

## Seamus Heaney: A Portrait of a Poet in Search of His Unique Voice

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**Abstract:** *The most accurate voice to inform a poet is the closest voice to him. Therefore, the artist en route to reach universality finds the source of his uniqueness in his own values. What he seeks, in effect, is a voice coloured with the factors contributing to his personality and raised in concurrence with a harmonious music. Analysing the works of 1995 Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, one can see he attaches great importance to these elements. He believes that the poetic voice exposes its owner like a fingerprint and its musicality leads to the creation of interlinear harmony. This voice has bilateral functions; it both distinguishes the poet from average men in terms of his gift and provides a distinct position, within literary tradition, among other poets. The said uniqueness has been felt in all his oeuvre with the same incandescence since his early poems. This is one of the factors that takes the poet from the Mossbawn locale and places him among the distinguished representatives of contemporary British poetry.*

**Key Words:** *Seamus Heaney, poetry, poetic voice, musicality, artistic consciousness*

### Seamus Heaney: Özgün Sesini Arayan Bir Ozanın Portresi

**Özet:** *Bir ozanı anlatacak en doğru ses kendisine en yakın sestir. Bu nedenle, evrensel ulaşma yolundaki sanatçı, özgünlüğünün kaynağını kendi değerlerinde bulur. Gerçekte, onun aradığı, kişiliğine katkıda bulunan öğelerle renklenen ve uyumlu bir müzikle yükselen bir sestir. 1995 Nobel Edebiyat Ödülü sahibi Seamus Heaney'nin yapıtları incelendiğinde, bu öğelere büyük önem verdiği görülmektedir. Şiirsel sesin bir parmak izi gibi sahibini gösterdiğine ve müzikalitesinin dizeler arası uyumun yaratılışına öncülük ettiğine inanmaktadır. İki yönlü işlevi olan bu ses, hem yetisi yönünden ozanı sıradan insanlardan ayırır hem de yazın geleneği içinde ona öteki ozanlar arasında farklı bir konum kazandırır. Sözü edilen özgünlük Heaney'nin ilk şiirlerinden başlayarak bütün yapıtlarında aynı parlaklıkla duyumsanmaktadır. Ozanı Mossbawn yerelinden alarak günümüzde çağdaş İngiliz şiirinin seçkin temsilcileri arasına katan nedenlerden biri de budur.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Seamus Heaney, şiir, şiirsel ses, müzikalite, sanat bilinci*

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“[T]here is a connection between the core of a poet’s speaking voice and the core of his poetic voice, between his original accent and his discovered style” (1980: 43) writes 1995 Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney in his widely popular article ‘Feeling into Words’ as he discourses on the sui generis reality of the poet. Having haecceity, to him, is one of the most significant distinctive features of an artist in the groove of universality. What he has been deeply occupied with since his early years dabbling in verse under the pseudonym *Incertus* is to create a river flowing in accord with its bed. And that is inarguably the poetic voice for a poet, a voice floundering to find an artistic ground, a voice pertaining to himself and, like his fingerprint, revealing his identity. Needless to say, it is supposed to have a musicality, which would well befit the poet’s locale, history and social context. From this point of view, it may be assertively stated that Heaney nurtures his volumes, especially the earlier ones, with the musical elements of Mossbawn, a farm on which he was born into a Catholic family. In that rural milieu, the poet has created a close rapport strongly intertwined with the nature surrounding him. Since he comes from an agrarian society, his poetry echoes that traditional way of life and deeply links him to Ireland and his Irish past, whence the voice and musicality, which can be felt in his *oeuvre*, have originated.

