

"SEAMUS HEANEY'S POETRY AND THE MODERN SELF: A CONSCIOUSNESS RISING ON BEHALF OF UNPOPULAR IDEAS"

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Original scientific paper

DOI: 10.31902/fll.40.2022.5

UDK 821.111(415)-1.09Hini Š.

Abstract: To write an article on Seamus Heaney (1939-2014) might be a venture, given the many contributions to this field. Seamus Heaney's poetic career (1966-2010) went in search of answers to questions that were raised out of a preoccupation with the notion of selfhood. On the other hand, in the early modern period, certain thinkers associated with para-scientific literature confidently proclaim a vulnerable theory of selfhood which raises questions about the authenticity of the western traditional and classical understandings of the self. This study argues that Heaney's approach to poetry constructs a theory of the self which can be read as a revision of the illegitimate conception of humanity proposed in the twentieth century, one which has a continuing effect on contemporary thought, and makes the common-sense experience of the reality we live in both more widely understood and acknowledged.

Keywords: Seamus Heaney, poetry, self, mind, reality, reductionism, ordinary

INTRODUCTION

Belonging to the history of strange new ideas, in the early modern period, certain thinkers, quite influential, emerge to speak with the authority of science-although with nothing of its credible scientific argument-about the self and the reality as they understood them to be. These self-appointed spokesmen of science, rationality, and would-be enlightenment, including positivists, behaviorists, and sociologists such as E.O.Wilson, August Comte, Herbert Spencer, B.F.Skinner, and Charles Darwin, appropriate viewpoints to the notions of selfhood and human nature that inevitably lead to a very empty, bare, and limited understanding of humanity and its relation to the world and later provide the building block of Freudian, Nietzschean, and Marxist views to share with their reductionism. They exclude any observation, past or present, which subverts their arbitrary rationales and which is outside their closed arena; modern thought. These modern rationalists believe to hold so deep views about humanity and the mind, that they exclude

any account of history and culture embodying and embodied by the self. They dig so deep into human nature that they turn to the surface, quite ahistorical and a-cultural. Looking at the stars no one disputes each is sediments of history. Yet these self-acknowledged scientists do not bother thinking that if the world is unchanged in its nature, human nature as a part of it is also unchanged and so they embody the history of their existence, at least physical, not to perturb them with the questions of soul and mind. Just because we share our origin with animals is true enough for them to disregard human beings as bearers of history and culture and to the equal human mind, the locus of our perceptions, thoughts, and experiences, to the brain and even to doubt the word mind is meaningful

According to E. O. Wilson, the American Naturalist and the father of sociobiology, the brain, and its glands are probed, and no there exists no site to supposedly harbor the nonphysical mind. Steven Pinker, rejecting the non-physical nature of the mind, concludes that the mind is the function and activity of the brain and it can be simply bisected by a knife.

Their reductionism excludes whatever their scientific approach is not competent enough to measure and make explanations about, be it humanity, the mind, the soul, and metaphysics; and their theories fail to take account of the embedded nature of humanity within history, culture and metaphysics. Their method, therefore; is to misrepresent the earlier knowledge and beliefs: they assume that the western understanding of human nature is in error and exclude the classical and humanist understanding of the self. In so doing no longer the human is a microcosm mirroring the world and the kinship between the self and the others, the nature, and the whole cosmos is erased and inevitably our definition of reality sets us apart from reality, not a part of it. Enlightenment heralds the possibility of emancipating humanity through knowledge, but deep into a rather declined form. This model of humanity cut off from history and mystery is an unavoidable result of the rejection of metaphysics. The emancipation project sets humanity free from metaphysics. For, Metaphysics is capable of placing humanity in its right place, that is its cosmic setting, where modern thought cannot reach to. The problem is, at this scale metaphysics sounds like religion and hence the old repugnance and disaccord between modern science and religion. The prestige is that we are too modern to go back to the old vocabulary of metaphysics. In this neo-age of understanding and realization, a few simple formulas suffice to define our humanity: the survival of the fittest, means of production, primal guilt, oedipal

complex, pleasure principle, death wish, altruism, and self-alienation. Such generalizations are to tell us who we are.

What is intended by them is to impose a simple human within a simple reality on the world's thought. Our world of economics reminds one of the simple small boxes of the rats built for them by Skinner. In this economic world, we must ask ourselves about and find the shortest possible way to our benefit. Rational choice overcomes our humanity so much so that we do not ask ourselves are we rats living among rats or 'self's living among other 'self? Darwinism suggests the same scenario by making competition for survival the central key to our lives and relations. No wonder war and poverty are justified enough to be brought into consideration and crimes are hardly inexcusable given Herbert Spencer's laws of behavior. Yet it is the same selfish gene that Dawkins traces it transferring into us after he successfully manages to impose and later popularize his view that the entire world is an accident. After this great transferring of the genes, the human mind becomes one with the materiality of the mind; for it is not any longer the controlling center of our behaviors and ideas. Freud's understanding of human nature, which early twentieth century and even contemporary thought are so deeply fascinated by, is highly suspicious of the human spirit and whatever in this regard, according to him, is the sign of repressed sexuality and the reality and culture is simply a strange account of repressed desires. On hearing about Jung's interest in bog corpses, Freud faints and later was convinced it is Jung's death wish toward him (Sanders 50). In his time theories of race and nation were becoming dominant, so Freud developed a persona who challenges the racial and national conceptions as strata of the human mind and instead represents these issues as anxieties rooted in the human mind, turning them bereft of any external reality, and his theory of oedipal crime regards human nature as guilt-ridden and strange to his self. After Skinner or Comte or Darwin or Freud or Nietzsche or Marx or either Dawkins (no difference, they all share the same naivety) some well-defined understanding of the self and reality are being regarded as too naïve, too ordinary, too unscientific, and too moral to be measured up and any skepticism toward their theories is against open-mindedness.

