

## **Radical Homelessness of Humanity in Derek Mahon's Selected Poems**

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### **Abstract**

The notion of radical homelessness developed by Derek Mahon (1941-2020) is examined as one of the fundamental aspects of the human experience when individuals are troubled by the sense of displacement and existential despondency. The subject of radical homelessness, as discussed by Mahon, is not the only instance of exploring the issue; it is also a journey into the existential desire and alienation that is built into the experience of a human being. This paper espouses a transnational understanding that is the result of a feeling of displacement on the part of humanity. It is an extreme feeling of homelessness which may cause the person to ignore boundaries and acclimatize himself to a different place which is not his own country. It is the application of these theories of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) which are used to discuss what Mahon demonstrates. Their spatial ideas and spatial relations, especially the interaction of the inner and outer space give, a reinterpretation of the meaning of home. The idea of spatiality or transnationality represents the dream that man attempts to embrace by his experience of places.

**Keywords:** Mahon, transnationality, homelessness, Bachelard, Heidegger.

### **1. Introduction**

Poems by Derek Mahon often explore themes of place, identity as well as the human condition, and provide an in-depth look at the complications of existence. Through the liminal position, Mahon dared and denied the safety that tribal groups provided in Northern Ireland. His application of liminality, interstitiality, and peripherality makes this radical stand obvious.

Mahon's poetry deals with the temporary character of human life and the timeless quest of feeling of belonging. Whether he presents deserted scenery or explores inner memories, Mahon has managed to achieve the mood of deep homelessness with a chilling precision. There is a deep feeling of miss in the poems and the feeling of separation and loss is also realized. His analysis of the deep homelessness is interwoven with the other themes of the history, culture, and the flow of time. Exploring the common consciousness of communities, Mahon brings out the role of the past in the contemporary experiences of displacement and alienation. In his writing, he makes readers think about the interaction between personal

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and group identity and the enduring influence of human migration and diaspora. He describes the complexity of life and tries to find his consolation in the usual feelings of desire and alienation using powerful language and vivid images.

Mahon's poems create the poetic liberation, as they complicate the stereotypes connected with the identity, going beyond them to other metaphysical levels even beyond human history. Individual selfhood is thus eventually questioning the very concept of belonging. He sees himself as a tourist in his own country as an expatriate, and he expresses the same feeling as the Irish poet Louise MacNeice (1907-1963) (Kennedy-Andrews 99). The poetry of Mahon provides the insights of being a visitor in the own world, which is an issue that cannot be regarded as demeaning, but it is a suitable epitaph of the contemporary person. He is open to the uprootedness as a major part of the modern life and considers it to be a generator of creative possibility.

Having a background of a strict Protestant culture, Mahon has become an uncomfortable detachment to his background. Contrary to his other Northern Catholic fellow poets who can easily identify with the racial landscape, Mahon is an un-belonged Northern Protestant grappling with the idea of community. The latter is an existential outsider, more accustomed to feelings of alienation rather than belonging. Lacking a sense of belonging to any specific community, he is drawn towards an international community of romantic outsiders, bohemians, and the forgotten. An individual of such stance, Mahon grew to be indifferent to national boundaries and conventional social norms. Thus, he challenges the notion of a comforting connection to the past and a cultural identity based on tradition. For Mahon, identity is complex, ever-changing, and not something that can be easily understood. His travels through various countries reflect his self-imposed role as a perpetually alienated outsider (Kennedy-Andrews 2014, 100).

## **2. Review of Related literature**

In order to develop a comprehensive review of the relevant literature from Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard to the 21st century, it is essential to investigate the ways in which their concepts of space, dwelling, memory, and human existence have shaped and interacted with a range of philosophical, literary, and cultural movements. These concepts are outlined in the following outline using different periods in history, philosophers, literary theorists, and thinkers up until the present-day time.

Heidegger's fundamental concept of Dasein (being-there) emphasizes that human beings are inherently situated within a spatial context. The notion of lived space transcends mere abstraction, serving as a vital component of human existence and the process of deriving meaning. Dwelling for Heidegger suggests that individuals do not merely occupy space; rather, they "dwell" within it in a significant manner, fostering a profound relationship between the self and the surrounding world (*Being and Time*, 9).

The idea of dwelling does not simply mean just physical presence but it is a useful and contemplative experience with the environment. This view rejects modern technological modes of spatial interaction whereby the result is usually the loss of real interrelations with our spaces. Moreover, these concepts play a significant role in the modern discourses on architecture, technology, and environmentalism. ("Building, Dwelling and Thinking", 15).

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Bachelard focuses on the emotionality and imaginative side of the space experience. The home is used as the image of memory and imagination, and personal spaces of childhood, such as attics and cellars, are significant in terms of the psychological sense. Space is used as a zone of emotional importance, different rooms and places invoke a feeling of safety, nostalgia, and sense of self. According to Bachelard, the experiential aspect of space is a core aspect of his theory, which implies that people fill the spaces around them with relationships and dreams, and transform the physical spaces into emotional landscapes. (*The Poetics of Space*, 15).

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his masterpiece, *Being and Nothingness* (1943) explores the theme of personal alienation as it is applied in the space and the larger world. The concept of Space and the Other depicts how space becomes the area of struggle of human subjectivity where foreign environment is often viewed as hostile or estranging.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his book, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), has discussed the importance of the embodied experience in the perception of space, and hold the view that the perception of the space is necessarily tied to the body, with the mind being inseparably tied to the spatial context. This emphasis on the body and the sense experience has been immensely influential on the later theories of the experience and interaction with space particularly when it comes to the manner in which one lives.