As his poetic gift emerges, Heaney grows correspondingly more attuned to the nature of the current which endows his voice with a special music. However, it is necessary above all that the lyric poet determine a route for himself, a direction to show that his art is not prosaic but the speech of a man full of imaginative approaches and creative instinct. As regards a poet who lived until the age of thirty-three in Northern Ireland, where the Catholic-Nationalist minority has long been in conflict with the Protestant-Unionist majority, it is no little thing to achieve a dignity in art. Therefore, as if he was very keen on showing his devoutness and determination for the sake of his purpose, he embarks on his career with a challenging poem ‘Digging’, which is the door into his poetry. In this opening poem of *Death of a Naturalist*, the poet reveals the ground he physically, spiritually and mentally remains faithful to and chooses to realize himself in the realm of art, where he hopes to find eternal freedom with his pen, rather than to plough a small piece of land as his forefathers have done for centuries. In other words, he starts a journey throughout which he is to use paper for field, pen for plough and mind for body:

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I’ll dig with it. (1966:2)

Heaney yearns to be a conscious individual on course toward being an active subject, capable of making his own decisions under any circumstances, but not a passive object adrift in time. It is essential that -as understood from the aforementioned manifesto piece- the poet be in deadly earnest so as to carry out his aims, and for this, develop a special signature ad hoc. Defining ‘Digging’ as “the force of initiation” and “a fingerprint, be

recorded and employed for identification” (1980:42-43), he takes stock of his career in this regard.

Heaney, in fact, wants to invent a new level where he can have an opportunity to contribute to the mental and spiritual metamorphosis of his people, without relinquishing his Irish roots and sacrificing his yearnings for a better future. The poet thus cognizes the artistic side of his fathers in doing their work, however great his desire to drift apart from their lifestyle may be, he keeps boasting of their talent. The quintessence of this pride is that when depicting how adroitly his grandfather –or rather his great-uncle Hughie as he confesses to Dennis O’Driscoll (2008a:25)- acts in cutting turf and his father in ploughing, he speaks of men as if at the peak of their gifts. His grandfather “cut more turf in a day/Than any other man on Toner’s bog”; nor is this all, he is depicted “Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods/ Over his shoulder, going down and down/For the good turf” (1966:1-2). On the other hand, his father, who was in the strictest sense of the word an expert in his mind’s eye, was good at ploughing.

The relation of his fathers with earth resembles the bond between poet and poetry, that is “working with words is no less dignified, no more prissy, than working with earth” (Ricks, 1997: 22), and this is the very reason Heaney finds his artistic voice, mostly in his early volumes, in the agricultural images abound in Irish traditional lifestyle. Elmer Andrews expounding on ‘Digging’ discourses on a similar vein, writing that it evinces “pious devotion to inheritance, asserting continuity with the past, family, community; the desire for attachment and acceptance” (1998:41). However, the poet in ‘Follower’ emphasizes the fact that “But I have no spade to follow men like them” (1966:12). That means his propensity for attachment turns into a desire for detachment, in fact, a complimentary state arisen from both casts of mind. The ranks, although in the field realistically true, are nevertheless invalid and total opposites, because the boy who once admired his father, after growing and initiating his art, surpasses his father. Yet, the incipient state still has a complimentary cycle; seeing that his elders do the best in field, so will Heaney in poetry:

I wanted to grow up and plough,  
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.  
All I ever did was follow  
In his broad shadow round the farm.

I was nuisance, tripping, falling,  
Yapping always. But today  
It is my father who keeps stumbling  
Behind me, and will not go away. (1966:12)

At the beginning of his career, as O’Leary underscores, “there is little indication of what kind of digging the pen can effect, apart from uncovering the personal development of the poet” but with ‘Follower’, “the excavation of the past is now to be carried out in the

service of a collective future; a future which may be imagined but is, nonetheless, most real” (2008:668). For the sake of such fuzzy but rather charming days to come, Heaney puts a distance between himself and his father in order to establish his own independence. The nurturing reason for that kind of breaking up, for all intents and purposes, came with The United Kingdom’s 1947 Education Act, which enabled Irish children to access secondary and then university education. Heaney’s generation was the first to benefit from that opportunity. Providing a mere inkling of how the results of these politics affected the social evolution, Adrian Frazer explains clearly:

The generation gap divides, on the one hand, an older generation of Irish Catholics that were attractive in their immemorial rural customs yet contemptible in their acceptance of Protestant hegemony, and, on the other hand, a younger one adrift in urban modernism, nostalgic for a pre-capitalist sense of community, many of them determined to bring about political change by persuasion or by force (2001:24).

