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Joe Heaney as interpreter of a tradition

Seosamh Ó hÉinniú, known in Connemara as Joe Éinniú, and in the English-speaking world as Joe Heaney, was born on October first, 1919 in An Aird Thoir, Carna, in the Connemara *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking district) in County Galway. The people of Carna and the surrounding Iorras Aitheach peninsula were and are renowned for their verbal art; large numbers of songs and stories have been collected there since before the turn of the century. Joe won a scholarship at age 15 to attend college in Dublin, although he only completed four years of a six-year program of teacher training. By his own account, he was very shy about singing in front of other people until he entered and won first prize in a singing competition in the *Oireachtas* in Dublin in 1940. Not long after this he emigrated to Scotland, then England and eventually to America. It was abroad and on brief visits home to Ireland that he made the recordings and performances that consolidated his fame as the leading traditional Irish singer of his generation. He was a mainstay of the London folk scene during the 1960's and became well known as a singer in New York in the 1970's. His last years were spent in American universities – Wesleyan University at first, and then at the University of Washington in Seattle, as a visiting artist in the Department of Ethnomusicology. He died in Seattle on May first 1984.

When one listens to the many other fine singers and storytellers from Carna, of his generation and the ones that followed, it becomes clear that Joe was not by any means unique in his talents; he was the product of a close-knit supportive community which took (and takes) the art seriously, with high critical standards. What made Joe Heaney unique was his position as both insider and outsider, spending most of his life interpreting this tradition to others in other communities. By the time he became a visiting artist among musicologists he had already passed through at least two other interpretive communities—the Irish-language movement in Dublin and the folk revival scene in England and America. The influence was mutual. Joe Heaney was an exceptionally articulate, opinionated, insightful and forceful spokesman for the culture, language and artistic tradition of Connemara as he saw it. Participation in the tradition was an open-ended process of discovery for him as he sought to deepen his feeling for and ability to perform the songs. To this end he did not hesitate to look for insights from the various other communities he passed through along the way. Thus one finds him quoting, to support his views, the likes of Alan Lomax, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Ewan Maccoll, Séamas Ennis and Pádraig Pearse as well as his father, grandmother, and neighbors in Carna.

I was a student of Joe Heaney's at the University of Washington in Seattle, making the weekly trek to my lessons, which took place in an instrument storage room in the basement of U.W.'s music building. At an absurdly early hour of the day Joe would teach me songs, along with giving detailed descriptions of life in Connemara, his philosophy of singing, and other "lessons" about life and love. Joe's understanding of love songs impressed me the most—his explanation of why they were "lamentable," and the darkness and depth of emotion in the songs themselves. Then he would sing the songs for the tape recorder as various large

gongs resonated quietly in the corners of the room. Unfortunately I recorded only the songs, and it took me quite a while to realize the value and interest of the *talk*. My decision to rectify the situation came, alas, too late, leaving me only with memories, some notes, and the archived tapes of those who had the presence of mind not to turn off the recorder when the song was finished, and who generously contributed copies of their tapes to the U.W.'s archives.

In this paper I am interested in Joe's university career, in which he was required to explain and interpret his singing style to audiences of professional musicologists. Since his death in Seattle in 1984 the Music Department of the University of Washington has maintained a public archive of his songs and interviews. The interviews are most instructive. Asked formalist questions (such as "How do you know where to put grace notes in a song?"), Joe argued passionately and consistently for a radically different understanding of his tradition, in which musical form is only one aspect of a much wider act of *orientation*. He mobilized all available resources to articulate and defend this vision, including technical musicological terms, non-sequiturs, and a few otherwise dubious recollections and interpretations. In doing so he wasn't being *scientific*, but was, arguably, articulating his insights as best he could to people who came with quite different presuppositions about music, song, and much more. I intend in this paper to try to show what Joe was saying to us, how he built his argument, and why such an argument is theoretically interesting.

'Sean-nós' as a genre

The use of the term *sean-nós* ('old-style') as a name for both a style of singing and a repertoire of songs seems to have developed in the milieu of the Irish language revival movement, which sponsors singing competitions, most notably, as part of *An t-Oireachtas*, the annual Irish-language festival. The term itself is thus of fairly recent vintage (Mac an Iomaire 1994, Ó Laoire in press), and it is a matter of considerable ongoing debate what is and is not "true" *sean-nós* song. However, this does not compromise its validity either as a term or as a genre if one follows Bakhtin (1986) in maintaining that genres develop as a process in social discourse and embody an aesthetics and world-view as well. The *reflexivity* of the term *sean-nós*, as defined both from 'inside' and 'outside' the tradition, is also characteristic of the phenomenon of genre in general. The semantics of the term, meaning something 'old' as distinct from the new, is in keeping with this reflexivity (cf., the term 'novel' for another famous speech genre). Joe's career as a singer and exponent of Irish singing both developed out of and greatly influenced the development of *sean-nós* as a genre. Lillis Ó Laoire (in press) argues that *sean-nós* singing has been "transformed from a form of folksong little known and understood and practiced by Irish-speakers in rural areas, to a powerful national identity symbol, representing a different cultural and political agenda to that which was accepted as the contemporary norm"—effecting its "exaltation to a mystified high-art discourse."

