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'An unbewildered poet': The Ontological 'Sense of Place' in Seamus Heaney's Prose

Joanna Jarząb-Napierała

The place of prose in Seamus Heaney's literary legacy is in many critical inquiries downgraded into a peripheral or supplementary area in view of his poetry. Neil Corcoran, devoting his last chapter to the analysis of Heaney's essays, clearly denotes that the Nobel prize winner's criticism is 'the product or offshoot, or even intellectual ambience, of his own poetry'.[1] The justification for this approach is visible in the chronology of Heaney's writings, as the motives discussed in his critical texts are superseded by their appearance in his poems. Thus, to adopt the stance of Corcoran, it is poetry which generates new ideas, motives, and tropes; whereas prose serves the purpose of an additional comment to the poetic verse. Even if a certain idea is implemented by Heaney subsequently into his poetry and his criticism, still Corcoran finds the medium of poetic language superior to that of prose. But he fact that the author of *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (1998) devotes the whole chapter of his monograph, which as the title suggests deals with the poetic verse, to discuss the critical works in a more holistic perspective still shows the academic's acknowledgement of this part of Heaney's literary career.

In Michael Cavanagh's view, Corcoran's book serves rather as an exception to the majority of academic works on Heaney, which if they refer to the poet's prose writing at all, look at it only glancingly and selectively.[2] Despite the fact that Heaney was first a poet, only later to play also the role of a critic and an academic lecturer, his essays do constitute a substantial part of his work. Five collections of essays with regard to twelve collections of poems cannot be treated exclusively as an appendix to Heaney's career as a poet, but more as a separate section of his literary legacy.[3] Many a time does the author of *North* (1975) draw attention to the significance of his relations with Queens

[1] Neil Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study* (London, 1998), 209.

[2] Michael Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics* (Washington D.C., 2009), 3.

[3] Taking into consideration *Preoccupations*, *The Government of the Tongue*, *The Place of Writing*, *The Redress of Poetry* and *Finders Keepers*. The last collection includes essays from previous works, but it should be taken into consideration on the grounds of containing critical writings which had not been collected before.

University, his stay at the Berkeley or Oxford Universities, and, connected with them, his academic activity as having a significant impact on him as a poet.[4] David Wheatley points out that Heaney belongs to a particular group of poets whose critical activity results in a higher self-consciousness, seen as desirable by such literary icons as T. S. Eliot.[5] Others see it as a weakness, suggesting that Heaney has always been too self-aware as an artist. In this view, the close co-relation between his critical and poetic works is considered in terms of being a drawback of his essays. Michael Baron meticulously enlists major accusations directed at Heaney's prose. Among them one may find the argument of Peter McDonald stating that the Nobel prize winner lacks critical objectivism, and that, thus, instead of a reasoned analysis, he provides his readers with his subjective, personal and authoritative judgements. However, the harshest comment seems to come from James Simmons, who finds Heaney as a critic of 'commonplace ideas, timid moral postures and shallow metaphysics'.[6] Baron does not limit himself to the presentation of negative responses, also drawing attention to the positive reviews Heaney received after the publication of *Finders Keepers* (2002). The critic mentions the same argument pinpointed by Wheatley acknowledging Heaney's distinctive ability to look at poetry from the inside, thus seeing more than pure academics do.[7]

Regardless of whether Heaney's prose writing is presented in a positive or a negative light, the majority of criticism revolves around two aspects present in all five collections of his essays, namely Heaney's analysis of other poets' literary output or the enunciation of his own poetry. Even Cavanagh, whose *Professing Poetry* (2009) concentrates on the critical activity of the poet, focuses on the place of poetry in Heaney's prose, the impact of his mentors on Heaney's poetic career, the dialogue with other poets of his times, as well as the general defence of poetry. Rarely does anyone look at the content prevalent beyond the poetry, where beneath the literary criticism one may find more of a theoretical inquiry into the sense of the construction of identity with relation to the concept of place. Misleading as it might be, Heaney heavily relies on his own experience, making his inquiry a seemingly biographical one.

However, as Sander Gillman contends, there is observable a gradual turn

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[4] Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London, 2009), 136-45.

[5] David Wheatley, 'Professing Poetry: Heaney as Critic' in Bernard O'Donoghue (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, 2009), 122.

[6] Michael Baron, 'Heaney and the Functions of Prose' in Ashby Bland Crowder and Jason David Hall (eds), *Seamus Heaney. Poet, Critic, Translator* (New York, 2007), 75-7.

[7] Ibid., 74.

in theory towards biography, such as in the works of Walter Benjamin or Georges Bataille. The merging of theory and biography, for Gillam, stems from the 'posttheory desire for coherent narratives but also an attempt to plumb the critic's projected self'.[8] Heaney's self-awareness comes to the fore and becomes the basis for his theoretical reconsiderations of the question of 'the sense of place' in the Irish context. Ireland, as an island, has always been subjected to the constant changes in the geographical, cultural and symbolic representations of place. Thus, it is no surprise that this motif of space reappears in twentieth-century literature, as this period witnessed many redefinitions of the spatial understanding of Ireland. Heaney, with his rural background and Catholic denomination, remained sensitive to the traditional culture of the land and national metaphysics revolving around the myth of Ireland. According to Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, Heaney 'develops his own answering Catholic Gaelic myth of continuity grounded in the transcendental reality of place'.[9]

In his prose, Heaney repeatedly went back to the question he posed himself in the preface to 1980's *Preoccupations*: 'How should a poet properly live and write? What is the relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world?'.[10] Not only does this question indicate the importance of place, but it also underlines the significance of the poet's voice with reference to it. By this token, Heaney was trying to find an adequate concept that would best epitomise the complexity of his understanding of identity as grounded in the place of belonging.

Since the publication of Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958), many theoreticians have tried to create an analogous phenomenological analysis of other kinds of places, providing them with an ontological status, as Bachelard did with the interior of the house. This was not an easy task, because the second half of the twentieth century was dominated by the sociological approach toward studies of spatial representation, as witnessed by Edward Soja, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, or John Urry, just to name a few. However, Henri Lefebvre, one of the members of the French Marxist school, did not limit his urban studies solely to the sociological perspective. Instead, he

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[8] Sander L. Gillman, 'Collaboration, the Economy, and the Future of the Humanities', *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004), 384–90.

