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Babel's Suburbs: Irish Verse Translation in the 1980s

Miklós Vadja, editor of the *New Hungarian Quarterly* and a distinguished translator, spoke to the Irish Translators' Association in 1987 on the essential paradox of verse translation: "To believe in the possibility and viability of verse translation means, therefore, to acknowledge the paradox that a poem can lose its language and form, and then have the core of its non-lingual poetic substance, with most of its lost linguistic, cultural, prosodic, and other qualities coded into it, grafted onto another language, like some vital internal organ, with a certain hope for survival."¹ Translation is a paradox that Irish writers have willingly embraced in the 1980s and one of the most striking literary phenomena of the decade has been the upsurge in verse translation.

The Irish translation risorgimento has taken two forms. Firstly, there has been the extensive translation of work by Irish-language poets into English. Secondly, the appearance of new publishing houses such as Raven Arts Press and Dedalus Press provided an outlet for translations by Irish poets from other languages into English. The publication of translations was greatly facilitated by a change in Arts Council Policy in 1984 when a decision was made to actively encourage translation. Direct publication assistance and the author's royalty scheme eased the financial burden on publishers, who were hitherto reluctant to publish translations because of the high costs involved in translating material.²

The publication of *An Duanaire: Poems of the Dispossessed* by Dolmen Press in 1981 which included a selection of poems in Irish from 1600 to 1900, chosen and presented by Seán Ó Tuama and translated by Thomas Kinsella, marked in a sense the beginning of the movement to translate Irish poetry into English. Dermot Bolger in his "Editor's Note" to *The Bright Wave: An Tonn Gheal*, an anthology of English translations of modern Irish-language poets, stressed the novelty of this translation enterprise in Irish literature:

1. Miklós Vadja, "The Price of Verse Translation", *Irish Translators' Association Newsletter*, II, No. 1 (1988), 6.
2. For details on Arts Council Policy see Laurence Cassidy, "The Arts Council Translation Policy", *The Irish Translators' Association Newsletter*, II, No. 4 (1988), 8 and Michael Cronin, "After Fénius Farsaidh: Aspects of Translation in Modern Ireland", *Teanga*, No. 10 (1990), pp.109-121.

Although it was Government policy after independence to translate as much as possible from English and European literature into Irish ... no effort was made to reverse this process and make living Irish literature available in English. In fact, even when I was growing up and perhaps to some extent today, the idea of such translation was frowned upon, the general idea being that those who wished to know what was happening in Irish should be able to read the language in the first place and any concession would dilute the chances of the revival of the language.³

Whatever the lingering resistance to Irish-English translation the 1980s saw the continuation of the trend. In 1983 Seamus Heaney's translation of the Middle Irish text *Buile Suibhne* appeared under the title *Sweeney Astray*. In 1984, Tomás Mac Síomóin and Douglas Sealy published their translations of selected poems by Máirtín Ó Direáin *Tacar Dánta/Selected Poems*. Michael Hartnett's translations of Dáibhí Ó Bruadair entitled *Ó Bruadair* came out in 1985. Translations of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's poetry by Michael Hartnett and the poet herself appeared in 1986 as *Selected Poems/Rogha Dánta*. The *Bright Wave* anthology appeared the same year and a year later, Mícheál Davitt's poems appeared in translation as *Selected Poems/Rogha Dánta (1968-1984)*. The most recent collection of translations is an anthology of contemporary Irish poetry in translation edited by Declan Kiberd and Gabriel Fitzmaurice and entitled *An Chrann faoi Bhláth/The Flowering Tree*.⁴

The openness to other languages and cultures was not confined to the island of Ireland as evidenced by the steady increase in translations from other languages into English (and Irish). Poets such as Tomas Tranströmer (Sweden), Miguel Hernandez (Spain), Marin Sorescu (Rumania), Agnes Nemes Nagy (Hungary), Paul Celan (Germany), Gerrit Achterberg (Holland) and Francisco de Quevedo

