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THE WORD IN THE WORLD: SEAMUS HEANEY AND THE SEARCH FOR PALPABLE LANGUAGE¹

ABSTRACT

The essay investigates the notion of palpable language in Seamus Heaney's poetry. It is here argued that Heaney's particular imaginative strength lies in his ability to fuse the words and the world, whether it is the place that is being evoked, the animal or the material reality. The focus is here laid on Heaney's celebrated poems of place names (*Dinnseanchas*) but also on his less critically appreciated lyrics that seek to unite the word with animals and, finally, on the few poems that envision what might be termed an incarnated language. As a result, Heaney's life-long ideal, whereby "what survives translation [is] true," is shown to develop towards a language that could become, as nearly as possible, a tangible presence in our experience of the world.

KEYWORDS: Seamus Heaney, contemporary Irish poetry, language, materiality

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy esej bada pojęcie języka namacalnego w poezji Seamusa Heaney'a. Postulowane jest tu twierdzenie, że szczególna siła wyobraźni poety leży w umiejętności złączenia słów i świata, czy to jako miejsce ewokowane w wierszu, czy jako zwierzę, czy też wreszcie jako fragment rzeczywistości materialnej. Uwaga zostaje tu poświęcona szeroko komentowanym wierszom poświęconym nazwom miejscowości (tradycyjne irlandzkie *Dinnseanchas*), lecz również mniej przyswojonym lirykom, które szukają możliwości splecenia słów ze zwierzętami. Wreszcie analizie zostaje poddanych tych kilka wierszy, które można by określić mianem języka wcielonego. W efekcie, ideał, który od zawsze bliski był Heaneyowi – że „to, co przetrwa w przekładzie jest prawdą” – ukazany zostaje jako próba stworzenia języka będącego tak bardzo, jak to tylko możliwe namacalną obecnością w naszym doświadczeniu rzeczywistości.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Seamus Heaney, współczesna poezja irlandzka, języka, materialność

Ever since his debut volume, *Death of a Naturalist*, Seamus Heaney's poems have been widely acknowledged as being delightful in their "power and precision" (O'Donoghue 2009: 2). More so than one of his masters, Patrick Kavanagh, Heaney gives utterance to the world that he knew best as a child and hardly shies away from employing vernacular terms even if some of them may often seem hermetic

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for a non-native. Similarly to W. B. Yeats's father, the garrulous painter John Butler Yeats, who once quipped, as was his wont, about his part in his son's success: "By marriage with a Pollexfen I have given a tongue to the cliffs" (qtd. in Foster 1999: 1), in Seamus Heaney the tongue was given to the minutiae of country life. One remembers the painstaking rendition of the image of the poet's father "digging": "The course boot nestled on the lug, the shaft / Against the inside knee was levered firmly" (1966: 1). In Heaney, to use Wallace Stevens's famous line, "description is revelation" (Stevens 1990: 344).

In "Description without Place," Stevens goes on to make a claim as pertinent to his own poetry as it might be to Heaney's: "[The theory of description] is the theory of the word for those // For whom the word is the making of the world" (Stevens 1990: 345). And yet the analogy with Stevens falters in that whereas Stevens considered it his first duty "to enable that revelation by describing the ever-changing life of human emotional response" (Vendler 2007: 135), Heaney would be more interested in the eternal foundation of our life. It was this eternal aspect that allowed him to recognise continuities between, for example, the Graubelle Man and Ireland's contemporary condition; to pitch "The invisible, untoppled omphalos" against "armoured cars" (1979: 7) and assert that "In the beginning there was one bell-tower / which struck its single note each day at noon / in honour of the one-eyed all-creator" (1987: 11). Although in "Further language," he argues for some levity in the construction of the poetic utterance which is to be "a way of putting the muse back into amusement" (qtd. in Dennison 2015: 192), Heaney repeatedly stresses that there is a fundamental connection between language and the world from which it springs and in which it unravels, thus implying that language is in fact an almost palpable instantiation within the material reality. In the following essay, I seek to demonstrate that for Heaney language existed as more than just a space of restoring the balance to an otherwise unruly experience of the world, as he claims in *The Redress of Poetry*; language, as it transpires from his own poetry, is an element of the world that inheres in the fabric of the landscape, redefining it as the words are being defined by it.

