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Making the Present Speak: "The Extasie" Behind Seamus Heaney's "Chanson d'Aventure"

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Recent studies of Donne's influence on modern poets, both those in the earlier twentieth century and those writing more recently, have developed the concept of the "voiceprint" as a way of "tracking" Donne's linguistic presence. Judith Scherer Herz defines this term as a profound immersion of one poet into the "psychology" and "linguistic system" of another.[1] The "later writer greets" Donne, she explains, "trying on his language and looking inside his imagination."[2] The ensuing "encounter" "happens less in the manner of a Bloomean agon or an overreaching than simply as a willingness to listen, to reimagine, to make over as one's own."[3] As Raymond-Jean Frontain notes, a "cultural tradition evolves—not through an anxiety of influence, as Harold Bloom would have it, strong poets competing to prove themselves against other strong poets—but through a sympathetic call and response, a system" of what Walter J. Ong calls "'reciprocating

[1]Herz, "Under the Sign of Donne," *Criticism* 43.1 (2001): 31. This essay is the first stage of Herz's "tracking of Donne's voiceprint." Stage two was published later as "Tracking the Voiceprint of Donne," *John Donne Journal* 26 (2007): 269–282. The later installment appeared in a cluster of essays in *John Donne Journal* on Donne's influence, along with contributions by Jonathan F. S. Post ("Donne, Discontinuity, and the Proto-Post Modern: The Case of Anthony Hecht," pp. 283–294) and Raymond-Jean Frontain ("Registering Donne's Voiceprint: Additional Reverberations," pp. 295–312).

[2]Herz, "Under the Sign of Donne," p. 31.

[3]Herz, "Under the Sign of Donne," p. 31.

physical interiors,' one poetic voice reverberating in reply to a voice that sounded earlier, the nature of that response revealing something about the 'interior structure' of the instrument from which the new voice emerges."[4] When Donne's voiceprint appears in the work of subsequent writers, his language furnishes the imaginative spur, enabling the creation of new poems or at the very least "verbally color[ing]" them.[5] Readers may notice this form of Donne's afterlife first through echo and allusion, those obvious markers a poet uses to establish an intertextual connection with the work of another. A remembered phrase or line might suddenly spring forth as part of a poet's meditation on a subject. But the voiceprint also appears more subtly through the incorporation of parallel logical or grammatical structures, re-used stanza forms, or repeated words. It enacts an intimate exchange between Donne and our contemporaries.

In the work of such diverse poets as John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Anthony Hecht, Allen Ginsburg, Mark Jarman, Carl Phillips, and Paul Muldoon,[6] Donne's presence becomes something to bounce off of as well as incorporate wholly or piecemeal. A poem from Seamus Heaney's most recent collection, *Human Chain* (2010)[7], showcases another way in which Donne's poems become useful for the modern poet: not just for their language or their approaches to subjects or even for the strong, engaging presence of Donne within them, but instead for the way they define specific experiences and for the truths they convey about them, truths the subsequent poet assumes as his or her own. As a resource for defining experience, Donne allows subsequent poets to make their moments speak with greater force.

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[4]Frontain, p. 295–296. The relevant passage about "interior structures" comes from Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 125.

[5]Frontain, p. 297.

[6]On Hecht, see Post; on Ginsberg, see Frontain; on Jarman, Phillips, and Muldoon, see Herz, "Tracking the Voiceprint of Donne"; and on Ransom, Warren, and Tate, see P. G. Stanwood, *John Donne and the Line of Wit: From Metaphysical to Modernist*, the 2008 Garnett Sedgewick Memorial Lecture (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2008).

[7]Heaney, *Human Chain* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

Unlike close friend Paul Muldoon, who in such poems as "Sillyhow Stride: *In Memory of Warren Zevon*" "swallow[s] Donne whole" to create a music heavily dependent on Donne's "beat,"[8] Heaney has not engaged Donne's verse as assiduously in the making of his own, though he has written eloquently about the work of other seventeenth-century poets, most notably George Herbert.[9] Yet the few occasions when he does turn to Donne overtly in poetry are revealing, especially his most recent one.

