"Out of sight, out of mind," Leopold Bloom thinks hopefully to himself as Paddy Dignam is buried in the "Hades" episode of Ulysses (U-GP 6:872), but in Ulysses, what goes down must come up, and in the course of the novel we see or imagine drowned corpses popping to the surface of Dublin Bay, dead mothers and sons returned to visit the living, and even the ghost of poor Paddy Dignam himself come back for some buttermilk to soothe his stomach. Foxes, dogs, and rats scuttle through the text, digging up and "vulturing the dead" (U-GP 3:363–64). Even the pragmatic Bloom can't help but get nervous as he thinks of ghouls "scraping up the earth at night with a lantern... to get at fresh buried females.... Give you the creeps after a bit. I will appear to you after death. You will see my ghost after death. My ghost will haunt you after death. There is another world after death named hell" (U-GP 6:998–1002). Joyce's Dublin is a city of memories, of doors into the dark, "where dwell the vast hosts of the dead" that Gabriel senses at the end of "The Dead" (D67 223).

James Joyce and Seamus Heaney are both fascinated by the persistence of memory, especially the memory of the dead. Despite differences created by their choices of literary genre and the urban versus rural natures of their visions, both writers are particularly fascinated by the notion of an underworld of memory, a repository connected to and triggered by place, by a landscape, or, in Joyce's case, cityscape, loaded with the significance of the past and of memory.

The world of memory and the past—whether personal or cultural—is a world conceived of as in some ways other and under—a world buried, in the case of each individual, under all the moments and events that have followed it and, in the case of a culture, under all of the interpretations and retellings
that stand between the original events and the present. This underworld is often accessible, as are the underworlds of Homer, Virgil, and Dante, through the landscape of the present, by finding the right place in our world. Whether it be across "the stream of Ocean" in Homer or through Dante's "dark wood," the imaginative landscape of the present always contains the links, triggers, and doorways that open the underworld to the writer and, consequently, the reader.

Heaney and Joyce are highly conscious of the interconnectedness of place and memory, highly aware of the presence of the dead, both in terms of our personal lives and the ghosts that haunt them, and the hovering, shaping, and directing presences of literary ancestors. Perhaps the best way to compare their visions of place, memory, and underworld is to look at the ways in which each of them appropriates Dante when constructing an underworld. Both Joyce and Heaney have paid homage to Dante, highlighting their connections and debts to the author of The Divine Comedy. Joyce compared his own situation as an artist most fully to Dante while writing Ulysses, writing to Martha Fleischmann in 1918, "I am 35. It is the age at which Shakespeare conceived his dolorous passion for the 'dark lady.' It is the age at which Dante entered the night of his being" (Ellmann's translation from the Italian, SL 234). Just as Joyce observed that he was "nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" when he composed Ulysses, so Stephen Dedalus describes Shakespeare in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode, "with thirtyfive years of life, nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" (U-GP 9:830-31). Just so, Heaney sees himself at the start of "September Song" in Field Work, published when Heaney was forty years old, "In the middle of the way / under the wet of late September" (43).

