wrack," "sees," "seeks," "receding" and "seek." It flows through the section, taking root

⁶⁴ The cicada's links with immortality seem to come from the story of Tithonus, a lover of Eos, the goddess of Dawn, who, when seeking immortality, was turned into a cicada by the gods. Lord Alfred Tennyson recounts Tithonus' lament, left "to dwell in presence of immortal youth / Immortal age beside immortal youth" in his poem "Tithonus" (583).

across the lines as the speaker desires. The need to take root in oneself intimates a denial of hierarchy yet the mythopoeic man and, indeed, the poem itself retain the remnants of the diverse influences from Europe to Africa that shape him, despite his amnesia. Reading this section synaptically speaks to the creation of a sense of being that, like the rhizome, is not rooted, but which has memory nonetheless. The speaker may not be connected to the past but its vestiges, including the names of those unrecorded in the annals, are present in the synaptic sea and he returns to that sea to seek his name. The specificities of his own mythic coast then shapes and reshapes these myths in its meaning-making capacity. In a similar way to the fossils which date the rock for the geovangelist but remain inconclusive for the speaker, the unrecorded names of the mythic sea offer a site of identification for Walcott's mythopoetic man, despite their invisibility.

The non-hierarchical nature of this section is aptly mirrored by the cycles Walcott invokes through the sea and metaphors of stitching. The "receding shoal" moves with the currents, whilst the final image of the sea is one of constant movement and reinvention: "The sea waits for him, like Penelope's spindle. / Ravelling, unravelling its foam" (Walcott, *CP* 15). Coupled with a specifically feminine act of sewing, the sea is more specifically compared to the stitching tools used: his mother's machine in the earlier section and Penelope's spindle here. The sea as a maternal and creative space is evident in Walcott's work, as explored in the previous chapter, however, it is the artifice with which cultural fusions at sea have taken place that is emphasised here. In this way, Walcott stresses the truth and untruth of this mythic sea, as Goodison does in her poem. The poet recognises the yearning to create one's own myth, to speak to the truth of his beginnings, but at the same time is acutely aware of the inability of any one of those ancient myths to reveal an essentialised truth of existence, given the varied and multiple influences at work. Instead, he turns to revisions and cycles as he begins to grasp at an

origin in the sea which, on the one hand, “razed that / memory [of colonisation/slavery] from / our speech” and on the other hand, offers up for “harvest ancestral voices from its surf” (Walcott, *CP* 15, 16). The mythic nature of the sea provides Walcott with a vehicle to help acknowledge that beginnings in the Caribbean rarely occur with complete forgetting. The mutability of the synaptic sea opens up to a newness that is informed by memory.

Writing from the continental island of Ireland, Heaney is less concerned with origins in the sea. Rather, conscious of the sea’s position on top of the Earth, Heaney views the sea as offering a site of new beginning in its chaos and danger. He turns to the *immrama* tradition – voyage narratives of early Irish seafaring monks – playing on the notion that “Irish monks ventured into what they regarded as the ‘desert of the sea’ to find barren isles where they could practice *kinosis*, the emptying out of the self, the opening-up to the divine” (Gillis 22). In contrast to Goodison’s and Walcott’s poems’ search for beginnings, Heaney’s “The Disappearing Island,” based on the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, demonstrates a desire for renewal through a sea journey. In the *immram*, Saint Brendan, while sailing the islands of the Atlantic, disembarks on one island, which turns out to be a whale. A “blend of traditions from Antiquity and Celtic lore” (Beaulieu 11), *immrama* can be read as hybrid creations. Heaney adds a modern element in this poem, reflecting that it was “born out of living in contemporary Ireland” (qtd. in Morgan and Heaney par. 22). This background blurs a distinct sense of periodicity, as Heaney enters into a space of sacred time through the poetic act of writing the legend of St Brendan in the contemporary moment.

In “The Disappearing Island”, St Brendan disembarks on an island believing it, as the speaker says, a space to “found ourselves” (Heaney, *OG* 324) and begin the process of attestation. However, soon, the island “broke beneath [them] like a wave” (324). In

this apocalyptic vein, Frye demonstrates how the Biblical sea appears as the leviathan, “a sea-monster also identified with the social tyrannies of Babylon and Egypt” (150), with the Shakespearean sea as “the usual symbol for the lower or chaotic world” (184). As the land becomes water-like, it disrupts the monks’ resoluteness. The poem continues, “The land sustaining us seemed to hold firm / Only when we embraced it *in extremis*” (Heaney, *OG* 324). The sea’s tempestuous nature reminds Heaney that “When threat arrives, people are simpler and clearer. [...] *in extremis*, people begin to realize what is precious to them” (Heaney qtd. in Morgan and Heaney par. 20). In the specific nature of mythic sea voyage, Heaney finds a renewed vision of his society. Notably, the *immram* journey is not to some idealised past, but rather unleashes a sacred time, with the sea playing “the same role as a point of escape from reality into another world” (Beaulieu 12). Heaney’s *kinosis* in this poem is to attempt to remove himself from the chaos of debate in order to achieve clarity in his poetic outlook. The mythological sea-journey allows contemplation of these ideas as the sea’s unrelenting instability mirrors a chaotic society. Just as it literally upheaves the monks, the sea in the poem prompts Heaney to begin again by turning to the essentials. The sea offers him a freedom to imagine a situation that is unconcerned with complexities, seeing “a vision” (Heaney, *OG* 324), convincing or not, of extremes and what they might force people to do. Like Goodison’s unknown position at the end of “The Geovangelist”, Heaney’s vision may not be true but bids solace through its release of a different sense of time. Yet, for both, an awareness of spirituality is opened up in the encounter with the mythic sea.

Greek Myth and the Sea: Rejecting Linearity, Breaking Cycles

The ancient myths of Greece have influenced the work of all four poets. Given the importance of the sea to the Greek tradition and to the islands of Ireland and the Caribbean, the myths on which these poets draw are often those that either take place at sea or resonate with the sea. These myths are palpable in their contemporary moment and, as a result are present in their poetic engagement with the seas, reflecting the synaptic sea's ability to disrupt time as well as the artistic ability to operate within this scared time.

In a discussion of the myths of Ancient Greece, it is perhaps Walcott's *Omeros* that comes most immediately to mind, particularly in the Caribbean context. This seminal text reveals much about the ways in which myth is continually present within the sea. Ostensibly a poem that draws heavily on readings of Homer, *Omeros* is central to a discussion of Walcott's interaction with myth as well the sea's synaptic properties. Set on St Lucia, the poem is spoken by an unknown poet-narrator, and follows local fishermen, Achille, Hector, Philoctete and Seven Seas, retired British soldier, Major Plunkett and his Irish wife Maud, Helen, the local love interest of both Achille and Hector, and, finally, the Obeah healer woman, Ma Kilman. The classical resonances of these names are evident, as the narrator describes how the island's "Homeric association // rose like smoke from a siege" (Walcott, *O* 31). That a significant proportion of these characters are fishermen demonstrates the importance of the sea and seafaring journeys. Finally, the poem's *terza rima* form recalls Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, indicating that Walcott's engagement with myth extends across Greek and Italian traditions.

Walcott has much to say about these mythic resonances in the text and his essay, "Reflections on *Omeros*", published seven years after *Omeros*, gathers much of his thinking on the poem following its publication and reception. Reading the poem

alongside this text can reveal much about Walcott's overall attitude to myth as his statements both support and contradict the work of the poem.⁶⁵ This is particularly evident in an analysis of the poem's final sections, whereby the relationship to a Homeric frame becomes most strained, and as such is a significant site of analysis in a contemplation of Walcott's poetry and myth. Reading the sea as a synaptic site offers productive interpretations of the text's changing relationship both to myth and to other literary works, as Walcott presents a unique vision of artistic time that relies on the impulses of Homer's and Dante's texts transmitted through the sea. The epic elements of this poem are, as such, not exclusively of the human world but also influenced by the natural world of the sea.