In August 2006, Heaney suffered a minor stroke. For thirty-six hours, it caused complete paralysis on his left side, and he was unable to move his leg and arm. Then his mobility gradually returned, though he spent five weeks in the stroke unit of a hospital, undergoing what he has subsequently termed a "rest cure."[10] He has since made a complete

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[8]Herz, "Tracking the Voiceprint of Donne," pp. 270–271. "Sillyhow Stride: *In Memory of Warren Zevon*" is the last poem in *Horse Latitudes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006). Within Herz's musical analogy, apropos for the musician Muldoon, Donne is the "left hand of the stride piano, his words set the rhythm, they offer a deep structure, while Muldoon with the right hand makes melodic improvisations against those Donne chords." Muldoon establishes this "beat" through the inclusion of Donne's words, "half lines," and "whole lines." According to Herz, the words remain Donne's rather than become subsumed: Even as they "move through this new medium, they unspool old meanings and new, but also remain intact as a challenge to the pityings and self pityings which they evoke, ironize, and comment on and this is largely because, sorrows aside, Donne's words handle so well" (p. 272).

[9]For Heaney's comments on Herbert, see the eponymous essay in *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), where he sees Herbert as an important example of a poet who treats "poetry *as* poetry" and who therefore "redresses" poetry from the anti-aesthetic charge that poetry lacks value if it is not directly engaged in political action (pp. 1–16). In "The Depth of Herbert's Voiceprint: Intentional and Unintentional Traces in the Poetry of Alfred Corn" (*George Herbert Journal* 32.1–2 [Fall 2008/Spring 2009]: 68–82), I argue that Heaney's description of Herbert's verbal inventiveness offers an insight into the nature of how Herbert's voiceprint operates in the work of American poet Alfred Corn.

[10]Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 461–462. During his stay he received a surprise visit from former president Bill Clinton. As Heaney tells the story, Clinton had "heard about my 'episode' and on the Friday morning, when he was due to leave the country, a message came through that he was on his way to the

recovery. From his first collection, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), onwards, Heaney has looked unflinchingly and yet unsentimentally at the major traumas of his life in a quest to come to terms with his experiences. His meditation on his stroke continues this work. In "Chanson d'Aventure," published in September 2010, in *Human Chain*, his twelfth collection, he recounts his ambulance trip to the hospital with Marie, his wife of then forty-one years. The poem consists of three parts, each of which explores the tenuousness of bodily presence in the face of physical paralysis. It begins with an epigram of two lines from the penultimate stanza of Donne's "The Extasie": "Loves mysteries in soules doe grow, / But yet the body is his booke" (71–72).[11] Rather than simply provide a jumping off point for the ensuing poem, however, these lines—and Donne's larger definition of a soulful love inclusive of the body—furnish Heaney with a means to speak powerfully of his relationship with his wife at a time when mortality threatened the dissolution of their connection and even his fundamental ability to feel his wife's presence:

I

Strapped on, wheeled out, forklifted, locked
In position for the drive,
Bone-shaken, bumped at speed,

The nurse a passenger in front, you ensconced
In her vacated corner seat, me flat on my back –
Our postures all the journey still the same,

Everything and nothing spoken,
Our eyebeams threaded laser-fast, no transport
Ever like it until then, in the sunlit cold

Royal Hospital. And sure enough, inside half an hour, he strode into the ward, all aglow, like one of those gods who came down to visit old Philemon and Baucis" (p. 462).

[11]Throughout, I quote Donne's lines from *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1967). Heaney modernizes the spelling of these two lines in his epigraph.

Of a Sunday morning ambulance
When we might, O my love, have quoted Donne
On love on hold, body and soul apart.

II

Apart: the very word is like a bell
That the sexton Malachy Boyle outrolled
In illo tempore in Bellaghy

Or the one I tolled in Derry in my turn
As college bellman, the haul of it there still
In the heel of my once capable

Warm hand, hand that I could not feel you lift
And lag in yours throughout that journey
When it lay flop-heavy as a bellpull

And we careered at speed through Dungloe,
Glendoan, our gaze ecstatic and bisected
By a hooked-up drip-feed to the cannula.

III

The charioteer at Delphi holds his own,
His six horses and chariot gone,
His left hand lopped

From a wrist protruding like an open spout,
Bronze reins astream in his right, his gaze ahead
Empty as the space where the team should be,

His eyes-front, straight-backed posture like my own
Doing physio in the corridor, holding up
As if once more I'd found myself in step

Between two shafts, another's hand on mine,
Each slither of the share, each stone it hit
Registered like a pulse in the timbered grips.[12]

[12]Heaney, "Chanson d'Aventure," in *Human Chain: Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; London: Faber and Faber, 2010), pp. 14–16.

