

Time, Space, and Sacred-Secular Configurations in Modern European Poetry

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Abstract. Syncretic religions are often the result of cultural overlap, either between proximate geographical areas or because one culture comes to dominate another. Sometimes, however, a writer or a group of writers deliberately sets out to create a new form of syncretic belief. In Germany around 1800, a small cluster of thinkers and poets conceived a new experiment: what they envisaged was to be a fresh way of making abstract ideas more palatable to a broader audience. A two-page document written in Hegel's handwriting, but incorporating ideas of at least two other fellow students, Hölderlin and Schelling, urged that idealist philosophy might be enlivened by mythology, with its long poetic tradition. I adduce two poems from the period, Schiller's 'Der Spaziergang' (1795) and Hölderlin's 'Mnemosyne' (1803), to serve as examples of the syncretism espoused in that document. The special syncretic character of such poems stands out against the 'greater Romantic lyrics' in other European languages, as in the case of texts by Wordsworth and Lamartine, which do not employ mythological allusions. Nonetheless, in the mid-nineteenth century, we find Nerval making his texts a crucible for an eclectic combination of beliefs; and in the aftermath of World War II, Johannes Bobrowski develops a new kind of syncretism in which ancient Slavic divinities from Latvia and Lithuania seem to exist beneath natural landscape formations. In conclusion, the paper turns to a reading of Seamus Heaney's poem 'The Tollund Man in Springtime' (2005/06), in which anthropological empathy becomes a vehicle that brings an over-2000-year-old culture into a palimpsestic relation with the present day.

A sibylline remark in the anonymous and untitled text subsequently designated as 'Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus' ('The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism')¹ may give some insight into the strange mixture of polytheism, Christianity, and pantheism that, in varying

¹ Franz Rosenzweig, who first published this text, gave it this rather hyperbolic title, although its disjointed form can scarcely be called systematic.

proportions, characterizes European poetry of the period around 1800 and beyond: 'Monotheismus der Vernunft und des Herzens, Polytheismus der Einbildungskraft und der Kunst, das ist's, was wir bedürfen!'² What justifies this dual approach? Philosophers, the text explains, will deprecate mythology as long as it remains incompatible with reason; while ordinary people ('das Volk') require an appeal to the senses: they will have no interest in ideas unless these are made 'aesthetisch, d.h. mythologisiert'.³

Three fellow-students at the Tübinger Stift, F. W. J. Schelling, Friedrich Hölderlin, and G. W. F. Hegel (in whose handwriting the extant text was found) have been considered as possible authors. All three can be seen as sharing many of the ideas presented in the piece. It may have been a collaborative project for which Hegel was the amanuensis, or the text we have may be a copy he made of a text drafted by another. Eckart Förster, in a 2004 essay on 'Das älteste Systemprogramm', makes a vigorous, if somewhat circumstantial case for Hölderlin as the author.⁴ Corroborated by ideas of a 'new mythology' in various forms, not only in the writings of the three seminarists, but also in Friedrich Schiller and Novalis, the 'Systemprogramm' indicates that allusions to ancient Greek and Roman divinities in the period around 1800 go beyond mere rhetorical devices or decorative remainders. Rather, polytheistic elements are a purposeful element in the poetry of the period.⁵

Turning to Schiller, for instance, we might think of his famous poem 'Der Spaziergang' ('The Walk', 1795), composed in 100 elegiac distichs in a metre adapted from classical antiquity.⁶ Starting out as if it were simply a nature poem, the opening lines present a detailed description of natural phenomena perceived as the walker climbs up a mountain. Gradually, however, suggestions of classical antiquity emerge: first, the four elements of Greek philosophy (earth, fire, air, water) appear in oblique as well as more overt forms, such as 'Äther' (aether) instead of air (l. 34). Joining them are references to Demeter, Ceres, Hermes, Minerva, and Mount Olympus, etc. The 'gods' are specifically plural (in the phrase 'altars of the gods'). The walker shapes his climb as an

² G. W. F. Hegel, 'Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus', in *Werke. Band 1*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 235–336. 'Monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of imagination and art, that's what we need!' All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

³ 'Systemprogramm', p. 235. '[A]esthetic, i.e. mythologized'.