For Walcott, the poem is one of "associations, or references" and these associations are most strongly linked to the environment of Greece and St Lucia, "forcing the parallel of a kind of mythology that coincides with the landscape" ("Reflections" 239, 235-36). Yet, as noted, the relationship to myth is not static and as the poem progresses there is less of a reliance on the Homeric associations established at the outset. Walcott laments that the poem's first readers appeared to overlook the way in which the mythic frame was employed:

many reviewers and critics saw in *Omeros* a reinvention of the *Odyssey*, but this time in the Caribbean. I mean what would be the point of doing that? What this implies is that geologically, geographically, the Caribbean is secondary to the Aegean. What this does immediately is to humiliate the landscape and say to the

⁶⁵ My reading of "Reflections on *Omeros*" alongside the poem itself is influenced by Barthes' "Death of the Author", whereby to defer to the author "is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified" (1325). I contend that *Omeros* presents a more complex relationship to myth than Walcott acknowledges in his essay but that the palpable tension between the two offers a constructive reading of myth and time.

Caribbean sea “You must think of yourself as a second-rate Aegean, or, on a good day, you can look like the Mediterranean”. (232)

Whether early reviews were so tunnelled in their assessments is contestable but the important clarifications that Walcott makes here are useful in approaching his utilisation of the mythic sea as a tool.⁶⁶ He draws attention away from narrative and character resemblances and directs the reader’s view to the sea. The Caribbean Sea becomes not a second Aegean but rather a contemporary relation of Greece’s ancient divine sea. Walcott’s (and by extension St Lucia’s) right to myth is justified by the landscape. Nevertheless, although there has been much written on the presence of the sea in the poem, its connection to myth is less considered. For example, Joe M. Moffett notes the “many references to the sea” throughout the poem (8), while Thomas Austenfeld suggests that “arguably the main character of *Omeros* [is] the sea itself” (26). In general, however, the sea is not considered as an important site for myth. One exception is the work of Stefania Ciocia, which observes that from early on in Walcott’s poem, Homer is associated with the sea (89). Although Ciocia is primarily concerned with instances of *katabasis* in the poem, she does explore the sea and its relationship to epic. For her, the poem demonstrates that “the true epic resonance of St. Lucia resides in the impressiveness and eternity of its ocean” (97). Walcott would perhaps agree as, in refuting the claim that *Omeros* is an epic poem, he points out that Achille, the ostensible hero of the poem, does not encounter a military fight, clarifying that “a natural element is more challenging than an army” (“Reflections” 244). The poem’s epic nature is both human and non-human in this formulation, reflecting an engagement with the sea that

⁶⁶ Both positive and negative reviews demonstrate attentiveness to Walcott’s loose use of the mythic structure. Andrew Salkey, who praised the work, and Jonathan Martin, who sees the work as a failure, both note that the mythic elements are not mere imitation but shifting throughout the text.

can only ever be partial, in a way that extends beyond the geovangelist's or St. Brendan's inability to know the truth of what they saw.

Although Walcott claims that "nobody looks at the point where [the] book pivots on itself" and rejects the mythic parallels ("Reflections" 233), the extent to which the poem achieves this is questionable. In the poem's final sections, the narrator begins to doubt the endeavour that he has undertaken by asking himself to "see Helen // as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow" (Walcott, *O* 271). There is a desire to renounce Homer and see St Lucia and its people as they are in their own right. Yet, on closer reading, the text appears resistant to this idea and, although the narrator might crave a frame with no Homeric shadow, the poem does not completely reject myth. Austenfeld, for instance, observes that, as the Homeric influences decrease, the allusions to Dante become stronger (15). Yet, Homeric inflections remain a clear presence in the work. Following his question on Helen, the narrator continues

[...] when would I not hear the Trojan War
in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?
When would my head shake off its echoes like a horse
shaking off a wreath of flies? (Walcott, *O* 271).

As with Helen, the narrator desires to see Hector and Achilles as they are, neither as Homeric figures nor with the reverberations of Greece in their cursing. These echoes seem a pestilence, as flies swarm his head. Yet, at the same time that the narrator asks for this, he confirms the eternal presence of myth by reference to a horse, which recalls the ending of the Trojan War. Moreover, in the *terza rima* pattern, the half-rhyme of "war" and "horse" strengthens the reference to the Trojan Horse further, "horse" finding its rhyming partner with "Omeros" in the middle of the following stanza. This suggests that,

while the narrator advocates for a removal of myth, it will not be fully completed. Significantly, for Walcott, “Every little thing that you can think of as occurring today seems to have an ancient parallel” (“Reflections” 230). In this way, it would seem that neither a total erasure of myth nor an absolute dependency on its lens is productive for Walcott. This paradoxical or fraught relationship with myth is best exemplified by a later section in the poem that deals with the sea.

Having met Omeros, who appears as the poem’s blind fisherman, Seven Seas, the narrator attempts to reconcile his earlier questioning.⁶⁷ The passage below places the response to his self-questioning in the very same sea out of which Omeros/Seven Seas emerged:

All the thunderous myths of that ocean were blown
up with the spray that dragged from the lacy bulwarks
of Cap’s bracing headland. The sea had never known
any of them, nor had the illiterate rocks,
nor the circling frigates, nor even the white mesh
that knitted the Golden Fleece. The ocean had
no memory of the wanderings of Gilgamesh,
or whose sword severed whose head in the *Iliad*
It was an epic where every line was erased

⁶⁷ Originally named St. Omere, Seven Seas “claimed he’d sailed round the world. ‘Monsieur Seven Seas’ // they christened him, from a cold-liver-oil label” (Walcott, *O* 17-18). His original name foreshadows the poem’s ending whereby he emerges from the sea as the poet Omeros, while his nickname also cements the strong relationship between Homer and the sea in the poem, as acknowledged by Ciocia. Similarly, the marine resonances of the name Omeros are signalled early on in the poem through the narrator’s gloss of the *mer* of Omeros as sea (14).

yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf
in that blind violence with which one crest replaced
another with a trench and that heart-heaving sough
begun in Guinea to fountain exhaustion here,
however one read it, not as our defeat or
our victory; it drenched every survivor
with blessing. It never altered its metre
to suit the age, a wide page without metaphors.
Our last resort as much as yours, Omeros. (Walcott, *O* 295-296)

It is this interaction with the sea that helpfully clarifies and characterises Walcott's attitude towards myth. The sea, of course, does not remember the myths that have been set there and as Pocock Boeninger points out, "although Walcott's sea is a complex symbol, this sense of its forgetfulness is one of its most frequently recurring valences" ("I" 470). In this forgetfulness, it offers a sense of new beginning. Yet, at the same time, the sea becomes a site of remembrance, reminding the poet of the *Iliad* and the Golden Fleece, of Gilgamesh and Guinea.

