Chiara Sciarrino

TRANSLATING ITALY

NOTES ON IRISH POETS READING ITALIAN POETRY

www.aracneeditrice.it
info@aracneeditrice.it

via Raffaele Garofalo, 133 A/B
00173 Roma
(06) 93781065

ISBN 88–548–0208–5

I edizione: luglio 2005
I ristampa aggiornata: gennaio 2010

C O N T E N T S

Foreword

> How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.
> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
>
> I will provide with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret between privacies?
> Brian Friel, *Translations* [1]

The arrival in Baile Beag, Brian Friel's most favoured setting for his plays, of a detachment of Royal Engineers from the British Army, with the precise aim to convert the Gaelic place names into their English equivalents, would certainly no longer scare people from Donegal. The recently made decision of the Government of Ireland to translate back into Irish signposts and maps appears as an optimistic step towards a de-anglicisation and towards the recognition of the value of a better policy as far as the status and the use of the Irish language is concerned.

Spoken as mother tongue only by 10 per cent of the population in the Gaeltacht areas of Donegal, Galway, Mayo, Kerry, Cork and Waterford, Gaelic, the official language of Ireland, is taught in secondary schools in the Republic and in some areas of Northern Ireland.

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[1] B. FRIEL, *Translations, Plays*, Faber & Faber, London, Boston 1996. The play was first presented by the theatre company of Field Day, on 23 September 1980, in Derry. Friel acknowledged in the first programme for the play, set in 1833, his debt to George Steiner's *After Babel*.

As proclaimed in the 1937 Constitution, English, the second official language, is spoken by the vast majority of the Irish population. It is referred to as 'Anglo-Irish', 'Hiberno-English' and as 'Irish English', let alone the term 'Ulster Scots', which indicates the variety introduced by the descendants of Scots around 1600.

'Anglo-Irish' is employed to refer to the language introduced by the English settlers in Ireland during the seventeenth-century. It is hence applied in its social context and obviously has political and religious implications. It is now the most widely term for literature written in English by Irish writers.

'Hiberno-English' is usually applied to stress the presence of certain features of Gaelic in a variety of English mainly utilised by educated speakers whose mother tongue was Irish. More diffused in the Gaeltachts and in rural areas, it then implies the notion of 'Irishness' [2].

The problem as to a proper use of either word is often overcome by the adoption for a more generic term, i.e. 'Irish English'. As Hickey reports in his *Source Book for Irish English* (2002):

> the attempts by some authors such as Henry (1977) and Todd (1992) to introduce and establish a clear difference in usage between 'Hiberno-English' and 'Anglo-Irish' have not resulted in general acceptance among the scholars in the field, not least because these two authors define the terms in diametrically opposing fashions. [3]

* *

[2] Another approach to the question of terminology is diachronic. Raymond Hickey thus distinguishes among a 'cover term' (Irish English), the Latinate form for English (Hiberno-English) and the 'older form' (Anglo-Irish). 'Hiberno-English,' writes Hickey, 'enjoyed brief popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, especially since the pioneering works of Alan Bliss gave currency to the label. It has been used by many authors since, notably Filppula and Kallen.' See his *Source Book for Irish English*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, Philadelphia 2002, pp. 1-2. Terence Dolan more properly defines Hiberno-English as 'characterised by two main features: the use of the English vocabulary, which is obsolete, obsolescent or dialectical, and influence from the Irish language in its lexicon, syntax, idiom and verbal system.' T. DOLAN, 'Translating Irelands: the English Language in the Irish Context', *The Languages of Ireland*, ed. by M. CRONIN, C. Ó CUILLEANÁIN, Four Courts Press, Dublin 2003, pp. 78-9.

[3] *Ibidem.*

Brian Friel's issue about the socio-cultural position that language detains in the evolution of a community – reflected in the concerns of and the role played by Owen, the schoolmaster's second son, the translator and mediator between the two languages who has recently returned from Dublin – somehow refers back to a well-known passage from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen Dedalus's incapacity to recognize those words which sounded so 'different', as his, though originating from a need for change, expresses Joyce's intention to remain faithful to the language of his country.

By acknowledging the ambiguity and the lack of cultural references in those terms so familiar to the Dean of Studies of UCD, Stephen affirms the necessity to hold on to a specific linguistic heritage in order to assert his own identity. In this respect, Joyce follows the tradition of those writers who have privileged, in one way or another, the use of Hiberno-English and who have also felt obliged to sometimes draw attention to and explain Anglo-Irish words and phrases which they employed throughout their work [4].

The alternative to this behaviour, as the contemporary poet Tom Paulin points out in 'A New Look at the Language Question', is to:

> restrict [his] audience at each particular 'dialectical' moment. A writer who employs a word like 'geg' [mock] or 'gulder' ['shout'] or Kavanagh's lovely 'gobshite' [nonsense], will create a form of closed, secret communication with readers who come from the same region. This will express something very near to a familiar relationship […]These words act as a kind of secret sign and serve to exclude the outside world. [5]

Besides, the marginal status of a language which 'lives a kind of romantic, unfettered existence – no dictionary accommodates it, no academy regulates it, no common legislative body speaks it, and no

[4] This, for example, is what Maria Edgeworth suggested in *Castle Rackrent*: 'Many of the terms and idiomatic phrases with which it abounds could not be intelligible to the English reader without further explanation' M. EDGEWORTH, *Castle Rackrent*, Oxford University Press, London, Boston 1964, p. 98.

[5] ID., 'A New Look at the Language Question', *Writing to the Moment. Selected Critical Essays 1980-1996*, Faber & Faber, London 1996, p. 65. In a way, Paulin's version of Montale's 'L'anguilla' does so.

national newspaper guards it' [6], has never discouraged Irish writers from employing it.

Whenever they have been able to, Irish writers have consciously deviated from the norms of Standard English to give new strength to their work, to refer to their cultural background and to address a specific audience.

Although Paulin's claim now looks outdated – since then a large number of dictionaries of Irish English has been published – his conclusion could still well describe the current cultural and linguistic situation: 'One of the results of this enormous cultural impoverishment is a living but fragmented speech, untold numbers of homeless words, and an uncertain or a derelict prose.' [7]

The Irish use of English has indeed changed considerably in many parts of the country, most notably in the speech of Dubliners and of young people. This is due, as Markku Filppula argued [8], to the declining numbers of speakers able to draw on words, expressions etc., from the Irish language in their daily use of English.

* * *

> Today Dublin, tomorrow Paris or Rome – / And the blur of cities/ Is one City, simultaneous,/ Eternal, from which we are exiled forever.
>
> Harry Clifton

> Translation as a cultural metaphor is a sign of the degree to which in contemporary Ireland inherited definitions of national life […] fail to account for much individual and collective experience.
>
> Terence Brown

During the last few years, literary translation has become a relevant part of some Irish writers' activity. Such poets as Ciaran Carson, Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Eamon

[6] T. PAULIN, *Ireland and the English Songs and Poems*, Bloodaxe Books, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1984, p. 191.

[7] ID., 'A New Look at the Language Question', *cit.*, p. 66.

[8] See M. FILPPULA, *The Grammar of Irish English. Language in Hibernian Style*, Routledge, London, New York 1999.

Grennan, Desmond O'Grady, among others, sometimes seemed to have been more concerned about translating than about writing. Translation has offered itself as an occasion for literary experimentation, re-writing as well as for learning and discussing about other worlds.

Each translated work has become a personal piece of interpretation, at times even deprived of any pretence of objectivity, accuracy or elegance; an activity where the translator's preoccupations recreate, introduce and are well illustrated by the topics of the source text; where the very political and religious present the translator lives in is questioned.

The analysis of the translating activity, undertaken by some Irish and Northern Ireland writers, is inevitably linked to the definition of the concepts of identity, history and of literary and political tradition, as the translator sees in it a means for understanding and eluding, interpreting and denying the local and 'national' borders as well as a way of re-defining their literary work.

While offering opportunities for elaborating new artistic forms, the Italian places from the translated texts of Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Montale, Leopardi, Petrarca etc. also inevitably allude to, *create* a 'liminal space', a space of a textual frontier.

Representations of an alterity which is possessed, manipulated and sometimes misunderstood by a translator who does not necessarily want to convey a message, such translations nevertheless make us think about the roles they play in the redefinition of the notions of national, cultural, political, religious identity.

Always steering back to the Irish locale and to its language, such 'other' places of the host texts contribute to an easier fruition of Italian culture in Ireland and to the building up of images about Italy. Some of the Irish poets I have selected – Desmond O'Grady, Pearse Hutchinson, Derek Mahon, among others – have translated a considerable amount of poems by Italian writers and included them in anthologies/collections of translations that have significantly modified the landscape of the Irish publishing market of the last few years.

Translators as cultural mediators, some of the Irish poets in question, have lived in foreign countries for a long time. They have been engaged in and affected by travelling. They have sometimes adjusted their own language in order to produce a form of 'cosmopolitan English' to suit international readers. They have given

new currency to themes dear to Italian writers and common to the Irish cultural history: war, emigration, exile.

For those who have shared Joyce's famous line about writing and leaving – 'the shortest way to Tara is via Holyhead' – the return to the target language has sometimes taken place in a changed and/or changing context which has inevitably shaped their own perception of language itself.

Its joining the European Union in 1973, followed by the economic growth of the nineteen seventies, the growing number of foreign people now living in the country and the effects of globalisation have turned Irish society into a multicultural and multilingual space. Such a cross-cultural, intercultural, transcultural background allows Irish writers to go beyond physical boundaries even when staying at home. It forces them to look at other written worlds/words which can call their consciousness and their identities into play. It is then that the leap from the local to the universal is accomplished, that step that is made up of universal values even though the images they are expressed by, are local.

Questioning the role and the position of the Irish writer who distances from or moves within the European or international context proves somehow inevitable as well as undertaking an investigation of the forms of this interaction. Besides, if such translators as Denis Devlin, Brian Coffey, Samuel Beckett represented only a small community of émigrés in the early nineties, in more recent years, the presence of whole anthologies of translations – which stand out against collections of poems by the same authors in bookshelves – no longer surprises.

* *

As Michael Cronin reports in one of his books on the topic[9], the number of translations accomplished in Ireland during the last thirty years or so, has noticeably increased thanks to a specific translation policy brought about by the Arts Council, supported by the Irish Translators' Association and later dealt with by ILE (Ireland, Literature Exchange), an agency founded in 1994 with the aim to encourage translations into other languages.

[9] M. CRONIN, *Translating Ireland. Translation, Languages, Cultures*, Cork University Press, Cork 1996, p. 170.

It must also be remembered that as European Capital of Culture (2005), the city of Cork has seen a whole series of unprecedented events that have involved translators and encouraged the carrying out and publication of new translations.

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Relevant questions about translation theories specifically applied to the Irish context seem inevitable. Yet, this being too broad a topic to be discussed here, a socio-cultural perspective as background to a linguistic analysis entailing the notion of 'cultural identity' (Venuti, 1994) has been privileged.

The analysis of the meaning and the purpose of each translated text, in its variety – approximations, rewritings (Lefevere, 1992), imitations (Lowell, 1961), interpretations (Hewson and Martin, 1991), compensations (Hatim and Mason, 1990), transferences (Derrida, 1985) – has then tried to never lose sight of the social, historical and religious issues at stake in the various discourses involved.

Convinced that answers to theoretical questions can sometimes come on the way and aware that the range of examples provided is only a part of a growing number of translations – by well-known poets as Seamus Heaney and Ciaran Carson, and of poems by Mario Luzi, Maria Attanasio, Alda Merini, to name some Italian contemporary writers, I have conceived the present study as an occasion and starting point for further investigation on the innumerable ways in which Italian poets have influenced, with their themes, discussions, forms and dialects, Irish poets and translators.

Chapter I

Synge's Hiberno-English Version of *Rime in morte di Madonna Laura*

> How would it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?
>
> Synge, *Riders to the Sea*

> O come mai verrebbe alla deriva? O non sono nove giorni che lo cerchiamo, giorno per giorno, con questo vento che soffia già da un pezzo dal sud e dall'ovest?
>
> Synge, *Riders to the Sea*, trans. by James Joyce

The translation which Joyce completed in 1909 with a former student of his, Nicolò Vidacovich, of John Millington Synge's one-act play *Riders to the Sea* [1] well introduces the much debated topic of the translatability of a work of poetry.

Although the attempt to make it into acceptable Italian proves somehow successful, the translation obviously fails – and Joyce was aware of this – to suggest all the nuances of a kind of writing whose vocabulary, verbal structures, idioms and syntax are recognisably those of Hiberno-English.

The poetry of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) was somehow adjusted to the specific linguistic features which distinguish Synge's writing.

While faithfully reproducing concerns of the nineteenth century Dublin playwright (1871-1909), the posthumously published

[1] J. M. SYNGE, *Riders to the sea*, Elkin Mathews, London 1905; Italian translation by J. JOYCE and N. VIDACOVICH, Unicopli, Milano 1988. In March 1903 Synge and Joyce met at an hotel in Paris. Even though Joyce first criticized Synge's disregard of Aristotelian rules, he accepted to translate the play.

translation [2] of some sonnets of the Tuscan poet epitomises the desire to combine themes, poetic styles and forms provided by both the native Gaelic language tradition and European cultures.

Synge turned to the Tuscan poet only towards the end of his life. By then, he had travelled in Europe [3] and often manifested, both practically in his stage writing and theoretically in some essays, his views about local and international issues of literary and linguistic nature.

It was in language that Synge came to see a valid means for the renewal not only of his writing but also of his contemporaries' work in Ireland.

Synge had started writing poems and articles while in Paris – where he spent five years – and there he had become more and more interested in the Irish political and cultural activities promoted by the 'Association Irlandaise' founded by Maud Gonne.

It was there that he met Yeats, on 21 December 1896. Already an active exponent of the Gaelic Revival, Yeats encouraged him to go back to Ireland and live in the Aran Islands so that he would be able to 'express a life that has never found expression'. This Synge did in May 1898.

By then, he had also benefited from his reading of some French writers as Anatole France and Guy de Maupassant, both of whom certainly inspired a passionate love for the spoken language.

Though Synge was already familiar with the dialect of his native County Wicklow, where he spent his boyhood, it was only when he learnt Irish in the *Gaeltacht* – the evidence is to be found in his notebooks and letters – that he developed the idea of making English more similar to the Gaelic spoken there. The result was, as Yeats wrote, a language that was able to see and to 'escape self-expression', that 'allowed' him 'to see all that he did from without […] to judge the images of his mind as if they had been created by some other mind.' [4]

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[2] ID., *Some Sonnets from "Laura in Death" after the Italian of Francesco Petrarch*, Dolmen Press, Dublin 1971. The edition of the translations I refer to is the 1992 Everyman edition, J. M. Synge, *Plays, Poems and Prose*, ed. by A. PRICE, Everyman, London 1992.

3 Synge left Ireland to go and study music in Germany. From there he moved to France where he settled in 1895.

[4] Quoted from D. KIBERD, *Synge and the Irish Language*, Gill & Macmillan, London 1993, p. 203.

During the same years, back home, attempts to make a somewhat similar use of the vernacular were being made by representatives of the Gaelic League. The everyday speech of common people, it was argued, had to be referred to as a starting point from which to create a literary style which could give account of and translate the cultural identity of the Irish.

With the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893, Douglas Hyde (1862-1949) started off a campaign for the revival of Irish which was also supported by the publication of some editions of religious and love songs as well as folk tales which he had taken down from Irish speakers.

Such editions were usually accompanied by translations into the Anglo-Irish dialect, designed for students who had difficulty with the language, and often offering literal English renderings of the Irish originals. Paradoxically, the spreading of Irish literature, which was the author's main aim, was to give way to an interest not for the source text but for the language of the target text.

A response to both what appeared to be Hyde's unrealistic desire of survival of the Irish language and to Yeats' call for a language which could still preserve 'an indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style', was in a way what Synge produced from those years onwards.

Influenced by the theories about the translator's role expressed by Hyde in the introduction to his *Religious Songs of Connacht* and to his *Love Songs of Connacht* [5] and by his allegedly faithful rendition of a source text, Synge proved that he could render people's thoughts and words in a truly representative way [6].

By expressing such concerns, Synge was merely manifesting a general feeling of apprehension about the future of the Irish language whose general decrease in use ironically, in his view, would have

[5] D. HYDE, *Abhráin diadha chúige Connacht: or Religious Songs of Connacht*, T. Fisher Unwin, London; M.H.Gill and Son Ltd, Dublin 1906; *Abhráin grádh chúige Connacht or Love songs of Connacht*, T. Fisher Unwin, London; M.H.Gill and Son Ltd, Dublin 1893[1], 1905.

[6] Whether his language is some kind of invented picturesque stage-Irish or an accurate, faithful rendering of the speech of rural Ireland is still a debatable topic. It is true, indeed, that Synge often refined the language to an extent in which he would have noble characters speak a common vernacular or rather, a heightened dramatic language. Sometimes, he would simply translate from the Irish rather than reproducing the talk of the peasantry, that is he would use English words in Irish syntax.

facilitated the writing of something which would be 'perfectly Irish in essence' [7].

* *

Despite his growing interest in Gaelic culture and for what he called 'the Kingdom of Ireland' [8] – inevitably associated with the loss of faith imposed on him by the Ascendancy tradition his family belonged to – Synge maintained a vivid interest in European literary traditions.

He demonstrated this interest not only by undertaking a physical voyage but also, once that voyage was accomplished, by bringing, through translation, that otherness home [9].

There were various other reasons for Synge's decision to translate Petrarch's sonnets about Laura's death. First of all, though some English translations of the Italian poet's work had already been done, especially by English Renaissance Petrarchists, there was the awareness that some sonnets had been neglected by both critics and translators and hence should be translated.

As Ann Saddlemyer notes in her introduction to the *Collected Letters* [10], Synge had bought a 1740 edition of Petrarch's poetry while studying at the Collegio Romano in Rome [11] and had continued reading his poetry in Paris, where he attended some literature classes.

It was only ten years later, between 1906 and 1907, that Synge started his translations, which he worked on until his death in 1909.

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[7] ID., 'The linguistic atmosphere of Ireland has become definitely English enough, for the first time, to allow work to be done in English that is perfectly Irish in essence.' SYNGE, *Collected Works. Prose*, ed. by A. PRICE, Oxford University Press, London 1966 p. 384.

[8] 'Soon after I relinquished the Kingdom of God I began to take a real interest in the kingdom of Ireland. Everything Irish became precious and had a charm that was neither quite human nor divine, rather perhaps as if I had fallen in love with a goddess.' SYNGE, *The Autobiography of J. M. Synge*, ed. by A. PRICE, The Dolmen Press, Dublin; Oxford University Press, London 1965.

[9] He also translated, among others, some poems by Villon.

[10] A. SADDLEMYER, ed. by, *The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1983-1984, p. 7.

[11] Synge spent approximately three months in Rome, from 5 February to 30 April 1896.

This endeavour was probably also helped by his knowledge of French which must have been better than his Italian [12].

Synge's love for the activity of translating, intended as both a literary exercise and a new form of expression, was certainly also aided by his bilingualism. The fact that he could well speak both English – be it the Hiberno-English of common people and the Anglo-Irish used by his Protestant Family – and Irish, made his role as interpreter of both cultures easier.

This is why, as Declan Kiberd suggests, Synge's rendering of Petrarch's poetry could be defined as 'an act of supreme translation', in the sense that being already in-between two cultures, Synge did know quite well how to switch to another and transpose the source text into his own.

However, what Synge seemed to have deemed most important, as he himself made clear in the *Preface* to his *Poems and Translations*, was something more than the faithful rendering of the source text: 'The translations are sometimes free, and sometimes almost literal, according as seemed most fitting with the form of language I have used.' [13]

Resorting to the use of folk speech certainly offered itself as a deliberate counterpart to the use of the vernacular Petrarch made in his *Canzoniere* and as an alternative to the language some of his contemporaries wrote in [14].

The sonnets in question, taken from the second part of what was originally conceived as *De Rerum Vulgarium Fragmentia*, despite the suggestion of an idea of fragmentation implied in the title itself and in the use of term 'rime sparse', constitute a carefully conceived series of poems of varying subject-matter covering a one-year span [15].

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[12] Synge, as he writes in a letter to his fiancée, is able to read, understand and would be willing to teach Italian: 'In the evenings now I am reading Petrarch's sonnets, with Miss Tobin's translations. I think I'll teach you Italian too so that you may be able to read the wonderful love-poetry of these Italian poets, Dante, and Petrarch and one or two others.' SYNGE, *Synge's Collected Letters*, ed. by A. SADDLEMEYER, vol. I, Part Five, 1906, 'Letter to Molly Algood', 27 December 1906, p. 267.

[13] Preface to 'Poems and Translations' in J. M. SYNGE, *Plays, Poems and Prose*, Dent, London 1992, pp. 222-3.

[14] In a way similar to Petrarch using both Latin and the vernacular.

[15] From the day Petrarch met Laura, 6 April 1327, to the day of her death, 6 April 1348. In 1347, Petrarch had also decided to go to Italy.