⁴ Eckart Förster, 'A New Program for the Aesthetic Education of Mankind?', in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. by David Wellbery and others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 470–75.

⁵ Bernd Witte interprets Hölderlin's aim rather differently in his essay 'ChristosDionysos: Hölderlin als Stifter einer neuen Religion', *Arcadia*, 51.2 (2016), 344–62. He regards 'Das älteste Systemprogramm' as a manifesto written by Hegel and Hölderlin for a counter-religion they hoped would prevail against both monotheism and pantheism. Witte sees Hölderlin's late poem 'Mnemosyne' as an admission of failure in achieving this aim (pp. 354–58); in contrast, I am not fully convinced of this interpretation: see my reading below.

⁶ Friedrich Schiller, 'Der Spaziergang', in *Sämtliche Werke, Band 1* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag), pp. 228–34. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

allegory of human civilization from antiquity to the present, and we begin to sense that the ancient gods are not truly absent. Suddenly, however, the experiencing self enters a dark fantasy where he loses his sense of location: ‘Aber wo bin ich?’ (l. 173).⁷ We are not shown precisely how he comes down from the mountain peak; perhaps he is only imagining this expedition. Or, to adopt Kate Rigby’s formulation in connection with a similar descent into a mountain by the protagonist in Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Schiller’s walker may be understood as ‘slipping, as it were, beneath its [the mountain’s] skin’ in order to experience what Rigby terms the ‘inner, subjectival dimension of the material realm’.⁸ We can infer that Schiller’s walker loses not only his sense of place, but also of self. The walker does not awaken from this loss of awareness until the last lines, where, in a gesture characteristic of elegy, he finds a consolation: ‘die Sonne Homers [...] lächelt auch uns’ (l. 200).⁹ In traversing space, he also travels through time, creating a vision of unity that momentarily transcends the divide between self and nature.

A poem like Schiller’s ‘Spaziergang’ implicitly raises a question that is still relevant today: does the period around 1800 suggest the beginning of a new understanding of the sacred? If so, it would fine-tune the long period from the Middle Ages to the present in a somewhat different way from Charles Taylor’s discussion of chronological shifts in his book *A Secular Age*, where his title derives from a broader question: ‘why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?’¹⁰ In the introduction to his book, he speaks of ‘three senses’ of secularity: the first, where churches have largely separated from political structures; the second, when public spaces altogether are regarded as ‘emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality’; and the third, a stage when ‘belief in God [...] is understood to be one option among others’.¹¹ I think we can agree that in Western culture today, religion tends to appear as ‘one option among others’. Taylor is, to be sure, only one of many scholars writing in the twenty-first century about issues of secularity.¹² Talal Asad represents another recent approach to these matters by exploring the problem of the secular from an anthropological perspective, asking, for instance: ‘How do attitudes to the human body (to pain, physical damage, decay, and death, to physical integrity, bodily growth, and sexual enjoyment) differ in various forms of life? What structures of the senses — hearing, seeing, touching — do these

⁷ ‘But where am I?’

⁸ Kate Rigby, ‘Mines aren’t really like that: German Romantic Undergrounds Revisited’, in *German Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene*, ed. by Caroline Schaumann and Heather Sullivan (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 111–28.

⁹ ‘Homer’s sun smiles for us, too’.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 25.

¹¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 2–3.

