

The Aesthetics of Seeing in Seamus Heaney's *Seeing Things*: Memory and Transcendence-in-Immanence in the Aesthetics of Everyday Life

Jéssica Moreira

FACULDADE DE LETRAS DA UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO

Citation: Jéssica Moreira. "The Aesthetics of Seeing in Seamus Heaney's *Seeing Things*: Memory and Transcendence-in-Immanence in the Aesthetics of Everyday Life." *Via Panoramica: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos*, série 3, vol. 7, n° 1, 2018, pp. 72-92. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.lettras.up.pt/>.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to deconstruct not only the things that Seamus Heaney sees in his collection of poems *Seeing Things* but, more importantly, *how* those things are perceived. In order to do so, I will be applying Husserl's phenomenological concept of transcendence-in-immanence and different philosophical theories of perception, such as adverbial theory, to construct a useful device with which to read and look at *what* Seamus Heaney is seeing. In *Seeing Things*, unlike in previous collections, the perceptual experience of objects and these objects themselves will be transubstantiated and, therefore, transcended. The things perceived acquire a double status: they are both "there," in the tangible world to be observed, but also "beyond," in an ethereal realm in which they are "made different."

These theories push us, however, even deeper into the rabbit hole: into the problem of the ontological and the phenomenological status of the object and the problem of representation. These issues will be examined according to Heaney's own process of signifying them, for example: childhood memory, the death of his father and notions of limits and boundaries (which relate to concepts of binarism such as presence and absence). Furthermore, memory is the medium through which the ordinary and the visionary overlap and become transparent, but also the domain in which ontological meaning is restored after the revelation of the paradoxes that memory itself produces: for it is in memory that contraries intermingle - contraries such as life and death, fullness and emptiness, presence and absence.

Key-words: Seamus Heaney; Irish poetry; artistic creation; perception; ontology; representation; transcendence; immanence; death; memory; binarism.

Resumo

O propósito deste artigo é o de não só desconstruir as coisas (“things”) que Seamus Heaney vê na sua coleção de poemas *Seeing Things*, mas também o modo *como* estas coisas são percebidas. De modo a consegui-lo, será aplicado o conceito fenomenológico de transcendência-em-imanência, de Husserl, bem como diferentes teorias filosóficas no âmbito do debate da percepção - tal como a teoria adverbial - de forma a construir um mecanismo útil para ler e olhar para o que Seamus Heaney está a ver. Em *Seeing Things*, contrariamente ao que tinha vindo a acontecer em coleções prévias, a experiência perceptual dos objetos e os objetos em si mesmos serão transsubstanciados e, portanto, transcendidos. As coisas percebidas adquirirão um duplo estatuto: elas tanto estão “lá,” no mundo tangível para serem observadas, como também estão “para além de,” num reino etéreo no qual estas são “tornadas diferentes.”

Estas teorias empurram-nos, conquanto, ainda mais para o fundo na toca do coelho: para o problema do estatuto ontológico e fenomenológico do objeto bem como para aquele da representação. Estas questões serão examinadas de acordo com o processo de significação dos objetos do próprio Seamus Heaney, como por exemplo: a(s) memória(s) de infância, a morte do seu pai e noções de limites e divisões (que se relacionam com conceitos de binariedade como aquelas de presença e ausência). Adicionalmente, a memória será vista como o meio através do qual o comum e o visionário se sobrepõem e tornam transparentes, mas também o domínio no qual é possível a restauração de significado ontológico após a revelação dos paradoxos que a própria memória produz: pois é nela que os contrários coabitam - contrários como vida e morte, cheio e vazio, presença e ausência.

Palavras-chave: Seamus Heaney; poesia irlandesa; criação; percepção; ontologia; representação; transcendência; imanência; morte; memória; binariedade.

We never . . . originally and really perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things . . . ; rather, we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-engine aeroplane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than any sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door slam in the house, and never hear acoustic sensations or mere sounds. (Heidegger 156)

All I believe that happened there was vision (Heaney, “The Disappearing Island,” *The Haw Lantern* 50)

Seeing Things (ST) is both a poem and a collection of poems in which Seamus Heaney returns to the generational themes¹ of his earliest poems but with a whole new sense of awareness of his own writing process and of perceiving and representing those themes. As Eugene O’Brien asserts in *Seamus Heaney: Creating Irelands of the Mind*,

this volume is about “seeing things anew - a second look where things are seen in their full complexity” (96), “anew” being a key word to this point. Remarkably, while Heaney revisits the topics of his previous poetry - rurality, childhood, generations, places - these things are transubstantiated, re-contextualized and, most notably, re-seen. This shift from a kind of poetry “constrained by identities” to one which has “more openly metaphysical concerns” (McDonald 15) is propelled by the death of Heaney’s father, Patrick Heaney, just two years after the death of his mother. The death of his father and the realization of himself as an orphan comes to inform Heaney of a boundary that only poetic creation seems to be able to penetrate and trespass - an idea which reverberates throughout the whole collection and to which we will turn our attention later in the essay. Deviating from the ideological turn of his earlier work - while still exploring the same spectrum of themes - *Seeing Things* is no longer bounded to those images of purely empirical experience but allows the poet its transcendence. Therefore, he is able to *see things*, both in the colloquial way of seeing things² that are not “actually” there, and in the sense of transcending the tangible world in order to see *beyond* it - or maybe *through* it. As Jerzy Jarniewicz argues in “The Way Via Warsaw: Seamus Heaney and Post-War Poets,” in a section devoted to history and memory in *Seeing Things*,