The section starts off with the assumption that the author has already given in the previous section, 'Rime in vita di Madonna Laura', an account of the dreams prompted by his being away from Laura and predicting her death. The author – and the reader –is aware that Laura, being a human being, will die. He, on the contrary, has somehow to live on to be able to use the gift of poetry to tell about his love for a woman who at one point is imbued with almost angel-like qualities.

Descriptions of the beauty of nature and of ordinary life give way to meditations upon the psychological strain the author suffers because of the loss of his beloved. The themes of Laura's beauty and the act of contemplating her, strengthened by the emphasis on memory as a way of expressing the poet's voice, are then linked to more general reflections upon the theme of death [16].

It is no wonder then that such themes somehow attracted the relatively young Synge, who already knew he would die of cancer and was unconsciously looking for a reflection in someone else's poetry of his meditation upon the meaning of love, life and poetry itself.

Indeed, as recounted by various critics, Synge was a rather solitary person. Micheál Mac Liammóir, for instance, portrays Synge as a mysterious figure, quiet and at the same time suddenly dynamic; 'an enigmatic outsider somehow out of step with his time', whose work was characterised by 'a fusion of harsh merriment and fateful melancholy' [17]. We also know that when Synge first read Petrarch, he was suffering from love pains as he had spent the previous summer trying to convince Cherry Matheson to marry him [18] in the same way Petrarch was well aware of the impossibility of being with Laura who was destined to marry Ugo de Sade.

It was inevitable then that such themes as the love-dialogue between the artist and his soul and the quest for some kind of truth, which make Laura a constant source of inspiration but also a mere literary pretext, were dear to Synge. It is also likely that the decision to give Laura some angelic qualities towards the end of the section and the equally valid decision to affirm, from the very beginning, the

[16] Petrarch was already forty-five at the time. He was then at a mature age for his time.

[17] See A. SMITH, 'Introduction', *Ibid.*, vii.

[18] Synge had previously been refused by other women also because of his atheism.

value of a kind of poetry which distances itself from the sacred message of *The Divine Comedy*, were probably of great interest to the Dublin playwright.

Like Petrarch, who at one point in his life began to question the truth advocated by Christians and repeatedly turned to the subject of an eternal life as suggested by Christianity, Synge, well before attending Trinity College, renounced religion. As the son of an Ascendancy family, part of the Protestant middle and upper class, he inevitably had to come to terms with the primarily Catholic country he was living in.

In Synge's autobiographical writings, such an experience is thus recorded: 'Soon afterwards I turned my attention to works of Christian evidence, reading them at first with pleasure, soon with doubt, and at last in some cases with derision. [19]

It is indeed the ambivalence implicit in the account and description of what is presented as the object of 'folle disio' – be it Laura or Lauro, the writing itself – that provides Synge with interesting suggestions on how to deal in a new way with such general themes as the common dichotomy atheism/faith or life/death.

As the final message of Petrarch's *Trionfi* makes clear, the world has lost all connection with Dante's *Paradise* and now seems to share with the 'Kingdom of Ireland' Synge once referred to, also the ultimate questioning of the value of narration itself: in a place where the sentiment of being alive only for 'a short while' and the idea of a life intended as the result of 'some frenzy of the earth' are all-pervasive, Synge made Petrarch's definition of poetry as the 'object of poetry itself' very much his own [20].

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[19] SYNGE, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

[20] The various references to *La Divina Commedia* in sonnet 34 from the *Canzoniere* make it clear that Petrarch hoped that poetry could offer an alternative to the teleological mysticism proposed by Dante.

> He made word and phrase dance to a very strange rhythm, which will always tell his plays have created their own tradition.
>
> Yeats

> Those speeches […] as he recited them, almost chanting, certainly sounded like incantations woven out of magic words.
>
> Stanislaus Joyce

The general assessment about the section 'Rime in morte di Madonna Laura' is that it is much richer and more varied than the first one. This is achieved through a simple, essential and rhythmic style, whose lexis is voluntarily precise and elaborate.

A way of suggesting that musicality of a different kind, which both Yeats and Joyce were aware of, is provided by sonnet CCXCII, 'Gli occhi di ch'io parlai si caldamente' which in Synge's version bears the title 'He ceases to speak of her graces and her virtues which are no more'.

Synge, who disregarded the subdivision into lines, the rhyme scheme and the meter of the original, presents the poem in the following way [21]:

The eyes I would be talking of so warmly, *and the* arms, and the hands, and the feet, and the face, that *are after calling* me away from myself *and making* me a lonesome man among all people;
The hair that was of shining gold, and brightness of the smile that *was the like of* an angel's *surely*, and was making a paradise of the earth, are turned to a little dust that knows nothing at all.
And yet I *myself* am living; it is for this I am making a complaint, to be left without the light I had such a great love for, in good fortune *and bad***,** and this will be the end of my songs of love, *for the vein where I had cleverness is dried up*, and everything I have is turned to complaint only.

[21] SYNGE, op. cit., p. 240. Sonnet CCXCII: 'Gli occhi di ch'io parlai sí caldamente,/ et le braccia, et le mani, e i piedi, e 'l viso,/ che m'avean sí da me stesso diviso,/ et fatto singular da l'altra gente;/ le crespe chiome d'òr puro lucente,/ e 'l lampeggiar de l'angelico riso/ che solean fare in terra un paradiso,/ poca polvere son, che nulla sente./ Et io pur vivo; onde mi doglio e sdegno,/ rimaso senza 'l lume ch'amai tanto,/ in gran fortuna, e 'n disarmato legno./ Or sia qui fine al mio amoroso canto: secca è la vena de l'usato ingegno,/ et la cetera mia rivolta in pianto.' F. PETRARCA, *Canzoniere*, Garzanti, Milano 2004.

Some of the linguistic devices [the italics are mine] Synge makes use of and which can also be found in the small passage quoted above from *Riders to the Sea* as well as throughout his work, are present here:

(1) the Hiberno-English perfect to express the past participle;
(2) the use of 'and' ;
(3) the use of the adverbial form 'surely' as an emphatic form;
(4) the term 'the like of';

(1) There are two tenses in English to which there is no corresponding tense in the Irish native language: the perfect and the pluperfect [22]. The present perfect tense is formed by the word-order "present tense of 'be' + after + the gerund". This construction indicates that something has taken place only a short time while or immediately before the time one is speaking. It is the direct translation of the Irish idiom 'iar' or 'a n-diaigh', but examples of it have also been found, as Wright reports in *The English Dialect Dictionary*, in Suffolk, Cheshire and Inverness. Of this construction, the writer George Moore in his *Vale* wrote that it is a 'richer phrase, faintly different' from the other one, certainly something that can only be detected by native speakers.

The word group 'after + the gerund' forms an adjective equivalent modifying the preceding noun. This usage is more often found when the noun is preceded by 'there be' or 'here be' or 'have'. It is also used to denote the present action.

This feature also recurs in

– sonnet CCC: 'What are a grudge I am bearing the heavens that *are after taking* her' ('Quanta ne porto al ciel, che chiude et serra', v. 5);

* *

[22] To express the perfect tense the simple past tense is also sometimes used while to express the pluperfect the simple past is used.

> The Irish have an inveterate habit of repeating the same words, phrases, clauses, or sentences in rapid succession… in some cases it conveys an animated flavour akin to the exclamatory construction.
>
> Taniguchi

> Quacky Quested from Limerick that owned the boat *and* he cushed them off with flinging iron bolts at them.
>
> S. O'Faolain

(2) In Irish English 'and' is often redundantly used, especially after expletives or swearing words. The conjunction 'and' also reproduces the more commonly used Irish equivalent 'agus' and when used with certain verbs or verbal forms or with certain nouns, it has the function of much more than a mere copula. 'And' is also used in the phrase 'and the way' which is a literal translation of 'agus an slee', meaning 'since' or 'because'.

(a) 'And' also stands between the suspended phrase or clause and the pronoun so that it creates the so-called case of 'anacoluthia' which consists in beginning with one grammatical construction and then changing to a different one, so that the first half of the statement remains unfinished, the last half being connected with it not grammatically but only logically' as in:

– sonnet CCLXXIII: 'Let you seek heaven when there is nothing left pleasing on the earth, *and* it a poor thing if a great beauty' ('Cerchiamo 'l ciel, se qui nulla ne piace;/ ché mal per noi quella beltà si vide', lines 12-3);

– sonnet CCLXXVIII: 'My thoughts are going after her, *and* it is that way my soul would follow her, lightly, and airily, and happily, *and* I would be rid of all my great troubles.' ('Ché, come i miei pensier dietro a lei vanno,/ cosí leve, expedita, et lieta l'alma/ la segua, et io sia fuor di tanto affanno', lines 9-11);

(b) The word 'and' can also be used to introduce an adverbial clause and with no finite verb as in the last example and in:

– sonnet CCLXXIX: 'thinking of love, writing my songs, *and* herself that heaven shows me […] *and* hear the way that she feels' [the subject being 'I'] ('Là 'v'io seggia d'amor pensoso, et scriva,/ lei

che 'l ciel ne mostrò, terra n'asconde,/ veggio, et odo, et intendo ch'ancor viva,/ Di sí lontano, a' sospir miei risponde.// Deh, perché inanzi 'l tempo ti consume?/ -mi dice con pietate - a che pur versi/ degli occhi tristi un doloroso fiume?', lines 5-11);

– sonnet CCCX: '*and* the sweet ladies, with their grace and comeliness, are the like of a desert to me, *and* the wild beasts astray in it' ('e 'n belle donne honeste atti soavi/ sono un deserto, et fere aspre et selvagge.', lines 13-4);

– sonnet CCCXXXVIII: 'since you, Death, have crushed the first seed of goodness in the whole world, *and with it gone* what place will we find a second? ('ché svelt'ài di vertute il chiaro germe:/ spento il primo valor, qual fia 'l secondo?', lines 7-8);

– sonnet CCCXLVI: '*and* they in great wonder, saying one to the other ('dicean tra lor', v. 6);

– sonnet CCCXXXVIII 'The world didn't know her the time she was in it, but I myself knew her - *and* I *left* now to be weeping in this place; and the heavens knew her' ('Non la conobbe il mondo mentre l'ebbe;/ conobbil'io, ch'a pianger qui rimasi,/ e 'l ciel, che del mio pianto or si fa bello.', lines 12-4);

(c) It often appears in the following sequence 'and + pronoun + ing-form' as in:

– sonnet CCCXV: 'My flowery and green age was passing away, *and* I *feeling* a chill in the fires' ('Tutta la mia fiorita e verde etade/ passava; e 'ntepidir sentìa già 'l foco', lines 1-2)

– sonnet CCCXXI: 'Is this the nest in which my phoenix put her feathers of gold and purple, my phoenix that did hold me under her wing, *and* she *drawing* out sweet words and sighs from me?' ('È questo 'l nido, in che la mia fenice/ mise l'aurate e purpuree penne?/ che sotto le sue ali il mio cor tenne, e parole e sospiri anco ne elice?', lines 1-4);

– sonnet CCCXXXIII: '*and* she *living* and dead, and now I have made her with my songs so that the whole world may know her, and give her the love that is her due.' ('sol di lei ragionando viva e morta,/ anzi pur viva, et or fatta immortale,/ a ciò che 'l mondo la conosca e ame', lines 9-11);

– sonnet CCCXXXVIII: 'The air and the earth and seas would have a good right to be crying out – *and* they *pitying* the race of men that is left without herself' ('Pianger l'aere e la terra e 'l mar

devrebbe/ l'uman legnaggio, che senz'ella è quasi/ senza fior prato, o senza gemma anello', lines 9-11);

(d) Probably due to the their limited knowledge of English, the Irish peasants tended to employ the same words, especially the word 'and' as in:

– sonnet CCCX: 'The south wind is coming back, bringing the fine season, *and* the flowers, *and* the grass' ('Zefiro torna, e 'l bel tempo rimena,/e i fiori e l'erbe, sua dolce famiglia', lines 1-2); There is a cheerful look on the meadows, *and* peace in the sky *and* the sun is well pleased ('Ridono i prati, e 'l cielo si rasserena', v. 5); '*and* the air *and* the waters *and* the earth herself are full of love, *and* every beast is turning back looking for its mate' ('l'aria, e l'acqua, e la terra è d'amor piena;/ ogni animal d'amar si riconsiglia.', lines 7-8);

– sonnet CCCXXXVIII: 'It's you have left Love without eyes or arms to him, you've left liveliness stripped, *and* beauty without a shade to her, *and* all courtesy in chains, *and* honesty thrown down into a hole.' ('Lasciato ài, Morte, senza sole il mondo/ oscuro e freddo, Amor cieco e inerme,/ leggiadria ignuda, le bellezze inferme,/ me sconsolato, et a me grave pondo.', lines1-4);

* *

(3) The same function is given by Synge to a direct translation from Gaelic, i.e. 'surely'. We can find an example of this in the translation of sonnet CCLXXII: 'and the days to come will be the same *surely*.' ('e le cose presenti, e le passate/ Mi dànno Guerra, e le future anchora', lines 3-4).

* *

(4) The use of 'the like of' occasionally assumes the function of an adjective, qualifying or modifying a substantive before it; in this respect it is considered as an equivalent of a simple adjective 'like'. This practice derives from the Irish language as well as the adverbial use of the phrase. On the other hand, the occurrence of the phrase – as Jiro Taniguchi exposes in his detailed grammar of Irish English – intended as a noun, does not specifically come from Irish.

The use of this phrase is quite frequent in Synge's version of Petrarch's poems.

It recurs again in:

– sonnet CCLXXIII: 'the *like of her*, would be destroying your peace' ('ché mal per noi quella beltà si vide,/ se viva e morta ne devea tôr pace', lines 13-14);

– sonnet CCCX: 'and the sweet ladies, with their grace and comeliness, are *the like of* a desert to me' ('e 'n belle donne oneste atti soavi/ Sono un deserto, et fere aspre et selvagge', lines 13-14);

– sonnet CCCXLVI: '*The like of herself* hasn't risen up these long years from the common world.' ('Che luce è questa, e qual nova beltate?/ - dicean tra lor - perch'abito sí adorno/ dal mondo errante a quest'alto soggiorno/ non salì mai in tutta questa etate', lines 5-8);

* *

Other recurrent linguistic features which appear in the translation of the sonnets are:

(5) the use of the sentence construction 'it is' or the relevant interrogative 'what it is' or 'what'. This – together with the use of 'and'– is often regarded as part of the general habit the Irish have of adding words, phrases, clauses in extra-position as a kind of afterthought after the subject and predicate have been expressed. Though this linguistic phenomenon is not limited to Irish English, it is considered as a peculiarity of it. We find references in the following:

– sonnet CCLXXII: 'so that if I wasn't taking pity on my own self, it's long ago I'd have given up my life.' ('veggio fortuna in porto, e stanco omai/ Il mio nocchier, e rotte àrbore e sarte,/ E i lumi bei, che mirar soglio spenti', lines 12-4);

– sonnet CCLXXIII: '*What it is* you're thinking? […] For *what is it* you're turning back […] For *what is it* you're throwing sticks on the fire' ('Che fai? Che pensi? Che pur dietro guardi? […]/ Anima sconsolata, che pur vai// Giugnendo legne al foco ove tu ardi?', v. 1, v. 3-4); 'But *what is* delaying me is the proper thing to lose me utterly […]/ And what a sweet death I might have died this three years to-day […] it is that way my soul would follow her' (Ciò che s'indugia è proprio per mio danno,/ per far me stesso a me più grave salma./Oh, che bel morir era, oggi, è terzo anno!', lines 12-4);

– sonnet CCC: '*What* a grudge I am bearing the earth […] *What* a grudge I am bearing the heavens […]*What* a grudge I am bearing the blessed saints that have got her […] and *what* a grudge I

am bearing against death' (Quanta invidia ti porto, avara terra […] Quanta ne porto al ciel, che chiude et serra […] Quanta invidia a quell'anime che 'n sorte […] Quant'a la dispietata e dura Morte', v. 1, v. 5, v. 9, v. 12);

– sonnet CCCX: 'And *what* a coming to me is great sighing and trouble' ('Ma per me, lasso!', v. 9); 'And *it is* this way I am that' ('Et cantar augelletti, e fiorir piagge', v. 12);

– sonnet CCCXXXIII: 'that *it is* tired out I am with being alive' ('ch'i' son già di viver lasso', v. 5); '*It is* of her only I do be thinking' ('Sol di lei ragionando', v. 9);

– sonnet CCCXXXVIII: 'Ah Death, *it is* you that have left the world cold and shady, with no sun over it. *It's* you have left Love without eyes […] I am making lamentation alone, though *it isn't* myself only' ('Lasciato ài, Morte, senza sole il mondo/ oscuro e freddo, Amor cieco et inerme […]/ Dogliom'io sol, né sol ho da dolerme', lines 1-2, v. 6);

– sonnet CCCXLVI: '*It's* for *that* I'm lifting up all my thoughts' ('Ond'io voglie e pensier' tutti al ciel ergo', v. 13);

* *

> In a manner of speakin', sir, only *let* you see the arses of the guns.
>
> S. O'Casey

(6) the imperative formed with 'let'. Apart from the imperative being the expanded form of a verb, there is another kind of imperative in Irish English which consists of 'let', often used as an auxiliary and the second person. It can be either positive imperative with expanded form of a verb and negative imperative with simple form of a verb as in:

– sonnet CCLXXIII: '*Let you not be* giving new life every day to your own destruction […] *Let you seek* heaven when there is nothing left pleasing on the earth' ('Non rinnovellar quel che n'ancide;/ non seguir più penser vago, fallace,/ ma saldo e certo, ch'a buon fin ne guide', lines 9- 11);

– sonnet CCCXXXIII: '*Let you go* down […] and then *let you call out* […] *Let you say* to her' ('Ite rime dolenti […]/ Ivi chiamate […] Ditele', v. 1, v. 3);

* *

It was me found her, sir.
L. O'Flaherty

(7) the omission of the relative 'that' and 'who', to introduce a subordinate or relative clause. In literary English 'that' is never or seldom absent. This practice is common in Irish English, in which a relative is often suppressed where it could not be in standard English. We have examples of this in:

– sonnet CCCXXXIII: 'sorrowful rhymes to the hard rock is covering my dear treasure' ('Ite, rime dolente, al duro sasso/ Che 'l mio caro tesoro in terra asconde', lines 1-2);

– sonnet CCCXXXVIII: 'though it isn't myself only has a cause to be crying out' ('Dogliom'io sol, né sol ho da dolerme', v.6);

* *

Are you fretting now maybe because he *does be* in there (pointing to the study) half the night at his books.
J. Joyce

(8) the use of 'do be'. In Irish English 'do' or 'did' are placed before 'be+ing-form'. This expresses the idea of habit, that is 'to do habitually' 'to be used to'. This is a direct translation of an Irish idiom. The following examples have been found:

– sonnet CCLXXIX: 'That's where I *do be stretched* out thinking of love' ('Là v'io seggia d'amor pensoso, e scriva', v. 5);

– sonnet CCCXXI: 'turning back all times to the place I *do be making* much of for her sake only' ('Talché pien di duol sempre al loco torno,/ che per te consecrato honoro e colo', lines 10-1).

* * *

The translated sonnets provide a rich range of other features used in Hiberno-English:

(9) the use of 'the way' [23] in place of 'how' (deriving from the Irish 'amhlaidh' > 'thus', 'so', 'how', 'in a manner') or of the conjunction 'so that' introducing a subordinate adverbial clause [24] as in sonnet CCCXV: 'Then my sweet enemy was making a start, little by little, to give over her great wariness, *the way* she was wringing a sweet thing out of my sharp sorrow' (' Già incominciava a prender securtade/ la mia cara nemica a poco a poco/ de' suoi sospetti, e rivolgeva in gioco/ mie pene acerbe sua dolce onestade', lines 5-8);

(10) The suppression of the personal pronoun before the reflexive pronoun. In ordinary English, it seems to be less common now than it used to be and it occurs more frequently in dialectal speech than in standard speech. In Irish English, the frequency of occurrences of this practice is still the highest of all dialects.

The use of reflexive pronouns with or without the suppression of personal pronouns occurs in:

– sonnet CCCXXXIII: 'may she be there to meet me, *herself* in the heavens' ('Ella è nel cielo, a sé mi tiri e chiame', v. 14); sonnet CCCXXXVIII: 'but *I myself* knew her' ('Conobbil'io', v. 13);

– sonnet CCCXLVI: 'And *herself*, well pleased with the heavens […] and turning her head back to see if *myself* was coming after her.' ('Ella, contenta aver cangiato albergo […] Et parte ad or ad or si volge a tergo', v. 9, v. 11).

By defining the suppression of the personal pronoun as idiomatic, Taniguchi attributes a specific Irish use to it. He also distinguishes among the uses of 'himself', 'herself' and 'itself'. While 'himself' and 'herself' 'often stand for the master of the house and the mistress' [25], 'itself' is often given the meaning of 'even'. The reason for this is the use of the Irish word 'fein' which means both 'even' and 'itself'. In translating this word, the word 'even' was often avoided and substituted by the better known 'itself'.