Given all this, it is interesting to discover that in his interviews, Joe rarely used the term, focusing instead on what he called (in English) 'laments' as an exemplary subset of songs which he felt embodied the essence of the tradition. His main examples of 'laments' were religious songs such as *Caoineadh na dTrí Muire*, ('The Lament of the Three Marys') which he recorded and made famous, but

which were considered, both locally in Carna and more generally throughout Ireland as being women's songs. In fact these sacred songs were felt to function as both as prayers and as direct substitutes for the *caoineadh* ('keening', women's funeral lament) which was suppressed by the Church (Partridge 1983). 'Lament' was the term Joe used in English for the *caoineadh*. Thus we find one of the major exponents of *sean-nós* as a genre basing his understanding of its aesthetics on forms which echo, replace or imitate other forms which are completely outside of that genre.¹⁹ I would like to argue that we should understand Joe Heaney's statements about singing as, in part, a strong dialogic *response* to the ongoing discourses about singing, in Ireland and elsewhere, including the attempts (largely by those born outside of the Gaeltacht) to define and regiment '*sean-nós*' as a genre.

'*Sean-nós*' as direct discourse

In Ireland, reported speech is a very important part of both conversation and verbal art. The repetition of apt and witty sayings may include description of the original 'scene'—what Tannen (1989:101) calls "reported context." Poetry and conversation have a particularly close relationship in the Gaeltacht regions, above and beyond the features universally shared between the two, as Denvir (1989:96) points out:

...the good speaker and his hard sayings are held in high esteem in Ireland, particularly in the Gaelic tradition. Speech can be almost a creative art-form in itself, and many saying, lines, or indeed verses of the poets are mentioned in ordinary conversation.

Likewise, the popular oral poetry of the Gaeltacht draws its inspiration and many of its forms from conversation. Narrative storytelling has always relied heavily on the portrayal of the speeches and conversations of characters in stories. Often, the dialogue in these stories is in verse.²⁰ James Carney suggests that much of the epic tradition in Ireland took the form of poetic dialogues in a prose context:

A very common literary form in Irish is the tale which is a mixture of prose and verse, the prose being used for narrative, the verse for emotional statements by the characters involved (Carney 1963:22)

It has been maintained (Dillon 1947:10-11) that this is the original form of the epic in Indo-European society, which was preserved until modern times in the Irish and Scots Gaelic Fenian tales. There is a strong tendency in many Irish genres to identify "poetry" with directly reported speech. This should be considered in the light of indigenous ideologies and practices with regard to poetry. The oral tradition tends to represent poetry as having been composed extemporaneously.

¹⁹ ¹⁹ See Hanks 1987 for a discussion of creative ambiguity between genres.

²⁰ For example, a number of the stories collected in the 1940's from Peig Sayers (Wagner and Mac Congáil 1983) feature verse-dialogue.

There are a great many stories about poets, usually consisting of a narrative description of the scene which acts to frame the poetic utterances of the protagonist(s).²¹ These stories offer outsiders an insight into 'folk' conceptions of poets and poetry, but also function to maintain traditional attitudes about poetry and language, and help preserve the power of the poets. In many stories, however, the protagonists are not named as 'poets' but appear as ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. Ó Madagáin (1985) argues that extemporaneously composed poetry, usually in the form of song, including "arguments in verse," was commonplace in Ireland in the last century. These utterances were often passed on orally, along with narrative description, i.e., 'reported context'. Much of the song tradition, especially the Irish-language tradition, takes this form, which could just as easily be used by poets to project a narrative scene for their works, casting them in dramatic form. Rather than seeing this frequent practice as mendacious, we should see it as reflecting a pervasive sense, in the folk tradition, of poetry as being fundamentally dialogic and dramatic, as a powerful response to a situation *in medias res*. The song tradition as a form of discourse is an important site for the social construction of the subject and subjectivity in general. Direct poetic discourse with its potential for masking and projection offers a surprising range of possibilities for the subject (cf., Ní Annracháin 1994). Songs very frequently support multiple interpretations—in effect different 'stories' or construals of their originating personae. This is a feature of the manuscript tradition as well.²² Discussion and argument about the true narrative background to lyric poems is thus part of the tradition. Multiple interpretations do not necessarily cancel each other out—a case in point being the so-called *aislingí* or allegorical 'vision' poems which serve, among other things, as both love songs and as political allegories. The affective power of these songs *depends* on their being multiply narratizable. Gibbons (1996) argues for the pervasiveness of allegorical representations in colonial Ireland, representations which Irish nationalism sought to reduce to unitary symbols of identity.