Heaney has remained devoted to the craft of poetry but has not isolated himself from his roots, which are fundamental to his conscious. He is a poet who has managed to acquire a voice from the milieu he lives in. Therefore, defining poet and poetry, he directly develops ipso facto the bond in an unusual way by taking the terms from the agricultural domain and signifies his agrarian-poetic approach:

The poet as ploughman...and the suggestive etymology of the word ‘verse’ itself is pertinent in this context. ‘Verse’ comes from the Latin *versus* which could mean a line of poetry but could also mean the turn that a ploughman made at the head of the field as he finished one furrow and faced back into another (1980:65).

As inferred, this definition can be considered as an inclusive token of Heaney’s devotion to tradition. The poet, in ‘Glanmore Sonnets’, a long poem with ten parts in *Field Work*, uses similar expressions in a parallel fashion:

Then I landed in the hedge-school of Glanmore  
And from the backs of ditches hoped to raise  
A voice caught back off slug-horn and slow chanter  
That might continue, hold, dispel, appease:  
Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground,  
Each verse returning like the plough turned round (1979:34).

It is this impulse that compels him to deal with such out-of-date professions and their masters as turf-cutters, ploughmen, diviners, thatchers and blacksmiths throughout his first two volumes. All these archaic figures are part of the deep hinterland of modern Ireland to which the poet’s artistic voice is indebted, and each of them has mysterious and even occult skills (Deane, 1997: 66). And it is most probably from this viewpoint that

he develops another agreeable definition for poetry within the circuit of 'The Diviner', a poem from *Death of a Naturalist*, saying that "the diviner resembles the poet in his function of making contact with what lies hidden, and in his ability to make palpable what was sensed or raised" (1980:48). It can clearly be seen in this poem that the poet "takes a phenomenon of the rural life he knew as a child and transforms it into a metaphor for a Romantic concept of poetic inspiration" (Schirmer, 1992: 269). The diviner uses his hazel forked stick with a very great skill, in the same way the poet creates highly different worlds out of ordinary words. Both of them are the exact owners of their instruments, whereas the stick or the words turn into nondescript stuff in the hands of others:

The bystanders would ask to have a try.  
He handed them the rod without a word.  
It lay dead in their grasp till, nonchalantly,  
He gripped expectant wrists. The hazel stirred (1966:23).

Schirmer (1992:270) also draws attention to the final rhyme between 'word' and 'stirred' to reveal the connection between poet and diviner and asserts that it embodies a thoroughly romantic aesthetic. The person who can find the water with his hazel is only the diviner and likewise the poet is the sole person to lay the hidden bare through poetic inspiration. Here, Heaney emphasises the idea of transcendental reality of the romantic poets, who regard nature as the source of inspiration and the realm of imagination, and assigns a dual perspective to poetry. On the one hand, he depicts a horizontal relation between nature and the poet, and on the other, within the same context, reflects a vertical attachment extending from the poet to the transcendental. However, it would be deceptive to claim that Heaney considers nature as a signifier of the God, as the romantic poets did in the past. It is, to him, "a signifier of a mysterious and hidden reality or meaning awaiting interpretation" (Dau, 2003:35).

Heaney, parallel to 'The Diviner', in 'The Real Names' from *Electric Light*, highlights how the artist is different from the everyman in terms of his approach to and discussion of things that concern him, stating that he can effect the things seen and heard by everybody in a more perfect and satisfying style with his unique talent. He demonstrates this divergence through the example of Shakespeare and his father:

Shakespeare's father (or so John Aubrey claims)  
Was a butcher, and when Shakespeare was a boy  
"He exercised his father's trade, but when  
He kill'd a Calfe, he would doe it in *high style*  
& make a speech." (2001: 54)

'Personal Helicon', "the ars poetica piece" (Auge, 2003:273) that appears at the end of *Death of a Naturalist*, also gives clues of Heaney's posture concerning artistic ground.

The images taken from rural life serve as conveyors to unite his voice with universality. And that voice, as discerned, belongs to a poet who assures his position with each passing day, to a poet eager to pass behind the darkness in order to carry the hidden or the forgotten into the light. As Neil Corcoran suggests, this poem “more egotistically suggests that the importance of the poem lies in its ability to reveal the poet to himself, restoring in language what has been lost in reality” (1986:54).