¹² For an excellent overview, see Craig Calhoun, *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. by Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan van Antwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

attitudes depend on?’¹³ His view that ‘anthropology is more than a method’ allows him to pay attention to myth, mysticism, and such phenomena as the *homo sacer*.¹⁴ His brief section on ‘myth, poetry, and secular sensibility’ is basically a sketch of an anthropological approach to poetry. Writing about the use of myth by modernist poets such as T. S. Eliot, he also considers a modern Arab poet who publishes under the pseudonym Adonis.¹⁵ Adonis is motivated, Asad claims, by the idea that ‘myth is plural, even anarchic, while the religious law is monotheistic and totalitarian’.¹⁶ It is, of course, coincidental that Asad’s formulation of the difference between myth and religion appears so similar to the point about polytheism and monotheism in ‘Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus’ quoted at the beginning of this essay.¹⁷ In addition, Asad’s view of an anthropological approach to poetry — an approach that would attend to the growth and development of a human being — can, I would suggest, be used very effectively in connection with the last of the poems I will be discussing here, Seamus Heaney’s ‘The Tollund Man in Springtime’ (2005/06).¹⁸ There, questions of the physical body come together with a consideration of religious beliefs about which we can only speculate, since they belong to a prehistoric period. Yet, by means of an empathetic approach to the life of the senses — that which Asad defines as ‘hearing, seeing, touching’ — the poet allows us to approximate the experiential situation of a long-dead prehistoric man whom we are asked to imagine as having come back to life in the present.¹⁹

In Hölderlin’s late hymns, attempts to insert Greek mythological figures into modern landscapes, as Schiller does, have all but vanished. A notable exception is his free-rhythm hymn ‘Mnemosyne’ (1803), where place takes on a varied role.²⁰ The title refers to the Greek personification of memory, a daughter of the Titans and mother of the nine graces. Not an actual goddess, she is nonetheless one of the panoply of figures in ancient Greek mythology. The poem consistently

¹³ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 17. I am grateful to Caroline Sauter for directing my attention to this book.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53. According to Asad, Adonis uses Western myth to respond to what he regards as the Muslim failure to secularize (pp. 54–56).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁸ We will look primarily at the first published, shorter version of this poem in *Metre* and *The Guardian* (both 2005; see <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/apr/16/poetry.seamusheaney>> for the *Guardian* text). That version, consisting of three 14-line stanzas, contrasts with the version published in Seamus Heaney’s volume *District and Circle* (London and New York: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 55–57. Four words are transposed in st. 1, l. 3: ‘Lapping time in myself’ becomes ‘Lapping myself in time’ in the longer version in *District*, st. 1, l. 3, p. 55.

¹⁹ In English, we might be more likely to use the term ‘ethnographical’ instead of ‘anthropological’. See Arthur Kleinman, ‘Moral Experience and Ethical Reflection: Can Ethnography Reconcile Them? A Quandary for “The New Bioethics”’, *Daedalus*, 128.4 (Autumn 1999), 69–97.

²⁰ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, Volume 1*, ed. by Günther Mieth (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1989), pp. 394–95. This is the third version of the poem. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

associates mythology with place. The opening lines speak of ripe fruit and of a natural law that everything goes in, 'Schlangen gleich, | prophetisch, träumend auf | den Hügeln des Himmels' (ll. 3–5).²¹ The word used here for 'to go in' is 'hineingehen', and it is usually understood as signifying death. Whether this image is simply an allusion to pagan beliefs in general, where snakes are frequently seen in terms of transformation and rebirth, or to ancient Greek thought more specifically, where they may be guardians of the underworld, the complex syntax of these lines are an effect based on Pindar, whose odes were much admired by writers around 1800 for their difficult style.