[9] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, 'Heaney and Muldoon: Omphalos and Diaspora' in Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (ed.), *Paul Muldoon. Poetry, Prose, Drama. A Collection of Critical Essays* (Gerrards Cross, 2006), 101.

[10] Seamus Heaney, 'Foreword' in idem, *Preoccupations. Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London, 1980), 13.

became an advocate of a phenomenological treatment of the city. The French sociologist postulated providing the city with its ontological status as a place deserving its own state of being.[11] The treatment of place as an *oeuvre* as well as space for defining collective identity constitutes the key concept of Henri Lefebvre's 'defence' of the city in a section titled: 'Right to the City' (1967). By talking about urban space in artistic terms, Lefebvre tried to prove that the city, as with any other type of space, deserves phenomenological attention. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Lefebvre many a time referred to one of the most prominent phenomenologists – Martin Heidegger. Already in 'Right to the City' he criticized the author of *Being and Time* (1927) for failing to notice the philosophical potential of urban areas.[12]

Lefebvre's preoccupation with the question of the space of the city manifests itself in his later work *The Production of Space* (1974), where the critic continued the discussion on the artistic potential of space as well as of place in more general terms. This time, Lefebvre went further by focusing on the ontological status of space. Once again he referred to Heidegger's works, especially to 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' (1951).[13] Lefebvre challenged the Heideggerian ontology, rendering it obsolete with regard to the contemporary global world's need for a constant change of place.[14] Heidegger translated dwelling into 'remaining, staying in a place', therefore to dwell means to protect, to preserve and to cultivate literally the soil and, metaphorically, one's origin.[15] Lefebvre saw this definition of dwelling as restrictive, as the contemporary understanding of the concept of origin does not have to be ascribed to one particular place. Heidegger's preoccupation with the issue of preservation led, according to Lefebvre, to the predominance of time over space. Consequently, as Lefebvre argued, space production is limited to time and place.[16] Together with preservation, Heidegger advocated absolute space, defining it as 'something that has been made room for, something that

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[11] Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities,* Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (ed. and trans.) (Oxford, 1996).

[12] Ibid., 100–1.

[13] The essay was first presented in the form of a lecture in 1951, and printed in 1952 in Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt, the citations come from the English translation published in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter (trans.) (New York, 1971), 145–61.

[14] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.) (Oxford, 1991), 121.

[15] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 146–7.

[16] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 121–2.

is cleared and free, namely within a boundary'.[17] However, boundary here is understood as the beginning of the spatial presence, and thus it does not limit space in any way. The descriptive mode of space presented by Heidegger is once again too limiting a concept for Lefebvre. The sociologist denounced Heidegger for going too much into the sphere of pure understanding, leaving the matter of experience behind.[18]

Despite his critical remarks on some aspects of Heidegger's concept of space and dwelling, Lefebvre shared many statements proposed by Heidegger. First, Lefebvre acknowledged the importance of Heidegger's analysis of *mundus* as a place in philosophical terms. For him, such an example showed that the Heideggerian 'world' well encapsulates experience and understanding.[19] Both critics tackled the question of the ontological status of space. Both talked about the production of space. Heidegger claimed that space is produced thanks to the presence of location; hence, space without location does not exist.[20] Following Lefebvre's line of thinking, it is people – not things – who predominantly produce spaces by providing them with a meaning. Consequently, space is a social construct.[21] Lefebvre preferred Michel Foucault's division of space into the mental and the social, understood as theoretical and practical respectively. However, to underline the difference between these two types of space, Lefebvre advocated the usage of the term space, referring to the mental idea, whereas place stands for the physical equivalent. Frequently the former becomes a representation of the actual place, subsequently carrying some meaning or message. As a result, Lefebvre contended that 'space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction', which means that as space is always referential, so it necessitates experience to provide a given place with its subjective meaning.[22] Apart from the social space and the representation of space, Lefebvre also distinguished a third level of spatial production: representational space. This deals with the symbolic, and therefore, reaches the highest level of abstraction and standing of the concept of space, the one commonly reserved for art. Representational space fulfils yet another important role, namely it delineates the essence of the being of material places, and thus reaches an ontological status.

Although Lefebvre in the rest of his book concentrated predominantly

[17] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 154.
[18] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 122.
[19] Ibid., 242.
[20] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 154.
[21] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 12.
[22] Ibid., 144.

on the epistemological role of space as the indicator of human relations, his introductory remarks well illustrate how representational space may be read in ontological terms, as a way of being in the world. An analogous division can be found in Wojciech Kalaga's work *Nebulae of Discourse* (1997), where he distinguishes between epistemological and ontological interpretation. Inasmuch as the term interpretation refers to the reading of art, being taken from hermeneutics, it constitutes one of the elements of human understanding.[23] The majority of phenomenological thinkers agree on the ontological status of human understanding, but they tend to differ when it comes to the place ontology takes in the process of the understanding and interpreting of reality. For Heidegger, understanding and interpretation are the essence of *Dasein*, thus they are part and parcel of the ontological process.[24] Paul Ricoeur treats interpretation as a way leading to the ontological understanding,[25] whereas Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that ontological understanding is a prerequisite for any interpretation.[26] To adopt the stance of Gadamer, interpretation as a result of ontological understanding requires the creation of preconceptions so as to familiarise oneself with the interpreted world.[27] Looking at Lefebvre's division of space, one may find equivalents in the Heideggerian ontology. The representational space may be equated with *Dasein*; the representation of space, with understanding and with interpretation; whereas the place is equated with the world. Consequently, space is nonexistent without understanding and interpretation, as they provide the perception of the outside world with ontological meaning.

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[23] Wojciech Kalaga, *Nebulae of Discourse: Int–rpretation, Textuality and the Subject* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 10.

[24] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (trans.) (Oxford, 1961), 139.

[25] For Ricoeur, the self-awareness grows through the process of interpretation, since the subject by interpreting the text reaches his own self-interpretation, which results in his better self-understanding. This approach might be applicable to the way Heaney reads other poets, especially Yeats and Kavanagh, but his works on places do not hold such a structure. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B. Thompson (ed. and trans.) (Cambridge, 1981), 158.

[26] No matter which approach is taken into consideration, the quintessential relation between understanding, interpretation and the world, remain dependable on one another. Understanding and interpretation are impossible without the world, but so is the case with the world as it is an integral part of being, since it is the understanding of the world and its interpretation which reaffirm its material existence. Thus, the presence of singular experience appears necessary for the whole theory.