The phenomenological tradition does not view space as an abstract concept in the Cartesian sense, but views the importance of lived space that involves emotional, relational, and subjective aspects.

Michel Foucault (1967) also proposes the concept of heterotopia that is applied to spaces of otherness that are located outside the usual, organized environment. These spaces such as prisons, hospitals and cemeteries disrupt and challenge the established social order, offering alternative and often disenfranchised ways of being.

The methods of deconstruction used by Jacques Derrida undermine the traditional boundaries of the meaning, and the views on space are also fluid. He criticizes the idea of consonance in concepts, such as those of space, which he believes is fragmented and is not wholly containable or definable. The postmodern writers, including Thomas Pynchon, Jeanette Winterson, and Salman Rushdie, in their works challenge traditional notions of space, and often portray space as piecewise, non-linear and influenced by memory and identity. The activity of such philosophers as Bachelard and Heidegger can be traced in the description of psychological and subjective spaces in the literature.

According to Henri Lefebvre (1974), space is the product of social interactions which is determined by political and economic factors. Instead of a neutral space, space is filled with relations of power and social interactions (30). Doreen Massey (1990s) explores the dynamic characteristics of space with the focus on its constant change under social, political, and economic pressure. Through her writing, *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) she brings out the different experiences of various groups in space especially with respect to gender, classes, and geography (222). The works of Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler are the works of feminist authors who criticize the gender discourse of spaces and suggest the reappropriation of the domestic and personal space as the place of resistance and transformation. According to postcolonial theorists, such as Homi K. Bhabha, colonized people experience spatial dislocation and alienation, navigating through the spaces of hybridity that undermine the colonial boundaries. Third space

as a concept questions the strictness of identity and space, which promotes the concept of displaced and diverse identities.

Internet and virtual worlds change traditional conceptualizations of space in (1990s-2000s). Introduced in the context of the introductions, the notion of cyberspace presents novel views on space as something intangible, virtual, and temporal. Globalized world enables new spatial practices and experience due to movement of people, money and ideas across national boundaries. Themes of displacement, migration and global interconnectedness are the growing topic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century literature explored by thinkers like David Harvey in analyzing the constant transmission of space through capitalism, politics and migration. Authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Haruki Murakami explore the space-identity-memory nexus in the context of a globalized society.

The ever-growing concern with environmental questions has led to the reconsideration of space in relation to ecological sustainability and interactions between man and nature. The authors like Rachel Carson and contemporary philosophers remind the real need to view our lives ecologically and reestablish a relationship with the earth as a place of care and responsibility. The rapid development of artificial intelligence, augmented reality and virtual space keeps questioning traditional conceptualizations of space. Philosophers and analysts explore the ways in which the emerging technologies transform the way we understand spatial boundaries and how we engage with both the physical and digital worlds.

### **3. Mahon's Transnationality: The Poetics of Space**

Mahon was born in Belfast but he was educated in Dublin and kept moving between London and the United States. His writings are more often than not filled with identities and home, both by the Northern Irish conflicts that he had witnessed, but also by the religious and political differences of his native land. In an attempt to seek a sense of belonging, Mahon pushed himself out of his geographical as well as the emotional context. Consequently, his poetry tended to lean towards the existential lyrics, which were written in reaction to the dislocation between subject and object (McConnel 2024, 194). This particular object possesses various facets, encompassing his connection to Ireland, his belief in God, and even his poetry, which he perceived as a futile endeavor to bridge the gaps between individuals and himself, as well as between individuals and society and this means transnational aspect. The sensation of homelessness, not only limited to Ireland but present in any location worldwide, appears to be a prevailing emotion that Mahon could not escape. This sentiment of being disconnected from humanity permeates Mahon's poetry and serves as evidence of his all-encompassing state of exile. However, amidst the overarching themes of disconnection and detachment, some of his poems reveal hidden attempts to discover a place he can truly call home.

Mahon's poetry explores imaginary situations, strange realities, imagined futures, and various landscapes. Such an approach is correlated with the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's as well as the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's idea about space and spatiality and the connection between indoor and outdoor; the idea of the house/mind is an embodiment of dreams for it contains past, present, and future that the individual attempts to depict though his personal experience of place and the radical homelessness of humanity (Bachelard 1994, 81). Mahon's works frequently explore themes of

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displacement, identity, and belonging, which may be understood more broadly as reflecting notions of fluidity concerning nationality and gender. These themes may be related to the concept of transnationality that includes the versatile and mobile character of national identity. This contributes to transnationality of the poetry written by Mahon. Mahon explores the problem of alienation, displacement and the search of self-identity in a changing world. These themes can be used as a metaphor of the experience of trans people who tend to struggle between the image of themselves and the social norms. Another theme in his poetry is the concept of personal change, and the complexity of human experience in the context of history or political systems, the same which can be linked with the fluidity of identity, including national identity. Besides, a post-colonial approach can be often traced in the works by Mahon, who addresses the legacies of the Irish history and the complexity of the national identity. This focus on belonging and identity could open up a broader prism that will allow to perceive transnationality as a moving concept that does not confine to the rigid conceptualizations of place or belonging. In the Last of the Fire Kings, a poem in *Collected Poems* (2000) the speaker explores the different identities and travels across different landscapes. By seeking liberation from societal norms, he draws inspiration from the American West myth as well as the imagery of the railroad-riding hobo:

I want to be  
Like the man who descends  
At two milk churns  
...  
and vanishes  
Where the lane turns,  
Or the man  
Who drops at night. (*Mahon* 2011, 63)

