Chapter 4

Clearing the Stations: The Resolution

Digging into the past has been the hallmark of Seamus Heaney in the early days of his poetic career for it helped him to get in touch with his roots and establish himself as a poet. A study of the first five volumes of his poems shows that the poet delves not only into his personal past but also into the transpersonal realm of the racial past. His sixth volume, *Station Island* (1984) reflects the culmination of this long process of regression that results in a healthy forward and upward movement of progression. *Station Island* is divided into three parts, the first untitled section consisting of twenty five poems and the second, "Station Island", a long poem having twelve sections, and the third, "Sweeney Redivivus" comprising twenty short poems. In this chapter the poems of this book are examined from three different angles. The first section traces the journey taken into the native realm wherein the poet comes into contact with people who had faced similar situations. The second shows the poet's effort to establish a contact with the literary heritage, with the writers of other times and lands, especially with Dante. The third section interprets the journey metaphorically as a pilgrimage and explains how the struggle is resolved.
The political and social climate had changed a lot when Heaney started writing, and writing in the context of a civil war had made him extremely wary. Heaney observes, “during the last few years there has been considerable expectation that poets from Northern Ireland should ‘say’ something about the ‘situation’ but in the end they will only be worth listening to if they are saying something about and to themselves” (qtd. in Meyer 49). He was blamed by his fellow northern Catholics that his poems do not address the issue of their suppression and Heaney was at a loss “to deal somehow with truth and justice . . . in a society like that of Northern Ireland, where truth and justice are not generally at work in the society” (Foster 6). Writing had its risks because any word written in that volatile atmosphere can be exacerbating. For instance, when Heaney wrote “Requiem for the Croppies” in 1966, it did not reveal any political undercurrents or violent implications but twenty years later it was seen as a poem supporting Irish Republican Army. Heaney himself wondered whether he should acknowledge the relationship between “lyric and life” and take responsibility for what he said. He could not deny: “do you have to take responsibility for the effect of your work? And in the North of Ireland, I think the answer is yes” (qtd. in Foster 6).
The question of writing in English has troubled many Irish writers like James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, and Heaney himself is not free from this conflict. The Irish writer when he writes in English is using the language of the oppressor and is adapting the British historical and literary tradition. In his essay "Belfast" Heaney writes that one half of his sensibility comes from his ancestry, culture and belonging to a place. The other half is from his reading and education and the two voices pull him in two directions. He tries to solve this conflict at the end of the essay by saying, "I began as a poet when my roots were crossed with my reading. I think of the personal and Irish pieties as vowels, and the literary awareness nourished on English as consonants" (Preoccupations 37). Yet the nagging question does not seem to be settled once for all.

Having come to the "middle of the way" as he calls it in "September Song" (FW), Heaney considers it obligatory to do a thorough self-examination and resolve the ambiguity and conflicts concerning his artistic commitment. In "Envies and Identifications" Heaney explains how he had planned to do this:

The main tension is between two often contradictory commands: to be faithful to the collective historical experience and be true to the recognitions of the emerging self. I hoped that I could dramatize these strains by meeting shades from my own dream-life who
had also been inhabitants of the actual Irish world. They could perhaps voice the claims of orthodoxy and the necessity to recognise those claims. They could probe the validity of one’s commitment. (qtd. in Corcoran Student’s 160)

This dramatization is what is seen in “Station Island”, the centre piece of the volume consisting of 740 lines and the longest individual poem Heaney has written so far. In the note to the poem, the poet himself points out that the poem “is a sequence of dream encounters with familiar ghosts set on Station Island on Lough Derg in Co. Donegal”(122).

The twelve “familiar ghosts” that Heaney meets during his pilgrimage were varied in their vocations and persuasions and had reacted differently to the religio-political conditions in Ireland. Yet they were all Irish and Heaney could relate to them in one way or another. The priest he meets in Section XI is Spanish but he has made Ireland his home. They had all in some way or other contributed to the growth of Heaney’s personality and vocation or had caused a provocation unintentionally. Each of the encounter of the poet poses a question or throws an accusation or provides a revelation and Heaney emerges out of these confrontations a positive beneficiary with all his throbbing questions reconciled to a resolution.
The first three spirits are viewed from a religious perspective. It is Sunday when Heaney starts his pilgrimage and when a “hurry of bell-notes” calls them for worship, Simon Sweeney is seen among the hazel bushes “with a bow-saw, held / stiffly up like a lyre.” It is the poet who accosts him: “I know you, Simon Sweeney, / for an old Sabbath-breaker / who has been dead for years.” Derisively he replies “Damn all you know, . . . ‘I was your mystery man / and am again this morning’ (“Station Island I”SI). Sweeney is a Druidic figure who had nothing to do with institutionalised religion and part of Heaney held an unquenchable attraction towards him and his unbridled stand while the other part of the poet is rather unsure of the very attraction. In his Preoccupations, Heaney writes about the lure of the forbidden ground, the moss, and how on their way to school Heaney and his friends watched the smoke rising from the house of the man who lived there and how his name was “synonymous with mystery man”(19). Yet when Sweeney admonishes him to “stay clear of all processions” Heaney does not pay heed to it. In fact, this is the only instance when he breaks off the meeting and moves away from the spirit and follows the other pilgrims. In other encounters, the spirits fade away leaving Heaney to choose his own course.

The second spirit introduced in Section II is that of William Carleton, a novelist of the nineteenth century who was Roman Catholic by birth but renounced his religion and joined the
Protestant church to find an artistic identity outside the traditional loyalty. Carleton’s “The Lough Derg Pilgrim” is a ridicule at the superstitious rituals at the Station Island. Heaney has this to say on Carleton:

Carleton wrote copiously, politically, imperfectly . . . . he flailed between the attitudes of his adopted faith and the affection of his deserted tribe, but he wrote without any sacral sense of the race he belonged to, a figure of controversy because of his apostasy but a witness to a realistic politicized Ireland that the nineteenth century poets and their revival heirs could not or would not voice. (“Tale” 12–13)

In the island when Heaney reminds him of his work, Carleton says how the “hard-mouthed Ribbonmen and Orange bigots” made him “the old fork-tongued turncoat / who mucked the byre of their politics” and suggests that there may be a lesson for Heaney too. But Heaney asserts, “I have no mettle for the angry role.” Carleton’s story encapsulates the plight of an artist in Ireland.