DINNSEANCHAS

Heaney has always been conscious of the etymologies of words and the implications those etymologies carry for place names, especially important because in those names language and geography coalesce, forming a kind of organic whole, if only in the imaginations of the inhabitants of a particular township or village. "Anahorish," "Toome" and "Broagh" (from *Wintering Out*) represent three of the best-known early poems that bring together the word and the land. In the first, the name of the village in South Derry leads the speaker first to consider its sound:

“soft-gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow” (1972: 6) before a wider image of the place is evoked. “Toome” and “Broagh” face each other in *Wintering Out*, as the speaker lovingly muses over the sounds of the names: “My mouth holds round / the soft blastings, / *Toome, Toome*” (1972: 16) and

in *Broagh*,
its low tattoo
among the windy boortrees
and rhubarb-blades

ended almost
suddenly, like the last
gh the strangers found
difficult to manage. (1972: 17)

The names that are given in Gaelic introduce the postcolonial context, in which English is filtered through Irish and is found wanting. Whereas English speakers cannot properly pronounce the sounds like the “gh” in Broagh, the native Irish, like Heaney, excel in using English. Therefore “Anahorish,” “Toome” and “Broagh” spring from the ur-colonial conflict of Irish writing, which is expressed in Stephen Dedalus’s conversation with the Dean of studies in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. When the Dean expresses surprise at the meaning of the word “tundish,” which he deems is a kind of Irish perversion of “funnel,” Stephen is harrowed by feelings of non-belonging: “The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine” (Joyce 1977: 172). Later in the novel, however, he discovers that tundish is “good old blunt English” (Joyce 1977: 227). Despite English being an essentially foreign tongue for Stephen, he acquits himself better than the native Dean, which for Heaney remains a significant moment in the Irish struggle for cultural as well as political independence. He returns to it in “Station Island, xii,” in which Joyce’s ghost instructs the poet that “The main thing is to write / for the joy of it” (1984: 93), thus establishing an important caesura in Heaney’s career that had so far navigated a narrow road between privacy of voice and responsibilities for the public sphere. More importantly, however, Joyce’s ghost represents a covering angel, who confirms the instincts implicit in the *dinnseanchas* (traditional Irish onomastic place-name poems) of *Wintering Out*: “The English language / belongs to us” (1984: 93). “Anahorish,” “Toome” and “Broagh” therefore scoff at the Englishman who cannot master the foreign sounds, while at the same time he must succumb to the domination of the foreigner, and of all foreigners an Irishman, whose command of English is better.

However, the poet’s trust in the mastery over English, which partly derives from his knowledge of Gaelic and Hiberno-English, is given a twist in “Belderg” (from *North*). The poem opens with a description of “strip[ing] off blanket bog / The soft-piled centuries” that allows the speaker and a “pupil dreaming / Of neolithic wheat” an insight into the layers of geological formation of the land until they

behold “A landscape fossilized, / Its stone-wall patternings / Repeated before our eyes / In the stone walls of Mayo” (1975: 4). By the time north was released in 1975, the image of tiers of landscape as carriers of history of Ireland, “Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before” (1969: 44), would have struck readers as characteristic of Heaney. Still, in “Belderg,” the poet goes on to uncharacteristically compare the image his interlocutor’s home that “accrued growth rings / Of iron, flint and bronze” (1975: 4) to the way the word denoting his own home, Mossbawm, has accrued meanings over time:

So I talked of Mossbawm,
 [...]
 I’d told how its foundation

Was mutable as sound
 And how I could derive
 A forked root from that ground,
 Make *bawm* an English fort,
 A planter’s walled-in mound,

Or else find a sanctuary
 And think of it as Irish,
 Persistent if outworn. (1975: 5)

Heaney wrote of this aspect of the name: “Our farm was called Mossbawn. *Moss*, a Scots word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and *bawn*, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses. Mossbawn, the planter’s house on the bog. Yet in spite of this Ordinance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss bann, and *Bán* is the Gaelic word for white” (1980: 35). In the poem, Heaney parallels the change of the landscape, which is caused by layers of geological material coming one on top of another, with words that endure through various uses, as different etymologies fuse to produce the motley signifier. As a result, the poet’s home, whose name he obstinately pronounced as “Moss bann,” is located on the intersection of geology and language, both subject to constant change.

