"Through the Wall": Heaney's 'Impure' Translation in "Ugolino" and *Sweeney Astray*

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to investigate Heaney's activity as a translator with particular reference to what the poet himself calls 'impure' translation, so as to show to what extent translation represents the first step towards assimilation of translated texts into his works, the first moment of a movement aimed at a fecund intertextual dialogue. As examples of 'impure' translation, Heaney explicitly mentions his version of the Ugolino episode from Dante's *Inferno*, and "to some extent" also *Sweeney Astray*, a version of the medieval Irish poem *Buile Suibhne*: this is the reason why attention is here focused on these two works. There is, however, another fundamental reason for selecting them: these translations are used together as pre-texts—as something existing before the text—in the poet's reworking of the Dantesque journey and the Sweeney legend in *Station Island*, where the *Divine Comedy* is literally translated/transferred to Ireland (Lough Derg, County Donegal), and they thus unequivocally testify to the indeed fertile osmosis between poetry and 'impure' translation in Heaney's works.

I would like to start this brief discussion of Heaney's activity as a translator by referring to that peculiar condition which was very aptly defined by Claudio Guillén as "latent multilingualism":

> The most evident multilingualism is that of writers who actually expressed themselves in more than one language ... But there is another multilingualism, latent, characteristic of societies, towns and whole countries, as well as of the poet, dramatist, and narrator, for whom the relationship with more than one language was the *humus* of his culture ... and the condition of his monolingual work. (Guillén 1985, 327–28; my translation)

This condition certainly plays an important role in Heaney's experience as a writer, and it seems to be the very ground in which also his activity as a translator is rooted. In some of his early poems, in fact, translation clearly responds to the bilingualism of Ireland, representing an attempt to bridge the gap with the Irish language. One thinks, for instance, of some poems from the collection *Wintering Out* in which translation works as an instrument of memory, alluding to the Irish language not only to give voice to the 'divided

mind' of an Irish artist, but also to create the material conditions for communication between the two 'souls' of Irish culture.[1]

Later on, however, Heaney's use of translation moves beyond this originary condition of 'multilingualism' and cultural displacement, and seems to be more and more at the service of the poet's widening horizons. From Baudelaire to Dante, from Juan de la Cruz to Virgil, the remarkable choice of offering a text in translation in every poetry collection since *North* actually testifies to an inborn openness to dialogue, nourished by a keen awareness of the presence of *otherness* within one's own cultural identity. The presence of translated texts in his works could thus be seen as a reflection, in the creative work, of the personal intellectual quest of a poet who does not hesitate to look for models and 'examples' crossing linguistic frontiers within and beyond his country.

Before looking more closely at passages from his translations, it is important to point out what according to Heaney the 'translator's task' should be—that is, what is the view of translation which lies beneath the act of linguistic transposition itself. In this sense it proves extremely useful here to refer to Heaney's own comments from an interview published in the poet's fiftieth birthday issue of the literary review *Salmagundi*, where he distinguishes between 'pure' and 'impure' translation according to the translator's motives. On the one hand, you have translation born from the 'pure' will to attempt to reproduce the beauty of a work of art so that it can be shared also by those who cannot understand the original language—an attempt of course always bound to end in frustration, but which must nonetheless be carried out without discouragement. On the other hand, you have translation compared to the eavesdropping "through the wall" on a conversation taking place in "another room in a motel", imperfectly reproduced on the other side of the wall—that is, translation as 'taking over', appropriation, desire to carry the foreign work of art across the linguistic frontier by adapting it to the new context. However 'impure' in its basic motives, this kind of translation has its own dignity and its own truthfulness—its own *"verité"*, the poet says—and this is the kind of translation practised by Heaney himself in most cases:

> You are listening through the wall of the original language as to a conversation in another room in a motel. Dully, you can hear something that is really interesting. And you say: 'God, I wish that was in this room.' So you forage, you blunder through the wall. You go needily after something ... I had that motive, I suppose, in relation to the Ugolino section that I did from Dante. It was a very famous purple passage, but it also happened to have an oblique applicability (in its ferocity of emotion and in its narrative about a divided city) to the northern Irish situation. So one foraged unfairly

into Italian and ripped it untimely from its place. To some extent that was also true of *Sweeney Astray*. (Heaney 1989, 12)

Heaney explicitly mentions, as examples of impure translation, his version of the Ugolino episode from Dante's Inferno, placed at the end of *Field Work*, and "to some extent" also *Sweeney Astray*, a version of the medieval Irish poem *Buile Suibhne*. His vision of translation as 'taking over' is particularly evident in "Ugolino": actually the translation of this passage seems to be deeply influenced by the poet's reading of the episode—featuring the themes of cruelty and betrayal in a city torn between opposed factions—in the light of Irish history. In this sense it is useful here to remember that "Ugolino" seems to be placed in an Irish context by immediately following the poem "In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge", devoted to an Irish Catholic poet and soldier, killed in 1917 while fighting in the British army, and it is just the final verse of this poem, "Though all of you consort now underground", which introduces the descent underground, into Hell, implicit in the poet's encounter with Ugolino.[2]

Heaney's version starts from the closing lines of Canto XXXII:

> Noi eravam partiti già da ello
> ch'io vidi due ghiacciati in una buca,
> sì che l'un capo all'altro era cappello;
> e come 'l pan per fame si manduca,
> così 'l sovran li denti a l'altro pose
> là 've 'l cervel s'aggiunge con la nuca;
> non altrimenti Tidëo si rose
> le tempie a Menalippo per disdegno,
> che quei faceva il teschio e l'altre cose.
> 'O tu che mostri per sì bestial segno
> odio sovra colui che tu ti mangi,
> dimmi 'l perché' diss'io, 'per tal convegno
> che se tu a ragione di lui ti piangi,
> sappiendo chi voi siete e la sua pecca,
> nel mondo suso ancora io te ne cangi,
> se quella con ch'io parlo non si secca'.
> (*Inferno* XXXII, 124–39) (Dante 1991, 969–71)

> We had already left him. I walked the ice
> And saw two soldered in a frozen hole
> On top of other, one's skull capping the other's,
> Gnawing at him where the neck and head
> Are grafted to the sweet fruit of the brain,
> Like a famine victim at a loaf of bread.
> So the berserk Tydeus gnashed and fed

> Upon the severed head of Menalippus
> As if it were some spattered carnal melon.
> 'You,' I shouted, 'you on top, what hate
> Makes you so ravenous and insatiable?
> What keeps you so monstrously at rut?
> Is there any story I can tell
> For you, in the world above, against him?
> If my toungue by then's not withered in my troath
> I will report the truth and clear your name.'
> (Heaney 1979, 61)

Heaney substitutes a simplified rhyme scheme (axa, bxb) for the more demanding interlocking rhyme (aba, bcb, cdc...) of the Dantesque tercet—a choice probably explained by the paucity of rhymes in the English language, to which also earlier translators of Dante had already drawn attention, but which also indicates Heaney's decision not to adhere strictly to Dante's versification. As far as the Italian hendecasyllable is concerned, Heaney seems not to be interested in keeping metrical regularity throughout the passage; "nevertheless", as the scholar Anthony Oldcorn among the commentators of this passage remarks, "the ghost of the iambic pentameter is for the most part respected" (Oldcorn 1989, 264; my translation).

