

FINALITY AND PHENOMENOLOGY IN POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY

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*Taking into consideration some negative criticism of Seamus Heaney's poetry², primarily concerning the lack of the metaphysical as well as the absence of "universal meaning", "true quotable statements about common experience and general concern" or "universal meaning" I came to a conclusion that the touch of phenomenology is more than evident. The deepest involvement of philosophy in Heaney's poetry can be felt in his collections *The Haw Lantern* and *Seeing Things*. *The Haw Lantern* represents Heaney's first break into virtual and he continues to explore it in *Seeing Things*. Heaney is turning to the invisible and virtual in order to reconcile the imaginary and the real. *Seeing Things* represent a turning point in Heaney's writing. He is not concerned with the outer physicality of things. He becomes aware of the inner landscapes of the mind. The trace of metaphysical could be found in Heaney's isolation from the material reality by transcending into another dimension in "Field Vision", in his awareness of the emptied space in "Clearances" or his dealing with metaphysics of meaning in "Parable Island". On the other hand, what could be more the issue of our general concern than our prospective non-existence or non-being that Heaney's poetry is imbued with. The essential cause for such development of Heaney as a writer could be found in the phenomenon of finality. The realisation of finality often serves as an excellent ground for shifting the reality on two levels with an emphasis on the immaterial, spiritual or transcendental realm which brings us to the phenomenology resulting with a deeper philosophical dilemmas in Heaney's poetry.*

Keywords: *phenomenology, finality, material, immaterial, metaphysical*

1. Introduction

The essential element of human emancipation lies in the obvious importance of the conscious and rational existence. We are all aware of our primeval position in this world but philosophical speculation is not the only possible way of its interpretation or comprehen-

¹ Osnovna škola „Jurja Dalmatinca“ u Šibeniku

² Elmer Andrews, "Heaney and the Anglo-American Canon", in *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, pp. 36-39. (Cambridge, 1998.)

sion. According to that, we can encounter essentially identical questions and dilemmas that both poetry and philosophy are dealing with.

Perhaps the most obvious or at least the deepest involvement of philosophy in Heaney's literature can be felt in his collections *The Haw Lantern* and *Seeing Things*.

The Haw Lantern represents Heaney's first break into virtual, which he continually explores in *Seeing Things* as well. In these collections Heaney is turning to the invisible and virtual in order to reconcile the imaginary and the real.

Vendler associates *The Haw Lantern* as "allegorical poetry"³, but not the one written to escape the censor but to avoid the topicality of political journalism and to define the realm of the invisible. *The Haw Lantern* is concentrated on the metaphysical and spiritual domain.

Before *The Haw Lantern*, a central aim of Heaney's art had been to turn the material world into a crystalline one. However, the deaths of his parents represent a breaking point in his poetry. Natural deaths, and not the deaths caused by violence introduce a new strain in Heaney's work. He becomes aware of absence and his primary aim gains reverse directions he orientates himself to turning the crystalline or virtual realm into material one and on making it visible by using ordinary metaphors.

There is hardly anything that can generate such revolutionary change in man as the close encounter with death. Heaney incorporates the motive of finality of man in his poetry and draws our attention to the problem of existential meaning. Our prospective non-existence we cannot deny. This statement is doubtless even though man often avoids thinking of it. In that sense in *The Haw Lantern* Heaney alludes to the "self-respect from dying out"(l.4.). People shouldn't deceive themselves by pretending to be indifferent. We cannot escape our non-existence by beautiful perspectives or utopias. Man should confront the fact of finality but for such observation he needs to attain intellectual integrity and above all – the courage to live with such insight.

We can trace similar inclinations throughout *The Haw Lantern* beginning with "Clearances" where Heaney introduces us to the paradox of a living absence inspired by the death of his mother, or in the famous poem "From the Frontier of Writing" where he insists on the equality of presence between the material and immaterial.

We can come across some negative criticism of Heaney's literary work as well. One of those reviews goes so far to imply the lack of the metaphysical in his poetry.

The Irish cultural critic Desmond Fenell represents the opposite criticism from Vendler. He shows no interest in the uniqueness of the poetry, which is precisely Vendler's concern.

