
Aesthetic Subjectivation and Identity in Seamus Heaney's "Station Island"

M. Reza Ghorbanian
Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis, France

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Abstract. Seamus Heaney's "Station Island" occupies an important place in Heaney's work as it is an allegory of self-creation and subjectivation. It introduces a subject whose attempts at discovering and creating the self and identity are challenged by the socio-political atmosphere of Northern Ireland. This study sheds a new light on the process of aesthetic subjectivation, tracing the development of the subject's personal and artistic abilities. Informed by different views about the art of self-creation, from philosophy, asceticism and art, including the ideas of Foucault and Deleuze, it traces the archaeology of personal and collective identities in this poem. The subject advances through a constant "curved" movement in order to unfold and reveal the fragments of his self. This movement is part of a strategy to circumvent social obstacles as he confronts a hostile space, the Other. Moreover, it positions him in various points of view, the sites that help him reveal the fragments of his self, once put together, constitute a complex mosaic representing a new and strong identity.

Key Words. Heaney, subjectivation, self, subject, Deleuze, identity, other.

Resumen. "Station Island" de Seamus Heaney ocupa un lugar importante en su obra, ya que es una alegoría de la auto-creación y la subjetivación. Introduce un sujeto cuyos intentos de descubrir y crear el yo y la identidad se ven desafiados por la atmósfera sociopolítica de Irlanda del Norte. Este estudio arroja nueva luz sobre el proceso de subjetivación estética, rastreando el desarrollo de las habilidades personales y artísticas del sujeto. Informado por diferentes visiones sobre el arte de la auto-creación, desde la filosofía, el ascetismo y el arte, pasando por las ideas de Foucault y Deleuze, traza la arqueología de las identidades personales y colectivas en este poema. El sujeto avanza a través de un constante movimiento "curvo" para desplegar y revelar los fragmentos de su yo. Este movimiento es parte de una estrategia para sortear los obstáculos sociales mientras se enfrenta a un espacio hostil, el otro. Además, lo posiciona en varios puntos de vista, los sitios que lo ayudan a revelar los fragmentos de su yo, una vez reunidos, constituyen un mosaico complejo que representan una nueva y fuerte identidad.

Palabras clave. Heaney, subjetivación, el yo, el sujeto, Deleuze, identidad, el otro.

“Station Island” is an important part of Heaney’s work. The twelve sections of the poem, which map the stages of the pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s Purgatory at Station Island, a rocky island in Lough Derg, represent the subject’s efforts to understand, construct and create himself in a particularly complicated socio-political context. The poem is an allegory of subjectivation, a process of psychological, linguistic and artistic evolution through which the subject, motivated by self-care, begins the journey to re-create his universe. The personal and artistic techniques of this operation are juxtaposed to reconstruct the life of a subject confronted with a hostile space, mysterious and controlled by social and communitarian powers.

The speaker, or the subject, cultivates his self through a personal and artistic pilgrimage. The metaphorical journey is indeed a curved movement through which the subject is positioned at various angles of vision to circumvent obstacles and deconstruct the truth of his self. The staging of his itinerary in this pilgrimage testifies to the complex movement that examines the self, faced with the power games and struggles in circumstances particularly hostile to artistic independence. His determination is tested during a journey marked by successive encounters with ghosts, who reveal the folds and fragments of his identity. It portrays an aesthetic subjectivation, an artistic representation of the making of a modern artist through various stages.

“Station Island” demonstrates some similarities to the philosophy of subjectivation. This is an effort for the aesthetic enactment of subjectivation, concomitant with the ideas of subjectivity set forward by scholars such as Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze. The poem abounds in symbols and notions related to what Foucault calls “self-care”; it contains images and schemes of self-creation related to paganism, literature, Christian asceticism and philosophy. Moreover, Heaney’s subject openly rejects individuation, a process through which individuals are thought and “constructed” by contexts, namely, societies, groups, and spaces. The poem then portrays a subject who adopts an individual, active and alternative lifestyle, transposing the artistic, philosophical, literary and religious dimensions to entertain a work by the self on the self. It also analyses and redefines the relationships between the self and the other, staging the techniques of self-creation, thus constituting the journey leading to a new aesthetic existence, the art of representation of the process of self-creation, an art in which the subject and the artefact are not two different entities, but the same process. Here the subject and the work of art are identical, since the creation of the subject is an art which embodies the narrative of the construction of the artist.