Particularly interesting is Heaney's reworking of lines 127–129. There is no attempt at a line-to-line correspondence: the first line of the tercet, "e come il pan per fame si manduca"—literally "and as bread for hunger is eaten"—is postponed and translated as "Like a famine victim at a loaf of bread", thus closing the sentence; line 128 is reduced to the clause "Gnawing at him", which does not exactly correspond to the meaning of Dante's "così 'l sovran li denti a l'altro pose", in which Ugolino simply "set his teeth" upon his enemy; finally, line 129, "là 've 'l cervel s'aggiunge con la nuca", literally "where the brain joins the nape", is translated as "where the neck and head/are grafted to the sweet fruit of the brain". This last choice seems to be aimed at emphasizing the 'purple' atmosphere of the passage with the expansion of the Italian "cervel" (brain) into "the sweet fruit of the brain"—an image which returns later in Heaney's version of the tercet 130–132, when the poet *ex-novo* adds the simile "as if it were some spattered carnal melon" referring to "the severed head of Menalippus", omitting the last line of the tercet, which could have been translated "as he was doing with the skull and the other parts". The most interesting choice, however, is the use of the word "famine" in the translation of line 127: the poet seems here to surrender to the false parallelism between the Italian *fame* (hunger) and the English *famine*—perhaps *via* Dorothy L. Sayers's translation of the same line, "And as starved men tear bread" (Dante 1960, 274), in which the shift from the abstract concept of hunger to the concrete image of people starving had already taken place. By this choice, the image of the Great Famine is

grafted to the text, with the double effect of pulling the Dantesque episode into an Irish orbit and of casting the gloomy atmosphere of Hell upon a very dark period in Irish history. Heaney also brilliantly succeeds here in enriching the text—deprived of the rhyme "manduca" (eats)/"nuca" (nape)—with an interplay of rhyme and consonance in the sequence head-brain-bread, extremely effective in conveying on the phonological level the transformation of the head of Ugolino's enemy—Archbishop Roger—into bread.

Also worth mentioning, in this passage, is Heaney's decision to transform Dante's closing sentence—where the poet enquires, through indirect question, about Ugolino's hate and offers his voice as instrument of redress—into three direct questions, in which also the reporting verb ("diss'io", "said I") is changed into the stronger "I shouted"—possibly aimed at expressing that "ferocity of emotion" which Heaney had found appealing in Dante's passage. The last of these questions ("Is there any story I can tell/ For you, in the world above, against him?") is extremely interesting, because by using Dante's lines 135–138 simply as a pretext, it actually gives voice to Heaney's own 'preoccupations' about the poet's responsibility, which will find fuller expression in the Dantesque sequence of encounters in the central part of *Station Island*. One thinks here, for instance, of the decisive sections of that sequence, where the poet's self-questioning attitude and his anxiety about his role are dramatized through the encounter with ghosts of the victims of violence in Northern Ireland. Particularly interesting as regards the thematic relevance to "Ugolino" is section IX, beginning with the monologue of a dead hunger-striker—a "voice from blight and hunger" (Heaney 1984a, 84)—strikingly similar in tone to Heaney's version of the Ugolino episode.

For further evidence of Heaney's 'impure' motives in translation some more passages from Canto XXXIII may be considered. The first one is the translation of lines 22–27:

> Breve pertugio dentro de la Muda
> la qual per me ha 'l titol de la fame
> e che conviene ancor ch'altrui si chiuda,
>   m'avea mostrato per lo suo forame
> più lune già, quand'io feci 'l mal sonno
> che del futuro mi squarciò 'l velame.
> (*Inferno* XXXIII, 22–27) (Dante 1991, 984)

> Others will pine as I pined in that jail
> Which is called Hunger after me, and watch
> as I watched through a narrow hole
> Moon after moon, bright and somnambulant,
> Pass overhead, until that night I dreamt
> The bad dream and my future's veil was rent.