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[23] The word 'way' is sometimes used to mean 'by this time' such as in the following example from Gerald Griffin's *Collegians*: 'The horse is ready this way.'

[24] Taniguchi reports that the use of this phrase is also common among 'both educated and uncultured, some among the illiterate only. In the United States this phrase is apparently in universal circulation, a great number of instances being met with in literary works.' He quotes various interesting examples both from older English (Marlowe) and American English (Hemingway) too. TANIGUCHI, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

(11) the presence of complicated sentence structures, i.e. word-order inversions. The noun is consequently separated from its modifiers. We can find:

* the inversion of the adjective which goes after the noun as in sonnet CCCXLVI: 'The first day she passed up and down through the heavens, *gentle* and *simple* were left standing' ('Li angeli eletti, e l'anime beate,/ cittadine del cielo, il primo giorno', lines 1-2);

* the inversion of the verb with the constructions 'it is…' and starting by 'and' in sonnet CCLXXII: 'it's long ago *I'd have given* up my life' ('Se non ch'i ho di me stesso pietate,/ I' sarei già di questi pensier fòra.', lines 7-8); and in sonnet CCLXXVIII: 'And what a sweet death I *might have died* this three years to-day' ('Oh, che bel morir era, oggi, è terzo anno!', v. 14)[26].

(12) The Irish often insert a parenthetic clause or sentence between two elements of a sentence, which is occasionally lengthy enough to suspend the conversation. An example is provided by sonnet CCCX: 'There is a cheerful look on the meadows, and peace in the sky and the sun is well pleased, *I'm thinking*, looking downward' ('Ridono i prati, e 'l ciel si rasserena; / Giove s'allegra di mirar sua figlia', lines 5-6).

Finally, the following expressions can also be found:

– 'the days about me': in sonnet CCLXXII ('e le cose presenti', v. 3);

– the use of 'rather' after the adjective: 'You'd right to be glad *rather'* in sonnet CCLXXIX ('Di me non pianger tu', v. 12);

– the use of expressions such as 'your two eyes' or similar: ''and what a grudge I am bearing against death, that is standing in *her two eyes'* in sonnet CCC ('Quan't a la dispietata e dura Morte,/ ch'avendo spento in lei la vita mia,/ Stassi ne' suoi begli occhi, et me non chiama!', lines 12-4);

– the omission of prepositions (such as 'in'): 'and with it gone, what place will we find a second?' in sonnet CCCXXXVIII ('Spento il primo valor, qual fia 'l secondo?', v. 8);

[26] Some of these examples do not seem to appear in ordinary English. On the contrary, as Taniguchi writes, their presence is reported in the Mid-South of the United States, even in colloquial speech.

– the use of ‘in it’. From the Gaelic ‘ann’ (‘in it’ i.e. ‘in existence’), it means ‘in existence’ [27]. An example is provided by sonnet CCCXXXVIII: ‘The world didn’t know her the time she was *in it’* (‘Non la conobbe il mondo mentre l’ebbe’, v. 12);

– the use of the expression ‘at all’ for emphasis. This is also derived from the Irish ‘idir’. We find an example in sonnet CCCXLVI: ‘What new beauty *at all*?’ (‘e qual nova beltate’, v. 5).

* *

> I have put away sorrow like a shoe that is worn out and muddy […] How would I be happy seeing age coming on me each year, when the dry leaves are blowing back and forward at the gate of Emain.
>
> Synge, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*

A detailed fragmentation of the translations obviously opens the way for some more general remarks on the target texts.

The absence of rhyme and of a faithful rendering of the meaning as well as of the nuances of each word from the source text probably determined by Synge’s poor knowledge of Italian, certainly helped result in a language which is colloquial but which nevertheless succeeds in conveying a sense of the strong feelings that overwhelm the speaking voice.

Synge makes the deliberate decision of freely translating the source text by using a distinctively Hiberno-English dialect, by sometimes altering the sequence of the verses according to their length and their meaning; by graphically presenting them as prose pieces with some sort of synopsis as a title which has nothing to do with the incipit of each poem [28].

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[27] About this feature P.W. Joyce writes: ‘The same mode of expressing existence by *an* or *in* is found in Ulster and Scotch phrase for *to be alone*, which is as follows, always bringing in the personal pronoun: - ‘I am in my lone,’ ‘he is in his lone’ […] All these expressions are merely translations from Gaelic.’ P. W. JOYCE, *English as We Speak it in Ireland*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin 1988, pp. 25-6.

[28] Sonnet CCLXXII, for instance, bears the following title: ‘Laura being dead, Petrarch finds trouble in all the things of the earth’ as opposed to the first line which in Italian reads like this: ‘La vita fugge e non s’arresta un’ora’.

With such phrase constructions as 'it is'; the presence of adverbs like 'surely' or 'rather' to strengthen the concept expressed; the repetition of adjectives to define people rather than places; the frequent use of 'and' to list the various aspects about the surrounding nature; the imperative formed with 'let' + the second person singular and the actual impossibility of rendering the various Latinisms characterising the source text [29], the overall feeling is that it is a less spiritual and more passionate new version of Petrarch's poetry.

The target text which proves to be full of vigour, effectiveness and rhythm, is definitely evocative in the use of words, images and allusions in a way not dissimilar to Synge's own *Deirdre of the Sorrows*.

Written during his illness and never completed, the play certainly develops even further – this time anchoring in local folklore – themes dealt with in his previous works [30] and in his translations: the tension between dreams and reality; the influence of the surrounding nature both in its natural suggestions and in its political and religious manifestations; the awareness of the inevitability of physical death; mysticism and the negation of one's identity [31].

Interested in the life and speech of common people, and being a kind of outsider himself, Synge most likely found in Petrarch's idealised but all-too-human love for Laura, in his struggle between love and religious belief; in his tormented melancholy, not only a source of inspiration – which he benefited from for the writing of his last work – but also a reflection of his own concerns.

The years spent in the Continent certainly helped him find a way to overcome those small personal sorrows that once brought him to unsuccessfully commit suicide but they also helped him find a way of reconciling – once back home – what he had learnt abroad and what his country could offer him in those years.

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[29] There are, in Petrarch's collection, various references to Dante and Ovid, among others. His vernacular is interspersed with elements of the Latin language which are not easily translatable.

[30] From his earliest collection of poems *Vita Vecchia* (1895-7) to *Riders to the Sea* (1904), from his autobiographical account of the period spent in the Aran Islands (1907) to *The Playboy of the Western World* (staged at the Abbey in January 1907).

[31] Deirdre's dramatic last speech is not but Synge's ultimate affirmation of the reality of decay brought about by death.

Chapter II

Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Montale interpreted by Denis Devlin, Gerald Dawe, Tom Paulin, Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon

2.1 Denis Devlin: the 'Heavenly Foreigner' Reader of Ungaretti and Quasimodo

> The time is perhaps not altogether too green for the vile suggestion that art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear.
>
> Samuel Beckett

It is well known that Beckett spoke of Denis Devlin (1908-59)[1] in terms of 'the most interesting of the youngest generation of Irish poets'. His appraisals of the style, the techniques and the themes embodied in his contemporary's work, were based on the shared assumption that art no longer occupied a privileged position and that it could combine both traditional and modern forms.

In an article written by Beckett in 1934, Devlin is intentionally referred to as one of the experimentalists [2] as opposed to the so-called twilighters or antiquarians who peopled the cultural panorama of Ireland of the nineteenth-thirties.

This brief sketch by Beckett of the literary history of a country which had recently undergone an acute cultural deprivation due to the

[1] Born in Scotland to an Irish family, studied at Belvedere and UCD where he was appointed to a position at the English Department. He then resigned and entered the Department of Foreign Affairs. In 1938 he was posted to Rome as first secretary. After some years spent in New York, Washington, and in London, he was appointed minister plenipotentiary to Italy in 1950 and named ambassador to Italy in 1958.

[2] S. BECKETT, 'Recent Irish Poetry', *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. by R. COHN, John Calder, London 1983, pp. 70-6.

so-called Emergency, i.e. isolationist policy of the war years, is certainly accurate insofar as it also reflects a moment of transition in writing, that occurring from modernism to late modernism.

By deliberately deciding not to write in the Irish tradition as exemplified by Austin Clarke and Patrick Kavanagh, and by sharing interests and friendship with those who left Ireland, like Brian Coffey and Beckett, 'the most resolutely cosmopolitan of recent Irish poets' – as John Montague defined him – undoubtedly came to offer an alternative tradition in the way that he continued to express his more moderate views not only about Irish writing but also and more generally about poetry itself.

The originality of Devlin's work lies in the seemingly paradoxical achievement of dealing with the political and social issues of a country that was still inward-looking and denying him some sort of recognition, while at the same time finding inspiration and a large audience elsewhere. 'The first poet of Irish Catholic background to take the world as his province', Devlin demonstrated that one could make a living by writing outside of Ireland, while simultaneously bridging the gap between his own country and the outside world.

Devlin achieved this by translating from one culture to another. His interest in certain seventeenth-century Irish poets such as Douglas Hyde [1860-1949] complements, as well as contrasts with, his constant reference to the poetic techniques of the Surrealist writers. The effect produced is a kind of poetry that is generally regarded as highly allusive and elliptical; that is full of elusive echoes which refer to and utilise different cultural traditions and results in emphasizing the confusion of the speaking voice.

The necessity of a cultural identity common to Ireland and the Continent also resulted in Devlin's poetry emerging as a sort of hybridised 'international poetic English' which, even though still recognisably Irish to an American ear, would not bear traces of Yeats's recognisable language of the Celtic Twilight.

* *

This constant movement back and forth between Ireland and elsewhere is reflected in the various translations into English Devlin

carried out from French, German and Italian and which were published by Robert Little in 1992 [3].

These include the translation of three poems by Italian writers, namely 'Dove la luce' by Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970), 'Ride la gazza, nera sugli aranci' and a fragment from the poem 'Strada di Agrigentum' by Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968).

Little, critics assert, is known about the circumstances that brought him to engage himself in translating exercises and to choose certain texts over others. It cannot be claimed with certainty whether his translations were only the result of a poetic affinity associated with the constant desire to, as Brian Coffey once wrote, 'de-individualize' or simply the consequence of editorial suggestions and friendships.

It was certainly during the years spent in Italy, first as minister plenipotentiary in 1950, then as ambassador in 1958, that he continued writing, translating and participating in the literary meetings organised by the editor of the Botteghe Oscure [4], as well as those by himself [5].

Such periods undoubtedly brought Devlin closer to Italian culture [6], about which he learned more by reading and meeting Italian poets and also by translating writers from other countries, such as Du Bellay [7] and Goethe, both of whom had written accounts of their stays in Italy.

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[3] D. DEVLIN, *Translations into English*, ed. by R. LITTLE, Dedalus Press, Dublin 1992. The collection includes translations into English of German (Goethe, Hölderlin, Rilke), French (Éluard, Breton, Char, Baudelaire, Verlaine) and Italian poems; translations from French into Irish and from Irish into English. Some of his translations into Irish had been previously published in *Ireland To-Day*, a journal which ran from 1936 to 1938.

[4] It was in the little Rome-based magazine edited by Marguerite Caetani, Princess Bassiano, that his translation of poems by René Char and his *The Colours of Love* were published in 1952 whereas the year 1959 saw the publication of his *Memoirs of a Turcoman Diplomat.*

[5] "In these years Devlin's home became a meeting place for a number of Italian writers, including the neorealist novelist Ignazio Silone […] to whom the published version of 'The Tomb of Michael Collins' is dedicated." A. DAVIS, *A Broken Line. Denis Devlin and Irish Poetic Modernism*, University College Dublin Press, Dublin 2000, pp. 117-8.

[6] Alex Davis gave a detailed account of Devlin's political views during his stays in Italy. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7.

[7] Devlin translated some sonnets of the French poet who visited Rome in 1553. Through the speaking voice of the sonnets, Devlin succeeds in conveying a sense of his feelings for the outcome of Mussolini's fascism in Italy.

These sojourns also convinced him of the necessity of carrying out small translating exercises in Italian, which he saw as an invaluable opportunity to identify other poetic techniques and adapt them to his own. These projects were undertaken very much as his writing was: with a passionate and meticulous sense of the text itself which led him to constantly revise and sometimes leave sentences incomplete.

The inevitable result is an intentional and well-wrought fragmentation. This informs both the works of Devlin the poet and those of Devlin the translator to such an extent that one could easily attribute to his poetic English a 'translated quality' while referring to his translated language in terms of a combination of Irish, English and French.

Such a disjointedness bestows an original and experimental quality on his writing. This manifests itself in impersonal ballad-like repetitions which occur in the space of a few lines and remind the reader of the distinctive features of seventeenth-century Irish poetry. Compound or combining forms; the anacoluthon, a sentence structure probably derived from Apollinaire and Mallarmé; the peculiar use of punctuation, prepositions, conjunctions and verbs likewise reminiscent of Surrealism; the movement inevitably suggested by the line-endings, which seem to take a sudden turn and go in unexpected directions, are favoured by Devlin.

* *

> What regiment are you from/ brothers?// Word trembling/ in the night// […] involuntary revolt/ of man face to face with his own/ fragility
> Ungaretti,'Fratelli', trans. by Patrick Creagh

Devlin's translations are a reflection of his aesthetic concerns. More than once in his poems, for instance, he attacked the excessive Puritanism of the Irish Church and put forward some form of more liberal thinking. The world of 'mirrors flashing each other' created by a 'Lord of delight and absence', as pictured in his collections *The*

Heavenly Foreigner and *The Passion of Christ*[8], finds a natural complement in the reading and interpretation of such authors as Rilke, Ungaretti and Quasimodo.

Devlin, who probably heard of Ungaretti during his time in Paris, was no doubt fascinated by the aesthetic and political ideas of the Italian poet.

Sentimento del tempo[9], the collection from which the poem in question – 'Dove la luce' – is taken, can be defined as an example of symbolist poetry insofar as it is based on the emphasis on imagination over words. The collection, which employs what Ungaretti defined as a 'return to order', was composed on the premise that the avant-garde extremisms had destroyed verse by depriving it of its logical associations, of its possibility to communicate, and, ultimately, of its value.

Ungaretti's contribution to such a poetic debate was characterised by verses rich in common subordinates, inversions and complicated analogies that generate an aura of vagueness. His lines tell about the passing of time, of loved ones, of life; they tell stories of nostalgia and desolation and while hinting at the eternal, they long for some kind of spiritual peace.

In this respect, Ungaretti's language, drawing from the recognised influence of such poets as Petrarch and Leopardi, represents the only valid means of conveying a sense of the mystery and contradictory power inherent in itself.

What strikes the reader about Devlin's translation of the poem is the overall effect of a narrow rendering of the original. While finding correspondence in the deviant meaning of the source text, Devlin seems to catch and convey quite well the idea of suspended immobility, strongly associated with the sense of desolation brought about by war: the evocation of the place 'dove non muove foglia più la luce', 'where the leaf moves light no longer', leads the way to the equally vague imagery offered by the 'colline d'oro' translated as 'hill of gold':

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[8] D. DEVLIN, *The Heavenly Foreigner*, ed. and int. by B. COFFEY, Dolmen Press, Dublin 1967; *The Passion of Christ* in *Collected Poems of Denis Devlin*, ed. by J. C. C. MAYS, Dedalus Press, Dublin 1989.

[9] The poems from this collection were written from 1919 to 1930. G. UNGARETTI, *Sentimento del tempo*, Novissima, Roma 1933.

That unchangeable, ageless gold
In its lost nimbus
Shall be our winding-sheet.

L'ora costante, liberi d'età,
Nel suo perduto nimbo
Sarà nostro lenzuolo. [10]

The effectiveness of the description is strengthened by the idea of a regular continuity as suggested by the light of the setting sun which tries to obliterate the memory of those tragic years and at the same time asserts the necessity of it.

In the opening line of the final stanza, Devlin surprisingly questions the nature of the translation activity he has undertaken: it is most likely that, by voluntarily mistranslating 'ora' into 'oro' and thus rendering 'l'ora costante, liberi d'età' by 'that unchangeable, ageless gold' (v. 14) – which distinctively refers back to the preceding line – he wanted to apply a symbolist, almost metaphysical kind of reading and open up more meanings than there were in the original.

No wonder if the reader of Devlin's work finds one of its main themes to be the meditation of the self who undergoes, and tries to recount a real mystical experience, where either nothing, as Beckett wrote, makes sense, or, where, only at times, symbolic images try to find their way, through different settings, abrupt changes and compressed meanings, towards clarity.

An example of 'European intelligence' offered by an Irish poet, Devlin's translated poetry provides the reader with multiple interpretations [11] and by so doing, disarrays all expectations.

* *

[10] UNGARETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 104. DEVLIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 304-5.

[11] It is sometimes difficult to assess to which extent his poetry is the product of outside influences or simply the result of his imagination.

> I morti di Glendalough/ sotto le croci celtiche guardano da un monte/ fluido di nubi nere/ e corte. Dicono che fuggono la primavera,/ ascoltano lentamente i rovesci/ di pioggia e le ombre dei corvi/ che passano e seguono lassù parole/ bianche di ponente.
>
> Salvatore Quasimodo [12]

> Perhaps it is a true sign of life: /about me, with gentle/ movements of the head, dance in a game/ of cadences and voices the length of the church/ lawns […]// And you south wind, strong with orange scent,/ push the moon where naked boys/ sleep, force the foals to the fields […]
> Quasimodo, 'Ride la gazza', trans. by Desmond O'Grady

More than the metaphysical rigour and the Catholic-Baroque tension of Ungaretti's lines, Devlin was probably attracted by the reminiscences of Sicily which are evoked in two poems by the Italian 1959 Nobel Laureate for Literature, Quasimodo.

Both 'Strada in Agrigentum' and 'Ride la gazza', from the collection *Nuove Poesie* (1936-1942), geographically project the occasional reader and translator in a remote elsewhere, which is transfigured and presented as a sort of lost paradise. The poem evokes and combines both past and present elements of Quasimodo's home place, which symbolically represents everyone's home.

Devlin most likely identified himself with the nostalgic voice of the poet who spent many years away from the Mediterranean island. He probably found in the discursive syntax and traditional metrics Quasimodo naturally turned to, an alternative and interesting way to vividly recall the personal vicissitudes, the heritage and the atmosphere of his homeland.

In 'The Magpie Laughing, Black Over the Orange Trees', the familiar and intimate tone of the account of the childhood years, the

[12] S. QUASIMODO, *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, ed. and intr. by G. FINZI, with a preface by C. BO, Mondadori, Milano 1971[1], 2001.

smells and the countryside landscape peopled with animals, are vaguely conveyed by its English translation:

There lasts a wind which I remember, burning
In the names of sidelong horses

Là dura un vento che ricordo acceso
nelle criniere dei cavalli obliqui [13].

Though, once again, Devlin tries to stick to the original as faithfully as possible, he inevitably makes the scenario more indeterminate: the result is that places and people are no longer a mere representation of Sicily but a more universal evocation of the power of memories.

Except for 'the mournful sculptured pillars' – the 'telamoni lugubri', i.e. the remains of the temples – the first six lines given from 'Street in Agrigentum', from the fragment left of Devlin's translation, could easily be describing an Irish landscape which has the main merit of emphasizing the value of remembering.

Not accidentally, Devlin selected two poems which are built on a series of sensations and images that seem to grow out of continuous associations and bring about a state of imperceptible uneasiness.

The overt omission of those poems which witness and denounce the tragedy of the World War can, one could argue, be only justified by the intent to avoid any political reference in a country where he was working as a diplomat.

Though his translations, especially those from French, constitute a relevant body of information as to his literary tastes and the influences on his poetry, they seem not to take a stance, sometimes remaining inbetween the status of mere literary attempts or unconvincing English versions of the originals without energies of their own. One thing seems certain though: inspired by the meeting of some fellow writers, Devlin approached the texts of those he found most congenial to his view of life and poetry.

Distinctively Catholic himself, Devlin became inevitably interested in the kind of restless Christianity manifested by a poet like Ungaretti and in the assertion of memory through the written word by

[13] DEVLIN, *op. cit.*, p. 307. QUASIMODO, 'Strada di Agrigentum', *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, Mondadori 2001, p. 102.

Quasimodo. By so doing, he came to perceive 'in the poetic act the power to heal the split between body and soul, between sexual and religious identity'[14].

2.2 Gerald Dawe after Salvatore Quasimodo

> And here is the sea and the flowering agave,/ and the bright river parallel to ancient tombs/ fitted into the wall like cells in a hive;/ within mirrors, still smiling,/ girls with their jet hair down.
> 'Footfall', after S. Quasimodo, trans. by S. Carnell and E. Segre

> It would be too easy, and, in a historical and political sense, immoral, if the sons were excused – excused in what is ugly, repellent, inhuman in them – by the fact that the fathers erred. The negative paternal legacy may half-explain them but for the other half they are themselves responsible.
> Pier Paolo Pasolini

Pasolini's words seem to work well by way of introduction to some reflections on the theme of politics and literature given by the Belfast-born poet Gerald Dawe (1952-) [15] in a volume of essays on the cultural panorama of Ulster [16].