The structure of the poem is inspired by Dante’s *Comedy*. Written in the tradition of epics like *Ulysses* and *Aeneid*, it transposes its objectives, beyond the religious rite of pilgrimage, to implement the process of artistic subjectivation. The omnipresence of Dante both in the form and contents of the poem provides a guide and an artistic model for the development of the subject.¹ Like Dante, Heaney creates the epic of the evolution of a subject-artist who constructs his self through his movement, encounters and explorations. However, unlike epic characters, the subject is neither a sublime hero nor a flamboyant actor, but a modern artist. Humble and assiduous, he is hesitant, suspicious and particularly self-critical. His journey and his encounters with ghosts draw a panorama of the process of subjectivation, highlighting the fragments of his identity, in the omnipresence of the symbols of light and darkness. The Dantesque journey reveals the artist’s voyage in a space dominated by discordant political and social discourses, orchestrating the different aspects of the construction of a complex self.²

From the beginning, the subject tries to move into the positions beyond the great discourses that allow him to create new possibilities of existence. During the pilgrimage, which incorporates, among others, Bakhtinian carnivalesque elements, the subject undertakes a multifaceted movement to encounter some ghosts that uncover internal and external artistic and ideological the obstacles, prohibitions and norms of society in Northern Ireland. This is what Deleuze, in *Le Pli*, calls a “curved” movement, allowing the subject to examine his hidden

“folds” and the fragments of his identity. The “stations” on this audacious movement, evoked in the twelve stations of the poem, are not stable positions, but “Leibnizian” points of view on a curved line. They provide him with new angles of vision that allow him to unfold the various folds of his identity. For Deleuze, these points of view constitute the very essence of the subject:

On l'appelle point de vue pour autant qu'il représente la variation ou inflexion. Tel est le fondement du perspectivisme. [...] Sera sujet ce qui vient au point de vue, ou plutôt ce qui demeure au point de vue. C'est pourquoi la transformation de l'objet renvoie à une transformation corrélative du sujet. (27)

The movement, which is motivated by “self-care”, provides points of view, stations and successive encounters with the ghosts of Sweeney, Carleton, Joyce, and others, and constitutes the core of this “correlative transformation”. It is not accidental that the first point of view reveals Sweeney’s stratagems, while the latter emphasizes Joyce’s artistic strategies. Both these ghosts elaborate the techniques of self-care, emphasizing artistic independence. They establish the points of departure and arrival while stressing the role of art in subjectivation. Like Virgil in Dante’s *Comedy*, Joyce and Sweeney are emblematic figures who accompany and represent the artist through his journey of subjectivation. Of course, at the interval of the two come the ghosts of Colum McCartney and Francis Hughes, unfolding the conformist fragments of the subject, aligned with the linear movement advocated by the great discourses. The stations thus provide the points of view reveal the fragments of the self and its relations with the Other, thus disclosing divisions, tensions and self-incriminations. While the ideological complicity and linear movement evoked by some of the ghosts may lead the subject into a comfortable life, he chooses artistic independence and the freedom that the curved movement offers. In *Station Island* Sweeney introduces the artistic technique of “dissimulation”, one of the underlying principles of aesthetic subjectivation. “The King of the Ditchbacks” may be considered as a prelude to the subject’s self-care. For Sweeney, this process begins with the dissociation and abandonment of “dependence” on the Other, portrayed in these lines:

And I saw myself
 rising to move in that dissimulation,

 top-knotted, masked in sheaves, noting
 the fall of birds: a rich young man

 leaving everything he had
 for a migrant solitude. (III: 21-6)

The “migrant solitude” and the resulting freedom become the integral parts of the subject’s lifestyle, who adopts asceticism. The biblical allusion to the “rich young man”, who sold all his belongings to save himself, marks the subject’s approach to create the self by frugality, a symbolic act that would guarantee his evolution. For, as Foucault observes, it is through free movement that the subject manages to discover the truth of the self: “Cette conversion peut se faire sous la forme d’un mouvement qui arrache le sujet à son statut et à sa condition actuelle” (*L’herméneutique*, 18). The subject’s “migration” emphasizes the repudiation of political, social and religious prescriptions. Self-care requires a curved movement that leads him to circumvent the obstacles through artistic tact, to reveal the folds of his existence.

The meeting with Sweeney in the first section of “Station Island” provides the subject with the first point of view, where the Irish mythological hero reveals the different stages of aesthetic subjectivation, namely “dissimulation”, artistic independence, wandering and

exile. Sweeney's injunction, warning him to stay away from all "processions" emphasizes these artistic principles:

I was a fasted pilgrim,
light-headed, leaving home
to face into my station.
'Stay clear of all processions!'