(Heaney 1979, 62)

Once again, Heaney's lines provide a rather free reworking of the Italian text: extremely interesting is Heaney's decision to give rhythm to the lines through a sequence of repetitions ("pine as I pined"; "watch/as I watched"; "Moon after moon"; "dreamt/ The bad dream") which have no equivalent in the Italian text and seem to be designed to stress the sense of time inexorably moving towards tragedy—that sense of "expectation and agonizing impatience" (Mandelstam 1991, 427) of which Osip Mandelstam, a strong influence on Heaney's reception of the Italian poet, had written commenting on this passage in his *Conversation about Dante*. Also interesting, among the lexical choices, is the shift to the word Hunger itself of the capital letter used by Dante in the word "Muda"—the tower where Ugolino was imprisoned, which was, in the Italian poet's words, "entitled hunger after him": with reference to what Heaney calls, in the above mentioned interview, the "oblique applicability" of this passage to the Northern Irish situation, his emphasis on the word Hunger, combined with the choice of the noun "jail", and with the verb "to pine" in the simple future, almost sounds like a prophecy about the "future" hunger-strikers in the British prisons. It is perhaps important to remark that instead of the literal "hunger", Dorothy L. Sayers had here preferred the word 'Famine' (Dante 1960, 278), between inverted commas and with the capital letter, as a name for the tower, and that this is a possible source for Heaney's exploitation of the same word earlier in his translation.

Let's now move on to Heaney's rendering of lines 37–42:

> Quando fui desto innanzi la dimane,
> pianger senti' fra'l sonno i miei figliuoli
> ch'eran meco, e dimandar del pane.
> Ben se' crudel, se tu già non ti duoli
> pensando che ciò che 'l mio cor s'annunziava;
> e se non piangi, di che pianger suoli?
> (*Inferno* XXXIII, 37–42) (Dante 1991, 986–87)

> When I awoke before the dawn, my head
> Swam with cries of my sons who slept in tears
> Beside me there, crying out for bread.
> (If your sympathy has not already started
> At all that my heart was foresuffering
> And if you are not crying, you are hardhearted.)
> (Heaney 1979, 62)

Heaney enriches the text by substituting the colloquial metaphor "my head/ Swam with cries of my sons who slept in tears", for Dante's plain "pianger

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senti' fra'l sonno i miei figliuoli" ("I heard my sons weeping in sleep"), and reproposes, in a tragically different context, the key rhyme head-bread, exploited earlier in the text. Most astonishing, however, is the effect of the Eliotian "foresuffering", to express Ugolino's sad premonition in the translation of line 41: as in the previous reference to Mandelstam, we perceive, here, how Heaney's rendering is filtered through other readings and to what extent the poet's consciousness of this network of references permeates his translation. A further instance of Heaney's appropriation of this passage can be seen in his choice to put in brackets the three lines corresponding to the tercet 40–42, and the decision to omit the direct question "e se non piangi, di che pianger suoli?" ("if thou for this weep not/at what then art thou wont to weep?", in Dorothy L. Sayers' more literal translation of this line) closing the sentence in a tone of accusation, or at least of insinuation, which betrays, again, the poet's anxiety about his role.

Finally worth mentioning is Heaney's typically Irish sense of place applied to the Dantesque passage in lines 79–80 ("Ahi Pisa, vituperio de le genti/del bel paese dove 'l sì suona") brilliantly commented on by Anthony Oldcorn in the already quoted essay: with his "Pisa! Pisa, your sounds are like a hiss/Sizzling in our country's grassy language", the Irish poet transforms Dante's reference to the language, where Italy is identified as the country in which "sì" (yes) sounds, into a tiny *dinnseanchas* relating the very hissing sound of the toponym Pisa to the treacherous nature of the town, alluding to the phrase "snake-in-the-grass".

In his translation of the Ugolino episode, Heaney thus repeatedly betrays his 'impure' motives, his will to carry the text over to his side of the wall, and in this sense this translation really looks ahead to *Station Island*, the work in which Dante's journey is literally 'translated' to Ireland—to Lough Derg, County Donegal—and the poet, having assimilated the model, finally writes his personal *Divine Comedy*. A comparison between "Ugolino", placed in 1979 at the end of *Field Work*, and "The Crossing", closing *Seeing Things* twelve years later, would prove extremely useful in revealing to what extent the poet has at this stage overcome his need of appropriation: it is only when he has finally freed himself from any 'impure' intention through such a daring act of creative misreading of the *Divine Comedy* as *Station Island*, that he proves his ability in what he would consider a 'pure' translation. As an example I will here quote the first four tercets of "The Crossing", corresponding to lines 82–93 of the Canto:

> Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave
> un vecchio bianco per antico pelo,
> gridando: "Guai a voi, anime prave!"
>   Non isperate mai veder lo cielo!
> I' vegno per menarvi all'altra riva,
> nelle tenebre eterne, in caldo e in gelo.