In section IV we see the poet meeting the spirit of Terry Keenan, a priest who went, as a missionary, to Philippines. His is a story of failure:

... I lasted

only a couple of years. Bare-breasted

women and rat-ribbed men. Everything wasted.
I rotted like a pear. I sweated masses

("Station Island" SI)

Ironically he uses an imperialistic tone and speaks of the people in derogative terms just as the British Protestants would talk of the Irish Catholics. Remembering the past when he used to accompany Keenan on his visits as a clerical student, Heaney feels that he had been doubtful of Keenan's commitment. There is a suggestion that Keenan had been secular beneath his sacred garb: "his polished shoes / unexpectedly secular beneath / a pleated, lace-hemmed alb of linen cloth." At the beginning of this section, Heaney, having arrived at a particular station, is expected to say three times at the outset, "I renounce the world, flesh and the devil" but he is interrupted by the presence of Keenan and Heaney breaks off from the renunciation "to clear the way for other pilgrims." This suggests that the priest could not renounce the world and in turn the poet is also caught between the conventional religion and the world of artistic sensibilities which the religion may not approve of. The result of this duplicity in Keenan is seen in what took place in his missionary field: "... In long houses / I raised the chalice above headdresses. / In hoc signo..." Keenan is not able to say the word "Vinces" which means "shall conquer." His mission had not been victorious. The poet reprimands Keenan for his behaviour and Keenan responds that he was then young and followed convention. He turns upon Heaney pointing out that the latter is older and lives in times when it is...
believed that god has withdrawn but he is behaving no better by following the same ritualistic practices started centuries before.

The first spirit has no place for religion; for the second, religion is politicised and has no value for the inner man. Carleton's closing comment, "We are earthworms of the earth, and all that has gone through us is what will be our trace" ("Station Island II" SI) is more affinitive to Heaney's conscience and experience than all he had said earlier. The third spirit, Keenan's, expresses doubt, because conventions could mislead. Between the last two confrontations, the pilgrim has a dream-vision of a shell casket owned by Agnes, a sister of Heaney's father who died of tuberculosis very early. Though her name had been erased from domestic conversations, her absence had always been felt by Heaney, especially when the family sang the litany of the Blessed Virgin. To Heaney, the words, "Health of the Sick, pray for us" seemed to lack substance. All three spirits and the vision of the casket project the absence of spirituality in the institutionalised religion and its inadequacy to sustain its followers. Verbalising helps the poet-pilgrim to do a thorough introspection which is therapeutic.

In Section V the spirits of Barney Murphy, Michael McLaverty and Patrick Kavanagh, are met by the poet. They have contributed towards Heaney's development, linguistic and artistic, and now they help him to surface his opinions on writing. Barney Murphy was the
master of the primary school at Anahorish where the poet studied. To the poet's observation that the school itself would have been a purgatory, the master responds, "Birch trees have overgrown Leitrim Moss, / dairy herds are grazing where the school was / and the school garden's loose black mould is grass" ("Station Island V" SI). Order has reverted to the wild and the vigorous, and the teacher is sad that the school is no more. The poet feels that even the memory of the Latin classes that Barney took is refreshing. He is grateful for having studied Latin, a language that was not theirs. Latin in fact was the language of the conquering Romans and it was thrust upon the Anglo Saxons. Though for the Irish writer the choice of the English language was a dilemma of political and artistic dimensions, to Barney the learning and teaching of Latin did not pose any dilemma. This helps Heaney to see the question of language in the right perspective.

Michael McLaverty was a short story writer and Headmaster of St. Thomas's Intermediate School, Ballymurphy, where Heaney was a student-teacher. One crucial way in which McLaverty nurtured Heaney's poetic career was to introduce him to the works of Kavanagh (Heaney, Government 7). R.J.C. Watt feels that heroes who undertake the journey to the underworld always sought help. Heaney's fee across the Styx was paid by McLaverty by supplying him with obol-like words (231). Heaney pays tribute to McLaverty thus: "fostered me and sent me out, with words /
Imposing on my tongue like obols” (“Fosterage” North). In section V of “Station Island” McLaverty breezes in with a quotation from Hopkins’s letter to Robert Bridges: “For what is the great / moving power and spring of verse? Feeling, and / in particular, love.” His short stories give priority to “the human heart whose corners are inaccessible to the affairs of Kings and State” (qtd. in Andrews 112). Obviously to him poetry transcends sectarian attitudes and when love is the motivator it obliterates all divisions.

Patrick Kavanagh, another important influence on the poet, and a poet himself, makes fun of Heaney for the choice of his subject matter. Yet he asserts the validity of his native experience:

... Forty-two years on
and you’ve got no farther! But after that again
where else would you go? Iceland, may be? May be the Dordogne? (“Station Island V” SI).

Forty-two years before Heaney wrote Station Island, Kavanagh had authored a poem about Lough Derg. It was Kavanagh’s poetry that encouraged Heaney at the outset of his poetic career and taught him not to negate his experiences in the Irish farm. In The Government of the Tongue, Heaney writes of Kavanagh’s poems, “I was excited to find details of a life which I knew intimately – but which I had always considered to be below or beyond books – being presented in a book.” It was a “primitive delight in finding world become word” (7; 8). He goes on to say how he enjoyed MacNeice’s
"Postscript from Iceland" but it was not the same as Kavanagh's. In his evaluation of the works of Kavanagh, Heaney comments that the phrase "socially committed" would have been repellent to Kavanagh and he searches for an "art that would be an Olympian Criticism of Life" rather than allowing the social and religious squabbles to spoil his overall concern for the "quality of life" in the country (Preoccupations 126). All the three spirits help Heaney examine his views, and of those who fostered him on artistic space and the use of English language to communicate the feelings of the Irish. As literary men, they have been beyond the limitations of parochialism.

The next four spirits impose feelings of guilt on Heaney. It is strong self-criticism on what he had done or not done as a friend, poet and neighbour in his adult phase of life. In Section VII Heaney meets William Strathearn, "the one stylist" in their football team. He was woken up in the middle of the night and was gunned down in his own shop by two Protestant off-duty policemen. The "big-limbed, decent, open-faced" young man narrates the circumstances of the murder and the horror-stricken poet blurts, "Forgive the way I have lived indifferent - / forgive my timid circumspect involvement." The next spirit is that of Tom Delaney an archaeologist at Ulster Museum at Belfast and a friend of Heaney. In Section VIII when Heaney comes to the station called St. Brigid's Bed, there stands Delaney with his "straight-lipped smile." Heaney recalls meeting him at the hospital ward where Delaney lay dying.
The poet had wished to keep up the banter but he was feeling scared and empty and could not offer solace. This painful memory that he had "somehow broken / covenants and failed an obligation" has to be appeased. Delaney tells how he "loved" his archaeology and feels being robbed of his life: "but dead at thirty-two! / Ah poet, lucky poet, tell me why / what seemed deserved and promised passed me by?" This makes Heaney guilty for having life because while men of stronger commitment did not get a chance to live and pursue their interests, he is blessed with life.

Heaney's cousin Colum McCartney denounces the poet outrightly thus:

You confused evasion and artistic tact.
The Protestant who shot me through the head
I accuse directly, but indirectly, you
who now atone perhaps upon this bed
for the way you whitewashed ugliness and drew
the lonely blinds of the Purgatorio
and saccharined my death with morning dew.

("Station Island VIII"SI)

In his "Strand at Lough Beg" in *Field Work*, Heaney mourns for this victim of random shooting. But according to McCartney, the poet had shown less agitation than those other poets with whom he was spending his time then. The poem shows no anger and the whole thing is softened and made artistic by beginning with an epigraph
from Dante and ending with a scene of Heaney washing the body with dew and rushes, as Virgil did to Dante in Purgatorio. Heaney is indeed troubled whether artistry overshadows real human feelings and if so, how could poetry be a "revelation of self to self" (Preoccupations 41).