Discussion

Then what is an art to modern thought? It is not a way of exploring the self, its experiences, its history, and its nature. Rather it is a way to deceive the self, to set it separated from the reality it is within. The Marxist artist pictures the self as an object among other objects in the

world of materiality and the Freudian self finds art a channel for sublimation. Rather than a way for coming to terms with the self, art becomes an underground for safely repressing the self and it will be far from a repose gained through self-exploration, reflection, and grasping of the common experiences, feelings, emotions, and perceptions which illuminate the life. For the self is set aloof and detached from the reality which used to embody him and the felt experiences, feelings, thoughts, and any high act of the mind is obviated from focus. To disjoint the self effectively, Modern thought finds it necessary to do away with any connection between the mind and the reality it is the creator of. To Modern thought, the individual leads no mindful life, no self-scrutiny, and no self-exploration. Then what becomes of the self's chains to his mind, to others, and the world? The chains Heaney sings of in his "human chain":

Seeing the bags of meal passed hand to hand
 In close-up by the aid workers, and soldiers
 Firing over the mob, I was braced again
 With a grip on two-sack corners,
 Two packed wads of grain I'd worked to lugs
 To give me purchase, ready for the heave –
 The eye-to-eye, one-two, one-two upswing
 On to the trailer, then the stoop and drag and drain
 Of the next lift. Nothing surpassed
 That quick unburdening, backbreak's truest payback,
 A letting go which will not come again.
 Or it will, once. And for all. (Heaney, SP, sec.1o3)

When Seamus Heaney was receiving the Noble Prize for literature his verse was praised for being a combination of "lyrical beauty and ethical depth which exalt everyday miracles and the living past." (NP 1) Michael Cavanagh also argues that Heaney's approach to the problem of poetic function is bringing the two imperative side by side (66). The tribute is in fact speaking of a powerful locus which makes it possible to create and keep harmony between the two imperatives in his poetry, the lyrical and personal vs the ethical and communal, which in turn gives his poetry the miraculous power of exalting the ordinary. This locus, I try to argue, is the theory of selfhood presented implicitly in his poetry. Seamus Heaney's "great modernist virtue of doubt" (O'Donogue 11) about his vocation and hence the movement in his poetry between the two poles of poetry generates a notion of selfhood which is a deep reformation of the modernist self. "Heaney's project" (*ibid.*), as O'Donoghue terms this poetic venture, is the projection of an

understanding of the self which refines our treatment and definition of reality and the quotidian life. "Me waiting until I was nearly fifty / To credit marvels" (SP, sec 18.) says Heaney in *Fosterling*, and the marvels, I argue, are to be found deep within the ordinary on the surface of our lives and are excavated through self-questioning, Heaney believes: "what I think always happens anyway as you get towards your fifties, [...] is a certain rethinking of yourself, a certain distance from your first self." (Foster 133).

Writing amid the rush of the new modern thought (which was popularized and justified only because of creating a historical threshold and holding the posture of science), Seamus Heaney regards his art of poetry as a coming into terms with his self and this idea is the foundation of his oeuvre including the collections of his poetry: *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Sweeney Astray* (1984), *Station Island* (1985), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991), *The Spirit Level* (1996), and *Human Chain* (2010). The way Heaney regards poetry creates a theory of the self that is not in accord with the prevalent ideas of his time and defies the modern self. Heaney's poetry presents a picture of a dialogical self in dialect with the other; his history, culture, nature, and mind. A self in time, in contact with the common-sense experiences and capable of presenting more of the life and reality to its inhabitants. He believes:

The amount of sensory material stored up or stored down in the brain's and the body's systems is inestimable. It's like a culture at the bottom of a jar, although it doesn't grow, I think, or help anything else to grow unless you find a way to reach it and touch it. But once you do, it's like putting your hand into a nest and finding something beginning to hatch out in your head. (O'Driscoll)

Heaney's practice of this kind of mind searching in his poetry results in "reveal[ing] more aspects of the self to the self" (O'Brien 26). Early in his career, the poet clarifies his goal of finding answers to his preoccupations through art:

I had a half-clarified desire to come to poetic terms with myself by considering the example of others and to try to bring into focus the little I knew. But I hope it is clear that the essays selected here are held together by searches for answers to central preoccupying questions: how should a poet properly live and write? What is his relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world? (Preoccupations, ch.1, para.1; emphasis added)

In this quotation, Heaney outlines not just the "the *raison d'être* of his entire oeuvre" (O'Brien 11) or his aesthetic theory, but a theory of the self who is embedded in a network of relations with his inner self, his history, and his world. What is central in this forward to his poetic career is the centrality of a notion of selfhood which shares a tradition with theories and philosophies of the self held by the philosophers and thinkers who set on a campaign of revisionism against the empty modern discourse; a rethinking of the modern order, which is so far from not just the common wisdom but the specialist knowledge. Heaney's aesthetic theory proposes a theory of the self which is a response to the atomistic theories of Marxism, scientism, and even positivism guilty of an "attenuation of response" (174) to the art and the self. His poetry resists any reductionist, simplistic, solid, and atomic representation of the self and instead pictures the man as flowing through the stream of consciousness, culture, and history. This resistance is launched by Heaney's belief in the need for the poet to respond to himself; "coming to poetic terms with myself" (Heaney, *Preoccupations*, ch.1, para.1); a need which Heaney raises in the words of Pinsky in his "responsibilities of the poets" too.