[27] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Garrett Barden and John Cumming (trans.) (New York, 1975), 236–7.

Apart from the three levels of spatial concept, these two critics share yet another important term – appropriation. This word appears in Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking* (1959), in his Socratic-like dialogue between a teacher, a scholar and a scientist. The conversation revolves around the question of the nature of knowledge, which in the end is defined with a Greek word standing for 'going toward'. However, it is not the individual who actively moves towards the truth, but human nature is appropriated to the knowledge of truth.[28] Pivotal for understanding Heidegger's concept is his differentiation between calculative and meditative thinking. Calculative thinking, ascribed to technological development, is disregarded by the philosopher because it expects definite results. Meditative thinking may happen due to the 'releasement towards things', understood as the concomitant acceptance of things and rejection of their influence on us, or an 'openness to the mystery', understood as the acceptance of the hidden meaning of these things.[29] Only by freeing oneself from the willingness to know can a man reach the truth. Here Heidegger draws attention to the will to think, which results in a mere 're-presentation'; whereas meditative thinking allows for 'appropriating truth'.[30] The spatial rhetoric used by Heidegger may be applied to literature, treating willingness as leading just to the representation of place, whilst meditative thinking gets the poet nearer the truth about place.

Lefebvre differentiated between dominated and appropriated space. Analogously, dominated space is a space transformed by technology, imposed on people, and thus a certain forced willingness is here implied. Appropriation, borrowed by Lefebvre from Karl Marx, stands in a stark contrast to the concept of property. Thus, appropriated space delineates the active role of people in the process of its creation. Significantly, Lefebvre stated that 'an appropriated space *resembles* a work of art, which is not to say that it is in any sense an *imitation* work of art'.[31] Lefebvre's imitation is analogous to Heidegger's re-presentation, therefore appropriation in both cases stands for the same quality expected from the relationship between truth and a work of art.

At this point the question arises which path Heaney followed. Greg Garrard advocates reading Heaney's poetry through Heidegger's concept of

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[28] Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freud (trans.) (New York, 1966), 88–9.

[29] Ibid., 54–5.

[30] Ibid., 55.

[31] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 164–5. Italics in original.

dwelling.[32] The critic, focusing predominantly on the parochial understanding of the term, uses dwelling interchangeably with geophilosophy as an alternative to political internationalism and global environmentalism. Garrard when defining geophilosophy refers to such theoreticians as E. F. Schumacher, Kirkpatrick Sale or Garrett Hardin, without mentioning Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who coined the term. Deleuze and Guattari defined geophilosophy against the Heideggerian approach towards place. For them, Heidegger remained a historian as he underlined the importance of being in a place being read as cultivating origin. In contrast, Deleuze's and Guattari's geography 'wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. It wrests it from the cult of origins in order to affirm the power of a "milleu"'.[33] However, Garrard does not seem to notice this discrepancy – concentrating instead predominantly on the ecological overtones of Heidegger's writings. According to the critic, this is the aspect which links Heidegger with Heaney. Here origin gets an additional meaning, as Heaney does not stay on the level of simple topography and, connected with it, place-names, but rather goes on a vertical exploration, named by the poet as digging, and by the critic, as 'archaeography'.[34] On the basis of the 'bog poems' Garrard illustrates how landscape literally and metaphorically preserves memories. Sometimes the landscape becomes a memory itself. Whilst the Heideggerian belonging has no cost, Heaney, as Garrard notes, saw the political meaning and the cost human beings have to pay in order to belong to a place.[35] Garrard's essay already illustrates what Cavanagh names as the poet's 'two-mindedness' in the treatment of place as a trope, sometimes blending different stances, sometimes being antagonistic in his views, finally arriving at a completion of his previous ideas, or even the deconstruction of his own understanding of spatial concepts.[36] Cavanagh brings this forward to argue for the presence of conflicted sentiments in Heaney's works, which leads to the poet's self-consumption and self-deconstruction.[37]

Heaney's ecocriticism is not the only aspect linking the poet with the

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[32] Greg Garrard, 'Heidegger, Heaney and the Problem of Dwelling' in Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (eds), *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (London, 1998), 167–81.

[33] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlison (eds) (London and New York, 1994), 96.

[34] Garrard, 'Heidegger, Heaney and the Problem of Dwelling', 170.

[35] Ibid., 170.

[36] Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry*, 68.

[37] Ibid., 31.

Heideggerian thought. Analogously with Heidegger, Heaney looked at space in more holistic terms, rejecting the idea of physical boundaries. Analysing the poet's essays chronologically, one may notice how the concept of place continuously evolves, which bears resemblance to the Heideggerian meditative thinking and to his spatial rhetoric serving the purpose of unravelling the nature of knowledge about the world. The more Heaney wrote about 'the sense of place', the more his analysis moved from relying on experience to focusing on an ontological understanding of the concept. However, contrary to Heidegger who believed that terminology 'freezes thought but at the same time renders it ambiguous', Heaney constantly searched for a term best expressing his idea of place.[38] Therefore, his ontology seems to be more in accordance with that of Gadamer since in Heaney's critical writings the interpretation comes once all the needed terms have been defined and they are treated as the basis for providing a link between his understanding of place and his life experience. Heaney may not finally have found a term which would encompass all his understandings of place, but Heidegger's term *techne* is the one that well encapsulates Heaney's 'mode of knowing'. Understood by Heidegger as 'to have seen', or 'to apprehend what is present', the term clearly denotes the double nature of knowing.[39] An artist, for Heidegger, is not only a craftsman, but is able to create, and thus can 'cause something to emerge as a thing'.[40] Thus, the essence of poetry appears to be the production of spaces.

The construction of the ontological status of place is superseded by the gradual development of the poet's own conception of the relationship between space and identity. What links Heaney with Lefebvre is the poet's double perspective (phenomenological and sociological – theory and experience), which results in the ontological attempt to grasp the essence of 'the sense of place'. Analysis of Heaney's essays reveals three stages of his growing spatial awareness, starting with the local perception of the surrounding physical reality, followed by a more holistic view of Ireland as an island, and finishing with the broadest aspect of Ireland's relation to other countries. Such a presentation of the notion of space, namely from the microscale to the macroscale, resides in the chronological reading of the critical texts; by this token illustrating the path of development of Heaney's approach towards place and the issues related to it. What Lefebvre and Heaney also shared was the motif of threshold with reference to poetry. Lefebvre uses the word when talking about the poetry

[38] Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 59.
[39] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 59.
[40] Ibid., 60.

of the Romantics, who were exceptional in their ability to separate 'abstract spatiality from a more unmediated perception'.[41] Consequently, they managed to provide a threshold for this antagonism in the form of poetry, in which they combined these two seemingly contradictory understandings of place, linking ontology with experience. Similarly, Heaney's poetry becomes a threshold for his 'conflicted sentiments', as well as a threshold which appears in his poetry as one of many spatial motifs.