The last spirit of this third group appears in Section IX. Francis Hughes was the second of the nine men who died in the Maze Prison Hunger Strike of 1981. Hughes joined IRA even when he was a boy and ambushed British soldiers in the Derry countryside. Stefan Hawlin writes that Hughes came from the same part of Northern Ireland as Heaney, and "because of this he presents the poet with an alternative life, a path not taken, the life of commitment to violent political struggle" (45). There is no direct accusation in the speech of Hughes. He describes, "My brain dried like spread turf, my stomach / Shrank to a cinder and tightened and cracked" and this "voice from blight and hunger" makes Heaney feel wretched. All these four had encountered death at a young age and in a tragic way. They seem to chastise Heaney's passivity and his non-participation in his nation's ongoing political struggle.

The ten spirits that Heaney had met so far lead to a self-exploration in the areas of religious, artistic and political commitment. The process of self-examination is accentuated by the image of gazing into mirror or mirror-like objects. Carleton is
identified in the driving mirror; Strathearn appears when Heaney is looking into water “as if it were a clean barometer / or a mirror”; Delaney intrudes when Heaney was staring into the granite slab. In Section IX the poet looks at his face in the shaving mirror at the end of the self-examination. He is filled with “self-disgust”:

... All seemed to run to waste
As down a swirl of mucky, glittering flood
Strange polyp floated like a huge corrupt
Magnolia bloom, surreal as a shed breast,
My softly awash and blanching self-disgust.

The latter part of Section IX shows several dream images picturing his plight of moving adrift with the current. He cries, “I repent / My unweaned life that kept me competent / To sleepwalk with connivance and mistrust.” Then a lighted candle, a sign of relieving the darkness of despair, appears and his feet touches the bottom and his heart revives. Once again something round and clear, polished and brilliant and mirror-like is focused on him. The intrusion of self-preoccupation knocks him down and he utters, “I hate how quick I was to know my place. / I hate where I was born, hate everything / That made me biddable and unforthcoming.” The surfacing of the overwhelming feelings is cathartic. There seems to be a need to stop wallowing in doubts, fears and guilt and be oneself.
Section X brings Heaney back to his elements. It is morning and there is water plumping and the open door lets in sunlight. He sees a mug painted with blue corn flowers. It was an old, haircracked mug that was never disturbed from an upper shelf except once. It had been borrowed by some mummers and for a while, it became the “loving cup” of a couple. When it was restored after the mime, the old cup’s status had altered. There was an added glamour to it. It is compared to Ronan’s psalter thrown by mad Sweeney into the lough waters and miraculously recovered by an otter without any damage. Similarly the transformation he experiences could be irrational and less specific but it is a seachange all the same.

The affirmation of change comes through another encounter narrated in Section XI. In this section, the spirit of the old Spanish priest appears. Once when Heaney had gone to him guilt-ridden, he had made him feel “there was nothing to confess.” His suggested penance was to “Read poems as prayers” and translate something by St. John of the Cross, a sixteenth century Carmelite monk who suffered much in isolation because of his ideologies and firm stand. The rest of the section is Heaney's translation of the Song of the Soul that Rejoices to know God by Faith” – sometime entitled “La fonte” or “The Fountain” – by St. John of the Cross. Each stanza consists of a couplet and a refrain of “although it is the night” and has the quality of a religious chant. It is a declaration of faith that
"knows" before it "sees."

This eternal fountain hides and splashes
within this living bread that is life to us
although it is the night.

Hear it calling out to every creature.
And they drink these waters, although it is dark here
because it is the night.

I am repining for this living fountain.
Within this bread of life I see it plain
although it is the night.

("Station Island XI" SI)

The song is of an eternal fountain which is the source of all
sources and hence is of God. The triune God is revealed in the
"bread of life," the Eucharist which he can see before him. Jesus
Christ calls himself the "Bread of Life" and to a Catholic the
eucharist is Christ himself. In the earlier sections of "Station
Island", the fallibility of "knowing" is hinted at. Sweeney shouts to
Heaney, "Damn all you know." When Heaney tells that his
experiences are akin to those of Carleton, he replies rather
irritatedly, "I know, I know, I know, I know" and then adds a "but"
and warns him to keep his head. Strathearn remembers that he
"knew" the would-be assassins who were knocking at his door.
Keenan "knew" that he was following convention when he became a
priest and went as a missionary to the rain forest but finds that he had been mistaken. In “The Fountain” the believer “sees” by faith God’s presence in the world. The words “I know” keep recurring about the fountain that cannot be seen but the song ends with the assertion of “I see it plain” in the bread of life. Earlier Keenan remembers showing the eucharist to his parishioners. He can say only “By this sign, . . .” and cannot finish it with the words “shalt conquer” because he has experienced no victory. The poem that Heaney translates and includes in the latter part of Section XI suggests a longing for affirmation and the final triplet shows his restoration of faith in the “living fountain” which when interpreted in an artistic context refers to Helicon, the source and origin of poetry. Earlier Heaney had asserted, “I rhyme . . . to set the darkness echoing” (“Personal Helicon” D N). But now in the darkness he sees a fountain and “all light radiates from it” (“Station Island XI” S I).

Section XII presents the last spirit, that of James Joyce. He is presented as a tall, seemingly blind man with an ash plant, Tiresias and Virgil combined. He comes out with a tirade of “dos” and “don’ts” with an authority of a mentor. Heaney reports:

... ‘Who cares,’
he jeered, ‘any more? The English language belongs to us. You are raking at dead fires,
a waste of time for somebody your age.
That subject people stuff is a cod's game,
Infantile, like your peasant pilgrimage.
The pilgrimage may be foolish. Yet the experience has done him good. It has helped him to resolve the embarrassing questions of his own past. Joyce admonishes, “You’ve listened long enough. Now strike your note.” Joyce’s need not be the last word for Heaney. Even at the beginning, his role is ambiguous, for he gripped the hand of Heaney, “whether to guide or to be guided”, Heaney is not certain. At the end, Heaney does not follow Joyce. A screen of downpour falls like a closing curtain and separates them.

Bringing together the paradigm of a pilgrimage and the Dantesque element of meeting spirits helps the poet to tackle the overwhelming questions while standing at life’s cross-roads. The twelve people that he has chosen out of the many he had known in life, are those who faced similar situations like Heaney had, and made choices in their lives. They provide alternate life styles and help the poet to take a stand. Four of them had opted to go against the tide, not paying heed to approvals from their fellowmen: Simon Sweeney preferred to stay away from religion altogether; Carleton left his Roman Catholic church and ridiculed its superstitious practices; Hughes chose at a very early age to live and die for the national cause which he believed in, preferring even the path of violence and destruction; the Spanish priest, unlike many others of
his position, had made Heaney feel that "there was nothing to confess." The Irish Catholic religion was well-known for its repressive nature and for looking down upon all that was secular. Yet he prescribed a penance which was to read poems as prayers and translate something written by Juan de la Cruz. There is one who followed the call of tradition but appears to be disillusioned at his choice: Keenan was secular in his preference and yet he espoused the church and became a missionary. Now he regrets that he was "young and unaware" when he took the decision.