The song and the story in performance

Irish-language song is arguably another example of Carney's "tale which is a mixture of prose and verse"—where the 'verse' is sung and the 'prose' not necessarily recited. It might seem strange to regard the singing of lyric poetry as a kind of storytelling, but in doing so I am following Joe's own advice, in insisting that "singing a song is like telling a story." Other singers of his generation are of like mind in maintaining that songs have or tell or go along with stories. The songs generally take the form of the speech of the main character(s), who are identified only by accompanying narratives. Sometimes referred to as *údar an amhráin* ('The authority for the song'), these narratives may be told by the singer

²¹. Delargy (1945:207) mentions "duels in quatrains", as a rule with a short explanatory prose introduction."

²². Ruairí Ó hUiginn, personal communication.

or by someone else, and range from a few words of introduction to complete stories; sometimes the sung verses are interspersed with spoken narrative. The use of the term *údar* seems to encompass several of its senses as defined by Ó Dónaill (Ó Dónaill 1977:1296):

1. Author, originator; source, origin.
2. Author, writer. [...]
4. Authority, reliable evidence.
5. Cause, reason.

The 'story' of a song, as "*údar*" is first of all an account of the person who composed it, the dramatic situation in which the song originated, and the reasons for and effects of the author's poetic response to that situation. But it is also the *authentication* of the song, which makes it real for an audience by tying the poetic utterance to a definite origin in history and by locating the song in a specific place in the landscape.²³ As Hugh Shields has observed,

the simple identity of the poet is often a matter of special interest to a Gaelic audience. [...] Since the first-person mode predominates, the same identity is shared by the poet and the main personage [...] so that authorship need not be considered an extrinsic, non-narrative aspect. A poet may be a local person whose circumstances local people may guess at, if not actually know (Shields 1993:77).

The 'story' in *sean-nós* singing is what could be called a 'potential' as opposed to a 'performed' narrative. As narratives they seem to range from quite formal, artistic, and *performable* stories all the way to simple background knowledge or indeed mere hunches or intuitions about the meaning or origin of a song. In my fieldwork in Rath Cairn I rarely heard stories to songs narrated as part of song performance, but I frequently heard them discussed in conversation, often not connected with actual song performance. Older people who are not singers nonetheless know both the words and the 'stories' to songs; I have heard one man in particular complain that younger singers he hears on Radio na Gaeltachta obviously do not know the stories, even altering the gender of a song's characters. That the 'story' functions as shared background information rather than performed narrative does not diminish its importance. Without its shared narrative background, much of a song's meaning is lost. This is true especially since *sean-nós* songs often consist *entirely* of the protagonists' speech, and thus are lyric and dramatic, rather than narrative, in nature. Songs *refer* to their stories, just as ordinary conversation is enriched by references or allusions to songs--e.g., a young man, while cleaning out an ancient decrepit pipe for an older man, laughingly compares it to *Píopa Ainde Mhóir*. In my own fieldwork, I have frequently been struck by how smooth and continuous the transition from conversation to song can be, a phenomenon also well documented by Glassie

²³ It is interesting to compare *sean-nós* song with Austurian "deepsong" (Fernandez 1986); both are currently undergoing popular revivals based on their qualities of personalism, celebration of place, and spontaneity as a kind of heroic utterance.

(1982) and Shields (1993). Ordinary conversation provides the occasion for reference to, then narration of, a story, which peaks with *reported poetic conversation* between the story's protagonists, followed by a few sung verses or an entire song.

