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Ciaran Carson and the Equilibrium of Language(s)

Clíona Ní Ríordáin

Introduction

Do m'athair Liam Mac Carráin
To my father William Carson
Belfast Confetti, Gallery 1989

- 1 Ciaran Carson expresses his bilingual identity via the dedication he addresses to his father in the collection entitled *Belfast Confetti* (1989). The apparent equilibrium achieved between the Irish and English lines reflects Carson's preoccupation with language. The text can be viewed as the physical representation of an attempted balance between Irish and English. Irish, as Carson's mother tongue comes first; the English language translation figures underneath. Yet, as Carson himself would be the first to admit, an equilibrium between the two languages is impossible, not just for reasons of world language vs minority language, but because the effect produced by each language is completely different. In an interview Carson gave the *Guardian* he expressed his relationship with language, and his own bilingualism, as follows:

"I think as a result of that [his upbringing in Irish] I was always aware of language, how it operates. How if you say it in one language it's not the same as saying it in another." He remembers drifting off to sleep, aged four or five, "and at that time you could still hear horses [in the street], and I would think horse, and then the Irish 'capall', horse, capall, capall, capall." He rolls it around on his tongue. "And the sound of 'capall', to me was horse, whereas 'horse' sounded exotic, and odd."

- 2 Carson may describe the effect of the "other" language as "exotic and odd", yet he is also very much aware that language can act as a disguise, a cloak in which one can wrap oneself to become Other. "Liam MacCarráin" responds to a linguistic identity as an Irish nationalist, an identity shared by both his father and mother who learned the language and decided to raise their children in Irish. In the same *Guardian* interview the journalist explores the relationship his parents had with the Irish language:

They [his parents] met when his mother attended an Irish class taught by his father ("so they were in love with each other and the language"), and decided that only Irish would be spoken at home. It was a political choice (Irish wasn't officially recognised in Northern Ireland until 1998), but in 1944 not the lightning-rod kind of choice it would become later; then, as far as they knew, they were one of only four families in all of Belfast who spoke mainly in Irish.

- 3 William Carson, the English version of his father's name, the moniker his birth was registered under officially in the United Kingdom, is linked to the founding fathers of Ulster Unionism: King William, and Edward Carson (who dreamt up the Ulster League and Covenant). Carson's choice of billing himself as Ciaran Carson, an Irish language forename without the diacritics on the "a", an English language last name, shows us that Carson has opted for a form of linguistic balance, much like Sean O'Faolain did before him¹. A commentary by Carson in response to the Forward Prize in 2015, is revealing in this regard: "And I wonder how far all this double-dealing comes from my bilingual background, as embodied in my name, Ciaran the Catholic Irish, Carson the Protestant Ulsterman. At any rate I relish the ambiguity".
- 4 In this article, I examine the way Carson's linguistic tight-walk has influenced his work. I look at how the ambiguity of his linguistic identity is woven into the weft and warp of his writing — how the search for an equal balance between opposing linguistic forces (to paraphrase the first entry for the term equilibrium in the online version of the OED) has shaped Carson's aesthetics. The preoccupation with linguistic balance, I will argue, has sometimes generated the subject matter for certain works of prose and poetry. And, Carson's Irish/English bilingualism has also led him to foster relationships with other, less abrasive, language pairings, notably, with the French language². Indeed, as I will show, Carson likes to avoid the binary of language pairings, infusing the translational equilibrium between one language and another with the addition of a third element, avoiding any easy explanations.
- 5 For the purposes of this article, my exploration will be limited to the collections, *The Alexandrine Plan* (AP), and *From Elsewhere* (FE), and the novel, *Exchange Place* (EP), but will make various excursions into Carson's other work. Moreover, the article will also be informed by the writings of two philosophers whose own preoccupations with language have shaped Carson's aesthetic practice— Ludwig Wittgenstein and Walter Benjamin. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* study the "genuineness" of language, and the way in which signs function in mapping out "the immediate private sensations" (Wittgenstein 2009, 243) of the speaker; Benjamin's thinking on language, as outlined in the introduction to his translations of Baudelaire's poems, and the physical structures of Benjamin's own relationship with Paris, as explored in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, form an intellectual baseline for the nurturing of Carson's own relationship with Paris, with the French language, and with the act of translation itself.