Five of the twelve people whose spirits Heaney meets in the Station Island chose to keep their calling above the warring factions of politics and the conflicting arguments in the literary world. Master Murphy, McLaverty, Kavanagh and Joyce gave priority to their learning and writing, and Delaney to his archaeology. Two of them, Strathearn and McCartney, were pulled into the whirlpool of violence without their volition and became martyrs for the Irish Nationalist cause. Heaney had been moved by their murders but was not provoked enough to act.

It is obvious that Heaney, Aeneas-like, expects the "familiar ghosts" to set right his vision and direct him in his onward way. The dead have always occupied a significant place in Heaney's poems. They had taught him of the buried life of the past. They had shown how death can rejuvenate, sustain and provide continuity. In fact in
a world where death is at the doorstep and the living caution one another, “whatever you say, say nothing”, the dead speak more than the living do. In “Station Island”, the twelve spirits seem to have restored Heaney to a wholesome artistic self. He examines his self, his stance and his choices, and emerges in a way as a continuation of several of them. Later in *The Redress of Poetry* Heaney asserts boldly that the two strains of British and Irish cultures had “emphasized rather than eroded” his identity. He goes on to suggest that the majority of Northern Ireland should make an effort at “twomindedness, and start to conceive of themselves within – rather than beyond – the Irish element” (202).

[2]

Standing at crossroads, and venturing a scrutiny of his commitments and his understanding of what is expected of him, Heaney finds that he is not alone in such a predicament. For centuries, in both the East and the West literary men and others who trusted their originality found themselves in quandary, very often uprooted, forced to take decisions and had to go to great lengths to resolve their questions. By casual references or picking analogies from their works or integrating their words into his own or by careful imitation of the great masters, Heaney acknowledges a continuity with the literary men.
The difficulty of making choices haunts Heaney and he expresses it in the words of Milosz:

*I was stretched between contemplation
of a motionless point
and the command to participate
actively in history.* ("Away from it All" SI)

Czeslaw Milosz is a Polish writer who had resisted the Nazi occupation of Poland, had gone through Warsaw and had "broken from the ranks of Peoples’s Republic after the war and had paid for the principle and pain of all that with a lifetime of exile and self-scrutiny" (Heaney, *Government* 38). The lines quoted above are from an essay entitled "Marxism" in which Milosz reviews an article written about him by a communist critic who accuses him of "wanting to keep his hands clean." The dichotomy that is seen in Milosz is evident in Heaney. Placed in the first part of *Station Island* the poem shows the guilt accrued by the comments of politically zealous critics. "Contemplation of a motionless point" describes an aesthetic stasis and permanence which Heaney is not ready to choose. In fact in his "A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on the Irish Literary Revival" he blames Yeats and even Synge for being so. Neither is he ready to choose the other pole. The line that follows the quotation shows Heaney’s reaction: "Actively? What do you mean?" Active participation would only be perpetuating revenge and making the land more foul with blood.
In an interview to Randy Brandes, Heaney says that he finds Milosz’s "authority irresistible because there is the weight of personal hurt and loss, and the weightlessness of impersonal despair for the humanist venture." There is also the parallel of Milosz being a Catholic, for he says that Ireland still has a religious unconscious which is there in the poetry of the Poles. Though divided by space, and set in different political atmospheres, Heaney finds in Milosz enough that echoes his outlook: "I find in the Polish Poetry, sub-cultural recognitions in myself which are never called up or extended by English poetry" (10).

The figure of Juan de la Cruz or St. John of the Cross is focused in Section XI of "Station Island" by the Spanish priest who does not succumb to the repressive Irish Catholic patterns. St. John of the Cross, never deviated from his chosen path even when he was isolated and tortured by a dissenting group of his own order. He developed a concept of life as a spiritual journey in which suffering, the long night of the soul, brings forth the song of a joyous Christian. Gerald Brenan in his studies of St. John of the Cross comments that it was the final point of "that historic movement of love for the absent, amor de lonh, which had inspired the Provençal poets and through them Dante and Petrarch" (qtd. in Molino 163). Though St. John of the Cross seems to be one who has chosen "contemplation of a motionless point", the Spanish monk whose words purged the guilt of Heaney is more balanced.
In the third section of *Station Island* “Sweeney Redivivus”, Heaney presents a laudatory poem entitled “An Artist”. This artist is supposed to be Paul Cézanne, a late nineteenth century French painter who excelled in landscapes and still lifes. “He developed a highly original style which has had profound influence on later artists. The main characteristics of his paintings are his use of vivid colour, . . . and an attempt to unite the best elements of impressionism with the art of the past” (“Cézanne”). Heaney lists all that he loves in this artist and the final praiseworthy quality in the artist is “The way his fortitude held and hardened / because he did what he knew” (“An Artist” *SI*). Heaney’s admiration at this juncture is at an artist who blended the best of the past and the modern, and who knew what he was doing. Heaney engaged in a similar vocation of blending the past and the modern, expresses a desire to be like Cézanne who was sure of his choice.

The idea of renouncing tradition and falling back on one’s own self is introduced in the section where Heaney meets Terry Keenan, the missionary to the rain forest. There in the “long houses”, Keenan had tried to proclaim the famous words of Constantine the Great but there had not been much of renunciation in him and no victory. Constantine the great Roman emperor of fourth century was marching towards Rome to meet his rival Maxentius when he saw a vision in the sky, of a flaming cross and the words *In hoc signo vinces* meaning “By this sign, conquer.” Constantine placed the sign
of the cross on the shields of his soldiers, confronted his enemy and
won a great victory. Thus he became the first Christian Roman
Emperor and his change marked a great change in the kingdom
because he became a champion of Christianity. The practice of going
on pilgrimages was started by him and his mother St. Helena.
Emperor Constantine and Terry Keenan stand in contrast. While the
emperor depended on a personal experience and won, Keenan tried
to act on another’s experience or the “convention” of the church.
Later in the poem Heaney is reminded by Joyce, “It’s time to swim
out on your own” and people who have dared to take untrodden ways
seem to flood the mind of the poet.

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is brought to mind by the Midas story
referred to in Section VI of “Station Island.” King Midas was
punished with ass’ ears by Apollo at a musical contest. Midas tried
to hide his punishment but a servant saw them and was sworn to
secrecy. But the servant, not able to control, whispered the story to
a hole by the river and covered it. Unfortunately the reeds that grew
on the spot whispered the secret when the wind blew. In the context
of Heaney’s poem, the lines, “whispers on like reeds about Midas’s /
Secrets, Secrets. I shut my ears to the bell. / Head hugged. Eyes
shut. Leaf ears. Don’t tell. Don’t tell”, and a line from Horace’s ode
in the same section, “Till Phoebus returning routs the morning star”
refer to the repressed feelings which are not approved of by the
Church. In the sixth section where these references are found, the
poet remembers his first love and the guilt he had over the sexual attraction. Hence the references to Ovid and Horace show “an attitude to life that runs contrary both to the ascetic attitude dictated by a religious pilgrimage and to the sublimation of sexual instincts” (Molino 158).