3. Dermot Bolger, Editor's Note, *The Bright Wave: An Tonn Gheal* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1987), p.9.
4. *An Duanaire: Poems of the Dispossessed*, trans. Thomas Kinsella, ed. Seán Ó Tuama (Mountrath: Dolmen, 1981); *Sweeney Astray*, trans. Seamus Heaney (London: Faber, 1984); Máirtín Ó Direáin *Tacar Dánta/Selected Poems*, trans. Tomás Mac Síomóin and Douglas Sealy (Athlone: Goldsmith, 1984); Dáibhí Ó Bruadair *O Bruadair*, trans. Michael Hartnett (Dublin: Gallery, 1985); Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill *Selected Poems/Rogha Dánta*, trans. Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Michael Hartnett (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1986); Mícheál Davitt *Selected Poems/Rogha Dánta*, trans. several (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1987); *An Chrann Faoi Bhláth/The Flowering Tree*, trans. several, (editors) Declan Kiberd and Gabriel Fitzmaurice (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1991). Translations of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's work have also been brought out by Gallery Press, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, *Pharaoh's Daughter: New and Selected Poems*, trans. several (Dublin: Gallery, 1990).

(Spain) are among the poets translated by Irish writers over the last decade and published in Ireland. *Poetry Ireland Review* brought out a special issue devoted to modern Latin-American poetry edited by Ciarán Cosgrove in 1987 and which contained translations of a number of Latin-American poets. In 1989 the literary journal *Krino* published a significant number of translations of work by poets from France, Germany, Spain, Hungary and the Soviet Union.⁵

The intense translation activity in Ireland in the 1980s has not however been matched by a similar scale and sophistication of critical response. There have been isolated attempts to assess the importance of the translation phenomenon, notably Terence Brown's essay entitled "Translating Ireland", but little has been done to expand or deepen our understanding of the linguistic, cultural and political aspects of this development in Irish literature.⁶ One of the effects of this neglect is to produce a certain confusion as to the nature of translation itself. In Michael Smith's introduction to his translations of Francisco de Quevedo he argues that "the real energy of the poetry, and I believe Borges to be generally correct in his analysis, is that energy directed towards the making of the poem as a literary artifact, a cunning verbal device that invites and entertains inspection and contemplation by the reader."⁷ Smith's translations are described on the front cover as "versions" and on the back, it is stated that Quevedo's poetry "has been recreated in modern English." However, in his notes to Quevedo's poems Smith claims that they contain "indispensable information for the reader to anchor Quevedo's verse, just as it did for me while *translating*" (my emphasis).⁸ No definition of the term "version" is offered so the reader is unsure as to whether what he/she is reading is a 'recreation' or a translation. To borrow the terminology of Dryden's "Preface to Ovid's Epistles" it is unclear whether "versions" are understood to mean metaphrase, paraphrase or imitation. Thus, Smith argues that verbal skill is the essence of Quevedo's genius but

5. Tomas Tranströmer, *The Wild Market*, trans. John F. Deane (Dublin: Dedalus, 1985); Paul Celan, *65 Poems*, trans. Brian Lynch and Peter Jankowski (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1986); Gerrit Achterberg, *Hidden Weddings*, trans. Michael O'Loughlin (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1987); Miguel Hernandez, *Unceasing Lightning*, trans. Michael Smith (Dublin: Dedalus, 1987); Marin Sorescu, *The Youth of Don Quixote*, trans. John F. Deane (Dublin: Dedalus, 1987); Agnes Nemes Nagy, *Between*, trans. Hugh Maxton (Dublin: Dedalus/Budapest: Corvina, 1988); Francisco de Quevedo, *On the Anvil*, trans. Michael Smith (Dublin: Dedalus, 1989); *Poetry Ireland*, Nos. 18/19 (Spring 1987); *Krino*, No. 7 (1989). This article will not discuss translation into Irish as the subject would require a separate treatment given the scale of activity in this area over the last decade.