Fenell's critique of Heaney appeared in an Irish Times article, entitled "The Heaney Phenomenon". "Everyone is agreed that Seamus Heaney is a good poet, but people you talk to in Dublin – literate people, poetry lovers – have been worried for some time by what they call the Heaney Phenomenon ... We think Heaney is good but many of us think he is not that good; not another Yeats, nor even, indisputably the best contemporary Irish poet...Great poetry illuminates the world, it does this by making true quotable statements about matters of common experience and general concern, or by presenting images of particular subjects

³ Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (London, 1998.)

in such a manner that they have universal meaning. Heaney's poetry takes its motto "Whatever you say, say nothing" from his Northern Catholic background. It makes no quotable statements about general matters and, except in two or three instances, its images of particular and private subject convey these and nothing more. In his later poetry, partly because the language ignores its audience and sometimes because the subject is obscure, what he is saying is often difficult to penetrate. In short, his poetry – like much good but minor poetry – is pour in word and meaning and says nothing of general relevance. That is one of the reasons why, apart from a few well-turned phrases, no one quotes Heaney."⁴

It suggests that Heaney's poetry never had any real vision or quotable philosophy. The purpose of this paper is to prove him wrong.

2. Phenomenology and finality

Before the appearance of *The Haw Lantern* in 1987 Heaney had lived through the deaths of both of his parents. These deaths initiated a perceptible change in his verse with a strong emphasis on his conceptions of life and death. For Heaney, the death of his father was the final "unroofing" of the world. He also said that he was certain that it had affected him in ways that had been hidden from him before and then.⁵

Helen Vendler is discussing the collection *Seeing Things* under the title of "airiness" in order to emphasize the presence of death that cannot be overlooked. These facts in Vendler's opinion make his landscapes "airy" rather than laden, static rather than dynamic, distanced rather than proximate and they resemble stills rather than moving pictures.

The most important phenomenon regarding this period, at least from the philosophical point of view, is the phenomenon of emptied space or his awareness of the materiality of absence caused by death which is the fact that exists as the essential problem of philosophy for centuries.

Naturally, Heaney's reality inevitably changed. It is altered and the change is caused by a gap created as a result of his reaction to the close encounter with death. Thoughts of emptiness are essential part both of *The Haw Lantern* and *Seeing Things*.

In the sonnet sequence "Clearances", which is written in memory of his mother, Heaney does not define reality by the presence within it but precisely by absences of the reality he had experienced since his birth:

"I thought of walking round and round a space
Utterly empty, utterly a source"

"Clearances"8

However, the poem doesn't have negative connotations. Even though it is imbued by thoughts of emptiness and endings it also suggests a kind of new beginning in which absence is transcended in its opposite as a result of love and memory that still remains in the poet.

⁴ Elmer Andrews, "Heaney and the Anglo-American Canon", in *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, pp. 36-39. (Cambridge, 1998.)

⁵ Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones, Interviews with Seamus Heaney*, pp.322. (London, 2009.)

The fact that we exist, among other people, amid society and in this world we cannot deny. However, what causes a problem is another incontrovertible fact caused by the previous one – we were not here before and will not be forever. Certainty of this statement is indisputable. Non-being, in philosophical terms, is often referred to as Nothingness. I believe that Heaney's ideas of absence and emptiness respond to this matter.

Philosophy regards that Nothingness can be discussed only as a particular condition and according to that in terms of experience as well. In that respect experience could never be Nothingness and each man in his lifetime feels the Nothingness even though most of them tend to ignore it. It seems that Heaney became aware of it in terms of "emptiness" or "absence" stimulated by the death of his parents.

Nothingness as such is thematically elaborated by Martin Heidegger in "Was ist Metaphysic?". He raises question: Why Being instead of Nothing?

The phenomenon of Nothingness, according to Heidegger can be experienced rarely and exclusively through the experience of anxiety which he radically separates from fear. In his opinion in the state of anxiety we feel uneasy as a whole. All things, including ourselves flounder to indifference. The anxiety reveals the Nothingness and we can experience it as our prospective non-existence.