For Heaney poetry draws the connections between the mind and the world. His phrase 'searching for answers' attests that consciousness and mind are not only central to any act of the individual, here searching for answers, but that coming to an answer to the question of self or in his words coming to poetic terms with himself presets an understanding and taking account of the workings of the mind. The thing modern reductionist approaches to the self obviate is the need for by trivializing the status of mind and its reflections and perceptions. To him the mind credits poetry and poetry credits the mind. His poetry implies a conception of selfhood which in itself makes great poetry possible. The much-discussed modern doubt of the poet in face of his responsibility as a national poet to his society and his desire to un-anchor his art; "you lose more than you redeem/doing the decent thing... fill the element / with signatures on your own frequency" (SI 1); is settled for him through employing a concept of self in his poetry who is both historical and ahistorical, solitary and dialogical, inward-looking and communal. His employment of holistic dialectical selfhood creates the space for poetry that owes its greatness to its being both an interpreter of and witness to national history and the voice of an inward artist. In his Noble prize lecture, he recalls the time around the 1940s when he was living in rural Co. Derry a kind of "den-life which was more or less emotionally and intellectually proofed against the outside world. ... Ahistorical, pre-

sexual, in suspension between the archaic and the modern" (1) and he remembers how they used to hear the voice of a BBC newsreader in their house without any of the news of army divisions, bombers and bombed cities "entering [him] as a terror" (2, emphasis added). However, as the years went his listening to the news become more deliberate and he get to know more about the world beyond his rural living; "a journey into the wideness of language, a journey where each point of arrival - whether in one's poetry or one's life turned out to be a stepping stone rather than a destination" (ibid.). This journey from, as he has, a "pre-reflective", "pre-historical", "pre-literate" (ibid.) self to one that grows up into its embodying history and culture makes his poetry credible. Yet it is a reciprocal relationship. For poetry creates him the space to restore a relationship between the mind and its circumstance, between the child who on hearing the BBC voice would pick up the strange words, "enemy, allies", and would count the number of planes lost to a man who faces the world and anchors his poetry to it. The kind of the self who lives in his poems makes poetry not just "itself" but a "help" (ibid.). Poetry finds stability and repose in the mind and the mind finds its truth in poetry. In his Noble prize lecture, Heaney credits poetry for making it possible to come to this honored position as the winner of the Noble prize and says:

But I credit it ultimately because poetry can make an order as true to the impact of external reality and as sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being as the ripples that rippled in and rippled out across the water in that scullery bucket fifty years ago. An order where we can, at last, grow up to that which we stored up as we grew. I credit poetry, in other words, both for being itself and for being a help, for making possible a fluid and the restorative relationship between the mind's center and its circumference" (ibid.)

Heaney escapes from a sort of relativism about the function of his poetry and his role, through raising a notion of selfhood in his poetry which is against the modern relativist views of the self and the mind, a self who creates the order. The mind brings variations on the world it perceives and yet comes from this cosmos and returns to it. It is like rain. While its drops change the earth, they return to it to come back from it again. Written at the time of poet's anxiety and deliberation over the nature of his poetry, "Exposure" presents the picture of the poet invited by nature, by the rain to listen to, feel, and experience the world fully, to voice it fully; both the history that is eroded from it and the "absolute diamonds" of his inner world:

As I sit weighing and weighing
 My responsible tristia.
 For what? For the ear? For the people?
 For what is said behind-backs?

Rain comes down through the alders,
 Its low conducive voices
 Mutter about let-downs and erosions
 And yet each drop recalls

The diamond absolutes. (N 80)

The presence of this kind of dialectical self in his poetry explains the fact that many commentators believe the highest achievement of him is the lyric form. Neil Corcoran maintains that "Seamus Heaney's true distinction as a poet is a lyric distinction, and that the successful larger forms he has so far found forms which accommodate, even while they provoke and extend, his lyricism" (Allen 120). His notion of the self brings the artist probing inward in terms with the imperatives brought to him by his being part of the real world. In other words, as O'Brien, arguing the double poetic role of Heaney, maintains, to:

"reconcile what he terms 'lyric celebration', and its concomitants 'the phrase or cadence which haunts the ear and the eager parts of the mind', with the demands of an ethical imperative which 'the poet may find as he exercises his free gift in the presence of the unfree and the hurt" (14)

This profound achievement in lyric form is brought about by the dialectical approach to the self in his poetry. An approach wherein one can get a better understanding of the self and a higher aesthetic. His poem credits a notion of selfhood which in its turn makes his poetry transitive. This relation between his poetry and his conception of the self is given a poetic image in poem VIII of "The Lightenings"

The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
 Were all at prayers inside the oratory
 A ship appeared above them in the air.
 The anchor dragged along behind so deep
 It hooked itself into the altar rails
 And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,
 A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
 And struggled to release it. But in vain.

