Editor's Note

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I am honored to be Guest Editor of the inaugural issue of *Irish Studies South: Remembering Seamus Heaney*. Launching *Irish Studies South* is a testament to the talent and commitment of the Southern Region’s officers and members over the years and it bodes well for the future of all things Irish in the south. I attended the first ACIS Southern Regional Conference at Nova University, served as the Southern Regional President and hosted the conference at Lenoir-Rhyne University in 1992, where Seamus Heaney was the guest of honor. To see all of these personal and professional threads come together in this issue, therefore, is especially edifying.

I first met Seamus Heaney in 1981 as a graduate student at Emory, where he befriended me as he has done to so many. But as the call for papers for this issue argues, we in the Southern Region feel that we can claim a particular closeness to Heaney. Many a scholarly essay has been written on the affinity, beyond the diaspora, between Irish poets from the North and the Republic for the country sides and cultures of the Southern US. Heaney in particular turned this imaginative affinity into a demonstrative reality by placing a large part of his archives at Emory University, being the headline speaker at so many of our professional conferences and university events, and by working closely with so many scholars and students across the south.

These personal encounters are documented in *Remembering Seamus Heaney*. While the majority of the contributions describe experiences with the poet that took place in the South, some are written by scholars, artists, and students living in other parts of the country or even the world. These contributions range from the first-responders, those who captured their feelings and memories in prose and poetry at the moment that they found out that Seamus Heaney had died, to those who were called upon to memorialize Heaney publicly. Other contributors describe their relationship with the poet which began as a professional exchange and ended up as a personal embrace. These essays blend more explicitly an appreciation for the brilliance of the verse with an admiration for the man. The diversity of the contributions speaks to the openness of the poetry and the approachability and kindness of the poet.

Because of the mostly informal character of the contributions collected here, certain editorial principles had to be employed (and ignored) so that the personal, spontaneous, and emotional voice was not lost as it expressed its sense of loss. Each piece required a unique editorial approach. The poetry and creative prose were left untouched. The creative non-fiction entries were edited for clarity and consistency. The contributions that are transcripts of oral presentations were treated as such and were not subjected to strict grammatical precepts. Though written by highly regarded seasoned scholars, the more formal essays were submitted with the understanding that they would not be treated as strictly objective impersonal academic works. Consequently, these essays were written for the occasion and thus vary in their approach to documentation. However, every effort has been made to maintain the semblance of standard MLA practices.
One contribution requires special comment because of the occasion it records and the circumstances under which it appears here. The last poem in Heaney’s last trade edition is “A Kite for Aibhín,” which is taken from Giovanni Pascoli’s “L’aquilone.” It is difficult to imagine a more affirming and inspiring “last poem,” and it is “so Heaney” to invoke another poet, place, and time as his final poetic gesture. Marco Sonzogni was working with Heaney on the Italian edition of *Opened Ground* as well as Pascoli’s “L’ultima passeggiata”—“The Last Walk”—near the very end of Heaney’s life. Sonzogni’s “Note on Heaney and Pascoli” was written for Gallery Press, which had followed the development of these translations and then published *The Last Walk* as originally planned with Heaney. I met Marco at University College Dublin as he was preparing to move to teach in New Zealand. He sent me his contributions to from India and he revised them in Zurich. We are honored to include Marco Sonzogni’s powerful tribute to Heaney as well as his note on Heaney’s translations of Pascoli which is a “last look” at a poet on his “last walk.” Even though Seamus Heaney had traveled the globe in the name of poetry and the “Republic of Conscience,” when you were with Seamus he made you feel as if it were just the two of you and you were the most important person on the planet.

This is why we are remembering Seamus Heaney.