The three-section poem is difficult throughout, but place is an important element in it, and it seems to be frequently associated with death. The second section, for example, presents a puzzling Alpine scene, complete with a wanderer, but it also alludes to 'ein Himmlisches' (l. 24)²² and to the wanderer who speaks 'vom Kreuze | Das Gesetzt ist unterwegs einmal | Gestorbenen' (ll. 29–31).²³ In the last section of the poem, heroes from Homer's *Iliad* are mentioned: Ajax, Achilles, and Patroclus. Significantly, the deaths of the first two are connected with natural phenomena: the fig tree for Ajax, the grottoes of a lake and brooks near the river Scamander for Achilles. Patroclus' death is not located in a place, but rather 'in des Königs Harnisch' (l. 44), i.e. wearing the armour of his friend Achilles.²⁴ None of the three heroes is a god, of course, but they have certainly become part of Greek mythology. 'Eleutherä', the name of the city of Mnemosyne, suggests a new mythological figure. Like a female figure in ancient Greek art or sculpture, the city Eleutherä wears a cloak (her name is the feminine form of Greek *eleutheros*, meaning 'free'). The last seven lines of the poem present an eclectic combination of divine or allegorical beings: a singular 'Gott' (God) who takes off the city's cloak, a figure called 'das Abendliche' (the evening one), and a reference to plural 'Himmlische' (heavenly ones). In its combination of natural landscape, the Christian cross, ancient heroes, heavenly beings and even an 'evening being', Hölderlin's hymn 'Mnemosyne' is a prime example of syncretism at its most captivating.

Perhaps because of the expectation that many readers had enjoyed a classical education, Hölderlin's form of syncretism may have appeared relatively natural at the time. Novalis's version was more daring in certain respects, especially in his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where mythic modes of thinking mingle with contemporary philosophy and science. A different approach to syncretic belief is evident in Gérard de Nerval's work, again not only in his poetry but also in his prose narratives *Sylvie* and *Aurélia*.²⁵ In his search for an ideal

²¹ 'Like snakes, | Prophetically, dreaming on | The hills of heaven'.

²² 'A heavenly one'.

²³ 'The cross that has been erected at some time along the path in memory of the dead'.

²⁴ 'In the king's armour'. In contrast to the indications of place in the cases of Ajax and Achilles, the manner of death is given in the case of Patroclus, doubtless to highlight the fact that he was engaged in carrying on Achilles's role in battle.

²⁵ See Max Milner, 'Religion et religions dans le voyage en Orient de Gérard de Nerval', *Romantisme*,

religion, Nerval aimed to draw on what he regarded as the best elements of Christianity, classical antiquity, Egyptian, and Islamic ideas. In this way, he anticipates Salomon Reinach's study of comparative religion later in the nineteenth century.²⁶

In this respect, the meditative poetry of Schiller, Hölderlin, Novalis and Nerval differs from what M. H. Abrams terms the 'greater Romantic lyric'.²⁷ By this, Abrams means the major reflective poems of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These English poets do not subscribe to an eclectic mixture of different religions, but they do develop a synthesis in which memory, place and belief come together; their approach has also come to seem 'natural' to readers today. Although Wordsworth's 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798' is the best example of the 'greater Romantic lyric', Alphonse de Lamartine's 'Le Lac' ('The Lake', 1820) fits Abrams' description of the genre equally well, since it, too, turns on a place, the Lac du Bourget in the south of France, which he had visited a few years earlier.²⁸ The structure of 'Tintern Abbey' involves a second visit to a place that the poet had first visited five years earlier; Lamartine's poem reflects on a personal experience of 1817 from the perspective of a later visit. In contrast to the German poems from the years just before and after 1800, where the traces of ancient divinities and their haunts can be seen just below the surface of the natural geology, Wordsworth's and Lamartine's poems combine a belief in divine immanence in nature with the idea that certain features of nature operate on human consciousness, not only bringing back individual memories, as in 'Tintern Abbey', but also becoming, as it were, storage places for such memories, as the lake becomes in Lamartine's poem.