What interests me here is the way in which each writer appropriates Dante, the ways in which The Divine Comedy—especially the Inferno and the Purgatorio—is used as a model for the presentation of the dead. The best model for carrying out this comparison is one set up by Heaney himself in his 1985 essay "Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet." In this important and graceful essay, which appeared in the same year as Station Island, Heaney argues that "when poets turn to the great masters of the past, they turn to an image of their own creation, one which is likely to be a reflection of their own imaginative needs, their own artistic inclinations and procedures" (5). Briefly summarized, "Envies and Identifications" looks closely at the very different ways in which T. S. Eliot and Osip Mandelstam have constructed Dante as a literary predecessor, each poet serving the needs of his own career. Heaney argues that "Eliot's work is haunted by the shade of Dante" (as Heaney's own work seems more and more to be), and he goes on to examine the style and tone of "Little Gidding" in order to determine what it was that Eliot needed from Dante and how he went about setting up a Dante who fit those needs, a "universal" poet who writes in a language close to the "universal Latin" of the late middle ages, a poet above the frays and decay of the
waste land, an “illusion of oracular authority,” to use Heaney’s words (9). Eliot’s Dante allowed him to escape from the local, the trivial, and the particular into “an absolute and purely delineated world of wisdom and beauty,” a repository of “images free from the rag-and-bone-shop reek of time and place” (9). As Heaney points out, Eliot’s “Little Gidding” emulates these supposed qualities of Dante’s writing, tending “to eschew the local, the intimate, the word which reeks of particular cultural attachments” (9). Eliot, then, envies and identifies with Dante’s classicism, certitude, coherence, and solid anchoring in tradition, turning him into “the figure of the poet as expresser of a universal myth that could unify the abundance of the inner world and the confusion of the outer” (14).

Heaney contrasts Eliot’s stately, austere Dante with Osip Mandelstam’s Dante, an experimental writer closer to Rimbaud than to Virgil, an “eager” and “approachable” fellow who, in Mandelstam’s words, “shakes up meaning and destroys the integrity of the image” (quoted in Heaney, “Envies” 15–16). While Eliot needed a Dante who would anchor and sustain him amid the instability and aridity of the modern waste land, Mandelstam needed a Dante who could help him liberate himself imaginatively from the constricting, suffocating didacticism of the Stalinist vision of art. Like Joyce, Mandelstam craved liberation from the confining political and artistic requirements of his culture; unlike Joyce, unfortunately, he could not flee. Naturally, however, his Dante is a figure who, in Heaney’s words, “wears no official badge, enforces no party line, does not write paraphrases of Aquinas or commentaries on the classical authors” (18).

Perhaps we can turn the tables on Heaney and ask the same questions about his own appropriation of Dante, comparing it to Joyce’s by focusing especially on the different ways in which each of these Irish writers constructs an “underworld” under the influence of the author of The Divine Comedy. Joyce’s method of appropriation and incorporation of other authors is most often ironic and oblique. Although, as Mary Reynolds has capably demonstrated, Joyce was drawn to the grandeur of Dante’s design, using it as one of the paradigms or shadow structures that underlie such books as Dubliners and Ulysses, generally his literary appropriation of Dante, seen especially in the kind of psychic underworld he creates in Ulysses, is not a translation or a veneration, but an ironic and parodic transfiguration. Joyce’s ghosts are almost always personal, almost always incoherent, often ironic, and always ambiguous. Where Heaney’s underworld is fundamentally Jungian and Modernist, setting up an imaginative refuge, a repository of useful information, a sounding board for the poet’s own thoughts and needs, Joyce’s underworld, especially as manifested in “Circe,” is more Freudian than Jungian, more postmodernist than Modernist, and as much Homeric as it is Dantesque. It is useful to recall that in the Odyssey, the voyage to Hades is not necessarily a journey down or underground to another world, but rather a voyage to a vague and ambiguous zone
somewhere very close to our own world, a vision more compatible in some ways with the ways in which memory and the dead remain always connected to the present world of the trivial and mundane in Joyce’s work: Bloom’s mother’s memory is attached to a potato, for example, while Stephen’s vision of his mother’s ghost is involuntarily provoked by a series of seemingly random and trivial events, rather than consciously summoned.