In *Seeing Things* Heaney juxtaposes the transcendent and the real of our perception. Transcending in its Latin origin means crossing from one realm into another. Analogously the last poem of *Seeing Things* is entitled "Crossing" even though the most of the poems before it describe crossings as well, ranging from the phenomenal reality of the earth to scenes made sublime by altered perception.

Irene Gilson Nordin⁶ refers to *Seeing Things* as a turning point in Heaney's writing. From an earlier concern with the outer physicality of things, Heaney turns with deepened awareness to the inner landscapes of the mind, where the thingness of things is explored and expressed in language. He contrasts absence and presence, speech and silence as our experience of being-in-the-world.

Our mind is constantly challenged to overcome the repressive limits that prevent us to extend our cognition. Kant described a situation resembling the one in Heaney's poetry in *The Critique of Judgement*. He points out that sublime experiences begin when overwhelming natural phenomena challenges the mind's ability to conceive of them and then raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace to discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the apparent omnipotence of the nature. What Kant wanted to say is that the speculative mind, if suitably challenged reduces all apparently omnipotent natural phenomena to concepts and manifests its own omnipotence. For Kant reason is transcendent.

Heaney obviously incorporated Kant's ideas of sublime in his own aesthetic concept. The sublime for Heaney is motivated by monotony of what Kant refers to as a vulgar commonplace.

⁶ Irene Gilson Nordin, *Crediting Marvels in Seamus Heaney's Seeing Things* (UPPSALA, 1999.)

In "The Field of Vision" he introduces to us his aunt Mary in her wheelchair. The unchanging scene outside the house is her only source of perception. She keeps on staring at the monotony of:

"The same small calves with their backs to
Wind and rain,
The same acre of ragwort, the same mountain."
(l. 7,8.)

However, she finally triumphs over commonplace barriers and attains the sublime or the "distinctly strange" (l. 19.) solely by using her own steadfastness that makes the vision itself compelling:

you could see
Deeper into the country than you expected
And discover that the field behind the hedge
Grew more distinctly strange as you kept standing
Focused and drawn in by what barred the way."
(l. 16-20.)

The motive of the woman in the wheelchair is not unintentional. Heaney deliberately introduces to us a woman whose world is limited (she could have been blind just as well) and in a way she is forced to expand it by transcending into "another dimension". But this woman is definitely not deprived. She has enough time to open her mind to alternative perception. For fundamental insight we don't have to move in a physical sense or experience anything new by using our senses solely.

People often don't bother to break through the surface of the phenomenal. In that respect we distinguish two kinds of "reality" - the simulated, fictitious one and the actual but hardly approachable reality. What we are actually lacking of is the deeper insight into the essence of the things. Considering that, the very title of *Seeing Things* is ambiguous. Heaney is trying to simulate us to split reality on two levels. Even the word "seeing" is itself abstract, has a double meaning and its application in this collection has nothing to do with the sense of sight. What Heaney is actually trying to accomplish here is an isolation from material reality. Vendler refers to that phenomenon as a "portcullis that dropped between Heaney and materiality"⁷ in a way that such scrim prevents touching or any kind of empirical experience of reality. In that respect, only through higher or theoretical senses of sight or hearing contact could be made with objects without actually touching them.

In this respect we can draw comparison with the seventh sonnet of "Clearances" in which Heaney describes the death of his mother. Confronted with such painful experience the family is bound closer together. But more important is that Heaney becomes aware of the emptied space (a phenomenon which is also the reason for the title of this sequence). The death of his mother effects a clarification of space as well as a clarification of meaning:

⁷ Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (London, 1998.)

Then she was dead,
The searching for a pulsebeat was abandoned
And we all knew one thing by being there.
The space we stood around had been emptied
Into us to keep, it penetrated
Clearances that suddenly stood open.
High cries were felled and a pure change happened."