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> E tu, che se' costì anima viva,
> partiti da cotesti, che son morti".
> Ma poi che vide ch'io non mi partiva,
>   disse: "Per altra via, per altri porti
> verrai a piaggia, non qui, per passare:
> più lieve legno convien che ti porti".
> (*Inferno* III, 82–93) (Dante 1991, 90–92)

> And there in a boat that came heading towards us
> Was an old man, his hair snow-white with age,
> Raging and bawling, 'Woe to you, wicked spirits!

> O never hope to see the heavenly skies!
> I come to bring you to the other shore,
> To eternal darkness, to the fire and ice.

> And you there, you, the living soul, separate
> Yourself from these others who are dead.'
> But when he saw that I did not stand aside

> He said, 'By another way, by other harbours
> You shall reach a different shore and pass over.
> A lighter boat must be your carrier.'
> (Heaney 1991, 111)

The most outstanding feature is perhaps Heaney's attempt to create a line-to-line equivalence between original and translation, successfully carried out, with a few exceptions, throughout the passage. Heaney even tries, this time, to reproduce the hendecasyllable—actually alternating eleven and ten-syllable lines—and does not miss the chance, in the quoted excerpt, to reproduce the rhyme "cielo/gelo" with the equivalent "skies" and "ice". Although several lexical choices do not perfectly correspond to the original ("bianco" becomes in Heaney's version "snow-white"; "gridando", which literally means "shouting", becomes "raging and bawling") these choices do not seem to be conditioned by the wish to project new meanings onto the text, but rather by metrical considerations and definitely tend in the direction of explicitation and explanation: see, for instance, Heaney's "boat" for Dante's "legno" (literally "wood"). Extremely interesting, indeed, as a sign of Heaney's interest in translating as literally and faithfully as possible is his preference throughout the passage for words cognate to the Italian original, whenever this is possible, without incurring unintentional/deliberate effects of the *fame/famine* kind: see "to pass over"/"to pass" for the Italian "passare" (ll. 92 and 127); and "eternal" for "eterne" (l. 87) in the quoted excerpt; see also, later in the passage, "livid" for "livida" (l. 98); "cruel" for "crude" (l.

102), to which it is etymologically related; and finally "brown" for "bruna" (1. 118), which could have been been translated with the English "dark". However obvious these choices might seem, they testify to Heaney's completely different attitude from that displayed in "Ugolino".

I will now briefly touch on *Sweeney Astray*, Heaney's version of the medieval Irish poem *Buile Suibhne*. Once again the poet is moved to translation not so much by a 'pure' search for linguistic and philological accuracy, but by the desire to "pull [the poem] out of Irish"—a movement of appropriation rather than approximation. "Even though I can read Irish", Heaney declares in the already quoted interview with Randy Brandes,

> ... the *Buile Suibhne* wasn't singing in me as a great structure that I previously knew and loved in Irish. In fact, it was in order to get to know it that I wanted to pull it out of Irish. And of course I felt I had the right to it. It wasn't that original linguistic love-right, but it was a cultural, political, historical in-placeness, a 'we are all in there together' feeling. (Heaney 1989, 12)

Heaney's introduction to *Sweeney Astray* acknowledges O'Keeffe's 1913 bilingual edition as his guide to the interpretation of the line-by-line meaning of the poem: any distance from this model is therefore not for the sake of a deeper adherence to the original Irish—Heaney's knowledge of the Irish language was perhaps not enough to carry out such work—but mainly involves his interpretation of the poem. So I would venture, with no sufficient knowledge of the Irish language myself for a close reading of the translation as a whole, a few considerations resulting from the comparison of O'Keeffe's and Heaney's versions, using Heaney's re-elaboration of the translated text in the "Sweeney Redivivus" section of *Station Island* as a convenient 'litmus paper' to illustrate the continuity between Heaney's poetry and his 'impure' translation.