6. Terence Brown, "Translating Ireland", *Krino*, No. 7 (1989), pp.1-4.

7. Smith, "Quevedo" in *Quevedo*, p.15.

8. *Ibid.*, p.103.

there is no explanation offered as to how he went about the task of translation which would appear all the more difficult because of the linguistic self-consciousness of Quevedo's poetic art. Lorna Shaughnessy in a review of Smith's earlier Hernandez translations equates version with metaphor, "I suspect Michael Smith's 'versions' of Hernandez come closer to the stuff of a parallel text than a translation. Perhaps this is why he has opted for the ambivalent category of 'version'."⁹ John F. Deane's translations of Marin Sorescu's work are also called "versions" but he appears to explain his usage of the term in his "Introduction" to the collection, "I have worked from English draft versions, from the original model and German and Spanish translations; the poems have been submitted to Sorescu and he has approved them."¹⁰ The reader without a knowledge of Rumanian and in the absence of the original text is still uncertain as to what the status of the "original model" and the "English draft versions" is in the production of the translations. On the other hand, Hugh Maxton's translations of Agnes Nemes Nagy are presented as 'translations' rather than 'versions' though the Irish poet acknowledges that it was a collaborative translation project and that he worked from draft translations from the Hungarian made by Mária Kőrösy and Eszter Molnár. Maxton, however, in his commentary, makes a point of investigating the translation process and discusses the difficulties of translating from Hungarian pointing to the absence of gender in the language, the prevalence of rhyme in Hungarian poetry and the specific difficulties of cultural allusion in Nemes Nagy's work.¹¹ The absence of sustained and coherent translation criticism in Ireland has therefore generated a certain amount of vagueness as to the exact nature and purposes of the activity.

If this vagueness is immediately apparent in a terminological uncertainty, the relative lack of public theoretical reflection on the art and more particularly the science of translation limits discussion on the question. These limits are particularly apparent in the prefatory remarks that precede many translation collections or anthologies. The editor of the *Bright Wave* anthology, Dermot Bolger, states his translation policy as follows: "In giving my instructions to translators, I have stressed that, for this book, I am more concerned that the spirit of the original poem should come across and work as effectively as possible, as against merely

9. Lorna Shaughnessy, "Shafts of Fire", *Graph*, No. 3 (Autumn 1987), p.16.

10. John F. Deane, Introduction, *Don Quixote*, p.8.

11. Hugh Maxton, "The Poetry of Agnes Nemes Nagy: A Commentary", *Between*, pp.79-91.

reproducing a strictly literal line for line version."¹² Alan Titley in his Introduction to the anthology discusses translation. Like Bolger he is hostile to literal rendition and prefers a dynamic equivalence which "gives a different existence (rather than a 'new life') to a work of art."¹³ Declan Kiberd in his Introduction to the *Flowering Tree* anthology fails to mention any of the specific linguistic problems faced by translators in dealing with contemporary poetry in Irish. Thomas Kinsella and Seán Ó Tuama, on the other hand, devote a section of the *Duanaire* anthology to the problems of translation. Their translations are not "free 'versions', however. It was taken that fulfilment of our primary aim required translations of the greatest possible fidelity of content, and the results are as close to the original Irish as we could make them."¹⁴ They acknowledge the inherent untranslatability of effects linked to Irish prosody and departures from literal translations of lexical items are recorded in the notes to the anthology. Ciarán Cosgrove in an essay entitled "Language and Translation" which prefaces the special issue of *Poetry Ireland Review* on Latin-American poetry sees translation as a desirable if ultimately impossible compromise with the original, "unless poems are going to be crafted and worked to the point where they operate within the primacy of primary statement, then I fear that translation will always be selling the original short. In nearly all cases in the present anthology, the absent originals shine more brilliantly."¹⁵

Cosgrove's article is something of an exception in that it attempts to look more closely at the specific options available to a translator and considers the impact of translation on language. Most prefaces to translated work over the last decade have been more concerned with presenting a particular poet's work, the historical problems of the Irish language or the changing socio-cultural relationships between the two languages in Ireland than with addressing the particular predicaments of the translator. The existence of such a lacuna is arguably on the grounds that excessive attention to linguistic detail will bore the general reader. However, the failure to explore the exact nature of formal transformations in translation has a number of important consequences.