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[14] D. KIBERD, *Inventing Ireland, op. cit*., p. 463.

[15] Dawe studied at the University of Ulster in Coleraine and UCG, Galway where he taught from 1977 to 1987. He teaches English at Trinity College Dublin. His first collection of poems, *Sheltering Places,* was published in 1978. He is the recipient of various awards, the author of collections of poems and essays and editor of *Krino*, a literary magazine.

[16] J. LUNDY, A. MAC PÓILIN, ed. by, *Styles of Belonging. The Cultural Identities of Ulster*, Lagan Press, Belfast 1992.

Dawe suggested that writers should assume a distant, critical stance towards politicians so that they would be able to understand each other's identity, be this national and/or religious.

Though writing in Northern Ireland often comes to be associated with either Protestantism or Catholicism, during the last forty years or so, it has embraced a sort of pluralism; it has accepted diversity and looked elsewhere to such an extent that stereotypes no longer apply, that old identities are fragmented, shattered but always haunted by the obstinate question of the 'divided mind'.

Poets seem to have somehow freed themselves from national constraints by rereading tradition, by experimenting with new techniques and themes they have become the representatives of what the critic Richard Kearney calls the 'migrant mind':

> This is where modernity's obsession with absolute novelty and rupture – its frequent repudiation of historical memory – is perhaps tempered by a post-modern awareness that we cannot afford not to know our past. Rupture is complemented by remembrance. Creation ex nihilo gives way to the more playful practice of recreation.[17]

The 'migrant mind' is able to 'translate back and forth between the familiar and the foreign, the old and the new, tradition and utopia, reinterpreting one's own history in stories which address the challenge of change.' [18]

As Neil Corcoran wrote, the poetry of Northern Ireland since 1969 has tended towards the transcultural and the 'commitment to the pressing claims of the lyric self'[19], in other words, it has turned to language as a way of looking at the world and, at the same time, as a means of belonging to a native place that is more personally conceived.

The problematic dynamics of language represents a way of specific cultural identification used both as a means – paraphrasing from a poem by Seamus Heaney – to walk away or to engage with one another.

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[17] R. KEARNEY, *Across the Frontiers. Ireland in the 1990s: Cultural, Political, Economic*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin 1988, p. 186.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

[19] N. CORCORAN, *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997, p. 154.

Another way of combining both is offered by Gerald Dawe also when writing about Ciaran Carson's love for naming things [20], intended as a concealed form of nostalgia for things that are gone forever; as a search for authenticity which now looks at a city that 'sits fractured, looking all ways at the same time' [21].

In a way, the reflections of the now Dublin-based poet seem to echo those expressed by the Italian poet Quasimodo in his 'Il poeta e il politico'[22]: one's philosophy almost collapses when 'trees and walls fall'; death starts questioning moral principles and poetry itself. At that stage, poetry may threaten politics.

Some of Dawe's translations of Quasimodo which are due to be published soon in a comprehensive collection, appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation* in 2001 [23]. These include: 'Primroses' ('Primule'); 'The Flower of Silence' ('Il fiore del silenzio'); 'Serenity' ('Serenità'); 'The Burning Myrrh' ('Mentre brucia la mirra'); 'The Night Fountain' ('La fontana notturna'); 'The Swallow of Light' (La rondine di luce') from what is now *Poesie disperse e inedite* [24].

What strikes at a first reading of the translated poems is the imagery. The intense colours of 'Primroses', for instance, while recalling the beauties of Spring, also obliquely refer to the tragedy of war: 'Blood clots hanging over torn green velvet./ Ah the wounds of the fields!' [25].

Similarly, 'The Night Fountain' brings with it a hint of reflective uncertainty, a vague feeling that happiness does not last long:

The scent of an orange blossom, an enchanted night fountain,
when sleep escapes me
I call you with the names of most delicate flowers […]

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[20] One must remember Heaney's concern for place names, landscape and memory as a metaphor for the ability to speak.

[21] G. DAWE, 'Belfast and the Poetics of Space' in N. ALLEN, A. KELLY, ed. by, *The Cities of Belfast*, Four Court Press, Dublin 2003, p. 210.

[22] S. QUASIMODO, 'Il poeta e il politico' in *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, Mondadori, Milano 1971[1], 2001 pp. 305-317.

[23] See D. and H. COSTANTINE, ed. by, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, Queen's College, Oxford, New Series, no 18, 2001, pp. 148-51.

[24] S. QUASIMODO, *Poesie disperse ed inedite*, in *op. cit*., 2001.

[25] G. DAWE, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, p. 148; QUASIMODO, 'Grumi pensili di sangue sul lacero velluto verdognolo./ Oh le ferite dei prati!', *Poesie disperse e inedite*, p. 994.

I left two kisses on your orchid body,
they looked like two little flowers
like those which grow at the roadside,
so small, suffering the cold,
and outside the dappled sky bore my fever

and I thought I was happy.

Profumo di zagara chiusa, fontana notturna d'incanti,
io ti chiamo coi nomi dei fiori più fragili […]
Lasciai due baci sul tuo corpo d'orchidea,
che a me parvero due margheritine,
di quelle che stanno sui lembi delle strade
e sono piccole piccole ed hanno tanto freddo,
e fuori, il cielo a macchie scure e bianche come una pernice
aveva la febbre, e io credevo d'essere felice. [26]

The Irish reader is nevertheless enchanted with the perfumes and colours of flowers as in the bucolic atmosphere of 'The Swallow of Light':

Al mattino la rondine breve ad una fonte	In the morning the swallow drinks at a well
dove l'acqua è un cespo di farfalle	where water is a bunch of butterflies
che parlano di fiori	that talk about flowers
accanto a tre piccoli cipressi	near three little cypresses,
tre piccoli sogni addormentati.	three small sleeping dreams.
Tu prega che la fonte non si dissecchi mai	Pray that the well will never dry;
a mani giunte, starò ad ascoltare	With joined hands I will listen
	to gold music rustle on the sunset's harp [27]

The Sicilian landscape is looked at, admired and modified by the Irish poet as a part of a voyage into serenity and into poetry itself. The hymn to the beauty of nature offered by another poem, 'The Burning Myrrh', has not surprisingly something of a sacred, though still questioned, message in it while 'The Flower of Silence', overtly anchored to the Sicilian locale, provides a more universal kind of peace and hope: 'Sorrow, an eternal spring of good things,/ here is your temple, your sacred stone/for the sleep that knows no torment' [28].

[26] G. DAWE, p. 150; S. QUASIMODO, p. 1101.
[27] G. DAWE, p. 151. S. QUASIMODO, p. 1097.
[28] G. DAWE, p. 149; 'Dolore, o fonte eterna delle cose buone,/ ecco il tuo tempio, la tua pietra sacra/ per il sonno che non ha tormento.' S. QUASIMODO, p. 1075.

The translator, as a constant bearer of a personal and historical knowledge which is, though other, shared, has voluntarily turned to those poems whose free verse, linguistic impressionism and the vivid choice of colours and images, make his interpretation of them more poetic and more contained like most of Quasimodo's best poetry.

2.3 Tom Paulin, Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon: New Looks at Montale

> To thee/ I have willed the life drained/ in secret transfusions, the life chained/ in a coin of restlessness, unaware, self-angry./ […] Of thee nothing in the grey hours and the hours/ torn by a flame of sulphur,/ only/ the whistle of the tug/ whose prow has ridden forth into the bright gulf.
>
> Montale, 'Delta' trans. by Beckett

> Samuel Beckett's prose is a repudiation of the provincial nature of Hiberno-English in favour of a stateless language which is an English passed through the Cartesian rigours of the French language.
>
> Tom Paulin

One of the reasons why three contemporary poets from Northern Ireland decided to translate two poems by the Italian Eugenio Montale (1896-1981) could probably be found in a literary portrait offered by one of them, Mahon, about the Republic and Northern Ireland:

> Like Ireland itself (and I intend to sneer), the (Southern) 'Irish' poet is either unwilling or unable to come to terms with 'the twentieth century' … to the extent that the Northern poet, surrounded as he is by the Greek gifts of modern industry and what Ferlinghetti called 'the hollering monsters of the imagination of disaster', shares an ecology with the technological societies his rulers are so anxious to imitate, he must,

to be true to his imagination, insist upon a different court of appeal from that which sits in the South. [29]

Tom Paulin and Paul Muldoon seem to agree with Mahon when they view Northern poetry as the result of a series of different influences, as a combination of American, British and Irish elements which have led poets to go beyond the geographical and cultural confines of the six counties. In a way similar to their contemporary, they seem to face, live, propose diversity. Examples are given by the interpretations of Montale's 'La casa dei doganieri' and 'L'anguilla', respectively proposed by Paulin and Mahon and Paulin and Muldoon.

2.3.1 Tom Paulin's Creative Translations

The first of such poets to be dealt with, Tom Paulin (1949-) [30], has often committed himself to the cause of the English language in Ireland.

Almost since the beginning of his literary activity, Paulin has devoted special attention to language. The extensive use of dialect in *The Strange Museum* (1980) was pursued in *The Book of Juniper* (1982) mainly written in Ulster dialect and in his adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* (1984), written in Belfast dialect.

So far, his most notable contribution to the issue has been an essay published in 1983, *A New Look at the Language Question* [31] – in which he advocated the use of Hiberno-English – and his editing of *The Faber Book of Vernacular Verse* (1990).

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[29] D. MAHON, 'Poetry in Northern Ireland', in *Twentieth Century Studies*, November 1970, pp. 89-93, p. 90.

[30] Born in Leeds, he grew up in Belfast and studied in Oxford. He published on Thomas Hardy. Some of his poetry collections, from *A State of Justice* (1977) to *The Wind Dog* (1999) respond to the political culture of modern Ireland, Britain and Europe. In 1983-84 he was visiting associate professor of English and Fulbright scholar at the University of Virginia. Since 1972 he has lectured at the University of Nottingham.

[31] T. PAULIN, 'A New Look at the Language Question', in *Writing to the Moment. Selected Critical Essays 1980-1996*, Faber & Faber, London 1996, pp. 51-67.

More than to his desire to revitalise what he regarded as a declining usage of 'standard English', Paulin's insistence on the use of local dialect, for which a full and inclusive dictionary of Irish English was by him advocated, responded to the specific constraint to locate poetry within the cultural and political crisis in the North of Ireland:

> Spoken Irish English exists in a number of provincial and local forms, but because no scholar has yet compiled a Dictionary of Irish English many words are literally homeless. They live in the careless richness of speech, but they rarely appear in print. When they do, many readers are unable to understand them and have no dictionary where they can discover their meaning. The language therefore lives freely and spontaneously as speech, but it lacks any institutional existence and so is impoverished as a literary medium. It is a language without a lexicon, a language without form. [32]

In the more recently published *The Road to Inver* [33], Tom Paulin has decided to assemble his encounters with several kinds of otherness. These are offered by translations of sixty-two prose and poetry pieces from French (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Chénier, Hugo, Mallarmé), from German (Heine, Goethe), from Portuguese (Pessoa) and Italian (Montale, Sereni and Leopardi) among many others.

'La casa dei doganieri', from the fourth part of the collection *Le Occasioni* (1939) [34], centres upon the theme of remembrance and upon time that inexorably consumes images and feelings of our past, confirming once more the author's disconsolate view of life. The melancholic tone of the verses achieved through the slow rhythm given by syntactical and metrical pauses and by a bare vocabulary, is complementary to the elegiac dimension of the poem, vacillating between the sadness of remembering lost love and the lamentation for the time gone by. By looking at the coastguard station, he recalls not

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 60. The result is what is sometimes said to be a difficult language, understandable only by locals which allows him to move freely in and out of that world he is referring to, to question it, hoping that some resolution of the conflict be found.

[33] T. PAULIN, *The Road to Inver. Translations, Versions, Imitations. 1975-2003*, Faber & Faber, London 2004.

[34] *Le Occasioni* are fatal moments of one's existence as when all of a sudden one is able to perceive a different reality, to apply a different approach to it or to give an unforeseen meaning to it. These are solemn, apparently conventional moments to which one can almost confer a religious meaning and of which poetry can give an account by way of a formal result achieved by a sort of incantatory evocation, extraordinary revelations, by a series of vivid and bizarre images.

so much the moments he spent with a woman there but the anxiety he felt that day, of which that love constituted an occasion; a chance to go beyond that destiny that fills life with pointless actions.

What strikes the reader on first reading Paulin's 'The Coastguard Station' is a contextualisation of the Italian poem which results in an Irish version of forms and contents which are only loosely connected to the original:

Henry Snodden and me we've nearly forgotten
that scraggy coastguard station –
a ruin from the Black and Tan war
it stood on Tim Ring's hill above the harbour
like an empty a crude roofless barracks
- same as the station in Teelin or Carrick [35]

Tu non ricordi la casa dei doganieri
sul rialzo a strapiombo sulla scogliera:
desolata t'attende dalla sera
in cui v'entrò lo sciame dei tuoi pensieri
e vi sostò irrequieto. [36]

These are:

— the division into two five-line stanzas and two six-line stanzas reduced to two stanzas, respectively of ten and twelve lines;

— the use of recognisably Hiberno-English words: 'scraggy', line 2; 'claggy', line 22 (the *Concise Ulster Dictionary* entry reads the following: '1. sticky. 2. *of soil* soft and heavy. Scots and Northern English);

— the use of words markedly referring to a Northern Ireland setting: 'Black and Tan war', line 3; 'Tim Ring's hill above the harbour', line 4; 'same as the station in Teelin and Carrick', line 6; 'by people like us from Belfast', line 21.

The very first line introduces the reader to a man called Henry Snodden and to the narrator, i.e. two male protagonists in place of the 'couple' of the original poem. The coastguard station has nothing of the romantic spot where the woman and the Italian poet spent some time in the past. Instead, it is made of some desolate remains from the Black and Tan war. Useless as it is, if one prefers to cling to the

[35] T. PAULIN, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[36] E. MONTALE, 'La casa dei doganieri' in *Occasioni*, *Tutte le poesie*, ed. by G. ZAMPA, Mondadori, Milano 1984[1], 2000, p. 167.

meaning of the *Concise Ulster Dictionary* and to Tom Paulin's view, the political activity of the British force deployed against the IRA, tragically stands in neat contrast to the now silent and solitary house on the cliff.

In Paulin's world, where distinctively Irish place names remind the reader of the poet's background, there is only room for the present. It is not a coincidence that one August the two men did not find the ruins of the coastguard station but a 'grassy track' which led them imagine that the spot could be made into holiday houses:

> […] and instead
> of that ruin there was only the grassy track
> on the grass hill and so the field's stayed
> year after year though we're both afraid
> that one day very soon that unused field
> 'll be sold as sites […]
> as a new colony starts up all owned
> by people like us from Belfast
> who've at last laid that claggy building's ghost

The connection with the original, which lost its way after the first verses and is somehow then taken up again by the theme of the passing of time and of people coming and going, abruptly ends with the last line – 'well I wouldn't go as far as that' – which asserts the need on the part of the poet to stop remembering, to stop writing, to reject and escape from, in his own words, the 'degrading bondage' of politics.

* *

> Tongue *lingua*/ it enters small apertures/ that are airy wet waxy/ or taste of old hapennies/ […] it acts as love's secret agent/ a diligent sapper that digs/ into ears and emery armpits/ or slides between fingers and toes// it penetrates the bum on state occasions/ and searches the *mons pubis*/ for a fleshy button/ a tiny wee *cep*
>
> Tom Paulin

'L'anguilla', another poem by Montale [37], which was translated by Paulin in 2001, seems to have constituted an easier exercise:

then licks their bottoms
with its tongue its slime
tongue threading each muddy bum […]
flicking its slick inches
snaking and thinning
an oiled slippy whip […]
in a ditch
in that dry or wet –
either way hairy – slit
where this sperm always fits
- a wee tiny bomb
kissing the ovum
then going *boom*!
in the palmy womb
this wet spark [38]

The poem, which centres upon the analogy eel-woman as a metaphor for the ability to give life, strikes the reader for its very long sentence which slides, loosens all the way through to find its governing clause only with the closing 'puoi tu, o donna, non credere tua sorella l'anguilla?'. Almost doubled in size – forty-three lines as opposed to the thirty of the original – Paulin's version results muffled,

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[38] PAULIN, 'L'anguilla', *op. cit.*, pp. 40-1, lines 1-3, lines 10-2, lines 20-8.

but successfully onomatopoeic, alluding to a reality which is more human than animal-like [39].

The evocation of the migration of the eel from the Northern seas to European rivers – where the act of spawning and death is accomplished – paced by an epic and dramatic rhythm, then gives way to a description of a sexual intercourse between a 'spark' (i.e. 'boy/girlfriend, object of romantic interest') and his/her mate.

Furthermore, the absence of the specific geographical references from the original – 'nei fossi che declinano/ dai balzi d'Appennino alla Romagna', lines 13-5 – reminds the reader of the metaphor of the bomb going off like sperm spreading in the woman's ovary, which neatly anticipates the recurring motif of a desolate Northern Ireland landscape made of cities – to quote from one of his poems –'burn out by hate' and yet pervaded by a gloom of light glistening in [40].

Besides, when reading Paulin's poetry one often has the feeling that the poet, socially and politically involved, wants to engage 'with the status quo' and stir up 'debate and argument' [41]; that he does not want to be 'outside history where 'the sound of battles can't be heard'. He wants to see himself, as he claims, 'more tribally' than before so that he can better express and affirm the notion of a multicultural and multiracial society.

His poetry, as Neil Corcoran wrote, 'longs […] for a release from the necessity of public conscience, but feels guilt about that longing, and must labour to recover a sense of responsibility and urgency' [42]. He does so by exploiting the allusive, the suggestive, the metaphoric, the emblematic.

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[39] Even though the sequence of the lines has obviously changed, Paulin has to maintain those short ones describing the sinuous movement of the animal and the various elements of the surrounding nature. See for example 'una luce scoccata dai castagni/ ne accende il guizzo in pozze d'acquamorta,', lines 11-2, translated as 'as the chestnut blossoms/ burst white over its worm's/ eye view inside the bosom/ of dead water', lines 14-7.

[40] This is, not surprisingly, comparable to the plant object of his *The Book of Juniper*, a sort of Utopian allegory of the capacity to survive in desolate places.

[41] 'Tom Paulin Interviewed by Eamonn Hughes' in J. P. MYERS, *Writing Irish. Selected Interviews with Irish Writers*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York 1999, p. 120, p. 119.

[42] N. CORCORAN, 'Tom Paulin', *Contemporary Poets*, ed. by T. CHEVALIER, St James Press, Chicago, London 1991, p. 749.

Montale's eel, as a symbol of the continuous flow of life, of the impetus with which life, though deep into the desolation of its transience, seeks to triumph over death, is then exploited by Paulin to address his personal view of contemporary Northern Ireland; to offer a way of displacing the concept of national identity by substituting it with something which is other and infinite, something, as he himself stated, 'that's moving all the time'.

2.3.2 Derek Mahon: Assessing the Other, Assessing Himself.

> I too have suffered/ Obscurity and derision,/ And sheltered in my heart of hearts/ A light to transform the world.
>
> Derek Mahon

The version given by Derek Mahon (1941-) of 'La casa dei doganieri' [43] is certainly a small part of a wider tribute to translation, cultural adaptation and transfer offered by the poet all throughout his life: from Gérard de Nerval's *The Chimeras* (1982) to Molière's *School for Husbands*, presented as *High Time* by Field Day, from Molière *School for Wives* (1984) to the *Selected Poems* of Philippe Jacottet (1988), his poetic world seems dominated by other people, other cultures, other places.

If the collections *The Hudson Letter* and *The Yellow Book* integrate poems and translations in an unprecedented way, his 1999 *Collected Poems*[44] resonates with literary allusions to other writers: 'Night and Day' was written after Ariosto; 'A Siren' after Saba; 'Roman Script' is a look at Pasolini's Rome revisited for the occasion.

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[43] Born in Belfast, he grew in Glengormley. He studied at TCD and the Sorbonne and worked as a journalist and teacher in Dublin, London and New York. His first collection, *Night Crossing* was published in 1968. In *Lives* (1972) the central issue is the relation of self to the world. *Poems 1962-1978* (1979) was followed by *Courtyards in Delft* (1981) and *The Hunt by Night* (1982). His work responds in a complex manner to a northern, Protestant, middle-class background. 'The Coastguard House' was published in *Translation Ireland*, September 2000, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 14.

[44] D. MAHON, *Collected Poems*, The Gallery Press, Co. Meath 1999.

In the same way, his last *Harbour Lights* (2005) reveals the wide range of intertexts which shape his writing and his anxious desire to look elsewhere: one can find poems written after Éluard, Valéry, Bonnefoy, Brecht and others that, as the cover specifies, 'are interspersed with penetrating glances and a series of dazzling translations'.