In translating *Buile Suibhne* Heaney's attention is definitely focused on the weave metamorphosis-madness-exile as mutually interdependent aspects. This can be seen even from his version of the title: *Buile Suibhne*, literally "Sweeney's Madness/Frenzy", had been translated by O'Keeffe as *The Frenzy of Suibhne*; with his *Sweeney Astray*, instead, Heaney alludes to Sweeney's wandering as both a physical and a mental condition. In the translation of the key section of the poem describing the cleric's curse on Sweeney, Heaney's reworking of O'Keeffe's literal translation seems to be essentially aimed at a careful use of poetic devices designed to highlight this aspect:

> 'My curse on Suibhne!
> Great is his guilt against me,
> his smooth, vigorous dart

> he thrust through my holy bell.
>
> That bell which thou hast wounded
> will send thee among branches,
> so thou shalt be one with the birds —
> the bell of saints before saints.
> (O'Keeffe 1913, 13)
>
> My curse fall on Sweeney
> for his great offence.
> His smooth spear profaned
> my bell's holiness,
>
> cracked bell hoaring grace
> since the first saint rang it —
> it will curse you to the trees,
> bird-brain among the branches.
> (Heaney 1984b, 7)

In O'Keeffe's translation the curse is expressed as being sent "among the branches" (an image of exile) and "to be one with the birds" (the effect of metamorphosis). Heaney, instead, creates an extremely effective alliterative interplay combining the three key elements bird-brain-branches in one line, foregrounding on the phonological level the connection metamorphosis(bird)-madness(brain)-exile(branches). A similar device is used in the closing lines of the section, where Heaney creates a new alliterative play with the consonants *m* and *s* revolving around the highly suggestive word "spasm":

> Even as in an instant went
> the spear-shaft on high,
> mayst thou go, O Suibhne
> in madness without respite!
> (O'Keeffe 1913, 13)
>
> Just as the spear-shaft broke
> and sprang in the air
> may the mad spasms
> strike you, Sweeney, forever.
> (Heaney 1984b, 8)

Heaney's poetic ability is displayed also in his treatment of Sweeney's metamorphosis in the following section:

... whereupon turbulence (?), and darkness, and fury, and giddiness, and frenzy, and flight, unsteadiness, restlessness, and unquiet filled him, likewise disgust with every place in which he used to be and desire for every place he had not reached. His fingers were palsied, his feet trembled, his heart beat quick, his senses were overcome, his sight was destorted, his weapons fell naked from his hands, so that through Ronan's curse he went, like any bird of the air, in madness and imbecillity. (O'Keeffe 1913, 15)

His brain convulsed,
his mind split open.
Vertigo, hysteria, lurchings
and launchings came over him,
he staggered and flapped desperately,
he was revolted by the thought of known places
and dreamed strange migrations.
His fingers stiffened,
his feet scuffled and flurried,
his heart was startled,
his senses were mesmerized,
his sight was bent,
the weapons fell from his hands
and he levitated in a frantic and cumbersome motion
like a bird of the air.
And Ronan's curse was fulfilled.
(Heaney 1984b, 9)

The most evident distance between the original and O'Keeffe's version on the one hand, and Heaney's on the other, is the poet's choice to write in verse what was originally in prose. The blank verse chosen, instead of the rhymed quatrain used elsewhere in the poem, gives the passage an excited pace in which images almost expressionistically follow one another, whereas the lexis alludes to a precise diagnosis of schizophrenia: "his brain convulsed", "his mind split open" (a likely allusion to the very etymology of the word schizophrenia), "vertigo", "hysteria", are all terms referring to psycho-pathology which represent a decisive interpretative choice.[3]