Firstly, the nature of translation achievement is obscured. The English-language translators who translated poetry from Irish for the *Bright Wave* had very different degrees of competence in Irish, yet there is nothing to indicate whether the translations were direct

12. Bolger, *Bright Wave*, p.9.

13. Alan Titley, Introduction, *Bright Wave*, p.20.

14. Kinsella and Ó Tuama, *An Duanaire*, p.35.

15. Ciarán Cosgrove, "Language and Translation", *Poetry Ireland*, p.29.

or from draft versions in English. Again, as with the ambiguous use of the word 'version', the term of 'translation' which usually implies a thorough knowledge of the source language becomes highly problematic. Secondly, the Irish and English languages would benefit greatly from a translation criticism based on the systematic comparison of the linguistic structures of both languages which would allow critics to chart the nature of changes in translation. Such a study would enable critics to deal *specifically* with points of difference and similarity and contribute greatly to our knowledge of the exact contribution of poetry in Irish to the Anglo-Irish tradition and the reversal of this process in more recent times. Michel Paillard's and Hélène Chuquet's *Approche linguistique des problèmes de traduction* devoted to the formal changes in English-French translation offer a model of the form such a study might take.¹⁶ Paillard and Chuquet's work has the added advantage of being free of the linguistic relativism of earlier pioneers in the field such as Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet which lead to somewhat dubious propositions about the psychology of peoples based on differences in linguistic structure.¹⁷ Thirdly, standards of literary translation in Ireland can only stand to benefit from detailed translation criticism which acknowledges not only the shortcomings but also the successes in translation. Translators would then be taken seriously in their own right and not seen merely as self-effacing brokers in the process of language transfer.

The present situation can be unfavourably compared with the prevalence of translation commentary in nineteenth-century Ireland. From Charlotte Brooke's discussion of translation problems in her preface to *Reliques of Ancient Irish Poetry* (1789) to Samuel Ferguson's articles on James Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy* in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1834 and the continued attention to translation difficulties voiced in the work of Edward Walsh, William Hamilton Drummond and George Sigerson, we find in the nineteenth century a constant sensitivity to the complexity and specificity of translation.¹⁸ Though from a translation point of view late twentieth-century Ireland is as lively and productive as mid nineteenth-century Ireland, there does appear to be a marked difference in the level of theoretical and critical response to this

16. Hélène Chuquet and M. Paillard, *Approche linguistique des problèmes de traduction* (Paris: Ophrys, 1987).
17. For a critique of earlier versions of comparative stylistics see Robert Larose, *Théories contemporaines de la traduction* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1989), pp.11-31.
18. The most comprehensive survey of Irish-English translation in this period is to be found in Robert Welch, *A History of Verse Translation from the Irish 1789-1897* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988).

development. One reason for a certain reluctance this century to engage in translation debates in Ireland would appear to be the suggestion that verse translation is an intrinsically mysterious act which precludes the factual prying of the translation exegete. Seamus Heaney in a talk given to the Translation Seminar at Boston University notes that:

Literary translation — or version-making or imitation or refraction or whatever one should call the linguistic carry-over that is mediated through a crib — is still an aesthetic activity. It has to do with form-feeling as much as with sense-giving, and unless the practitioner has the almost muscular sensation that rewards successful original composition, it is unlikely that the results of the text labour will have life of its own.¹⁹

What is striking in Heaney's comments is the terminological hesitancy that we commented on earlier, "version-making" and "imitation" as possible synonyms, and the indeterminateness of much of the critical language used. Terms such as "form-feeling", "sense-giving" and "muscular-sensation" may indeed accurately describe the poet's own feelings about the nature of translation. On the other hand, they tend to perpetuate a critical vagueness about the textually visible changes that occur to poetry in its transfer from Irish to English. Alan Titley, for his part, argues that "poetry is still one of the mysteries of the universe inaccessible to multinational software and its pards" and continues "this magic shadow-show of our consciousness is not a place where everyone likes to play and there would be no point calling upon the service of translators who wouldn't know their hearts from their elbows as far as poetry is concerned, however serviceable they might be in the acts of faithfulness and exactitude."²⁰ The suggestion is once more of a impenetrable verbal sorcery that can only be described in oblique metaphors, a hieratic function that disdains the attentive linguistic empiricism of a Samuel Ferguson. Mark Hutcheson argues in an article on translations of Joseph Brodsky's work that "the truth of the matter is that translating poetry can be a very troublesome business, in some ways more demanding even than simply writing new poems. There is so much self-sacrifice and so little concomitant reward."²¹ The irony is that the unquestionable self-sacrifice of translators of poetry will continue to go unrewarded as long as the activity of translation in Ireland is treated as a divine alchemy