Anton Chekhov and Dante are two writers who undertake a journey to find inner freedom. While Dante uses the artistic space Chekhov literally went on journey to Sakhalin, a penal colony and Heaney reports of it in “Chekhov on Sakhalin”, a poem in the first part of Station Island. In 1890, at the height of artistic and social success, Chekhov announced his intention to visit the island of Sakhalin, off the Pacific coast of Russia. It was then a place where criminals and political agitators were banished and Chekhov considered it to be “a place of intolerable suffering.” On the eve of his departure, his friends presented him with a bottle of cognac which he did not use during his long and difficult journey. But on the first night at Sakhalin he drank the cognac and smashed the glass against the rocks which echoed “the convicts’ chains” and it haunted him all through his life. Heaney writes,

... In the months to come

It rang on like the burden of his freedom

..............

He who thought to squeeze

His slave’s blood out and waken the freeman
Shadowed a convict guide through Sakhalin.

("Chekhov on Sakhalin" SI).

There were several reasons for Chekhov undertaking this journey. He had identified himself with his serf grandfather and he declared after the trip to Sakhalin that he had laid to rest his oppressed shadow-self and is a free man. Heaney believes, “The Sakhalin journey would be a half-conscious ritual of exorcism of the slave’s blood in him and an actual encompassing of psychic and artistic freedom” (Government xvii). To Chekhov, encountering the suffering provided him with “the reality of experience.” It is a lesson that Heaney also learns, that an artist must confront suffering and not be evasive about it.

The structure of Station Island is modelled on Dante’s Divine Comedy. Heaney had been making use of Dante in his previous collections, yet when he thought of dramatising the strains of scrutiny, it was Dante who showed him the way. Heaney could identify with Dante as a person. Dante’s medieval Florence was in no better condition than the poet’s strife-ridden Ulster. The Guelphs and Ghibellines, the two warring families, were for ever fighting and Dante was exiled when he was still young and eager for fame and honour. He was cut off forever from his family and friends and from his native city to which he was passionately devoted. And all this was because “he favoured the white party although nominally a
Guelph” (Kuhns xiii). In an interview in Rome, Heaney elaborated on how the reading of Dante strengthened his cultural identity as a Roman Catholic. Carla De Petris quotes Heaney’s words in the essay, “Heaney and Dante”:

The way in which Dante could place himself in a historical world yet submit the world to scrutiny from a perspective beyond history, the way he could accommodate political and the transcendent, this too encouraged my attempt at a sequence of poems [Station Island] which could explore the typical strains which the consciousness labours under in this country.

(Garratt 161 – 62)

Though the tripartite structure is the same in both Divine Comedy and Station Island, the parallelism is stronger between the middle section of Station Island and “Purgatory.”

Station Island’s first part is a collection of personal poems and is not about a journey and yet even the first poem “The Underground” reminds one of the journey taken by Dante into the chasm of Hell. The poem describes Heaney and his wife in a London subway station near the Albert Hall:

There we were in the vaulted tunnel running,
You in your going-away coat speeding ahead
And me, me then like a fleet god gaining
Upon you before you turned to reed

..................

... and now

I come as Hansel came on the moonlit stones

Retracing the path back, lifting the buttons

To end up in a draughty lamplit station

After the trains have gone, the wet track

Bared and tensed as I am, all attention

For your step following and damned if I look back. (SI)

The place of action resembles the infernal regions of Hell. The title “The Underground” itself is suggestive of that. The “vaulted tunnel” brings to mind Wilfred Owen’s “profound dull tunnel” of “Strange Meeting” which the speaker soon finds to be hell. By the subtle reference in the last line to Orpheus, who in hell looked back and lost his wife Eurydice, once again hell is focused. The punishments that the people endured in Dante’s hell have a strange correspondence to their sins on earth. They are caught by what they had sought for in life. For instance, the murderers and tyrants are plunged into rivers of blood and the schismatics are cloven asunder. In the poem “The Underground” there is a similarity. The poet runs after his wife, fearing that she may be metamorphosed and later she comes after him and he is afraid to look back. The reference to Hansel brings the disturbing memory of the fairy tale with the witch and the threat to be roasted alive. The prevailing mood of the poem
is one of stress and loss of hope. Like Hansel, Heaney comes back picking up the buttons that had been shed earlier, but he finds no home at the end as Hansel found. He ends up in a “draughty” station which is empty and feels “bared and tensed.” This echoes the words written on the gate of Dante's hell: “All hope abandon ye who enter here” (Inf.3.9). Even the action of “retracing the path back” in the tunnel reminds Dante's journey through hell which is indeed a journey through the past and forsees Heaney's which is reported in the next section. The first poem of the book thus gives the picture of twentieth century version of hell which is analogous to Dante's.

Dante's “Inferno” is full of colourful pictures strikingly and shockingly drawn, emanating horror, hate and torment. In comparison, the first part of Station Island is less startling but there too are found descriptions that evoke similar feelings. “Sandstone Keepsake” has even a direct reference to Hell’s river of boiling blood, Phlegethon, about which Dante says, “whose crimsoned wave yet lifts / My hair, with horror” (Inf. 14.74–75). Heaney has in his hand a “chalky russet stone” and when the search light of the internment camp falls on it he sees it differently:

A stone from Phlegethon,
bloodied on the bed of hell’s hot river?
Evening frost and the salt water
made my hand smoke, as if I’d plucked the heart
that damned Guy de Montfort to the boiling flood –

("Sandstone Keepsake" SI)

Heaney is aware of the watch tower across the Lough Foyle and feels the prying eyes of those with the “trained binoculars.” He accepts painfully their dismissal of him as “a silhouette not worth bothering about, / out for the evening in scarf and waders / and not about to set times wrong or right,” (“Sandstone Keepsake” SI). The estuary and the internment camp at Magilligan brings to mind the city of Dis in Dante’s Hell: Across the putrid waters of the Stygian marsh two lights flash from the top of a tower at Dante and Virgil. The city of Dis is shaped like a medieval fortress and the towers gleam blood red. High up on the summit of the towers the furies stand stained with blood and girdled with writhing serpents.