Foreign experiences inevitably come to shape his perception of Ireland and affect the poems set and concerned with Ireland, as in 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford' in which the Irish setting fades away to give room to the image of the people of Pompeii or, as in 'A Garage in Co. Cork', where the local spot allows the reader to feel elsewhere.

Nor is it surprising to read from the agenda of the small journal Paulin edited in the nineteen seventies, *Atlantis*, that 'the magazine will be published in Dublin, but not exclusively in Dublin […] Part of our aim is to see Ireland in an international perspective, to lift its drowsy eyelid and disturb it into a sense of relationship and awareness' [45].

Caught between two cultures – British and Irish, Protestant and Catholic – Mahon frequently uses the themes of travel, of foreign cultures and experience, and the inherent alienation from his own background.

Besides, he has often expressed his ideas and feelings about his native place, to which he returned to teach in 1977. It was during that year that, driven by disappointment [46], he took to translating Corbière's 'Le poète contumace', a poem which exactly conveyed the sense of alienation he himself was experiencing, the sense of 'being in exile when actually at home', as Terence Brown once wrote about him.

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[45] MAHON, *Journalism*: *Selected Prose 1970-1995*, ed. by T. BROWN, Gallery Press, Oldcastle 1996, p. 94

[46] Of this experience, Mahon wrote: 'Some people seem to be able to write in the middle of suffering, like Michael Longley or Paul Muldoon, but I found when I went back there recently to Coleraine that I wrote nothing at all until I was leaving. Then when I'd come away I wrote a whole batch of poems about it, some of which are in the new book… When I was actually there, all I could do was re-experience the landscape, re-experience the awfulness.' Quoted from H. HAUGHTON, 'Going Home. Northern Ireland and Derek Mahon's *The Hunt by Night*', in *Metre*, n. 11, Winter 2001/2002, p. 53.

In Mahon's poems, we detect a strong sense of local place, almost steeped in abundant topographical details and, at the same time a desire of a way out, of an escape somewhere else; a possibility of release from a fragmented world.

This is one of the reasons why he responded to the parochial world advocated by the Ulster regionalist John Hewitt in 'The Bitter Gourd' in the following way:

> The Ulster writer, says Hewitt, must be a *rooted* man. He must carry the native tang of his idiom like the native dust on his sleeve; otherwise not an airy internationalist, thistledown, a twig in the stream… He must know where he comes from and where he is; otherwise how can he tell where he wishes to go?' This is a bit tough […] I feel there's a certain harshness, a dogmatism, at work here. What of the free-floating imagination, Keats's 'negative capability'? Yeats's 'lonely impulse of delight'? Literature, surely, is more than a branch of ethics. What about humour, mischief, wickedness? [47]

Mahon pursues an ironic detachment and a kind of internationalism that draw him, as Elmer Andrews wrote, towards 'the marginalised figures of the wider, European world' and to the Irish past, more than to English culture.

'A way to keep the pen moving' and something 'that takes its own life', as Mahon admitted in an interview [48], especially in the ninety-eighties [49], translation, more than the writing of verses, has offered itself as a means for reflecting upon the meaning and the value of language; for experimenting with new styles.

Mahon, however, does not aspire to fidelity: his interpretation of Montale's poem, for instance, if compared to Paulin's, steps away from the original.

Still, he seems to have found a reflection of his own feelings in the perspective of the speaking voice. The position of the self, ideally and nostalgically detached, in a house up on a cliff, seems to correspond to the position privileged by the Irish poet who observes the world as if through a window, who asks himself where home is.

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[47] D. MAHON, *Journalism*, p. 94.

[48] 'Derek Mahon Interviewed by James J. MURPHY, Lucy MCDIARMID and Michael J. DURKAN' in *Writing Irish*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

[49] After the publication of *Antarctica*, in 1985, there was a long ten-year silence before the following collection of poems was published, during which his version of Euripides' *The Bacchae* and his translation of Jaccottet's poems were published.

Mahon gives an almost immediate idea of what happens to him, by introducing the adverb 'never' and changing the initial verb into 'think': the impression is that the woman is there; she is part of the poet's present and not just mere memory. The past, no longer explored, projects the author into the future, into a landscape which is not just that of the Ligurian coast but also that of a desolate Northern Ireland beach, almost a symbolically cosmic place which gives voice to a metaphysical pain. Besides, sea shores, coasts, strands, rivers often recur to hold a privileged position in his poetry as they allude to something that is still to come, to the idea of movement and change:

You never think of it, that coastguard house
where a sheer cliff drops to a rocky
shore below; desolate now,
it waits for you since the night
your thoughts swarmed there
like moths and paused uncertainly. [50]

The translation seems to be characterised by:

— Irishisms such as the use of the present simple instead of the present perfect continuous: 'it waits for you since the night' (instead of 'it has been waiting for you since the night');

— more enjambments than in the original: 'rocky/ shore below', vv. 2-3, 'another time/ has intervened, vv. 11-2, 'Sometimes a tanker in the sunset lights/ the horizon', vv.19-20;

— a more discursive tone which renders the elegy of the last stanza more prosaic. The emphasis of the original then loses its evocative quality, also by the omission of the strategic adjective 'questa':

Oh l'orizzonte in fuga, dove s'accende	Sometimes a tanker in the sunset lights
rara la luce della petroliera!	the horizon where it withdraws
Il varco è qui? (Ripullula il frangente	at the point of no return.
ancora sulla balza che scoscende	Breakers crash on the cliff-face
Tu non ricordi la casa di questa	but you don't recall the house
mia sera.	I recall tonight
Ed io non so chi va e chi resta. [51]	not knowing who comes or goes.

[50] D. MAHON, *Translation Ireland*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[51] *Ibid.* MONTALE, *op. cit.*

Mahon seems to have found in Montale's words an opportunity to express his own feelings as an outsider, who rarely takes part into poetry readings or cultural events. The author detachedly observes and gives account of the social, political, religious and personal issues of his time while being – as he said of a poet he very much admired, Louis MacNeice – 'a tourist in his own country', a poet of displacement and unrest.

2.3.3 Paul Muldoon's 'The Eel'

> Muldoon […] writing about the here-and-now, with a cleverness and facility which constantly amazes me. For all the technical skill… It arises from ordinary speech, and the peculiarity, the vitality and strangeness […] It includes the myths, of course, and then sets them up against pub-talk and slabbering.
>
> Ciaran Carson

An analogous way of responding to local history through the language and poetry of other cultures, is offered by the poet from Northern Ireland Paul Muldoon [52].

His poetry, like Mahon's, features representations of space, of acts of transition between Ireland and elsewhere. His poetry tries, though evasively, to embrace, appropriate and convey the essence of the multiple experiences he goes through. It tries to give voice to his acceptance and refusal of the other and to raise important issues of cultural identity both about Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

Muldoon prefers to suggest rather than declare; he evokes rather than enunciates, alludes rather than explains, observes and amusingly responds rather than asserts. He does so by assigning unprecedented meanings to traditional words, by giving priority to

[52] Muldoon (1951-) was born in Co. Armagh, Northern Ireland; he was educated at St Patrick's College and QUB. He worked as a radio producer with BBC Ulster before lecturing at various universities in the United States. Since 1990 he has lectured at Princeton University. P. MULDOON, 'The Eel" in *Moy Sand and Gravel*, Faber & Faber, London 2002, pp. 58-59.

form, to the auditory and the semantic; by using the language of Northern Ireland and symbols from other civilisations; by indulging in riddles, sudden changes, puns, subjunctives, conditionals. He deconstructs syntax and uses technical ambiguities which inevitably allude and refer to his questioning the supposed certainties about past and future life.

It is also out of a desire to renovate his language and his vocabulary and encouraged by an admittedly weak connection with his native place, that Muldoon has tried a variety of forms over the years – from long sonnet sequences to the use of rhymes and assonances – and opened his writing up to the formal anxieties of influence.

The 'Eel' is part of a collection of poems – winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2003 – which range from personal experiences both in Co. Armagh and in New Jersey, to translations and remakings such as that of Yeats's 'A Prayer for my Daughter':

L'anguilla, la sirena […]
per giungere ai nostri mari,
ai nostri estuari, ai fiumi […]
di ramo in ramo e poi
di capello in capello, assottigliati,
sempre più addentro, sempre più nel cuore
del macigno, filtrando [53]

The self-same, the siren […]
to hang out in our seas,
our inlets, the rivers […]
against
the flow, from branch to branch, then
from capillary to snagged capillary,
farther and farther in, deeper and deeper into the heart [54]

The poem contains what is a constant element of Muldoon's poetry that is a continuing listing of objects and of nouns. Such a device certainly confers a specific energy to the poem itself; it strengthens, reinforces the idea of a continuous movement which has something of the obsessive working routine of the world the poet lives in.

While reading these lines, one has almost the feeling that Muldoon's vocabulary, in his depiction of a world of chaos and confusion, fails to communicate to the reader the content of what was supposed to be the original message. Muldoon's propensity is to confuse, defer, 'unsettle' rather than provide solutions or give hope:

[53] MONTALE, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[54] P. MULDOON, 'The Eel" in *Moy Sand and Gravel*, Faber & Faber, London 2002, pp. 58-9.

I want my own vision to be disturbed, I want never to be able to look at a hedgehog again or a… briefcase again – or at least the poem wants me never to be able to look at a hedgehog or a briefcase again – without seeing them in a different way. [55]

Muldoon deconstructs traditional forms of syntax and assigns to words that uneasiness and multiplicity which is a constant feature of Ulster culture. The 'eel' is, not accidentally, a kind of expanded sequel to a poem, 'The Briefcase', previously written in response to Seamus Heaney's 'A Lough Neagh Sequence', dedicated to Muldoon, where a case turns into a eel.

In the translation of Montale's poem, the eel is not simply a sexual animal. It is a political one that returns to the recognisable British 'green and pleasant spawning ground' and it is also a 'green soul' seeking life when 'desolation' prevails; a literary strategy, a way out of the translator's personal crises:

l'anima verde che cerca	a green soul scouting and scanning
vita là dove solo	for life where only
morde l'arsura e la desolazione	drought and desolation have hitherto clamped down [56]

[55] Quoted from E. LONGLEY, *The Living Stream. Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, Bloodaxe Books, Newcastle Upon Tyne 1994, p. 55.

[56] MONTALE, *op. cit.*; MAHON, *op. cit.*

Chapter III

Or volge l'anno: Infinite Ways of Reading Leopardi

> Are you bearing in mind/ that time when there was/ a fine look out of your eyes/ and yourself, pleased and thoughtful,/ were going up the boundaries/ that are set to childhood? […]May was sweet that year,/ and it was pleasantly you'd pass the day […] It's then I/ would set store on the quiet sky/ and the lanes and the little places,/ and the sea far away in one place/ and the high hills in another./ There is no tongue will tell till judgement/ what I feel myself those times.
> Leopardi, 'A Silvia' trans. by J. M. Synge

> La perfetta poesia non è possibile a trasportarsi nelle lingue straniere.
> G. Leopardi, Letter to Francesco Puccinotti, June 5, 1826

The various responses to the poetry of Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) that make up the volume *Or volge l'anno. At the Year's Turning* [1], certainly contrast with the translation J. M. Synge gave of 'A Silvia'. Published on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the Italian poet's birth, the volume contains the contributions of one hundred and six Irish poets, both major and minor ones, who have read – or must have read – and interpreted Leopardi's poetry. Either willingly or because they were asked to, these poets have sometimes:

— faithfully translated (or at least, they have endeavoured to);
— adopted the style and neglected the content;
— maintained the content and disregarded the form;
— introduced elements of strangeness;

[1] M. SONZOGNI, ed. by, *Or Volge L'anno. At the Year's Turning*, Dedalus Press, Dublin 1998.

— commented on the poems themselves;
— used specific Hiberno-English features;
— written verses that apparently have nothing to do with, or hardly fit into, the whole schema because they were previously published;
— reproduced the general atmosphere of the poem.

The latter is the case with Desmond Egan's 'Silvia', a reproduction of the original poem which optimistically looks at the poet's present reality, that of his fourteen-year-old daughter playing some music by Mozart:

this bungalow is full of morning
and my daughter playing her allegro
solemn eyes […]
not an echo
but your winter words Giacomo
hold more hope in their defeat
than any library of lies

longing is also a kind of love

so I will not stop
listening to my daughter. [2]

* *

Others have more freely exploited the texts, some to the extent of producing satire as in the case of Rita Ann Higgins's 'For Crying Out Loud' where the speaking voice, that of a cabbage seller, tries to cheer Leopardi up:

Listen Leo love
pardon me for saying so
but that cockaleekie
about the storm
is hard to stomach.

A little less
of your lethargic lingo
would go a long way

[2] D. HEGAN, 'Silvia', *ibid*., pp. 128-9.

In order words Leo love
lighten up. [3]

The stanzas of different lengths, which evoke the sounds of the streets of Dublin, ironically conclude with the assertion of the value of life which can be neither obscured by Leopardi's apocalyptic vision of the storm nor by his 'theories on what death heals us from' because, were the author in slight agreement with the Italian poet, she would be either dead or in a state of despair.

* *

Sometimes, Leopardi's poems can prove thoroughly inspiring, with their themes all combining in one composition as in David Wheatley's 'Omaggio a Leopardi'. Here, the image of the Icelander wandering in the desert merges with those of the majestic moon and the distant slopes of Vesuvius devouring all it can:

Emerging from his brilliant equatorial mausoleum
Leopardi's Icelander patrolled
his blazing desert wastes
with the tenderness of a pessimistic gardener.[...]
The moon's ruined face
bestowed its impotent benevolence.
[…] A distant Vesuvius rumbled,
wondering what remained to destroy. [4]

* *

Distinctive Leopardian echoes coming from different sources can also be found in one poem by Michael Longley (1939-), 'Leopardi's Song-Thrush'. The attempt to save 'Il passero solitario', i.e. the song-thrush, and references to 'La ginestra' are intertwined in a way that is characteristic of his best nature descriptions:

Have they eaten all the thrushes here in Italy?
In the resonant Valle del Serchio I have heard
Thunder claps, church bells, the melancholy banter
of gods and party-goers, echoes from mountaintops

[3] R. A. HIGGINS, 'For Crying Out Loud', *ibid*., p. 150.
[4] D. WHEATLEY, 'Homage to Leopardi', *ibid.*, p. 244.

And Alesandro's hillside bar, but not one thrush.[...]
My lamentation a batsqueak from the balcony,
I stick some thorns onto the poet's beloved broom
And call it gorse (or whin or furze), a prickly
Sanctuary for the song-thrush among yellow flowers,
Its underwing flashing yellow as it disappears. [5]

The fascination for details of the landscape, which expresses itself in imagery conveyed by a narrating voice constantly concerned with domestic situations, yet able to debouch into more cosmic reveries, is a constant feature of Longley's poems. Both in *Weather in Japan* and in other collections about Co. Mayo, he finds consolation in the observation of plants and animals that he enjoys naming one by one and that lead him – as in the poem above – to considerations upon the political implications of the state of the ecological system.

It is thus unsurprising to find that Longley's poetry, often consisting of binary oppositions – Englishness and Irishness, urban and pastoral – while 'encouraging people to feel reverence and wonder in natural world' has often had specific political gestures. This also is borne out of a desire to receive, to appropriate the other; to make it objectively identifiable through an elaborate, grafted, ordained form, through long cadenced lines about the Italian scenery as his wonderfully constructed lyric 'Etruria' illustrates.

* *

The excerpts from the poems that follow are both from the above-mentioned collection, *Or volge l'anno*, and from a collection of Leopardi's poems translated into English by the Irish poet Eamon

[5] M. LONGLEY, 'Leopardi's Song-Thrush', *ibid.*, p. 168; in *The Weather in Japan*, Cape Poetry, London 2000, p. 55. In the same collection Longley introduces the Irish reader to the poetry of Pascoli and dwells upon the description of the nature around Tuscany, where he has spent many a summer. Born in Belfast of Protestant parents, Longley studied classics at TCD, worked in London, Dublin and now lives in South Belfast with poet and professor Edna Longley. He is the author of an autobiographical account of the years spent in Belfast with Derek Mahon, Seamus Heaney and others, *Tupenny Stung* (1994); various collections of poems, the last of which, *Snow Water* (2004) have made him win the 2005 Montale Prize for Poetry. These are *An Exploded View* (1973), *Man Lying on a Wall* (1976), *The Echo Gate* (1979) and after a twelve-year gap *Gorse Fires* (1991); *The Ghost Orchard* (1995).

Grennan (1941-)[6]. In order to better understand the reasons for, the nature of and the differences among the various texts here provided, an introduction to Grennan – as well as to some of the authors who have been involved in the project – has proved necessary.

* *

What brought the Irish-born and American-based Grennan to such an enterprise? It was certainly the student's love for the 'calm lucidity of understanding and expression, the combination of eloquence and idiomatic directedness' of the Italian verses. It was also, as he wrote in the notes to his translation, the thematic combination of the 'cosmic and the quotidian'; the philosophical propensity towards a constant state of melancholy often enlivened by the magnificence of the beauties of nature.

Grennan tells the reader that he first tried to translate 'L'Infinito' while studying at UCD but that he soon gave up the task when he went to America where much of his time was devoted to researching and teaching.

Well aware that there is no such thing of a completed translation as such, but that a translation can only be an approximation, an attempt to reproduce the original 'as best as one can', Grennan emphasised the specific technical difficulties he encountered.

He also touched upon the problems inherent in the reception of the poems by an English-speaking reader – be this inevitably linked to the content and the form of Leopardi's poetry: the 'restrained intensity' of style which reminds one of the Romantic age, may strike the contemporary 'Anglo-American-Irish ear as excessive […] artificially invocative […] sentimental, abstract' [7].

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[6] E. GRENNAN, ed. and trans. by, *Giacomo Leopardi. Selected Poems*, Dedalus Press, Dublin 1995. Born in Dublin, Grennan studied Italian and English at UCD; spent one year in Rome, then moved to America where he completed a PhD on Shakespeare. Since then – except for a sabbatical year spent in Co. Wexford with his family, in 1977 – he has been lecturing in English in New York. He has various collections of poems: *Wildly for Days* (1983), *What Light There is* (1987), *Relations: New and Selected Poems* (1998) published in the United States and *Selected and New Poems* (2000) published in Ireland. He is also the author of numerous translations. For the collection in question he received the PEN Award for poetry in translation.

[7] See *Giacomo Leopardi. Selected Poems*, xv.

To this, he added the not-easily-translatable sudden change of tone – from the quotidian to the more philosophical – which may produce an inevitable shift of rhythm.

The attempt to convey the musicality, the speed, the smoothness, the spirit, the 'true sound' [8] of the source texts has been made somewhat easier by the use of the free lyric verse employed by Leopardi. Though sometimes made difficult by the presence of rhyme – to his view a distinctively Italian feature – such an attempt has been achieved by way of a sort of colloquialism which had necessarily to be 'straightforward' and 'timeless' and could not be associated with a line-by-line rendering of the content.

As for the kind of English utilized by Grennan, being an Irishman who settled in America at a relatively young age, it is also characterised by Americanisms. The 'Irish' and the 'American', whatever are the cultural, historical, identity issues the two terms constantly entail, have marked most of his poetic production and his translating activities.

Grennan has often claimed that he felt in-between two worlds, going through a sense of passage, of mutability, of uncertainty [9]. This feeling finds a complement in the beautiful descriptions Leopardi gave of nature [10] and more generally in his aesthetics: no wonder then if Grennan's 'Men Roofing' alludes to the acceptance of a Leopardian secular view of the world [11] while suggesting, with its 'common ground and nobody's sky', an idea of not belonging to a specific place.

In this respect, the versions of Leopardi's poems evidence Grennan's gift for translation and for language intended as means of

[8] In the translations published up to the moment he finished his, i.e. 1995, Grennan blames the absence of it or the sometimes too weak a rendering of it. Of some of these, the 1923 one by G. L. Bickersteth or the one done in 1946 by John Heath-Stubbs, for instance, he still acknowledges some qualities.

[9] This is also translated by the careful choice of titles: 'As If It Matters' or 'What Light There Is' question in the very moment they assert it, one truth and proclaim another.

[10] It was also Wallace Stevens, as he recalls, who considerably led him towards a kind of poetry about nature which could assign the main role to language.

[11] Grennan once defined himself a 'post-Catholic', that is something that has seen 'the loss of the institutional stuff but the residual presence of the savour, the frisson, the speechless interior, for which some of the solf words become a kind of shorthand.' J. QUINN, 'Eamonn Grennan. Interview', *Metre*, ed. by J. QUINN, D. WHEATLEY, no. 9, 2001, p. 19.

escaping into the ineffability, the unpredictability of his unconsciousness. Poetry comes from:

> a laconic sense of passage, a kind of sense, of, well, so what, this is all there is, a sort of shrug. It's that end of the spectrum. So on the one hand there's a sort of Wordsworthian thing in some of his moods (the heart dancing with the daffodils), and on the other there's a touch of Leopardi and l'infinità vanità del tutto. There's a romantic streak in there, in me […] So it's both vision and recognition – the counterpoint of vision and recognition. [12]

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-8.