Sweeney shouted at me. (I: 50-54)

As the starting point of the curved movement, this opportunity enables the subject to adopt an alternative existence, based on the abandonment of ideological predilections, which will lead to the creation of the self in connection to the philosophical, artistic and spiritual techniques. Such a strategy, an integral part of the curved movement, is necessary to circumvent the great discourses emanating from the Other. Through his curved movement, he is gradually transformed into the "other".

This disposition is sustained by William Carleton's ghost in the second section, where a new point of view reveals the folds of a subject dissociating from political discourses. The ghost demonstrates that this dissociation necessitates a solitary movement, far from the prescribed direct lines: "It is a road you travel on your own" (II: 27). The recurrence of the phrase "on your own" throughout the poem reconfirms the importance of independence associated with curved movement, a condition of artistic freedom, reinforced by the allusion to Carleton's life and works. In his introduction to *Tales of Ireland*, the nineteenth-century Irish writer, who portrayed himself as a committed independent writer capable of rectifying the nation's flaws, was criticized for his "ambiguous" and non-partisan positions. His first work, a travelogue entitled "The Lough Derg Pilgrim" (1828), denounced the pilgrimage.³ His distance from the practices of his countrymen in his works provoked the wrath of both nationalists and unionists, who accused him of hypocrisy ("fork-tongued") and treason ("turncoat"):

hard-mouthed Ribbonmen and Orange bigots
made me into the old fork-tongued turncoat
who mocked the byre of their politics. (II: 30-33)

The point of view portrays the sources of the sectarian conflict and postcolonial identity in Northern Ireland to define the subject's current stand. It unfolds the tumultuous past that continues to haunt and define the subject through socio-political tension. The fold reveals the subject's posture in these particular circumstances as he is tempted to follow the ideological discourses of the "Ribbonmen": "Obedient strains like theirs tuned me first" (II: 47).

But for the subject, threading his "own path" and resisting conformist discourses require great endurance. This ability is examined through another point of view in the first part of section V, where Barney Murphy's ghost, Heaney's former Latin teacher appears. This position uncovers some other folds of the subject's identity, including the memories of his training at Anahorish School, an important period of his artistic development. As he addresses his former teacher, "You'd have thought that Anahorish School / was purgatory enough for any man" (V: 29-30), he implies that he is not "any man", dissociating himself from others, while emphasizing the continuity of his movement. However, the school, despite its rigorous teaching, has never been "enough" for the development of the artist; it was rather a starting point. Although the subject had been educated there, "You've done your station" (V: 31), he continues his path, a movement against the collective current: "He was gone with that and I was

faced wrong way” (V: 39). This dissociation is part of the curved movement, which leads to what Deleuze, in his course on Leibniz, described as the “condition de surgissement ou de manifestation d’une vérité”, the truth of the self.⁴ The movement also reveals the subject’s conformist tendencies and the dangers of submission to dominant discourses. It allows him to position himself in a point of view where the ghost of a missionary priest, Terry Keenan, appears to examine the subject’s fold of passive conformism, the inclination towards ideological discourses. Keenan, a missionary priest subjected to the “civilizing” machinery of colonialism, was condemned to follow and undergo the indoctrination of concordance, “the decent thing” (IV: 35). His tragic death in Africa, following a tropical disease, highlights the consequences of obedience to the “conventions”. As a cleric, he is supposed to call the masses to allegiance to the cult, but he reproaches the subject for his participation in the pilgrimage and regrets his own obedience to the system. As the subject’s fold and internal voice, he expresses his contrition and questions the subjugation to religious discourses:

‘And you,’ he faltered, ‘what are you doing here
but the same thing? What possessed you?
I at least was young and unaware

that what I thought was chosen was convention.
But all this you were clear of you walked into
over again. And the god has, as they say, withdrawn. (IV: 43-8)

If the inclination of individuals towards “conventions” has many reasons, “possession”, immaturity (“young”) and imitation (“doing the same thing”) are the most important ones. The recurrence of “the same” rituals is part of conformism that would make the subject’s journey converge with that of other pilgrims. But this point of view sheds light on the negative effects of the power of social institutions on the subject. The conditions evoke the horrors of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, where colonial discourse denigrates individuals like Kurtz, who according to Arendt, are “rien en eux-mêmes, rien que le symbole vivant de ce qui leur était arrivé, l’abstraction vivante et le témoignage de l’absurdité des institutions humaines” (126). In these situations, the individual is not an adventurer, but a soulless being. Ironically, as Dewsnap puts it, “The colonized Irish become religious colonizers and encounter ‘The horror! The horror!’ The mission is reduced to impotence and the self stagnates” (171).