The feelings of hopelessness, torment and bitterness which are seen in all its vehemence in the infernal circles of Dante, are seen in Heaney’s Station Island poems too in a subdued way. In “Migration”, Brigid, her mother and sisters, a migrant family, miss the bus at Wicklow, their last connection. The young ones are “scared and cross” the mother is “at a loss” and “in desperation”, and they “start out for the suburbs”, “into the small hours.” When they finally sit and switch on the cassette player they find “the battery’s gone.” In some poems the feelings are objectified. The “Sloe gin” “had a cutting edge / and flamed / like Betelgeuse” (“Sloe Gin” SI).
The granite chip that the poet took from Joyce's Martello Tower was jaggy, salty, punitive and exacting. *Come to me* it says *all you who labour and are burdened, I will not refresh you.* ("Shelf Life 1" *SI*)

It had hurt his hand like a "stone age circumcising knife." The old smoothing iron was hot with "stored danger" and moved into the linen like "the resentment of women" ("Shelf Life 2" *SI*). The lobster that was picked up from the cobbled floor of the tank by a cold steel fork was in the "colour of sunk munitions" and was "fortified and bewildered." ("Away from it All" *SI*). In "Kite for Michael and Christopher" the poet-father urges the boys to take the line and feel the pull of it and he calls it "long-tailed pull of grief" (*SI*).

The next section, "Station Island", is obviously Dantesque and some of Heaney's critics see the first part and the third, as merely a frame to the centre-piece. But the first part has enough poems to show that there is a crisis in the nature of the calling of the poet and this indeed is hell. A pilgrimage might resolve the questions that throng. In "A Snowshoe" Heaney writes how once he sat writing "eager and absorbed and capable / under the sign of a snowshoe on the wall" and "Now I sit blank as gradual morning brightens / its distancing, inviolate expanse" ("Shelf Life 6" *SI*). "Making Strange" pictures the dilemma of the poet standing between one with "travelled intelligence" and another, "unshorn and bewildered."
Then is heard “a cunning middle voice” from across the road urging to “Be adept and be dialect” and to “Go beyond what’s reliable” (*SI*). Reviving the music through what has been, and is dead now, is illustrated in a short eight line poem called “Widgeon”. The bird had been “badly shot” and when plucking it, its voice box was found in the broken wind pipe. Blowing upon it, he produced “his own small widgeon cries” (*SI*). The last poem in the first part of *Station Island* is “The King of the Ditchbacks” who is the mad Sweeney, the alter-ego of the poet. There in that prose-poem the poet says, “I went back towards the gate to follow him. And my stealth was second nature to me, as if I were coming into my own. I remembered I had been vested for this calling” (*II*). Heaney’s travel into the past as part of the individuation process and his struggle to keep himself to his calling is reflected in these lines. The closing lines of the poem give the picture of “a rich young man / leaving everything he had / for a migrant solitude” (*III*) suggesting the pilgrimage which follows.

Heaney’s coming to terms with himself is also done in a Dantesque fashion and the paradigm is that of a pilgrimage. Stephen Wade comments that the “Introspective exploration” that takes place in “Station island”, the second section, is similar to that of Dante for “Dante too, had lived in a most dangerous age, most complicated, most ruffianly and Dante . . . was a member of the ‘fourth estate’” (qtd. in Wade 62). According to Pietro Alighieri, one of the earlier commentators of *Divine Comedy*, the pilgrimage is “to
free men of their sins to direct them towards the purgation of their souls and to strengthen them in holiness and virtue” (qtd. in Kuhns xxii). Oscar Kuhns, a later scholar of Dante, is of the opinion that apart from the religious and the politico-historical meaning, there is a personal allegory as well: “Dante himself is the chief actor ... we are told that it is necessary for Dante to make this journey in order to gain full experience of God's purpose and to reach that liberty which is more precious than life itself” (xxii–xxiii). When Cato questions Virgil about Dante, Virgil informs, “... In the search / Of liberty he journeys ...” (Purg. 1.70–71). Like Dante, Heaney also has been in search of liberty and is counselled by his mentor James Joyce to “fill the element / with signatures on your own frequency” (“Station Island XII” SI). The similarities between Dante and Heaney in this section have been widely dealt with by critics and commentators.

“Sweeney Redivivus”, the third part of Station Island has a few similarities with Dante’s “Paradise”, the third part of Divine Comedy. In both the works, the movement is that of flight. In Paradise, Dante soars up in the air with Beatrice by his side. She explains that purged of sin, man can fly towards God. The spirits in Jupiter fly like birds singing the glory of God. In “Sweeney Redivivus”, the poems “are voiced for Sweeney” the bird-man, as the poet himself, explains in the notes (123) and hence the upward movement, perching on heights and looking down below seem to be
the recurrent actions. In "The First Flight" the poetic persona boast, "so I mastered new rungs of the air / to survey out of reach / their bonfires on hills," (SI). "In the Beech" describes how the birdman sits up on the beech tree and watches the landscape and he says, "And the pilot with his goggles back came in / so low I could see the cockpit rivets." (SI) It is the feel of the heights and unpinioned flight, suggestive of freedom, that resonates in both the works of Dante and Heaney.

Dante had been full of questions about God, man and other theological concepts. As he travels from planet to planet in Paradise, Beatrice explains to him some of these, and his conversations with philosophers and theologians clear his mind of doubts, over which he had brooded long. The mystery of Trinity which he could not comprehend is solved by a sudden flash in his mind. Dante is granted a vision of God and his journey ends. The closing lines of this great poem show that the poet is at peace because his will is in harmony with that of God. Heaney's Station Island does not have such a happy ending. The vision he sees is of no celestial glory but that of "a drinking deer," "cut into rock" with its nostril flared because there is no water to drink. The poet meditates till the stone-faced vigil is broken and the deer moves away to find water elsewhere. There is hope because the deer has decided to "break cover" and so has the poet because he seeks new directions rather than sticking on to what is expected of him, which is unyielding and hard as the rock.
Interviewing Heaney, Frank Kinahan comments that Heaney's poems could be fairly described as a “series of recoveries, with things long buried . . . bringing the past back into the present.” Agreeing to the description, Heaney reminds Eliot's notion that “poetic sensibility unites the most ancient and the most civilized mentality” (413). True to this dictum, Heaney seeks to bring to the present not only the personal and communal past but a literary past, both Irish and non-Irish. This attitude to transcend the limits of his own language and literature, is indicative of his future course, not a definite blue-print but one that is directive of what is to come.

Heaney picks analogies and metaphors from the pre-literary past of fairy tales and myths. The references to Hansel and Gretel, Orpheus, Lot's wife, Niamh, the cornfield of Boaz, and the young man who came to Jesus wanting to know what he should do to be saved would appear casual and insignificant but they all have something in common with the poet's lot. They point to the risks and the benefits involved in taking a new course of action. The backward look of both Orpheus and Lot's wife was indeed costly because in different ways they lost what they desired most. Niamh, the daughter of the king of the Land of Youth had tried in vain to keep Oisin with her. Archetypally, she would be the Great Mother who obliterates ego and does not allow to individuate. The cornfield of Boaz in the Bible is symbolic of the promise of love and fertility to
Ruth, the one who left her past and courageously faced the unknown future. The young man of the Bible is one who is challenged to leave his inheritance and take a new course. The artistic sensibility of the poet is fortified at the crucial point in his career by such similar experiences found in different literatures, and he establishes continuity.