From a moving train' and "strikes out over the fields" into the unfamiliar, "not knowing a word of the language" (63), an individual embarks on a journey, completely relying on his language skills. Mahon's imagery is rooted in the historical context of American frontierism, The Frontier Thesis, alternatively referred to as Turner's Thesis or American frontierism, put forth by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 posits that the settlement and colonization of the challenging American frontier played a crucial role in shaping the culture of American democracy and setting it apart from European countries, and its diverse cultural manifestations. This is evident in works such as Walt Whitman's (1819-1892) "Song of the Open Road", Mark Twain's (1835-1910) *Roughing It*, John Steinbeck's (1902-1968), *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Jack Kerouac's (1922-1968) *On the Road*. These works indicate the distinctively American obsession with the movement, mobility, the discovery of boundaries. Such works involve a tedious search of personal or group identity, resistance or avoidance of the existing cultural norms. Mahon accepts the concept of being disengaged and isolated and considers it an opportunity to escape his past and present reality. He aims at role-playing a character, which is enigmatic, indefinable, living on the margins without definable origins or ambitions. In the third stanza of *The Last of the Fire Kings*, the use of Or brings out his ability to choose an identity instead of being one that is determined by others. To delve into several of the symbolic roles of an American hobo, the ruler of a pagan people, a

follower of the aesthetics of Yeats, or a social realist Mahon is rather inquisitive and uncertain about the concept of identity. In the case of Mahon, identity is manifold, changing and enigmatic that is difficult to conceive. Mahon does not necessarily deal directly with transgender or transnational issues but the general themes of self-exploration and the variety of human experience offer the possibilities of exploring transgender issues and transnational issues in his work.

This is illustrated in Mahon's "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford of The Snow Party" (1975), a shed that is already abandoned, which serves as a reminder of the forgotten history and parted identities, an overall concept of displacement and homelessness. The poem evokes the sense of isolation and decay which remind of the ephemerality of the human life and changeability of the surrounding world. Using powerful language and haunting, Mahon manages to capture the nature of the human displacement and it may be hard to find the belonging of the individual in the world characterized by impermanence. "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford" is one of the most successful works by Mahon, in exploring his deepest interests of displacement and homelessness. The poem gives us a detailed description of how a shed is neglected to represent a strong symbol of the forgotten past and the forgotten identity. Both Mahon with his peerless language and haunting imagery help the reader to leap into the world of desolation and decay, where the physical decay of the shed is a reflection of the existential decay of the human being:

They are begging us, you see, in their wordless way,  
To do something, to speak on their behalf  
Or at least not to close the door again.  
Lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii!  
'Save us, save us,' they seem to say,' (2011, 3-4)

The poem by Mahon takes the reader back to the creepy places with a strange atmosphere of displacement that may in the future be the beginning of new creative activities, where the idea may be nourished. Nevertheless, the feeling of abandonment and grief is the order of the day in such locations:

Peruvian mines, worked out and abandoned  
To a slow clock of condensation,  
An echo trapped for ever, and a flutter  
Of wildflowers in the lift-shaft (2-3).

The poem shifts its setting between the exotic places such as Peruvian mines and Indian compounds to the local and forgotten place of Ireland. More precisely, it puts into fore a dilapidated shed at Co. Wexford, which in turn characterizes the forgotten and unimportant side of the whole country. This shed, situated within the grounds of a burnt-out hotel, serves as a metaphor for the decay and political failure experienced under colonial rule, as depicted in the English-born novelist of Irish decent J.G. Farrell's (1935-1979) *Troubles*, a novel addressing the political and human ramifications of British colonial governance. Within this dimly lit and deprived space, individuals endure a life of starvation and limited vision due to the oppressive circumstances:

A thousand mushrooms crowd to a keyhole  
This is the one star in their firmament  
Or frames a star within a star.

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What should they do there but desire? (2011, 3-4).

Reduced to both "patience" as well as "silence" such human mycelia look forward to liberation by "us" – the politically informed, the conscientious poet, the reader, the politician, for

[t]hey have been waiting for us in a foetor  
Of vegetable sweat since civil war days  
Since the gravel-crunching, interminable departure  
Of the expropriated mycologist (2011, 3-4).

These lines convey a straightforward criticism, as the authority figure responsible for categorizing, approving, and validating the forgotten individuals has yet to come back: "He never came back, and light since then / Isakeyhole rusting gently after rain / Spiders have spun, flies dusted to mildew " (2-3). In the meantime, they have to endure the sounds of deterioration surrounding them, as well as the tempting clues of past lives lived in brightness: "And once a day, perhaps, they have heard something – / A trickle of masonry, a shout from the blue / Or a lorry changing gear at the end of the lane /" (2-3). Their lives deteriorate, not just through physical demise, but also due to the spiritual and psychological imbalances they experience borne of the "grim / dominion of stale air and rank moisture" (3-4). Despite being alive, these overlooked individuals have been severely impacted by the ordeal, they are the:

Powdery prisoners of the old regime  
Web-throated, stalked like triffids, racked by drought  
And insomnia, only the ghost of a scream  
At the flash-bulb firing squad we wake them with  
Shows there is life yet in their feverish forms  
Grown beyond nature now, soft food for worms  
They lift frail heads in gravity and good faith (44-50).