When a song's 'story' is narrated in performance it portrays the lines of the song as the actual direct utterance of the protagonist(s). An example of this is Joe Heaney's spoken introduction to *Amhrán Shéamais Uí Chonchúir*.²⁴ I include the first two sung verses to give a feel for the kind of transition involved, between spoken narrative and the sung poetry which this narrative frames as direct quotation:

Bhuel, an t-amhrán atá mé ag goil a rá anois, sé an t-airn a tugtar air, 'Amhrán Shéamais Uí Chonchur'. Nó, tugann cuide de na daoine 'Amhrán Árainn' air. Mar is in Árainn a rugadh 'is a tógadh Séamas Ó Conchur. Fear bocht diaganta a bhí ann. 'Is an t-am a raibh na ministéirí, nó, thugfadh cuide de na daoine 'souters' orthu ag goil thart. Gheall ministéir a bhí in Árainn cnagaire dúthaigh, sé sin a rá, gabháltas talúna, rud a dtugainn muide gabháltas air, cnagaire a tugtar in Árainn air. Sin timpeall's, ocht n-acra fichead talúna. Gealladh é sin do Shéamas as ucht amhrán a dhéanamh, a' moladh an chreideamh gallda agus ag rith síos a chreideamh fhéin, an creideamh caitliceach. Agus bhí Séamas bocht mar a duirt mé, agus ní raibh a fhios aige céard a dhéanfadh sé. Chuaigh sé abhaile agus luí sé ar a leaba. Agus san oíche, bhí aisling aige. Agus san aisling tháinig an t-aingeal agus thóg sé lámh leis. Agus thaspáin sé dhó an t-anam dhá mheáchan. D'éirí Séamas ar maidín, agus chuaigh sé go dtí an sagart paráiste. Agus d'inis sé dhó, mar a bhí an aisling aige. "Chonaic mé" ar seisean "an t-anam dhá mheáchan aréir." "Agus a Shéamais a stór" a dúirt an sagart, "ar mheáigh an mhaith an t-olc" "Ó mheáigh" a deir Seamas, "míle buíochas is altú le Dia." "Muise a Shéamais anois" a deir sé, "an bhfuil socraithe i t'intinn a'dsa céard a dhéanfas tú?" "Ó tá" arsa Séamas. "Tá mise ag goil abhaile anois" a deir sé, "Agus cluainfidh an saol fós, an t-amhrán atá mise ag goil a dhéanamh." Agus dearfaidh mise an t-amhrán anois mar a rinne Séamas Ó Conchur é.

(Well, the song I'm going to sing now, they call it "Séamas Ó Conchur's song." Or, some people call it "The Árainn song." Because Séamas Ó Conchur was born and raised in Árainn.²⁵ He was a poor, pious man. And this was the time when the ministers, or, as some people would call them, the Souters, were going around. A Minister

²⁴. Broadcast 3/9/95 on Raidió na Gaeltachta. Recorded by Raidió Telefís Éireann in the Damer Theatre, Dublin, in 1957. The song itself, without the spoken introduction, can be found on the C.D. *Amhrán ar an Sean-nós*.

²⁵. Inis Mór, the largest of the Aran Islands.

who was in Árainn promised him a 'cnaire dúthaigh' [a measure of land], that is to say, a 'gabhaltanas talúna' [a land holding], what we [in Connemara] would call a 'gabháltas', they call it a 'cnaire' in Árainn. That's about 28 acres of land [16 acres according to Ó Dónaill p. 254]. That was promised to Séamas in return for making a song, praising the foreign faith and running down his own faith, the Catholic faith. And Séamas was poor as I said, and he didn't know what he would do. He went home and lay on his bed. And in the night, he had a dream [*aisling*, a vision]. And in the dream, an angel came to him, and took his hand. And he showed him the soul being judged [lit., 'being weighed', after death]. Séamas got up in the morning and he went to the parish priest. And he told him about the dream he had. "I saw," he said, "the soul being judged last night." "And Séamas, dear" said the priest, "did the good judge the bad?" "Oh it did" said Séamas, "a thousand thanks and blessing to God." "Well Séamas" he said, "Have you decided what you'll do?" "Oh I have" said Séamas. "I'm going home now" he said. "And the world will still hear [i.e., hear forever] the song that I'm going to make." And I'll sing the song now as Séamas Ó Conchur made it.)

Dhá bhfaighfinse culaith éadaigh a mbeadh óir a' silleadh léi
Ar chuntar dán a dhéanamh, ag moladh an chreideamh gall,

(If I would get a suit of clothes streaming with gold in return for making a song praising the foreign faith)

Ní bhfaighfinse ó mo chroí istigh, sliocht Liútair a mholadh ar aon chor,
A d'iompaigh ar lamh chlé, 's ar thréig Mac na ngrást.

(I couldn't bring myself from my heart inside, to praise Luther's descendants, who turned towards evil and abandoned the Son of graces.)

[10 more verses...]