The very title of the collection, though alluding to the visionary possibilities of seeing things; that is, “crediting marvels” and imaging the reality beyond the material world, in its literal meaning, keeps the poet close to the horizontal dimension of the tangible world of time and space, of history and place. (114)

Therefore, when Henry Hart, in his article’s title, asks “What is Seamus Heaney seeing in *Seeing Things*?” we would not have a much better answer than what we would have given to any of his previous works. The objects and themes examined remain, more or less, the same. Instead, the mutation occurs in Heaney’s ways of seeing - and hence, of representing - them. In such a manner, the question seems not to be only a matter of *what* the things are that are seen by Heaney, but *how* these things are seen or observed.

In order to find an answer to the “how?” a distinction will be drawn between the two primary ways in which the notion of “seeing” things may be addressed when referring to the collection. The first method I will designate as *empirical* or *ordinary* - for referring to the usual mode of perceiving things which the *concrete* experience of the object itself provides. The second type of vision - transcendent to the first - I will be referring to as transcendence within (or “in”) immanence, in accordance with the

expression used by Husserl in the second volume of *Logical Investigations*. Transcendence will be considered in the sense of surpassing - or “seeing beyond,” to use Heaney’s terminology - the ordinary phenomenological experience of the object. Immanence, on the other hand, is described in terms of what is subjacent to the object but hidden from intentional consciousness - as Husserl formulates it. My point will also be that while these terms are commonly opposed to one another - especially in theological philosophy - it seemed more appropriate to make use of Husserl’s synthesis of them. This is because, for Heaney, even though the re-attribution of meaning to mundane objects seems to be done through transcendence, the meaning is never outside the object but within it, to be revealed. As Alan Peacock theorizes about the collection in “Meditations: Poet as Translator, Poet as Seer”: “The visible and the invisible are continuous: the marvellous and the numinous may be sought in the visible, tangible ordinary. Seeing things is co-terminous with seeing things in the colloquial sense of having vision: the material dissolves into the immaterial” (251).

Accordingly, there are two main ways in which “seeing” - always related to mundane objects - will be regarded: an ordinary seeing, and a transcendent-in-immanence kind of seeing. Better still would be to say that there is only one key way of seeing - to which every other is subordinated - which is the imaginative dialectic relationship between both methods, but, in order to get to that, the distinction needs to be made.

Besides these, I will allude to *senses of seeing* which also refer to perception and which I will be addressing as *adverbial vision*. The concept will be used in continuity with the theory of perception from which the term is borrowed. This theory explicates the nature of perception according to the apprehension of the object’s intrinsic qualities - *qualia* - and to the way the subject is altered. Specifically, adverbial perceptions are those which are presented to the subject through the intrinsic and phenomenal qualities of the object itself. In this way, according to adverbial theory, when I perceive “green water” I am experiencing “greenly” and “water-ly.”³ Adverbial theory, inversely to canonical descriptions of perceptual experience, considers perception in terms of action, reconceptualizing experience in terms of the dynamic act-object (excluding any particular order). The object ceases to be an object to become an adverb describing and mutating the way in which the action is perceived.

This type of vision is, in a way, what permits the poet the transcendence-in-immanence kind of perception. Only via the self-referential means of the things seen,

i.e. through the way in which the subject reacts and is altered by the perceived object, can a proper theory of signification be established.

But how is this relevant for the study of the ways in which perception is understood by Seamus Heaney? The argument can be made that the poetic vision and descriptions on perception of *Seeing Things* draw their energy from a form of seeing that is mainly adverbial. This is because the objects that Heaney is seeing are not only figurative but call his being - and his being there - into question. The image/object/place ceases to be merely static and becomes performative, *adverbial*. The object is perceived according to the ways in which it behaves, is modified and *plays* with its context - and its beholder. Take, for example, the poem “The Ash Plant” in which Patrick Heaney - Heaney’s father - takes “the phantom limb/ of an ash plant in his grasp” and finds “his touch” which “steadies him” and allows him to “stand his / ground” (19). The subject and the action are represented through the link they hold with the object; and the object is perceived through the way it modifies and interacts with the subject. This relationship is made especially clear in poems whose titles are object names, such as “The Biretta,” “The Pitchfork” or “The Schoolbag,” to name but a few.⁴