This idea of interdependence of language and land as they mutate and inform each other recurs throughout Heaney’s oeuvre but comes to prominence in *Seeing Things*. In the volume, the poet insistently returns to the notions of continuity and change that he sees as underlying both physical life and language, a notably unstable tool. Describing the construction of a house in “Lightenings, ii” section of “Squarings,” he comes to conclude: “Sink every impulse like a bolt. Secure / The bastion of sensation. Do not waver / Into language. Do not waver in it” (1991: 56). The appreciation of feeling is here tantamount to the process of building but while the resultant home may become a permanent feature of the poet’s familial landscape, language is a zone of wavering, into which the hapless constructor might stumble. Interestingly, however, the second poem in the “Seeing Things” sequence

summons the familiar image of landscape, this time in the form of a stone “alive with what’s invisible: / Waterweed, stirred sand-grains hurrying off” (1991: 17). In the final lines, the attention of the poem is shifted to air that surrounds the stone scene: “the air we stood up to our eyes in wavered / Like the zig-zag hieroglyph for life itself” (1991: 17). The metamorphosis that the poem enacts leads from “*Claritas*. The dry-eyed Latin word” through “the carved stone” to air, all the way back to language signalled by the reference to hieroglyph. The simile indicates that the dichotomy, apparent throughout the poem, between the stone and what covers and surrounds it is a slightly modified version of the fusion of land and word in “Belderg.”

In “Seeing Things, ii,” language, like air, may be impalpable but in its intangibility lies in its resemblance to life. Once more, therefore, language and a physical element in the world are brought together into a single image. The hieroglyph evokes also the connection that the first written language shares with pictorial arts, as the first written-languages relied on the importance of the visual. The poet advisedly uses the reference to hieroglyphics, for the poem itself, like many others in Heaney’s oeuvre, may well be described as hieroglyphic in that it stresses the connection between the arbitrary words on the page and the designate in the material world. As has been argued in connection with the other place-name poems, Heaney seems to deliberately emphasise the physical aspect of language as he conceives of it. Words may be disembodied signs but their rootedness in the landscape, its rock and air, constitutes their elemental part.

WORDS LIKE ANIMALS

Much as language’s connection with the land and its organically fused townships has become a hallmark of Heaney’s verse, his desire to wed words with the world about him goes beyond the rocks and hills. In “Saint Francis and the Birds” (from *Death of a Naturalist*), a remarkable early little gem, the poet imagines a scene “When Francis preached love to the birds, / They listened, fluttered, throttled up / Into the blue like a flock of words” (1966: 40). While the logic of simile dictates that there is homology between the birds and the words, the noun phrase “a flock of words” furthers the association between the two. In the ending of the poem, the birds dancing and singing “like images took flight. / Which was the best poem Francis made, / His argument true, his tone light” (1966: 40). Although initially the two similes maintain a distinction between the birds and the words, eventually their identity is asserted. The poem reaches the epiphanic mode in its last line, as Francis not only gets his “argument true, his tone light” but also manages to achieve unity between the bird and the poem. No longer “Like a poet hidden / In the light of thought,” Francis has learnt the lesson that Shelley’s poet could

only beg of the skylark: “Teach me half the gladness / That thy brain must know” (Shelley 1973: 452, ll. 101–102). Thus where Shelley and Keats failed to emulate the cadences of their skylarks and nightingales, Heaney’s Francis succeeds in making one of the central English Romantic myths come true. Moreover the brevity of the lyric contrasts with the protracted meditations of “To a Skylark” and “Ode to a Nightingale” so that the poetic triumph, won by a Catholic saint who is famous for hymns in praise of all creation, becomes also the triumph of faith as opposed to the purely poetic invocations of Keats and Shelley.

Animals in Heaney’s poetry, particularly in *Field Work*, often represent the *élan vital* that remains beyond total expression, hovering just outside the margins of the words. Whether it is the “Alive and violated” oysters (1979: 3) or the “palpable, lithe / Otter of memory” (1979: 43), animals in Heaney, as Randy Malamud puts it, “accentuate their ethereal otherworldliness, their resistance to being pegged, pinned, literally (or figuratively) *captured*, by the poet or anyone else” (Malamud 2003: 173, emphasis in original). Even if they are caught, like the salmon in “The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon,” the act does not bring the speaker any closer to understanding what is it that annually propels the salmon to the upper reaches of rivers to spawn, so that he declares: “We’re both annihilated on the fly” (1969: 8). Therefore the fact that Francis manages to fuse his song with the birds is a moment of epiphany as much as of a nearly divine incarnation.