3.1 ‘Alla luna’

O graziosa luna, io mi rammento
Che, or volge l’anno, sovra questo colle
Io venia pien d’angoscia a rimirarti:
E tu pendevi allor su quella selva,
Siccome or fai, che tutta la rischiari […]
Il rimembrar delle passate cose,
Ancor che triste, e che l’affanno duri!
Leopardi

Should the reader of Leopardi be surprised to find that what Brendan Kennelly (1936-) offers of ‘Alla luna’ is the picture of a toothless old woman? Most likely a member of the poet’s family or some dear friend, who loved gathering little boys and girls around her, she is nostalgically remembered by the poet:

Mary Anne Boland’s face
lit with joy at the sight of the youngsters
my brothers and sisters
chattering up steps
to flock her chair […]

Yet no moon can equal
the light in her eyes
when she sits and names them
like the Maker on the seventh day.

[…] Colm John Brendan
Alan Mary Anne
Paddy Kevin

The innocent gaze of the boy gives way to a sadder, gloomier tone which prefigures the image of the woman lying in the coffin and which glances at the picture of one of the poet’s sisters, dead at the age of seven, overlooking the fields, an image dear to Kennelly [13].

[13] B. KENNELLY, “A Toothless, Happy Moon”, *ibid.*, pp. 159-60. Born in Ballylongford, Co. Kerry – where a festival dedicated to him has been held for the past two years or so – Kennelly moved back to Dublin after having studied at TCD and in England. He has been teaching English at TCD since 1973 and he is now retiring. In the early stages of his literary activity he wrote two novels, *The Crooked Cross* (1963), which is about emigration and famine and *The Florentines* (1967), out of his student life in Leeds. He then mostly moved to poetry – of which we have numerous collections – and did a few versions of classical plays such as *Antigone*

Kennelly's contribution is characteristic of most of his poetry and in accordance with what he has written in the various prefaces to his collections about the origin and the nature of his poetry:

> the desirability of continuing, of sticking at it, of waking up again and walking out into the morning light […] I like to write about things that move and sing and kill and generate – hounds, birds, badgers, tinkers, children, gossips. I am fascinated by the animated aimlessness of ordinary conversation […] Because poetry is conscious and impassioned repetition, constantly compelling us to recognise and to speak out recognitions, it forces us to slow down, to stop, to look and to try to see […] it points out the absurdity of the busy man, the sad farce of the totally preoccupied mind, the ludicrousness of the hot face of haste, and the dubious ambiguous nature of 'progress.' [14]

His is a poetry born out of the minutiae of daily life sometimes taken for granted, occasioned by small and major events, made up of the different voices coming from people, from nature, from the city and its life and often come alive in a colloquial way as his most recent collections of poems show.

* *

Any comparison with the more faithful, or at least supposedly more faithful, Grennan's 'To the Moon' would prove pointless at this stage:

Now that the year has come full circle,
I remember climbing this hill, heartbroken,
To gaze up at the graceful sight of you,
And how you do tonight, bathing them in brightness.
But at that time your face seemed nothing
But a cloudly shimmering through my tears,
So wretched was the life I led: and lead still…

(1986) and *Medea* (1988). He is one of the best known poets in Ireland; a marvellous reader of his poetry. His collections of poems include among others: *My Dark Fathers* (1964); *Cromwell* (1983), a long poem in which through the investigation of Cromwell, he looks more deeply at some major historical events of Ireland; *The Book of Judas* (1991), an epic poem in which he lets an almost contemporary-like Judas speak; *The Man Made of Rain* (1998) written after a major operation due to alcoholic problems; *Begin* (1999).

[14] Quoted from Å. PERSSON, *Betraying the Age. Social and Artistic Protest in Brendan Kennelly's Work*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteburg, Sweden 2000, p. 75, p. 77.

[…] how welcome then
The remembrance of things past – no matter
How sad, and the heart still grieving. [15]

Instead of pointing at the year's turning, the first verse of Grennan's poem emphasizes the circling, episodic nature of time, the year having 'come full circle' implying that the year has come to an end and has turned out the same way the preceding one had and that man's life is eternally made of sorrow and disappointment.

The effectiveness, the repetitiveness of the events, though, is not always efficaciously rendered as the choice of some words reveal: 'heartbroken' (line 2) for the Italian 'pien d'angoscia' (line 3) or 'To gaze up at the graceful sight of you,' (line 3) for 'Io venia […] a rimirarti' or such expressions as 'no matter' (line 14).

The translator here seems to insist on stressing the internal struggle of the speaking voice by emphasizing his physical strain through his climbing rather than his simply being on – the hill. The inversion of lines 6-8 contribute to creating such an effect: 'But at that time your face seemed nothing/ But a cloudy shimmering through my tears,/ So wretched was the life I led'.

[15] E. GRENNAN, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

3.2 'A se stesso'

Or poserai per sempre,
Stanco mio cor. Perì l'inganno estremo,
Ch'eterno io mi credei. Perì. Ben sento,
In noi di cari inganni,
Non che la speme, il desiderio è spento.
Posa per sempre. Assai
Palpitasti.

Leopardi

Sometimes, as in Francis Harvey's 'Bestiary', a more general theme brings forth reflections inspired by local realities: 'A se stesso' then becomes a pretext for examining the grief caused by the death of a woman in a country dominated by sectarian conflicts:

Nights and he empties himself of himself.
[…] You are different he hears the priest say,
you are not a pig or a cow or a sheep,
but remember how they found the body
of Owney Bán curled up under a whinbush
like a beast that had crawled away into
a dark place to lie down and die.
He took her for granted [16]

* *

It is more interesting, though, to compare the two versions of the same poem offered by Seamus Deane (1940-) [17] and Eamon Grennan:

Seamus Deane, 'A se stesso'

The long wait is over. Now you can rest.
forever, my tired heart. The final lie

[16] F. HARVEY, 'Bestiary', *Or volge l'anno*, p. 144.

[17] Born in Derry and educated at QUB and Cambridge, Deane taught at UCD and then moved to teach at Notre Dame University. He is the author of several essays about Ireland, most notably *A Short History of Irish Literature* (1986) and *Strange Country* (1997); of some collections of poems and a novel about the Troubles, *Reading in the Dark* (1996). He is the editor of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature* (1991).

has been told, though I confess
I never thought to see it die.
I no longer long to be blessed
by false hopes; now I can say goodbye
to all desire, and can let you rest
from your fast beating [18]

Eamon Grennan, 'A se stesso'

Now you will rest, tired heart, forever. Finished
Is your last fantasy, which I felt sure
Would endure forever. It's finished. I know in my bones
That hope and even desire are cold
For any more fond illusions.
Stay easy forever. You've been
Throbbing long enough. [19]

While Grennan insisted on keeping the specific initial temporal reference which stresses the power of the assertive voice, from the very beginning Deane emphasized the inevitable passing of time and by preferring the past participle and the passive form, he put the accent on men's incapacity to resist events. So, if the 'I' of Deane's version is inevitably to surrender to destiny, or has already been subjugated by it, Grennan somehow made the protagonist of his poem responsible for the actions of his life.

The disregard for the meaning of the original work, in Deane's poem, may be ascribed to his decision to use rhyme. This facilitated the adding of further information – 'I no longer to be blessed/ by false hopes' (lines 5-6) – and the slight alteration of the content so that the rendering of 'Assai palpitasti' by 'can let you rest/ from your fast beating' (lines 7-8) highlights the intensity rather than the length of the verse.

A careful look at Grennan's interpretation of the poem draws attention to elements already detected in the previous translated text:

— the omission of the verb: 'and, the world/ Mud' (lines 10-1) here creating an enjambment;

— a tendency towards emphasis: 'Life is nothing/ But blankness of spirit' (lines 9-10); 'Fate gave our kind/ No gift but death' (lines 12-3);

[18] S. DEANE, 'A se stesso', *ibid.*, p. 117.
[19] E. GRENNAN, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

— the anticipation or suspension of the content of some verses, which sometimes makes the poem longer and which alters the connection between the lines;

— a kind of more colloquial lexis;

— the disregard for the brevity of the verses: the extreme original concentration suggested by it is expanded into longer sentences that have to be read all at once and visibly loosen the reader's attention.

3.3 'La sera del dì di festa'

Dolce e chiara è la notte e senza vento,
E queta sovra i tetti e in mezzo agli orti
Posa la luna, e di lontan rivela
Serena ogni montagna. […]
Nella prima età, quando s'aspetta
Bramosamente il dì festivo, or poscia
Ch'egli era spento, io doloroso, in veglia,
Premea le piume; ed alla tarda notte
Un canto, che s'udia per li sentieri
Lontanando morire a poco a poco,
Già similmente mi stringeva il core.

Leopardi

The same features can also be detected in Grennan's 'Sunday Evening', i.e. 'La sera del dì di festa'.

The final image of the poem, whose original forty-six lines have become fifty-three, depicting the child waiting for Sunday to arrive, in its English rendering, has a more colloquial tone and an Irish flavour:

The night bright and easy, not a breath
Of wind: calmly the moon hangs
Above the rooftops and the kitchen gardens
Revealing in the distance the clear
Outline of every mountain […]
When I was a child, I used to wait
In a fever of desire for Sunday,
And when it was over I'd lie awake
Brokenhearted, sobbing to my pillow;
Then, in the small hours, a song
I'd hear dying away little by little
Through the back streets of town

Would make my heart ache as it's aching now. [20]

The poem, which presents the poet's grief as an emblem for human destiny, in its English rendering still maintains the beautiful and detailed description of a lunar landscape. This is conveyed by the turnings of the phrases, by the rich use of adjectives and indefinite topographical references.

The recurring theme of the passing of time, with its inevitable reflection upon the futility of history, has certainly been of interest to the Irish poet who has often written about an overtly distant attitude towards a society dominated by politics.

Once again, the theme of Leopardi's 'La sera del dì di festa' has been loosely translated by Desmond O'Grady into a new poem. In 'Her Birthday Night', he gives voice to the memory of the moments he spent with his beloved, of her passing by, of time inevitably forcing him to forget about happy occasions such as that of her birthday:

All day the compliments of friends and, in their traditional way,
elders congratulate you while they happily recall times past.
The young with gaiety evoke your promise of a happy future. [21]

[20] GRENNAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5.
[21] D. O'GRADY, 'Her Birthday Night', *Or volge l'anno*, p. 208.

3.4 'Il sabato del villaggio'

Siede con le vicine
Su la scala a filar la vecchierella,
Incontro là dove si perde il giorno
E novellando vien del suo buon tempo,
Quando ai dì della festa ella si ornava,
Ed ancor sana e snella
Solea danzar la sera intra di quei
Ch'ebbe compagni dell'età più bella. […]
Poi quando intorno è spenta ogni altra face,
E tutto l'altro tace,
Odi il martel picchiare, odi la sega
Del legnaiuol, che veglia
Nella chiusa bottega alla lucerna,
E s'affretta, e s'adopra
Di fornir l'opra anzi il chiarir dell'alba […]
Godi, fanciullo mio; stato soave,
Stagion lieta è cotesta.
Altro dirti non vo'; ma la tua festa
Ch'anco tardi a venir non ti sia grave
Leopardi

The contribution offered by Harry Clifton (1952-), while more distinctively looking at contemporary life in Italy, departs from it in the very moment it enters it. As it often occurs in his poetry, reflections about local life end by creating an air of universality. 'The Dead of Poggio', in its oblique reference to Leopardi's 'Il sabato del villaggio', is the portrayal of the village people who dress up for the Sunday church ceremonies and walk up and down along the same streets. The poem provides with a look at those who pay their respects to their dead and give presents to their children the day after and at those who – like the Irish – were forced to leave for America to make a living and to those who, one day, will be dead themselves:

Because there's no soil
To bury them, the dead
Are stacked above Poggio
In honeycombed vaults

Of an afternoon, I pause
Among the plastic flowers
And photographs – the dead
Dressed in their Sunday clothes,

As if eternity
Were a country dance
They were going to[...]

All their lives, on All Soul's Day,
With a red votive lamp
And a question, until
They are one of the dead themselves. [22]

* *

Some of the poets have added a distinctively Irish trait to their translations of the poem.

Such is the case of 'In the Village of a Saturday' by Peter Fallon (1951-), constantly interested – as his collections of poetry show – in supporting and defending Kavanagh's love for the parochial. He does so by using Hiberno-English and Gaelic words:

Peter Fallon, 'In the Village of a Saturday'	Eamon Grennan, 'Saturday in the Village'
The *cailleach* sits like Clotho	On her own front steps the old woman
with the women of the village.	Sits spinning with her neighbours,
She's studying the setting sun.	Facing the sun as it sinks in the west.
She's all talk of a previous age	She prattles on about the good old days
	When she too would dress up for Sunday
when for the festive times	And how – still quick and trim –
it was she who'd decorate	She'd dance the whole evening away
and adorn her own	With all those boyfriends
hale and hearty figure	She had in her shining youth […]
and dance her fill	
with all the young men of the place	
in those old days,	
the good old days. […]	
When all the other lights	Then, when every other light is out
are out and there's no	And there isn't another sound,
other sound you'll hear	You'll hear the carpenter's saw,
saw and hammer sounds and know	You'll hear his hammer
	Banging from the shuttered shop
that in the half light	Where, by lamplight, he sweats and strains

[22] H. CLIFTON, 'The Dead of Poggio', *ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

of his shut up shop
the carpenter is labouring
to complete a job before sun up. […]

To finish a job before break of day […]

Revel in them, *a mhic*.
I'll say no more
than this: Don't fear
or fret if you can't bear

the wait until the holiday [24].

Enjoy it, little one, for this
Is a state of bliss, a glad season.
I'll say no more, only
Don't fret if your Sunday
Seems a long time coming. [23]

The poem questions the possibility of true happiness. One can only find delight in either the cessation of sorrow or in waiting. Hoping for some future happiness is therefore vain.

What is kept in the two versions of 'Sabato del villaggio'?

What strikes at a first reading of Fallon's poem is the aforementioned use of the Irish idiom which confers a local flavour to the lines: 'cailleach' (old woman, hag, alcove) and 'a mhic' (mac, mic: son, boy) explicitly steer the reader back to a specific cultural context.

Fallon's translation is then an overt appropriation of features from the original text which is accomplished in the light of a more general view of how poetry should be. It is for this reason that in his version:

— 'le vicine' are 'the women of the village' and not 'her neighbours', because in an Irish village there is no difference between being a neighbour or a villager;

— 'la vecchierella', i.e. 'cailleach', is intent on telling about the old times rather than carry out a kind of activity preferred, or at least very much in use, by Italian women, that is spinning;

— the use of colloquial expressions from Ireland is preferred as in the rendering of 'E novellando vien del suo buon tempo' (line 11) by 'She's all talk of a previous age' or of 'intra di quei' (line 14) by 'the good old days';

— the use of inversions to emphasize actions and actors, as in 'it was she who'd decorate', is sometimes preferred;

[23] GRENNAN, *op. cit*., p. 79, p. 81.

[24] Born in Germany, graduated at TCD, lives in Ireland. He is the editor and author of numerous collections of poetry, among which *The Speaking Stones* (1978), *Winter Work* (1983) *The News and Weather* (1987) P. FALLON, 'In the Village of a Saturday', *ibid.*, pp. 131-3.

— compressions such as ‘saw and hammer sounds’ dissipate the effect of repetitiveness provided by ‘Odi il martel picchiare, odi la sega/ del legnaioul’ (lines 33-4) or miss out some nuance as is the case with ‘of his shut up shop’ (‘nella chiusa bottega alla lucerna’, line 35);

— copulatives are omitted as in ‘to complete a job before sun up’ (‘anzi il chiarir dell’alba’, line 37).

Overall, the feeling is that Fallon’s adaptation is more effective than Grennan’s expectedly more faithful rendering of the poem with his excessively conversational ‘boyfriends/ She had in her shining youth’ or with his weak ‘And there isn’t another sound’ as opposed to Fallon’s ‘there’s no/ other sound’.

The latter’s love for the events, the people and the language of his own ‘parish’, Co. Meath, testified by his translation, proves to be as effective as in his *The News and Weather* and *Winter Work* . What the critic, poet and professor, Bernard O’Donoghue wrote about Fallon’s poetry seems to hold true for ‘Village of a Saturday’ insofar as it shows that a foreign text, while offering an opportunity to look beyond, can well be an efficient, original way to turn back to where one is from:

> It may not be too sophistical to suggest that the charge of provincialism against Fallon is itself evidence of a fear of narrowness; it has certainly led to a desperate wish for cosmopolitanism in Irish writing which is embarrassing and unconvincing. Fallon has par excellence the virtue of writing of what he knows about. When his subjects are allowed to carry the weight […], Fallon has more to teach than writers of more declared ambition. [25]

* *

‘Il sabato del villaggio’ by the poet and critic Bernard O’Donoghue (1954-) distinguishes itself by being a variation of part of the original poem soaked in Irish rain and permeated by aspects of Irish life:

> […] Cleaning Sunday shoes,
> Listening to Céili House, interspersed
> With the thrush though the open window.
>
> Look: *‘red sky at night, shepherd’s delight’*.

[25] B. O’DONOGHUE, ‘Peter Fallon’, *Contemporary Poets*, ed. by T. CHEVALIER, St James Press, Chicago, London 1991, p. 290.

But that was the best of it. You were woken
At six a.m. by the insistent rain,
Falling on the hay, and making it muddy
Underfoot. To put a good face on it,
Your mind tilts towards the next week's vigil. [26]

3. 5 'La quiete dopo la tempesta'

Passata è la tempesta;
Odo augelli far festa, e la gallina,
Tornata in su la via,
Che ripete il suo verso. Ecco il sereno
Rompe là da ponente, alla montagna […]
L'artigiano a mirar l'umido cielo,
Con l'opra in man, cantando,
Fassi in su l'uscio; a prova
Vien fuor la femminetta a còr dell'acqua
Leopardi

Dennis O'Driscoll (1954-) draws from Leopardi's 'La quiete dopo la tempesta' to develop even further the theme of one poem of his, 'Weather Permitting'. Though the criterion for the selection of the text after which each Irish poet wrote his/her own is not known, it is likely that O'Driscoll, who was interested – as his poetry reveals – in the human condition, 'in the tenuous hold we have on life, the humiliations and uncertainties experienced', was attracted more by the theme than by the style or the metre of the original.

At a close reading, the third section, 'After Leopardi', appears as a successful combination of both Leopardi's verses translated into English, and his own. This is achieved by shifting from a Leopardian image of the reached calm, prompting thoughts and hopes, to a less faithfully rendered recognition, accompanied by an economic kind of language, of the temporariness of those feelings:

The storm runs out of wind; nature, which
abhors a silence, fills the vacancy with birdsong.
Deserting the airless, low-ceilinged coop,

[26] B. O'DONOGHUE, 'Saturday Evening', *ibid.*, p. 203. Born in Co. Cork, O'Donoghue lives in England where he teaches in college. He is the author of different collections of poems and of critical essays, namely *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (1994).

the hen repeats herself ad infinitum. […]

Balm of mind and body. Will we ever feel
more reconciled to life than now, ever
know a moment more conducive to new hopes,
eager beginnings, auspicious starts?
How easily pleased we are.

The closing of the poem, however, expresses at the same time the Irish poet's intention to commit to the pages of the source text, whose presence is then finally acknowledged: 'Lack of woe equates with rapture then,/ Though not till death will pain take full leave/ Of our senses, grant us permanent relief.' [27]

* *

Two other versions of the same poem are provided by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (1942-) with her 'After Leopardi's Storm', and by Grennan's 'The Calm After the Storm'.

The sky clears, and at the top of the street
I can hear the hen giving out her litany,
The stream bounding down the slope
In its tunnel of broom.
The lacemaker
Stands at her window singing,
Her work still in her hand: a huge ruffle
Wavering its fins in the watery breeze. [28]

The storm has blown over
I can hear the happy chatter of birds,
And the hen out on the road again
Cacackling her one phrase. Look
How blue breaks over the mountains […]
The craftsman stands
And sings in his own doorway,
So he can see the glistening sky;
Housewives hurry to gather
The first pails of fresh rainwater [29].

[27] D. O'DRISCOLL, 'After Leopardi', *ibid.*, p. 207; in *Weather Permitting*, Anvil Press, London 1999, pp.57-8. Born in Co.Tipperary, O'Driscoll was educated in Dublin. He is most known for *Quality Time* (1997) and *Weather Permitting* (1999); for being the reviewer of the now dead *Hibernia*, the *Sunday Tribune*, *Poetry Review*, *Harvard Review*, the *TLS*. The last lines from Leopardi's poem read: 'assai felice/ Se respirar ti lice/ D'alcun dolor; beata/ Se te d'ogni dolor morte risana.' lines 51-4.