From the outset, the title exposes its sphere of interest and awakens the first images of Heaney’s message in reader’s mind, referring to the sources of inspiration by connecting itself with Greek mythology. As for the myth, ‘Helicon’ refers to a mountain along which the ‘Aganippe’ and the ‘Hippocrene’, two springs sacred to the muses who were the divine spirits of inspiration, flowed in harmony with each other, wherefrom the ‘Hippocrene’ was regarded to be the source of poetic inspiration. Furthermore, the pool where Narcissus fell in love with his reflection was believed to lie on this mountain. What is remarkable for Heaney in handling this story is that he links the route of the rivers and the course of his poetic voice.

Seeking a secure place, Heaney’s use of a mountain image, which evokes impassability in terms of being an obstacle on the way to the target and which requires a persevering and undaunted disposition against its hard and strenuous nature, is somewhat meaningful. His purpose is to surmount the insurmountable so as to discover the spring he could irrigate the barren lands of poetry with and have a fertile ground where he could find his own reflection and echo of his poetic voice:

Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,  
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring  
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme  
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing (1966: 44).

The Gods’ decision regarding Narcissus, so beautiful a lad that all girls who see him fall in love but are never requited in their love, is quite poetic: “may he who loves not others love himself” (Hamilton, 1942: 88). His tragic destiny is sealed when he sees his reflection in a clear pool and, upon understanding no way to obtain the beauty looking at him from the water, he considers death as the best choice. It would seem at least partially valid to claim that what appears to be black luck for Narcissus also marks the beginning of the nascency of Echo’s everlasting black destiny.

The similes used from this myth are rather influential. Considered from Heaney’s viewpoint, the poet is Narcissus as a self-lover, the waterpool signifies the poem, and Echo represents the satisfaction of the poet with the reflection of his poetic voice or a quality to delight the owner of the original voice. That means Heaney is a poet of pleasure, and what makes him a lovable poet, as Kirsch interprets, rather than an admirable one, is that “his sense of responsibility extends to pleasure itself. The poet, he knows, must delight and instruct; and without the delight, the instruction is worse than useless” (2006:55). The reasons for Heaney to write poetry are obviously clarified here, a self-investigation

and a detailed research into the untouched heritage of Ireland, which is to say, he initially explores the darkness of himself and gives way in his later volumes, like *Wintering Out* and *North*, uncovering the truths about the dark and violent past and present of his country.

In his artistic journey in which he defines poetry as “divination... as revelation of the self to the self” (1980:41), he hopes to find out “...echoes, gave back your own call/With a clean new music in it” (1966:44). The essence of the music he creates for his poetry is the old pump in the backyard of their house in Mossbawn:

I would begin with the Greek word, omphalos, meaning the navel,  
and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and repeat  
it, omphalos, omphalos, omphalos, until its blunt and falling music  
becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our  
back door (1980:17).

Heaney seems to be caught by the sound of the word and then he matches it to the sound of water spouting from the pump, a fantastic symbol of his imaginative power. Here, “the pump, like his poetry, taps hidden springs to conduct what is sustaining and life giving” (Andrews, 1985:369). The music ensuing from it is the voice Heaney pines for throughout his career. That kind of artistic eagerness can be seen more obviously in ‘The Forge’, where the old pump shows itself in the shape of an anvil ‘somewhere in the centre’. The anvil that marks the centre becomes an ‘omphalos’ and with the echoes of each hammerblow of the blacksmith, a clean new music is composed. The opening line of the poem “All I know is a door into the dark” appears to address Heaney’s purpose in parallel with the one he expounds in ‘Personal Helicon’. He is determined to penetrate into “the heart of a world which is beyond the everyday, but which proves to be somehow simultaneously central to it” (Murphy, 2000:20-21). All his effort would enlighten his prospective strategies and determine the doors he aspires to pass soon.

All I know is a door into the dark  
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;  
Inside, the hammered anvil’s short-pitched ring,  
The unpredictable fantail of sparks  
Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.  
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,  
Horned as a unicorn, at one end square,  
Set there immovable: an altar  
Where he expends himself in shape and music (1969:19).