"Clearances"7

In *Kritik der Reinen Fernunft* Kant suggested that even if we manage to deny from our empirical concept of something physical everything that derives from our senses (including colour, hardness, impenetrability...) we will be still stuck with the space previously occupied by that, now vanished, object. Precisely that space is something we cannot deny. Actually, what we can never deny is the mere quality by which we imagine something as a substance. It all implies that such a concept has its residence in our power of cognition. Precisely that insight surpassing the empirical world is the source for the research of our mind and that aim we find more sublime than anything we can learn from the phenomenal domain. In that respect, regardless even of the danger of self-deception or delusion we rather choose anything than to abandon such essential research.

Heaney implies⁸ that there are two ways in which place is known and cherished. He regards that one of them is lived, illiterate and unconscious, and the other learned, literate and conscious. In the literary sensibility they are both likely to co-exist in a conscious and unconscious tension and that tension, according to Heaney produces the poetry. That different sense of Ireland and Northern Ireland have affected poets for the last hundred years.

Heaney's "Parable Island" transcends in a way the limits of Irish insularity. It is a poem dealing with metaphysics of naming. The natives have one name for a mountain, the occupiers another and all those differing opinions actually correspond to inconsistent convictions of different schools of archaeologists. To one school "the stone circles are pure symbol" (l. 32.), to another they are "assembly spots or hut foundations" (l. 33). One school thinks that a post-hole stands "for a pupil in an iris" (l. 35.) and other thinks "a post-hole is a post-hole is a post-hole" (l. 36.). However, the poet in a way denies all those names and assumptions suggesting that there are no authentic origins except for a cluster of storytelling or "prophecies" (l. 15.) which actually force the origin into an original emptiness, the area where Ireland begins.

"Although they are an occupied nation
and their only border is an inland one
they yield to nobody in their belief
that the country is an island.

⁸ Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations, The Sense of Place*, p.131. (Selected prose 1968. – 1978.)

Somewhere in the far north, in a region
 every native thinks of as 'the coast',
 there lies the mountain of the shifting names.

The occupiers call it Cape Basalt.
 The Sun's Headstone, say farmers in the east.
 Drunken westerners call it The Orphan's Tit.

To find out where he stands the traveller
 has to keep listening-since there is no map
 which draws the line he knows he must have crossed."

(l. 1-3.)

The repressive limits or borders felt in Heaney's other collections could be as well of political, religious, or psychological kind. He refers to some of them in "Fosterling". He also implies that lightening was actually caused by his being weighed down by various repression inevitable for a continually exposed poet in Ireland. It all caused a kind of a progress in a literary sense – a poetry growing more mature. Now he wants to embrace the lightness of being. Actually, Heaney even concedes that such tendency towards sublime developed relatively late in his life:

"Me waiting until I was nearly fifty
 To credit marvels...
 So long for air to brighten,
 Time to be dazzled and hearth to lighten."

(l. 12-15.)

After all that accumulated "heaviness of being" (l. 10.) Heaney expects "hearth to lighten" (l. 15.) and to experience the things of this world in a more genuine but the only possible way. However, precisely such repression, for Heaney, results in sublimation. Exactly this "heaviness of being" (l. 10.) urges the mind to demand the new of cognition in order to transcend its own heaviness. As Declan Kiberd emphasizes⁹, Heaney's poems become much less earthed in identifiable locales as well as less bound by hard and fast titles than the earlier work. Now they tend to take off into the sky or across the waters on a voyage into the unknown. According to Kiberd the unknown is a dimension in which man can finally become an almost non-human witness of himself.

Throughout these collections and with an emphasis on *Seeing Things* Heaney draws our attention to borders, limits, lines, roofs, circles and squares. He is actually eager to demonstrate the way in which the mind confronts its established boundary, at first hesitating but eventually even urged to transcend it. *Seeing Things* actually represent a strange return to the phenomenal world. In *Inventing Ireland* Kiberd refers to Heaney as a poet who had once

⁹ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p.597, (London,1995.)

taken up a position in the real world from which he explored analogies of distant metaphor and who eventually reversed the process, occupying a world of metaphor from which he could now and then look back upon the real.¹⁰ Such revolution demands an alteration of style as well. Heaney achieves that by conveying the simplicity of the actual, but the actual that cannot be experienced or conceived by senses. Before *Seeing Things* Heaney's language was closely connected to the thing itself but now he examines an aesthetic in which the language used is completely opposite from the thing it represents. The direct application of such formulation of aesthetic is especially noticeable in the title poem "Seeing Things" that describes a medieval baptism of Jesus carved in stone on the facade of a European cathedral. Heaney is making an unusual choice of words to present us the river in which Jesus stands:

“
Lines
Hard and thin and sinuous represent
The flowing river. Down between the lines
Little antic fish are all go. Nothing else.”
(I. 28-31.)