This motif of incarnating the world in language becomes particularly significant in “Alphabets.” *The Haw Lantern*, in which the poem is collected, features a number of meditations on nature, language and the intertwining of the two but it is the opening poem that focuses directly on integrating them. The poem revisits the speaker’s early days at school, when he was busy learning to write, drawing “the forked stick that they call a Y,” but also figures to the effect that “A swan’s neck and swan’s back / Make the 2” (1987: 1). There is nothing unusual about the implicit discovery of the existence of letters and digits by means of referring them to shapes in the familiar world. Still, the connection of “swan” to the digit “2,” superbly evocative as the image is, implies that the written symbol and the outside world begin to inform one another in a gesture that one might associate with Craig Raine’s Martian poems. Furthermore Heaney’s speaker grows and goes on to study calligraphy: “The letters of this alphabet were trees. / The capitals were orchards in full bloom, / The lines of script like briars coiled in ditches” (1987: 2). As the boy grows so his associations gain in evocativeness, principally in relation to his perception of calligraphy, which summons the traditional Welsh bardic poem, *Cad Goddeu*, or *The Battle of the Trees*. The poem collected in the lays of a Welsh poet Taliesin recounts the episode when the poet Gwydion summoned trees to fight against his enemies. Despite the fact that the military context of *The Battel of the Trees* does not carry over to “Alphabets,” Heaney’s poem seems to situate itself in a position that tries to retain the possibility that poetry may accomplish the incarnation of the world in the word.

Still, the ending of “Alphabets” brings forth the speaker, now a mature man, who is less willing to grant the surprising connections between man-made objects and the natural world. It is only in the last line that he again opens himself to the magical aspects of the written word, as he observes “the plasterer on his ladder / Skimming our gable and writing our name there / With his trowel point, letter by strange letter” (1987: 3). Despite having recalled the uncanny nature of the alphabet that he saw as a child, the poet, now that he is adult, can only see strangeness in the letters but not their connectedness to the natural world. There is an air of Wordsworth’s “Intimations of Immortality” with the young boy as “Nature’s Priest” in “Alphabets.” However, whereas Wordsworth finds strength in what is left of that state: “Though nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower; / We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind” (Wordsworth 1973: 181, ll. 178–181), Heaney’s speaker ends up feeling desolate and distinctly not at home with what is left of the early connection. Yet in spite of the note of mourning after the lost completeness, the poem adumbrates what Heaney is implicitly after the entire time: that language, both in its spoken and written form, shares a link with the surrounding world.

FROM PURE VERB TO VOWELS

“Oysters” has become one of Heaney’s most frequently-discussed poems, alongside “Digging” and the bog poems. In the present analysis, it is the last lines that stand as particularly important: “I ate the day / Deliberately, that its tang / Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb” (1979: 3). While most readings of the poem focus on the political subtext (see Quinn 100; the conflict between vowels and consonants appears in Heaney’s earlier poem “A New Song” [1972: 23]), the last line emphasises also the tension between transcendence and thingly immanence. As Daniel Tobin perceptively argues:

“Might” is the word on which the last line turns. It implies tentativeness, but also a reversal of the absolutism that engenders violation through the “might” of empires and the “might” of nature. In turn, “quicken” refers to the moment of quickening when the soul is believed to enter the unborn child. It hints at new birth, but also implies a spiritual dimension transcending the natural order. By the end of the poem, however, the otherworldly and the mythological are transposed from hierarchical gestures of gods to “the pure verb” of being itself. Transcendence is understood as a mode within immanence in which the poet hopes to participate. (Tobin 1999: 147)

This ruse towards the worldly would place Heaney’s poem in the Romantic tradition of Shelley (especially in “Mont Blanc”) and Yeats (notoriously torn between the beyond and the within) rather than in that of Patrick Kavanagh. And yet, the fact that the poet uses “pure verb” rather than, for example, pure being shows his desire to stress that this being here is always filtered through being in a language.