19. Seamus Heaney, "Earning a Rhyme", *Poetry Ireland Review*, No. 25, pp.95-100.

20. Titley, *ibid.*, p.19.

21. Mark Hutcheson, "Beyond his Malicious Village", *Graph*, No. 4, p.25.

rather than an operation on languages open to inquiry, criticism and explanation.

Underlying the magical theory of literary translation is the age-old debate as to whether translation is a science or an art. Translation theoreticians such as Cary, Savory, Toper, Newmark and Steiner have held that translation is an art which cannot be encompassed in the reductive theorems of a putative translation science. Edmond Cary, the French translator and critic, was particularly hostile to the attempt by the Soviet linguist Federov to make translation subservient to linguistics with its implicit scientificisation of the former.²² In debates on the question, a distinction is frequently made between scientific/technical texts and literary texts. The vocabulary of science and technology is held to be monosemic and style in scientific and technical writing is infinitely less important than terminological exactitude. Jean Maillot in his *La traduction scientifique* is deeply critical of this viewpoint, holding that technical texts have a wide variety of styles, registers, semantic ambiguity and metaphorical uncertainty.²³ The experience of researchers in machine translation looking for machine-readable scientific and technical texts that are free of ambiguity bears out Maillot's contention. Thus, the literary translators may in fact have more in common with technical, commercial and scientific translators than the magical school of translation thought would have one believe. Eugene Nida while conceding that fully satisfactory translation is always an art points to important distinctions that must be made in the art/science debate:

Whether translating is to be regarded as a science depends on the meaning given to translating. If by translating one refers only to the actual process of reproducing the message of language to the forms required by a language, then it is not a science. However, the activity involved in such interlingual communication can certainly be made the subject of scientific inquiry. An act of verbal communication is not science, but speech itself may become the object of scientific analysis, description, and explanation.²⁴

22. Edmond Cary and R.W. Jumpelt, *La qualité en matière de traduction* (New York: Pergamon, 1963), p.32. See also A.V. Federov, *Introduction à la théorie de la traduction* (Vvednie v teoriju perevoda) (Moscow: Institut des littératures en langues étrangères, 1953).
23. Jean Maillot, *La traduction scientifique et technique* (Paris: EDISEM, 1981).
24. Eugene Nida, "A Framework for the Analysis and Evaluation of Theories of Translation" in R.W. Brislin (editor), *Translation: Applications and Research* (New York: Gardner Press, 1976), p.66.

The advances in textual linguistics and translation assessment, notably in the work of Robert de Beaugrande and Juliana House indicate the opportunities for the development of a more objective translation criticism in Ireland based on an equitable relationship between art and science.²⁵ The dearth of such criticism leads to a linguistic *laissez-faire* which ultimately results in bafflement. The translator and critic, Douglas Sealy, drew attention to the effects of absent standards in a review of a recent collection of translations of poetry by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. The translators are many and include Ciarán Carson, Michael Coady, Peter Fallon, Michael Hartnett, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Medbh McGuckian, Tom McIntyre, Derek Mahon, John Montague, Paul Muldoon and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. Sealy argues that the difficulty for the reader is in forming any clear or consistent picture of the writer of the original poems. He asks "has she [Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill] the smart raciness of Muldoon ...; the clotted, verbal richness of McGuckian; the conversational bite of Carson; the ornate elaboration of Longley ... has she got the bewildering variety of tone supplied by the thirteen translators?"²⁶ Sealy answers his own question negatively and claims that most of the translations are Lowellian or Drydenesque 'imitations', the originals serving as points of departure for new poems by the various English-language translators. The same principle of a number of different translators for the one poet was used in the *Bright Wave* anthology and the Mícheál Davitt translations but without some attempt at objective cross-language comparisons the reader is left unsure as to the poetic identity of the creator of the original poetry. Of course, it can be argued that variety is a virtue and that verse translation should have the same interpretive freedom as good criticism. Liam Mac Cóil, an Irish-language writer and translator, attacks what he sees as the essentialism underlying the hostility to heterogeneity in translation. He claims "for my part, instead of arguing about what is lost, I prefer to look at what is there, variety" (my translation).²⁷ If entropy is inevitable in verse translation and change intrinsic in the historical and synchronic position of the translator, there are however tools provided by comparative stylistics, text linguistics and translation theory which allow the commentator to evaluate the *relative*