The overlap of the local, indigenous marginalised groups and the scattered dissipated global is observed in a scathing critique, where the approaching death and untold suffering is felt by some people. The poem sequence has a wonderful power to unite the past, the momentary and the eternal. It is very powerful not only in the power to suggest the experiences of the lost or the displaced but also in the power to remind the reader of the invisibility and the feeling of loss which come with the displacement, groaning at their deliverance, so long awaited they are that there is only left the attitude. The term of a thousand mushrooms crowding to the keyhole creates an impression of despair, obscurity, and powerlessness experienced by an individual requiring assistance. It also reveals all the common cracks brought about by colonization and displacement, resulting in a final cry with the apparent linking of global wars to both local wars and ideologies:

Let the god not abandon us  
Who have come so far in darkness and in pain.  
We too had our lives to live.  
You with your light meter and relaxed itinerary,  
Let not our naive labours have been in vain! (2011, 4-5)

The authorities are given responsibilities in charge of the absence of common humanity and provided with so-called light meters and itineraries.

Mahon creates the impression of barrenness and decay by providing such detailed descriptions of the churchyard creating an image of the forgotten and abandoned area. The use of imagery of "nettles and dock leaves," crumbling vaults, moss-covered headstones evokes a spooky feel and underlines the temporality of the physical world and the unavoidable decay.

Nevertheless, in the corruption, Mahon discovers the beauty and comfort of the strength of memory and imagination. According to him, although time has come and the physical world has festered, our memories and experiences remain, and that makes us identify with whom we belong. In the lines like these, the thought of you does bring me comfort, Mahon emphasizes on the way that a loved one can always be with us even after they are gone. The discussion of the memory by the poet is closely connected with his application of memory as a literary device and his cogitation about memory recall. The Irish poetry is marked by the theme of flexible and changeable nature of memory as a reinterpretation of the notion of home space set into the context of Bachelard *Poetics of Space* (1958). According to Bachelard, the world people live in and reside is a very personal place and a momentary refuge, which is able to provoke emotions and memories. These temples can be taken as important tools in the discovery of human soul and spirit. The poet redefines the concept of home by disrupting the established spatial boundaries and erasing the boundaries between the world of the public and the personal. Bachelard and Mahon both oppose the notion that space is a definite and measurable phenomenon. Bachelard views space to be a highly personalized creation of memory and fantasy as opposed to objective measurement. This view is portrayed in the poems of Mahon as he tends to portray spaces that are beyond the physical. His landscapes are knowledgeable of individual accounts, cultural recollection and temporality rendering the confines of room open and interpretable. The barriers between nature and human experience are porous in the works of Mahon. He often portrays an ongoing balance between the human and the non-human, the internal and the external worlds, which Bachelard can also relate to his discussion of the personal experience as something that can redefine the space boundaries. By way of illustration, in the descriptions of urban or natural environment as created by Mahon, the boundary between personal experience and historical occurrence is blurred. The space is seen as a place where people work out their identities in dynamic world as it is in the philosophy of intimate, emotional space created by Bachelard.

Another poem by Mahon that develops the theme of radical homelessness in relation to the physical world can be found in the *Collected Poems* (1999) collection, "In Carrowdore Churchyard". The cemetery turns into the object of reflection and contemplation, with the borders between the past and the present becoming indistinct, reminding about the fluidity of human experience. Mahon opines that even though we are physically transient, our memories and experiences last longer, and that these help to form our sense of belonging and identity. This is the same point of view related to the concept of Heidegger and Bachelard of the space and spatiality and the relation of the inside and outside that is presented by the house/mind as the embodiment of dreams because it has the past, the present, and the future. The major point of intersection between Mahon and Heidegger is that they both discuss liminality environments, which are spaces of transition, movement, and transformation. Heidegger discusses the feeling of

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alienation that the modern world has adopted due to the lack of connection with dwelling, but the poetry of Mahon often describes the feeling of alienation personally, as a result of exile, emotional or a fight to attain the true feeling of belonging. Both thinkers are expressing desire to reconnect with a deeper engagement with space, although this engagement can be unattainable or out of the reach. Heidegger and Mahon both analyze space as a complex, existential concept, in which the outer world and inner perceptions meet. Heidegger puts much stress on dwelling, which implies a significant experience of engagement with the world that brings about authenticity and sense of belonging. He does not approve of the alienation of modernity and technological innovation, which destroys the authentic relation between man and the spatial environment. On the other hand, Mahon poetically explores space, which in many cases brings out its emotional and psychological dimensions especially through themes of displacement, exile and nostalgia. His characters often occupy interstitial zones, they are in the conflict between the sense of belonging and the sense of being alien to the surrounding reality. The idea expressed by both philosophers is that space is more than just physical; it is something that is connected with our identity, memories and belonging. The philosophy of Heidegger offers a more extensive ontological understanding, and the poetry of Mahon gives a deeper and more personal look at how the space affects the human experience in the modern society. They both focus on the importance of constructing a meaningful relationship to the spaces we inhabit and they both recognize the profound impact dislocation and alienation and the longing can have on our world perception.