Moreover, the fact that it is the “tang” of the oysters that is to “quicken” him “into pure verb” connects directly the crustaceans with language, as one influences the other.

From the level of parts of speech, Heaney delves more deeply and reaches to what comprises words themselves: vowels and consonants. In “Kinship,” a six-part meditation on the centrality of the bog image to his oeuvre, Heaney shows the bog as the domain of the goddess: “I stand at the edge of centuries / facing a goddess” (1975: 36). The image may derive something of its imaginary sweep from Ted Hughes’s delineation of the term. Although Hughes’s *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* did not appear until 1992, in the 1970s the two poets spent some time together, as both the Heaneys visited Hughes in his Sussex house in Court Green and Hughes made some visits to Ireland (Feinstein 2001: 176, 212–213). In 1971, Hughes wrote an introduction to Faber’s *A Choice of Shakespeare’s Verse* in which he discussed the central assumption behind his reading of Shakespeare. Among the crucial consequences that the rise of Puritanism had on Shakespeare “was the drastic way the Queen of Heaven, who was the goddess of Catholicism, who was the goddess of Medieval and Pre-Christian England, who was the divinity of the throne, who was the goddess of natural law and of love, who was the goddess of all sensation and organic life – this overwhelmingly powerful, multiple, primeval being, was dragged into court by the young Puritan Jehovah” (Hughes 1994: 110). Hughes’s catalogue of the symbolic incarnations of the goddess, the notion he derived from Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess*, marks its fall from the position of hegemony to that of an evil witch, who in Shakespeare’s plays is best represented by Sycorax. This notion would have appealed to any Irishman, as it set much stock beside the female goddess figure not unlike Sheela-na-Gig (indeed Graves recognises this connection) or Cathleen ni Houlihan, but for Heaney, the goddess constitutes an even more important departure point. In “Kinship,” it is “Quagmire, swampland, morass” that is her “slime kingdom” (1975: 34), which is also identified as “outback of [the poet’s] mind” (1975: 35). This kingdom is then argued to be a “centre [that] holds / and spreads” (1975: 36), clearly unlike that in Yeats’s “The Second Coming” which “cannot hold” (Yeats 1996: 187). The ancient goddess worship is thus a more potent unifying symbol than the occult images of Yeats.

In section iv of “Kinship,” Heaney identifies the bog as

[...] the vowel of earth
dreaming its root
in flowers and snow,

mutations of weathers
and seasons,
a windfall composing
the floor it rots into. (1975: 36)

Tobin argues that in a volume so profoundly marked by a hermeneutic of suspicion of “fundamental artistic presuppositions” as *North*, in this fragment “Heaney discovers grounds for a chastened hermeneutic of trust” (1999: 129). I would argue that the image of “the vowel of earth” plays a crucial role in regaining this trust, for it identifies the sacredness of the bog, its depth and self-sustaining capacity, with language. This is in line with Hughes’s (and Graves’s) perception of the goddess as the addressee of the poet’s invocations. When Heaney approaches the goddess, he finds solace in the fact that as poet he comes to the core of all his art, the spring and goal of his poetry, for language, much like the bog, composes the floor it then inevitably rots into. In this sense Heaney unites words with the land, as both become the seat of the goddess, the seat that, for different reasons in Heaney and in Hughes, “is sour with the blood / of her faithful” (1975: 38).

The equation of language and land is taken up in the “Glanmore Sonnets” sequence (from *Field Work*), in the first of which the speaker sees “Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground” (1979: 28). This “opened ground” is the realm of poetry and land in which the speaker, “Breasting the mist,” can summon “My ghosts” that “come striding into their spring stations” (1979: 28). It is also in this “opened ground” that the poet observes languages flow into one another, as etymologies of English, Gaelic and Hiberno-English intertwine and stay mutually informed. In “Glanmore Sonnets, v,” the context of *Cod Goddeu* returns, as the speaker lovingly glances at Elderberry and Boortree which “is bower tree, where I played ‘touching tongues’” (1979: 32). Now as an “etymologist of roots and graftings,” he becomes not only the dweller of the “opened ground” but also its historian, the historically-conscious speaker of “Bogland” still holding sway over his imagination, though now it is words themselves that may be identified as bottomless. As “Glanmore Sonnets, ii” puts it, effecting a complete unification of language and land: “Vowels plough into other, opened ground, / Each verse returning like the plough turned round” (1979: 29). As a result of this fusion, the speaker sees “Words entering almost the sense of touch / Ferreting themselves out of their dark hutch” (1979: 29). Once more it appears that the working of poetic imagination is regarded as close to hieroglyphs in that vowels as well as words, both written and spoken, are endowed with the qualities of the land their seek to evoke.