The didactic beginning to Joe's narrative reflects the occasion—a performance in Dublin for an urban audience—although the discussion of terms and dialectal differences would be common 'at home' also. Joe was quite adept at telling these introductory stories to English-speaking audiences, followed by Irish-language songs, while maintaining that the songs themselves were untranslatable. The main function of the 'story' when narrated is to orient the listeners, setting the stage for the song and equipping them for the change in footing²⁶ when the

²⁶. Goffman (1981); see also Urban (1989) on the use of the first person in South American ritual discourse. On the importance of reported speech for understanding the sociocultural functions of language, see Voloshinov (1973).

song inserts them directly into this constructed scene. What was past in the story becomes present in the song, and the third person becomes first person. The central act of singing and listening to *sean-nós* song was for Joe this projection back in time, and he often used the word 'story' to refer, not to any kind of narrative, but to this past scene itself. This past scene is the *secret* of the song, a shared history that is ritually enacted in performance:

...This is why they go anticlockwise when they're singing, they hold hands and go anticlockwise. Because they're turning back the clock, to when this time was—and each song tells a story. Because when most of the songs were composed, the people couldn't speak about their feelings they had to put it over in song so people wouldn't understand what they were saying. The common enemy, wouldn't understand what they were talking (Heaney 78-15.5).

Ornamentation in traditional song

The most often remarked feature of the *sean-nós* singing style is the highly ornamented solo melodic line. Pitch, duration, tone-quality, and dynamics all appear to be organized so as to allow the singer the greatest flexibility in ornamentation (Bodley 1973). Melodic ornamentation consists of adding small grace notes: melismatic ornamentation is "a group of adjacent auxiliary notes decorating or replacing a main note of the melody;" intervallic ornamentation is the replacement of intervals between main notes, and the filling in of intervals with "a series of stepwise notes" (Ó Cannain 1978:71). Ornamentation results in a kind of rubato:

The number of accents or beats per bar is constant, and falls mostly into patterns of 2, 3, or 4. The duration of each of these beats is variable—indeed it has to be so in order to accommodate the ornaments. Thus one gets a form of rubato that is to some extent structural—a rubato that has a specific part to play in the musical structure (Bodley 1973:52)

The practice of ornamentation is but one aspect of the musical variation (between measures, verses, performances, and performers) which is valued as the hallmark of "true" traditional style:

Not only is the ornamentation changed from verse to verse, but what might be considered the basic musical material of the song may be varied as well (Bodley 1973:72).

Ornamentation, along with melodic and rhythmical variation take the same forms in both song and instrumental music, which also share the same basic melodies.²⁷ However, the exact nature and role of ornamentation in traditional singing is a matter of some debate. Lillis Ó Laoire has suggested that the Gaelic Revival

²⁷. See Williams (1985) for a formal analysis of Joe Heaney's style of ornamentation. Williams argues that Heaney tends to ornament unstressed syllables; she emphasizes the importance of the interaction between rubato and ornamentation in creating poetic tension (stress and release) within the lines of a song.

movement and other aficionados have made a "fetish" of melodic ornamentation, taking it as the unique measure of 'true' *sean-nós* style and distorting the tradition in the process, whereas many singers and some regional styles use very little ornamentation (Ó Laoire in press, and personal communication). Clearly, melodic ornamentation is but one of many ways of structuring a performed text. Relevant to this discussion is Glassie's (1982:40) observation that storytelling in County Fermanagh had two 'modes':

One is full and flat in sound, complex in grammar; it is used to digress informationally, to orient the listener, and it approximates prose. The other is melodic, rhythmically broken, grammatically simple; it is used to advance the narration, to excite the listener, and it approximates poetry. Neither prose nor poetry, thought nor action, stories are both.²⁸

Perhaps song performance lies on a similar continuum between relatively 'narrative' and relatively 'lyric' poles; different regional traditions as well as different singers and indeed songs in a given region would then occupy different positions on this continuum. As we shall see, Joe Heaney understood melodic ornamentation in this way, as one aspect of narrative performance—as part of telling a story.

A performer's account of ornamentation

Joe was often asked about ornamentation: where does it go, does it go in the same place every time, how did you learn to do it, and so on, questions which assumed that ornamentation was first and foremost a matter of *musical form*. He did not see it that way, refusing to consider any aspect of performance or form in isolation from what he saw as an essential unity of the song and the story. The verb most often used in Connemara Irish for singing is *abair*, the basic meaning of which is 'say', also the verb used in quotation (*Dúirt sé [go]... – 'He said [that]...'*). Joe regarded this as proof of the connection between song and story:

Well you see, nobody ever asked you to sing a song. '*Abair amhrán*'. Say a song. You know what I mean? Therefore, you're telling the story in a nice way.