[28] E. Ní CHUILLEANÁIN, 'After Leopardi's Storm', *ibid.*, pp. 190-1; also in *The Girl Who Married the Reindeer*, Gallery Press, Co. Meath, 2001, p. 36. Born in Cork, educated in Cork and Oxford, Ní Chuilleanáin teaches Renaissance Studies at TCD. Together with her husband, the poet Macdara Woods, and Pearse Hutchinson, she is the editor of the literary magazine *Cyphers*. She is one of the most distinguished women poets in Ireland. She is the author of many collections of poems, *Acts and Monuments* (1972) being the first, followed by, among others, *The Second Voyage* (1977), *The Rose-Geranium* (1981), *The Magdalene Sermon* (1989).

The first offers a partial rendering of the content of the original which mixes with personal reflections spurred by the place she is in and graphically signalled by dots. Of the original poem, Ní Chuilleanáin's version only maintains some lines accidentally selected: from the image of the sky clearing – where there is neither mention of the storm nor of the birds chirping – to the coming out of the hen and on to the description of the river.

What is most interesting is that she draws the reader's attention by feminizing the protagonist of lines 11-12: 'l'artigiano a mirar l'umido cielo' is turned into someone who makes laces and who also participates in the activity – as the repetitive use of the personal pronoun 'her' designates – originally assigned to another character, a 'femminetta', that is, gathering rainwater.

Ní Chuilleanáin's poem then pulls back from the original by asserting a female voice contemplating and trying to describe the landscape. As in other poems of hers – take 'Lucina Schynning in Silence of the Nicht' for instance in which the speaker, after three days of rain, goes out of the house to immerse herself into cold water – the representation of a woman who submerges herself in a world of nature dominated by water imagery, prevails:

Reflected light lies about everywhere.
Like birds we approach, to sip and splash
At the hedges of our watery nature [30].

An attempt to compare this version with Grennan's translation of 'La quiete dopo la tempesta', once again proves unsuccessful in that, as part of a longer project, Grennan had to faithfully reproduce the source text. The enthusiasm and the joy of the villagers and the animals who come out after the storm is here so vividly recounted that one has the feeling that the whole scene was described in the same moment it was being lived. Though, from a syntactical and lexical point of view, there does not seem to be anything relevant to remark upon, except for the onomatopoeic imitation of the hen's sound, one may note that the main theme of the poem, with its final emphasis on death as the end of sorrow, seems to have exercised an overt influence

[29] E. GRENNAN, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
[30] E. Ní CHUILLEANÁIN, 'After Leopardi's Storm', p. 190.

over the writing of a poem of his, ‘Orison’. In this respect it is worth looking at it in order to find some similarities:

A morning washed to gleamy skin and bone, to the vapoury
radiance left by
Rain, to such absolutes as my own shadow burnt on treebark
and hedgeleaf and
Living its other life there while I walk this present, provisional
body towards
The vanishing point. [31]

[31] E. GRENNAN, *Metre*, Winter 2002/3, p. 70.

Chapter IV

Desmond O'Grady, Pearse Hutchinson: Translating Culture, Translating Dialect

4.1 Desmond O'Grady, the Engagé Translator

> The Delta that wombs Alexandria?
> The hills that bosom Tuscan shores?
> A Greek island? Either way familiar to me, if unrecognisable.
> Desmond O'Grady, 'Dream'
>
> I am a citizen, not of Athens or Greece, but of the world.
> Socrates

'A citizen of the world' is indeed an apt description of the most prolific Irish translators of recent years, the poet Desmond O'Grady (1935-) [1].

O'Grady seems to have always privileged his experience as a traveller; his being a 'wandering Celt', i.e. one who sees leaving, arriving, meeting the other as a natural process through which one can better understand oneself.

[1] Desmond O'Grady was born in Limerick in 1935. In 1954 he left Ireland for Paris to write, while teaching for a living. There he made friends with Beckett, Sartre, Brancusi and Picasso. In 1957 he went to Italy and settled in Rome. Besides teaching he broadcast the news on Vatican Radio, frequented the cultural salons and translated film scripts. There, he also founded the European Community of Writers, played the role of a poet in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. He then moved to America as a teaching fellow at Harvard University while taking a doctorate in comparative literature. He has also taught at the American University in Cairo and at the University of Alexandria, Egypt. He now lives in Kinsale and still often goes back to Italy. He is the author of various collections of poems, *Chords and Orchestrations* (1956), *The Dark Age of Europe* (1967), *The Road Taken: Poems 1956-1996*, *The Wandering Celt* (2001); he has also translated the Middle Welsh heroic poem, *The Gododdin* (1977), poems from Irish, *A Limerick Rake* (1978) and poems by C. P. Cavafy (1999).

His volume, *Trawling Tradition, Translations 1954-1994* [2] contains a large number of versions into English from such diverse languages as Greek, Chinese, Arabic, Welsh and Irish but, most considerably Italian. Leopardi, Montale, Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Pavese, Pasolini, Luzi, Guidacci, Sanguineti, Gentili and Cardarelli [3] are among the thirty Italian poets who feature in the book.

Having been blamed for having lost sight of 'poetry' while being engaged in the process of translating, O'Grady has always asserted that the two activities were given the same attention and were, most importantly, strongly interrelated, both informing each other and supporting the need to trawl in the traditions of western cultures:

> When not writing my own poems I translate the poets who interest me […] Now my writing pattern was to translate when not writing poems of my own […] Translating poems helped me not only to get to know the work of the poets more intimately but also their languages and therefore their cultures. It has broadened and deepened my reading, sharpened my awareness, refined my sensibility – enriched me. It has shown me ways to give expression in my own poems to experiences I might not have done otherwise so that my poems and my translations inform each other. It keeps me in a prosodic and 'creative' state of mind, active with the purpose of language and has given me sharper focus in my own writing. [4]

A good number of the poems introduces the English speaking reader to multiple aspects of Italian society and culture.

As O'Grady points out in the preface to his volume, he found in translation an opportunity to work on the language he was still learning, i.e. Italian, and through it, to come across nuances of his own language he was not aware of.

The translations, versions or renderings – as he calls them (and the awareness of the distinction among such terms is

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[2] D. O'GRADY, *Trawling Tradition*, *Translations 1954-1994*, University of Salzburg, Salzburg 1994. The collection, which is a selection of previously published translations, includes poems by the following Italian writers: Corrado Govoni, Aldo Palazzeschi, Clemente Rèbora, Dino Campana, Arturo Onofri, Carlo Bettocchi, Attilio Bertolucci, Antonio Pozzi, Piero Bigongiari, Maria Luisa Spanziani, Alfredo Giuliani, Elio Pagliarani, Amelia Rosselli, Ercole Ugo d'Andrea, Ennio de Santis, Massimo Lippi, Guido Garufi.

[3] ID, *Off Licence*, The Dolmen Press, Dublin 1968.

[4] D. O'GRADY, *cit.*, xi, xii.

noteworthy)[5] – are always related and relatable to his poems. Both, as he states, derive from the explicit necessity to bring Ireland to Europe and make European cultures and literatures more accessible and comprehensible – the prefaces to the selected authors are significant in this respect – to the Irish reader.

Great support was given to him by Beckett, whom he met in Paris and by whom he was encouraged to move to Rome where, with a letter of introduction, he would meet the then ambassador of Ireland, Denis Devlin.

Besides, being in Italy certainly helped him to think in terms of broader spaces as opposed to the insular confines of his home country already evidenced by the writer he most loved, i.e. Joyce. In Rome he took part in literary and cultural events that led him not only to become more interested in Italian culture, but to look at European history from a different perspective. With such major literary figures as Ungaretti and Gadda and film directors as Fellini or Bertolucci, Rome was undoubtedly more alive than any other place in Europe.

Also, as an Irishman interested in Catholicism, it was inevitable for him to turn to the Vatican City as the ideal place where to learn more about, live and eventually write about a different kind of religiosity [6].

* *

For a young man, like him, with little experience in writing verses of his own, translation was not only a way of learning a foreign language, but a way of developing an awareness of its sounds, of developing ideas, of working out his own view of the world and of composition.

His translations also come out of an individual propensity towards identification with the content of the source text and of the willingness to question the role of language itself through reading.

The 'creative translation', the process through which a meaning can lead on to a personal interpretation which leaves room

[5] Apart from the suggestions coming from Ezra Pound's theory on 'creative translation', O'Grady was more generally helped to define his own theory about translation by his studies on comparative literature.

[6] Two most notable works of his on the subject are *Rome Reshaped* () an account of the history of Roman Jubilees and *Rome and the Church from Costantine to Charlemagne* ().

for the poetic voice, is what seems to mostly interest the Irish poet. Though motivated by the necessity to faithfully transpose the meaning of the original as part of a composite project, O'Grady is aware that compromises have sometimes to be made; that his presence is always there, recognisable, felt in each line he translates.

4.1.2 Vincenzo Cardarelli: an Exilic Return to Poetry.

> When Vincenzo Cardarelli lay dying/ she took me that midnight to say farewell./ His last words to us were a whispering/ request: 'translate my poems in English well.'/ I've done that for him, and her, with love./ At dawn he died. We left. His poems stand, live.'
> Desmond O'Grady, 'La Dolce Vita'[7]

It was probably the death of the Italian poet Vincenzo Cardarelli (1887-1959), which occurred two years after his arrival in Rome, that convinced O'Grady to translate part of his work. He first published the following poems as a section of a volume entitled *Off Silence*, in 1968, by Dolmen Press, Dublin: 'Adolescent' ('Adolescente'), 'A Welcome to Summer' ('Saluto di stagione'), 'Flight' ('Volo'), 'Friendship' ('Amicizia') 'Adrift' ('Alla deriva'), 'Poem' ('Poesia'), 'The Past' ('Passato'), 'Cruel Farewell'('Abbandono'), 'Seagulls' ('Gabbiani') 'Ligurian Evening' ('Sera di Liguria'), 'To Death' and 'Nostalgia' ('Alla morte e alla nostalgia'). To these, he subsequently added 'Meeting on the Circle Line' ('Incontro in circolare'), 'October' ('Ottobre'), 'Nocturnal Encounter' ('Incontro notturno'), 'Journey', 'Gavinana Evening' ('Sera di Gavinana'), 'Calendar' ('Calendario'), 'Liguria', 'To the Walls of My Town' ('Alle mura del mio paese').

O'Grady prefaces the poems of his collection by a few biographical details about their authors. What is striking is that despite some references to Cardarelli's native place, i.e. Tarquinia, north west of Rome, O'Grady seems to lay the weight on the influence of Leopardi and on the Italian poet's lack of money, who even when buried was 'wearing a borrowed coat'. Besides, it seems, the accurate account of Cardarelli's financial difficulties proves somehow

[7] Desmond O'Grady writes on in the poem: 'A nervous crisis made me walk out of Rome,/ for days, to Cardarelli's Tarquinia/ where he lies a dead guest in some friend's tomb.' D. O'GRADY, 'La Dolce Vita', *The Wandering Celt*, Dedalus Press, Dublin 2001, pp. 117-8.

necessary if one wants to fully understand how he perceived life and what he wrote about.

At the age of seventeen, the Italian poet left his home town and moved to Rome. It was only after trying different jobs that he became a literary journalist. At some stage he also founded a literary journal, *La Ronda*, which would only last a few years but which gave him some literary fame. There he expressed his ideas about a return to order, a return to a kind of modern classicism.

What attracted O'Grady about Cardarelli's poetry is indeed the simplicity of his language, the prosaic nature of it: as the Italian poet wrote, his poems can be called 'discorsi', as they are conceived as the direct expression of the speaking voice and as the bare representation of 'light without colour, existence without attributes'.

Translating Cardarelli's poems is a literary exercise and a precious starting point from where to gain knowledge of poetic techniques [8].

Moreover, O'Grady must have seen a reflection of his own concerns as well as of his own country in the texts he went through: the lines from 'Gabbiani' describing the flight and life of seagulls, here seen as a metaphor for the perpetual wandering of the poet who never fully experienced happiness, who never succeeded in finding peace in one place, made him think about his own background:

'Gabbiani'	'Seagulls'
Non so dove i gabbiani abbiano il nido,	I do not know where the seagulls nest,
ove trovino pace.	where they find peace.
Io son come loro	I am just like them,
in perpetuo volo.	in perpetual flight.
La vita la sfioro	I graze life
com'essi l'acqua ad acciuffare il cibo	as they do water scavenging sustenance.
E come forse anch'essi amo la quiete	And perhaps like them too I love quietness,
la gran quiete marina,	the great sea quiet.
ma il mio destino è vivere.	But it is my lot to live.
Balenando in burrasca.[9]	flashing in storms. [10]

[8] The structure of Cardarelli's poetry still maintains a precise grammatical and syntactical order which reminds of ancient Greek and Roman poetry: he himself defined his poetry as something that goes all the way straight to the point, with a rhythm that does not admit digressions and does not concede delays. More often, he added, it proceeds by juxtapositions of ideas and images as refractions of the same concept, it aims at a 'defining accuracy'.

[9] V. CARDARELLI, 'Gabbiani', *Poesie*, Mondadori, 1972, p. 55.

A close reading of the translation evidences O'Grady's intention to faithfully render the original. The nature of the Italian language, though, renders its completion only vaguely possible so that the English reader misses: the inversion of the traditional syntactical order which situates 'la vita' at the beginning of line 5; the recurrent presence of identical sounds provided by 'com'essi', 'anch'essi'; the sound of 'Balenando in burrasca' which seems to increase the meaning of the two words; the meaning of 'acciuffare' rendered by the weaker 'scavenging'[11].

Rather than for the Italian author's realization that life fades away, that peace and happiness cannot be achieved, the poem then caught the attention of the Irish poet for the suggestions coming from the theme of the eternal flying of seagulls. In the same way as seagulls inevitably announce and escape storms, it was out of tormented restlessness that he had moved from Ireland to France and from France to Italy. It was with feelings of love and hatred that he looked at his home place, a place where nothing ever changes, where sensations and images, more than real facts, contribute to creating a sort of paradise lost, 'enchanted in memory'.

Echoes of Cardarelli's poem can be found in O'Grady's *Chords and Orchestrations*. From 'My heart longs to return […] where winging seagulls mourn' to the memories of a 'childhood love', from a series of elegiac sonnets to the awareness of mutability, the collection, published in 1956, is made up of poems written when he was translating Cardarelli's work.

'The Past' ('Passato') [12], for instance, pays homage to the love for a woman, to what is left to us of a feeling, of an event, of a person and what cannot be developed further.

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[10] D. O'GRADY, 'Seagulls', *Off Licence*, p. 45; *Trawling Tradition*, p. 424.

[11] The definition from the Oxford English Dictionary reads: '(of an animal or a bird) search for decaying flesh as food'.

[12] 'I ricordi, queste ombre troppo lunghe/ del nostro breve corpo,/ questo strascico di morte/ che noi lasciamo vivendo/ i lugubri e durevoli ricordi/ eccoli già apparire:/ melanconici e muti/ fantasmi agitate da un vento funebre./ E tu non sei più che un ricordo/ Sei trapassata nella mia memoria.' V. CARDARELLI, 'Il passato', p. 59. 'Memories, those too long shadows/ of our short lived bodies,/ this trail of death/ we leave behind while living,/ everlasting and despondent memories,/ you see, they appear already:/ mute and melancholic ghosts/ aggravated by a funeral wind./ And you, you are nothing more than a recollection./ You have passed back into my memory.' D. O'GRADY, 'The Past', *Off Licence*, p. 44, *Trawling*, pp. 422-3.

* *

It is out of a desire to start off from the autobiographical detail, move on to the description of the landscape and reflect upon human destiny that some of Cardarelli's best poems are interpreted. Poems about specific places and recollections about them, such as 'Ligurian Evening', 'Liguria', 'Gavinana Evening' and 'To the Walls of My Town' are there also with the intent of offering the reader a view of some Italian places:

'Sera di Gavinana'	'Gavinana Evening'
Ecco la sera e spiove	Here comes the evening and the rain stops
sul toscano Appennino	on the Tuscan Apennine.
Con lo scender che fa le nubi a valle,	With the descent of cloud on the valley,
prese a lembi qua e là	caught here and there at the hedges
come ragne fra gli alberi intricate,	like cobwebs entwined among the trees,
si colorano i monti di viola.	the hills colour violet.
Per chi s'affanna il giorno	It's pleasant to wander,
ed in se stesso, incredulo, si torce.	for those whom the day upsets
Viene dai borghi […]	and for him […]
un vociar lieto e folto in cui si sente	From the villages, stirring here below,
il giorno che declina	comes the merry and busy sound
e il riposo imminente. [13]	of this declining day
	and imminent repose. [14]

A look at the target text highlights a different approach to translation undertaken by O'Grady in more recent times. One has the feeling that he either misunderstood the meaning of some lines or deliberately neglected their content. More interested in conveying an overall atmosphere rather than a specific meaning, he took licence with phrasing in an effort to make poems work as English poems in their own right.

This is the case for lines 7-8 whose English version does not reproduce the ambiguous subject of the action that is then split in two so that 'per chi' is referred to both by the plural demonstrative adjective 'those' and by the singular pronoun 'him' of the English lines 7-9.

[13] V. CARDARELLI, 'Sera di Gavinana', *op. cit.*, p.101.
[14] D. O'GRADY, *Trawling*, p. 431.

* *

Overall, poems by O'Grady like 'At Home in Rome', 'Return to Rome', 'Roman Elegy II', 'A Walk in Rome', 'Trastevere House', '10 Piazza Campitelli', while drawing from as different cultures as the Roman, the Greek and the Celtic, seem to owe a lot to those poems by Cardarelli celebrating the beauty of a woman and of some specific place [15].

In the same way, O'Grady's 'Roman Autumn' could be compared to Cardarelli's 'Autunno', where the author complains about the passing of 'il miglior tempo della nostra vita', 'the best time of our life' or to the already quoted 'To the Walls of My Town', whose reassuring image still suggests the inevitable decay, the 'crumbling' of both things and people. The lines from O'Grady's own poem read:

In my
decline, my need of change, I fly again
to Rome – my home from home about forty
years now despite some cities in between.

[…] That seems the age-old mode of mortal life:
to leave, return, recount, then leave again.
Psychic exile, seasons' forage, self-strife.

[…] Here I pass my time in walks through streets
to sites I know like long lost loves. The lives
of places, people, all things, suffer the fates'

process […]
Some old neighbours and friends
have died […] And some
foreigners, like me, returned to their homelands. [16]

[15] 'Meeting on the Circle Line' ('Incontro in circolare'), for the poet's recounting of a woman he happened to stare at in a Rome street and 'To the Walls of My Town' ('Alle mure del mio paese') for its beautiful and moving description of 'I recall nothing now of my town/ but the falling walls/ where they curve quite gracefully/ close by the great and glorious,/ if ruined, Basilica. […]/ I have always admired you./ Your solitary appearance/ was a consolation to me then' 'To the Walls of My Town', *Ibidem*, p. 435.

[16] D. O'GRADY, 'Roman Autumn', *The Wandering Celt*, pp. 130-1. 'It's the same with me as with you/ crumbling away hour after hour/ nor is it worth the

4.1.3 Umberto Saba: the Outsider and the World

The selection of biographical details about Umberto Saba (1883-1957) and of nine of his poems – 'The Theatre of the Artigianelli College' ('Teatro degli Artigianelli'), 'Old City' ('Città vecchia'), 'Economic Kitchen' ('Cucina economica'), 'Ladies' Swimming Champion' ('Campionessa di nuoto'), 'This Year' ('Quest'anno'), 'Milan', 'Turin' and 'Florence' ('Tre città') – seems to have been affected by the translator's need to assign his book the specific role of offering his reader multiple glimpses of Italy.

Saba, an 'outsider in an outsider port-city with an outsider language'[17], certainly gave the translator the opportunity to learn more about a liminal place like Trieste and about its everyday life:

'Città vecchia'	'Old City'
Qui tra la gente che viene e che va	Here among the people who come and go
dall'osteria alla casa o al lupanare,	from the pub, home or to the brothel,
dove son merci ed uomini il detrito	where there's merchandise and the flotsam
di un gran porto di mare,	of a great seaport
io ritrovo, passando, l'infinito	I, passing, find infinity
nell'umiltà.	in the humility.
Qui prostituta e marinaio, il vecchio	Here prostitute and sailor, the old man
che bestemmia, la femmina che bega,	who curses, the quarrelsome woman,
il dragone che siede alla bottega	the dragoon who sits
del friggitore […]	at the fried food shop […]
sono tutte creature della vita	are all creatures of life
e del dolore;	and of sorrow;
s'agita in esse, come in me, il Signore.	the Lord moves in them, as in me.
Qui degli umili sento in compagnia	Here in the company of humble people I feel
il mio pensiero farsi	my thought becomes
Più puro dove più turpe è la via. [18]	purer where the street is most indecent. [19]

Though the transposition into English of the depiction of the city reproduces a general desire for some kind of religiosity – which,

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friendly mercy/ to save me from corroding time.' ID., 'To the Walls of My Town', *Trawling*, p. 435.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 382.

[18] U. SABA, 'Città vecchia', *Il Canzoniere*, Einaudi, Torino 2004, p. 81.