The use of an adverbial type of vision, in turn, seems to be connected to the attribution of physical meaning to ontological concerns relating to the issue of representation - to which the dialectic correlation between ordinary perception and transcendence-in-immanence comes to answer. The problem of representation arises essentially from a concern towards the poet’s capacity to give ontological meaning to things perceived through the medium of “going back,” i.e. by remembering. In “Squarings, 4. Squarings, xxxvii,” Heaney dwells upon this idea by endeavouring to undertake the stabilization of perception in the act of writing. By concluding that such representation can only be achieved⁵ through the “virtue of an art that knows its mind” (*ST*, “Squarings, 4. Squarings, xxxvii” 97) Heaney appears to suggest that the poet must get beyond ordinary ontological meaning to truly know the object - through the exercise of the mind. Thus, one might even say that what is at stake is the exposure of the ontological nature of the object of perception, when he asks in “Squarings, 2. Settings, xxii”:

Where does the spirit live? Inside or outside
Things remembered, made things, things unmade?
What came first, the seabird’s cry or the soul

Imagined in the dawn cold when he cried? (78)

It can be argued that *Seeing Things* is shaped after the concern with signifying or giving meaning to perception beyond the limited prejudices of ordinary/mundane experiences and objects - whose commonness attributes rigid meaning, impeding transcendence. Perceptual experience is thus to be signified through the medium of imagination between subject and object for “Whatever is given/ can always be re-imagined” (ST, “The Settle Bed” 29). One might recall in these words - and in the practice itself - the words of Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey”:

and of all that we behold
From this green earth, of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half create,
And what perceive . . . (105-108)

Implicitly in “Tintern Abbey” is an attribution of meaning to the phenomenal world: Wordsworth’s description of the landscape is mediated by what he feels toward it, stressing not only the object’s influence on him but equally how his experiences and feelings endow “reality” with meaning, shaping his perception of it. The experience of the world in art - and, more importantly here, in poetry - is, consequently, done through the mediating power of the imagination of the artist who proposes to transcend the bounds of representation. Likewise, and taking into consideration the placement of Heaney as descending from Romanticism,⁶ the denunciation that Heaney appears to do of the rigidity of meaning correlates with the Romantics’ critique of the principle of mimesis and inflexibility of neo-classic rules. Consider, for example, poem xix of “Squarings, 2. Settings”:

Memory as a building or a city,
Well lighted, well laid out, appointed with
Tableaux vivants and costumed effigies -
. . . So that the mind’s eye could haunt itself

With fixed associations and learn to read
Its own contents in meaningful order,
Ancient textbooks recommended that

Familiar places be linked deliberately
With a code of images. You knew the portent
In each setting, you blinked and concentrated. (75)

Or from poem xxii of the same sequence of poems:

How habitable is perfected form?

And how inhabited the windy light?

What's the use of a held note or held line
That cannot be assailed for reassurance? (78)

In both poems memory is compared to that “perfected form” of mimesis and in both the idea of representing it faithfully or literally is disregarded for its stativity and for adding no meaning or true value both to life and art. Heaney goes on to say in the following poem, in respect to his own process of representing a memory: “I remembered it as a frisson, but cannot/ Remember any words. *What I wanted then/ Was a poem of utter evening*” (ST, “Squarings, 2. Settings, xxiii” 79, my emphasis). However, even though a quasi-Romantic, transformative type of perception - and poetic creation - is upheld, the usage of memory speaks of something else: that perception is always grounded on “familiar places” or, in another way, in mundane reality. It is mundane because “for Heaney the appeal of metaphysical visions and voyages is countered by a similar devotion to the quotidian” (Hart 34). In this sense, transcendence-in-immanence of perception and of representation becomes a self-referential movement, informed by Heaney's experiences and memories. Not only is this the case, but it also implies a movement of self-discovery of *himself as a poet* and, hence, a *being* endowed with the capacity to unveil new meanings - “For Heaney, the notion of poetry as a mode of knowledge is one which partakes of multiple perspectives . . .” (34).

Also, the usage of the imagery of “light”⁷ as a new vision angle, which is combined with a sense of alleviation, is developed in “A Basket of Chestnuts.” In this, *lightness* - as in the antonymous of *heaviness* - forces the intertwining of a transcendence-in-immanence type of vision with the adverbial type through the mediating power of the poet's imagination. This relationship has been increasingly nurtured throughout the poems but is made explicit here:

There's a shadow-boost, a giddy strange assistance
That happens when you swing a loaded basket.
The lightness of the thing seems to diminish
The actual weight of what's been hoisted in it.

For a slip second your hands feel unburdened,
Outstripped, dismayed, passed through.
Then just as unexpectedly comes rebound -
Downthrust and comeback ratifying you. (24)

In the poem, the basket⁸ acquires the texture of an adverbial kind of perception. The meaning of this is both of transcendence of the past from mere remembrance to retrospective vision, of a “child on his first morning leaving parents” (ST, “The Schoolbag” 30), and also a reference to the poet’s artistic production. This is exemplified as the poet “Recollect[s] this basket full of chestnuts” (ST, “A Basket of Chestnuts” 24) and wishes “they could be painted, known for what / Pigment might see beyond them” only to realize that “the reach / Of sense despairs as it fails to reach it, / Especially the thwarted sense of touch.”