Thus, though Joyce may pattern his Dublin in part on Dante’s Divine Comedy, his intertextuality is always ironic, deliberately confused, a little warped. For example, the passage in Ulysses most often compared with Dante’s interviews with the dead in The Divine Comedy is Bloom’s vision of his grandfather Lipoti Virag. Mary Reynolds has called this “a pastiche of Dante’s Cacciaguida episode” from the Paradiso, but notes that this is mixed with “descriptive details from two cantos of the Inferno, the highly coloured episode of the Malebranche.” “The result,” Reynolds argues, “is a grotesque parody of a grandfather” (70). Bloom’s progenitor is a colorful but ridiculous figure, walking, when he first appears, “on gawky pink stilts” and “sausaged into several overcoats” (U-GP 15:2305–6). And what sort of wisdom does grandfather Virag bring back from the world of the dead? When he is not talking nonsense or leering at prostitutes or metamorphosing wildly from a man to a weasel to pig to parrot and so on, he speaks, as Dante’s and Heaney’s dead spirits do, in the imperative, advising Bloom, “Never put on you tomorrow what you can wear today” and telling him to “Stop twirling your thumbs and have a good old thunk. . . . Exercise your mnemotechnic” (U-GP 15:2383–85). While we are free to decide that this advice is useful to Bloom in some way—that he might indeed benefit from exercising his mnemotechnic—the appearance and decorum of the speaker are a far cry from the generally dignified and decorous ghosts of Station Island or Seeing Things. Similarly, when Paddy Dignam is briefly resurrected from the dead, he is “putrid,” “ghoul-eaten,” and “mutilated” (U-GP 15:1204–14). Stephen’s mother, May Goulding, is more of a figment of Stephen’s own neurotic imagination, a ghoul compounded of guilt, fear, and sorrow, than a Dantesque spirit from purgatory. She arises, “emaciated,” “her face worn and noseless, green with gravemould,” not in order to bring her son useful information or salvation but to berate him for not saying his prayers. “Get Dilly to make you that boiled rice every night after your brainwork,” she adds (U-GP 15:4202–3).

More elevated figures from the cultural memory do not fare any better in Joyce’s underworld; in the “Circe” episode, for example, Bloom and Stephen look into a mirror together and see reflected there the face of Shakespeare. Yet here again, Joyce opts for a fractured Danteism, a vision of Shakespeare “beardless . . . rigid in facial paralysis,” who speaks nonsense “with paralytic rage” (U-GP 15:3821–29). Specters from the Irish Nationalist past are similarly incapacitated, as we see when absurd representations of the Croppy Boy and Old Gummy Granny arise before Stephen near the end of the “Circe”
episode. These are not the weighty ghosts that Eliot's Dante would deliver, full of important information and advice to help the modern writer anchor himself in the world of the present after his return from the world of the dead; Joyce's ghosts in *Ulysses* seem more akin to the creations of Mandelstam's Dante: unstable, batlike souls with little coherence, more comic than tragic, creatures drawn more from the Freudian unconscious than from the depths of hell or the terraces of purgatory.

As Heaney's career has developed, so have his ghosts, the voices of the dead that he incorporates into his poetry. In the earlier verse up through the "bog poems," the dominant metaphor for memory is "digging" or archaeology, a stripping away of the layers of time to (literally) discover or uncover the buried dead and the significances they hold for modern Ireland. Often passive and powerless, like the bog people in such poems as "Bog Queen" and "The Grauballe Man" who rise from what Heaney has called the "memory bank" of the bog (quoted in Stallworthy 167), these awakened victims speak only haltingly, if at all, depending on the poet to interpret their experience, their significance, and, especially, their relevance to the political situation in Northern Ireland, as in "Punishment" or "Kinship." The landscape of Heaney's earlier work is a cache of cultural memory in the sense that it contains the dead themselves, ready to be exhumed, examined, and explained. In these earlier poems, the lessons the dead teach us are often inscribed on their buried bodies in the form of punishments—nooses, blindfolds, and the like—and depend on the voice of the poet for their articulation. Heaney's more recent poetry, however, relies increasingly on a more traditional, more formal method for managing the literary encounter with the dead—the *nekyia* or *katabasis*, a descent into the underworld, a summoning of the dead. The significance of what Heaney's dead have to tell us has not diminished—on the contrary, his spirits now speak more directly to the poet and the reader, and are fuller than ever of wisdom and advice about the proper role of the poet.