All these theoretical inquiries are very applicable to the Irish context, especially to an important part of the cultural heritage embodied by place-names.[42] The very essence of Lefebvre's doctrine of space as embedded in meaning, as well as the Heideggerian cultivation of origin, can be found in Heaney's comment on the importance of place-names: 'Our farm was called Mossbawn. *Moss*, a Scots word probably carried to Ulster by Planters, and *bawn*, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses ... Yet in spite of this Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss bann, and *bán* is the Gaelic word for white'.[43] This citation, first published in 1972 in *The Guardian*, later becoming a part of an essay titled 'Belfast', acutely expresses how one place can carry two meanings not only in the literary sense but also by exemplifying the cultural duality of the Ulster region. Heaney continued this theme in one of his most influential essays 'The Sense of Place' (1977). There he accounted for the term *dinnseanchas*, literally in Irish translated as topography,[44] but in the cultural heritage standing for a separate genre in the Irish literary tradition, denoting 'poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology'.[45] Heaney also presented the third level of Lefebvre's spatial production as representational

[41] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 290.

[42] Desmond Gillmor's analysis of place-names constitutes in the Lefebvrian hierarchy the first level of space production, namely the social space, and the second, the representation of space. As long as a place-name stands for the 'physical characteristics of the locality', the name of a place refers to the actual geographical feature of the landscape, distinct enough to have been marked by the local community. However, Gillmor points to the fact that many Irish places describe features no longer present in the surrounding reality. Thus, they 'are useful evidence in the reconstruction of landscape history', but not only. By this token, they are no longer places, but spaces storing a memory of the place, which is nonexistent. What is left is the story in the form of the name, being the representation of space. Desmond Gillmor, *The Irish Countryside* (Dublin, 1989), 118.

[43] Seamus Heaney, 'Belfast' in idem, *Preoccupations*, 35.

[44] According to *Folclóir Scoile. English-Irish, Irish English Dictionary* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1998).

[45] Seamus Heaney, 'The Sense of Place' in idem, *Preoccupations*, 131.

space, since it immediately gains the most symbolic meaning by entering the realm of poetry. The poet distinguishes between 'the geographical country' and 'the country of the mind', standing for the 'lived, illiterate and unconscious', and the 'learned, literate and conscious' respectively.[46] He also agreed with John Montague's claim that the Irish landscape is a manuscript, which people have lost the ability to read.[47]

For Heaney, place-names in the majority of cases function just in the realm of the mind, as they have long lost their geographical exemplification. Consequently, they become unintelligible to those who operate on the level of the lived, unconscious approach towards the landscape. Heaney did not differentiate between the representation of space – a place-name and the representational space – with the use of the place's-name in poetry. The author of *Preoccupations* considered these two to be an inseparable whole, treating every place-name in terms of a story on its own; thus, it happens in his own poetry – where, as David-Antoine Williams rightly observes, the place-names used by Heaney, for instance Toome, Broagh, Anahorish, Derrygarve, or Castledawson, tell the story of their heritage embedded in the Irish language, but also in Ulster Scots.[48] Neil Corcoran sees in Heaney's usage of place-names a Wordsworthian influence, for whom each place, besides the historical account encoded within its very name, carries personal memories and emotions. Therefore, the poet by implementing a place-name into his poems broadened its meaning, providing it with yet another connotation.[49] What also links Heaney with Wordsworth is, according to Eugene O'Brien, his attempt to create space free of any political bias. In accordance with the critic, Irish places at a certain point became ideological, political and cultural signifiers. Therefore, Heaney tried to balance the ideological predefining and hoped to find a new potential in the places which for too long had been restricted by the ideological imperative.[50] Such an approach towards place-names testifies to the overlapping of Heaney's and Heidegger's understanding of thinking, which

[46] Ibid., 132, 131.

[47] John Montague in his essay on place-names remains nostalgic towards the function of *dinnseanchas* naming it 'a primal gaeltacht' – as the knowledge of the meaning of places in Ireland allowed people to have at least some knowledge of the Irish language. John Montague, 'A Primal Gaeltacht' in idem, *The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays*, Antoinette Quinn (ed.) (Dublin, 1989), 42–5.

[48] David-Antoine Williams, *Defending Poetry. Art and Ethics in Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Geoffrey Hill* (Oxford, 2010),111–13.

[49] Corcoran, *Professing Poetry*, 44–5.

[50] Eugene O'Brien, *Searches for Answers* (London, 2003), 113.

first and foremost calls for a 'releasement towards things' – an openness to its content, openness to what is given. Only then can a new quality emerge, new meaning and finally truth.[51]

The explanation of the etymology of Mossbawn given by Heaney is elaborated on in an essay titled 'Mossbawn' (1978). This time Heaney started from implementing the term *omphalos* into his reading of places.[52] The poet applies this term to explain the ontological status of the Mossbawn of his childhood, perceived as the centre of the world, understood as the centre of his existence as a boy: 'Broagh, The Long Rigs, Bell's Hill, Brian's Field, the Round Meadow, the Demesne; each name was a kind of love made to each acre. And saying the names like this distances the places, turns them into what Wordsworth once called a prospect of the mind'.[53] The personal attachment to the names associated with his childhood results in places becoming representations of space in the poet's mind.[54] This brings Jarniewicz to a tentative conclusion that the whole essay revolves around the essence of a word. According to him, it is not coincidental that Heaney began the text with the definition of a word, repeating it in later lines several times. For Heaney, a word constituted the essence of his being as a person, but most importantly as a poet. So too do all the place-names he mentioned later – for each of them seems to have constituted some part of Heaney's being. The opening words 'I would begin with' are interpreted by Jarniewicz as 'that is where I, my self-consciousness, have my beginnings'.[55] Mossbawn stands for the centre of Heaney's identity and marks the beginning of his interpretation process of the world through the prism of his life experience. As Georges Bataille notes, the singular experience begins when the person realises the impossibility of reaching the universal one.[56] This statement well explains why Heaney had

[51] Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 54.

