

Heaney's Journey into the Self: Towards a Dantean Light

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Abstract: This article focuses on the influence that Dante had on Seamus Heaney's artistic creation, demonstrating that the Irish author's poetic endeavour is perceived as a Dantean journey. Like the medieval master, Heaney goes through an *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, attempting to disengage himself from political and cultural pressures. In his collection *North*, Heaney displays infernal imagery, such as tortured bodies, the underworld, and a general darkness of tones. The bodies found in the bogland of Aarhus, in Denmark, become the perfect metaphor to depict the endless violence and hostilities in Northern Ireland. Heaney's collection *Station Island* is more purgatorial in tone. In a Dantean manner, the poet encounters shades from his past, in order to display the affliction of the people around him, and to affirm his commitment. Through these interactions between self and other, he is able to rise out of a sense of cultural attachment, and to create an art based on the recovery of his own individual past. Finally, *Seeing Things* deals less with history and more with the individual. It is characterised by a more transcendental poetry and by a great luminosity, similar to the atmosphere of Dante's *Paradiso*. The Dantean journey allows Heaney to leave behind the sense of entrapment that he felt as a committed Northern Irish writer, and like his predecessor, he can interpret his experience in the joy of his verse, thus placing poetry at the summit of things.

Keywords: Dante, Seamus Heaney, influence, Troubles, journey, liberation.