

MOVING BACKWARDS TO REACH FORWARDS: SEAMUS HEANEY AND THE LIVING PAST

Juan Ráez Padilla
Universidad de Jaén

Abstract

Intersecting violence and sectarianism, unfortunately, represent an encumbering yoke from which Northern Ireland has been struggling to liberate itself for the past fifty years (since the Troubles began in the late 60s). Seamus Heaney's poetry is no exception. This paper focuses on some of his poems dealing with these issues, especially those written in the years following the first cease-fire in Northern Ireland (1994), which, by revisiting the past, foresaw a new future for Ireland. This move backwards to reach forwards is practised at different levels. Not only does Heaney look back in history (ancient Greece, for example) to rediscover new horizons to the impasse in Northern Ireland, but he also revisits his own poems and personal experiences, positing some sort of magic foreknowledge acquired in childhood which helps the adult poet to come to terms with his troublesome present, as well as to

Resumen

La violencia fratricida y el sectarismo, desafortunadamente, representan un pesado yugo del que Irlanda del Norte ha intentado liberarse durante los últimos cincuenta años (desde el comienzo de los llamados *Troubles*, a finales de los años sesenta). La poesía de Seamus Heaney no es una excepción en este sentido. El presente artículo se centra en el análisis de algunos de los poemas que exploran tal temática, especialmente en aquellos publicados en los primeros años tras el primer alto el fuego en Irlanda del Norte (1994), los cuales, a través de la revisitación del pasado, vislumbraban un nuevo futuro para Irlanda. Este movimiento hacia atrás para progresar hacia delante es explorado a diferentes niveles. Heaney no sólo mira hacia atrás en la historia (hacia la Grecia clásica, por ejemplo) para redescubrir nuevos horizontes en el *impasse* norirlandés, sino que también revisita sus propios poemas y vivencias personales a través de un cierto tipo de preconocimiento mágico adquirido en la infancia que ayuda al poeta adulto a interiorizar la mencionada violencia en el presente, así como a apuntar hacia "un nuevo

point towards “a new beginning” (Heaney 1996:69) in Irish history.

comienzo” (Heaney 1996:69; la traducción es nuestra) en la historia irlandesa.

Keywords: Seamus Heaney, Northern Ireland, *The Troubles*, past, future, violence, sacrifice, mythology.

Palabras clave: Seamus Heaney, Irlanda del Norte, *The Troubles*, pasado, futuro, violencia, sacrificio, mitología.

The past as “personal helicon” (Heaney 1966:46) or source of inspiration for the poetic recreation and reconstruction of the present is a recurrent topic in the poetry of Seamus Heaney. The myth of the Mother Earth –giving birth to all human existence, but also its ultimate grave–, for example, is a powerful symbol at the beginning of Heaney’s career, which tactfully permeates through his most controversial poems on the fratricidal violence among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s. These are the so-called *bog poems* in the collections *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), which, according to Goodby and Phillips, have “open[ed] a can of worms that (in Irish critical circles, at least) has never really been closed” (2001:244). A book by P. V. Glob, *The Bog People* (1969), was decisive in Heaney’s early mythology of anthropophagy and sacrifice. In that book Glob writes about the unearthed bodies of men and women who were preserved in the bogs of Jutland and who date back to the Iron Age. According to this author, some of these men and women (such as “The Tollund Man” in Heaney’s *Wintering Out*, 1972) were offered in sacrifice to Mother Earth, who in turn guaranteed the eternal cycle of life. This mythic pattern offered to Heaney a thought-provoking parallel to the internecine violence in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s (the so-called *Troubles*) which, nonetheless, was not deprived of disapproval by some critics who understood such mythology as a dangerous aestheticization and legitimization of violence.¹

Maybe the most memorable poem in this respect is “Punishment,” where the Nobel prize winner draws a parallel between a young woman from the Age of Bronze, murdered for adultery and preserved in the bogs from the north of Europe, and many other Northern Irish women (“your betraying sisters” below) who, during the *Troubles*, were tarred and feathered as a punishment for their romances with the British soldiers who occupied the Ulster:

Little adulteress,
before they punished you
you were flaxen-haired,

¹ See, for example, Carson (1975), Coughlan (1997), Cullingford (1990) and Lloyd (1997).

undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
[...]
I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge. (Heaney 1975:30-31, ll. 23-31, 37-44)

The Northern Irish conflict, and Heaney's desire to rationalize the atrocities committed in his homeland, are at the base of this initial atavistic mytho-symbolism of violence. As old barriers were progressively wiped out, especially after the first cease-fire in Northern Ireland (1994), Heaney's poems showed that a new future for Ireland, free or at least unencumbered by internecine conflict and sectarianism, could be envisaged. Still, the poet's favourite poetic device to reach *forwards* is to move *backwards*. In this article, I will concentrate on some of Heaney's post cease-fire poems, which, by revisiting the past at different levels (historical, personal, literary), rediscover new horizons to the impasse in Northern Ireland.

Heaney frequently revisits his own past poems as the trigger for the creation of new ones casting some new light. Between the poem "The Tollund Man," published in 1972, and "Tollund," published in 1996, there exists a mythological revision fostered by the new turn of events in the recent history of Northern Ireland. Light is a symbol of optimism in "Tollund." The poet keeps the promise he once made in "The Tollund Man" – "Some day I will go to Aarhus" (1972:36, I, l. 1) – and writes about a Sunday in Tollund Moss, Jutland, the aforementioned context for a significant part of his early mytho-symbolism of sacrifice. While the poem from 1972 juxtaposed Irish reality with the terrible barbarity of bog sacrifice in early Iron Age times, the poem from *The Spirit Level* (1996) arises from a much closer and promising reality: the ceasefire from the IRA and the main unionist paramilitary groups in August 1994. Thus the poem is dated "September 1994" (1996:69), influenced by the optimism of the ceasefire proclaimed in Northern Ireland just a

month before.² The atavistic darkness of “The Tollund Man” gives way in “Tollund” to a land of “dormant”, “silent” bogs (1996:69, ll. 7, 8), only disturbed by “light traffic sound” (1996:69, l. 5). This rural scene of quietness gives off a new light: “It could have been a still out of the bright / ‘Townland of Peace’, that poem of dream farms / Outside all contention,” writes Heaney (1996:69, ll. 9-11). The mythic sacrifices are subsumed within a modern landscape, where a scarecrow’s arms “stood open opposite the satellite / Dish in the paddock” (1996:69, ll. 12-13). A dolmen is demystified into “a standing stone / [...] With tourist signs in *futhark* runic script / In Danish and in English” (1996:69, ll. 13, 15-16). That is not the same Tollund as in years past. “Things had moved on” (1996:69, l. 16). Things were moving on as well in Northern Ireland. Whereas the young Heaney imagined there, in Jutland, that he would “feel lost, / Unhappy and at home” (1972:37, III, ll. 11-12), the speaker in the later poem is much less pessimistic, as the middle-aged poet finds himself there “footloose, at home beyond the tribe” (1996:69, l. 20). As Neil Corcoran argues, “‘Tollund’ is a self-corrective poem and gesture, a revisiting of the old ground to possess it newly and differently” (1998:205). Far from atavism (note “beyond the tribe”), hope lightens up. A new future for Heaney and his community could at last be foreseen:

More scouts than strangers, ghosts who’d walked abroad
 Unfazed by light, to make a new beginning
 And make a go of it, alive and sinning,
 Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad. (1996:69, ll. 21-24)

The expression “Ourselves again” above is especially revealing in the Northern Irish context: the translation into English of the IRA’s political arm, *Sinn Féin*, is “Ourselves Alone” (Murphy 2000:103). Heaney thus detaches himself from this other type of atavistic isolation in favour of a much more plural and reconciliatory concept of *Irishness* encapsulated in the phrase “Ourselves again”.

More personal than mythological or *demythologized* is the poem “Keeping Going,” whose very title shows evidence of a more optimistic approach to the conflict in Northern Ireland. An ordinary object rescued from childhood memories is the main symbol throughout the poem. This is a whitewash brush, Heaney’s brother’s sporran when he pretended to play the piper as a young boy, or that magical instrument with which the familiar farm Mossbawn regained whiteness at springtime (1996:10). The poet recollects the fascination provoked by its

² In 1996 this first ceasefire by the IRA stops, and it is renewed again in July 1997 after the Labour victory in Great Britain. The most important day in the recent history of pacification of Northern Ireland is 10 April 1998, when the *Good Friday Agreement* was signed by the British and Irish governments, as well as by most Northern Irish political parties, including Sinn Féin, the IRA’s political arm, and the Ulster Unionist Party.