In earlier collections, Heaney’s representation on childhood is, or is trying to be, solely informed by the child’s naïve perspective with no other term of comparison; however, in *Seeing Things* the poet seems to recognize the failure in “the reach.” In this manner, and in these poems specifically, artistic creation acquires a whole new sense of itself through retrospective recollection in which childhood memory is transmuted by the mediated power of the adult’s imagination “like memories/ You’ve trained so long now they can show their face/ And keep their distance” (ST, “Glanmore Revisited, 6. Bedside Reading” 36). In the same manner, Edward Maguire, who provides us with the archetype of the artist in the poem, fails to fully portray the static scene for:

Although it was what he thought he’d maybe use
As a decoy or a coffer for the light
He captured in the toecaps of my shoes.
But it wasn’t in the picture and is not.

What’s there is comeback, especially for him.
In oils and brushwork we are ratified. (ST, “A Basket of Chestnuts” 24-25)

Again, the point can be made of the need that one must transcend everyday life perception in order to give it significance and, with it, the sense of awareness that this act of transcendence must also involve the act of “rebound,” “comeback” or “return.” The reason why immanence is so important, and why we talk about transcendence-in-immanence and not of just one or the other arises precisely with this point. For the movement of transcendence is never truly detached from experience, since it does not involve a measly migration to another plan of being; it is instead always grounded in the object whose meaning it proposes to transcend in the first place. The movement of transcendence is then claimed as one of uncovering (the immanence of the object) and of “return” or “comeback” to the object - instead of alienation or escape. If one accepts this premise, then it becomes clear that, in the

last verses cited, the rebound is connected to the artist specifically, whose representation involves neither just similitude nor just transcendence: it means *transfiguration*, sublimation through the faculty of the imagination, of the object - making it sublime.

Henry Hart conceptualizes this relation of transcendence with that of the sublime, relating it to Kant's aesthetics, quoting from the *Critique of Power of Judgement*⁹ a passage which relates the experience of the sublime with that of resistance. And while that can be sustained, for Kant, the experience of the sublime confronts the faculty of the imagination with its own limits and incapacities - for him, instead, the sublime can only be apprehended by the faculty of reason. For Seamus Heaney, however, it means the experience of mundane things made sublime *through* the power of the imagination - the source of our capacity for the transcendence-in-immanence vision.

The act of creation of poetry is, in many instances, explored through the analogy of fishing. Consider poems such as "The Pulse" from "Three Drawings" or "Casting and Gathering," which transform memories into moments of writing's autoreferentiality and where the tangible is subordinated to the transcendental - here typified by the act of writing. Childhood, through the act of fishing, suffers an apotheosis and is re-contextualized by the agglutinative power of the poet who rarefies the line between the real memory and the imagined one. In these poems the focus shifts from the object to the poet, who is the medium of transcendence and the vehicle to the extraordinary. The modification of sensitive perceptions through the faculty of imagination signifies the transcending of experience as it is given to us and of the mortality of the particulars of our memory. The same is to say that, through the movement of transcendence of the actuality of the objects - particularly of the objects of childhood memory -, one instils new meaning into them. In this way, the ontological nature of ordinary objects is revised through the lenses of the actual - in the sense of present - standpoint of the poet when looking into past memories. They are observed not just through the adult's retrospective vision but also through the poet's imaginative representation and reconstruction of their meaning. Objects and the connections they hold, both with their intrinsic qualities and with their context as they were perceived in the first place, are reframed and re-affirmed through the transcendental power of recollection and retrospective vision.

Therefore, the signifying process - the dialogical relationship between the "real" and the "imagined" - discloses the dialectical relationship between present and

absent, between episodic memory and episodic imagining. In *Seeing Things* recollection has to do with the need to give ontological meaning to its constituent objects and its manifestation relates both to first-order information - through which the event is recalled as it originally occurred - and second-order information - the subject's current memory of it. Subsequently, conventional chronology and causality are transcended and, instead, childhood memories are associated and connected with one another in a state of flux as Heaney enunciates in poem xxvii of the third group of poems in "Squarings": "Everything flows," and then "Flow on, flow on / the journey of the soul with its sole guide" (85). The poem that gives name to the collection, "Seeing Things," epitomizes just that.

"Seeing Things," however, might as well have been called "Two Ways of Seeing Things," since the first two parts of the poem seem to be alternating between the two main ways of seeing that we have been referring to. The first poem is related to ordinary vision and is devoted to giving an "actual" or "factual" image of the remembered experience in itself - an "unadulterated" episodic memory. This gives way or *flows out* - in the last four verses - to a possibility of a new means of seeing things. Suddenly, it was as if the boy was "looked from another boat / Sailing through the air, far up, and could see / How riskily we fared into the morning" (ST, "Seeing Things, I" 16). Here, the boy's imagination transforms experience and takes him upwards. This "new way of seeing things" or of redefining their meaning is made apparent in the second section of the poem which opens with the word *Claritas*, a Latin word meaning brightness, clarity, clearness or distinctness, explanatory of this transcendence-in-immanence type of vision.