Warned by Keenan’s fate, the speaker continues his curved movement by digging the land. Thus, in section V, another stage of his manoeuvre, he reaches another point of view, the village of Toome, the site of some important archaeological monuments. His transformation into archaeologist unravels the ideological discourses and norms that have presented an unreal image of the world. The archaeology of the collective memories deconstructs the past and the present, unfolds the neglected layers of his self and liberates his artistic potential, to help him reconstruct the narrative of the development of his identity. The unfolded collective and individual memories constitute the core of Heaney’s work that incorporates affective, literary and anamnestic elements. This had already been underscored by Carleton’s ghost, who set out a metaphorical conception of memory, emphasizing its role in the construction of identity: “We are earthworms of the earth, and all that / has gone through us is what will be our trace” (II: 67-68).

Memory occupies then a particular place in artistic subjectivation. The places like wells, archaeological sites, history and language are the archives of “memory”: they provide the folds and strata of raw materials from which the subject, adding emotions to them, recreates his self and his identity. The new perspective reveals the ghost of Patrick Kavanagh, the twentieth-

century Irish poet, who encourages him to tap into the sources of memory and symbolically to drink water from his uncle's well at Toome:

‘We’ll go some day to my uncle’s farm at Toome –’
 Another master spoke. ‘*For what is the great
 moving power and spring of verse? Feeling, and
 in particular, love.* When I went last year
 I drank three cups of water from the well. (V: 45-9)

The place name, which is the homonym of “tomb” in English, refers to the underground tombs. By unfolding the folds buried here, the subject discovers precious objects and vestiges of a rich past, a source of artistic inspiration, relayed by the water symbol. The exploration of the archives reaches the bottom of the wells, where emotions spring, enrich and embellish his art. “Feeling, / and in particular, love” alludes to *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges* where the English poet praises love as the “source” of poetry. Although emotions are thwarted by social obligations,⁵ love triumphs, as it is an important force in the construction of the self, and also in artistic creation. Love, as a force for both departure and rapture, is an important part of the subjectivation process. According to Foucault, “erôs et askêsis sont [...] les deux grandes formes par lesquelles [...] on a conçu les modalités selon lesquelles le sujet devait être transformé pour devenir enfin sujet capable de vérité” (*L’herméneutique*, 17).⁶ The subject’s first love for a girl in Section VI marks the transformation of the subject’s identity. This love is concretized by the memory of his beloved Muse, who like Dante’s Beatrice, enriches the self and his art. It is an evolution as it follows a sudden dazzling sunshine, “I was sunstruck at the basilica door” (VI: 7). The luminous dazzle is a source of personal development and poetic inspiration, a turning point bestowing on the subject another fold containing the “thirteen secrets of Midas”, the power to transform personal and collective memories into art, and therefore into gold. This is the time of reckoning when, “la vérité vient à lui et l’illumine” (*L’herméneutique*, 18).

“Transformed” and armed with the archaeological knowledge, the subject continues his curved movement to discover a new fantastic world. Unlike other pilgrims who follow the crowd, his movement against the flow divulges Saint Patrick’s purgatory, a new point of view that unfolds the depths of his psyche. This involves the boiling of emotions during a detour that avoids the prescribed straight line. Allusions to pagan gods and rites again reveal the folds of his identity by adding secular and artistic dimensions to it. This emancipatory point reveals an oak, which transposes the subject into Sabine, Horace’s farm, adding new strategies of subjectivation, inspired by classical literature and the pagan practices of self-construction, and therefore new dimensions to his identity:

A stream of pilgrims answering the bell
 Trailed up the steps as I went down them
 Towards the bottle-green, still
 Shade of an oak. Shades of the Sabine farm
 On the beds of Saint Patrick’s Purgatory.
 Late summer, country distance, not an air:
 Loosen the toga for wine and poetry
 Till Phoebus returning routs the morning star. (VI: 15-22)

Sabine’s pagan freedom outshines the darkness of St. Patrick’s purgatory. Horace, therefore, adds other folds to the subject’s identity, who detaches himself from the influence of the rite, and loosens the toga, devoting himself “to poetry and wine” all night until dawn. The result is

a creative blossoming that replaces the orthodoxy of the rites. The apparition of the morning star, the planet Venus, the goddess of love, and Phoebe, the Roman sun god, opens the way, once again, to the dazzle of the light, the metaphor of the revelation of the truth of the self. Wine, love and light come together to create the subject and intensify his artistic inspiration.