25. Robert de Beaugrande, *Factors in a Theory of Poetic Translating* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978); Juliana House, *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment* (Tubingen: Verlag Gunter Narr., 1977).
26. Douglas Sealy, "A New Voice for the Seanachie", *The Irish Times*, 8 December 1990, p.9.
27. "Maidir liomsa, in ionad a bheith ag cur is ag cúiteamh faoin rud atá cailte, b'fhéarr liom féachaint ar an rud ata ann, an éagsúlacht". Liam Mac Cóil, "Ag Aistriú", *Graph*, No. 1 (October 1986), p.21.

success of a translation. This is not to say that translation theorists have a set of algorithms which will confidently assess the aesthetic validity of a given verse translation. However, there is room in Irish literary translation for a greater clarity of purpose, a more exact rigour in execution and a more helpful form of recognition for accomplished translators. The realisation of these aims would certainly be advanced by a greater linguistic, theoretical and cultural attention to the rapid growth of translation activity in Ireland over the last decade.

An unfortunate consequence of the paucity of discussion on Irish verse translation is the restricted range of theoretical reference. George Steiner is almost invariably invoked though his work on translation *After Babel* is in many respects seriously deficient as a treatise on translation. Steiner's work ignores the fundamental contributions of theorists such as Mounin and Nida to a theory of translation, confuses modern linguistics with generative grammar, pays little or no attention to text linguistics and generally ignores the problem of translation assessment.²⁸ A higher profile for translation commentary would undoubtedly contribute to a broadening of theoretical horizons so that debates on translation would move beyond the philosophico-literary impressionism that is endemic in Steiner's approach. It might then be possible to ask whether prose/poetry distinctions in terms of translation difficulty are really tenable in a country with a ludic prose tradition this century stretching from Joyce and Flann O'Brien to Bernard Share and Kevin Kiely. It may indeed make more sense in Irish literary practice to see obstacles to translation as primarily text-specific rather than a necessary function of the nature of Irish verse itself. Thus, if as Ciarán Cosgrove argues "the best translation can only be dazzlingly approximate", the remark by no means only holds true for poetry and applies equally to attempts to translate the formal conceits and intertextual allusiveness of certain Irish prose writers.²⁹ Indeed, Gerry Dukes in an essay, "Hand to Mouth: 'Translating' Beckett's Trilogy for the Stage", suggests another problem area in Irish translation, drama.³⁰ The Irish theatre has witnessed something of a vogue for translated work through the involvement of dramatists like Frank McGuinness and Aidan Mathews. However, though the theatrical presentations attract much comment, only the most cursory references are made to the translations themselves. For this reason,

28. For a fuller discussion of the shortcomings of Steiner's work see Larose, *Théories contemporaines*, pp.115-149.

29. Cosgrove, "Language", p.27.

30. Gerry Dukes, "Hand to Mouth: 'Translating' Beckett's Trilogy for the Stage", *Krino*, No. 7 (1989), pp.90-94.

any theoretical exploration of literary translation in Ireland would unnecessarily and mistakenly limit itself by confining its attention to verse.