This poem is the second in which Heaney calls to mind "The Extasie" in reference to his relationship with Marie. Twenty-nine years earlier, he alluded to it in the last of "Glanmore Sonnets," written after the Heaneys moved out of Northern Ireland and settled into County Wicklow, where they lived from 1972 to 1975 in Glanmore Cottage, which they rented from J. M. Synge scholar Ann Saddlemyer. This was a key period in Heaney's life. In 1972, the Bloody Sunday shootings occurred in Derry and the Bloody Friday bombings in Belfast. Heaney resigned his lectureship at Queen's University Belfast and started a new life as a full-time writer in the Irish Republic. In addition to the significance of physical relocation, the early years at Glanmore marked an artistic change. "Glanmore was the first place where my immediate experience got into my work," Heaney recalls. "Almost all the poems before that had arisen from memories of older haunts; but after a couple of years in the cottage, it changed from being just living quarters to a locus that was being written into poems."[13] He refers to Glanmore Cottage as a kind of "hedge row school" for learning a new way to make poetic use of his experiences. The "Glanmore Sonnets," dedicated to Saddlemyer, capture glimpses of that "immediate experience," and the last of these, number X, meditates on the nature of Heaney's union with his wife. It begins with the recollection of a dream that, as Donald W. Rude has noticed, recalls the initial set-up of Donne's poem:[14]

> I dreamt we slept in a moss in Donegal
> On turf banks under blankets, with our faces
> Exposed all night in a wetting drizzle,
> Pallid as the dripping sapling birches.
> Lorenzo and Jessica in a cold climate.
> Diarmuid and Grainne waiting to be found.

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[13]O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 198.

[14]Rude, "Seamus Heaney and John Donne: An Echo of 'The Ecstasy,'" *John Donne Journal* 22 (2003): 255–257.

> Darkly asperged and censed, we were laid out
> Like breathing effigies on a raised ground.
> (1–8)[15]

Citing these lines, Helen Vendler views the allusions to famous literary lovers as evidence of Heaney's desire to "leave his level cottage ground" for more mythical territory: "The first, Shakespearean metaphor still lies within the positive dimension of pastoral, even if transmuted from the warmth of Venice to the chill of Wicklow; the second, Celtic one, however, comes within the aura of tragedy."[16] Yet a third literary couple reposes here, as these lines also quietly recall the lovers in Donne's poem, lying like "sepulchrall statues" alongside a "Pregnant banke" (18, 1–4). Equally still, Heaney and his wife are "Pallid," the color of "dripping sapling birches," which also is the color of sculpted marble, and they "were laid out / Like breathing effigies on a raised ground" (7–8). While the implied parallel may seem slight here, perhaps even coincidental, the resonance with Donne's poem builds as the dream of still, companionable lovers with drizzle-dampened faces leads to the memory of the Heaneys' wedding night:

> And in that dream I dreamt—how like you this?—
> Our first night years ago in that hotel
> When you came with your deliberate kiss
> To raise us towards the lovely and painful
> Covenants of flesh; our separateness;
> The respite in our dewy dreaming faces.
> (9–14)

"By inviting us to visualize the lovers similarly lying upon a bank," Rude explains, "Heaney may suggest that the pair had believed that the consummation which is recalled in the rest of the poem was based upon a

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[15]Heaney, "Glanmore Sonnet X," in *Field Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 42. "Glanmore Sonnet X" from *Field Work* by Seamus Heaney. Copyright © 1979 by Seamus Heaney. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC., and by Faber and Faber, Ltd.

[16]Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 68–69.

comparable spiritual unity."[17] In the final lines of the poem, Heaney describes the physical, real-time aftermath of that wedding night encounter, the "first night" of their union as husband and wife. Heaney attempts no larger metaphysical speculation the way Donne does. He does not speak of the "unperplex[ing]" character of spiritual (and/or sexual) ecstasy, the mysterious mixture of souls, or the way in which "soule into soule may flow" ("The Extasie," 29, 33–36, 59). Indeed, he does not have to: the echo of Donne's poem calls to mind the metaphysical unity Donne defined, and that recall creates an implicit suggestion for how to gloss the "Covenants" of flesh these lovers make to each other. After their elevation, their "separateness" merely marks the end of the lovemaking. The "respite in their dewy faces" suggests confidence and contentment, a result of their newfound understanding of their union,[18] "[s]mall change" from the union that preceded it, now that they "are to bodies gone" ("The Extasie," 76).