In contrast to ordinary literal manner of presentation, in "Seeing Things" Heaney is using a kind of hieroglyphic manner in a way that the carved lines in stone symbolize water and not mimic it. But anyhow, through the media of those symbols, in the mind of the observer, water is revived with all its qualities as Heaney remarks that "the stone's alive with what's invisible" (l. 33.). Therefore, poetry analogously to Egyptian writing embodies a symbolic "hieroglyph for life itself" (l. 38.) corresponding to the "zig-zag" (l. 38) complexity of its objects. In this respect it is important to point out that these hieroglyphs have their origin in the material world and the way we comprehend them depends exclusively on our own way of perception.

“All afternoon, heat wavered on the steps
And the air we stood up o ur yes i wavered
Like the zig-zag hroglyph for life itself.”
(I. 36-38.)

These hieroglyphs are primarily abstract, unmythologized and unpolitical. Heaney is not representing things mimetically as they happened and not even as he remembers they happened but on a rather abstract and symbolic level. Heaney is drawn into that abstraction in such a way that even his primary materiality of dirt and mud cannot resist the abstracting impulse. The obvious link between these two collections is emphasized with the phenomenon of mud that appears both in *The Haw Lantern* and *Seeing Things*. Heaney's perception of mud in *Seeing Things* is slightly altered also emphasizing the obvious shift concerning these two collections as well. Heaney makes this clear by "Wheels within Wheels". In contrary to *Seeing Things*, as Vendler remarks¹¹, in *The Haw Lantern* Heaney's ambitious wish was to join the domain of mud with the domain of vision. In correspondence to that, "The Mud Vision" ends in clarification of life that refers both to a physical and intellectual process:

¹⁰ Ibid., p.597.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 144.

“Just like that, we forget that the vision was ours,
 Our one chance to know the incomparable
 And dive to a future. What might have been origin
 We dissipated in news. The clarified place
 Had retrieved neither us nor itself.”

(l. 52-56.)

Nevertheless, by the time of *Seeing Things* mud has altered, “chain snapped” (l. 37.) and “nimbus” (l. 36.) disappeared. In “Wheels within wheels” dirt becomes magical. The poet returns to his childhood and moves his bicycle upside down to a mud-hole with its saddle and handlebars submerged producing a shower of silt just by turning its wheels:

“The tightness and the nilness round that space
 when the car stops in the road, the troops inspect
 its make and number, and, as one bends his face
 towards your window, you catch sight of more
 on a hill beyond, eyeing with intent
 down cradled guns that hold you under cover
 and everything is pure interrogation
 until a rifle motions and you move
 with guarded unconcerned acceleration,
 a little emptier, a little spent
 as always by that quiver in the self,
 subjugated, yet, and obedient.”

(l. 1-12.)

The traumatic experience also stimulates an impalpable one that takes place on the frontier of conscience. The poet reexperiences the same event all over again but that time only in his mind.

Apart from the obvious act of transit through the roadblock, as Stan Smith noticed¹², the poet is also “through with that country: with exposed position, with having to justify himself as well as with perpetual interrogation”. The permission to pass is given and the poet is released through the real road-block. He is relieved to be liberated. However, the ability to liberate oneself is the exclusive privilege of the power of one’s own mind. The mind confronts the established boundaries. The soldiers are still present but they are also irretrievably metamorphosing into the organic form of trees:

“And suddenly you’re through, arraigned yet freed,
 as if you’d passed from behind a waterfall...
 past armour-plated vehicles, out between
 the posted soldiers flowing and receding
 like tree shadows into polished windscreen”

(l. 19-24.)