Meanwhile, the juxtaposition of pagan and Christian ascetic techniques of self-development, imputes spiritual processes that facilitate the movement and evolution of subjectivation. If the “hymn to Mary” is another turning point where it leads him to unfold the layers of memory through introspection, revealing an asceticism begun since his childhood:

As a somnolent hymn to Mary rose
I felt an old pang that bags of grain
And the sloped shafts of forks and hoes
Once mocked me with, at my own long virgin
Fasts and thirsts, my nightly shadow feasts,
Haunting the granaries of words like breasts. (VI: 23-8)

The hymn triggers the memories of the sufferings during long nights at the boarding school, where he looked for the profusion of light and sensuality. The allusion to the horrors of circumstances evoked in the poem “The Barn”, in *Death of a Naturalist*, exposes his loneliness and endurance during his education. This new movement and the point of view shed light on the experiences of the boy engulfed in darkness. In these moribund circumstances he braved prohibitions, by eroticizing texts and looking for evocative words like “breasts”, the symbol of life and procreation. This moment marks the development of his language, which is a very important aspect of his subjectivity.⁷ Love leads to a sudden transformation through which religious prohibitions and language barriers fall and the subject flourishes. Love opens the way to an awareness that unfolds the deeper layers of memory related to the subject’s adventures with his beloved:

As if I knelt for years at a keyhole
Mad for it, and all that ever opened
Was the breathed-on grille of a confessional
Until that night I saw her honey-skinned
Shoulder-blades and the wheatlands of her back
Through the wide keyhole of her keyhole dress
And a window facing the deep south of luck
Opened and I inhaled the land of kindness. (VI: 30-7)

This is a major personal and artistic development as his attempts to seduce the feminine figure, whose intransigence compared to the grids of a confessional, finally brings down her inflexibility. The result of the union with his beloved “Beatrice” is a new transformation, concretizing the personal and artistic fulfilment in these lines translated from Dante’s *Inferno*:

*As little flowers that were all bowed and shut
By the night chills rise on their stems and open
As soon as they have felt the touch of sunlight,
So I revived in my own wilting powers
And my heart flushed, like somebody set free.
Translated, given, under the oak tree. (VI: 38-43)*

The obstacles, prohibitions and restrictions, evoked by the “lock” and “the confessional grid”, give way to opening and illumination which symbolize the evolution of the subject’s identity, leading him to proclaim: “so I revived”. Evoking Dante’s transformation after meeting Beatrice, these lines reveal how the subject’s a new self emerges. The comparison between his transformation and the “prostrate” and “closed” flowers, which suddenly open at the sunshine, marks an important development: he is “translated”, “liberated” and therefore “inspired”. Paganism symbolized by the oak tree associates him again with Sweeney’s freedom. Nonetheless, this freedom and the subsequent artistic and identity developments are not permanent, as he confronts new obstacles that threaten the continuity of his movement toward evolution.

One of the obstacles is directly related to the political tension emanating from the Troubles of Northern Ireland and the presumption of commitment to communitarian discourses. As the subject reaches a new position, elaborated in Section VIII, which reveals other important facets of his identity through Colum McCartney’s ghost, by shedding light on his actions during the conflict. A victim of sectarian conflict, McCartney reveals how the poet failed his supposed “obligations”, reproaching him of his indifference to socio-political events, including his reaction to his murder:

‘You saw that, and you wrote that – not the fact.
 You confused evasion and artistic tact.
 The Protestant who shot me through the head
 I accuse directly, but indirectly, you
 who now atone perhaps upon this bed
 for the way you whitewashed ugliness and drew
 the lovely blinds of the *Purgatorio*
 and saccharined my death with morning dew.’ (VIII: 71-8)

The ghost refers to the poet’s artistic predispositions and criticizes his impartiality towards political events, previously portrayed in *Field Work*’s “The Strand at Lough Beg”, where Heaney had presumably “obscured” and “aestheticized” the circumstances of McCartney’s murder, without taking a partisan position. He equates the poet to the “Protestant” assailant by accusing the former of treason.⁸ The denunciation of his “evasion”, “irresponsibility” and falsification of “truth”, reveals an important fold of his identity, which is the source of strong tensions between politics and art. This confrontation and the ensuing criticism of the poet’s artistic approach by McCartney illustrate the subject’s attraction to these communitarian discourses.