[52] *Omphalos* is a word which etymologically comes from Greek, meaning 'the navel'. The term was used as a name for a semi-circular stone in Apollo's Temple in Delphi, carrying the meaning of the centre of the world. It was also treated as a symbol of the connection between the mother and the child, between human beings and earth, the origin and termination of being. Jerzy Jarniewicz, *The Bottomless Centre: The Uses of History in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (Łódź, 2002), 15.

[53] Heaney, 'Mossbawn' in idem, *Preoccupations*, 20.

[54] According to Elmer Kennedy-Andrews the majority of places Heaney introduces into his poetry and prose are provided with the meaning of *omphalos*, for example, Anahorish stands for the pump signifying the centre and the poet's source of water, whereas Broagh is read through the appearance of 'O' in the verse, once again read as the first letter of *omphalos*. Kennedy-Andrews, 'Heaney and Muldoon', 104.

[55] Jarniewicz, *The Bottomless Centre*,19.

[56] Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, Leslie Anne Boldt (trans) (Albany, 1988), xxxii.

to resort to his singular experience to negotiate his self-consciousness, since there is no definition of Northern Irishness universal enough to grasp the complexity of individual identities.

Things change when the meaning of *omphalos* becomes contextualized, as happens in the case of the poem 'The Toome Road'. According to Peter MacDonald, the trope of the centre loses its primordial meaning, becoming the embodiment of possession and permanence in contrast to the historical narrative presented in the poem. The critic presents his own reading of *omphalos* in Heaney's poem, claiming that it serves the purpose of resistance to the narratives of usurpation. This critic presents the stances of other academics, who, like Michael Parker, go as far as to state that *omphalos* symbolizes the everlasting being, which will outlive all possible historical circumstances; or Neil Corcoran's treatment of *omphalos* as a sign of Irish national resistance.[57] For Cavanagh, prose concomitantly with poetry dislodges Heaney's anti-historical bias embodied in his home locale. Whenever Mossbawn appears, it stands for universality and ahistoricism, the kernel of the *omphalos* concept.[58] O'Brien claims that this essay begins the process of the gradual decentralisation of Heaney's understanding of place as a concept. The critic reads Heaney's prose with reference to Jacques Derrida's understanding of identity as 'being shot through with traces of alterity'.[59] The very concept of *arche*-trace introduced by Derrida well corresponds to the problematic nature of Heaney's Mossbawn. The trace itself being the disappearance of origin, at first glance seems to imply that there was something before the trace. But the scrutiny of the origin reveals the painful truth – that there is no origin, but instead of it yet another trace of nonorigin – *arche*.[60] Therefore, O'Brien rightly observes that Heaney's prose works stand for a journey through different traces, none of them reaching the origin itself.

Encountering difficulties in defining himself as an Irish poet in the 1970s, Heaney went back to his most intimate experiences from childhood to identify himself with the place of his origin. 'The new place was all idea, if you like; it was generated out of my experience of the old place but it was not a topographical location' – words from another essay, 'The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh', which acutely summarise the significance of experience as

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[57] Peter MacDonald, *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1997), 54–6.

[58] Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry*, 40–2.

[59] O'Brien, *Searches for Answers*, 121–2

[60] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak (trans) (Baltimore and London, 1967), 61.

the constructive force in Heaney's world.[61] To a similar conclusion comes Wheatley, who notes that Heaney's prose is 'rooted in his own life' and thus the chronological reading of the essays constitutes 'the narrative of his growth as a writer'.[62] Seamus Deane notes that one of the factors taking an active part in the development of Heaney as a poet resides in 'the secrecies of personal growth in his own sacred places to a recognition of the relations between this emergent self and the environing society'.[63] However, the trope of *omphalos*, and connected with it the sense of the centre embodied by Mossbawn, loses its reality effect as Heaney acknowledged that the place he described in his poetry does not exist any longer, remaining solely in his memory. As Cavanagh notes, such poets as Philip Larkin helped Heaney to realise that 'this place we grow up in is vestigial of an older, numinous world, of which it serves as symbol or reminder'.[64] Following this line of thought, it is poetry where Heaney, thanks to Larkin, builds a connection between the symbol and numen. The term symbol if replaced with trace, and numen with *arche*, becomes analogous with Derrida's concept of identity. Indeed, poetry allowed Heaney to keep place alive, but at the same time made him realise the irretrievable loss of the reality he himself associated with it. Seamus Deane rightly observes that, paradoxical as it may seem, loss and revival coexist in Heaney's poetic verse.[65] For Corcoran, Heaney's strength as a poet comes from his ability to restore in language what he had lost in reality.[66] Therefore, quintessential for Heaney became the sublimation of Mossbawn with Glanmore. Heaney admitted not only to the fact that Glanmore gave him a new inspiration he lacked in Belfast, but more importantly that he was always wary of Glanmore being a 'displace' in comparison to his original Mossbawn. Still, it served its role as a Lacanian substitution well enough.[67] The year of the publication of the article 'Belfast' in *The Guardian* is the same as the appearance of Heaney's third collection of poems *Wintering Out*, which for Corcoran marked a new stage in the poet's artistic life, treating this volume as more conscious than

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[61] Seamus Heaney, 'The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh' in idem, *The Government of the Tongue* (New York, 1988), 4.

[62] Wheatley, 'Professing Poetry: Heaney as Critic', 123.

[63] Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals. Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London, 1985), 175.

[64] Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry*, 203.

[65] Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, 184.

[66] Corcoran, *Professing Poetry*, 12.

[67] O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 198–9, 231.

the first two.[68] Concomitantly the same year Heaney changed his place from Belfast to Glanmore. These three events are far from coincidental, delineating in Heaney's case a set of relations among place, poetry and prose. Not only did Glanmore serve the purpose of the real *omphalos*, but also it became the place of refuge from the feeling of displacement Heaney encountered in Northern Ireland.