For the narrator, the sea "was an epic where every line was erased // yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf". The constant erasure and rewriting occurs across the stanza break reflecting a spatial, a temporal and a conceptual gap; this gap is a synaptic site. The synaptic sea holds elements of myth at the same time that they are erased by it. Moreover, the unities of myth are violently broken by the waves to neither defeat nor victory. In this passage, various impulses press up against one another leading to a number of paradoxes in the verse. Indeed, Walcott acknowledges that within the poem the interactions with myth are hybrid, as he gets "none of those [mythic] references

‘right’. They’re all jumbled up [...] because every new mythology has screwed up the preceding one, gotten it wrong” (“Reflections” 242). Walcott’s *new* myth of the sea is not wholly divorced from those old myths and, while not beholden to them, it retains a link through synaptic impulses, drenching “every survivor // with blessing”. On the whole, the poem’s development, for Jahan Ramazani, sees

Walcott not shedding but deepening his European interests as he explores his African commitments, putting into dialectical interrelation literary and cultural influences that would seem to be politically antithetical and becoming neither a Eurocentric nor an Afrocentric poet but an ever more multicentric poet of the contemporary world. (“Wound” 411)

Similarly, reading the sea as a synaptic space, which privileges neither Europe nor Africa, demonstrates the way in which a new mythology for the Caribbean may be created by an interaction with that sea. It becomes, paradoxically, a metaphorical “wide page without metaphors”, signalling the dissolving and reconstitution of synaptic impulses of myth. Nonetheless, the sea appears resolute, unchanging and unchangeable, while standing apart from human conceptions of time as it “never altered its metre / to suit the age”. The sea contains these myths but also, by its nature cannot remember them. It mixes and disrupts and violently writes afresh the myths present as allusions in Walcott’s poem.

Walcott’s understanding of the literary myths with which he interacts challenges linear time, as Ní Chuilleanáin’s female voices of chapter four do. Referring again to the critical reading which sees *Omeros* as a rewriting of Homer, he suggests that a linear conception of artistic time serves to belittle cultures which copy, as it were. Instead, “if you think of art as a simultaneity that is inevitable in terms of certain people, then [James] Joyce is a contemporary of Homer (which Joyce knew)” (Walcott, “Reflections” 241).

The sea existed for both Joyce and Homer and in the above lines from the poem, Walcott alludes to the fact that the sea is what exists between the narrator and Omeros. It is his “last resort” as much as it is the last resort of Omeros. Moreover, the sea is a key site of connection in the sections set in Ireland where the narrator encounters Joyce in the coastal setting of Howth, just as Heaney does on the lake-island of “Station Island”. The set of mythic allusions is traced in the sea from Greece to Ireland and beyond throughout the poem as all three writers exist in a simultaneous space connected by a sea which disrupts linear conceptions of time. This mythic and literary interaction via the sea is so central to the text that the twinned ideas of time and sea are found in the poem’s final line. After Achille returns to the beach from a fishing trip, the narrator leaves the reader with this final image: “When he left the beach the sea was still going on.” (Walcott, *O* 325). The sea, in its eternal forgetfulness and ability to hold the impulses of the past, is not only the narrator’s last resort but indeed the last resort of the entire poem.

Notably, Walcott never fully shakes off the mantle of Homeric allusion. The final glimpse of Helen on the poem’s last pages sees her working in an upmarket hotel resort, serving tourists. While the narrator may wish to see her without the shadow of Helen of Troy, the writing betrays a remaining indebtedness to myth, as he suggests that Helen’s eye “never carried the spoil // of Troy, that never betrayed horned Menelaus / or netted Agamemnon in their irises” (Walcott, *O* 323). Thus, Walcott’s recognition of the dangers of an over-reliance on myth does not result in a disavowal of myth on the whole. As the sea goes on, so too do the ancient myths that are found there. Indeed, the nautical and island-based links in these lines confirm that the sea is Walcott’s ultimate point of return

throughout the poem.⁶⁸ After all, Walcott reveals the poem is an expression of “gratitude for the island – for the people of the island, the beauty of the island” (“Reflections” 242).

Omeros draws various mythic and literary impulses and influences together through his engagement with his environment. At the same time, “the natural world is saturated in more than just language, and the centrality of the act of discovering [...] what exactly lies between language and the languaged world, entitles West Indian culture and spiritually links it to that of Ionic Greece” (Callahan 117-18). The poem achieves this discovery by writing with the sea. The natural world has both human and non-human elements, linguistic signs and those which cannot be comprehended by the writer, and yet the mythic, literary, historical, political and personal inflections of the poem can be detected in the synaptic quality of the sea. In doing so, Walcott’s work can be read alongside Baucom’s to disrupt time so that, if Joyce is Homer’s contemporary, then Walcott completes this trio with *Omeros*. Walcott comes to see both the beauty of the landscape and people around him as they are, while also demonstrating the contemporaneity of Homer, Dante and Joyce, among others. Although myth is not the consoling lens Walcott hoped it might be, it is a presence in the Caribbean for the poet, nonetheless.⁶⁹ His poetic voice is influenced by the myths of the sea at the same time that he can see and even write beyond them as a voice contemporaneous with canonical authors.

For Heaney, too, the Greeks are important and much like Walcott, who sees Ancient parallels in his everyday life, Heaney reads the Greeks through an Irish lens and *vice versa*, suggesting, “There’s a clannish energy about the classical and pre-classical

⁶⁸ The reference to “horned Menelaus” recalls Walcott’s repeated references to St Lucia as a horned island throughout the poem, calling to mind the twin Piton peaks found to the south of Soufrière.

⁶⁹ In “Sea Grapes”, Walcott demonstrates the uneasy relationship with myth in the Caribbean in his declaration, “The classics can console. But not enough” (PDW 197).

Greeks that feels familiar” (qtd. in O’Driscoll and Heaney 294). Unlike Walcott, Heaney ostensibly connects these traditions through a rural, inland setting, declaring, “It’s the vitality of that ritual and romance at ground level that attracts me as much as the big earth-moving machinery of the literature and the myths” (294). While this earth-based association is important in his work, the Greek connection through the sea has been less explored. Nonetheless, Susan Shaw Sailer explains that, in his early poetry, Heaney’s “mythic materials” appear as “forces in Irish land, waterways and people” (59). The poem, “Girls Bathing, Galway, 1965”, sees the speaker on the beach, attempting a similar demystifying as the poet-speaker of *Omeros*.

Although the speaker of *Omeros* attempts to view the poem’s characters through the Greek lens at the outset, Heaney’s speaker recognises the ways in which the myths of Greece are not entirely at home in the reality of the cold, coastal Irish landscape. As the girls play on the beach and “the swell foams” (Heaney, *DD* 23) in the poem’s opening lines, the reader is primed for the emergence of the goddess of love, Venus/Aphrodite, born of the sea.⁷⁰ Yet, Heaney makes that link only to immediately distance the specific Irish topography from it:

No milk-limbed Venus ever rose
 Miraculous on this western shore.
 A pirate queen in battle clothes
 Is our sterner myth. [...] (23)

⁷⁰ Although Heaney names the Roman version of the goddess of love, Venus, the Romans heavily associated her with her Greek counterpart, Aphrodite. Aphrodite’s origins are in the sea, to which Heaney refers in the second stanza of this poem. Indeed, her name, Aphrodite, comes from her birth in the sea-foam (*aphros*) and she was also known as Cythera due to her birth on the island of Cyprus (Morford and Lenardon 67).

That Ireland's "sterner myth" is clothed is significant, not only because it counteracts well-known images of the birth of Venus, such as Botticelli's famous painting, but because it also presents a stronger force than the rose-like (note Heaney's play on words), delicate skin of the naked Venus. Connected by the sea but distanced, for Heaney, by the local topography, the Galway coast cannot be that of Greece. Unlike Walcott, who connects the locations by environment, Heaney recognises that his local topography disrupts the synaptic impulses of ancient Greco-Roman myth. By distancing the girls on the beach from the surfacing Venus, Heaney succeeds in demystifying them, in "humaniz[ing] the mythic" (Shaw Sailer 59), as Walcott wishes to do with his Homeric characters. At the same time, Heaney demands "recognition of the ritual element in ordinary activities which deepens into rite" (59).