PALPABLE LANGUAGE

Heaney’s oeuvre comprises numerous such hieroglyphic images, whereby language and the land become one. One may recall “Song” (from *Field Work*) and its “mud-flowers of language” (1979: 53), or “A New Song” (from *Wintering Out*) and its call to “our river tongues” that must “Flood, with vowelling embrace, / Demesnes staked out in consonants” (1972: 23). However, it is in *The Spirit Level*

that Heaney goes further in his attempt to image forth a language that would be as palpable as the land it folds into. In “M.,” a poem remembering Osip Mandelstam, “the deaf phonetician” is shown to be able to “tell which diphthong and which vowel / By the bone vibrating to that sound” (1996: 57). In much the same manner, the poet declares: “I set my palm / On a contour cold as permafrost / And imagine axle-hum and the steadfast / Russia of Osip Mandelstam” (1996: 57). This is a step further than the deaf phonetician’s feat, for the speaker, who we are led to infer does not know Russian, contrives not only to hear the late Mandelstam but also to distinguish the quality of his language, as though the very vibrations that words surge through the palm have become an impulse capable of inciting bodily reactions.

A similar situation is invoked in “At the Wellhead,” in which the speaker tells first of a singer whose “songs, when you sing them with your two eyes closed / As you always do, are like a local road” and then of “our neighbour, Rosie Keenan,” “Who played the piano all day in her bedroom” and “Her notes came out to us like hoisted water / Ravelling off a bucket at the wellhead / Where next thing we’d be listening, hushed and awkward” (1996: 65). Like the deaf phonetician who distinguishes the sound of words through touch, so attuned are his senses to the physical presence of words in the world, Rosie Keenan would “say she ‘saw’ / Whoever and whatever” (1996: 66). This is more than just synaesthesia, for the poem celebrates not the receptivity of certain images but Rosie’s ability to feel the presence of words so intimately that she begins to see them. There is a distinguishable note of admiration in the poem, for the poet admits that “Being with her / Was intimate and helpful, like a cure / You didn’t notice happening” (1996: 66). There is more to this poem than “celebration of quiet, stoical endurance” (O’Donoghue 2009: 11), as it summarises in the figure of Rosie Keenan the ideal of palpability that Heaney seems to aspire after throughout his work. Explaining the notion of poetic authority, Heaney argues: “By poetic authority I mean the rights and weight which accrue to a voice not only because of a sustained history of truth-telling but by virtue also of its tonality, the sway it gains over the deep ear and, through that, over other parts of our mind and nature” (1988: 109). It is just this “deep ear” that Rosie seems to possess and thanks to it she is able to translate sounds into sights.

In “Remembered Columns,” Heaney describes how “The solid letters of the world grew airy” and concludes: “I lift my eyes in a light-headed credo, / Discovering what survives translation true” (1996: 45). This translation does not concern two different languages but the rendition of the tangible reality into words, which results in an increasing airiness of the otherwise “solid letters.” This would suggest that in language all that is solid melts into air but the final line emphasises that the goal of poetry is to retain the distinctness of the world so that only the aspects of the world that endure in the poem are true both in the sense of matching facts and preserving the unique quality of the subject. All across Heaney’s oeuvre there are numerous images that seek to embody the features of the world that rivet the poet’s

eye. Whether it is the “clean rasping sound / When the spade sinks into gravelly ground” (1966: 1) or “Treating [the pen] to its first deep snorkel / In a newly opened ink-bottle, // Guttery, snottery” (2010: 9), Heaney remains poised to turn the words of his poem into the things that those words are applied to. Therefore the world that survives the translation into poetry and the poetry that endures in the world both constitute an essential part of the interconnectedness of our life. It is between the word and the world, to paraphrase one of Heaney’s last poems, that “I had my experience. I was there. / Me in place and the place in me” (2010: 43).

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