"This man can't bear our life here and will drown,"
The abbot said, "unless we help him." So
They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it. (1)

The air is here element which makes the flowing of the ship possible, yet it is dangerous too. The crewman is in danger of drowning unless the anchor is released and he comes back to the ship. Heaney's poetry ship is anchored to a notion of self that is flowing through the world; as such it is at the same time moving and anchored. If the poet let himself into his inner personal world, he does not survive; but to survive he needs to be anchored to his time so that his poetry moves forward while tightened to a center. O'Brien believes "Heaney's epistemology of poetry focuses on the dialectical forces of space and time, presence and absence, movement and stasis..." (62). More specifically, this sense of movement is created in his poem as the result of the opposing structures created through the dialect of the self and the world. Poetry as he famously says is both "the ship and the anchor. It is at once both a buoyancy and a holding, allowing for the simultaneous gratification of whatever is centrifugal and centripetal in mind and body" (qtd. in O'Brien 178); for the core is a self who both transcends beyond itself by flowing into time, history, and its culture and anchors inward to keep the center; "I Swim in Homor" (Heaney, BR 4) It ripples inward and outward. As such the ethic of Heaney's poetry lies in his view of the self, for by employing a dialectical view of the self in his poems the focus is not just on his self, but on the entire humanity. As Emerson puts "in going down into the secrets of his mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds."

Christopher Norris believes the theory is "capable of providing a better, more adequate conceptual grasp of experiences that would otherwise belong to the realm of pre-reflective commonsense knowledge" (11). In other words, how common sense experiences and perceptions, which their efficacy is highly doubted in modern thought, might be affirmed? And how is this affirmation of the ordinary is embodying and embodied by his notion of selfhood?

What we call reality is a very simple account of a life that we think must be accepted. Our definition of reality is very objective and is for the most part in the service of contemporary disciplines; economics, politics, sociology, and psychology. This mindless obedience leaves no space for our imagination to add to or change what is conceived as reality and to ponder upon our experience of it. So much so that it is very easy for many to justify everything to themselves through a release

mechanism: it is reality. It makes us, defines our relations and our love. This is the work of poor imagination. There exists among us a collective agreement that works as the reality for us. Seeing a needy fellow, we simply release ourselves of any humanitarian concern by remarking that he is pretending. When a good man or woman does a wrong, we say we knew it ahead, and if they have a generous kind moment, we regard it as hypocrisy. One who once has done wrong is no longer capable of any gracious act according to us. A stranger is potential harm to us and we are much more capable of harm than good. These collective agreements work as the reality for us, hence our failure to feel and perceive the illumination of the ordinary life, to grasp the soul of our fellows, to astonish ourselves by life, and to feel the presence of any moment.

Art is hoped to replace this diminishing reality that has made our view of ourselves too small with one that reminds us we are a wonder. "it is essential that the vision of reality that poetry offers should be transformative, more than just a print-out of the given circumstances of its time and place" (Heaney, RP. P.13, para 17.). It is like sliding on the ice, as Heaney pictures:

A farewell to surefootedness, a pitch
Beyond our usual hold upon ourselves (ST)

It is to propose more passionate arguments about what we are to ourselves and others. As Heaney says "no lyric has ever stopped a tank" (GT, sec.17, para.22.), yet it is powerful enough to remind us of our humanity, of our selfhood. Heaney sees the paradox and the eminence of art to reality:

Here is the great paradox of poetry and the imaginative arts in general. Faced with the brutality of the historical onslaught, they are practically useless. Yet they verify our singularity, they strike and stake out the ore of self which lies at the base of every individuated life. In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil - no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited. (ibid.)

To him, art is like writing in the sand. Heaney in his *Government of the Tongue* cites the parable of Jesus' writing on the sand in the face of the accusation of the adulterous woman. When some men bring the woman who is taken in the very act and tell Jesus she must be stoned, Jesus sits on the ground and writes on the sand with his finger as if he has not heard them. After they continue asking him what to do with the woman, Jesus tells them to let the first man among you who has never been sinful cast the first stone on her, and then he sits down again

writing. When he again stands up all the accusers have left and the accused is set free by him. Jesus' writing in the sand is like art. "It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality" (Heaney, *Redress* 1). It is null for it is in the sand and cannot face the winds of the times, but it creates a space, a moment for the self to think back on his selfhood and rethink his presence in the world; a space wherein we might see our 'selves' and others in a universe of connections, and where "our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves", in our poet's words. In the parable, Jesus' writing like the art is the power of imagination to alter the actual. Living is supplying the content of our lives through imagination. In Heaney's poetry the function of "imaginary space" is "transformation of the actual, and the creation of an alternative paradigm of truth and integration" (25). The function of poetry is to transform the reality as the sunlight does in *Churning Day*:

 Their short stroke quickened, suddenly
 a yellow curd was weighting the churned up white,
 heavy and rich, coagulated sunlight
 that they fished, dripping, in a wide tin strainer,
 heaped up like gilded Gravel in the bowl.

...