The first part of the poem seems to expose a certain anguish - "in nervous twos and threes," "nobody speaking," "I panicked," "Kept me in agony" - which is illustrative of the ontological vacuum that the first type of vision imposes on this memory. However, in the second part, the theological imagery (the baptism, Jesus, John the Baptist, the cathedral); the opposition between "sunlight" and "shadowy," "visibility" and "invisible"; and the state of flux of the water and sky - all make clear the contrast between these two parts. This reinforces the argument for the necessity for a transcendence-in-immanence type of vision:

And yet in that utter visibility
The stone's alive with what's invisible:
Waterweed, stirred sand-grains hurrying off,
The shadowy, unshadowed stream itself. (ST, "Seeing Things, II," 17)

The predominance of religious symbolism in the second part of the poem, however, is not an end in itself, but instead serves the purpose of providing context to the poem's closing movement, in which the object-action-subject transcend/are transcended and are made mythical - resembling the end of "Man and Boy." This is also exemplified in "Glanmore Revisited, 7. Skylight" which will be returned to later. In the collection, this *new light* cast upon ordinary objects becomes especially evident and gains a new importance after the death of Heaney's father, an event that leaves him to "face the ice this year / With my father's stick" (ST, "1.1.87" 20).

The death of Heaney's father is, conversely, the major axis from which Heaney appears to extract most of his ontological concerns with ascribing meaning - as can be seen in "The Ash Plant," "Man and Boy," "1.1.87," "An August Night," among others. Memory and the revisiting of his childhood are here used both as a way to revisit the *presence* of his father and to contradict the tendency of apparently meaningless reality and consequent ontological anguish that death inflicts upon the subject. The realization of the lack can only take place through the death of the author's father; only then can one achieve "A whole new quickened sense of what rifle meant / . . . For the sin it was against eternal life." (ST, "Squarings, 2. Settings. xxi" 77). And Heaney seems to encourage the reading of a relation between this unravelling and one's consciousness of an ontologically void sense of Death when, in "Squarings, 1. Lightenings, xii," he clarifies the concept of light - which becomes a main motif throughout the poems:

Illumination, and so on, is this:

A phenomenal instant when the spirit flares
With pure exhilaration before death - (66)

There is, then, the necessity of transcending the mundane-ness of everyday life through the restoration of the objects of childhood memory in order to repair ontological meaning after the absence that Heaney's father's death represents. It is precisely from his father's "ghosthood immanen[ce]" (ST, "Seeing Things, III" 18) and after everything "tumb[es] off the world" that Heaney

saw him face to face, he came to me
With his damp footprints out of the river,
And there was nothing between us there
That might not still be happily ever after. (my emphasis)

and that the poet can clearly (through the no-longer-static-nor-opaque image of his father's figure) "capture the illumination of a son seeing his father 'face to face,' for the first time, without the halo, or, in Mr. Heaney's case, the hat of authority." (Parker 219).

This idea is reinforced by the first and last poems that frame the collection. The opening poem is a translation of the "Golden Bough," a passage from book VI of the *Aeneid* that deals with the need for Aeneas to obtain the fruit on that bough to gain entrance to the underworld in order to see his father. Meanwhile the concluding poem is a translation of a section in canto 3 of Dante's *Inferno* that deals with the crossing over to the underworld on Charon's boat. The two passages are concerned with the theme of death and those notions of absence and presence but also with how ordinary things can be rendered in illuminating detail (the bough) and with the deconstruction of meaning (Charon's task), both of which are permitted by *crossings* between the immanent and the transcendent.

The scene from the *Aeneid* that opens the collection begins with Aeneas pleading with the Sybil for one last face-to-face with his father, to which the Sybil replies that the descent is the easiest part of the expedition, "but to retrace your steps and get back to upper air, / This is the real task and the real undertaking" (ST, "The Golden Bough" 2). So, returning from the underworld will be impossible unless he brings Proserpina the golden bough - as if the gift of poetry was the only way for a safe passageway. And "while the role of the poet may not earn Heaney a 'face-to-face meeting' with his father, an encounter similar to the one so earnestly sought by Aeneas, it enables him to see his father again in a variety of ways, with imaginative powers that heighten and transform memory" (Collins 169), one can still argue for the poem "Seeing Things" - especially if we look at the third section - as one which retraces, nevertheless, those steps taken by Aeneas in his journey.

In the same mode, the journey we witness in *Seeing Things* is a journey *downwards*, which also means *backwards*, one of looking *down* into the past and the "imagined perfection" (ST, "A Basket of Chestnuts" 23) of things, when his father is not yet an absence and the consequent renegotiation of the ontological space occupied by him was still an unpondered possibility. The movement *backwards*, however - and similarly to what happened with Aeneas - also involves a crusade *upwards*, which in this case means transcendence through representation: "Confidently bearing the golden bough of metaphor before him, he combs the

underworld of memory for ‘clear truths and mysteries,’ and ascends into the ‘upper air.’” (Parker 217).