This "nice way" of telling a story also makes it cryptic to outsiders:

Because, when most of these songs were composed, the people couldn't express their views orally so they had to put it in verse. And that told the tragic tale, what was it an emigration song, or a boating song— a boat tragedy like *Anach Chuain*, or something like that, these conveyed the message and without telling the story the song was lost. That's why it's always advisable to say a little bit about the song before you start doing it you know.

²⁸. See also Ó Cualaoich (1989); Linzee (1984) analyzes ornamentation in Joe Heaney's storytelling.

When he was asked 'How did you know, when you were singing something, if it wasn't good?' He replied,

Sure, I judge it by the way I feel. Now, 'do I feel this, or don't I?' That's the question I ask myself all the time. Do I feel this song, do I put myself in the man's name that this particular song was written about. Am I suffering the labors he did, can I go through that or have that picture before me; if I can't follow that man, the journey he took, whether he was in bondage or in slavery, I don't follow the song and I don't do it justice ... (Heaney 78-15.2)

For Joe the central act in singing was putting oneself "in the name" of the song's protagonist. In "saying" (that is, singing) another person's words, empathy-- "suffering the labors that he did"--is an act of orientation, a coordination of vision. For Joe Heaney, everything else about the song tradition follows from this central act. But this act first requires "knowing the story;" one must first know who the person was, and what he or she was facing. Each line must be properly sung according to its place in the "story:"

...the first important thing about a song: know the story. What the story is all about. And that's very important. And then, you're doing the song the same as if you were telling the story. Each line varies, but you've got to put them all together so they'll make sense. I mean it's no use in trying to get *one* line, because, one line follows the other, and it's before another line. So they've got to knit into one another. ...That's the way it's got to be (Heaney 78-15.2).

The singer's understanding of and feeling for the song comes out in the ornamentation of the melodic lines:

...that's "nature's accompaniment" they called that. I don't try to do it, it just happens through the song when I try to draw out a line, ...hold onto that particular line because there's something special about that line. Don't throw it away, just hold onto it as long as you can (Heaney 78-15.10). ...the ornamentation came from ...that the people wanted to hold onto this particular line. They didn't want to let it go. They wanted to hold onto it as long as they could (Heaney 78-15.1).

Through ornamentation a singer gives dramatic structure to a song, and this requires an understanding of the 'story':

Different lines in a song are different, sung differently to other lines in a song, some verses tells you of the tragedy and other verses tells, why did it happen and they vary, like that the same way you sing any version of a song. There's an old saying that you start a song slowly, you build up a climax and come down gently. And in folk music, there is no beat, it's just a pulse (Heaney 78-15.1).

Ornamentation 'just happens' as a result of the emotional attachment the singer forms with the lines, according to their place in the 'story'. The singer 'holds on to' lines, drawing them out, slowing down time. I found it fascinating that Joe

talked in a very similar way about the emotional attachment to the dead in wakes:
...people are not waked anymore like they used to be waked you know, it took you three nights and three days you know. They hated to part with the person at all you know. So they really kept him till the last minutē you know(Heaney 78-15.3).

As for the ornaments themselves, "there's nobody living who can tell anybody where to put grace notes in a song." Ornamentation is an aspect of what Joe called "style," which is an inherently individual matter; "you develop your own style," which "takes years" (Heaney 78.15-1). Ornamentation is "doing justice to a song." It is a moral act that comes out of a proper relationship between the singer and that other "I" -- the one in whose "name" the singer sings. Emotion is the force behind this process, the reason for "drawing out" a line, but Joe is careful to show that emotion is not a direct response to the words, but comes out of "pictures" which are "followed" as the song emerges. Learning to sing is learning to *see*. The same goes for listening. Joe said that visitors would come to hear a song, *Caoineadh na dTrí Muire*,²⁹ sung in his family's house every Friday during Lent; it was the old people especially who responded to it:

(Would the people taking part become emotional?) Oh, they would, most of them would... especially if the older people would become emotional they'd cry, because this is something they could see, as the person carried on. They could see what was happening, the event taking place which was the real meaning of the song anyway, to follow a story, to follow a path, until you come to the turn (Heaney 78-15.3)

Both singers and listeners must learn to "follow a story," and this means relating the events and feelings of one's own life to those experienced by the songs characters. A sad song such as *Caoineadh na dTrí Muire*

...sometimes took a long time to sing because whoever was singing the lament put everything they had into it, and it was usually a woman [who would sing this song]. They left nothing out. Everything. And the sadness and sorrow of their own lives helped them to make it even better (Heaney 78-15.3)

At a concert in 1978 Joe was asked to sing a verse of a song without, and then with, ornamentation. He chose to sing *The Rocks of Bawn*, a song in English which consists of a conversation between a "big" farmer and his recalcitrant hired hand, Sweeney (a Connemara man). Joe attempted to do this,³⁰ and then explained the

²⁹. Joe was the first to commercially record this song, which is now widely associated with his name. Cf. Partridge (1983:30-31), which also casts doubt on his account of how he got this song.