Moving to a much later period, we can identify one poet writing in German as a closer successor to the German tradition of meditative poetry in which individual experience is brought into conjunction with ancient deities: the post-World War II poet Johannes Bobrowski, who creates a quasi-mythic geography to which he gives the ancient name of Samartia (it comprises postwar Latvia and Lithuania). This territory, as Bobrowski imagines it, is imbued with a subliminal presence of the Old Prussian or Borussian gods who were worshipped there in early times. Three gods in particular, Perkunas (god of thunder and fire), Pikoll (god of the underworld), and Ptrimpas (god of agriculture and fertility) play a

50 (1985), 41–52. Milner gives an excellent account of some of the various belief systems on which Nerval drew. For a broader perspective, see also Paul Bénichou on Nerval's 'quête d'une croyance', in his *L'École du désenchantement* (orig. 1992), cited here according to *Romantismes français II* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004), pp. 1795–816.

²⁶ Salomon Reinach, *Orpheus: Histoire générale des religions* (Paris: Picard, 1909).

²⁷ M. H. Abrams, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric' in *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* (New York and London: Norton and Company, 1984), pp. 76–108.

²⁸ See Lloyd Bishop, '“Le Lac” as Exemplar of the Greater Romantic Lyric', *Romance Quarterly*, 34.4 (1987), 403–13. Bishop mounts a similar argument in an earlier essay, 'Musset's "Souvenir" and the Greater Romantic Lyric', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 12/13.4/1 (1984), 119–30.

major role in Bobrowski's poems and novels.²⁹ In some of Bobrowski's poems, the shape of the gods' bodies seems to be almost visible beneath the surface of the land; in other poems, they seem to have emigrated into the bodies of cattle. Although Bobrowski can rightly be regarded as a bridge between Hölderlin and present-day German poetry, he is not well known outside the German-language tradition.³⁰

Finally, I would like to show how Seamus Heaney's 'The Tollund Man in Springtime' functions as a culminating point in the attempt to combine Christian and pagan traditions, while ultimately going beyond them. I focus mainly on the three-stanza version of the poem's publication in *The Guardian* in April 2005.³¹ Consisting of the first, fourth and sixth stanzas of the longer version published in *District and Circle* (2006), it is, to my mind, more elegant than the longer version.³² It presents a highly sophisticated understanding of the sacred in the secular that may shed new light on this issue in today's world.

The Tollund Man is named after his place of discovery: a bog in Tollund, Denmark. In May 1950, when two peat cutters came across what looked terrifyingly like the body of a recent murder victim, they first called the police; yet the condition of the body was baffling. Summoned as a consultant, the archaeologist Professor P. V. Glob examined the body and declared that the cause of death was probably an act of ritual sacrifice that had been performed over 2000 years ago.³³ The tanned, leathery skin of the corpse was the result of its long rest in the acidic water of the bog. Glob was inclined to believe that the death and submersion of victims in a peat bog suggests something like a marriage between the dead man and an earth goddess.³⁴ But because the bog people and their contemporaries had left no written traces, we do not really know what role these deaths played in their culture. When the Tollund Man was found, archaeologists lacked experience in preserving bog bodies, and so the only part that could be saved was the head, which bears an uncanny resemblance to people living today. Before the body was disposed of, an autopsy of the stomach contents was performed. This, together with autopsies of other

²⁹ Johannes Bobrowski, *Die Gedichte*, ed. by Eberhard Haufe (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1998). See also David Scrase, *Understanding Johannes Bobrowski* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), p. 27.

³⁰ See Sabine Egger, 'Between Hölderlin and Heaney: Thresholds and Boundaries in Johannes Bobrowski's Poetry', *Germanistik in Irland: Jahrbuch der/Yearbook of the Association of Third-Level Teachers of German in Ireland*, 8 (2013), 102–23. The title of Egger's article suggests a more direct connection than is in fact the case: both Bobrowski and Heaney were familiar with Hölderlin's poetry, but Heaney does not seem to have read Bobrowski.