 The empty crocks
 Were ranged along the wall again, the butter
 in soft printed slabs was piled on pantry shelves. (DN 22)

What is meant by transformation of reality is the way common, ordinary experiences are enlightened to be differently grasped and much deeply felt. The givens around us are amplified, to better perceive the greatness of the ordinary. It is peeling away a surface from the ordinary to see better deep within it. The transformation of the ordinary in Heaney's poetry is achieved through the kind of the 'I' he employs. This 'I' as discussed challenges the 'self' offered by the champions of modern science who failed to accept the subject as a self-interpreting, mindful, dialogical being and as a result developed a fundamentalist and simplified version of the reality and disallowed any belief in the complexity and ambiguity of human experience of the world.

It all comes down to the failure of taking account of the mystery of the mind and its relation to the self and cosmos. The modern sciences' cheerful insistence on the censorship of the subject does not lead to less than a mindless creature. Heaney's 'I', unlike the popular trend, is an interpretive being. Not just in the literal sense, which the I stands for the poet who interprets and evaluates his poetic career, his obligation to

himself and community and his values, but more specifically here the poetic I who imagines, remembers, evaluates, experiences, loves, and fears. As philosophers (after Kant's and Heidegger's tradition) like Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty, or Martha Nussbaum hold, this feature of the self takes notice of the capability of the human mind for norm guided actions such as thinking and interpreting. These subject-related features were disallowed by the objective supposedly scientific approach of the proponents of evolutionary theory, sociobiology, and behaviorism. The self in Heaney's poetry, in a sense, legitimizes the workings of the mind, its intuitions, concerning, such as love, ethic, obligation, memory, and imagination. Who we are is largely defined by our interpretation of the world, that is our experiences, relations, and the things that make us. As such our self-interpretation is not fully achieved by ourselves. Although the biggest desire of the self is to fulfill a sort of self-authenticity, a being true to one's self and values-which is both a development and a rejection of the forms of individualism favored by Descartes' disengaged rationality and Locke's atomism- modern independence is not a negation of the "dialogicality" of the self, to use Taylor's term (Ethics, 35). Then for the self who turns inward and to the alterity to shape an interpretation of his selfhood, common-sense experience, the ordinary and quotidian, "that which we stored up as we grew" (Heaney, Noble 2) turn to be more intuitive, reflective, and meaningful. Heaney believes knowledge of and contact with our roots in others, past or present, "could significantly widen the answers which each side could give to the question of who we are?" (9) In the introductory essay to his prose collection, *Preoccupations*, Heaney begins with *Omphalos*, meaning the stone that marked the center of the world, and he goes on repeating the word so that "its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door" (sec. para.1.) To him the pump is "centred and staked the imagination, made its foundation the foundation of the omphalos itself" and its ordinariness signifies the center of his work. By this early reference in his work, Heaney idealizes his work as a veneration of the ordinary. His celebrating of the ordinary life gives word to one of his shortest poems, *An August Night*, where a single image is quite evocative of self-open to the wonder of the ordinary:

His hands were warm and small and knowledgeable
When I saw them again last night, they were two ferrets,
Playing all by themselves in a moonlit field. (SP, sec. 7)

This short poem is from the collection *Seeing Things* which is described as always "returning to the ordinary to in pursuit of its spirituality" (Cavanagh 169). Indeed, by the term spirituality, one does not intend only a religious sense but also spirituality in terms of intellect. Reading the poem, one is reminded of John Donne's "No Man is an Island". In everyone, looking again, there is a spot of the world he has lived. Hands are the bearers of the life one has lived and by looking at them he has found them as knowledgeable, probably carrying the knowledge of the years lived. Moreover; the image of looking at one's hand reminds one of the beauties of feeling one's presence, which might be passed unnoticed in the guise of ordinariness. But being ordinary is not equal to being insignificant. Yet it seems that the speaker implies a sense of transformation of view in the part of the 'I'; for in the first line simply some adjectives are put together while the following line creates a metaphor for describing the hands. Metaphors signify an interpretive look and indent a feature that is probably not easily recognized by others or underlines the different thought structure and the specific mindset of the viewer. His hands are the sight of marvelous if they can be seen feelingly. The image also signifies a sense of place and space to which either the speaker or the one he holds his hands belong. In a natural local place, they seem to be rooted.

The sensing of the place is portrayed in his other poems of place such as "The Wishing Tree", "Bogland", "At Toombridge", "Broagh" and "Anahorish". Then why the word sense rather than a sense of the place? In *Preoccupations*, Heaney enunciates a side of his interaction with his Irish roots and as implied the notion of place as such:

If you like, 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 awarenesses nourished on English as consonants. My hope is that the poems will be vocables adequate to my whole experience (37)

Drawing from such accounts many critics, not erroneously, however, tend to read such place poems only as delineation of Heaney's ties to his Irish background and his sense of place. They believe the poems are "loud with the slap of the spade and sour with the stink of turned earth" (Dunn) and give us "the soil-reek of Ireland" (Cox 1). However, besides this popular sight to Heaney's 'I'/'eye' the place is an ordinary which holds a space under disguise. He looks at the ordinary place and through its memory and interpretive mind transcends it to a space. As he also mentions, knowing and belonging to a certain place brings a sort of nourishment, which is not just an obsession with a

specific locale, for instance, a sense of Irishness (Preoccupations, sec.16., para.13.). Through a different reading, one can propose that the ordinary place can be sensed as a space to enrich the common-sense experience and knowledge. In his Noble prize lecture, Heaney tells the story of the chestnut tree that was planted when he was born and grew as he grew up. Years later they moved to a new house and the new owners of the place cut the chestnut tree. Then Seamus in his mind's eyes began to identify with the space as he used to identify with the tree. Yet