alchemical power, capable of distilling shining clarity out of the “greeny burning” and “watery grey” (1996:10, ll. 14, 16) of the mix water-lime. “All that worked like magic” (1996:10, l. 18), states the speaker, astonished, thrilled. This is, as many other objects taken from the ordinary world –a spirit level, a rain stick, a sofa, a sharpening stone or a weighbridge, for example, in the collection *The Spirit Level* (1996)–, some sort of poetic “foreknowledge” (1996:5) acquired in childhood which teaches the adult poet a delayed lesson and helps him to come to terms with his troublesome present: the whitewash brush, “that old blanched skirted thing / On the back of the byre door” (1996:10, ll. 9-10), symbolizes the transmutation of dirtiness into whiteness; the distillation of hope out of distress. The same watery grey and muddy mixture evoked in childhood days, nevertheless, is stained with blood in the unmagical, harshly violent present. In a scene reminiscent of Macbeth and the three witches’ clairvoyant cauldron, Heaney’s mother warns her son against bad company in college as she quickens a gruel which, just a few lines afterwards, turns that of a part-time reservist murdered in Northern Ireland: “Grey matter like gruel flecked with blood / In spatters on the whitewash” (1996:11, ll. 50-51). White now turns to grey; magic is brutally murdered by the merciless reality of sectarianism. Little can the poet’s alchemical verse do to restore life. Little can do those who, like his brother Hugh –the young piper with a whitewash brush as a sporran–, have remained faithful to the victims by staying in Northern Ireland: “My dear brother, you have good stamina. / You stay on where it happens. / [...] But you cannot make the dead walk or right wrong” (1996:12, ll. 66-67, 73).

After death there only remains –for Heaney and for Hugh, for the individual and the community– the consolation of the word, the promise of a new future. This is where poetic alchemy appears with strongest potential for redress. Heaney’s detractors have frequently adduced a consolatory backward look at the victims, accusing him on some occasions of a motionless stagnation on the past. Nonetheless, as Eugene O’Brien suggests (2003:1), we cannot forget about that other forward look at the future in Heaney’s poetics. This is how we should understand the poet’s frequent imagery of sacrifice in his oeuvre: the restoration of life after death, the sublimation of hope out of sorrow. In “Keeping Going” the scapegoat is a unionist, a part-time reservist “toting his lunch-box” (1996:12, l. 55) who is murdered, presumably, by the IRA. In “Punishment,” on the other hand, the victims of internecine violence were young Republican girls. Both are protagonists and scapegoats, in two different poems, of the same fratricidal story. As in the war of Troy, which is the background theme in Heaney’s poetic sequence “Mycenae Lookout” (1996:29-37), “The war put all men mad, / horned, horsed or roof-posted, / the boasting and the bested” (1996:36, 4, ll. 46-48). In such grief –there it is the alchemical power of poetry–, we can only hope –imagine, dream, at least– a new future in which the reservist’s grey matter may turn white on “the parched wall he

leant his back against” (1996:12, l. 53), as grey watery lime did on the white walls of Mossbawn. In such a sacrificial background the wall above indeed appears thirsty for blood, like the ghosts who, just a few pages afterwards, in “Damson,” come back from their tombs “with their tongues out for a lick of blood” (1996:16, l. 25), inflamed by the bleeding knuckles of a bricklayer who builds –cyclical irony– another wall. At first the speaker in the poem asks the bricklayer to use his trowel as Odysseus’ sword “that dug the trench and cut the throat / Of the sacrificial lamb” (1996:16, ll. 33-34). The sacrificial lamb is another symbol of the atavistic violence unleashed in all the aforementioned poems.