As the preceding example suggests, Heaney implicitly sides with those scholarly readers of "The Extasie" who emphasize what they consider its consummate portrayal of what Achsah Guibbory calls its "celebration of the sacredness of sexual love," its treatment of loving as an experience of mutuality between lovers, made mysterious, even sacred, through the complex and even indefinable relations between the body and, in Donne's terms, the soul.[19] Heaney thereby implicitly rejects other

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[17]Rude, p. 256.

[18]Because I see the description as a dramatic narration of the physical sequence of events, I disagree with Rude's further claim that the "covenant" Heaney describes with his wife "contrasts with the spiritual unity in Donne's poem inasmuch as the lovers seem to transcend their separateness only momentarily" (p. 256). We are given here a realistic account of the end of lovemaking within a continuing—burgeoning—relationship.

[19]See Guibbory, "Donne, Milton, and Holy Sex," *Milton Studies* 32 (1996): 3. Like Guibbory, other recent interpreters think nothing of speaking of the poem in religious terms. For Eleanor J. McNees, "The Extasie" proceeds like a eucharistic ceremony by shifting from an "emphasis on the physical presence of the elements—the two bodies—to the spiritual union of souls" (*Eucharistic Poetry: The Search for Presence in the Writings of John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, and Geoffrey Hill* [Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1992], p. 40.). See also Harold Bloom, who remarks that the "sophistication" of Donne's "erotic meditation" "touches upon sanctification"

recent scholarly interpretations that resist the sense of mutuality, such as Sergei Lobanov-Rostovsky's, which views the image of the lovers' gaze as, finally, a reification of Donne's "masculine subject,"[20] as well as readings that treat Donne's definition of ecstatic love as merely rhetorical, a ploy for seduction.[21] This is for good reason: Heaney's purpose is not to rewrite or contradict or even answer Donne's poem in any way, but to press it into service as he defines his own experiences of the dawning comprehension of union with his beloved wife (the tenth "Glanmore Sonnet") and of potentially losing that connection ("Chanson d'Aventure"). Although the seductive gesture of "The Extasie," however we construe it, has no place in the circumstances of either poem, Heaney can trust Donne's sturdy metaphysical description to carry great semantic weight.

(*Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* [New York: Warner Books, 2002], p. 264). "For Donne," according to Catherine Gimelli Martin, the "simultaneously physical and mental 'testing' of the lovers' purity," in addition to being deeply learned in Renaissance Neoplatonic discourse, "meant looking through the grossly physical bodies of mortal humans to see the blinding miracle of the incarnation and resurrection experienced here below in the anticipatory ecstasy of fully requited love" ("The Erotology of Donne's 'Extasie' and the Secret History of Voluptuous Rationalism," *SEL* 44.1 [2004]: 141).

[20]Lobanov-Rostovsky, "Taming the Basilisk," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 208–209.

[21]Eugene R. Cunnar, for example, says that the "speaker's argument ultimately turns on the control and fulfillment of his desire, which, in turn, marginalizes the woman" ("Fantasizing a Sexual Golden Age in Seventeenth-Century Poetry," in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993], p. 198). Similarly, Don Beecher, in "Eye-Beams, Raptures, and Androgynes: Inverted Neoplatonism in Poems by Donne, Herbert of Cherbury, Overbury, and Carew," claims that Neoplatonic love in the poem is simply "outlandish" conceit added to the "libertine invitation to sex" (*Cahiers Elisabéthains: Late Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 65 [2004]: 5–7). David W. Shaw, meanwhile, considers Donne's speaker's metaphysical argument as casuistical, in that it is "carefully rehearsed, and proceeds logically to its foregone conclusion," the need for the lovers to have sex ("Masks of the Unconscious: Bad Faith and Casuistry in the Dramatic Monologue," *ELH* 66 [1999]: 442).