This choice, being treated as the epitome of the poet's lack of political involvement, does not seem to have helped Heaney to escape the problem of displacement, however, since it appears in his later essays, especially in 'Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland' (1984). Heaney tried to define his approach towards the question of displacement by implementing new terminology, borrowing two terms from Carl Jung: 'higher level of consciousness' and 'affect'. The first was used by Heaney to explain the mental condition in which he as well as other poets often find themselves, namely of 'being in two places at once, of needing to accommodate two opposing conditions of truthfulness [because] each person in Ulster lives first in the Ulster of the actual present, and then in one or other Ulster of the mind'.[69] Again Heaney distinguished between the physical place and its mental representation.[70] This time, the scope changes, since having established his local self-consciousness, the poet tackled the question of collective identity. To do so, he introduced a second term – the affect, which he applied 'to the particular exacerbations attendant on being a native of Northern Ireland, since this "affect" means disturbance, a warp in the emotional glass which is in danger of narrowing the range of the mind's responses to the returns of

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[68] Corcoran, *Professing Poetry*, 28.

[69] Seamus Heaney, 'Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland' in idem, *Finders Keepers. Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London, 2002), 115.

[70] When analyzing the works of other Irish poets, Heaney draws attention to the way the places of the mind are created. Heaney seems to associate himself with Kavanagh's changing approach from provincial irony to a parochial appreciation of the countryside. So the physical place remains the same, but what changes is the mental representation (Ibid., 3-14). Interesting in this case is Yeats, who, as an exception to the rule, first created the landscape of the mind and then searched for the topographical representation of his imagined space. The result is Yeats' Thoor Ballylee, which Heaney scrutinizes in the essay 'Place of Writing'. There he draws attention to the fact that the majority of writers create a sort of union with the place they occupy, allowing the place to define them as artists; whereas Yeats from the very beginning 'imposed Yeatsiness upon' the place he chose. Seamus Heaney, 'The Place of Writing: W. B. Yeats and Thoor Ballylee' in idem, *The Place of Writing* (Atlanta, 1988), 21.

the disturbance itself'.[71] According to Heaney, the difference between Ulster as a region and the Ulster of his mind in this particular essay concerns the question of the cultural heritage of the region, and the growing dissonance between how the poet perceived Ulster and how it was being defined by Irish Nationalists and Unionists. Heaney was bothered by their one-sidedness in defining Ulsterism as a collective identity, which marks a change in his approach towards the aspect of national consciousness. In the Heideggerian philosophy, displacement is a desirable state, since its aim is 'to transform our accustomed ties to world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work'.[72] At this point, Heaney seems to have dropped the attempt to maintain the continuity of a Romantic ethos by all means, realising that 'much of what we accepted as natural in our feelings and attitudes was a cultural construction, yet I was slow to begin the deconstruction'.[73]

As O'Brien constantly underlines, Heaney's gradual orientation towards change becomes the key to his 'ongoing recontextualisation of place in his work', which happens but at a certain cost and with great difficulty.[74] Michael Parker, in his article on *Human Chain*, notes that, in the case of Heaney, the abandonment of the traditional rural life in favour of the literary world resulted in the poet's deep regard for the simplicity and circularity of life in the countryside as well as the insurmountable guilt of writing instead of 'digging'.[75] Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Heaney might have felt a similar reluctance for other forms of defining his own identity than the idea of *omphalos*, and connected with it Mossbawn, which had imprinted deeply on his poetic imagination.[76]

However, Heaney did not resign from seeking an answer to the question of his sense of place with reference to Northern Ireland. Long before his decision to move from Belfast, the issue of his Catholic background occupied his

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[71] Heaney, 'Place and Displacement', 117.

[72] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 66.

[73] O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 289.

[74] O'Brien, *Searches for Answers*, 116.

[75] Michael Parker, '"His Nibs": Self-Reflexivity and Significance of Translation in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain*', *Irish University Review*, 42 (2012), 327–9.

[76] A lot of attention to Heaney questioning his poetic career and connected with it the experience of guilt is provided by Terence Brown. The critic analyses the consequences of the aesthetics Heaney implements in his poetry, namely his own understanding of locality, and connected with it, loyalty, which, for Brown, was also the source of guilt. Terence Brown, *The Literature of Ireland: Culture and Criticism* (Cambridge, 2010), 190-2.

thoughts. As Heaney recalled in one of the interviews with Denis O'Driscoll, from the very start as a poet, he found it problematic to write poetry which would not speak from a Catholic perspective, at least not purposefully.[77] Thus, an attempt to stand in-between the two denominations rather than represent his social class turned out to be not only difficult but also tiresome. Still, at a certain point Heaney testified to the fact that 'the out-of-placeness of those in-between years mattered as much for the poetry life as the in-placeness of childhood'.[78] To follow the words of Guinn Batten, the trope of displacement in Heaney's writings is prevalent on two levels: first, as the act of the displacement of nature into the self-consciousness of the poet, and secondly, as a relation between the familial places preserved in his memory and the very concept of Ireland as a homeland.[79] This Wordsworthian understanding of displacement illustrates that with time it started to sink into Heaney's conscience that what he regarded as the *omphalos* of his identity, namely the Mossbawn of his mind, was already a distorted and displaced image of the real place, which was no longer there. For Stan Smith, 'Place and Displacement' clearly articulates that place cannot be defined regardless of displacement. Heaney enunciated to himself as well as to the readers that the state of displacement is a necessary stage on the grounds of which one may build his or her own sense of place.[80]

The issue of Ulsterism is continued in 'Frontiers of Writing' (1993), with the very title suggesting the notion of the American frontier, understood as a flexibility of boundaries, which successively changed their place on the maps as the states gained new territories.[81] Heaney from the very beginning of the essay showed his disregard for the arbitrariness of the border dividing the inhabitants of the island into Irish and British Ireland. The division does not meet the needs of those people who do not associate themselves with the British identity despite living to the north of the border. This goes in accordance with the way Heaney defined himself as an inner *émigré* in the poem titled 'Exposure'. His self-emigration may be understood literarily as his movement from Northern Ireland to the Republic, and metaphorically as a

[77] O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, 65–6.

[78] Ibid., 25.

[79] Guinn Batten, 'Heaney's Wordsworth and the Poetics of Displacement' in O'Donoghue (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, 181.

[80] Stan Smith, *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity* (Dublin, 2005), 119.