¹² Stan Smith, “The Distance Between: Seamus Heaney” in *Seamus Heaney* edited by Michael Allen (London, 1997.)

In accordance with his new visionary seeing, in Part II of *Seeing Things*, Heaney also experiments with a series of forty-eight twelve-liners, each of the poems arranged in four unrhymed terses in freely handled iambic pentameter. Heaney called that sequence "squarings" which is a term he remembers from playing marbles as a child:

"Those anglings, aimings, feints, and squints
You were allowed before you'd shoot...
Test outs and pull backs, re-envisagings."

("Squarings" iii, l. 2-5.)

"Squarings" represent childhood but of a different kind. Heaney returns as a conscious adult to some scenes from his youth. These places within his mind become more visible now than they were to him as a child:

"Re-enter this as the adult of solitude,
The silence-forder and the definite
Presence you sensed withdrawing first time round."

("Squarings" xiii, l. 10-12.)

At this stage of his poetry, Heaney's tendency towards dualism is more than evident as well as his urge to reconcile those opposites. In *Seeing Things* Heaney explores the dynamic relations between the imaginary and the real, at the same time emphasizing their evident correlation. In the interview¹³ Heaney confirms that there is no doubt in connection between "Squarings" and the burden of his Catholic beliefs. Even in the first poem which is firm in its conviction that there is no afterlife we can find a sensation of "scope", human relation to the "shifting brilliances" and the roaming "cloud life". According to Heaney, it is still susceptible to the numinous. In "Squarings" x, while observing clouds moving across a flooded quarry, in his attempt to reconcile the water of diaphanous virtual with the rock of the massive material, the poet poses a question:

"Where you equal to or where you opposite
To build-ups so promiscuous and weightless".

("Squarings" x, l. 10, 11.)

What Heaney wants to imply is the mobility of our mind against the immobility of material. Our mind has ability of lifting up beyond the limits of empirical world. Precisely for that reason Heaney suggests us to "shield" (l.12.) our eyes and to "look up and face the music" (l.12). This idea of impotence of empirical insight for fundamental knowledge I also discussed above in "Field of Vision" where Heaney's aunt Mary opens her mind to alternative perception. However, Heaney's priority in "Squarings" is an attempt to harmonize contrariness, unite natural and supernatural in order to infuse confined with the sublime. In that respect in "Squarings" (xxiv), Heaney primarily distinguishes material from immaterial using the material nouns (stone, masonry, boards, glass) versus evanescent ones, (shimmer, equilibrium, vision). In that way we are aware of the material harbour scene and we feel its aura at the same time. Finally, air and water are harmonized and analogously material and immaterial become "antecedent" to one another:

¹³ Ibid. p. 319.

“Perfected vision: cockle minarets
 Consigned down there with green-slicked bottle glass,
 Shell-debris and a reddened bud of sandstone.

Air and ocean known as antecedents
 Of each other. In apposition with
 Omnipresence, equilibrium, brim.”

(“Squarings” xxiv, l. 7-12.)

For Vendler¹⁴, this ecstatic sufficiency happens less within the flesh than within the mind. The dynamic life of flesh would break this perfection imagined as the reciprocity of air and ocean. In that respect, Vendler regards this poem, in accordance to all perfected things – a hieroglyph of death.

In “Squarings” viii, which retells a story from the Irish annals, Heaney juxtaposes the transcendent and the real of our perception. The poem implies that in the same way the angel’s world seems miraculous to us, our world seems miraculous to a heavenly person. In that respect it would be death for the man from heaven to remain in the thicker air of earth. Analogously, human beings shouldn’t attempt to breathe the air of the transcendent. However, we may ascend to it just for a moment but after that we must immediately return to the phenomenal world.

Many philosophers, in a similar way accept the role of art as the mediator between the phenomenal and intelligible world. They would even agree with the fact that air of the transcendent we can never experience entirely but perhaps we can approach it for a moment without actually conceiving it but at least anticipate foreboding it through the media of art. We can never grasp the transcendental by using our senses. However, as it is installed in us we can project it in objects outside. Those objects are not transcendental but they merely provoke the emotion that diverts us from those phenomena and directs us to the ideas of higher purposefulness. According to that, the general need for poetry is intellectual as it encourages man to distinguish his inner and outer world in his spiritual consciousness through the work of art.

