

'The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there.' In the light of this quotation, explore how William Wordsworth and Seamus Heaney's poetry have represented interactions between the past and the present.

Seamus Heaney, once dubbed by fellow poet Robert Lowell as 'the best Irish poet since W. B. Yeats', created a powerful and precise poetic canon that clutched at nature, tradition, the self, and traumatic global events.¹ By exploring these themes through alternative language forms and metaphors, Heaney landed his poetry within the contemporary moment whilst proudly revealing his agricultural upbringing and Irish ancestry. The relationship he shares between the past and present circulates within his work; past memories and events seem cyclical in nature, often resurrecting previous literary works, with other intertextual allusions to other poets. These characteristics are most dominant within his last collection *District and Circle* published in 2006. Similar to his 2001 collection *Electric Light*, *District and Circle* once again addressed the millennial terrorist atrocities that occurred on a local and international scale.² The collection haunts the past and present, in terms of his personal history and literary histories, and explores the possibilities of freedom by reshaping language. By intertextualising Romantic poets, he exposed an influence of the 'Individual' and the 'Self' that eighteenth century writers such as Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth developed.

By blurring the lines between poetry and prose amongst creatively crafted metaphors, Heaney allowed his poems to translate chosen themes across to the reader, with added intertextual presence revealing an influence from past Romantic writers such as Wordsworth.³ Despite two hundred years separating these two writers apart, they demonstrated a similar dedication to capture the contemporary moment and contribute a new perspective. Heaney displays an informed critical reading of Romantic poetry, rather than an avid focus. In this essay, comparisons will be drawn between the different representations of temporality each poet presents, and an examination of how Heaney's poems reflect the present moment, inflected with his historical, emotional and literary past in contrast to Wordsworth's works.

The Northern Irish 'troubles' that escalated after the renewal of sectarian and political conflict in the late 1960's blighted the national identity and cast a clear impression on Irish

¹ Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy, eds, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th edn, (London: W. W. Norton, 2005), p.2099.

² Seamus Heaney, *Electric Light*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

³ Michael Parker, 'Fallout from the thunder: Poetry and Politics in Seamus Heaney's *District and Circle*' in *Irish Studies Review*, 16.4, (November, 2008), 369–384, (p. 269) in *Taylor & Francis Online* <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09670880802481213>> [accessed 10th March 2014].