The blacksmith is at a turning point; he either is to obey the rules of time and yield to flow or get back to his anvil “to beat the real iron out, to work the bellows” (19). He prefers the second and his choice can be regarded as a sign of his artistic fidelity

which gives priority to consciousness and creativity. A similar approach is witnessed in 'Thatcher'. It is impossible for this master to cope with the modern roof designs whose every part is produced in different factories. However, while the masters today work under written instructions in projects, he spiritually and mentally uses his creative power. Regardless of the negative conditions of the age, he perseveres in carrying out the traditional roofwork in a very mindful and studious manner and builds an artistic temple designed elaborately:

Then fixed the ladder, laid out well honed blades  
And snipped at straw and sharpened ends of rods  
That, bent in two, made a white-pronged staple  
For pinning down his world, handful by handful.  
Couchant for days on sods above the rafters  
He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together  
Into a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,  
And left them gaping at his Midas touch (1969:20).

Both 'The Forge' and 'Thatcher' draw a parallel line to the work of the poet in terms of artistic ability and creative impulse. The blacksmith and the thatcher are the representatives of tradition, who struggle in surviving to protect the bond extending from the past to the present. And Heaney should feel himself akin to them on some grounds while giving an artistic shape to his work of art with words. As the blacksmith 'beat[s] the real iron out' 'with a slam and flick' to cast and create his work, and as the thatcher 'snip[s] at straw and sharpen[s] end of rods', the poet similarly moulds his lines by beating words with linguistical strokes and peeling the husk of words, sharpening them in the proper form to be used as a gun. On the other hand, the situation is so permeable that Brandes determines these traditional tradesmen "come to represent not only the individual artist but also the quickly disappearing imaginative and cultural life of the rural community" (1997: 104).

In any case the fact is that the artistic fancy, unique voice and musicality the poet is in search of are inherited from literary pioneers. In this sense, the rural atmosphere of Mossbawn makes Heaney become more interested in and enthusiastic about the pastoral expressions of Wordsworth. To obtain his targets, for apparent reasons, he patterns himself after the old master. When he writes about Wordsworth composing "on the gravel path, to-ing and fro-ing like a ploughman up and down a field, his voice rising and falling between the measure of his pentameters, unites the old walking meaning of versus with the newer, talking sense of verse" (1980:65), in effect, he mentions a sound itinerary. Seeing that Coleridge liked to compose while walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse wood and Wordsworth always wrote walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption (1980:64), Heaney would try a different way to reach a unique voice.



For this very reason, in the process of writing a poem, he just follows his ear, and if he is working with pentameters, he does often beat out the line with his fingers, even while driving (Cole, 1997:132). Likewise, he does so much to point at the true nature of the relationship between poetry and musicality by indicating that “you can’t get started without a first line that goes musically -by which I don’t mean melodiously, just that it needs phonetic purchase or rhythmical promise” (O’Driscoll, 2008b: 254). Seemingly, Heaney emphasizes the voice and music he aspires for in his poetry with the following lines of his master in *Prelude*:

My own voice cheered me, and, far more, the mind’s  
Internal echo of the imperfect sound;  
To both I listened, drawing from them both  
A cheerful confidence in things to come. (1969:495)

The cheering of Wordsworth reminds of Heaney’s desire to be fascinated with his own voice, which is expressed in ‘Personal Helicon’. In connection with this kind of viewpoint, he believes that there are two elements constituting music in poetry. The first is the literary tradition that determines the structure, form, metre, rhythm and diction of the poem, and the other an unconscious activity which is spiritual rather than intellectual and what Heaney calls instinctual ballast (1980:62). Carrying these thoughts, in parallel to Wordsworth’s aforementioned lines, he is observed in a state of full admiration of Wordsworth:

The act of composition is a cheering one. But even though he is listening to the sound of his own voice, he realizes that this spoken music is just a shadow of the unheard melody, ‘the mind’s internal echo’. He is drawn into himself even as he speaks himself out, and it is this mesmerized attention to the echoes and invitations within that constitutes his poetic confidence (1980:63).