In "Chanson d'Aventure," "The Extasie" once again offers Heaney supplemental meaning within the context of the otherwise uncertain ambulance ride. It also cements a connection with the earlier "Glanmore Sonnet." This time, Heaney depends on Donne's vision of soulful lovers on the verge of sexual consummation not simply to affirm the connection with his wife but to underscore the tenuousness of physical relationships, dependent as they are on the allowances of health and time. He explicitly invokes Donne here, both through the epigraph and direct allusion. Perfectly still, though not lying beside one another, and silent, their "eyebeams threaded laser-fast," Heaney and his wife had experienced "no transport / Ever like it until then" (8–9). Heaney's "eyebeams"—recalling Donne's lines, "Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred / Our eyes, upon one double string" ("The Extasie," 7–8)—draw our attention to the particular way in which Heaney absorbs the work of other poets as encapsulations of experiential truths. Through the coinage of apt terms, phrases, and lines, poets add to the vernacular of human experience when they capture fine truths about experiences. In his interviews, essays, and poems, Heaney frequently introduces another poet's phrase when trying to describe, as accurately as he can, his meaning. He appears to *think* intertextually. For example, when describing Ted Hughes in an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, he again uses a Donnean apt phrase, loaded with meaning: "Ted was a chip off the Old English block, for sure, but in his own view of himself, he was a relict of Elmet, the old Romano-Celtic kingdom of the north-east; and he also had what John Donne called an hydroptical immoderate desire for learning."[22] Likewise in "Chanson d'Aventure," the use of "eyebeams" also serves as shorthand, this time for the rapt, whole-person attentiveness of lovers transported. Meanwhile, the rest of Donne's "The Extasie" speaks to the poignancy of "love on hold, body and soul apart," in this case not from purposeful sexual restraint but because of a failure of the body.

Each section of "Chanson d'Aventure" draws upon a different work of art. As we have seen, the first borrows the definition of soulful connection from "The Extasie"; the second immediately conjures John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." Yet the ensuing dialogue with Keats does not replace Donne's definition, as if the poet has moved on to an acceptance of the melancholy plaguing the Romantic. Rather, part two

[22]O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 298.

counters the poetic logic of Keats in such a way as to preserve Donne's vision—again, within the context of Heaney's relationship with his wife. The lines of the first part move quickly, mimicking the rush of the ambulance. Where are they rushing to? Not just the hospital but also the possibility of permanent separation. It is here that Keats's "Ode" enters the poem, through allusion and grammatical parallel. Compare the opening lines of part two—

> Apart: the very word is like a bell
> That the sexton Malachy Boyle outrolled
> *In illo tempore* in Bellaghy
> (13–15)

—with the opening lines of the eighth stanza of "Ode to a Nightingale":

> Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
> Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is fain'd to do, deceiving elf.
> (71–74)[23]

The notion that a single, two-syllable world can sound like a bell toll appears to signal a change in direction, as if thoughts of death threaten to overpower as they appear to do in Keats's poem (i. e., "Darkling, I listen; and, for many a time / I have been half in love with easeful Death, / Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme. . ." [51–53]). We might be tempted to say that the Donnean ecstasy born of the lovers' experience of connection has ceded to the lonesome "ecstasy" of the Nightingale, "pouring forth" its "soul abroad" near the close of midnight (56–58). Then, too, "Apart," the first word of the second section, emphasizes a key difference between the Heaneys and the lovers in Donne's poem. For Donne, the soulful mingling preludes a physical joining. For Heaney, "locked" in place, the future holds no such certain promise. "Apart," he writes, "the very word is like a bell." Like "Forlorn," which for Keats sounds a return to isolation, "Apart" sounds an almost funereal finality.

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[23]All quotations from Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" are from the poem as it appears in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 257–260.

Yet we should resist these temptations, for, the focus of part two undermines a straightforward endorsement of Keatsian melancholy. In the "Ode," the Nightingale's song seduces the speaker partly because its beauty encourages forgetfulness of present pains. Keats even demands the bird flee from the sight of human suffering:

> Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
> What thou among the leaves hast never known,
> The weariness, the fever, and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other grown;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs,
> Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
> Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.
> (21–30)

By contrast, rather than seek escape from past and present, Heaney dives into memory to explain the resonance of the current moment. In this sense, the "bell" of "Apart" might remind us of another bell, which carried the invalid Donne of December 1623, into, not away from, an understanding of community (". . . who bends not his *eare* to any *bell*, which upon an occasion rings? but who can remove it from that *bell*, which is passing a *peece of himself* out of this *world*? No Man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*. . ."). [24] Heaney remembers a sexton, Malanchy Boyle, ringing "*In illo tempore* in Bellaghy" and the heft of the college bell he once tolled "in Derry in [his] turn / As college bellman" (14–17), both memories of active participation within the life of a community. These memories contrast sharply with Keats's response and lend poignancy to Heaney's current crisis—his lack of feeling in his "once capable / Warm hand, hand that I could not feel you lift / And lag in yours throughout that journey / When it lay flop-heavy as a bellpull" (18–21). Heaney here conjures a different Keatsian moment through direct allusion to the fragment, "This living hand, now warm and capable," a poem in which

[24] Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 87.