The symbology of sacrifice is also a leitmotif in “Mycenae Lookout,” an impressive sequence *transfused* (to use a Heaney term)³ from Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* whose fratricidal violence implicitly juxtaposes with the civil war in Northern Ireland. We should remember that this classical work is also rooted in a sacrifice, that of Agamemnon’s and Clytemnestra’s daughter, Iphigeneia, who was offered in sacrifice so that gods would be favourable to the king of Mycenae in his military assault on Troy. In Heaney’s poem, Cassandra can be seen to parallel some of the Northern Irish victims of “Punishment.”⁴ Given to king Agamemnon as part of his loot, the Trojan prophetess becomes his lover and slave, a victim of pillage, adulteress in captivity. Unlike the connivance shown in the poem from *North* (1975), the Irish poet now declares about the woeful state of Cassandra after the war: “No such thing / as innocent / bystanding” (1996:30, 2, ll. 1-3). Her words were heard by the Greeks as the bleat of a lamb: “And then her Greek / words came, / a lamb / at lambing time” (1996:32, 2, ll. 36-39). These words warned about Agamemnon’s murder after his return to Mycenae, but as in Troy, when she predicted the trick of the wooden horse, they were ignored. Finally, both she and Agamemnon are killed by Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus. This is a whole expiating cycle of murder and slavery in which peace only arrives after exhaustion: “And the peace had come upon us” (1996:36, 4, l. 58).

It is worth noting that Heaney’s post cease-fire rewordings of homeland sectarianism clearly move away from the first Iron Age, Northern anthropophagic mytho-symbolism and approach, as can be seen in the references above to *Agamemnon* or Odysseus, classical Greek mythology. Thus Heaney’s verse oscillates between the particularization and the universalization of fratricidal

³ Seamus Heaney borrows the term “transfusion” from John Dryden’s preface to his translation of Aesop’s *Fables*, i.e. “another writer transfuses himself or his gifts or his voice into yours” (Carvalho Homem 2001:27).

⁴ The poem “Cassandra” (1996:30-33) within the sequence “Mycenae Lookout” also harks back formally to the collection *North* (1975) in the use of short lines making up thin stanzas. This is the so-called Heaney’s “artesian stanza” (O’Donoghue 1994:6).

violence. As Nicholas Jenkins writes of “Mycenae Lookout,” this is the “premonition of an eternal fratricidal civil conflict, [...] not only in Troy, or Mycenae, or Athens [...], but far beyond in time and space” (1996:11). On the other hand, the presence of classical mythology in his last book collections serves a much more ideologically-driven purpose. The poet himself has overtly acknowledged that, as W. B. Yeats, he has often adopted Greek themes as “a desire to relocate the centre of the universe at the centre of my own home ground” (2000:36).⁵ He precisely strives to do so in his autobiographical essay “Mossbawn,” where Heaney recollects to this purpose a water pump outside the door of the farmhouse where he grew up, whose sound was one of the first sounds he ever heard, and one that he kept hearing all through his rural childhood whenever someone worked its handle. “*Omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*” was that sound, “its blunt and falling music” (1980:17) blurring the peripheral existence of the poet. The word *omphalos* is the name of the stone that stood in the sanctuary of Apollo in Delphi, marking the centre, the navel of the whole Greek world. “That pump,” writes Heaney, “marked an original descent into earth, sand, gravel, water. It centred and staked the imagination, made its foundation the foundation of the *omphalos* itself” (1980:20). *Omphalos* and its symbolism represents, therefore, a mythological link between the classical world and the rural, isolated, peripheral world of the farm Mossbawn in County Derry, where young Heaney was brought up.

The poet’s attraction for underworld deliquescence and its centralising function in Heaney’s particular mytho-poetics is prominent since his early poems. “As a child, they could not keep me from wells / and old pumps with buckets and windlasses,” Heaney declares in the poem “Personal Helicon” (1966:46, ll. 1-2). The very title of this poem shows that water, wells, pumps, together with mud, bogs, all these symbols at the base of Heaney’s amphibious protomatter, connecting the world with the underworld, earth with water, are from early days for Heaney his source of inspiration, his Irish *omphalos*, his *personal helicon*.⁶ Again, we see another Greek leitmotif to characterize Heaney’s personal and familiar remembrances from rural childhood, a centralizing mytho-symbolism rooting Northern Irish personal experiences in the classical literary tradition. The sequence

⁵ In *The Spirit Level* (1996), curiously enough, the Irish poet strategically places at the centre of the volume the sequence “Mycenae Lookout.” Likewise, in his following collection of poems, *Electric Light* (2001), we also find six “Sonnets from Hellas” positioned at the centre of the book. The formal layout of these two recent volumes offers us, then, a peculiar regularity confirming the centrality of Greek leitmotifs in his work, with which Heaney tries to liberate his Irish psyche from any kind of marginality.