Heaney, too, like Wordsworth, dives into his inner world to obtain a musicality filled with pleasure. In light of such thoughts, he tells how he used to give his ear to the railway extending in front of his home in Mossbawn so as to hear the iron tune produced by the coming train. However, the poet transcending the ordinary sound, heard the struck couplings and piston pitched two miles away, and this shows that he prioritizes a different music, a melody beyond the average perception. The poet tries to reach that kind of an echo in his poetry after years in ‘Glanmore Sonnets IV’:

I used to be with an ear to the line  
For that way, they said, there should come a sound  
Escaping ahead, an iron tune  
Of flange and piston pitched along the ground,  
But I never heard that. Always, instead,

Struck couplings and shuntings two miles away  
Lifted over the woods (1979:36).

McLoughlin, within this context, while explicating these sonnets says that “Heaney is a writer with an abiding sense of literary lineage and his ‘ear to the line’ has a diachronic significance in relation to literary and cultural tradition” (1989: 203) and this determination really lends itself well to his messages. The poet, who used to endeavour to hear the iron tune from the coming train when he was a child, now hopes to catch the sound he is after by giving his ear to the line of poetry, supporting the efforts of Wordsworth and Coleridge within this coherence:

Finding a voice means that you can get your own feeling into your own words and that your words have the feel of you about them; and I believe that it may not even be a metaphor, for a poetic voice is probably very intimately connected with the poet’s natural voice, the voice that he hears as the ideal speaker of the lines he is making up (1980:43).

Heaney found his true voice in Glanmore after he left Belfast for Co. Wicklow, Republic of Ireland, where he discovered a sense of poetry in the context of art for art’s sake. During the years he spent in that rural area, he escaped the chaotic atmosphere created by the intensive conflicts and sectarian enmity in the North and reached a poetic voice in harmony with his thoughts by turning toward nature. In this change of decision, along with Wordsworth, James Joyce made a significant contribution.

This great man of literature, in his realm of art free from all rules, always chased the aesthetic pleasure and transcendental vision. What Joyce did was to carry the poet from the visible into the invisible, to a point where artistic reality is prevailing. In that universe, the aesthetic of the work and the ability of its beauty to fascinate its owner are the sine qua non. For this reason, the poet, who dealt with Irish Troubles and composed on the Irish linguistic, cultural and political destruction in *Wintering Out* and *North*, beginning with *Field Work*, is seen to value artistic satisfaction above everything. Therefore, in this period the principle of art for Ireland’s sake, with the influence of Joyce, converts to art for art’s sake. In the long poem ‘Station Island’, as Heaney questions his commitments and experiences a spiritual and mental purgation before passing through the realm of art, Joyce has the last word on the route of the poet toward gaining an authentic and pure voice:

... ‘Your obligation  
is not discharged by any common rite.  
What you must do must be done on your own  
so get back in harness. The main thing is to write  
for the joy of it. Cultivate a work-lust  
that imagines its haven like your hands at night

dreaming the sun in the sunspot of a breast.  
You are fasted now, light-headed, dangerous.  
Take off from here. And don't be so earnest,  
  
let others wear the sackcloth and the ashes.  
Let go, let fly, forget.  
You've listened long enough. Now strike your note (1984:92-93).

Joyce's admonishment may be interpreted as an act of self-awareness, a call for a new baptism for Heaney's poetry (Tobin, 1999: 197). Investigating his poems carefully one can easily see that the artistic principle mentioned in 'Personal Helicon' constantly comes to the forefront. Whenever he looks at the lines, he would see himself, and the sound emerging from the lines would constitute an authentic musicality coming from his imagination. In fact, he has been aware since his first volume that "the peculiar power of poetry is to offer a kind of liberating music, a lyric occasion which can seem free of all moral motions, secure in its own self-delight" (Brown, 2010: 190).

Joyce's advice can be regarded in conjunction with the story told in *Sweeney Astray*. The book is Heaney's translation of the medieval Irish poem, the tale of an Irish King who goes crazy after being cursed by Saint Ronan, and then is transformed into a half-human, half-bird creature due to his desecration of and obscene words towards Christianity and its sacred precepts. Suibhne pays the penalty for his crimes by spending most of his life as a bird away from his society. In the meantime, he discovers that he has a great talent for art, whereupon he sings poems about Ireland as a condemned nomad flying here and there. It would be quite meaningful to draw a correspondence between Mad Sweeney's hermitic journey and Heaney's purgatorial one in 'Station Island', in the last section of which the poet encounters Joyce and takes his aforementioned advice.