In section IX this tension reaches its peak as the subject moves into a new position illustrated. The point of view unfolds other facets of identity, related to political and aesthetic tendencies. Here, Francis Hughes’s apparition, a Republican hunger striker, who had followed the direct and directive lines of political ideology, clarifies the subject’s stance towards social and political “obligations”: “My brain dried like spread turf, my stomach / Shrank to a cinder and tightened and cracked” (IX: 1-2). The speaker in the first lines of the section is both the artist, the subject of enunciation, and the hunger striker, the subject of the enounced. The union of the two subjects discloses the complexity of the subject’s multifaceted identity, simultaneously tending and wary of these discourses. This revelation triggers an awareness, leading to confession to conformist tendencies, a virulent self-criticism and artistic repentance:

‘I repent
 My unweaned life that kept me competent
 To sleepwalk with connivance and mistrust.’

...
 'I hate how quick I was to know my place
 I hate where I was born, hate everything
 That made me biddable and unforthcoming.' (IX: 35-60)

The metaphor “unweaned life”, dependence on the communitarian cause can push the artist towards “somnambulism”, an unconscious life governed by the various diktats of ideological discourses, which Nietzsche, in *The Gay Knowledge*, calls “herd instinct” (144). The words “competent”, “connivance”, “docile” and “secret” mark the pinnacle of the subject’s penchant towards the prescribed lines ironically presage a fundamental transformation. The statement of contrition is the incarnation of the artist’s “weaning” from political discourse, a revolution against passive existence, and marks the evolution of his identity, a state that Picot describes as “masculinity”. It is a metamorphosis, from a passive into an active subject, who becomes the actor and agent of his life.⁹

This new evolution in identity strengthens the subject’s artistic autonomy, boosting his inspiration and artistic creation. As he moves to a new position creating another point of view in section X, his newly attained power enables him to transform ordinary objects into art and complements the artistic abilities previously evoked by the “thirteen secrets of Midas”. As the vision of a pot hanging on a chain with forged links unfolds the secrets of a large cup that, in turn, provokes a succession of revelations. The juxtaposition of images of water, sun and light harbingers another development in his art:

The open door letting in sunlight.
 Hearthsmoke rambling and a thud of earthenware

drumming me back until I saw the mug
 beyond my reach on its high shelf, the one
 patterned with cornflowers, blue sprig after sprig
 repeating round it, as quiet as a milestone. (X: 3-8)

The rhythmic pattern created by the words “forged links”, “rambling”, “drumming”, “patterned”, “sprig after sprig” and “repeating round” celebrates the cup and underlines the relation between ordinary objects, the self and art. It symbolizes and retraces the rhythmic stages of the process of artistic subjectivation, marked by the “milestones”, which constitute the turning points: movements, events and points of view in the artist’s life. By circumventing the straight lines, his curved movement facilitates the personal and artistic developments conveyed by the geometric metaphor “translation”; it conveys both the transfiguration of the cup as an object of art, by the pair of pantomime artists, and the metamorphosis of the subject. This new development underscores the artist’s new power, making him capable of transforming the ordinary into artefact.¹⁰ It is a miracle that, like the apparition of Ronan’s psalter, becomes the centrepiece of the self and artistic creation, as the miraculous “translation” is made possible by the power of art. This incredible breakthrough is represented by “the dazzle of the impossible”, which brings about a change in his vision:

And so the saint praised God on the lough shore.
 The dazzle of the impossible suddenly
 blazed across the threshold; a sun-glare
 to put out the small hearths of constancy. (X: 25-8)

The dazzling light marks, like a lightning, an opening in the darkness, unfolding the archives of the subject's identity, who develops an extraordinary ability, namely clairvoyance. This is an important symbolic moment, that of the revelation of the self to the subject; according to Foucault, "la vérité, c'est ce qui illumine le sujet ; la vérité, c'est ce qui lui donne la beatitude" (*L'herméneutique*, 18). The self as an internal source of light becomes so intense that it eclipses "the small hearths of constancy", the ideological discourses that used to bewitch and influence the poet. The dazzling light allows him to extension his vision, to sound the secrets of the world, enabling him to perceive beyond the appearances.