Heaney's turn toward Dante begins in *Field Work*, after he has moved away from the archaeological metaphors of the bog poems in *North*. Neil Corcoran has remarked that "the major poetic presence in *Field Work*, and in much of Heaney's subsequent work, is . . . Dante" (*Seamus* 129). Much has been made of Dante's influence (especially the *Purgatorio*) on "The Strand at Lough Beg" and "Station Island," and Heaney has written that he turned to Dante partly (as Mandelstam might have) for "the local intensity," the "vehemence," and the "personal realism" of Dante's writing; however, he is also attracted to Dante in a way that is closer to Eliot's reading, for he admires "the way in which Dante could place himself in an historical world yet submit that world to scrutiny from a perspective beyond history, the way he could accommodate the political and the transcendent" (18; my italics). In *Field Work* Heaney's allusions to *The Divine Comedy* tend to deploy Dante in a more violent and political manner than in his more recent verse: in "Leavings," for example, the
speaker imagines Dante's hell as the appropriate place for Thomas Cromwell, despoiler of tradition, breaker of statues ("Which circle does he tread, / scalding on cobbles, / each one a broken statue's head"); in "The Strand at Lough Beg" he appropriates Virgil's cleansing gesture at the beginning of the Purgatorio into an elegy for a cousin murdered in sectarian violence, and he gives us the first of his translations from classical nektyia in his "Ugolino," a short translation from the Inferno that again indirectly conjures the violence in Northern Ireland and images of hunger strikers. The tone in these poems is serious and stately, as befits their subjects—a far cry from Joyce's gibbering ghouls in Ulysses.

The most telling sign that Heaney was attracted to Eliot's manner of appropriating Dante by the time he wrote "Station Island" is his choice of Eliot's "Little Gidding" as a model for the final section of the poem. The Dantean overtones of "Station Island" have been thoroughly discussed; the point I wish to make here concerns the nature of the ghosts in this poem—the way they talk, the things they have to say. Some of these familiar ghosts are ordinary people—a tinker, a teacher, a missionary—while others are writers—Carleton, Kavanagh, and, of course, Joyce. This combination of ordinary folks and exalted predecessors in his craft reflects in part Heaney's perhaps unconscious ambivalence about his use of Dante; to some extent he wants to evoke the pungent, local tones that Mandelstam heard in Dante's Inferno and Purgatory, while on the other hand, he seeks coherent and useful answers to important questions he needs to ask about the direction of his art and its relation to matters Irish. In "Station Island" Heaney's underworld (or, more accurately, purgatory) is full of ghosts who deliver important advice, telling the poet what he needs to hear about his own art. Like Eliot, Heaney uses Dante as a model in this poem to help himself find coherence and stability, a link with a tradition that forms itself in the course of the poem, a lineage of writers who have found their own voices despite the various nets Ireland has thrown at them. In the already famous final section of the poem, Joyce advises the poet to "swim out on your own," to forget his anxieties about the use of English rather than Irish, the need for "infantile" pilgrimages, all the "dead fires" that now constitute the ashes of "that subject people stuff" (93). Heaney's evocation of Joyce's spectral presence here consciously echoes Dante through its overt allusions to Eliot's "Little Gidding"; in fact, as Lucy McDiarmid has noted in her thorough investigation of Joyce's presence in "Station Island," this final section of that poem was "originally published under the title 'A Familiar Ghost' in the Irish Times on Joyce's hundredth birthday" (131). In choosing Eliot as his link to Joyce, Heaney constructs a Joyce who, while perhaps seeming a bit peevish, bears the most serious, important, and potentially liberating advice for Heaney as a poet. While the difference in genre is to some extent the determining factor here, Joyce's terse and useful words for Heaney present a marked contrast to the indiscernible ramblings of the cuckolded Shake-
speare of Ulysses, who crow "'Tis the loud laugh bespeaks the vacant mind. . . . Iagogo! How my Oldfellow chokit his Thursdaymornun. Iagogogo!" (U-GP 15:3826–29). In this revealing series of apparitions of literary ancestors, Heaney chooses the more coherent, traditional model provided by Eliot (and, indirectly, by Eliot's appropriation of Dante) rather than the troubling and unstable Joycean paradigm, presumably because Heaney, like Eliot, requires an "illusion of oracular authority" to justify his own poetic needs and choices.