[81] Guinn Batten draws attention to the fact that the two essays are very much related to one another, as 'Place and Displacement' was delivered as a lecture at the Wordsworth Summer School in 1984, later being revisited in the Oxford lecture, which at the end became 'Frontiers of Writing'. Batten, 'Heaney's Wordsworth', 184.

movement from the state of certainty, verified by the notion of the centre, to the area of anxiety, resulting from the experience of displacement.[82]

To grasp the fluidity of the frontier, Heaney borrowed from Sir Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658) the figure of quincunx, the centre of which, occupies the essence of Irishness.[83] What Heaney presented as 'the centre, the tower of prior Irelandness, the round tower of original insular dwelling, located perhaps upon what Louis MacNeice called 'the pre-natal mountain', to a great extent bears a resemblance to his initial concept of *omphalos*; whereas, the phrase 'insular dwelling' well corresponds to Heidegger's dwelling, the pre-natal mountain being the place of the origin – *arche*.[84] The Heideggerian dwelling refers to a place, a location, which allows for open space to appear.[85] Heaney's frontier is an open space, with four points standing for the four directions of the world. At the most southern point, Heaney located the Spenserian Kilcolman Castle, signifying the Anglicisation of Ireland and the Renaissance poet's total rejection of his Irish background. The West is symbolised by the Yeatsian Thoor Balylee bespeaking of the Anglo-Irish cultural union and the poet's effort to restore the Irish cultural heritage. The East is occupied by James Joyce's Martello Tower on Dublin Bay, the symbol of the writer's attempt to replace the Anglocentric Protestant tradition with a more European (classical in Hellenistic terms) world-view. It is Joyce's tower that Heaney saw as an equivalent of *omphalos*, treating Joyce's place as the centre of the reinvented order. The North is occupied by Carrickfergus Castle, the place identified with Louis MacNeice – a Protestant who, despite his Anglocentric views, managed to remain faithful to his Ulster inheritance.[86] No matter which frontier is taken into consideration, one may easily observe that for Heaney all four parts of Ireland were marked with the merging of English and Irish cultures. Thus, it is erroneous to treat Ulster as the only place under British influence. Corcoran understands the concept of quincunx rather

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[82] Corcoran, *Professing Poetry*, 81.

[83] Thomas Brown devotes his work to the geometric pattern of quincunx popular in ancient gardens: 'five trees so set together, that a regular angularity, and through prospect, was left on every side, Owing this name not only unto the Quintuple number of Trees, but the figure declaring that number, which being doubled at the angle, makes up the Letter χ, that is the Emphaticall decussation, or fundamentall figure'. Thomas Brown, *The Garden of Cyrus, or the Quincunciall, Lozenge, or Net-work Plantations of the Ancients, Artificially, Naturally, or Mystically Considered*, William A. Greenhill (ed.) (1658; London, 1896), 85.

[84] Seamus Heaney, 'Frontiers of Writing' in idem *The Redress of Poetry*, 199.

[85] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 154.

[86] Heaney, 'Frontiers of Writing', 199.

as a transgression from the social and political constraints into the space of writing, where all the norms of imagination are available.[87] Thus, the area of quincunx serves the purpose of an 'integrated literary tradition', which does not appear to yet have any social or political equivalent.[88] Such a treatment of the concept is in accordance with Heidegger's notion of *techne*, which stands for a work of art capable of setting up a world. The interrelation between art and the world is best embodied in poetry. For Heidegger, poetry 'breaks open an open space, in whose openness everything is other than ususal'.[89] The frontier Heaney created with the concept of quincunx allowed him to keep his ideal of *omphalos*, his tower of Irelandness – with Mossbawn as the centre; but more importantly, it opened him and his poetry to the shared traditional, void of any borders.

Heaney had always felt uneasy about the artificiality of the border marking the end of one country and the beginning of the other. The author of *North* (1975) devoted a lot of attention to this aspect in 'Something to Write Home About' (1998). Following his style of analysis, the poet introduced yet another term, *terminus*, taken from the Roman god of boundaries. However, he drew attention to the Irish language that has *tearmann* (a sanctuary, a place of refuge[90]) as an equivalent, constituting many place-names, especially those which marked the division of the land into dioceses. Heaney remained sceptical about the concept of boundaries, stating that all boundaries are necessary evils and the truly desirable condition is the feeling of being unbounded, of being a king of infinite space.[91]

This 'double capacity' of human beings is of special interest for poets, who simultaneously are attracted by the security of the known and by the mysterious hidden beyond it. For Heidegger, poetry, by allowing the Open to happen, 'is the becoming and happening of truth'.[92] The philosopher time and again underlined the importance of openness in a poet's works, treating it as the key to the link between the world and art. The meaning of *terminus* is interpolated with Heaney's own world – his experience from childhood. To Heaney's mind, similarly with places, there are geographical boundaries and those boundaries created in our minds. His own constituted the River Moyola:

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[87] Corcoran, *Professing Poetry*, 216.

[88] Heaney, 'Frontiers of Writing', 199.

[89] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 72.

[90] According to *Foclóir Scoile. English-Irish, Irish English Dictionary* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1998).

[91] Seamus Heaney, 'Something to Write Home About' in idem, *Finders Keepers*, 48.

[92] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 71.

'even though there were no places called Termon in the Moyola district, I knew in my bones from very early on that the Moyola itself was a very definite *terminus*, a marker off of one place from another'.[93] The significance of the river is underlined by another two images that are introduced together with it. The first constitutes the phrase 'stepping stones', which enters Heaney's world of terms denoting transgression. In a comment to a poem 'The Other Side' he stated that 'the poem, however, ended up suggesting that a crossing could be attempted, that stepping stones could be laced by individuals who wanted to further things'.[94] Stepping stones indicates the physical trespassing of the forbidden land as well as the act of violating rules, going beyond the known and understood. This adheres to Bataille's view of transgression as the violation of the established order or taboos. This act works against the outside, but according to the inner self.[95] Similarly, Heaney tried to step outside the inherited categories, acting against the commonly known division of Protestants and Catholics, advocating his inner spatial perception, as he had already done with quincunx.

The second image is the bridge, which in the Heideggerian philosophy of spatial perception fulfils an important role. According to the thinker, a bridge cannot be analysed in terms of being in between two sides that are 'set off against the other [but which] brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighbourhood'.[96] Thus, a bridge provides a link between the places, unites them into one landscape. Here, however, Heaney did not seem to hold with Heidegger's perspective, constantly repeating the discrepancy between the two sides of the river:

> I grew up between the predominantly Protestant and loyalist village of Castledawson and the generally Catholic and nationalist district of Bellaghy. In a house situated between a railway and a road. Between the old sounds of trotting horse and the newer sounds of a shunting engine. On a border between townlands and languages, between accents at one end of the parish that reminded you of Antrim and Ayrshire and the Scottish speech I used to hear on the Fair Hill in Ballymena, and accents at the other end of the parish that reminded you of the different speech

[93] Heaney, 'Something to Write Home About', 49.