Highly estimating Heaney’s new approach to the poetry in *Seeing Things*, Helen Vendler in her book *Seamus Heaney* refers to it as a virtue that eternalize what is precious without binding it to a limited personal place and brief lifetime:

“The poet sacrifices himself- as autobiographical persona, as narrator of his
 Own era, as a person representing his class or ethnic group – in order to see
 Things in the most basic terms of all, life symbolized and verbalized in the full
 Knowledge of annihilation.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 149.

In his *Kritik der Reinen Fernunft* Kant remarks that the unconscious impulse to extend our insight declines all limits. He states an example of a light pigeon in his free flight, it feels the resistance of the air. In the same way Plato left the empirical world as it imposed different obstacles to his mind. For that reason, on the wings of ideas, he adventured upon the empty space of the mind.

The human mind cannot reject those questions imposed by its own nature. Unfortunately, those questions are unsolvable as they surpass all potentials of our mind.

In the opinion of Richard Kirkland, Heaney's work often occupies a landscape of absolutes in which language becomes just an unwarranted obstacle in the on-going drive to present unity and reconciliation within the transcendent and experience¹⁶

3. Conclusion

In my pursuit for "metaphysical"¹⁷, "true quotable statements about common experience and general concern"¹⁸ as well as for "universal meaning"¹⁹ and all other elements that Fenell couldn't find I realised that the touch of phenomenology in Heaney's poetry is more than evident. It is probably inspired by his confrontation with the thoughts of finality and it makes Fenell's statement completely unjustified.

What would be more metaphysical than Heaney's isolation from the material reality by transcending into another dimension in "Field of Vision", his awareness of the emptied space in "Clearances" or his dealing with metaphysics of meaning in "Parable Island". On the other hand, what is more our general concern than our prospective non-existence or non-being that Heaney's poetry is imbued with.

In my opinion, the essential cause for such development of Heaney as a writer could be found in the phenomenon of finality. The mere thought of death is not something that man from Ireland could easily escape. In Heaney's case, these thoughts were probably intensified by the deaths of his parents as well as the provoked sense of his own mortality. The realization of finality often serves as an excellent ground for shifting the reality on two levels with an emphasis on the immaterial, spiritual or transcendental realm which brings us to phenomenology resulting with the deeper philosophical dilemmas in Heaney's poetry.

Concerning Fenell, to a certain extent I could partly agree with his statement that Heaney's poetry possibly (but not definitely) doesn't have some quotable lines as Yeats's but with all respect to Fenell I must notice that we actually don't know, at least not for sure, what we will quote in a few decades. Besides, Fenell admits that it is often difficult to penetrate the meaning of Heaney's later poetry. In respect to that, I couldn't help noticing the absurdity of the statement. How could someone who admits his failure to understand certain poetry, say that it is poor in meaning and without general relevance. Besides, there are so many others, in-

¹⁶ Richard Kirkland, "Paradigms of Possibility: Seamus Heaney", in *Seamus Heaney* edited by Michael Allen (London, 1997.)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-39.

cluding appreciated and acknowledged critic Helen Vendler who highly estimates Heaney's poetry and doesn't have any problems with understanding it.

Finally, it seems more than fair to conclude with Heaney's own words when asked about Fennell's highly critical article. Heaney was in Harvard when the article appeared. He said that it hadn't been pleasant but that it hadn't neither been devastating. When asked if he had known Fenel, "afellow Northerner, after all"²⁰ he said:

"Oh yes. We'd met on quite a few occasions; in fact, I'd once driven him to Derry to attend the fir iht of Field Day Iyin the Guld. Ed even telephoned me a couple of times at home to invite me out for a drink. Maybe I should have accepted."²¹

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²⁰ Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones,Interviews with Seamus Heaney*,p.340.(London, 2009.)

²¹ Ibid. 341.