[19] O'GRADY, *cit.*, p. 384.

though of a different nature, is longed for by the Catholic O'Grady – it also seems to have lost the atmosphere of the place and its life: the 'osteria', 'lupanare' (line 2), and 'friggitore' (line 10), respectively turned into a 'pub', a 'brothel' and 'a fried food shop' lack their reference to specific cultural aspects of Italy.

4.1.4 Giuseppe Ungaretti: the War Poet

An analogous desire to address, question and affirm his identity as a Catholic is expressed by O'Grady's translation of one of the twelve poems by Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970), 'The Mother'.

It seems, though, that one theme prevails in most of the other poems he translated: 'Weight' ('Peso'), 'Brothers' ('Fratelli'), 'I Am a Creature' ('Sono una creatura'), 'The Rivers' ('I fiumi'), 'Don't Shout Any More' ('Non gradate più'), 'Quiet' ('Quiete'), 'Evening' ('Sera'), 'Forever' ('Per sempre'), 'Last Choruses for the Promised Land' ('Ultimi cori per la terra promessa') seem to support the translator's intent to give a wider picture of what happened in Italy during the First and Second World Wars. They also encouraged him – and the reader – to reflect upon to what extent such events – from which neutral Ireland was excluded – influenced Italian poets of the time.

The concision of a poem like 'Sono una creatura', which is a testimony to the poet's suffering in a precise moment of Irish history, i.e. 1916, the year of the Easter Rising, may also – as is the case for other poems – constitute a valid reason to render its simple and direct language into English.

A sort of diary account, the confession of the poet, who reflects upon the psychological and physical effects war has on him, becomes the expression of the poet's failure to give voice to more general sorrows:

' Sono una creatura'	'I Am a Creature'
Come questa pietra	Like this stone
Del San Michele	of San Michele
così fredda	so cold
così dura	so hard
	so perished
così prosciugata	so completely

così refrattaria
così totalmente
disanimata

come questa pietra
è il mio pianto
che non si vede. [21]

lifeless

My cry
unseen
is like this stone [20]

The repetition of the adverb 'così' introduced and followed by 'come questa pietra' creates a simile which is almost lost in its English version. The rhythm created by putting the verses one after the other, without the original pause between line 4 and line 5, is such as to impose an accelerated pace on the first seven lines, which is also made possible by the inexplicable omission of line six, 'così refrattaria'. The lack of the simile 'is like this stone' immediately after such a sequence, has the result of depriving the cry of the poet of those qualities which are assigned to the stone.

O'Grady has tried his best in a longer poem, one of Ungaretti's most notable ones about war, 'The Rivers' ('I fiumi'), written in August 1916. The poet who is at the front, swims in the river Isonzo; while lying close to his muddy uniform, he goes through 'the epochs' of his life, each of them being associated with a different river, the Serchio, the Nile, the Seine. A few stanzas, of variable length, have been randomly extrapolated from the whole text according to some points to be made. Even though the translator tries to be accurate, from time to time he runs into incongruities:

stamani mi sono disteso
in un'urna di acqua
e come una reliquia
ho riposato […]
ho tirato su
le mie quattr'ossa
e me ne sono andato
come un acrobata
sull'acqua

mi sono accoccolato
vicino ai miei panni
sudici di guerra
e come un beduino

This morning I stretched out
in a pool of water
and lay there
like a relic […]
I jocked up
skin and bone
and stepped
like an acrobat
on the water

I squatted beside
my grimy gear
and like a Bedouin
I bowed to get

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 440.
[21] G. UNGARETTI, *Vita d'uomo*, Mondadori, Milano 1996, p. 26.

mi sono chinato a ricevere il sole [23]	the sun [22]

The original order has been maintained but some words have gone missing or have been freely translated:

— 'jock up' seems to be either the result of the poet's imagination or the misprint for the verb 'jack up';
— 'stepped' ('e me ne sono andato', line 18) gives the impression that the poet has enthusiastically dived into the river rather than come out of the river;
— 'gear' (line 22) omits any reference to war so that the 'panni/ sudici di guerra' are merely somebody's dirty clothes;
— the slow rhythm created by the brevity of the last three lines of the stanza is compressed into a two-line span, now almost deprived of any allusion to the peaceful state of someone who feels at one with nature.

Sometimes, however, O'Grady seems to have found better solutions: the two meanings of the verb 'attinto' have been kept in the English text. Therefore, 'attinto' means 'drawn', with the suggestion that people physically draw water from the river and, being the river a constant presence of the landscape, the term also suggests the idea that it may have offered impressions, feelings to the locals. The pace of the stanza, though, is modified: the postponement of the verb 'drew' to line 49 creates an unusual divide between the two subjects of the sentence, so that the final 'my mother and father' are somehow disconnected from the rest, more than they are in the original.

questo è il Serchio al quale hanno attinto duemil'anni forse di gente mia campagnola e mio padre e mia madre [24]	This is the Serchio from which for perhaps two thousand years my country stock drew including my mother and father. [25]

[22] D. O'GRADY, *cit.*, p. 441.
[23] G. UNGARETTI, *cit.*, p. 28.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
[25] O'GRADY, *cit.*, pp. 441-3.

4.1.5 Eugenio Montale's 'Delta'

> Of thee I know nothing, only/ the tidings sustaining my going./ and shall I find/ thee shape or the fumes of a dream/ drawing life/ from the river's fever boiling darkly/ against the tide.
>
> Samuel Beckett, 'Delta' [26]

O'Grady pays tribute to the work of the 1975 Nobel Laureate Eugenio Montale (1896-1981), by including ten poems of his in his anthology: 'Falsetto', 'Delta', 'Under the Rain' ('Sotto la pioggia'), 'Motet I' ('Mottetto I'), 'Eastbourne', 'The Ark' ('L'arca'), 'Wind on the Crescent' ('Vento sulla Mezzaluna'), 'For an Album' ('Per album'), 'News from Amiata' ('Notizie dall'Amiata') and 'The Shadow of Magnolia' ('L'ombra della magnolia').

These poems, taken from different collections, try to provide an overview of the styles and the techniques employed by the 'most influential poet of the twentieth century', who, as the Irish poet specifies, not only lost his position as a curator in Florence – where he lived for almost twenty years – but was also 'unemployed and viewed with suspicion by the authorities because of his non-committal to either the Catholic, Fascist or Communist factions in Italy's power struggles' [27].

The collection from which 'Delta' is taken, *Ossi di Seppia*, strangely enough, does not bear any echo of the war – so dear a theme to Ungaretti – nor of what was happening in Italy the year it was published, i.e. 1925. As transpositions of an unattractive world into fantasies which blur the distinction between truth and dream, the poems in question help Montale build up a personal itinerary, which, from time to time, is suffused with sea imagery.

Compared to the other texts, 'Delta' – composed of two quatrains and two six-line stanzas – is undoubtedly more complex.

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[26] S. BECKETT, 'Delta', in *Translation Ireland*, ed. by M. SONZOGNI, no. 1, vol. 14, March 2000, p. 5. The poem was originally published in the April-May-June 1930 issue of the Parisian magazine *This Quarter*.

[27] See D. O'GRADY, *cit.*, p. 448.

This is not so much due to the metre characterised by the presence of assonances and hypermetric rhymes, but to its subject matter:

Montale, 'Delta'	Desmond O'Grady, 'Delta'
La vita che si rompe nei travasi secreti a te l'ho legata: quella che si dibatte in sé e par quasi non ti sappia, presenza soffocata […] presence […] [29]	I have harnessed to you that life which is destroyed in secret decantings: that life which, at odds with itself, seems not to know you, suffocated [28]

Only a connoisseur of Montale's poetry would know that the personal pronoun 'a te' (line 2) possibly refers to a dead woman [30]. A transfiguration of a real person and the product of his fantasy, the figure has a rarefied and vague quality to her, which makes her graspable only with a gesture or through a glimmer.

At times O'Grady seems to have made the language more easily understandable by trying at the same time to maintain the lexical vigour, as is the case for the verb 'to harness' whose effect is stronger than the original 'legata'.

Whenever he could, he translated the words as literally as possible, but changed their sequence and hence the meaning. This is the case for the first stanza which seems to lay emphasis on the person the 'I' refers to rather than to the initial 'vita' of the source text, now 'destroyed in secret decantings'. The translator was probably aware of this deficiency and for this reason decided to employ the noun again, instead of the original demonstrative pronoun 'quella' (line 3).

The poet receives a silent message from the woman who sustains him in his life: he does not know whether she exists or is the product of his imagination, nourished by a dream-like state similar to the confused flowing of a river – muddy and almost violent in its roaring and clashing against sea waves – in spate at its mouth:

Tutto ignoro di te fuor del messaggio Muto che mi sostenta sulla via: se forma esisti o ubbia nella fumea	Whether you exist as a particular form or whether you are a delusion, nourished in the vapours of a dream by the fevered,

[28] *Ibid*, p. 452.

[29] E. Montale, 'Delta', *Tutte le poesie*, Mondadori, Milano 2000, p. 97.

[30] Some identify the various female figures that appear in Montale's poems – from 'Incontro' to 'La casa dei doganieri' – with Arletta/Annetta, a young woman he met one summer in Monterosso.

d'un sogno t'alimenta	troubled seaboard thundering against the tide,
la riviera che infebbra, torba, e scroscia	I know nothing of you beyond the mute
incontro alla marea. [31]	Message that sustains me on my way. [32]

An inversion occurs in stanza three, where the initial 'Tutto ignoro di te fuor del messaggio/ muto che mi sostenta sulla via' (lines 11-2) goes at the end with 'I know nothing of you beyond the mute/ Message that sustains me on my way' (lines 15-6). In a way, this formula stresses the position the woman holds in the poet's life, her representing a revelation, a symbolic way out of ordinary life, be that of death or of the instinctive world of nature.

One should, however, praise O'Grady for his attempt to keep the onomatopoeia of 'infebbra, torba, e scroscia' through the alliterative 'troubled seaboard thundering against the tide', in the same way he succeeded in reproducing the idea implicit in 'ubbia nella fumea' with the mere substantive 'delusion'.

[31] E. MONTALE, *op. cit*.
[32] D. O'GRADY, *op. cit.*, p. 452.

4.1.6 'Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi' by Cesare Pavese

> Death will come and it will wear your eyes./Death demands the handover of your eyes./Death eyes you, stares you in the face./Then death assumes the running of your eyes./Death would take the eyes out of your head. […]/You are up to your eyes in death./Death will come and it will steal your looks.
> Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Towards a Cesare Pavese Title' [33]

Dennis O'Driscoll's poem, whose subtitle acknowledges its debt to Cesare Pavese's 'Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi', is undoubtedly a good literary exercise. Again, as is the case for a poem of his written after Leopardi, the Irish author seems more interested in playing with the theme than in anything else and each time he takes the opportunity to build up a line by maintaining the two key words, i.e. 'death' and 'eyes'. The result, graphically characterised by double-spaced lines – here not reproduced – is impressive as one has the feeling the poem could stand on its own as a more developed variation on the theme of death.

The original text, together with nine other lyrics, two of which were written in English, was found the day after Pavese (1908-1950) committed suicide. Desmond O'Grady, who translated it [34], thus introduced its author:

> In 1930 he took his degree with a thesis on Walt Whitman and began teaching while writing poems and prose. Politically committed to the left he was jailed and 'confined' several times by the Fascist Regime […] Pavese's early verse is original if eccentric […] During the Thirties nobody did as much as Pavese did, through critical essays and translation, to introduce American and some English literature to Italy. His free verse or prose line derives from his knowledge of those writers he translated:

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[33] D. O'DRISCOLL, 'Towards a Cesare Pavese Title (Verrà la morte e avra' i tuoi occhi)' *Weather Permitting, op. cit.*, p. 43.

[34] Poems from previous collections that feature in O'Grady's book are 'Nocturne' ('Notturno'), 'Summer' ('Estate'), 'The Earth and Death' ('La terra e la morte').

Defoe, Dickens, Whitman, Melville, Joyce, Stein, Faulkner. His translation of Moby Dick is a classic of its kind. [35]

What is striking about the first lines in English is that the translation of the verb 'accompagnare': 'morte che ci accompagna' (line 2) is rendered by 'death keeping us company' which loses the implication of an obsessive idea of death and seems to assign a neutral meaning to it:

'Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi'	Death Will Come and Will Have Your Eyes'
Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi	Death will come and will have your eyes
questa morte che ci accompagna […]	this death keeping us company […]
un vizio assurdo. I tuoi occhi	a ridiculous indulgence. Your eyes
saranno una vana parola,	will be a useless word,
un grido taciuto, un silenzio.	a silent scream, a silence.
Cosí li vedi ogni mattina	Thus you see them every morning
quando su te sola ti pieghi	when alone you bend over
nello specchio. O cara speranza,	the mirror. O dear hope,
quel giorno sapremo anche noi	we too shall know
che sei la vita e sei il nulla.[…]	that you are one life and nullity.[…]
Sarà come smettere un vizio,	it will be like renouncing an indulgence
come vedere nello specchio	re-emerge from the mirror
riemergere un viso morto,	like hearing a tight-lip.
come ascoltare un labbro chiuso.	We'll descend to the depths in silence. [36]
Scenderemo nel gorgo muti. [37]	

The language employed in the English version is less elegant and accurate. There are:

— approximations: 'vana' (line 6) simply rendered by the informal 'useless';
— repetitions: the adjective 'silent' (line 7) and the noun 'silence' repeated twice (line 7, line 19) contrasts with Pavese's careful attention to the choice of three synonyms, 'taciuto' (line 7), 'silenzio' (line 7), 'muti' (line 19);
— omissions: 'we too shall know' (line 11) does not have the chronological reference conveyed by the Italian 'quel giorno'

[35] D. O'GRADY, *cit.*, p. 483.
[36] D. O'GRADY, 'Death Will Come and Will Have Your Eyes', *cit.*, p. 488.
[37] C. PAVESE, 'Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi', *Le Poesie*, Einaudi, Torino 1998, p. 136.

(line 11). It thus deprives the text of the feeling of awareness the author has about the inevitability and coming of death. The exclusion of 'viso morto' (line 17) from 're-emerge from the mirror/ like hearing a tight-lip' (lines 17-8) and the use of the present 're-emerge' – which has no connection whatsoever with 'it will be'- not only makes one wonder who the subject of the phrase is, but it also lessens the strength, the emphasis on the subject of the poem, i.e. death itself;

— substitution of the definite article 'la', i.e. 'the' by the indeterminate article 'one' also seems the result of the translator's impossibility to share Pavese's feelings. Death, representing the only way, is opposed to the notion of death as 'one' of the possible ways man has, as felt by the Catholic O'Grady.

4.2 Pearse Hutchinson: Translating Dialect

For a poet used to writing in Irish and in English and used to translating, like Pearse Hutchinson (1927-) [38], coming across an anthology of dialect poems written in Italy must have represented not only a sort of challenge but also an occasion to learn more about and reflect upon the role dialects played and still play in Italy:

> Many people in Piedmont, Milan, Friuli and Sardinia would dispute the term 'dialect'. Whatever about that, this two-volume anthology was a revelation to me. Poetry has been written for centuries, all over Italy, in the regional *parlate* (or *caint na ndaoine*). But after the Second World War there was a tremendous upsurge of modern poetry in these tongues, the two main inspirational forces being Pier Paolo Pasolini, whose first book was in Friulano (Furlan), and Tonino Guerra, who writes in Romagnolo. [39]

Though his book of translations reflects a specific interest in Galaico-Portuguese, Portuguese and Galician, it contains a good number of poems he selected from *Le parole di legno–poesia in dialetto del 900 italiano* [40].

What made him decide to carry out the task was not simply the fact that he happened to receive the above mentioned volume from Prof. Melita Cataldi, but also because, as a student of Italian at UCD, he had learnt and appreciated, through "a lecturer called Signora Gaidoni reciting D'Annunzio's poem 'Le onde' ('The Waves')", the

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[38] Born in Glasgow to Irish parents, he moved to Dublin when quite young. He studied at UCD, worked as a translator in Geneva; lived in Barcelona from 1954 to 1957 and from 1961 to 1967. His first book was a volume of poems from Catalan (1962), followed by a collection of poems of his, *Tongue Without Hands* (1963) and by some poems in Irish, *Faoistin Bhacach* (1968). His second collection of poems in Irish, *Le Cead na Gréine* (1989) was preceded and followed by other collections in English. He has also translated from Irish and Old Irish (with Melita Cataldi).

[39] P. HUTCHINSON, *Done into English. Collected Translations*, Gallery Press, Co. Meath 2003, p. 24.

[40] P. M. CHIESA, G. TESIO, ed. by, *Le parole di legno. Poesia in dialetto del 900 italiano*, Mondadori, Milano 1984. Sandro Penna's 'To a latrine cool in the railway station…', lines from Elio Vittorini's *Conversation in Sicily*, Nelo Risi's 'The maxim that torture degrades…' and Amedeo Giacomini's 'Mad Toni' are some of the poems that appear in the book.

'unexpected strengths […] hidden softness […] music of different kinds' of the Italian language [41].

Determined to go back to his rusty Italian and aware that, contrary to his 'translation principles […] proclaimed in the past', he could not render the poems into English without the help of the texts in the official language, he selected a few poems from the anthology.

From Giacomo Noventa's 'What's beyond…?' ('Cossa ghe xé, pare mio') to Amedeo Giacomini's 'Mad Toni', the Italian texts seem to have some traits in common: not only the use of dialect, but also such themes as loneliness, a new perspective on the world and the incapacity to fully understand oneself.

[41] P. HUTCHINSON, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

4.2.1 'The Goat' by Umberto Saba

> I remember a line of Saba/ Only it's a syllable short. The long/ Years I've less than loved him/ Bothered by his babbled/ Passion, his cramped/ Cycle of existence.
> Franco Fortini, 'Saba', trans. by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

Done into English also includes 'The Goat' by Umberto Saba (1883-1957) offers a vision of the world based on the awareness that all creatures, men and animals, have a common destiny of misery:

'La capra'

Ho parlato con una capra.
Era sola sul prato, era legata;
sazia d'erbe, bagnata
dalla pioggia, belava.

[…] questa voce sentivo
gemere in una capra solitaria.
In una capra dal viso semita,
sentivo querelarsi ogni altro male,
ogni altra vita.[43]

'The Goat'

I spoke to a goat.
She was tied up alone in a field.
Fed up with grass,
Rain-soaked, bleating.
[…] That voice I heard
sobbing in a lonely goat.
In a goat with Jewish face
I heard all hurt complain,
all other life. [42]

Its language – like the language of the other poems Hutchinson translated – is simple and bare. Its rhythm and rhymes create a perfect expressive correspondence between the goat's lament and man's condition. In the English version the kind of universal and explicatory tone assigned to the adjective 'sola' and the past participle 'legata' of the two clauses of the second line loses its dramatic power: the sentence 'She was tied up alone in a field' sounds more like a shortened matter-of-fact statement.

The result is that the English lines seem to have the precise function of providing information without taking the following into account:

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[42] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[43] U. SABA, *Il Canzoniere*, Einaudi, Torino, data?, p. 68.

— the subdivision into three stanzas, which somehow distinguishes the two moments of the poem, that is the fun the poet has in imitating the animal's moan and the realisation that what the goat complains about is lived and shared by him too;
— the presence of the original enjambment (line 3);
— the elegance of such words as 'sazia' (line 3) and 'querelarsi' (line 12) as opposed to the more colloquial 'fed up' (line 3) and 'hurt' (line 13).

* *

The insistence on one's questioning the supposed truths of life, thoughts about suffering, death and religion and the brevity of their written expression seem to constitute a *trait-d'union* with the few Italian poems featuring in Hutchinson's anthology.

Such poems by the Milanese Franco Loi (1930-), for example[44], as 'I want to say a prayer to you, God' (), 'Was it here in Milan – I can't remember', 'Through tired air we go, filled up with nothing…' or 'What's Beyond' by Giacomo Noventa (1898-1960), substantiate the translator's agreement with a secular and remote kind of spirituality. For this reason, Hutchinson chose to include a poem like 'The Street' ('La strada') by Virgilio Giotti (1885-1857), where the self wanders in the streets of a city amongst 'the pale yellow facades, the shops […] // Yes, it's like our life: lived/ Soon over, and never really known.' [45]

Hutchinson translated a few other poems by Italian writers both into English and Irish, which featured in a 1998 issue of *Cyphers* together with translations by the poet Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin of contemporary women writers as Maria Attanasio, Brunella Bruschi and Alda Merini.

[44] Some of the poems mentioned here were dealt with in my previous *Un'Italia fuori dall'Italia*, Aracne, Roma 2005.

[45] V. GIOTTI, 'The Street', *Done into English*, p. 85. 'Le facciate giallicce, le botteghe,/ un caffè, le automobili, il viavai./ Come la nostra vita, sì: vissuta,/ ormai conchiusa, e mai ben conosciuta.'

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Finito di stampare nel mese di gennaio del 2010
dalla tipografia «Braille Gamma S.r.l.» di Santa Rufina di Cittaducale (Ri)
per conto della «Aracne editrice S.r.l.» di Roma

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