Keats urges an unnamed addressee (possibly Fanny Brawne) to grasp his hand while it still lives.[25] Likewise, for Heaney, the struggle is not to escape, as in the Nightingale ode, but to remain rooted in the life he shares with his wife. Small wonder, then, that Heaney returns to the Donnean gaze in the following lines, this time to show, through the intrusion of medical equipment, how the stroke threatens the connection symbolized by their "threaded" "eyebeams": a "hooked-up drip-feed to the cannula" "bisect[s]" their gaze. The instrument blocks their uninterrupted view of each other. They career "at speed" toward the hospital and the uncertainty of their future together and how long that future might be.

As if the recourse to memory were not enough to keep at bay the Keatsian escape into solitude, Heaney's choice of art work in the third section—the *Charioteer of Delphi* (470 BCE), the ancient Greek bronze statue that is missing its left arm—presents another contrasting image of fortitude. Unlike Keats, who eschews the chariot of "Bacchus" (wine) in favor of another intoxicant, the "viewless wings of Poesy," as a means of coping with lingering illness (32–33), Heaney, like the ancient charioteer, stands fast, even after his chariot and horses have crumbled away:

> The charioteer at Delphi holds his own,
> His six horses and chariot gone,
> His left hand lopped
>
> From a wrist protruding like an open spout,
> Bronze reins astream in his right, his gaze ahead
> Empty as the space where the team should be,
>
> His eyes-front, straight-backed posture like my own
> Doing physio in the corridor, holding up
> As if once more I'd found myself in step
>
> Between two shafts, another's hand on mine,
> Each slither of the share, each stone it hit
> Registered like a pulse in timbered grips.
>
> (25–36)

[25]I am grateful to Seamus Heaney for noting this allusion. "This living hand" appears on p. 553 of the Garrod edition of Keats's poetry.

Just as the idea of ecstasy provides the associationistic link between "The Extasie" and "Ode to a Nightingale" in the first and second parts, the paralyzed left hand, "flop-heavy as a bellpull," in part two leads naturally to the missing left hand of the charioteer in part three. Heaney seems to marvel at what seems the charioteer's resilience, made all the more suggestive by the subtractions of time and the oxidation and rubble that have claimed the horses, chariot, and hand. In spite of a "wrist protruding like an open spout," the charioteer holds onto the "[b]ronze reins astream in his right" hand. Heaney sketches a parallel between the charioteer's "eyes-front, straight-backed posture" and his own during recovery, "[d]oing physio in the corridor" and thereby reclaiming his capacity to move. He, too, will persist in spite of all. By ending the poem with the solidity of the gaze and of handholding ("another's hand on mine"), Heaney leaves open the possibility of future contact and eyebeam threading with his wife, thereby returning to Donne's definition of true lovers' union.

As I hope the preceding argument has demonstrated, Heaney's use of Donne is distinctive from that of other contemporary poets. One cannot call "Chanson d'Aventure" especially a rewriting or refashioning or corrective of Donne's poem because Heaney's purpose is not to address Donne in the slightest; rather, Donne's poem becomes instrumental in helping Heaney define the poignancy of the ambulance trip, how and why there had been "no transport / Ever like it until then" (8–9). He relies on Donne's poem to carry the weight of defining the "transport" of the moment, the depth of the love he feels toward Marie; yet the full cognizance of this reliance belongs only to those who know "The Extasie" as a poem defining an experience. Curiously, by assuming Donne's definition and by not positing his own, Heaney manages to introduce a sense of privacy in what is otherwise a public poem because of Heaney's popularity.

The distinction I am drawing involves the poet's motivation. Is the inclusion of Donne the result of a desire to engage Donne's language, Donne's wit, Donne's personality, or all of the above as a means to measure one's poetic abilities or contribute to centuries-old poetic conversations or merely have a little fun? Or does the poet turn to a Donne poem out of an emotional urgency, emergency, or even crisis? Does the poem become a need because of what it accomplishes within the poet? In other words, is the poet's desire related to the same impulse

that causes "The Good-Morrow" to be read at weddings and "Death be not proud" at funerals? These are not simple questions. They have stakes. They force us to remember the non-creative justification for reading poetry in the first place: for its capacity to function as, in Ezra Pound's words, the "news that stays news,"[26] the message that is always relevant, regardless of time. Heaney's engagements with Donne's "The Extasie" prove the verity of Pound's description within the ongoing story of Donne's poetic afterlife.

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[26]Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1934), ch. 8.