On the whole, "In Carrowdore Churchyard" is an eloquent reflection on the radical homelessness theme, and how memory and imagination provide the comfort and an element of connection, despite the physical mortality. Mahon encourages the readers to reflect on the timelessness of the past in our lives and the way it makes us who we are and where we belong through his poetic language and melancholic imagery:

Our ashes will not stir, however the winds roar  
Through elm and bramble. Soon the biographies  
And buried poems will begin to appear,  
But we pause here to remember the lost life.  
Maguire proposes a blackbird in low relief  
Over the grave, and a phrase from Euripides. (2011, 3-4)

Mahon juxtaposes the idyllic setting depicted in *Courtyards at Dleft* (1981) with the harsh reality of his urban landscape in Belfast as portrayed in his earlier work "Rage for Order" from *Collected Poems*. The ekphrasis serves as a method of detachment for the poet, removing him from reality and immersing him in a journey of absorption and detachment. Pieter de Hooch's 17th-century painting delves into the interaction between external and internal perspectives. The poem commences with a detailed portrayal of the painting, where the speaker remains completely detached from the narrative of its characters and the portrayal of its environment. Subsequently, the poet shifts towards personalizing the painting and the poem by envisioning himself "having lived as a boy in the house depicted in de Hooch's courtyard" (Tinley 1991, 107):

I lived there a boy and know the coal

Glittering in its shed, late-afternoon  
Lambency informing the deal table,  
The ceiling cradled in a radiant spoon.  
I must be lying low in a room there,  
A strange child with a taste for verse,  
While my hard-nosed companions dream of fire  
And sword upon parched veldt and fields of rain-swept gorse.  
(Mahon 2011, 96)

This interval between "artist and autobiographical self, between poet and people is allowed to narrow dramatically as the world of the Dutch painting becomes the world of the speaker's childhood" (Shields 77). Mahon, having been uprooted from his hometown and journeying through various locations and countries for educational and professional pursuits, endeavors to establish a sense of belonging, even if it necessitates the acceptance of a fictional place. Although he might appear to be reluctant to identify himself with the Belfast of his youth, it cannot be denied that his vision of the artwork is determined by his self-contradictory system of inclusion/ exclusion.

#### **4. The Role of Poetry In Conceiving Home:**

In the poem *Rage for Order*, Mahon adopts a gloomy attitude to the purpose of poetry. The title, which is the borrowing of the poem of the contemporary poet Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) *The Idea of Order at Key West*, (1934) preconditions the speaker about the perception of the poetic profession. Probably, in reference to the political conflict in Northern Ireland, the speaker does not see how poetry can influence the course of history or cause any change, even the smallest one. The speaker cries out the fact that their vocation is a dying art, (2011 47) which is the same thing he asserts in line 47, and in line 21. The whole poem is filled with the feeling of darkness, despair, hopelessness, especially regarding the identity of the poet, his/her feelings, and relationship with his/her people:

He is far from his people,  
and the fitful glare of his high window is as  
nothing to our scattered glass.  
His posture is grandiloquent and deprecating, like this,  
his diet ashes,  
his talk of justice and his mother  
the rhetorical device  
of an etiolated emperor – (Mahon 2011, 47)

The speaker is in no way connected with his people, he is an alien in the land that was supposed to bring comfort. Instead of being obliged to address his fellow citizens in order to make them create a change, the speaker sees the process of writing poetry as a painful one which he considers not only unnecessary but underappreciated. The journey that Mahon goes through in his country and his people depicts his feeling of being in exile, and it results in his not feeling connected with his origin. He intentionally creates a form of separation between him and his people; he stays in high rise building

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where he sees his people through the window. Although at the beginning of the poem the speaker is rather doubtful about the worth of poetry in the presence of death and poverty, the point of view of this speaker changes in the last stanza, the words death, and wages of the poor (47) and alters the whole scruple of his writing piece. "Now watch me as I make history. Watch as I tear down/To build up with a desperate love" (2011, 47). The fact that the speaker chose to identify himself with people he could not have related with before may be a sign that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and poetry is not in vain.

In his "The Sea in Winter" (1979), Mahon explicates:

And all this time I have my doubts  
About this verse-making. The shouts  
Of souls in torment round the town  
At closing time make as much sense  
And carry as much significance  
As these lines carefully set down.  
All farts in a biscuit tin, in truth –  
Faint cries, sententious or uncouth. (2011, 112)

Longing as discussed by Mahon is closely connected with the idea of space as presented by Bachelard which is used to shape and reflect the inner emotions. The worlds of longing in Mahon poems often refer to places that have either disappeared or been turned into something unfamiliar to the speaker, no longer in line with his or her wants. Whether it is the physical context of a degrading shed, as in the poem, or the spiritual context of fractured national identity, as in the other poems, Mahon speakers in both poems face a profound sense of longing to places that will give meaning and comfort and belonging, and yet they are inaccessible and unreachable to the speakers. The poem was originally called Belfast, which serves as a confirmation of his attachment to his home and the idea of going back to it. Nevertheless, he changed the title to Spring Vacation later to dissociate himself with the city and perceive it as an outsider. Lastly, he decided to adopt the name "Spring in Belfast" where he highlights his identity as a tourist and a citizen. The speaker in the first stanza finds his place in this community, as he is together with his fellow citizens:

Walking among my own this windy morning  
In a tide of sunlight between shower and shower,  
I resume my old conspiracy with the wet  
Stone and the unwieldy images of the squinting heart.  
Once more, as before, I remember not to forget. (2011, 15)

The stanza underlines the irony of the general activity of the speaker to reach the city and its inhabitants. While certain words like 'my own', 'resume', 'old', 'once more', and 'remember' highlight his efforts at connectedness, there are also words that suggest disconnectedness. The poet's struggle to be a part of the city is evident in his need to forget to transition from darkness (by remembering unwanted memories) to enlightenment (by forgetting desired memories). Agreeing with Catherine Shields, "to belong to his people, he must forgo his reason. Remembering not to forget, he deals with them circumspectly" (1994, 70). The concept is emphasized even more as he aligns himself with a 'tide of

sunlight' and impacts the other residents with the gloomier elements of the stormy weather that symbolizes Mahon's constant movement away from and towards Belfast, disrupting any solidification of the idea of home (Burton 2008,34-5). This contrast between logic/irrationality, darkness/brightness, and belonging/not belonging is further highlighted in the subsequent verse. There is a perverse pride in being on the side:

Of the fallen angels and refusing to get up.  
We could all be saved by keeping an eye on the hill  
At the top of every street, for there is,  
Eternally, if irrelevantly, visible – (2011, 15)

The speaker transitions from using the pronoun 'I' to 'we', possibly to showcase their solidarity with the people of Belfast and to establish or reestablish connections with them. This also reflects the poet's inclination to constantly shift from one location to another, not just physically (as mentioned earlier, he still embodies the role of a tourist rather than someone returning home), but also mentally and emotionally when it comes to his sentiments towards his hometown. In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker reverts to using the first person singular, seemingly undoing the pattern established in the previous two stanzas.

One part of my mind must learn to know its place.  
The things that happen in the kitchen houses  
And echoing back streets of this desperate city  
Should engage more than my casual interest,  
Exact more interest than my casual pity. (2011, 16)

The poet suggests that the speaker was unable to discover a resolution and had to accept living with a conflicted mind. This poem shows that Mahon "can only accept his origins across an interval between leaving Belfast and coming back for a holiday" (Shields 1994,71). This last image in the poem ("... streets of this desperate city/Should engage more than my casual interest, /Exact more interest than my casual pity"), this connection would symbolically and creatively link Mahon to his city, following his previous unsuccessful attempts at establishing a physical connection. The internal conflict within Mahon is manifested in his dual roles as a human being and as the speaker, which is vividly portrayed in this particular section of the poem, culminating in a deceptive resolution. While his actuality denies this merging, his creativity would validate its presence. This divide is distinctly reflected in his poem "Brecht in Svedenborg" through the following verses:

This could be home from home  
If things were otherwise.  
Twice daily the mails come  
Up the sound in a ship.  
I notice that the house  
Has four doors for escape. (2011, 18)

Mahon assumes the identity of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), the German poet and playwright, to convey his emotions without inhibition. According to Brian Burton's analysis in "Derek Mahon's Poetry

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of Community", Mahon often incorporates elements from various artists into his work, blending them seamlessly with his concerns being highly influenced (2008, 36). Writing may seem pointless to many individuals, including Mahon himself to a certain degree, "the guise of an adopted persona liberates the poet from the need to constantly foreground his own identity" (2008, 37). This approach enables Mahon to subtly and indirectly discuss Belfast as a place he considers both his residence and his place of banishment, thereby enhancing his contradictory portrayal of his native city and his emotions towards it and its inhabitants

In "Afterlives", from *The Hunt By Night* (1982) addressed to James Simmons, American hedge fund manager, mathematician, and philanthropist, Mahon establishes a connection between his life in London and his Irish memories. His poem is also his reaction to the accusations of missing the Troubles, which are intended to strengthen his identity with the home. The poem is divided into two sections, thus representing his ambivalent feelings of London and Ireland. The initial one describes the city (London) as a crowded and chaotic environment, which symbolizes restlessness and lack of motion. The words such as roar, light and bright are opposed to the words such as dark flat, dark places and dim forms depicting London as a mixture of modernity and civilization with philistinism and primitiveness. This part is mainly concerned with the description of his house in London which is his dark flat where he wakes up to the soft but strong sound of the world. The paradoxical phrase of soft roar expounds on the conflicting feelings Mahon had on London, though he is of Irish descent. The Oxford English Dictionary refers to the concept of mean to make a deep sound loud and loud, when a group of people is going on, or when an expression of agony or anger is going on vigorously, as roar (Roar). This statement is indicative of the thoughts that the poet went through as he pondered the possibility of an unrealized and subconscious connection between his peaceful life in London and the havoc caused by the happenings in Ireland. Mahon struggles with the opposing ideas of his present and past, whether he belongs or not, and is the one he ponders throughout the second stanza. The second stanza is a continuation of this, which adds features of light, reason, and hope like the guns, which go off in a back street (2011, 57). The fact that Mahon has managed to relate the conscious and subconscious is remarkable. He demonstrates his resolute effort to sever himself and his Irish identity and at the same time fails dismally. Although his physical location is in London, he totally forgets the "guns" and the war going on his country. But mentally and emotionally he is so deep-rooted and involved in that which he frantically attempts to escape.

The poet changes his style by coping the narration to the first person and using a present tense: I am going home by sea/For the first time in years. He compares the nature imagery in this stanza, which is depicted by the use of the words "gull," "masthead," "moon," and "waves" with the word roar of London. This opposition shows the association of the poet to Ireland and creates more rural background in the mind of the reader. The general atmosphere of the scene is also represented differently in the poem further in the scene when the ship is said to be trembling, turning and shuddering. Such acts represent the painful homecoming of the poet and his turbulent and disoriented feeling upon returning to his homeland. The last two stanzas are very vivid descriptions of the dramatic transformations that he observed in his city following the years of the war.:

And I step ashore in a fine rain

To a city so changed  
By five years of war  
I scarcely recognize  
The places I grew up in,  
The faces that try to explain. (2011, 57)

The city has changed entirely and he fails to recognize the locations of his childhood and connect to his fellow Irishmen. The poetic manner in which he is consciously alienated to his city and his people only enhances his ambivalent feelings of guilt and optimism. The only instance of a full rhyme in this stanza, 'rain' and 'explain', symbolizes the poet's connection to his homeland (nature once more) as he seeks to understand the changes that have taken place in his city, among his people, and within himself. The poem concludes with the arrival, "superimposed over a phantom image of the life he would have lived if he had never left" (Haughton 2007, 96):