[94] Ibid., 57.

[95] Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, Mary Dalwood (trans) (San Francisco, 1986), 37.

[96] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 152.

> of Donegal, speech with the direct, clear ring of the Northern Irish I studied when I went to the Gaeltacht in Rannafast.[97]

Paradoxical as it may seem to be, Heaney managed to formulate his centre of existence despite the predominance of in-betweenness, which implies the state of a non-belonging to either of the two sides, understood as the Unionist and the Irish nationalist respectively. Heaney returned to this issue in the later part of 'Something to Write Home About'. The term *terminus* is followed by the word 'march' – that, at least in the past, stood for a meeting at the boundary, being close, a lying alongside: 'it was a word that acknowledged division but it contained a definite suggestion of solidarity as well'.[98] Heaney's understanding of the word marching is close to the Heideggerian notion of the bridge, as it underlines the simultaneousness of division and binding. The poet's reference to 'the marching season' served the purpose of a harsh comment on the prevailing dichotomy between the two sides of the past conflict, who every year have a need to demonstrate their unchangeable stance, from which Heaney dissociated himself.

Once Heaney expressed his local sense of place followed by the delineation of the state of in-betweenness as an indicator of his understanding of the division of Ireland into two separate states, the time comes for looking at the ontological status of the Northern Irish identity in a broader perspective. The essay 'Through-Other Places, Through-Other Times: The Irish Poet and Britain' (2001) problematised the aspect of the triangulation of the Northern Irish heritage. By using the example of W. R. Rogers, a poet, who in his poem 'Armagh' introduced the word through-otherness to express 'the three-sided map of his inner being'[99] Heaney showed that this word best defines 'the triple heritage of Irish, Scottish and English traditions that compound and complicate the cultural and political life of contemporary Ulster'.[100] The term itself expresses the complexity of the analysed issue, as it is a compound word. Heaney, as usual, drew attention to the meaning of the word standing for 'physically untidy, or mentally confused', echoing the Irish expression '*tri na cheile*, meaning things mixed up among themselves'.[101] However, in Heaney's understanding of the term there was no place for confusion, rather

[97] Heaney, 'Something to Write Home About', 50.
[98] Ibid., 52.
[99] Seamus Heaney, 'Through-Other Places, Through-Other Times: The Irish Poet and Britain' in idem, *Finders Keepers*, 366.
[100] Ibid., 366.
[101] Ibid., 366.

it acknowledged the complexity that the Northern Irish heritage entails. A similar meaning was ascribed to the place-name Broagh used by Heaney as the topic for his poem of the same title. As Heaney enunciated: 'I very much wanted to affirm the rights of the Irish language to be recognized as part of that Ulster mix, to correct the official, east-of-Bann emphasis on the province's ur-languages as Ulster Scots, an Elizabethan English'.[102] This comment coming from 'Burns' Art Speech' (1997) well exemplifies Heaney's understanding of through-otherness as the essence of Northern Irishness, transposing the idea of in-betweenness with a new way of understanding his own identity. The notion of through-otherness does not stand in opposition to his previous idea of quincunx, but rather the two notions complement each other. Quincunx with its fluid, reflexive and complex form may, as for O'Brien, bring some positive results in Heaney's 'searches for answers'.[103] The critic takes the stance of Maurice Blanchot, who claims that the world demands things to be graspable objects, but the realm of literature more often than not operates within ungraspable spaces.[104] The multiplicity of frontiers and their inconclusiveness allow the quincunx to converge with Heaney's other spatial representations. Therefore, the concept of through-otherness together with quincunx appear to be the poet's best possible answers to the question he posed at the beginning of his essay-writing journey: his place of being, as a person as well as a poet.

The Scottish element is nothing new in Heaney's discussion on the trope of place. It appeared as early as in the enunciation of Mossbawn's etymology, where Heaney shows the traces of the three cultures in one word: the Ulster Scots *Moss*, and the English *bawn*, which in turn is an Anglisized form of the Irish *bán*. One does not have to look for a better exemplification of the journey Heaney embarked on from the primordial understanding of the concept of *omphalos* as the universal and everlasting centre of his existence, through the process of accepting the in-betweeness of his poetry and himself as a poet, to the final acknowledgement of the impact history has had on the Ulster region, now its majority people are called Northern Irish. Instead of escaping the historical influence, Heaney seems to have started accepting, or, to hazard a guess, appreciating, the complexity of the Northern Irish heritage, which history has imprinted on it. As Iain Crichton Smith observed, the fact that Heaney at a certain point in his artistic career began to associate himself with

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[102] Seamus Heaney, 'Burns' Art Speech' in idem, *Finders Keepers*, 351.

[103] O'Brien, *Searches for Answers*, 24-5.

[104] Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, A. Smock (trans.) (Lincoln, 1982), 131.

the image of Sweeney, who symbolises the 'cultural affinity with both western Scotland and southern Ireland' testifies to the poet granting veracity to the cultural hybridity of his homeland.[105] Neil Corcoran in his plenary lecture, which he delivered during the conference 'Seamus Heaney: A Conference and Commemoration', organised at Queens University, Belfast, borrows T. S. Eliot's words and calls Heaney 'an unbewildered poet'. Corcoran's viable interpretation shows that Heaney's experience, together with that which is real, are melting, as neither the memory nor poetry can fully retrieve what is irrevocably lost. But Heaney in his later works was no longer bewildered as Yeats was, when he could do nothing but helplessly observe the disappearance of the beloved Anglo-Irish culture, embodied by the Big Houses' gradual destruction and deterioration.[106] Gradually, Heaney became an unbewildered poet and critic, as he began to accept the surrounding reality as well as to come to terms with what he had lost in the past. He may not have answered the question of identity exhaustively enough, but he provided a plausible alternative for those who find themselves displaced in the polarised Northern Irish reality.

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[105] After Smith, 'Place and Displacement', 108.

[106] Neil Corcoran, 'The Melt of the Real Thing', presented during *Seamus Heaney: A Conference and Commemoration* (Queens University, Belfast: 10th April 2014).