In “Man and Boy,” “a poem about the generations, examining the connections of fathers and sons” (Ross 98), Heaney uses the memories of his father to indulge in a mystical experience of his own. One in which the father is no longer the source of the child’s unquestionable awe but a flawed human being, to whom Heaney can now gaze at an “eye-level.” In its own way, “Man and Boy” begins with tangible experiences only to ascend to a *quasi-apotheosis* in which the father and the boy are renovated in the form of mythical figures - Aeneas who bore his old father Anchises out of the burning city of Troy:

I feel his legs and quick heels far away

And strange as my own - when he will piggyback me
At a great height, light-headed and thin-boned,
Like a witless elder rescued from the fire. (15)

This scene typifies the two apparently opposite movements: downward and upward, immanence and transcendence, past and present, presence and absence. It encompasses a return to earlier experience that has taken on new meaning in the light of maturity but, more importantly, loss. As Daniel W. Ross asserts: “On one level both ‘Man and Boy’ and ‘Seeing Things’ are returns for Heaney to the generational themes of his earliest poems. However, Heaney, now aware of his own aging process and feeling the loss of his father, finds a deeper mystery in these relationships than he did in the 1960s” (99).

Consequently, the move “back from the *underworld*” - or from the revisiting of the once mundane materiality of past memory of the father figure - is made through transcendence, sublimity, attribution of meaning and filling of ontological gaps. Heaney is “carried ahead / On the phantasmal flow-back” while “still mean[ing] business in the here and now” (*ST*, “Squarings, 3. Crossings, xxvi” 84); his business with revisiting the past is not mere nostalgia but has to do with the current state of ontological indeterminacy. For all of this, representing the past is not, for Heaney, about portraying it as “fixed associations” in which, according to “Ancient textbook . . . familiar places must be linked deliberately/ With a code of images”,¹⁰ but rather about “learn[ing] to read/ Its contexts in meaningful order” (*ST*, “Squarings, 2. Settings, xix” 75).

Consequently, memory is the medium through which the ordinary and the visionary become transparent - as in “Wheels within Wheels” - and also the domain in which ontological meaning is restored after the revelation of the paradoxes that memory itself produces, for it is in memory that contraries intermingle. Contraries such as life and death, fullness and emptiness, presence and absence.

Glanmore¹¹ represents the archetypal place/object for transubstantiation as it involves a double journey to the past: to when he and his family lived there in the previous decade; and to Heaney’s childhood on a farm. This place had already served as reference in previous collections of poems, as Heaney hints at the beginning of the first poem of the sequence - which is, significantly enough, *a memoriam*: “It felt remembered even then” (*ST*, “Glanmore Revisited, 2. Scrabble” 31).

In the Glanmore house Heaney is confronted with this necessary recontextualization of the family home after the recognition of the *absence* of the rest of his family and the *emptiness* of the place. This, instead of being a symbol of sameness and continuity, becomes rather a place of difference. Even though the title gives us the impression of repetition and/or re-visitation of feelings and gestures experienced previously in Glanmore, this re-visitation differs from the poet’s memory temporally and, therefore, spatially and meaningfully:

The old activity starts up again
But starts up differently. We’re on our own
Years later in the same *locus amoenus*,
Tenants no longer, but in full possession
Of an emptied house and whatever keeps between us. (*ST* “Glanmore Revisited, 2. The Cot” 32)

As metaphorized in the seventh poem of “Glanmore Revisited, 7. The Skylight,” memory, represented by the house, is initially described as “low,” “closed” with its “claustrophobic, nest-up-in-the-roof/ Effect” (37), being re-imagined, re-signified and transubstantiated from a notion of place as enclosure to one of freedom. This allows us, once more, to return to that idea of enlightenment and of transcendence. Thus, through the transcendence of memory, meaning is made clear and transparent and the poet is healed of “closed” meanings that previously impeded the attaining of the immanent meaning. So much so that, when the skylight is opened, the feeling of the place¹² is changed, and Heaney feels “like an inhabitant / Of that house where the man sick of the palsy / . . . Was healed, took up his bed and walked away.” (*ST*, “Glanmore Revisited, 7. The Skylight” 37).

Furthermore, according to O'Brien in *Seamus Heaney: Searches for Answers*, places are usually - in Heaney's canon - "recontextualised in order to open different paths of signification" (O'Brien 7), places such as Glanmore, which is re-perceived temporally and in terms of presence/absence relations. In the third poem of the sequence, for example, this discontinuity through space and time is depicted via Heaney's change of perspective with regard to the disappearance of his friend's name from the bark, many years before. At the time, this moved him as "It brought back those blood-brother scenes where two / Braves nick wrists and cross them for a sign" (ST, "Glanmore Revisited, 3. Scene Shifts," 33) but, when remembered in his re-visitation, "is healed up."

What we seem to have throughout these poems is a sense of renegotiation - of place, memory and feelings toward it - which may be read as what O'Brien calls Heaney's "dialectic of presence and absence" (*Seamus Heaney: Searches for Answers* 52) and which is responsible for the renovation of the object/place's context and, hence, ontological meaning.