³⁰. Without much success—the 'unornamented' version is perhaps the better version, while the 'ornamented' version sounds forced.

difference, making a comparison between the drawn out, melodically ornamented lines of the song and the toils and troubles of the hero's own life:

There's a big difference in them two versions of that. In one of them you're in a hurry to go somewhere and the other one, you're playing the act, you're working exactly what Sweeney was doing. You're going through the same thing that he was going through, before the song was ever made. You have the picture before you of the man going through this agony, and if he would have stopped for one minute, somebody else would get the job. And that's exactly the picture you must follow when you're singing an old song. Especially if it's a sad one. ...you've got to have the picture before you. And always have that picture and then you'll do the song properly then (Heaney 78-15.10).

Thus, via ornamentation, sound becomes the medium which fuses images, emotions, and the life histories of the singer, protagonist, and listeners.

Embodiment: 'pulse' and 'drone'

Joe used two terms to talk about how a singer keeps continuity in a song while singing it, the 'pulse' and the 'drone' or 'nyah'. These are quasi-physical entities that a singer 'has', and Joe often mentioned them at the same time.

Well you see it's like a bee, when it's going into the hive. In *sean-nós* singing, which is old style singing, there's supposed to be the drone of the ancient pipes in the voice, accompanying the song. Some people have it, and some don't. I've been accused of having it, it's a great honor to be accused of having it Ewan Macoll told me I had it. Peggy Seeger told me I had it, ... I don't put there it's just there. [Does that help you sing better?] Well it helps me balance my voice better. Well I can hold on to the next line better by having this following y.k., following the words I'm saying. Or preceding the words I'm saying. I keep a link with the lines y.k., by doing that. The lines are linked to one another. It's like telling a story. You've got to put grace notes in a story even to tell it, with a bit of exaggeration. I mean it's no use telling a story the way it was—you've got to put something on to it. And help it along. [So even when you stop singing to take a breath or something you still hear the drones?] I still have it...even when I stop to talk, it still helps me to carry on with the same, almost the same note as I stopped on you know (Heaney 78-15.3).

There is, we suspect, 'a bit of exaggeration' in this account itself! But it accurately describes the role of nasalization in *sean-nós*, and makes sense as a phenomenological account from the singer's perspective. Likewise with Joe's description of the 'pulse':

My father told me, "when you're singing a song, start softly, build up a climax, and come down—slowly, easily toward the end—because remember, in folk music there is no beat, it's just got a pulse; and the minute you lose that pulse you're dead, the song is dead. You can

lose a beat," he said, and survive--but the pulse, no." That's the advice he gave me.

A pulse, you know, it's something that goes evenly more or less, you know, with no sort of loudness all the time, or no sort of down all the time. It's a thing that keeps going, and when it stops that's dead, whatever they're doing is dead. It keeps the same *moment*, you know; going the same way all the time. You don't run away with something. You don't beat (Quoted in Cowdery 1990:35).

It is hard to imagine Joe's father using the term 'folk music', and indeed in an interview in Irish,³¹ we hear Joe say:

...Mar a dúirt an Béarlóir fadó, "In folk music there's no beat--there's only a pulse." (...As the English-speaker said long ago, "In folk music there's no beat--there's only a pulse.")

My suspicion is that this 'pulse' is a musicological term that made sense to Joe, both as a description of what singing *felt* like and rhetorically as ammunition in his ongoing war against the Irish ballad boom, Liam Clancy, and the tendency to put a regular beat and guitar accompaniment on every possible song. Joe seemed to identify the pulse of a song with its poetic meter,³² and in this respect it is interesting to compare his idea with one found in Irish folklore about poetry and poets, *féith na filíochta* (the vein of poetry). As Ó hÓgáin (1979, 1982) has shown, folk stories often portrayed this literally as a physical vein which poets had; when the poet was seized by an emotional poetic frenzy, the pulsing of this vein would *produce* poetry, its pulse corresponding to the poetic meter. Thus, poetry is portrayed in the tradition as being a direct physical artifact of the poet's body and emotions. And since this poetry was *sung*, (Ó Madagáin 1985), we have evidence for a folk understanding in which song creates a *direct* connection over time between singer and poet, via the pulse.