Given the context of deliberate reworking of O'Keeffe's translation in which such lexical choices occur, it is certainly not by chance that at the beginning of the "Sweeney Redivivus" poem, "The First Flight", the reader's attention should be captured by the foregrounding of the verb "split open" (isolated in the fifth line) together with the word "spasm" (twice at the end of the line) encountered in two pivotal moments of Heaney's translation. These choices cannot but testify to the osmosis between Heaney's poetry and his activity as translator:

It was more sleepwalk than spasm
yet that was a time when times
were also in spasm—

the ties and the knots running through us
split open
down the lines of the grain.
(Heaney 1984a, 102)

Here, in the poem, where the two words are associated within a few lines, the very etymology of the word *spasm* (from the Greek *spasmós*, to tear) seems to suggest a possible cause-effect nexus between "spasm" and the subsequent "split open" (between a tension referred to the "times", to history, and the break): in this sense the poem works—as Heaney himself suggested in his note to the "Sweeney Redivivus" section of *Station* Island—as 'gloss' on the translation, as a further explicitation and interpretation of what is only hinted at in the translation.

Worth mentioning, before concluding, is Heaney's use of the word "pilgrim" towards the end of his translation: "Because Sweeney was a pilgrim" is in fact the way Heaney begins the third last quatrain of the penultimate section of *Sweeney Astray*. By this choice of the word "pilgrim", which is justified neither by the original Irish nor by O'Keeffe's version, Heaney highlights his reading of Sweeney's flight as a purgatorial journey, paving the way for *Station Island* where the pilgrim's visit to St. Patrick's Purgatory, Sweeney's flight and the reworking of the Dantesque journey, will be held together as allegories of the poet's quest.

Never a mere linguistic exercise, Heaney's 'impure' translation indeed represents a tribute to what Benjamin called, in his essay on the 'translator's task', the "survival" (Benjamin 1969, 58; my translation) of the original in a new form of poetry, and also represents the first step towards assimilation of the received text into his works, the first moment of what proves to be, in the end, a movement aimed at a fecund intertextual dialogue. In this sense, the use of translation of passages from *The Divine Comedy* and from *Buile Suibhne* as pretexts—as something existing before the text—in *Station Island* is extremely significant: no longer satisfied with eavesdropping "through the wall", trying to take over the original onto his side through an impure act of translation, Heaney finally meets the challenge of rewriting these texts in a personal way.

NOTES

[1] In "The Backward Look", a poem from the collection *Wintering Out* (1972), the English word "snipe" is brought back to its Irish variants (*mionnain aeir, gabhairin oidhche, gabhairin reo*) and translated back into English (*little goat of the evening, of the night, of the frost*) so as to keep memory of the Irish within the English language. In some of the famous *dinnseanchas* poems, in the same collection, translation gives new life to the Irish toponyms made incomprehensible by the English transliteration—as in the well-known poem "Anahorish", anglicized transcription of *anach fior uisce*, "place of clear water", as the poet *translates* in the first line of the poem.

[2] For a reading of "Ugolino" in the wider context of the political meaning of Dante's influence on Seamus Heaney, see De Petris (1987, 366–76).

[3] Also interesting is the whole sentence added by Heaney, "he levitated in a frantic cumbersome notion", which casts a new light upon Sweeney's flight—perhaps a borrowing from O'Keeffe, who briefly refers to the mystic phenomenon of levitation in his introduction (O'Keeffe 1913, xxxiv-xxxv). This allusion to Sweeney's flight in mystic terms as hypothetical ecstasy, an experience common to both the saint and the artist, seems indeed consistent with Heaney's view of Sweeney as a "figure of the artist", declared in the introduction to *Sweeney Astray* (Heaney 1984b, ii).

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