The rites of the beach force a rift in time, opening up to a sacred time and releasing the synaptic impulses of not only Greek myth but Irish legend too, in the form of Gráinne Mhaol, the "pirate queen" who ruled the bays around Mayo in the 16th century. The "myth" of Gráinne Mhaol is itself synaptic as her sea-based adventuring has historical aspects that are here rendered mythic. Perhaps the historical realities of the legend, also present in the St Brendan narrative, are the "sterner stuff" to which the speaker refers. Yet, as Walcott has suggested of his own poem, the presence of other myths in the sea transforms Heaney's Gráinne Mhaol, as the years converge at the end of this stanza though the sea: "[...] Is our sterner myth. The breakers pour // Themselves into themselves, the years / Shuttle through space invisibly" (Heaney, *DD* 23). The breaking wave releases trapped time, the space of the ocean intertwined with the years that race forward. In turn, they become the site of both the memory and continuation of religious domination: "generations sighing in / The salt suds where the wave has crashed / Labour in fear of flesh and sin" (23). The collective breath of generations, reflected in the pull of

the sea's tide, reveals the specificities of the Irish coast and the country's Christian mores, which prevent the synaptic remnants of the Botticelli-like Venus from emerging out of the sea. The crashing waves reverberate in the harsh and foreboding alliteration of "fear" and "flesh" turning the water into a complex mix of myth, legend and contemporary standards. The constant movement of the synaptic waves draw the timelines of 16th century Ireland and ancient Greece together making them palpable in the contemporary moment. This revelatory opening up of time to connect across generations is discovered through an interaction with the sea and ritual uncovered in the everyday.

Yet, much like *Omeros*' final sections, "Girls Bathing" cannot ignore the dominance of the Greek myth, suggesting that, in these girls' movements in and out of the water, "Venus comes, matter-of-fact" (Heaney, *DD* 23). Thus, the synaptic sea allows for remnants of the Greco-Roman goddess, although she is not deified at the poem's end. The truth of a mundane Venus underlines the falseness of fully aligning the Irish coast with the Mediterranean Sea. Similarly, Gráinne Mhaol disappears in the sea, as the reality of her strength dissipates. Although she is more at home on an Irish coast than Aphrodite, the reality of a Catholic culture that demonises sexual desires interrupts the female mythic elements of the sea. This is a contemporary moment that would demonise both female figures and as such they cannot inhabit the coast.

At the same time, however, the speaker's own position as a male poet watching girls "in swimsuits, / Bare-legged, smooth-shouldered and long-backed" (23) should be taken into account. On the one hand, the beach space is identified as a site of more open sexuality and as such, the poem's erotic elements serve to undercut the reality of the religious mores. On the other, the scene also takes its place alongside *Ulysses*' depiction of Bloom on the beach in Sandymount and presents a speaker uncritical in his gaze on the younger girls. Thus, while the poem inaugurates a subtle critique of policed sexuality

through the blurring of timelines, this criticism is undercut by the uneasy relationship between its speaker and subject. In any case, Venus, Gráinne and the girls of the poem are confined to symbol for the most part and, for all the potential opened up at sea, the poem closes off in its land-based exploration of the erotic.

For Goodison, the myths of the sea also offer space to consider her present reality and in her poem “The Mulatta as Penelope” Goodison, much like Heaney and Walcott, engages with the Greek sea-based myth in a non-hierarchical way through the synaptic sea. Given Goodison’s ambivalent relationship to the Mulatta figure discussed in chapter two, she should not be taken as “a facile assertion or valorization of syncretism and hybridity” in Caribbean/Jamaican identity (A. Morrison 11). Instead, the act of mixing and the “either/or and both” Baucom detects in the synaptic sea (“Charting” par. 12) is evident. Just as Walcott’s figures are not purely Homeric St Lucians, Penelope here can be read as both the Homeric wife of Odysseus and not. As she sends Odysseus off on his sea voyage in this poem, she rejects the persona of the dutiful wife. Presenting Penelope in a new light, the poet is not attempting to mystify this woman but instead is drawing attention to the disparity that has existed in men’s and women’s mythic interaction with the sea:

[...] this time
I will not sit and spin and spin,
the door open to let the madness in
till the sailor finally weary
of the sea
returns with tin souvenirs
and a claim to me. (Goodison, *CP* 74)

She rejects the mythical role ascribed to her and the cyclical position she must occupy as a sailor's wife, caught in a choice between Penelope's steadfast cunning and a Cassandra-like madness at being ignored. In a more active way than Walcott's characters, she denies her role in the Homeric myth cycle. *Omeros* allows the narrator to make and unmake mythic associations, whereas Goodison's poem places this disavowal in the mouth of the Mulatta figure herself. Indeed, the Mulatta of Goodison's poem could be seen as a missing voice from *Omeros*, that of the sailor's wife. For Jenkins, the poem is "a revisionary response to androcentric literary conceptions of the Caribbean as a new Mediterranean and the consequent Homeric apparatus that renders the Caribbean woman a passive Penelope to the male writer" (*Language* 148). The associations of the Caribbean Sea with the mythic Mediterranean have silenced women. In the above lines, the sea is a tiring, male space to which the Mulatta does not have access, as she features in the sailor's life as no more than an object.

Yet, the poem does not reject the mythic sea on the whole but rather, as Jenkins points out, the patriarchal associations therein. Although, the poem differs in many ways from *Omeros*, Goodison does present the heroics of the woman left behind, not as those needed to face an army or the elements but rather the need to care for her child, as Penelope's role as a mother is emphasised throughout the poem. Interestingly, Goodison does this, not through a rejection of the sea, but through an examination of the Mulatta's own emotional kinship with the ocean. Upon saying the "real goodbye" (Goodison, *CP* 74) to her husband, the Mulatta says,

[...] I returned from the quayside
my eyes full of sand
and his salt leaving smell
fresh on my hands (74).

Although no man can claim her, Goodison's *Mulatta* does not wish to detach herself from her partner and while he may find adventure in the sea, she discovers a space for her own emotions within it, as already seen in the earlier discussion of "She Walks into Rooms". The sand and salt mix in these lines to demonstrate that the *Mulatta* is both on land and connected to the sea. Indeed, her role as a mother becomes her "anchor awhile now" (74), as her comfortable stasis is both related to and contrasted with the male hero's adventuring. Her time begins to slow and expand through anchoring. For Goodison, the mythic sea is not a male-only site to be traversed but an embodied space from which Homer's Penelope can be in the Caribbean and speak from a previously ignored perspective. The synaptic sea allows Goodison to write the *Mulatta* as at once the Greek and the Caribbean mother, an immediate creation that both embraces and rejects the cycles of the mythic role ascribed to her.

Within the poem, the presence of the sea is undeniable, despite the fact that the speaker remains on land throughout and does not venture to the sea in the same way as her male counterpart, as with Penelope in the *Odyssey*. Notably, analysis of Penelope's relationship to the sea in the *Odyssey* by Beaulieu provides an interesting companion to the discussion of this poem. Emphasising the link between death and the sea, Beaulieu notes that at one point "Penelope wishes to be whisked away by a gust of wind and plunge into the Ocean [*sic*]" (152). For Goodison any such desire to do this in her husband's absence is countered by her decision to anchor herself to her child. This use of the word anchoring suggests the *Mulatta*'s desire to halt her presence in the sea's mythic cycle, at the same time that she is surrounded by the sea's omnipresence. Moreover, it links her to Goodison's own feminine sea-lineage by resonating with the description of the great grandmother in "Guinea Women" whose fate was "anchored / in the unfathomable sea" (Goodison, *CP* 86). Within the poem, it is the women's voice that is privileged above all

else with the synaptic sea facilitating and disrupting her place both within and beyond the mythic structures of the past and present.