In section XI, the transmutation of the subject's vision continues. The new point of view unfolds the archives of memory and reveals other fragments of his identity, the defects of his world and the need for change. The metaphor kaleidoscope highlights the important role of vision and imagination in art. Interestingly, the immersion of the toy in the mud exposes the imperceptible, the ghost of a monk whom Heaney had seen behind the grills of a confessional. Paradoxically, the religious man, supposed to be the incarnation of rites and conventions, questions common practices by proposing aesthetic repentance:

He spoke again about the need and chance

to salvage everything, to re-envisage
the zenith and glimpsed jewels of any gift
mistakenly abased.

What came to nothing could always be replenished.
'Read poems as prayers', he said, 'and for your penance
translate me something by Juan de la Cruz.' (XI: 6-12)

More than just a simple religious practice, repentance evokes the need for the reorientation of the subject's artistic path, approving his curved movement. It involves the saving of the "jewels of any gift", suppressed by obligations and conventions. The abandoning of the "zenith", the centre of gravity that attracts and fixes the trajectory of the subject on a stable and predefined line becomes a necessity. Change of direction can emancipate the subject, as it unleashes the bonds of his imagination and inspires him. As the spiritual techniques of self-care bear their fruit, the subject's vision extends.¹¹ Reading "poems as prayers" involves the substitution of conventions by art to pave the way for its boundless possibilities; this is a symbolic act, a reminder, confirming the poet's curved movement. The atonement is then part of a series of detours in the art of self-representation. Although these departures position the subject in the midst of darkness, paradoxically, he can illuminate and perceive the invisible through his vision.

With the new vision, the subject can probe the deepest folds of his existence. Hence the life and poetry of Saint John of the Cross, the Spanish mystic (1542-1591), adds a new dimension to the process of subjectivation. His development techniques illuminate the subject's path by guiding him to the source of artistic inspiration, the self. Once in the darkness, a new technique, "sounding" amplifies his vision. In the absence of light, he can perceive the source of his existence, his self:

Now his sandalled passage stirred me on to this:
How well I know that fountain, filling, running,
although it is the night.

That eternal fountain, hidden away,
I know its haven and its secrecy

although it is the night. (XI: 16-21)

The refrain “although it is the night” evokes the difficult socio-political circumstances in Northern Ireland, while complementing the metaphor of “muddy water” at the beginning of the section. Having passed through Kavanagh’s well in section V, and then “the dazzle of the impossible”, the subject arrives at the “eternal fountain”, where Jesus met the Samaritan woman. By discovering the source of the light in the darkness, he achieves his objective, in a series of symbolic places, which includes omphalos, bogs, tombs and wells. These dark spaces are not centres of “gravity”, but “hoarders” of collective and personal memories, the archives that make the unfolding and redefining of his identity possible.

In the last “station” a new luminous point of view reveals the ghost of Joyce. An artist in exile who like Sweeney advocates dissociation and artistic freedom, Joyce recapitulates and confirms the subject’s artistic philosophy.¹² Moreover, he epitomizes the new identity of the artist confidently determined to orchestrate his own self. As the master of language, the Irish novelist is an artist whose voice is “eddying with the vows of all rivers” (XII: 16), hence his authenticity, authority and attachment to the local landscape. These images, which resonate with the Moyola River, compared to the language in *Wintering Out*, “Gifts of Rain”, depict the importance of local language in the process of subjectivation, as he alludes to Stephen’s discussion with the English Dean in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Creating his own language and abandoning the “common rite” will put the subject in a strong position, implied by the reappearance of the expressions “your own” and “your note”, underlining the establishment of an independent artistic voice:

Your obligation
is not discharged by any common rite.
What you must do must be done on your own

so get back in harness. The main thing is to write
for the joy of it. Cultivate a work-lust
that imagines its haven like your hands at night

dreaming the sun in the sunspot of a breast.
You are fasted now, light-headed, dangerous.
Take off from here. And don’t be so earnest,

let others wear the sackcloth and the ashes.
Let go, let fly, forget.
You’ve listened enough. Now strike your note.’ (XII: 19-30)

This series of injunctions, pronounced by Joyce with force and conviction, summarizes the subject’s aesthetic philosophy. As the words “desire”, “hand” and “breast” indicate, love, “joy” and “pleasure” are the engines and motives of artistic creation. But social prescriptions, rituals and ideological discourses make individuals “light-headed” and “dangerous”, leading to political conflicts. As an artist, the subject dissociates himself from the Other’s centralizing rites, duties and constraints conveyed by the metaphor “sackcloth and the ashes” and cultivates his own point of view. In his course on Leibniz Deleuze, indicated that in subjectivation, “à la géométrie du centre se substitue une géométrie des sommets, une géométrie des points de vue”. In fact, an external disposition, at the margins of the centre and ideological “circles”, enables the subject to unfold the archives of the self and develop his own voice. By moving to the inflection points, the artist takes position at the margins of society, a locus that allows him to

draw and examine the folds of both internal and external worlds, hence the geometric metaphor "keep at a tangent":

'Keep at a tangent.