Ireland's linguistic pressures and shifts through the centuries have made translation a central feature of life on the island. It seems all the more regrettable therefore that we lack any proper history of translation and that Irish Translation Studies are still in a largely infant state. There have, of course, been very fine studies of particular periods of translation activity such as Nicholas Williams's fascinating *I bPrionta i Leabhar: Na Protastúin agus Prós na Gaeilge 1567-1724*, Alan Harrison's *Ag Cruinniú Meala* and Robert Welch's *A History of Verse Translation from the Irish 1789-1897*.³¹ The main concern of these works has not, however, been with a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of translation per se in Ireland over the centuries so that no clear picture emerges of the theoretical assumptions underlying the practice of translation. The approach to translation owes more to literary criticism and philology than to the insights of theoreticians of translation. This is in no way to fault the excellent scholarship in these works but merely to indicate how the material contained in them could be further used to establish a specifically *translational* perspective on Irish cultural history. The proper recognition of translation studies in Irish academic life would greatly facilitate this development in allowing scholars from different disciplines to work together in a common area of interest and through the interdisciplinary perspective of translation theory, a greater understanding might be gained of the way Irish experience has been crucially mediated through languages in the history of the island. It seems quite conceivable that the work of translation historians like Louis Kelly, Edmond Cary and Jean Delisle could be usefully added to by scholarly projects in Ireland that would take translation as their primary focus.³²

To return to verse translation in the nineteen eighties, one of the most significant phenomena in contemporary Irish writing is the prevalence of linguistic extraterritoriality, to borrow Steiner's term. Declan Kiberd in his introduction to *An Chrann faoi Bhláth* speaks

31. Nicholas Williams, *I bPrionta i Leabhar: Na Protastúin agus Prós na Gaeilge 1567-1724* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1986); Alan Harrison, *Ag Cruinniú Meala: Anthony Raymond (1675-1726), ministéir Protastúnach, agus léann na Gaeilge i mBaile Átha Cliath* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1988).

32. Louis Kelly, *The True Interpreter: A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1979); Edmond Cary, *Les grands traducteurs français* (Geneva: Georg, 1963); Jean Delisle, *La Traduction au Canada/Translation in Canada 1534-1984* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987).

of the "sheer number of artists producing high-quality work in both languages — Brendan Behan, Pearse Hutchinson, Críostóir Ó Floinn, Michael Hartnett and Mícheál Ó Siadhail are simply the latest exponents of a great tradition of bilingualism that reaches back, *via* Flann O'Brien and Liam O'Flaherty, to Patrick Pearse."³³ This is a tradition that has remained largely unexplored in terms of its implications for a theory of literary translation. It would therefore be interesting to contrast the work of these writers in both Irish and English, along with any translations they have made, to explore the structural and aesthetic differences in their writing in both languages in order to determine the extent to which all writing for these writers is a form of continuous translation.³⁴ An analysis of the high incidence of bilingual creativity in Ireland would be of certain benefit to a more general understanding of the relationship between language, writing and translation.

Like Miklós Vadja, Michael O'Loughlin, the Irish poet and translator of Gerrit Achterberg, sees translation in paradoxical terms:

I believe, the most important factor is the pull of the seductive paradox at the heart of the art of translation; the deeper you delve into the idiosyncrasies of a particular language, the closer you come to the root of language itself. As you teach the stranger to speak the dialect of your particular suburb of Babel like a native, you may sometimes sense a common music beyond all this fiddle.³⁵

It is a commonplace of mathematical and scientific thought that it is often the resolution of paradox that yields new insights and precedes the more dramatic epistemological breakthroughs in human thought.³⁶ The remarkable upswing in literary translation in the nineteen eighties in Ireland provides a challenge to scholars and critics to meet the interpretive challenge of the present and reappraise Ireland's rich translation past. Translation's multiple paradoxes carry in them a promise of much needed linguistic self-understanding.

33. Declan Kiberd, Introduction, *An Chrann*, p.xxi.

34. For an example of a comparative study in the case of one bilingual writer see Máirín Nic Éoin, *Eoghan Ó Tuaraisc: Beatha agus Saothar* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1988).

35. Michael O'Loughlin, "The Proper Tension", *Graph*, No. 1 (1986), p.25.

36. Nicholas Falletta, *The Paradoxicon* (Turnstone: Northamps., 1985), pp.xvii-xx.