For Ní Chuilleanáin, finally, myth is present in her sense of local place as already evident in poems such as “The Second Voyage”. Like Heaney, she recognises a link between the Irish and Greek traditions, as manifested through her use of *immrama* narratives alongside Greek myth in the poem “Voyagers” from *Site of Ambush*. In this truly synaptic sea, multiple times and spaces exist allowing for subtle critique of the past and present. The sea becomes a site of temporal connection, as for Ní Chuilleanáin, “the diversity of mythical material is united by the pervasive water imagery” (Meaney 109). Moreover, Ní Chuilleanáin herself declares “When I think of time, I think of a deep ocean one can plunge into – of how things can be obscured by time, but also about the moments when one is leaping easily over centuries” (qtd. in Hatch). “Voyagers” makes these leaps and obfuscations, as the speaker begins, “Turn west now, turn away to sleep / And you are simultaneous with / Maelduin setting sail again” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SP* 32) in reference to the hero Maelduin, the protagonist of *Immram Maele Dúin*, who sails around various mythical islands in an attempt to avenge his father’s death. As Dillion Johnston notes, Ní Chuilleanáin’s poetry attempts to “represent the expanse of time – past, present, and future – as not merely a vast plane or a flat, linear passage toward a goal but as a pliable surface capable of enfolding events so they remain present but invisible, hidden from the viewer’s perspective” (61). This is revealed in the poems discussed in the previous chapter and also achieved in “Voyagers” through the dream-like state and mythic sea, which holds several mythic cycles in its waves. Ní Chuilleanáin’s traveller experiences the same time as the Irish hero of the *immram*. Added to this are

[...] Odysseus crouching again

Inside a fish-smelling sealskin

Anticlus suffocating

Back in the wooden horse's womb

As he hears his wife's voice calling (Ní Chuilleanáin, *SP* 32).

Odysseus' cunning and Anticlus' desire to shout back to what is Helen's imitation of his wife's voice, while hiding in the Trojan Horse, are brought to the forefront. Similar to "Girls Bathing, Galway, 1965", the Irish and the Greek come together here, reflecting the shared space of the ocean. However, the addressee of the poem does not become these epic heroes but rather is at one with them as, once again, the sea is an escape to the sacred time of a concurrent world. Given that "Voyagers" is a section of the longer, title poem of the collection, "Site of Ambush", the context of the Irish War of Independence and Civil War are a shadowy presence. In presenting heroes of this nature, the links with war are made explicit and the sea operates both as an escape from and a deepening of these realities. It defies time and space through its relationship with sacred time. However, these Greek heroes extend little hope. By the end of the poem, this dream becomes something more sombre as the speaker instructs, "Turn westward, your face grows darker / You look sad entering your dream / Whose long currents yield return to none" (32). Much like Walcott's myths, which give no consolation, the heroes to whom Ní Chuilleanáin refers provide little relief to the poem's addressee.

Voicing the Mythic in the Present

The mythic sea is a continual presence for these poets and they engage with its cycles throughout their careers both to enter into dialogue with them as much as they might break away from their circulations. As such, in interacting with myth, they return to questions of how to write the multifaceted and sacred time of the mythic sea into a

contemporary poetic setting. The ideas discussed in chapter two around writing with the sea re-emerge as these poets attempt to write the voices of the mythic sea. For Heaney, Goodison and Ní Chuilleanáin, the mythic sea proffers voices that reflect upon the anxieties of their age.

For Heaney, this is notable in “North”, although, as discussed in the previous chapter on gender, he does engage with the Irish mermaid/selkie figure in “Maighdean Mara”. *North* is perhaps the volume most often studied in relation to Heaney’s use of myth as a result of repeated references to Norse mythology and the centrality of the bog as a site of ritual. *North* incited (and continues to do so) much critical debate with some of the strongest condemnations of Heaney’s career being levelled against his use of myth. Famously, Ciaran Carson, in a review of the collection, crowned Heaney “laureate of violence – a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for ‘the situation,’ in the last resort, a mystifier”, branding the collection “a messy historical and religious surmise – a kind of Golden Bough activity” (183, 184). However, the comparison between J.G. Frazer’s seminal work and Heaney’s volume seems to regard the poetry in a limited sense. Segal considers that Frazer’s work on “myth-ritualism” is limited “not only because it precludes modern myths and rituals [...] but also [because] it restricts even ancient and primitive myth-ritualism to myths about the god of vegetation, and really only to myths about the death and rebirth of the god” (67). Through this comparison, Carson presents Heaney as a poet with a teleological outlook, leaving little space for the self-doubt and attempts at human identification that can be detected throughout the collection. Moreover, these are evidently landed myths, taking place in rural settings and, as such, do not account for the qualities of the mythic sea.

As a result of this debate, much attention was given to the bog poems of *North* and as such, it is perhaps unsurprising that the collection’s title poem, with its coastal

setting, garnered less detailed reflection than its bog-based counterparts. Notably, in Heaney's interviews with Dennis O'Driscoll, gathered in *Stepping Stones*, the poem "North" is never mentioned in a discussion of the eponymous collection. Instead, focus is dedicated to myth, ritual and the bog in overall commentary on the poems of *North*. A more sustained examination of Heaney's interaction with the mythic sea surrounding Ireland provides a route towards fresh interpretation of his use of myth. *North*'s title poem opens with the speaker at the coast:

I returned to a long strand,
the hammered curve of a bay,
and found only the secular
powers of the Atlantic thundering. (Heaney, *OG* 100)

Here, there is an implicit link to cycles, as "the poet's actual return to a particular beach on the Atlantic coast typifies the poem's many other returns" (H. Hart 394). At the local site of the beach, the mundane becomes the mythic. Even though Harold Bloom characterises the sea in this poem as secular, offering an escape from the sectarian violence of the North (21), the appearance "suddenly" at the end of stanza two, of "those fabulous raiders" from Orkney and Dublin (Heaney, *OG* 100), is the manifestation of the sea's arcane mythology. Moreover, the poet imbeds lexical references to Thor, Norse god of thunder, throughout the first stanza. "Hammered," "powers" and "thundering" are suggestive of the beach's mythical quality. Thus, the mythic sea is present whether the speaker is fully attentive to it or not. The synoptic sea in this poem is a connective space, linking Ireland's Viking past with Nordic rituals and sea voyage. The "longship's swimming tongue" and "ocean-deafened voices" (100) warn and advise the poet-speaker, as the sea drowns out contemporary external sounds of Ireland's landed conflicts.

These voices speak both to the ancient past and to Heaney's present, stating, "exhaustions nominated peace, / memory incubating the spilled blood" (Heaney, *OG* 101). The shift from past tense to continuous present across these two lines signals myth's ongoing importance to the world of the poet, particularly in times of violence. This is heralded by the deafening, synaptic sea which holds the memory of those myths. It is through this loss of one sense that these voices can advise the poet

Lie down
in the word-hoard, [...]
Compose in darkness. [...]
Keep your eye clear
as the bleb of the icicle. (101)

In its mythical qualities and the clash of land and water, the sea plays a revelatory role in this poem. The material reality of its sounds draws the poet's attention to the past, allowing him to enter into the sacred time of the sea's underworld. There, the past's voices, which lie under the waves can speak to him. In this, the ever present mythical reveals itself, just as the voices of Wolfe Tone's comrades do in Heaney's later poem, discussed in chapter three. The sea prompts the return of these voices allowing them to speak from a renewed and clear position to the poet whose uncertainty is stressed by this position on the beach.

Indeed, Heaney's writing on land-based myth and ritual, particularly in *North*, is fraught with self-criticism. In contrast, "North" sends solace to this fraught voice through the ocean. Given this, it is tempting to deem a poem such as "North" as divided between the solitary poet figure and the community to which he belongs. Richard Rankin Russell does exactly that, suggesting that "'North' posits a position of freeing solitude for the

speaker-poet” (167). While Heaney is not addressing a community directly in this poem, and indeed, the speaker is offered singular poetic power from the oceanic voices, he is not removed from all sense of community and as mentioned, the specific connectivity of the ocean setting is notable. For Garden, the poem “facilitates a dialogue with the past”, while the Atlantic setting speaks to the poem’s intertextual and international relationships (96, 92). Yet, these voices are not past-made-present but continually palpable in the synaptic sea. The stagnating temporality of bog preservation, which captivates Heaney’s imagination in other poems from the collection, has no equivalent in the depths of the ocean in “North”. The North to which Heaney refers is a north united with a broader Atlantic community, held together by shared histories of violence, undoubtedly, but also of trade, language and geography.⁷¹ It is the ocean’s voices that tell him that his duty as a poet is to continue to write in the face of the community’s violence. With hindsight, these vestiges of the past can see the importance of language and art in times of violence.

