

## **Abstract**

In 2008, Dennis O'Driscoll published *Stepping Stones*, a book-length interview with the Irish poet and critic Seamus Heaney. When conducting the interview, O'Driscoll did not take a strictly chronological approach. Instead, he was interested in Heaney's literary influences, as well as his work and views on poetry. O'Driscoll's informed questions reflect his own thinking as both a poet and critic, and rather than playing the role of passive interlocutor, he confronts and challenges Heaney's views. The result is a discussion that is dynamic and revealing, providing insight into the minds of two significant Irish poets.

The interview in *Stepping Stones* forms the basis of my bachelor thesis, which examines the friendship and exchange of influence between Heaney and O'Driscoll, who had known each other since the 1970s and had written essays on similar topics. My thesis focuses on three points of disagreement between Heaney and O'Driscoll: Eastern European poetry, American poetry and literary culture, and the poetry of last things. My aim is to introduce both poets' positions on each subject, and consider how their opposing views influenced each other's thinking on those subjects. The purpose of this thesis is to clarify why O'Driscoll was important to Heaney and explore how both poets influenced each other.

Although neither Heaney nor O'Driscoll read any Slavic languages, they were both attracted to poetry in translation, in particular to Eastern European poetry. However, their views on some of the poets of the then-Soviet bloc differed. In the first chapter, I show that, for O'Driscoll, the political context of the time was less essential than it was for Heaney. As such, his fondness for Eastern European poetry was not lessened by the revolutions of 1989 whereas for Heaney the glamour faded. I focus mainly on Heaney and O'Driscoll's views on two Eastern

European poets he admired: Czech poet Miroslav Holub and Polish poet Wisława Szymborska. Unlike Zbigniew Herbert and Osip Mandelstam, favored by Heaney, O'Driscoll's favorites were not dissidents, and did not use their verses to protest against their Communist regimes. What becomes clear in the dialogue between O'Driscoll and Heaney is that, for the latter, the real value of the poets he admired was their resistance and dissidence, and his feelings were less warm to poets who showed any degree of conformity.

The second chapter deals with Heaney's relationship to American literature. I choose two aspects of American poetry that divided Heaney and O'Driscoll. Firstly, it is the poetry of John Ashbery, one of the most regarded experimental poets of the twentieth century. O'Driscoll attempted to bring Ashbery closer to Irish readers, including Heaney, who could not develop a taste for the American surrealist. Their discussion shows that Heaney was conservative in relation to American poetry, for he preferred formal poets like Robert Frost and Robert Lowell. Secondly, I contrast Heaney and O'Driscoll's views on American literary culture, namely creative writing workshops. In the third chapter, I follow their dialogue on death, the purpose of art, and the relationship between religion and poetry. I focus mainly on their opinions on Philip Larkin's "Aubade." Whereas Heaney condemned the pessimism of the poem, O'Driscoll argued that it is not the purpose of poetry to give comfort to readers.