Station Island is called "my book of changes" ("On the Road" SI) by Heaney himself and the book in the course of its three parts shows varied transformations. Heaney being the protagonist, a change in him also is perceived. In psychological terms, the change is the "becoming whole" of the artistic self and in the archetypal parallel it is the reunion of the self with the unconscious in a new identity before which there is the struggle with the dragon or descent into the underworld. The second part of this volume, "Station Island" shows the struggle or the final stage of the descent but this is poeticised using a religious metaphor of pilgrimage.

"Pilgrimage", a word derived from Latin "Peregrinatio", "in the sense of a journey undertaken to some sacred place as an act of devotion or expiation or to seek supernatural aid, has played a part in most of the great religious systems" ("Pilgrimage").

It accords with the great myth of the celestial origin of man, of his 'fall' and his hope of being restored to the
celestial realm, ... Man leaves and returns to the place of origin ... The idea is cognate, with that of the labyrinth. You understand the nature of it and move towards the mastery of it as a means to the centre. (Cirlot 255)

The pilgrim goes through several experiences of clearing the alluvial mud and reaches the primeval source of selfhood—in religious terms God—and having been reinstated to his original position or having found his true identity, enjoys true freedom.

The paradigm of pilgrimage is not new to English literature. In *The Pilgrim Progress*, the great allegorical novel of John Bunyan, certain obligatory features of a pilgrimage are clearly marked. It is to be remembered that Bunyan himself was in prison when he wrote the novel and had to endure the pain inflicted by his own people because he was firm in his religious belief. Christian, the pilgrim, begins his pilgrimage from City of Destruction when he feels the weight of sin on his back. Sin is separation from God or the Creative Source, the Divine centre. “The City of Destruction from which the Pilgrim fled does not stand for an actual town but for a state of mind, a disposition of will, a way of life” (Griffith 12). A chance self-examination leads to repentance and confession and at the cross, his burden was “loosed off from his shoulders” and he is reconciled to God. Freed from sin, Christian
walks free and joyous. No more is his progress an aimless wandering in the labyrinth. He does not perform any penance but he goes through the Valley of Humiliation, the fight with Apollyon, the alluring Vanity Fair, the nightmarish encounter with Giant Despair of the Doubting castle and with divine help, progresses towards the Celestial City. The whole life is seen as a pilgrimage and when Christian crosses the river to reach his destination, his life on earth ceases though he is told that he would continue to serve the king. The common aspects of pilgrimage like the realisation of the separation from the Primary Source, the process of expiation and the joyous restoration and the resultant freedom are the same in Heaney's pilgrimage too but Heaney chooses to follow the Roman Catholic version of pilgrimage rather than a Protestant one and uses as his model, Dante's *Divine Comedy* especially "Purgatorio."

Heaney has always identified himself as a Catholic writer. In an interview with Frank Kinahan, when asked why he described himself as a Catholic writer with C in upper case, he replied, "the specifically Irish Catholic blueprint that was laid down when I was growing up has been laid there for ever" (408). Carla De Petris quotes Heaney:

"In Ireland we grew up as rural Catholics with little shrines at the cross roads, but deep down we realised that the whole official culture had no place for them. Then I read Dante and I found in a great work of world
literature that little shrine in a corner had this cosmic amplification. (Garratt 161)

The Purgatory is more meaningful to a Catholic because it is part of his religious faith while a Protestant does not see the necessity of going through this intermediary of space or time.

The essential stages of pilgrimage like self-examination, repentance and confession which leads to reconciliation are symbolically presented in Dante's "Purgatory." As Virgil and Dante enter the purgatorial terraces from Ante-purgatory, they pass through a doorway, the lowest stair of which is of marble, well-polished and smooth, that Dante says, "therein my mirrored form / Distinct I saw" (Purg. 9.87–88). This symbolises self-examination. The next stair is of a "hue more dark/ Than sablest grain, a rough and singed block, / Crack'd lengthwise and across"(9. 88–90) and this represents contrition. The third stair "seemed porphyry" and the blood-red stone shows love towards God. The "portal" symbolises the sacrament of confession.

Heaney's Purgatory is located in a rocky island on Lough Derg in County Donegal. The Station Island is also called St. Patrick's Purgatory and is visited by nearly 30,000 people every year. It is believed that St.Patrick, the great saint of Ireland "saw here a vision, which promised all who should visit the sanctuary in penitance and faith, a plenary indulgence for their sins." ("St.
Patrick's Purgatory). According to Darcy O'Brien, "A strong tradition in the Irish church holds that Patrick himself established the forms of penance required of pilgrims to the Island, including a three days' fast, an all-night vigil, barefoot walking on stones, and the continuous repetitions of vocal prayers"(53). In the notes Heaney explains, "Each unit of the contemporary pilgrim's exercise is called a "station" and a large part of each station involves walking barefoot and praying round the 'beds', stone circles which are said to be the remains of early medieval monastic cells"(122). "Going to the island is called going to the station and once on the island, the pilgrim prays nine stations" in each "a set pattern of 280 prayers" (Hawlin 37). This island which has been a centre of pilgrimage since twelfth century had been visited by Heaney thrice in his younger days. Once again he takes up the journey in a metaphorical way joining the other Irish writers like Denis Devlin, Sean O' Faolain, Patrick Kavanagh, William Carleton and W. B. Yeats who have dealt with the effects of Station Island on the pilgrims, though with diverse attitudes.

In the course of the three-day penitential devotion, the pilgrim goes through a pattern of self-examination, repentance, confession, reconciliation and comes out with renewed faith and rededication. Though the poem is concerned more with the poet's vocation rather than with his spiritual renewal, it faithfully follows the religious pattern. There is a recollection and recrimination as a part of self-
examination in the sections one to nine. Heaney’s conversation with Sweeney, Carleton, Keenan, Murphy, McLawerty, Kavanagh, Strathearn, Delaney, McCartney and Hughes help him out to examine his religious, literary, political and social commitments. The latter part of Section IX shows repentance and confession. It was the second night of fasting after the all-night vigil and Heaney finds a place to rest, though quite uncomfortable, in the hostel dormitory. Hallucinations crowd the night and he says he “Cried among night waters” ("Station Island" SI). Reconciliation is seen more as a restoration in section X. Heaney’s reminiscence of the mug on the high shelf which assumed a new glamour, and the reference to the restoration of Ronan’s Psalter connote conciliation. The penance of translating the song of St. John of the Cross makes the restoration complete with a recovery of faith found in section XI. Coming back to the world after the pilgrimage, Heaney meets the spirit of James Joyce. Though this seems to be confusing and not analogous to the devotional pattern, his could be the voice outside the pilgrimage, the good suggestions from an erstwhile mentor. This serves to test the spiritual resolve of the pilgrim.

The pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s Purgatory had indeed given Heaney a sense of freedom but it has to be looked into whether the digging into the memory of the bygone days and the metaphorical meeting of the spirits had helped him to resolve his dilemma. In an interview with June Beisch published in the Literary Review of 1986, Heaney explains that
Sweeney's story was one about "displacement." "Sweeney was a Northerner and I had a little bit of identification going on there. . . . well, he's a mask for some aspects of myself" (165). The story of Sweeney is from *Buile Suibhne*, a seventeenth century Irish manuscript which is thought to have taken shape as early as seventh century A. D. "Sweeney is a tribal king cursed by priest Ronan for dishonouring him. The curse transforms Sweeney into a maddened bird-man condemned to fly over Ireland and Western Scotland in an unresting, outcast condition, cut off from family, friends and tribe" (Corcoran, *After* 20). Heaney calls him "Wood-lover and tree-hugger, a picker of herbs and drinker from wells. (*Preoccupations* 186).

The "little bit of identification" that Heaney finds with Sweeney is because Sweeney sang beautifully and his lyric expressions are poignant. He thwarted all attempts to be persuaded back, and celebrated in song the Irish Landscape, especially the trees. Quoting one of those in his *Preoccupations*, Heaney comments, "This is Sweeney's praise of the trees themselves, another paean to nature's abundance, another thanksgiving, another testimony to the nimbus of the woods in the Celtic imagination" (187). As a poet Heaney feels closer to the mysteries of the grove than to the monastic tradition. In his introduction to the translation of *Buile Suibhne*, Heaney writes,

> ... in so far as Sweeney is also a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance, it
is possible to read the work as an aspect of the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political and domestic obligation.

Talking about the duality reflected in his work, Heaney asserts thus in an interview:

... that is just the natural consequence of my particular experience in Northern Ireland. As a member of the minority, solidarity was expected: and yet you were not just behaving in accordance with expectations, you were behaving naturally along ingrained emotional grain lines. There is actually a phrase in one of those "Sweeney Redivivus" poems about being 'split open down the lines of the grain' and the image of the private consciousness growing like growth ring in the tree of community is true to what people experience in Northern Ireland. But there is a second command besides the command to solidarity—and this is to individuate yourself to become self-conscious, to liberate the consciousness from the collective pieties. (Brandes 8)

Looking at the text of "Sweeney Redivivus" poems, it appears that he chooses to individuate, to wing above the never-ending conflicts and Sweeney-like, not to be persuaded back from the newly-found freedom. The last section of "Station Island" describes James Joyce as walking straight, with 'his eyes fixed straight' and
finally when he moved off, the downpour screened his "straight walk". The poem ends with no obvious action of the poet but the freedom is seen in the first poem, of the third part, "Sweeney Redivivus," meaning "Sweeney Reborn":

Take hold of the shaft of the pen.
Subscribe to the first step taken
from a justified line
into the margin. ("The First Gloss" SI)

The poet sought the help of a master in the poem "The Master." The master dwelt "like a rook in an unroofed tower" and the poet had to climb up the deserted ramparts to "get close" to him. But when he reaches his "coign of seclusion", he found that his book had "nothing / arcane, just the old rules / we all had inscribed on our slates." He climbed down the "unrailed stairs on the wall" feeling "flimsy" and rather disappointed (SI). It looks that to individuate he cannot have any external help and the poet has to learn to trust his innerself.

The last poem in the section, "On the Road" shows that he is not concerned about arrivals and not sure where he is going next, but he is on his own. The figure of the rich young man who came to Christ asking "Master, what must I do to be saved?" is projected in the poem. In the Biblical narrative, it is told that to him Jesus replied that he should keep the commandments. The young man said
that he had kept them all from his youth and then Jesus told, “Go, sell all you have and give to the poor” and then “Come, follow me.” This command of Jesus as well as the question asked by the young man is quoted in the poem. To the man who has followed all “old rules” a new command is given to sell all he has, in other words, “cast off all that you have been dependent on” and venture forth. To Heaney, who had been disappointed with the master in the high tower a voice speaks, “Sell all you have”, “And follow me.” We are not told where the voice comes from. It may be his own inner voice in which he is learning to trust. He has always believed that poetry has an artesian quality: “I shall cling to my first position that a poem is a gift and that it stirs unexpectedly and cannot be summoned by the will and that it has an individual genetic life of its own, almost” (Beisch 165).

The poem shows a driver entranced in his driving:

The road ahead
Kept reeling in
at a steady speed,
the verges dripped,
..............
The trance of driving
made all roads one:

(“On the Road” SI)
The steering wheel was in his hands like a "wrested trophy." This gives the picture of the poet concerned about and enjoying his art rather than wondering where to go.

In Gestalt therapy, if a person is stuck with a problem, the "impasse resolution is usually carried out using the gestalt technique known as 'two-chair work'. The client imagines the conflicting parts of himself in different chairs, 'becomes' each part in turn, and carries on a dialogue with the object of resolving the conflict" (Stewart and Joines 275). Heaney does the same thing in "Station Island." He puts words into the mouths of those who advise him, admonish him or even affront him and thus goes through the rituals of self-examination, repentance, confession and offering penance. The pilgrimage metaphorically removes his burden of guilt, settles his doubts, resolves his questions and builds up his morale, or to use the vocabulary of the pilgrim, his faith. Having successfully completed the journey, the poet reaffirms his identity as a poet placed between "the demesne" and "the bog" as he sees himself.

Carolyn Meyer, in her article in Agenda writes that through the pilgrim-persona of "Station Island" Heaney dramatises his struggle "as a poet, to achieve and assert his independent voice and artistic integrity' (56). She quotes Alasdair Macrae who says that Station Island, "embodies Heaney's determination" in the middle of
his life "to sift through the emotional and spiritual and artistic accretions to ascertain what should be jettisoned." As Heaney finds a new voice, the "vertical quest downwards and inwards which assumes vital importance in Heaney's previous work... gives way in part to a countervailing movement upwards and outwards" (56-57).

The argument of this chapter is that Heaney's sixth volume of poetry Station Island is a turning point in the sense that it shows the end of one way of perception and the beginning of another. In the process of one's growth and maturation in one's vocation, one faces a crisis and it leads to a stock-taking and a change in the existing mode of action. Heaney as a poet has been finding sustenance in the past and his poems especially in the first five volumes show retreat into the buried past. In the sixth, he sorts through cultural and literary heritage in the form of a journey, a pilgrimage taken to a site of purification where the sediments of the past can be examined and resolved. The journey brings the pilgrim in contact with the dead whose lives had crossed his and left an imprint. The journey also ties the poet with the literary men of different lands and times.

The change in his poetic consciousness would be observable in the following books of Heaney but it is foreseen in the latter part of Station Island itself. Even a quick look at the titles of the poems in Part III
reveals a beginning. The third part itself is named “Sweeney Redivivus” meaning “Sweeney reborn” or “Sweeney revived” and Sweeney is the alter-ego of the poet. Three poems appear to be about a first event or action: “The First gloss”, “The First Kingdom” and “The First Flight”, “Unwinding”, “Altered”, “A Waking Dream” and “Sweeney Redivivus” show a movement from one existence to another. “In Beech” and “In the Chestnut Tree” are suggestive of perching on heights in contrast to tunneling underground. The last poem, “On the Road” presents the poet moving on to new pastures.