³¹ Seamus Heaney, 'The Tollund Man in Springtime', *The Guardian*, 16 April 2005. The *Guardian* version represents the poem's overall line of thought very nicely and is more subtle in its allusions to aspects of Christian belief. The stanzas are sonnets (with many half- or near-rhymes, and some lines that lack a rhyme word). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³² For the longer version, see Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle* (London and New York: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 55–57.

³³ Heaney read Glob's book in an English translation: P. V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved*, trans. by Rupert Bruce-Mitford (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 190–91.

bog bodies, showed that the victims' last meal had been one of grains and seeds. Following a recipe similar to the mixture found in the bog bodies, two distinguished archaeologists found the gruel so unpleasant that they could only swallow it by drinking a good chaser of modern brandy.³⁵

The second stanza of the shorter version (the third stanza in the longer version) begins with a gnomic statement: "The soul exceeds its circumstances" (st. 2, l. 1).³⁶ Although this phrase is often attributed to Czesław Miłosz, it is actually drawn from Leon Wieseltier's obituary of the Polish poet, as Heaney notes in his acknowledgements to *District and Circle*.³⁷ Heaney's text continues with an elaboration from another angle: 'History not to be granted the last word | Or the first claim...' (st. 2, ll. 2–3: ellipsis in original). Following his removal from the bog and preliminary study by specialists, the Tollund Man's body had been visible only as a reproduction in a museum display case. Heaney's poem omits reference to the severing and preservation of the head and the reproduction of the body in lieu of its preservation. Instead, the Tollund Man, gradually awakening as if from a long sleep, hopes that the small amount of peat in which he has been transported to the museum (the 'heather bed' is a poetic way of referring to the layer of peat) will exercise healing powers on his body, wounded by the turf-cutters' spades. He does not know that his preserved head has been severed from his original body, which we might imagine he still senses in the phantom form as an amputee might still experience a missing limb. His 'webbed wrists' (st. 2, l. 5) suggest an adaptation to the watery environment from which he was wrenched, while the fibrous surface on which he rests mimics the natural forms of birch trees and young grass. Such tracery can be seen very clearly in photographs reproduced in Glob's book.³⁸ There is a sense in which he still remains a part of nature.

With his spirit 'strengthened' by the ritual he underwent thousands of years ago, the Tollund Man is able to tell himself a story of healing and revival. Belief is in many ways what we tell ourselves. In that context, the wounds of the bog body appear as a version of the wounds of the crucified Jesus, and the 'reawaking' of the Tollund Man after 2000 years ('late as it was', to use Heaney's phrase: st. 2, l. 8) as an extraordinarily extended adaptation of the three-day period before the resurrection of Christ as depicted in the Bible. The longer version in *District and Circle* makes more explicit the Christian elements in the

³⁵ The archaeologists, Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Dr. Glyn Taylor, did so at the request of the BBC, in connection with a television program on the Tollund Man: see Barbara Purdy, *Wet Site Archaeology* (Caldwell, NJ: Telford Press, Inc., 1988), p. 223.

³⁶ Quotations come from the shorter version of the poem, unless otherwise stated.

³⁷ Leon Wieseltier, 'Czeslaw Milosz, 1911–2004', Sunday Book Review, *New York Times*, 12 September 2004. Although Heaney acknowledges this source in *District and Circle*, he fails to acknowledge another borrowing from Wieseltier's obituary of Miłosz, which he includes following the gnomic statement. Wieseltier writes: 'Miłosz's teaching was that history was no more to be granted the last word. One does not live entirely, or even mainly, for one's time. The soul exceeds its circumstances. So even in his dissent, history did not command Miłosz.' Heaney rearranges the order of his paraphrase.

³⁸ Glob, *The Bog People*, p. 24.

poem. Phrases like ‘scone of peat’ hint at the divine creation of the human body out of clay (*District*: st. 2, l. 13). As the turf-cutters turn up the Tollund Man’s body, his first encounter with the air since his submersion is expressed in terms of God’s creation of the earth (‘on the sixth day’; *District*: st. 2, l. 13) and the resurrection of the body (‘me, so long unrisen’; *District*: st. 2, l. 13).