Heaney's volume Seeing Things announces itself as a nekyia, or descent to the underworld, by beginning with a translation of a passage from book 6 of the Aeneid, in which Aeneas learns of the golden bough that will provide access to the underworld, and ending with a translation from canto 3 of the Inferno, in which the flesh-and-blood poet journeys across the river Acheron in Charon's boat. Heaney thus sets his latest volume up as a book of memory, a summoning of the dead in which he calls forth numerous dead friends and relatives, most significantly his father. The collection announces itself with the Virgilian phrase,

the way down to Avernus is easy.
Day and night black Pluto's door stands open.
But to retrace your steps and get back to upper air,
This is the real task and the real undertaking. (Seeing 4)

The poet here seeks to strengthen his contact with his predecessors and his memories, both personal and literary, rather than return to the troubled upper world of present-day Ireland.

Heaney seems to be using the trope of the underworld as one way to follow Joyce's advice in "Station Island," to swim out into the watery world of memory (and Seeing Things is full of water, rivers, and boats), finding his subject matter primarily in his childhood memories, in the objects and activities of everyday life, and in his relationships with the dead that he remembers. The matter of Ireland can be deflected or mystified by this technique: for example, in one of the poems in the "Crossings" sequence, the speaker remembers "Those open-ended, canvas-covered trucks / Full of soldiers" that he used to see "year after year" in Ulster. "They still mean business in the here and now," he thinks, but the poem ends in an aestheticized infernal image of "a speeded-up / Meltdown of souls from the straw-flecked ice of hell" (80). In the last of the "Crossings" poems, the memory of a peace march in Northern Ireland is cast in terms of a "Scene from Dante, made more memorable / By one of his head-clearing similes"; the marchers, herded to their cars by police, resemble the shades on the bank of the Acheron in Hades, while their parked car "gave when we got in / Like Charon's boat under the faring poets" (90).

The title poem of the volume, "Seeing Things," represents the peace and coherence Heaney seems to find in the reassuring presence of Dante that hovers over the volume. The three-part poem begins with a boat ride to "Inish-
bofin on a Sunday morning" reminiscent of Dante's crossings in the *Inferno*, in which "our ferryman / Swayed for balance" as they sailed "evenly across / The deep, still, seeable-down-into water" (18). In the final section of the poem the speaker recalls his father, "his ghosthood immanent," after a farm accident involving a cart that "went over into a deep / Whirlpool, hoof, chains, shafts, cartwheels, barrel / And tackle, all tumbling off the world"; the disorder of the circumstance is resolved, however, by the epiphany it produces between father and son:

That afternoon
I saw him face to face, he came to me
With his damp footprints out of the river,
And there was nothing between us there
That might not still be happily ever after. (20)

The rivers of Dante's hell become the waters of memory in *Seeing Things*, a clear, "seeable-down-into" medium that enables meaning to be retrieved from the past, a past which might seem irredeemably muddied had Heaney adopted Joyce's (or Mandelstam's) more radical construction of Dante.