Both the hills are still the same  
Grey-blue above Belfast.  
Perhaps if I'd stayed behind  
And lived it bomb by bomb  
I might have grown up at last  
And learnt what is meant by home. (2011, 57)

The last line in the poem is the word home, which is both the destination of the poem and the poet. However, its importance is unclear and mysterious. It is disturbing that the speaker believes that the only way that would make the meaning of home come to her is by being at home bomb by bomb. The fact that the rhyming between the word home and bomb is partial indicates the inner conflict of the poet and reminds him that his motherland is associated with the destruction and turbulence. Bachelard and Mahon merge the phenomenal and emotive qualities of home. According to Bachelard, imagination and memory fill physical space with emotional and symbolic significance, and in many poems by Mahon, the physical world, whether a ruined shed or an empty city, is an expression of the emotional state of the speaker. By means of this, both authors underline the deep connection between a person and the environment as they show how the emotional meaning of a place may place an impact on a person and make them feel part of it.

In "The Hudson Letter", from *The Hudson Letter* (1996) Mahon alludes to the destitute individuals residing in cardboard shelters and portrays himself as a mere "undesirable resident alien" (2011, 190) as well as an "amateur immigrant" (190). Brian Burton remarks that this homelessness is "as much a question of metaphysical displacement and physical distance from native territory as it is of not having a roof over one's head" (2008, 43). Mahon draws a parallel between his metaphorical exile and mental displacement to his geographical dislocation. He finds himself distracted and disoriented, struggling to define the concept of 'home'. To him, he feels completely removed from his true home.

Another poem that captures similar emotions of guilt and helplessness is "Leaves" from *The Snow Party*. A poem structured into four stanzas, each stanza creating a vivid image that engages all the senses of the readers. It opens with a contradictory statement suggesting that the 'prisoners' have chosen to be

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prisoners willingly and have come to terms with this 'forced' choice. The prisoners of infinite choice: "Have built their house/ In a field below the wood/And are at peace" (2011, 59)

Despite Mahon's assertion of being at peace, it is important to acknowledge that the prisoners are still confined as prisoners. A prisoner is defined as "a person who is kept in prison as punishment" and also as "someone who is under the control of someone else and not physically free" (Britanica). The prisoners depicted in this poem, however, have a unique situation as they have the freedom to make choices in constructing their homes within nature, experiencing tranquility and peace.

Mahon's creative and imaginative direction can be connected to a broader cultural phenomenon elucidated by David Cairns and Shaun Richards who state that, "Culture, then, requires the drive towards – if not the achievement of – unity. But the contradictions that are necessarily excluded as a means of its achievement are quite literally those elements that contradict, speak against, and speak otherwise than the dominant group"(Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, 180.). Mahon's investment in speakers who surpass this procedure and enter the threshold space, where cultural limitations are elevated and abandoned, leading to transnationality, presents a lyrical resolution to this impasse Even though the poems inherently feel the process of alienation and the lack of connection to these problems, they also attempt at innovating and renewing the past, in spite of the historical and cultural burden.

However, liminality is a part of a continuing strategy where Mahon is alert to prevent the position of hegemony of the repressive cultural ideologies in the world of poetry the same way they had swallowed the real world during the Troubles. Liminality discussed by Bachelard and Mahon is a complex and subtle idea. Bachelard views liminality as a part of the poetic and emotional meaning of the physical surroundings, where the lines between the external world and the internal spaces of memory, imagination and daydreaming are explored. Conversely, Mahon tends to define the liminality in terms of psychological and existential aspects of the yearning, displacement, and the search of identity, in which the speaker goes through the liminal zones of both cultural and personal development. However, neither of the scholars views liminality as the final answer but a realm full of emotional, intellectual, and existential possibilities-in which the person is always involved in the process of negotiation of existential and belonging states. His poetry verses seem to sound on the global scale instead of being limited to a local or national one. As a result, in *Sunday Morning, Collected Poems* the poet finds himself in the former prosperous center of the British Empire, London, observing its ultimate phases of decay:

Black diplomats with gorgeous wives,  
Promenading, notice the natives  
Dozing beside the palace gates –  
Old ladies under wide straw-hats  
Who can remember Chu Chin Chow  
And Kitchener. Exhausted now  
By decades of retrenchment, they  
Wait for the rain at close of play. (2011, 127)

This work demonstrates the sorrow over the loss of the British Empire, honoring such great British-born wealth magnates as Cecil Rhodes, a mining tycoon and a colonial statesman, and Horatio Kitchener,

a British Army general and a colonial governor. It is a classic case of imperial Orientalism at that time. The voice of the speaker is unbiased as it is neither a disappointed colonizer nor an embittered colonized man. Rather, it has a moderate and even comical outlook.