Rimbaud and Baudelaire

- 6 Carson's relationship with French language and literature is visible at several junctures in his work. In *The Alexandrine Plan* (1998), for instance, Carson translates Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, a towering trinity of French poets. This bilingual volume, with the constraints of the facing text is an exception in Carson's translation work, where the original text is more often than not absent³. The equilibrium which might be called for by the presence of the original text is eluded, as straight translation (i.e.

carrying the work over from the source language to the target language) is not enough for Carson. If one takes the example of the first line from “Spleen”, translated by Carson as “Rainy Liaisons” (AP, 46-7), we get a flavour of what is going on. “Pluviôse, irrité contre la ville entière,” is rendered as follows: “Here comes Mr Rainy Mouth again, to vent his spleen”. The hint at the strategy employed is to be found in “Mr Rainy Mouth”; this is a translation of Baudelaire voiced, I would suggest, for Bob Dylan via a certain intertextuality with “Mr Tangerine Man”. The additions to the original text all point to this interpretation “Mon chat sur le carreau cherchant une litière/ Agite sans repos son corps maigre et galeux,” becomes “My cat prowls round like she was high on mescaline/In her electric mangey fur”⁴. The reference to mescaline is nowhere in the source text; its addition anchors the text in a 1960s reality. The final stanza confirms this:

Héritage Fatal d'une vieille hydropique,
Le beau valet de coeur et la dame de pique
Causent sinistrement de leurs amours défunts.

Discarded by some poxy whore, the Queen of Spades
And greasy Jack of Hearts discuss their defunct trades
Of love: rainy liaisons of the dark back yards.

- 7 The choice of “poxy whore” sets the poem in a gutter language that does not correspond to the register of Baudelaire’s original. Yet, when we read the final addition, “rainy liaisons of the dark back yards”, we can view the segment as a riff, or a variation on the Baudelairean text, thus making the whole translated poem, with its “Rainy Liaisons” title, a sort of metatextual comment on what Carson is trying to achieve in his engagement with Baudelaire.
- 8 Should the reader not be aware of the complicated nature of Carson’s endeavour, the poet himself explains his undertaking in the preface to his collection *In the Light Of* (2012), where his own *démarche* is explicated with the help of Walter Benjamin, and Arthur Rimbaud himself (whose work Carson also translated in *The Alexandrine Plan*).

My concern in that book [*The Alexandrine Plan*] was not so much to give a ‘literal’ meaning of what the poems might be saying, as to reproduce the original metre in English and see what interpretations might emerge from those constraints, both of rhyme and the twelve syllables of the classical French alexandrine.

As Walter Benjamin has it in ‘The Task of the Translator’ [The translator] must expand and deepen his own language by means of the foreign language.’ One’s ‘own’ language begins to seem another.

So in translation one necessarily becomes Another. First-person, third-person, noun and verb, became confused: *Je est un autre* as Rimbaud has it. (Carson 2012, *ILTO*, 13)

- 9 In this preface, Carson reveals his preoccupation with form (the alexandrine metre) and the sophistication of his approach to translation, viewed through the prism of Benjamin’s seminal text “The Task of the Translator”. He highlights the fact that his translation is informed also by Rimbaud’s own poetics of estrangement. The confusion of pronouns is informative (“First-person, third-person, noun and verb [...]”), as we have seen in the earlier poem, where the translation of “Spleen” has involved the addition of a third voice.
- 10 This strategy is also at play in the translation of “Vingt ans” by Rimbaud. This poem comes from the volume, *In the Light Of*; the texts of the original prose poems are not

reproduced. However, when the comparison between source text and target text is made, the visual impact of Carson's extra constraints (i.e. that of imposing rhyming couplets and the twelve syllable alexandrine metre) is striking. The innovative formal element that the prose poem represented for both Baudelaire and Rimbaud⁵ is eluded in Carson's translation. One can surmise that the prose poem at the end of the twentieth century no longer presented any significant formal challenge for Carson, and so to the translational balance Carson adds another challenge, almost as if "straight translation", as defined earlier in the article, was too uncomplicated. Carson, like a racing horse, needed the extra weight of the rhyming couplets and the twelve syllable alexandrine metre to make the translational race worth running.