In the fifth poem of the sequence - "Glanmore Revisited, 5. Lustral Sonnet" - the mutability and consequent transubstantiation of the place and of Heaney's own revising - and truly revisited look - is theorized. It is "revisited," for in the poem we are informed that, for Heaney, "Breaking and entering: from early on" were "Words that thrilled me far more than they scared me" (35). And he goes on:

And still did, when I came to my own
Masquerade as a man of property.
Even then, my first impulse was never
To double-bar a door or block a gate
. . .
But I scared myself when I re-entered here,
My first break in . . .
Only pure words and deeds can secure the house.

During the poem, a renegotiation of perception toward the house occurs which ultimately gives way to its concluding moment in the last poem through the opening of the skylight. That which begins to be said in the first poem is here repeated in the first verses of the second stanza, the idea of Heaney's initial resistance to the place as difference and absence, whose otherness leaves the poet as the only source of referentiality and as a boundary to himself. This is an attitude, however, that is

ultimately unheeded for its narrowness of sight. He is now the “man of property” and the poet who is left to “secure the house” with “pure words and deeds.”

In Glanmore, as in memory, “contraries intermingle” and serve as the means for Heaney to transcend the absence and the “much too narrow” kind of prejudiced vision with which he initially perceived the experience. As Henry Hart proposes in his article, and as is perfectly confirmed here with the opening “Breaking and entering,” the notion of boundaries and of resistance is a necessary threshold for Heaney’s sense of transcendence. These inform the subject of his own limits - and those of signification - and that something lies beyond them. The notion of the limit is what compels the creative spirit of the poet to transgress it, a notion hinted at with the transposal of the phenomenal world when confronted with death, as mentioned earlier. In “Fields of Vision,” Heaney shows us this relation:

Face to face with her was an education
Of the sort you got across a well-braced gate -
. . . where you could see

Deeper into the country than you expected
And discovered that the field behind the hedge
Grew more distinctly strange as you kept standing
Focused and drawn in by what barred the way. (22)

In the scene described, both the lady’s confinement to a wheelchair and the reference to the gate are those which establish the limit or “bar . . . the way” and serve as catalyst to transcendence. In the same manner, Husserl’s intentional consciousness¹³ informs itself, through the recognition of its own limits, of something that lies beyond, hidden. We must remember that for Heaney, however, this experience - of sublimity - is always informed by the ordinary, by what is familiar. So, in the poem, the things that the woman sees are not unusual but instead are, by the transformative power of imagination, made unfamiliar, “made strange” - to use the expression employed by Hart. This makes the woman “see things,” to have a transcendence-in-immanence perception of the objects.

In “Markings,” the familiar scene is portrayed by a football game in which the sense of resistance materializes itself in the delimitation of teams, whose choice by name seems to strike Heaney as senseless - or deprived of any true meaning - creating a frontier that seems to be there without any justifying reason. It is in this senselessness that Heaney also seems to face mere empirical vision: it lacks true

ontological meaning. Also, similarly to what happens in the previous poem, the youngsters *transcend* the game's rules:

Because by then they were playing in their heads
And the actual ball came to them
Like a dream heaviness, and their own hard breathing
Sounded like an effort in another world (ST, "Markings" 8)

In the poem, "The interweaving of actuality and imagination is clear at this point as a physical experience is internalised and seen as a paradigm for the process of imagination" (O'Brien, *Seamus Heaney: Searches for Answers* 53). The reader is, moreover, informed by the transformative moment occurring in the second stanza of the first part of the potential of challenging those *meaningless* rules - whose "limit had been passed" (ST, "Markings" 8). By means of adverbial descriptions there is a shift from "dying light," "heaviness" and "darkness" to "fleetness," "untiredness" and "free" in the description of the relation between the object - the game - and the subject.

In "Casting and Gathering," a poem dedicated to Heaney's friend Ted Hughes, the poet articulates the idea of going outward in order to make an inward movement, of casting in order to gather. This is an idea which stresses both the movement of casting the net of the poet's consciousness into the past in order to recollect a new meaning, and also a movement of transcendence from the materiality of form and colour of the memory. The binarism of the two movements - casting and gathering - is furthermore stressed by the sounds, which "took sides" and assume two completely different positions compared with fishing - as we have seen before, this serves as an analogy to the act of writing. The subject, however, is not torn between the two perspectives: instead "years and years go past and I do not move" (ST, "Casting and Gathering" 13). When he declares, in the final stanza, "I trust contrariness," he seems to be advocating this necessary irreducibility of one type of vision to the other. Even though they are perceived as contraries, the poem seems to gesture in the direction of an "inclusivity of consciousness" that does not mean the reconciliation of the said opposites but an affirmation of both, co-existing at the same time. This is because the creation of aesthetic and ontological structures of meaning is done through the dynamic of the disjunction.