... this time it was not so much a matter of attaching oneself to a living symbol of being rooted in the native ground; it was more a matter of preparing to be unrooted, to be spirited away into some transparent, yet indigenous afterlife. The new place was all idea, if you like; it was generated out of my experience of the old place but it was not a topographical location. It was and remains an imagined realm, even if it can be located at an earthly spot, placeless heaven rather than a heavenly place (GT, sec.7, para.1, emphasis added)

Heaney's self is unrooted from the bounds of time and place and flows in space. By being unrooted his roots spread wide into the world space and the ordinary place in his 'eyes' transcend into a space where experiences and feelings grow universal. The poetic self walks "round and round a space, utterly empty" but "utterly a source" (Clearances). This emptiness acts like the subtle silence in "A Call"; the poem that "presents a modern morality play" (O'Brien, *The Soul?*). The speaker calls home to talk with his father:

'Hold on,' she said, 'I'll just run out and get him.
The weather here's so good, he took the chance
To do a bit of weeding.'
So I saw him
Down on his hands and knees beside the leek rig,
Touching, inspecting, separating one
Stalk from the other, gently pulling up
Everything not tapered, frail and leafless,
Pleased to feel each little weed-root break,
But rueful also ...
Then found myself listening to
The amplified grave ticking of hall clocks
Where the phone lay unattended in a calm
Of mirror glass and sunstruck pendulums ...
And found myself then thinking: if it were nowadays,

This is how Death would summon Everyman.
Next thing he spoke and I nearly said I loved him
(Heaney, SP, sec. 48)

Such emptiness is the source of concentration "back to ourselves", where the speaker thinks about all summoning death and there leaves nothing but to tell his father he loves him. Some truths of this life have become too ordinary or at times too strange to win our thought. We forget to tell our loved ones we love them and sometimes to hold their hands looking through them. We need art that knows its mind to wake us back to the illuminating ordinary. Sometimes the space created through the ordinary is where contradictions would be if not settled but at least put in a different context to be alleviated or to be rethought. The Other Side is silenced through this kind of space. This poem is regarded by many critics as including the interaction of self and others as its focal point. The poem is about the interaction of a Catholic and the other side: a Protestant neighbor. Most of the readings of the poem place it on a religious and political plane of thought which is, of course, noteworthy but their procedure can be turned around to suggest that it is the meeting of the neighbor as a quite ordinary experience which is transcended to a space for the understanding between the two 'self', a space where Heaney's search for answers might be done. Popular readings of the poem lead an argument similar to Daneil Tobin's view of the poem as a way "to read the complex colonial history of Heaney's Ulster." (87) However, in the rush of the colonial encounters, what soothes and creates spaces is the moments of grace bestowed on the self to question his self, to acknowledge the greatness of his nature and an understanding of the alterity. It is the moment the Protestant hand gripped the hand of the Catholic in the roadblock in... a moment of hope for, understanding of, and faith to our humanity. Yet the silence in the poem is often interpreted as a distance, a gulf created through history and community between the neighbors, "an emptiness of any shared reality other than division" (86). The title of the poem seems to be the words of a self who although sees himself as separated from the other but who is capable of cherishing his kind and trusting him and regarding his neighbor, as Heaney reminds us of catechism, as "all mankind" (9). The title of the poem signifies a unity within difference; for the phrase "the other side" implies that there is a single body of which different sides can be seen, but all belong to one. The 'I' of the poem does not deny the nets of connection with the other. The speaker of the poem is one of the sides, rather than an above eye reporting the relation, which holds up hope in communication between them. Also the speaker does

not suffice to what he sees but also talks what he hears from the other side ("my ear swallowing his fabulous, biblical dismissal", "we would hear his step round the gable", "and the casual whistle strike up"), which is again expressive of the possibility of communication; for listening and hearing is indicative of intention on his side for further connection with the neighbor. Moreover; Heaney is keen enough to avoid any blurring of the differences between the two sides: different languages, religions, and histories. To ignore the differences and make up for them is to disrupt the possibility of communication and further movement. Then at the end of the poem, the two different sides are put in a common ground: the prayer. The Catholic neighbor, seeing the Protestant neighbor saying a prayer in the dark, falls silent only to bring about communication: "Should I slip away, I wonder, / or go up and touch his shoulder / And talk about the weather / Or the price of grass-seed?" the mode of silence created at the end of the poem is not expressing division, rather the possibility of future communication.

In most of his poems the place is not a geographical place and as such the geographies of place coordinate more with the geography of the mind. Heaney's poetic self, as discussed before, defines himself in dialogicality with the others. An immediate other to him is his family and the life he had with them. Sometimes the speaker remembers some objects from the home and the family life and is taken to that world, such as the ticking of hall clocks in *A Call*, and in some other poems, the simple ordinary objects and furniture form the center of his poem as in *The Settled Bed*. The entitled bed, a family Irish inheritance, sounds of the history of the endurance of Irish people, Catholic, Protestant, and "the sigh-life of Ulster" .it is an inheritance from long ago, but as the speaker says "yet willable forward" and carries the burden of history to the speaker. The past is in the present, every person is the cumulative sight of past people, relations, events. Heaney's poetic self sees his present underlined by the past and to him, it attests to the power of mind that brings the past and present aside in events and objects surrounding us through imagination: "... whatever is given can always be reimagined, however four-square, plank-thick, hull-stupid and out of its time it happens to be." realizing that inheritance from past is like a God-given blessing from heaven: "tumbled from heaven" one can bear its weight. Although its history might be bitterly burdensome, it can teach the speaker to apprehend the interconnectivity of the world. He might be "dry as the unkindled boards of a funeral ship", but as a lie on the bed it enlivens him with tide of voices from history:

If I lie in it, I am cribbed in seasoned deal
Dry as the unkindled boards of a funeral ship.
My measure has been taken; my ear shuttered up.
Yet I hear an old sombre tide awash in the headboard:
Unpathetic och ochs and och hohs, the long bedtime
Sigh-life of Ulster, unwilling, unbeaten,
Protestant, Catholic, the Bible, the beads,
Late talks at gables by moonlight, boots on the hearth,
The small hours chimed sweetly away so next thing it was
The cock on the ridge-tiles. (SP, sec. 10)

The aura surrounding the bed is settled on it through the celebrating look of the speaker which preserves the bed and the burden of history upon it from slowly diminishing into forgetfulness. Talking about the entitled garden seat in Thomas Hardy's poem with the same name, Heaney holds that such object (like the garden seat, or the settle bed) has become:

a point of entry into a common emotional belonging. It transmits the climate of a lost world and keeps alive a domestic intimacy with a reality that might otherwise have vanished. The more we are surrounded by such things, the more feeling we dwell in our own lives. The air that our imaginations inhale in their presence is not musty but bracing. (Heaney, PPP 1)

In its turn, the bed is the overcoming power against historical amnesia and even carries a moral force, for it reminds one of his obligations to the past and the lives which have been silenced through history. By putting the central gravity in the notion of self as an interpretive dialogical mindful being, Heaney's poetry radiates into history and back.

The forward and backward movement into ordinary and extraordinary, between the earth and heaven, is reminiscent of his poem *The Swing*. The quotidian moments and experiences of life are like "fingertips" which "just tipping you would send you every bit as far [...] as a big push in the back" but if you give your whole self to the beauty of the ordinariness and be mindful to perceive the sacred," but once you get going", and then sooner or later "we all learn [...] one by one to go sky high". To the speaker the green field turns a field of vision where the light over it is not like the light in the paintings of Fragonard or Brueghel, rather it is more the heavenly light of Hans Memling's which portrays the peasant and the landscape. The piled straw is reminiscent of the

celebration of Jesus' birth and in the middle of this field the swing invites you to free your soul into heaven:

Not Fragonard. Nor Brueghel. It was more
 Hans Memling's light of heaven off green grass,
 Light over fields and hedges, the shed-mouth
 Sunstruck and expectant, the bedding-straw
 Piled to one side, like a Nativity
 Foreground and background waiting for the figures.
 And then, in the middle ground, the swing itself
 With an old lopsided sack in the loop of it,
 Perfectly still, hanging like pulley-slack,
 A lure let down to tempt the soul to rise. (SP, sec. 47)

The speaker sees the world in its transcendence, so that the ordinary becomes meaningful and the presence signifies an absence to be fetched. His childhood lingers in his mind to add something to his present life and self and the past belonging to him goes from mind to mind to be cherished; the moments are transferred like the words from mouth to mouth: "Go and tell your father, the mower says (He said it to my father who told me), 'I have it mowed as clean as a new sixpence'" says the speaker in *Man and Boy*.

In Heaney's poem the ordinary and earthbound come side by side and are merged and one as in his poem "St Kevin and the Blackbird", where the saint, valuing the world in its every ordinary element and moment, becomes one with the bird and with eternity:

And then there was St Kevin and the blackbird.
 The saint is kneeling, arms stretched out, inside
 His cell, but the cell is narrow, so
 One turned-up palm is out the window, stiff
 As a crossbeam, when a blackbird land
 And lays in it and settles down to nest.
 Kevin feels the warm eggs, the small breast, the tucked
 Neat head and claws and, finding himself linked
 Into the network of eternal life,
 Is moved to pity: now he must hold his hand
 Like a branch out in the sun and rain for weeks
 Until the young are hatched and fledged and flown. (SP, sec. 42)

Heaney's use of a biblical character and story, builds the ordinary within sacred and the sacred within ordinary. Moreover; allocating the

power of mind and imagination to the self, he invites us to "imagine being Kevin"; one who forgets himself in to the sacredness of the quotidian and becomes receptive to and one with his prayer "to labour and not to seek reward" and with the flowing of the river "alone and mirrored clear in love's deep river", the steadfastness and numbness of the tree "like a branch out in the sun and rain for weeks", and the the warmth of bird's eggs. This passiveness, "you are neither here nor there" (postscript), arising out of a self who knows and feels the workings of his mind creates us the space to fully grasp the experience of living in this world and to value it. Heaney encourages this sort of awakening in passiveness in his "Had I not been awake" (SP, sec. 91), where the speaker appreciates being awake and not missing a wind that "got (him) up, the whole of (him)". Once more the idea that one needs to be mindful of his being in time and yet one being able to be awakened by the ordinary world are merged: "and got me up, the whole of me a-patter, alive and ticking like an electric fence: had I not been awake I would have missed it"; he is awake to be gotten up by it. To define the self, the self needs to be receptive to the alterity, to the world he lives within. As Squaring xviii Rhymes:

Strange how things in the offing, once they're sensed,
Convert to things foreknown;
And how what's come upon is manifest
Only in light of what has been gone through
To know our 'self' and to be a pillar to our 'self' and other 'selves',
we should flow through the world; "row the steady earth"
(SP. Sec. 2)

and our guide will be the other souls; says Heaney:
Everything flows. Even a solid man,
a pillar to himself and to his trade
All yellow boots and stick and soft felt hat,
Can sprout wings at the ankle and grow fleet
As the god of fair days, stone posts, roads and crossroads,
Guardian of travellers and psychopomp
.... Flow on, flow on
The journey of the soul with its soul guide... (SP, sec. 19)

All we have to know is that we are among souls and capable of perceiving the soul in everything, even the soulless; a knowledge which has no place in the modern thought of Freud, Darwin, and Nietzsche for their understanding of the self is nothing getting near to selfhood and soul but mere objectivity. Heaney's rewriting of the self is bound to and

at the same time generative of a new conception of reality. According to the speaker in *Markings* "all these things entered you, as they were both the door and what come through it. They marked the spot, marked time and held it open." (SP, sec.2)

Michael McLaverty, the teacher poet, passes on a phrase on Heaney's poetry from Gerald Manley Hopkins which signifies the exactness of Heaney's descriptions: "description is revelation" (N 71). This tribute seems to be significant of not just the beauty of his description but the power of his verse in revelation of the life in the ordinary, which often passes unnoticed. His descriptions linger in mind and heart for they are words coming from soul to soul and awakens us to the sacredness of the ordinary, the soulfulness of life, and a self capable of perceiving it. Those reviewers who think Heaney's poems "consolidate him as the poet of muddy-booted blackberry-picking", have to reconcile themselves with the fact that the simple and quotidian in Heaney's poetry is the sight of his excellency and complexity. Heaney's poetry refines our facing the reality and our look at our surrounding. It makes us feel and fill the distance between us and the life around us. Poetry's workings are subtle. As Heaney says: I am tired of speculations about the relation of the poet's work to the workings of the world he inhabits, and finally I disagree that 'poetry makes nothing happen.' It can eventually make new feelings, or feelings about feelings happen, and anybody can see that in this country for a long time to come a refinement of feelings will be more urgent than a reframing of policies or of constitutions.

Heaney "alerts us to perceive" (*Preoccupations*, sec.13. , para.6., as he believes Hopkins does, and he "cherish[es] the ordinary, the actual, the known, the unimportant" (sec.10., para.16.) as Kavanagh does according to him. Through his earthly spirituality, Heaney nourishes our sense of our 'self' by reminding us of 'human nature', as he does in *Government of Tongue*: "We are dwellers, we are namers, we are lovers, we make homes and search for our histories" (*Preoccupations*, sec.16, para.21). His poetry is a "consciousness rising on behalf of unpopular ideas" (redress). In an interview with Seamus Dean, "Unhappy and at Home", Heaney affirms "I can only speak of myself from the notion I have of my own work. Poetry is born out of the watermarks and colourings of the self. But that self in some ways takes its spiritual pulse from the inward spiritual structure of the community to which it belongs; and the community to which I belong is Catholic and nationalist." (3)

His poetry confirms that the self is a mindful being in continuous borrowing and lending with the world he lives within and the reality

created by the mind and injecting its quotidian spirituality to it is not the modern matter that appeared out of the big bang. He believes the self is flowing and poetry acts as "stepping stones in one's own sense of oneself"; it gives you self-understanding and yet because of the flowing nature of the self you need to supply the fields of vision for new ventures into poetry: "Every now and again, you write a poem that gives you self-respect and steadies your going a little bit farther out in the stream. At the same time, you have to conjure the next stepping stone because the stream, we hope, keeps flowing." (Lyden) to much anguish to the Modern thought of the para-scientists of Evolutionary, Positivist, Darwinists, and Sociobiologist views, Heaney's poetry acclaims what it seeks: the self is a "SINGULAR UNIVERSAL" (Dean).

The self is a dialogical, interpretive, yet inward being. In our searches for answers, the end is where Heaney begins:

High-riding Kites appear to range quite freely
Though reined by strings, strict and invisible. (Death 43)

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POÉSIE D'EAMUS HEANEY ET MOI MODERNE : UNE PRISE DE CONSCIENCE AU NOM D'IDÉES IMPOPULAIRES

Écrire un article sur Seamus Heaney (1939-2014) pourrait être une aventure, étant donné les nombreuses contributions à ce domaine. La carrière poétique de Seamus Heaney (1966-2010) est à la recherche de réponses à des questions soulevées par une préoccupation pour la notion d'ipséité. D'autre part, au début de la période moderne, certains penseurs associés à la littérature parascientifique proclament avec confiance une théorie vulnérable de l'ipséité qui suppose de soulever des questions sur l'authenticité des compréhensions occidentales traditionnelles et classiques du soi. Cette étude soutient que l'approche de la poésie de Heaney construit une théorie de soi qui peut être lue comme un révisionnisme à la conception illégitime de l'humanité proposée au XXe siècle, tout en continuant son effet sur la pensée contemporaine, et rend l'expérience de sens commun de la réalité on vit à l'intérieur mieux saisi et plus reconnu.

mots clés: Seamus Heaney, poésie, soi, dérange, réalité, éducationnisme, ordinaire