Ní Chuilleanáin also turns to mythic voices of the sea to reconsider her present time. Most notably, this occurs in her translation of the 9th century old Irish poem, “The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare”, which she names “Song of the Woman of Beare”, signalling a variation in outlook from the title alone. This coastal *cailleach* figure speaks directly in the poem, like Goodison’s Mulatta, as her connection to the sea is emphasised.⁷² Indeed, as the sea allows for synaptic mutations, so too has the myth of the woman of Beare changed. In reading other translations of the poem, Ní Chuilleanáin perceives an inclination to present the poem “in the light of the concerns of their time” (“Ages” 205). Yet, the central elements of the myth remain intact:

⁷¹ Shelly Reece, for example, argues that Heaney’s use of language (particularly kennings) links present Ireland to a Scandinavian past (6).

⁷² The *cailleach* is an old woman figure from Irish mythology, often interpreted as a witch or hag. However, the word also has religious elements and in this way, in Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem the *cailleach* of Beare becomes a nun.

most, if not all stories show [the *cailleach*] as mortal, belonging to the past [...]
Her relegation to past time expresses an intuition about history itself, which is linear, and visible only in hindsight: that it takes a long time, that its changes are slow and can only be understood by taking the long view. Although she survived seven husbands and renewed her youth seven times, it is as a remote ancestress that she is remembered. (206)

Ní Chuilleanáin is aware of, and has studied, the various incarnations of the woman of Beare who has been used as a figure for the Irish struggle for independence. She makes explicit her desire to accentuate the mortal within the mythological, contrasting her depiction of Odysseus in “The Second Voyage” as the hero doomed to return to the sea but resonating with Walcott’s and Heaney’s work discussed above. This distances the *cailleach* from her symbolic position, criticising the impulse to appropriate woman for political and nationalist agendas. Moreover, in contrast to Walcott who explores the cyclical nature of myth in “Origins”, Ní Chuilleanáin emphasises the linear, stating the need to re-examine the repetition of the past. Ní Chuilleanáin attempts to break a cycle here, in way that resonates with Goodison’s *Mulatta* and the narrator’s desire in *Omeros*. She does so by turning to time but, rather than emphasising the enduring presence of mythic characters, as many other poems have done, she suggests that “Song of the Woman of Beare” attempts to return to the human and the mortal within the myth.

The sea’s vacillations mirror the *cailleach*’s several regenerations and prompt reflection through their connection to the ageing process throughout the poem. The opening lines stress the bond between this coastal figure and the sea: “Low tide. As with the sea. / Age darkening my skin” (Ní Chuilleanáin, *BB* 61). The tidal patterns reflect the woman of Beare’s regenerations, experiencing at various times, isolation, travel, sexual experience, conquest, abuse and violence. However, in full recognition of her mortality,

time becomes linear as she declares from her aged position “I know them [the tides], I have seen / Full tide and low water” (65). Given that Ní Chuilleanáin is specifically aware of the Woman of Beare’s position as a sovereignty goddess, the poem would seem to point to new understandings of both women and Irishness. No longer a symbol for an island ruled by its neighbour, the *cailleach* takes on a humanised mortality, partly through her interaction with the sea which is reflective of the stages of her life. The poem’s final stanzas return to the opening image and provide an ultimate focus on the sea and its fluctuations:

Well for islands at sea,
Their high tide follows low
Water; I do not hope
My tide will turn and flow.

Hardly a harbour now
Seems familiar to me;
All that the high tide saw
Low water drags away (65).

This woman does not seek resurrection. She will turn away from the sea that has been the model of her life, not least because it is often connected to the violence she has suffered as a woman, while also being associated with moments of joy. Unlike Odysseus of “The Second Voyage”, the woman accepts her fate and, despite her deep bond with the sea, does not long for its regenerative powers. However, while Ní Chuilleanáin emphasises the linear finality of the figure herself, the cyclical nature of the myth is clear. Like Walcott’s sea, Ní Chuilleanáin’s tide both remembers and forgets even as the poet manages to humanise the mythic in a way that Heaney and Walcott do not in “Girls

Bathing” and *Omeros* respectively. The island of Ireland will continue to experience the ebbs and flows of sea change and the sea’s fluidity will continue to destabilise what “the high tides saw”, prompting ongoing debate on the island with an engagement with the past.

For Ní Chuilleanáin, this is her specific poetic project, discovering through her prolific career that “it is as possible to write badly and uninspiringly about the past [...] as it is to write electrifyingly original work about the here and now” (Ní Chuilleanáin, “Ages” 212). For her, “the visions that haunt us and that, if we will allow them, creep into verse belong, not only to our personal present, but to our large and often frightening, often delightful, and very long and large cultural past” (212). Through an engagement with the sea in this poem, past and present come together as they do for Heaney in “Girls Bathing, Galway, 1965”, for Walcott in “Origins” and in Ní Chuilleanáin’s “Voyagers.” The sea for Ní Chuilleanáin does not provide answers as it does, in some ways, for Heaney. It remains eternal as the *cailleach*’s voice ends. Yet, for Ní Chuilleanáin, it is a productive space to dismantle the mystification of woman as sovereignty goddess, just as Goodison does in “The Mulatta as Penelope”. Time does indeed appear as linear for Ní Chuilleanáin’s figure and the sea’s infinity in the face of human mortality, rather than an acceptance of its cycles, is forefront in this poem.

Finally, Goodison also writes the voices of the sea. As already noted she gives voice to Penelope, demonstrating her specific relationship to mythic sea adventuring. Much like the sea’s ageing impulses detected in Ní Chuilleanáin’s “Song of the Woman of Beare”, the transformative power of the sea is reflected in Goodison’s early poem “On Becoming a Mermaid”. The speaker of Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem, links her life cycles to the ebb and flow of the tide. In Goodison’s poem, the speaker imagines the sea as a regenerative space, allowing for transformation in the face of death. If the mythic sea

represents man's greatest adventures and desires, then the longings of "On Becoming a Mermaid" from *I Am Becoming My Mother* are suggestive of female autonomy and freedom. In a similar way, Heaney's sea, which transforms the voices of the past, speaks to a comparable ideal of hope and freedom. Much like in Greek and, indeed, Irish mythology, the sea in Goodison's poem appears as a sort of underworld as the speaker, "watching the underlife idle by" imagines that "drowning must be easy death / just let go and let the water carry you / away and under" (Goodison, *CP* 78). In a more sinister way than the dreaming in Ní Chuilleanáin's "Voyagers", this poem happens upon sacred time through the ritual of death, the sea rendered not a maternal space but one which fuses the human and myth in ominous ways. The reader experiences the synaptic, mythic sea in real time as the creature with her "fish-tail, fan-like" and "mother-of-pearl scales", becomes a "green tinged fish/fleshed woman/thing" (78).