III

Vingt ans

Les voix instructives exilées... L'ingénuité physique amèrement rassise... - Adagio -
 Ah ! l'égoïsme infini de l'adolescence, l'optimisme studieux : que le monde était
 plein de fleurs cet été ! Les airs et les formes mourant... - Un chœur, pour calmer
 l'impuissance et l'absence ! Un chœur de verres de mélodies nocturnes... En effet les
 nerfs vont vite chasser.

3 Twenty Years A-Growing

The voices of instruction exiled...all gone sour,
 that physical innocence lost hour after hour...

adagio. Ah, the infinite egoism
 of adolescence, the studious optimism!

How full of flowers was the world that summer!
 Airs and forms expiring, murmur on murmur...

a choir to temper impotence, and absence in reprise!
 A choir of crystal glasses, of nocturnal melodies...

indeed, so quickly do the nerves take up the chase
 the foremost runner finds he comes last in the race.
 (Carson 2012, *ITLO*, 56)

- 11 The prompt supplied by the title "Vingt ans" sees Carson finding an equivalent from the Irish repertoire. His expanded title, "Twenty Years A-Growing", refers to the Irish language classic *Fiche Bliain ag Fás* by Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, translated into English as *Twenty Years A-Growing* by George Thomson and Moya Llewelyn Davies. The prose poem is made up of nine cadences, an irregular number which does not fit Carson's plan of rhyming couplets and so a final line is added for harmony and balance. The chase/race rhyme seems to generate the logical conclusion to the vignette.

Fugal Equilibrium

- 12 The search for harmony and balance, both linguistically and thematically can also be linked to Carson's attachment to music. He occupied the post of Traditional Music Officer in the Northern Irish Arts Council for twenty years. He is an accomplished musician, playing the traditional fiddle and the tin whistle. He is often joined by his wife, Deirdre Shannon, on the flute, during poetry readings, where musical interludes punctuate the programme. Carson's interest in music is not confined to traditional Irish music however. The volume *For All We Know* (2008) bears two epigraphs, one said

to be a traditional French song, and the other an excerpt from Glenn Gould's "So You Want to Write a Fugue".

Fugue must perform its frequently stealthy work with continuously shifting melodic fragments that remain, in the 'tune' sense, perceptually unfinished.
— Glenn Gould

- 13 The Gould quotation informs the mode of composition that Carson employs in *For All We Know*, with its two sections composed of poems bearing identical titles. Yet, one can surmise that this musical indication can also been seen as a clue to the wider compositional elements that influence Carson's aesthetics, where linguistic equivalents set the tempo for virtuoso performances in a fugal mode. This seems to be the case with the novel *Exchange Place* (2012). Set in Paris and Belfast, informed by Patrick Modiano's novel *Rue des boutiques obscures* (which itself owes its title to the translation of the name of a Roman street), the novel is a dizzying babel-like construction of languages and personae, lost in a Paris that owes everything to Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*. The book is peppered with expressions in French, and the narrator moves between one language and another in a constant search for equivalence, like the fugal interplay that one remarks in Bach's *Two Part Inventions*, for instance. These are some examples taken from the early part of the novel. Many refer to mundane everyday objects. The search for equivalence is frequently highlighted by the narrator himself, who repeats the verbal cues, like a recurring leitmotif.

Night light. What was the word? *Veilleuse*. [...]

He turned to the dark staircase and depressed the timer switch. What was the word? *Minuterie*.
Pilot Light
(Carson 2012, EP, 21)

Vacuum cleaner, what was the word? *L'aspirateur*. (Carson 2012, EP, 41)

- 14 Yet, as the novel progresses, and the intrigue becomes more complicated, and the borders between reality and imaginary are increasingly blurred, the linguistic search for equivalence takes on a new dimension.