⁶ *Helicon* was the name of a mountain in Boeotia, famous in Greek mythology because two springs sacred to the Muses (Aganippe and Hipocrenne) were located there. That is why the name of the mountain is usually used in an allusive way to refer to poetic inspiration (*OED*, 2001).

“Mycenae Lookout” also abounds in water imagery, wells, pumps, recollecting young Heaney’s own water pump at the farmyard and the centralizing echo of the word *omphalos*. Through symbolic and mythological association, then, Heaney binds together Athens and Mossbawn, Greek and Irish, emerging from the same core

like discharged soldiers testing the safe ground,
finders, keepers, seers of fresh water
in the bountiful round mouths of iron pumps
and gushing taps. (1996:37, ll. 33-36)

Heaney’s post cease-fire work fights against sectarianism with the whitening power of an old whitewash brush, the healing recollection of childhood pumps, the return to innocence in so many childhood episodes in his oeuvre. All of these, remember, “worked like magic” (1996:10). The *work of magic*, unfortunately, does not revive in the world of violence. It does not make the dead walk. It only works in that bucolic past of farm and school. What may succeed in doing so is *the magic of work*, included the poetic work, indeed that of so many poetic counterparts all through Heaney’s literary career: a potter in “To a Dutch Potter in Ireland” (1996:2-4), a bricklayer in “Damson” (1996:15-16), an architect in “An Architect” (1996:58), a tailor in “At Banagher” (1996:67-68), etc.⁷ All of them somehow remind us of Heaney as the artisan or words, as *homo faber*. To all of them the poet pays homage, as he originally paid to the rural job of his father and grandfather and ancestors, to the job Heaney himself has done since his earliest poem, “Digging”: “Between my finger and my thumb / the squat pen rests. / I’ll dig with it” (1966:4, ll. 29-31). That reservist in “Keeping Going” will not come back. But the magic of poetic work consists in –as far as it can help in doing so– struggling to prevent others from falling again. It offers thus not only consolation, but prospective action and results for the future. Somehow, the poem is like that whitewash brush which draws white upon grey, since from murder it may just as well distil the whiteness with which to mitigate the tragically human impulse to pull, in revenge, another gun’s trigger.

Literature plays here a very important role. Heaney is well aware of this, as well as of the risky and controversial task of carrying “the earth’s old ointment box”

⁷ The identification with the tailor is explicit in the poem: “Then all of a sudden there appears to me / The journeyman tailor *who was my antecedent*” (my emphasis) (1996:67, ll. 1-2); according to Joyce Wilson (1996:150) this tailor is Heaney’s great-grandfather. What especially attracts the poet’s attention is the task of recutting and resewing garments (1996:67, l. 4), maybe like the work itself of poetic search and renovation. The scrutiny from the others, as Heaney has declared with regard to his own career (literary criticism, mass media, etc.), is a disturbing element in his artistic craft: “So more power to him on the job there, *ill at ease / Under my scrutiny* in spite of years / Of being inscrutable” (my emphasis) (1996:67, ll. 13-15).

(1996:2, 1, l. 9), of becoming the poetic spokesman in the Northern Irish conflict, a role which he has publicly rejected.⁸ The poet who “would have cast” the stones of silence in “Punishment” (1975:31, l. 30) is imperatively urged to do so, for example, in “Weighing In”: “Still, for Jesus’ sake / Do me a favour, would you, just this once? / Prophesy, give scandal, *cast the stone*” (my emphasis) (1996:18, ll. 34-36). Likewise, in an even hoarser tone a Republican curses Heaney in “The Flight Path” 4: “When, for fuck’s sake, are you going to write / Something for us?” (1996:25, ll. 80-81). Heaney’s answer unequivocally suggests that any address to his community or to the political arena in Northern Ireland springs from the Republic of Poetry: “‘If I do write something, / Whatever it is, I’ll be writing for myself.’ / And that was that. Or words to that effect” (1996:25, ll. 81-83). Leaving doubt, tension or remorse aside in these troublesome contexts, which so frequently haunt the poet too, Heaney’s evocation of violence and sacrifice is developed not from a motionless, undecided perspective, but from the belief in alchemical transmutation learned in the magic of daily life. Hence, in “Damson,” the red of the bricklayer’s blood turns, at the end of the poem, into the red of damsons, jam and wine quelling the ghosts’ retaliatory thirst, “rigged in bloody gear” (1996:16, l. 27). Hence, and once the first instinct of counterattack is subjugated, Heaney transmutes Odysseus’ avenging sword into the bricklayer’s protective board:

But not like him –
 Builder, not sacker, your shield the mortar board –
 Drive them back to the wine-dark taste of home,
 The smell of damsons simmering in a pot,
 Jam ladled thick and steaming down the sunlight. (1996:16, ll. 34-38)

To this healingly familiar scene the poet sends the thirsty ghosts to drink. In it we can find the ointment for the wounds still to wholly close and heal. The Nobel prize winner’s pen is, then, like that old whitewash brush: it distils hope out of sorrow; it transforms the hard Northern Irish reality into –quoting from the press release by the Swedish Academy– “works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past.”⁹ In grief, this redeeming alchemy of verse and quotidian miracles is just not enough. But it may help us, in the worst-case scenario, to stand up after the tragedy and make a new beginning, if only, as Heaney reminds us, by keeping going.

⁸ Heaney has argued that, unlike Brecht or Neruda, his poetry does not come out of political sensibility. Nonetheless, “there are writers who are destined to receive a political reading of their oeuvre, and I am one of them” (my translation) (Iborra 1996:107).

⁹ See press release by the Swedish Academy, 5 October 1995: URL: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1995/press.html (01/12/12).

REFERENCES

- Carson, Ciaran. “Escaped from the Massacre?” *The Honest Ulsterman* 50 (1975): 183-186.
- Carvalho Homem, Rui. “On Elegies, Eclogues, Translations, Transfusions: An Interview with Seamus Heaney.” *The European English Messenger* 10.2 (2001): 24-30.
- Corcoran, Neil. *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998.
- Coughlan, Patricia. “Bog Queens’: The Representation of Women in the Poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney.” *Seamus Heaney* (New Casebook Series). Ed. Michael Allen. London: Macmillan, 1997: 185-205.
- Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler. “Thinking of Her ... as ... Ireland’: Yeats, Pearse and Heaney.” *Textual Practice* 4.1 (1990): 1-21.
- Glob, P. V. *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved*. London: Faber and Faber, 1969.
- Goodby, John and Ivan Phillips. “Not Bad: *The Spirit Level*.” *The Art of Seamus Heaney*. Ed. Tony Curtis. Bridgend: Seren, 2001: 241-261.
- Heaney, Seamus. *Death of a Naturalist*. London: Faber and Faber, 1966.
- . *Wintering Out*. London: Faber and Faber, 1972.
- . *North*. London: Faber and Faber, 1975.
- . *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*. London: Faber and Faber, 1980.
- . *The Spirit Level*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.
- . “Lecture Delivered by Doctor Seamus Heaney.” *Acto de investidura como “Doutor Honoris Causa” do Excmo. Sr. D. Seamus Heaney*. A Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, 2000.
- . *Electric Light*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001.
- Iborra, Juan Ramón. “Entrevista a Seamus Heaney.” *Hailing Heaney: Lectures for a Nineties Nobel*. Ed. Rosa González and Jacqueline A. Hurtley. Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1996: 105-117.
- Jenkins, Nicholas. “Walking on Air: Travel and Release in Seamus Heaney.” *The Times Literary Supplement* 5 (1996): 10-12.
- Lloyd, David. “Pap for the Dispossessed’: Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of Identity.” *Seamus Heaney* (New Casebook Series). Ed. Michael Allen. London: Macmillan, 1997: 155-184.
- Murphy, Andrew. *Seamus Heaney*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 2000² (1996).
- O’Brien, Eugene. *Seamus Heaney: Searches for Answers*. London/Dublin/Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2003.
- ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 34 (2013): 245-255

O'Donoghue, Bernard. *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry*. Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994.

Wilson, Joyce. "Spring Semester." *Harvard Review: Homage to Seamus Heaney, 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature* 10. Ed. Stratis Haviaras. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1996: 148-150.

How to cite this article:

Ráez Padilla, Juan. "Moving Backwards to Reach Forwards: Seamus Heaney and the Living Past." *ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 34 (2013): 245-255.

Author's contact: jraez@ujaen.es