This mythological hybridity coalesces in a sea which, paradoxically, is the site of death. Goodison twins death and desire through mythical becoming in the sea but these related ideas remain complex as the sea has neither beginning nor end. Writing about death at sea in a Caribbean context once again has connotations of the drowned African bodies of the Middle Passage, while the desire to transform is linked explicitly to a sexual unbecoming.

breasts full and floating buoyed by the salt
and the space between your arms now always
filled and your sex sealed forever under
mother-of-pearl scale/locks closes finally
on itself like some close-mouthed oyster. (Goodison, *CP* 78)

Baugh reads these lines as an essentially liberating transformation, as the figure is “being released from (heterosexual) entanglements, demands and frustrations. She undergoes a sea-change into something rich, strange, self-delighting and still essentially, utterly female” (Baugh, “Lorna” 5). Goodison rejects the male view of the mermaid as a *femme fatale* type and presents a being “wholly involved with the joy of her self-creation and self-discovery, and not at all with any desire to do men in” (6). The loss of her sexuality is on the one hand contrasted by her buoyant breasts, “full and floating”. However, the trapped nature of the body “sealed” with “locks,” cemented by the simile of a “close-mouthed oyster,” cannot be ignored. Thus, sexuality here remains complex.

For deCaires Narain, “the woman loses her sexed identity in the process of fitting into her new element”, reflecting Goodison’s ambivalent attitude towards nature (“Landscape” 55). Indeed, the sea in this poem is all-encompassing as the space around the mermaid is “always / filled”. Although, the line break between these words tempers the feeling of outright suffocation, this swelling is reflected in the larger shape of the poem, which ends with longer lines than the middle section. Moreover, the emphasis on the sea’s eternity and myth’s immortality through the use of “always” and “forever” demonstrates how the sea’s infinite, sacred time may also be confining, strengthening this sense of ambivalence. Like the hybrid mermaid, the poem holds many contradictions in play: the sea which kills and revives creatively as well as the potential renewal, which also confines. Wary of the myth-making process which turns women into symbols, Goodison infuses this poem with an uneasiness around the central transformation. She associates the sea with death and the underworld here allowing it to take on mythic undertones, denying the womb-like conception of the sea found in some of the poems discussed in chapter four. Goodison’s mermaid is indeed created outside of a relation to men but Baugh’s characterisation of her having no desire to “do men in” displays an

enduring antagonistic attitude towards the figure. For him, the lack of sexual desire renders the mermaid unthreatening, which is perhaps why he misses the lexicon of confinement. For Goodison, the denial of a heterosexual desire is not viewed as wholly negative or positive, but as a sort of border state.

The synaptic sea with its contradictions allows Goodison to explore these tensions, as she recognises both contemporary land-based constraints on women and also the suffocating powers of the eternality of mythic sea. Like the woman of Ní Chuilleanáin's poem, the mermaid of this poem and the Mulatta Penelope are placed into uneasy relationship with this idea of eternality through myth. Goodison, here, turns to the synaptic sea to explore the multiplicities of the sea's abilities. It represents death through the possibility of drowning, which in a Caribbean context recalls the transatlantic slave trade. At the same time, it holds transformative powers and cultural reverberations of the myths of the sea. Death becomes as such, not an ending, just as the origins explored in other poems are not a concrete beginning. These tensions make the mythic sea an apt tool with which to reflect on the present moment and, as reflected in the critical divergences between Baugh and deCarries Narain, on the shifting position woman occupies as sexual object both in the mythical, sacred time and the everyday, ordinary time.

Conclusion: Beginning Again in the Cycles of the Sea

For the four poets of this thesis, the turn towards the mythic sea is a key part of their wider engagement with the sea. Not only are myths of the sea important because of the specific topography and mythic cycles of the islands of Ireland and the Caribbean, but also because they open up to a sacred time, allowing these poets to reflect on their contemporary moment. The sea's synaptic quality facilitates a comparative reading of

myth and the poet's reality as simultaneous. This disrupts understandings of time and prompts a reconsideration of beginnings, renewal and endings. The mythic sea's presence in the poems of all four writers mutates the myths themselves. Notably, for Walcott, Ní Chuilleanáin and Goodison, myth in their poems has been altered by several of the sea's impulses. Heaney is most explicit in drawing parallels between myths and legends in the past but shares a common goal with the other three poets as they attempt to humanise the mythic in their work. Walcott presents an uneasy relationship with myth at times but its eternal quality remains important. For Goodison in particular, and for Ní Chuilleanáin, sacred time can be confining for female mythic figures, rendering them static and trapped within the sea's cyclical myths. Their figures may break away from these cycles at the same time as the sea remains an eternal presence. Death becomes not an ending in "Song of the Woman of Beare" and "On Becoming a Mermaid" but instead a site of unique and sometimes ambivalent relationship with myth.

Ultimately, the mythic sea confirms that the sea is a space of critique, as already noted in the previous chapters. Myth facilitates this in any case but the synoptic sea, with its mythic qualities allow these poets to take their place in the sea's never-ending, never-beginning cycles. In both a Caribbean and an Irish context, poets turn to the mythic sea as it offers a space in which to rethink their interaction with impulses that have shaped them. Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott see myth in the world around them. It is as omnipresent as the sea for these island poets. Thus, the myths of the sea, continually palpable but ever changing, allow these poets to find a voice that is concomitant with the past, but which also forces readers to see that this past is part of their reality. In doing so, these poets also write their voices and their concerns for their societies into the mythic sea. The sea continues to be a story that is tangibly present. Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott find their voices there, learning to write

with the sea throughout their careers. At the same time, they take their place in the sea's mythic cycle, adding to the voices, myths and stories of the sea.

CONCLUSION

Afterwaves

*[...] the many-foamed
ways of the sea*

(H.D., “Hermes of the Ways” 118)

The synaptic environment of the sea is a space of revelation, connection and, above all, poetry. Whether real or metaphorical, poetic immersion in the sea allows for subversion of dominating, landed ideas around nation, gender and linear time. Each poet’s work generates its own complex interactions from the island space, which nevertheless offer the potential for radical connection. The novel framework of the synaptic disruptive sea, employed in this thesis alongside an attention to the local coasts, plots out a route through these four poets’ work, revealing that the sea is a space that prompts comparative transatlantic readings. Bringing these four poets into dialogue for the first time, this thesis exposes correspondences across their work within the sea, impelled, as before, by Baucom’s assertion that “To refuse to read these linkages [...] is to refuse to read” (“Charting” par. 9). As such, the research undertaken here not only speaks to the ways in which the poetry of Ireland and of the Caribbean may be related through their interest in the reflections of the sea’s disruptive flows, but also demonstrates the importance of critical consideration of the sea’s agency within literature.

The readings of this thesis can themselves be understood as Atlantic crossings, discovering in the synaptic sea impulses that are shared, exchanged, blurred and defined. The memory of the Middle Passage, evident in Goodison’s and Walcott’s work, exists alongside Heaney’s Viking voices of “North”, while the sea’s relationship with colonisation is represented across the work of all four poets. However, the sea is invested

with more than just remembrances of historical events, extending to the island poet an unknowable site of creativity. Heaney and Goodison intuit its spiritual offerings, writing with them in poems such as “Settings xxiv” and “Trident”, just as Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott sense the sea’s linguistic and communicative abilities in “The Second Voyage” and *Another Life*. Yet these impulses do not reside in the synaptic sea unproblematically, as its tempestuous currents also destroy, dissolve and disrupt. For the sailor figures of these oeuvres, time spent in this challenging space unsettles ties to the nation. For Heaney, the context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland prompts a questioning of tribalism, which is readily challenged by the fisherman of “Casualty”, who finds sanctuary in water. Similarly, Walcott’s Shabine discovers his own sense of belonging in the seas he sails. Both poems crucially disrupt the binaries established by landed conceptions of the nation. Likewise, Goodison’s and Ní Chuilleanáin’s distinctive female voices confront patriarchal divisions, traditions and ideals, and assert a poetic power in poems such as “God a Me” and “Ardnaturais” through a feminist vocabulary drawn from the sea. Finally, the synaptic memories of shared myths such as those of Ancient Greece, as well as local legends from Irish *immrama* to the Caribbean negotiation “between the Greek and African pantheon” (Walcott, *CP* 12), are latent in the sea. This sea can be envisioned as a “zone of temporal confusion” (Baucom, “Charting” par. 4), as poetic re-imaginings of such eternally floating impulses from *Omeros* to the woman of Beare revitalise notions of temporality.