Eugene O'Brien devotes much of his thinking in his book *Seamus Heaney: Searches for Answers* to this theory of disjunction or of binaries - which he allies to Derrida's concept of presence/absence - and one of his main points is precisely that

this notion of duality is dynamic and serves as structure to what he calls “dialectical knowledge” (32). His perspective on Heaney’s usage of contrariness as writing and perceptual device remains that this “dynamic oscillatory structure” or “woven material,” as he also calls it, “is comprised of numerous criss-crossings and intersections of threads which face in different directions, processes analogous to the complexities of dialectical thought” (32). The poem “Wheels within Wheels” is one of those examples in which two distinct forces are intertwined, transmuting actuality and providing the subject with a transcendence-in-immanence vision. In the poem the “pedal treads / Worked very palpably at first against you” to later “sweep your hand ahead / Into a new momentum,” making the object of perception “Hummed with transparency” (46) by the action of the subject or, even, by the hand of the child made poet.

Analogously to what happened in “Markings,” in which

All these things entered you
As if they were both the door and what came through it.
They marked the spot, marked time and held it open. (9)

The subject becomes the medium wherein limits can be passed and new meanings made transparent by the recognition that “when one man casts, the other gathers / And then vice-versa, without changing sides.” (ST, “Casting and Gathering” 13). Returning, then, to the poem “Casting and Gathering,” one may finally conclude that this interfusion of differences, typified by the casting and the gathering, is at the core of Heaney’s attribution of meaning: “The ‘productive interplay of differences’ is, it seems to me, Heaney’s methodology of achieving his searches for answers. . .” (O’Brien, *Seamus Heaney: Searches for Answers* 68).

Moreover, says Colleen McKenna in “‘A Meaning Made of Trees’: The Unwriting of a Symbol,” “These poems describe thresholds, crossings and peripheral images; they are oblique glances rather than detailed compositions” (55), making the act of perception become one of looking *through* and *into*, not *at*. This is particularly important if we accept the premise that Heaney’s transcendence-in-immanence is not transcendence-beyond-the-world but transcendence through and because of sensibility: also, in this there is an interweaving of differences. Boundaries, such as death and absence, are necessary evils to the affirmation of their contraries: Heaney’s poetry remains within the boundaries of perception and representation while seeking to transcend them and imbue representation with this newly discovered meaning. As

Heaney, himself, tells us, “it is this double capacity that poetry springs from and addresses” (*Something to Write Home About: A Meditation for Television* 48).

Heaney’s ways of seeing seem to be, therefore, erected by opposition in order to undermine ordinary perceptions and create a private cosmos apart from complacent habits of seeing. Besides this, they provide a counternarrative to evidence-based and meaning-void vision of memory and of regular disinterested perceptions - and representations - of everyday life objects, whose identity is in need of renegotiation when one is confronted with the annulment of that identity, i.e., death. In this way, death is the mechanism through which Heaney is confronted with the boundaries and the contraries referred to - “for the sin it is against eternal life” - and from which he draws meaning for himself as a son of a lost father and as a poet whose poetry learns to transubstantiate itself in this collection. After all, “Who ever saw / The limit was the given anyhow?” (ST, “Wheels Within Wheels,” 46).

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¹ See the title poem, "Seeing Things"; "Man and Boy"; or "Glanmore Revisited."

² See Allan Peacock, "Meditations: Poet as Translator, Poet as Seer."

³ See, for example, the poem "Fosterlings" (*Seeing Things*, 50), when Heaney talks about his memory - and love - towards a "picture's heavy greenness", to which he refers again later as "My lowlands of the mind. / Heaviness of being. And poetry / Sluggish in the doldrums of what happens."

⁴ This can also relate to the importance of places and the way in which places are "felt" and become adverbial in Seamus Heaney's poems, as "Glanmore Revisited." However, in order to make the point about adverbial perception clearer and to prevent the discussion from deviating into matters of place and spatiality, the topic will not be exhaustively addressed in the current essay. To read more about the matter of place and space in Seamus Heaney's poetry, see, for example, "Space, 1984-91," in Michael Parker's *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet*, or "The Sense of Place," a lecture by Seamus Heaney included in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose: 1968-1978*.

⁵ This realization has something very close to Heidegger's ontological anguish that arises from and with the realization of the Dasein as a Being-towards-death for death gives the Dasein existence and, thus, ontological significance.

⁶ Neil Corcoran, for example, argues that Heaney's "critical consciousness of Wordsworth" is what "makes his basic conceptions of poetry essentially romantic ones" (Corcoran 31).

⁷ A notable metaphor throughout the collection.

⁸ Much like the schoolbag from the poem "The Schoolbag" "light / scuffed and supple and unemptiable" ("The Schoolbag" 30),

⁹ This is the version used in the current essay; Henry Hart uses a version in which the translation of the title is *Critique of Judgement*.

¹⁰ We can denote, one more time, the follow-up with Romantic aesthetic paradigms through the critique of neoclassic form.

¹¹ Heaney had already been there for a time during the 70s and ended up buying the cottage, which was his writing retreat and place of refuge, at the end of the 80s, from its previous owner and Heaney's friend, Ann Saddlemyer.

¹² "there is an opening, a sense of scope as place becomes space . . ." (O'Brien, *Seamus Heaney: Searches for Answers* 219).

¹³ See the second volume of *Logical Investigations*.