Songs as commodities?

...I still love the songs and I wanted to do them better and better and better. Do justice to the songs and that's the only way of presenting them is to keep them in the form that they were. If you can't add anything on, don't take anything away that's my policy I would never compromise with groups, or people who's running before they can walk. They run away with great songs, destroy them and then leave them down and take another one and do the same with them... Only for the old people who kept the songs alive, only where they were so preserved, in one area of Ireland, especially the

³¹. Interviewed by Mike P. Ó Conghaile, Raidió na Gaeltachta. Archived as tape R 779, An Teanglann, Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge, Coláiste na hOllscoile, Baile Átha Cliath.

³². cf. Williams 1985

poor areas, they wouldn't be alive today because they'd be destroyed and distorted and cut up to smithereens (Heaney 78-15.2).

...There's no way I can do them as good as I *want* to do them. Even to myself. I want to do them justice over justice. ...Because I love the spirit of the songs and I understand why the songs were composed in the first place. And nobody knows who composed the half of them you see. Although collectors came around with tape recorders and what have you, and they collected the songs, the people who gave them the songs never got a penny out of them. And the collectors sold books, you know, because the craze was on since 1966. ...Everybody wanted songs, to get these guitars and all that, groups over groups, and finally they're running out of names for groups in Ireland. There are three hundred ninety groups. They're all doing the same thing (Heaney 78-15.2).

Joe Heaney might seem an unlikely crusader against the commodification of traditional song. More than any other singer, he was responsible for creating a market for recordings of *sean-nós* song. He was a major participant in the folksong revival of the 1960's and proudly claimed to have given songs such as *The Seven Drunken Nights* to Liam Clancy. But he was strongly critical of certain musical alterations, most notably the addition of accompaniment to *sean-nós* songs, especially to the songs he called 'laments'. Joe saw accompaniment as "killing" a song, eliminating the possibility of 'holding on' to lines and ornamenting them. Any accompaniment which imposed a regular 'beat' would reduce the possibilities for rubato, the ornamental drawing out of lines of a song. Joe saw this as *exploitation*, reducing a song to a commodity and severing the essential connection between singer, song, listeners, and story. I find it fascinating that Joe Heaney criticized the commercialization of songs in these terms, which link formal changes in musical structure, a severing of social relationships, and a new conception of time. Mauss (1967:34-5) characterized the transition from gift exchange to barter and market systems in terms of the elimination of the element of time from exchange. In Ireland, Glassie (1982) has shown the importance of several genres of talk, storytelling, and song as elements in a system of exchange which also included food, music, and labor. Elsewhere in Europe, on the Greek periphery, Seremetakis (1991) argued for a 'women's imaginary' based on memory, shared substance, death ritual and laments, in opposition to discourses of modernization. I believe that Joe Heaney's comments are best understood against this background, and that what he was arguing for was a specific reality, of the nature of songs as texts and of practices of singing and listening, which is at odds with the forms that texts, singing and listening take under relations of market-governed production and consumption.

Conclusions

I hope I have shown the value of taking Joe Heaney's statements seriously as *theory*. They could point us towards a radically different way of understanding musical form, language, emotion, and performance. It would be interesting to see how useful his insights could be for research in other musical traditions. To that

end, I present, in a more abstract form, a few of these points:

- Musical form (in this case, ornamentation in *sean-nós* song) is not independent of but rather wholly constituted by local traditions and understandings.
- Musical form *communicates*, and is able to do so because it is subsumed under and constituted by language; in other words, it is a kind of speech.
- Speech itself is subsumed under and constituted by *social relations*. In *sean-nós* singing, these relations are complex, involving those of the original protagonists or characters in the song, those of the present day performer and his audience, and the relationships between these two sets of people.
- Social relations themselves are mediated by bodily practices, specifically by emotions and sentiments which are shared by persons who share a common experience as they make their way through life.
- Musical form thus understood becomes a *medium* which brings together speech, social relations, and sentiments, gaining a moral force—the ability to constitute us as moral subjects.
- As a theory, it is thoroughly grounded in the poetic practice of Connemara, and in that of Irish-speaking culture more generally.
- Joe's 'theory' works as a *general* theory of Irish traditional music, showing how poetic forms are linked to narratives, the meaning of which they condense in sound symbolism.

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