In the shorter version, we see the Tollund Man inhabiting both the ancient and the modern world. Still lying on a soft layer of peat in the glass museum case while also escaping from it into the modern world, he finds himself confronted with the world of modern machines, including automobiles and jet aircraft. Stubborn questions arise from this juxtaposition of the older, more natural world and the modern industrialized world: sights and sounds of the older world — the song of an ‘early bird’ (st. 2, l. 9) and the sight of meadow hay ‘still buttercupped and daisied’ (st. 2, l. 10) — seem to be overlaid by the noise of traffic from a nearby roundabout, polluting fumes from modern vehicles, and the repugnant stench of silage. Bog bodies, preserved in the acidic water that results from peat deposits, do not have a foul smell, whereas some crops, when converted by anaerobic processes for use as winter fodder for animals or as biofuel, smell like carrion. Just as the word ‘reawoke’ in the first stanza (st. 1, l. 9) suggests the theological concept of resurrection, so here, the presence of planes high in the sky (‘transatlantic flights stacked in the blue’: st. 1, l. 14) hints at a kind of transport that goes beyond the aerial transportation of people and freight.

The third and final stanza of the *Metre* and *Guardian* version is retained as the final stanza of the longer version in *District and Circle*. Ingeniously extending the interplay between the spirit world of the Tollund Man’s past and the virtual world of computerized modern life, this stanza presents some interesting consequences of transporting the ancient world into the modern. Once the protective powers of peat and bog water have performed their rejuvenation of the Tollund Man, he is led astray when he imagines that the ‘bunch of Tollund rushes’ (st. 3, l. 2) will survive and allow themselves to be transplanted in the new environment. Instead of retaining their initial freshness, the rushes turn musty in the ‘old stairwell | Broom cupboard’ (st. 3, ll. 3–4) and the speaker is forced to acknowledge their decay. It is hard to think of the voice here as solely that of the Tollund Man: surely, we also hear something of Seamus Heaney in the witty pun and the half-rhyme of the final lines: ‘As a man would, cutting turf, | I straightened, spat on my hands, felt benefit | And spirited myself into the street’ (st. 3, ll. 12–14).

The grandson of a modern-day turf-cutter (Heaney himself) and the pre-historical peat-bog man from Tollund, with his face accidentally injured by a turf-cutter, are superimposed here. Lightly sceptical as it is, this final appreciation of a shared humanity between the poet and his ancient precursor is shaped in the second version in *District and Circle* by tropes of creation, incarnation, and resurrection. These ideas, also part of Christian tradition, may

or may not have been at work in the unknowable set of beliefs that obtained during the time when the Tollund Man was sent to his death in the bog. Stating that ‘they chose to put me down | For their own good’ (st. 1, ll. 10–11), the text concurs with Glob’s suggestion that the Tollund Man’s death was part of a sacrificial nature ritual practised by a pre-historic community.³⁹ The quotation and paraphrases from Wieseltier’s obituary of Czesław Miłosz would then be part of a meditation on the relation between violence and the sacred.

Bringing Christian beliefs together with a pagan practice that can only remain a conjecture on our part, Heaney creates an imaginary place that conflates aspects of Denmark and Ireland. This place is truly a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory) in the sense of Pierre Nora, a place where ‘memory crystallizes and secretes itself’ but where at the same time ‘consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn’.⁴⁰ Reaching deeply into the pre-historic past, while also activating an empathetic approach to imagined sensory and emotional responses called forth by transposing that past into the present, Heaney’s ‘The Tollund Man in Springtime’ invents a polysemantic method of incorporating the sacred in today’s secular age.

³⁹ Glob, *The Bog People*, p. 25; pp. 190–92.

⁴⁰ Pierre Nora, ‘Between History and Memory: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7–24 (p. 7).