Heaney's allusions to Dante in *Station Island* and *Seeing Things* enable him to create a space where, like Mandelstam, he is able to contemplate the local, the everyday, and the personal in his own language and on his own terms. More important, however, is his appropriation of Dante as a means of continuing to "swim out on his own," a technique for distancing himself from the unstable upper world of Ireland, for giving a stateliness, meaning, and coherence to his experience, his memories and his poetry. Heaney's traditional, decorous translations and adaptations of Dante allow him to create the stability Eliot sought in Dante, rather than the experimental freedom Joyce and Mandelstam found in their Dantes. The descent into an underworld populated primarily with benign spirits, objects, and memories from his own personal and artistic past allows him to confer on himself, in Neil Corcoran's words, "a wily neutrality—alert, unsubmissive, refusing declaration but implying the election of new alignments" ("Heaney's" 45). Corcoran wrote this before *Seeing Things* was published but added presciently that Heaney's recent tendency toward "poetry in translation" heightens the move toward—for want of better words—the abstract or cosmopolitan or "universal" in his work, toward what Heaney called, in an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, his desire "to discover a sure, confident voice, born out of a particular history . . . that will be able to walk out of its colonial circumstances and be a universal voice" (13).

Neil Corcoran has suggested that Heaney's encounter with the shade of Joyce in *Station Island* is a response to his "potential embarrassment" at taking on the mantle of Catholic Nationalist poet, "visibly and publicly serving," Corcoran writes, "the position against which Joyce had uttered his 'non serviam' sixty years earlier" ("Heaney's" 42–43). Heaney's sense of having a re-
sponsibility as a spokesperson and yet wanting at times to evade that responsibility may explain his attraction both to Joyce as cultural icon and to the sort of Dantine voice and Dantine underworld that he describes Eliot being attracted to—a European, not insular, voice of universality, tradition, significance, and calm amid chaos—rather than Mandelstam's destabilizing Dante, a position we more readily associate with Joyce's writing.¹ We can see this concern reflected in many of Heaney's prose writings on place and literature: discussions of Kavanagh, Montague, Hardy, and John Crowe Ransom explore the tension between writers tied to the local, national, and colloquial versus those committed to the creation of a broader, more widely European or universal culture, which Heaney at one point labels "a kind of pseudo-past which can absorb the prescribed local present" ("Place" 47).

For Joyce, then, the underworld is always mixed up with the world of everyday objects, trivial events, and familiar places—a world no less confusing, chaotic, and ambiguous than our own. It perhaps contains no more than the garbled contents of our own experiences: memories that don't behave, that won't hold still or stand and deliver. In Heaney's recent verse, the underworld has become more and more of a place apart, a parallel world that serves, in some poems at least (particularly the translations that begin and end Seeing Things) as a sanctuary in which coherence, continuity, and tradition can be preserved. In an interview with Rand Brandes, Heaney describes the more abstract style of his recent verse as "like pseudo-translations from some unspecified middle European language" (18). For Heaney, crossing the river into the underworld is one way to escape into a world of relative peace and coherence, where the poet can "re-enter the swim, riding or quelling / The very currents memory is composed of" (Seeing 95).

Joyce, like Mandelstam, sought to escape what he saw as a stifling, authoritarian, paralyzed culture partly by constructing an art that ironizes, undercuts, and destabilizes tradition and thus liberates the artist and the reader; his appropriation of Dante as one source of inspiration for his psychic underworld is part of this larger strategy. Heaney, seeking like Eliot to construct a stable place to stand and speak from, has created a more coherent, classical Dantine underworld in his recent work in which "Running water never disappointed. / Crossing water always furthered something. / Stepping stones were stations of the soul." "It steadies me," Heaney writes, "to tell these things" (Seeing 86).

NOTE

1. In commenting on the manner in which Heaney positions himself between Joyce, Eliot, and Dante in the final section of Station Island in order to align himself with "Tradition with a big T," Lucy McDiarmid notes the poem's "determination not to be insular" and its consequent orientation "outward to a European literary tradi-
tion" (137). She argues, as I do above, that "to use Eliot with respect and admiration, as Heaney's poem does, is to get beyond provincial antagonisms to that larger Tradition which Eliot himself reverenced so much" (137–38).

WORKS CITED