When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim
out on your own and fill the element
with signatures on your own frequency,
echo soundings, searches, probes, allurements,

elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea'. (XII: 47-52)

Since the centre, with its strong gravity, can encircle and limit the subject's movement, any position outside its gravitational field is a position of strength, bestowing freedom on the subject. As Deleuze indicated in his interview with Parnet, "il faut multiplier les côtés, briser tout cercle au profit des polygones" (26). Society, as a powerful gravitational circular power, drags the subject into its overwhelming orbit. But by positioning himself on the margins, the artist liberates himself, maintains the curved movement and "sounds" the invisible secret folds of the two worlds. The act of "sounding" in the "dark seas" unfolds the collective and personal memories, revealing the folds and the fragments of the self that constitute the identity of a new subject. It is from this position that he can proceed simultaneously to the examination of the past and the present, the archaeology of the folds of the self and the Other, including the other in the self. Once revealed and represented in the text, these elements draw the contours of the hybrid identity of a new subject and a new world marked by the "signature" of the self. Such a non-conformist subject is marked by *non-serviam*, a paragon, an independent modern artist who pursues his own curved movement.¹³

The process of self-creation and aesthetic philosophy transforms the artist into a visionary guide for society. He exalts in his curved movement and attains the marginal, peripheral but prophetic position, with an alternative vision, intent on changing the game, namely creating his own centre for society. In "The Redress of Poetry" Heaney writes: "under the pressure of conflicting recognitions [...], self-divided and self-rebuking, the poet stands like an embodiment of the loaded scales and the trembling pointer needle" (18). If religion, philosophy and art intertwine in the poem, it is art, as a vector of humanism that triumphs.

Notes

¹ Paul Barolsky argues that: "Dante is not so much the precursor of the modern artist as hero as he is the inventor and apex of this idea" (6).

² According to Hawlin, "Heaney is concerned, like Joyce, to feel through aspects of his own development in relation to its social, political, and religious dimensions" (36).

³ Carleton justifies his criticism of the mores, writing: "If I became the historian of their habits and manners, their feelings, their prejudices, their superstitions and their crimes; if I have attempted to delineate their moral, religious, and physical state, it was because I saw no other person willing to undertake a task" (x-xi).

⁴ In *Le Pli* Deleuze writes: "l'élément génétique idéal de la courbure variable, ou du pli, c'est l'inflexion" (20).

⁵ Hopkins explains that: "Feeling, love in particular, is the great moving power and spring of verse and the only person that I am in love with seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly and when he does I cannot always 'make capital' of it" (64).

⁶ Askêsis is the discipline and the methodical work or training exercised on the self – both physical and mental – to acquire the capacity to control the affections and the implementation of a right judgment.

⁷ Collins believes that "even his sexuality, a crucial component of his identity, evolves [...] through his growing acquisition of language" (143).

⁸ Selon Ramazani “McCartney suggests a moral parallel between the man who drew his gun and the man who ‘drew’ the ‘blinds’ of art” (346).

⁹ “Heaney’s choice is clear: he now prefers riding to floating, and the masculine, self-illuminated state to the feminine ‘unweaned life’” (250-1).

¹⁰ According to Collins, “He sees the miraculous arise from the ordinary” (149).

¹¹ Guite observes “It is not that Heaney is asked to, or would be prepared to, sloganize for the Catholic Church, but rather [he is emphasizing] his cleansing of the instruments of our vision” (219).

¹² Number “twelve”, used both in mythology and in the bible, symbolizes the fulfilment of perfection. It is associated with seven, the other sacred number (Cirlot, 354-6).

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M. Reza Ghorbanian holds a Ph.D. in English language and literature and is currently a lecturer of English studies at Université Côte d'Azur in Nice, France. He has also taught English and cultural studies at Sorbonne Université, Université Paris Nanterre and Université Paris Diderot in France, as well as Carleton University and Queen's University in Canada. His teaching focuses on cultural studies and American and English studies. His interdisciplinary research concerns the politics and poetics of identity formation, self-creation and subjectivation and also the work of Seamus Heaney. He has published articles and lectured extensively on these subjects.

reza.ghorbanian@univ-cotedazur.fr