Suibhne's story is, indeed, a story of banishment, signifying the art's authority and artistic freedom. Heaney himself starts to translate this story from Irish in the year he left Belfast and with each passing day finds a great many similarities between himself and the king. In *Sweeney Astray*, he shows the artist under hard conditions and in captivity of a flight for peace, thereby making concrete the conflict between creative imagination and traditional and political boundaries. In this sense, Sweeney is "the prototype of the Irish exile or 'inner émigré' ...who never quite escapes the forces that set him in motion" (Hart, 1992:140). Some of the twenty poems in *Sweeney Astray*, as he says in an interview, are in the mad king's voice, and some using his situation, which yields a sense of displacement (Beisch, 1986: 165). Heaney largely explains his connections with this exiled king in the introduction of the book:

My fundamental relation with Sweeney, however, is topographical. His kingdom lay in what is now south County Antrim and north County Down, and for over thirty years I lived on the verges of that territory, in sight of some of Sweeney's places ...When I began work on this version,

I had just moved to Wicklow, not all that far from Sweeney's final resting ground at St Mullins. I was in a country of woods and hills and remembered that the green spirit of the hedges embodied in Sweeney had first been embodied for me in the persons of a family of tinkers, also called Sweeney, who used to camp in the ditchbacks along the road to the first school I attended. One way or another, he seemed to have been with me from the start (1983: vii-viii).

Heaney discovers his own voice in this myth, as a man who has drifted away from his homeland. Both in *Sweeney Astray* and 'Sweeney Redivivus', the third part of *Station Island*, he presents himself by regenerating this bird-man. As sober fact, Sweeney's story is Heaney's story. Each of them is a representative of a divided spirit and a hermit who grows his own solitude. They fulfill their longings for their homes by composing poems in the soothing climate of art. Sweeney, a real point of view for Heaney, is a guide leading the poet in surmounting the problems he meets in the modern era. Therefore, to use his own words, "insofar as Sweeney is also a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance, it is possible to read the work as an aspect of the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political, and domestic obligation" (1983: vi). From here it is reasonable to infer that Heaney makes Sweeney his alter ego, "at times an identity, not so much shadow as his own substance" (Tamplin, 1989: 91), and a mask for his dilemmas, especially in *Station Island*. The fantastic harmony in their names reveals the concord between Heaney/Sweeney, an indicator of poetical and musical unity. Approving the trueness of Quinn's argument (2008:141) that the name Heaney comes from the Irish for bird, 'ean', this fact, per se, is almost enough to connect the voice of the poet to the birdlike king's.

It is possible to reckon Sweeney as the archetypal artist who wants to have the pleasure of freedom and thus escape from individual and social loyalties. After questioning himself, Heaney metamorphoses into a bird as well, and like Joyce's Stephan Dedalus, equipped with 'silence, exile and cunning' (1996:281), flies toward a world without any restraints by breaking through the nets of nation, religion, ideology and language. Through all of the mentioned literary figures, he creates a position for himself, "a sort of imagined vantage-point and play area, where he can be true to himself and to the lyric impulse" (Hawlin, 1992: 37). He has thus found a voice that brings him close to art and freedom, as the freer and more independent he is, the closer he can remain to himself.

To conclude, art for Heaney has "a religious, a binding force, for the artist. Language is the poet's faith and the faith of his fathers and in order to go his own way and do his proper work in an agnostic time, he has to bring that faith to the point of arrogance and triumphalism" (1980:217). As Andrews states, the poet, brief and to the point, here "speaks as an apologist of the 'religion of art'" (1985:376). Heaney always emphasises his faith that humanistic points shine out in a society in which art is extolled, believing in the poetry "for its truth to life, in every sense of that phrase" (1995:12) has a role in purging the reader from primitiveness. Of all the brilliant poets of contemporary British

poetry, none is more so than he in terms of gaining a voice and creating a music en route to that faith. There extends a long and sound link from the pump in Mossbawn to the mythological king. The music stemming from the sound of the pump can be heard in the flutters of the wings of Sweeney, in Stephen and those of his kind. The opening and closing wings of the birdmen evokes the plunger slugging up and down and the original music is still heard: *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*.

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