A turn to the sea in poetry offers a disruptive way of thinking, making waves amongst landed ideals. As Steven Mentz suggests,

Rethinking movement as flows and circuits rather than progress or retreat can revivify intellectual communities. Thinking in terms of cyclical flows rather than

linear progress makes historical narratives messier, more confusing, and less familiar. These are good things. (*Ocean* xvi)

My focus on contemporaneous comparison through the synaptic sea challenges the more familiar mode of comparison through influence, an approach which inevitably generates a hierarchy of influencer and influenced. Instead, comparable interactions with gender, nation, commodification and islandness in Irish and Caribbean poetry have been tracked, as the sea offers a new language to the poetic mind.

The synaptic lens, as I have employed it here, in particular adding DeLoughrey's conceptions of local space to the frame, also allows for the interrelationship of Irish and Caribbean poetry to remain unsettled. Ireland's uneasy relationship to islandness and its historical turn to the rural is depicted alongside Heaney's and Ní Chuilleanáin's poetic interaction with the sea, which is characterised by a sense of extremity and obscurity. Ní Chuilleanáin writes in "Last Glimpse of Erin" that "the island trimmed with waves is lost in the sea" (*SP* 41), while "The glazed foreshore and silhouetted log" (*OG* 21) of Heaney's "The Peninsula" present similar images of unintelligibility. In Caribbean poetry, the profound reverberations of the transatlantic slave trade and Middle Passage are specific to poetic conceptions the sea, as Goodison describes her desire to "Cleanse the charnel house / of the bloodbath Atlantic" (*CP* 291) with her poetry in "The Living Converter Woman of Green Island". Moreover, the archipelagic relationship of the region's islands is solidified for Walcott in "Islands" by "strait-stitching schooners [...]" "That thread archipelagoes" (Walcott, *PDW* 49).

Even as these fundamental differences are recognised, the sea's connective properties are evident across both regions. In navigating the waters between these poets, this thesis makes a distinctive contribution to the growing body of work on Irish-

Caribbean connections; it not only offers an unparalleled comparison of four major poets but also reiterates the richness of a blue humanities lens on literary correspondences across these island spaces. It calls attention to each tradition's porosity, presenting that which brings them together in terms of precise and local reality. The sea-passages plotted here offer direction for further critical work that employs the ideas of the blue humanities and oceanic studies to both literatures. Analysis can, for example, be directed towards Sara Berkeley Tolchin's coastal reimagining of the Demeter myth in "South Beach", which prompts the mother to realise "I could no more hold her / than the fine sand, / I could no more keep her safe / than the wind or salty air" (32), or, to unravelling why in "History and Myth", Shara McCallum likens "the way mist shrouds mountains and salt / roils inland from the sea" to the coming of "Nanny, leader of the Maroons" (199). There is also scope to examine other contemporary relationships with the sea, which are not fully considered in this thesis. For instance, Caitríona O'Reilly recognises the sea's solemnity as a site of suicide for those who "followed the logic of the particle down // to the sea floor, literalists who found a solution" (25), while Olive Senior depicts an investor, who bought "up not just all our ground, / but [... has] taken / control of our seas and beaches" (102). Moreover, given the focus here on anglophone poetry, an obvious route for further work, particularly in the Caribbean setting, is to assess if and how francophone, hispanophone and/or lusophone writing envision the sea on island spaces and to what extent they might also be brought into dialogue with both English- and Irish-language poetry. Responses to these enquiries can reveal how attention to the sea in poetry from Ireland and the Caribbean reflects the transforming relationship between the traditions into the 21st century.

In the work undertaken in this thesis, the synaptic sea frame has brought Goodison, Heaney, Ní Chuilleanáin and Walcott into productive relation, their poetry

defined by resistance to rigidity, stasis and authority. The familiar possibility of reading Caribbean and Irish concerns in terms of the postcolonial remains, yet I have become less concerned about characterising specifically a “Irish” or “Caribbean” poetry, endorsing the notion that there is “perhaps, something about an ocean that allows us to conceive a different and urgent perspective” (Price 51). In this, my comparative outlook is influenced by Ramazani and the call he makes in *A Transnational Poetics*: “A nuanced picture of cross-national and cross-civilizational fusion *and friction* is badly needed today, and denationalised disciplines in the humanities may help to provide it, however limited their extra-institutional reach” (49; emphasis added). This shift in perspective is essential, and alongside sustained critical responsiveness to the seas and oceans, can revitalise the humanities to rethink rigid, bounded and static landed ideals.

Indeed, when I began this work in 2016, calls for national unity and isolationist policies were in ascendance globally and have arguably shaped the early part of the 21st century. At the same time, the reality of those displaced by these ideals was most starkly revealed at sea. Images of migrants on crowded dinghies became a commonplace sight and for all the anger galvanised by the photo of the body of the drowned Syrian child, Alan Kurdi in 2015, mass migration via the sea continues, with over 110,000 people fleeing to Europe via the Mediterranean in 2019, with over 1,200 deaths that year (IOM). The image of Kurdi’s death “abruptly brought the plight of the long living hell of millions of refugees to the world’s moral attention and captured the global imagination” (Bhabha qtd. in Schulze-Engler et al. 709). Nevertheless, there is a severe lack, whether through failure or wilful ignorance, to see the humanity of all but a few select cases. Elucidating shared ideas, outlooks and values, can influence how cross-border interactions, engagement and empathy take place.

Furthermore, my research remains pertinent, as recent global events have prompted further reconsideration of some of this thesis' key terms. In the context of a global health pandemic, border-crossings, viewed here in productive and positive ways, have taken on sinister new connotations, leading to the spread of a virus that has killed hundreds of thousands, if not more and yet, the need for a united, cross-national response is paramount. Islands across the world from Ireland's offshore islands to the islands of the Caribbean have been seen as sites of escape from the disease for those with the means to do so. Yet, these movements further continue the risk of the global spread of the disease, especially to sometimes less robust healthcare systems. On the island of Ireland, the border has once again come into sharp relief, its position in the Brexit debate somewhat in retreat, as Taoiseach Leo Varadkar spoke to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the need to view the island as "one epidemiological unit" (qtd. in McCurry et. al). Elsewhere, the "poetic", "historical symmetry" (Olusoga) of the dumping of a statue of an English slave trader into the same Bristolian harbour from whence his slave ships once sailed reveals the resonances that the sea still holds, as well as the transatlantic comradeship forged by the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Indeed, Black Lives Matter is a movement concerned, in part, with the ongoing and direct influence of chattel slavery in contemporary life. While analysis of these times is the work of other research, it is apparent that 2020 will bring a sea-change both to academia more broadly and to the work of the humanities. I believe that an openness to forging connections, both real and imaginative, across borders and boundaries, at the same time that such an endeavour reveals a place's uniqueness, will be essential in the years to come if we are to break away from discriminating capitalist, neo-colonialist and patriarchal ideals.

The sea remains, with its synaptic capacities, a space of poetry and undiscovered sea charts exist across literature. The afterwaves of this thesis ripple through the seas and oceans, which “run without boundary / into each other” (Goodison, *CP* 208), offering an innovative way of understanding the connections between the literature of the Caribbean and of Ireland, while also ensuring that each tradition can be valued for its particularities. A turn to the sea offers imaginative possibilities, not only to writers who are engaged by their surroundings and contemporary moment but also to readers who seek new and unpredictable maps of transnational correspondence.

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