According to Mahon, such an ideological frame of our life in time and space depersonalizes people, stifles their imagination, inventive powers, and critical thinking. This interaction between the potential emptiness and notions in a poem such as *Entropy*, in *Lives* (1972) enables a shift in the cultural and historical worldviews which are no longer dependent on the narratives. Objects are used in this poem to symbolize and imply new meanings of culture, all in a landscape of disaster and shattering. The personal, collective, and cultural memory processes are dynamically interplaced, which shows that his memory manipulation, according to Bachelard, is a reality. The poet re-tellers the story by taking historical occurrences in Irish history as documented in outside sources by emphasizing the untrustworthiness of the narrative voice of carrier of the memory (71): We are

Holing up here  
In the difficult places –  
In caves,  
Terminal moraines  
And abandoned farmhouses,

While we,  
Anemones, receive  
On our bare rock  
Whatever  
Nourishment the wash  
Of the waves may bring. (Mahon 1972,)

Mahon is an opposing selection due to his intimate connection with portraying the feelings of emigration, displacement, and alienation in various poems. One of his works, "To Mrs. Moore at Inishannon," serves as a letter poem that reflects the correspondence sent back home by Irish emigrants who were part of the immigrant groups entering through the "golden door." The poem is placed in the center of *The Hudson Letter*. The poem commences with a quote alluding to the emerging scent of racism that contaminates the idealized setting of the Emma Lazarus poem, "Give me your tired, your poor / your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" inscribed at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. These lines mark the conclusion of the book: "I dreamed last night of a blue Cycladic dawn, / a lone figure pointing to the horizon, / again the white islands shouting, "Come on; come on!" (Mahon 2011, 57)

Mahon particularly laments the way Western technology has estranged humans from their environment, a sentiment that often concludes his poems, leaving his witty ironies silenced by the weight of realization. For instance, the subjects of "The Banished Gods" "sit out the centuries / In stone, water, / And the hearts of trees, / Lost in a reverie of their own natures" (Mahon 2011, 85). In this passage, Mahon unmistakably savors the chance to indulge in rural lyricism. However, in the subsequent stanza, a stark

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contrast is presented as humanity's wisdom has now deteriorated to "a five-minute silence at moonrise". (86) These words mark the conclusion of the poem, filled with sorrow and shock.

Essentially, the book amplifies the sense of disgust towards Western civilization, initially introduced in a poem like "The Banished Gods," and presents it within a broader, more extensive structure. However, in contrast to the previous poem where Mahon discussed the gods' daydream and ended with a sense of disdainful sarcasm, *The Yellow Book* reverses this sequence. Once the lamentation has exhausted itself, Mahon shifts his focus away from the present world to contemplate a new possibility.

"Tractatus" offers a compelling illustration of the intricacy and intricacy of understanding, as Mahon suggests that he would only consider himself an Ulster poet, Ulster is one of the four traditional or historic Irish provinces where Mahon lived, if Ulster could truly grasp the world. Mahon begins by citing the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein which asserts that the world is all that is the case, i.e. the world is all that can be logically stated using language. The last line of the poem presents a beautiful image of the sun setting into the sea at night and the reader gets a question left at the end of the poem: "who would challenge that titanic roar, / The steam coming up wherever the edge maybe?" (Mahon 2011, 120). This is a good example of the skills Mahon has to develop stunning harmonies out of several lines of poetry. It is unclear where his poetic world begins and ends, maybe it is never to be seen again. The reference of a titanic roar, with the bursting steam, however, is a good reference to the RMS Titanic, a British passenger and mail steamer, which was run by the White Star Line. It sadly struck the bottom of the North Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912 following the collision with an iceberg during the maiden voyage between Southampton, the port city of England on the south coast, and the city of New York, the United States. Interestingly enough, the ship was built in the protestant shipyard of Harland and Wolff in Belfast, where the grandfather of Mahon was employed as a foreman.

### 5. Conclusion

The poetry of Mahon makes the readers reflect on the endless struggle of finding a sense of belonging in the ever changing and unsteady world. He effectively brings out the interdependence of location, memory and individuality and how these affect our idea of ourselves and the sense of place. Whether he is reminiscing the barren beauty of abandoned landscapes, or he is reaching into his own heart and soul, Mahon's poetry creates a sense of profound longing and feeling out of place. Moreover, the exploration of extreme homelessness by Mahon serves as a strong reminder of the common human experience, without paying attention to boundaries. In spite of our conditions, we are all facing the problem of finding our place and role in the ever-changing and uncertain world. Mahon's poetic approach lets the readers have a deep understanding of the complexity of human condition and eternal search of meaning and relation, which connects us to each other.

## التشرد الجذري للبشرية في قصائد مختارة لديريك ماهون

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### الملخص

يُستكشف مفهوم "اللامأوى الفطري" لديريك ماهون (1941-2020) باعتباره عنصراً أساسياً في التجربة الإنسانية، حيث يكافح الناس مشاعر النزوح والشوق الوجودي، ويمتد استكشاف ماهون اللامأوى الفطري إلى ما هو أبعد من مجرد النزوح المادي، إذ يتعمق في الشوق الوجودي والانفصال المتأصل في التجربة الإنسانية. يناقش هذا البحث منظور العبر ووطنية الذي ينبع من الشعور بالنزوح الذي تعيشه البشرية. إنه شعور فطري باللامأوى يمكن أن يؤدي بالفرد إلى إهمال الحدود والتكيف مع مكان بديل ليس وطنه، إذ تتم مناقشة إثبات (ماهون) لذلك من خلال تطبيق نظريات مارتن هايدجر (1889-1976) وجاستون باشلار (1884-1962)، وتوفر مفاهيمهما عن الفضاء والعلاقات المكانية، وبخاصة التفاعل بين المساحات الداخلية والخارجية، إعادة قراءة لمعنى المنزل(الوطن)، ويرمز مفهوم المكانية أو عبر الوطنية إلى التطلعات التي يسعى الفرد إلى التقاطها من خلال لقاءاته بالمواقع أو الأماكن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: : ماهون، العبر ووطنية، اللامأوى، باشلار، هايدجر

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