Kilpatrick toyed with the idea that Blanqui could be translated as Blank who.
(Carson 2012, EP, 34)
Braille sounded like an awl. *Une braille*. (Carson 2012, EP, 34)

- 15 Rather than offering dictionary equivalents, Carson strays into the territory governed by the *Philosophical Investigations* of Wittgenstein, where "words ... are to refer to what only the speaker can know—to his immediate private sensations ..." (Wittgenstein 2009, 243), or where "The signs in language can only function when there is a possibility of judging the correctness of their use, "so the use of [a] word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands" (Wittgenstein 2009, 261). Carson's novel plunges deeper into the *haecceitas* of language relishing the possibility of equivalences that his narrator alone decides upon.

- 16 These linguistic possibilities are mirrored by similar narrative events and prompts:

As he shaved himself before the mirror Kilpatrick looked at himself and thought, as he often had done before, how in a foreign country one could be anyone, and that indeed we are also close to the brink of being someone else.
He almost believed himself.
(Carson 2012, EP, 27)

- 17 And the narrative elements are further bolstered by the addition of material from Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*. Benjamin is referred to by the narrator as follows:

He [WB] saw Paris as the capital of the nineteenth century. His book was a dream representation of Paris itself, images and phrases intertwining in a vast fugal architecture, echoing rooms and galleries of language. (Carson 2012, *EP*, 28)

- 18 This in turn leads to the inclusion of a quote from page 112 *The Arcades Project*:

There exists a world where a man follows the road that, in the other world, his double did not take. His existence divides in two, a globe for each; it bifurcates a second time, a third time, thousands of times. He thus possesses fully formed doubles with innumerable variants, which, in multiplying, always represent him as a person but capture only fragments of his destiny. All that one might have been in this world, one is in another.

(Carson 2012, *EP*, 29)

- 19 This quotation is itself, as the narrator informs us, a translation of an extract from *L'Éternité par les astres* by Louis Auguste Blanqui, one of the many writers included by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. The text of course was translated by Benjamin from French into German, and Carson reads it in the English translation of *The Arcades Project*. In a commentary on the writing of *Exchange Place* Carson refers to this precise passage and suggests that it came to him via what he refers to as the "Library Angel", explaining that *Exchange Place*, as he originally intended, was not written. He also suggests that he was influenced by that arch-translator and inventor of multiple heteronyms, James Clarence Mangan (Carson 2014b, 223).
- 20 Towards the end of *Exchange Place*, the narrator offers this meta-textual insight on both the novel and, I would suggest, the process that the act of reading entails for Carson's ideal reader: "Reading is a form of translation, for every reader must interpret what he or she reads, visualizing the action or the scene described in his or her own way". (Carson 2012, *EP*, 85) *Exchange Place* is a novel which is propelled by this search for linguistic equilibrium, where the invention of etymologies sends us right back to Carson's collection *Belfast Confetti* where the actual etymologies of Belfast's Gaelic roots [Béal Feirste] inspired many of the poems in the volume. It is also, I would suggest, a Carsonian tribute, both to the French writer Patrick Modiano, and to Walter Benjamin, whose *Arcades Project* is a vast compendium of translated material, and architectural meanderings in the Passages and history of nineteenth century Paris.

Achieving Balance From Elsewhere

- 21 The final act to date in this compositional method is the collection *From Elsewhere* (2014). The title is foreshadowed in Carson's essay on Mangan:

So when I say the book I had in mind; I realize it is not so, for the book is always beyond the best intentions of its author, not to be known until written; and our best writing is that which seems to come from Elsewhere, dictated by Another, as if in an *aisling*. It should be something else beyond what we had in mind. (Carson/Mangan)

- 22 As if to summon up this writing, Carson embarks on a project where he translates the poems of Jean Follain. However, Carson pushes beyond the translations to create what he calls "fetches", creative responses to the source text. He defines fetches as follows:

A fetch is the act of fetching, bringing from a distance, or reaching after: it is something brought from elsewhere, an act of translation in other words. To fetch is

to draw or 'borrow' from a source. It is to derive etymologically. It is to go in quest of. In sailing, it is an act of tacking, and also to get into the wake of a vessel, as I fetched myself into the wake of Follain, and hence fetched my course, like a sailor who after a long fetch at sea comes home with a far-fetched tale. A fetch is the apparition, double, or wraith of a living person. A shadowy counterpart, as my poems might be to those of Follain. (Carson 2014, 14)

- 23 This notion of the shadowy counterpart was already evoked in Carson's essay on Mangan, where he spoke of writing in the shade of Mangan; in this preface, it is expanded on to include the actual poetic composition itself. However, I would argue, that to achieve this Carson needs to feel a certain empathy with the poet he translates and with the subject matter itself:

The poems initially attracted me by their visual quality; they're like a series of vignettes in a landscape, haunted by ghosts of the past. A good many of those ghosts seemed to echo my experience of Belfast, with its undercurrent of dark politics. And I was attracted by Follain's avoidance of any straightforward resolution to the ominous and resonant situations set forth in his poems. (Ploughshares)

- 24 The final result is a perfectly structured, harmonious creation. This time Carson's magic number is 3, and its multiples:

At any rate I ended up with 81 pairs of poems, translation and counterpart. I find it useful to work within some (usually arbitrary) numerical constraint. So the book consists of three parts of 27 pairs of poems each. $3 \times 3 = 9$; $3 \times 27 = 81$; $8+1 = 9$. The number 9 is a great one for playing about with. More seriously, I wanted to give a tripartite or triptych shape to the book: a beginning, a middle, and an end. An account of a life: youth, middle age, old age, beginning and ending with a shoelace being tied. (Ploughshares)

- 25 Carson's prefaces to his translations are themselves wonderful essays. He is generous with his reader, and offers them keys to access his compositional process, an obligation not felt by every poet. And yet, there is a teasing element to them too, an intertextual whiff that sends the scholarly bloodhound off on the trail of the other text that goes unmentioned. In the case of *From Elsewhere* the ghost in the machine is again Walter Benjamin. He is materialised via the reference to bread that Carson summons up in the preface to his Follain's translations, as a means of explaining Follain's attachment to the French language. In this instance, Carson refers to the Breton poet, Guillevic, recounting how Follain would insist that "French bread is another matter to English bread" (Carson 2014, 13). Carson goes on to explicate the reference: "*Le pain* belongs to a system of very different semantic weights, textures and measures; like wine, or rather *le vin*, it is rooted in the culture of France; in its linguistic *terroir*." This is of course Carson's answer to Benjamin's seminal essay, "The Task of the Translator", written as a preface to his translations of Baudelaire, where Benjamin summons up German bread "brod", and its impossible equivalence. Carson also refers to the impossibility trope, yet expands it to include not just language, but poetry itself: "It is often said that translation is impossible; yet it is done, and needs to be done. It has also been said that poetry itself is a kind of translation" (Carson 2014, 14).
- 26 Carson's translations and their equivalences are very accomplished. John Montague quibbled in his review of the book in the TLS ("Being chewed", 16 February 2015) that "one misses the original alongside", and it is true, one could imagine a fold-out, concertina-like arrangement which would enable such a presentation. Nonetheless, when the poems are laid together side by side the translations emerge as respectful, in

a manner that Antoine Bermann, the French translation theorist would like. In the example cited below the aspiration to equivalence in the translation is signified by the presence of the colon, which is a punctuational expression of equivalence and equilibrium. The poem itself is both simple and challenging to translate with the homonym “naît/n’est”

Vie	Vie: Life
Il naît un enfant dans un grand paysage un demi-siècle après il n'est qu'un soldat mort et c'était là cet homme que l'on vit apparaître et puis poser par terre tout un lourd sac de pommes dont deux ou trois roulèrent bruit parmi ceux d'un monde où l'oiseau chantait sur la pierre du seuil. (Follain, 1969)	He is born a child Into a boundless landscape Half a century on He is but a soldier And it was there that this man Was seen to appear And set down A sack loaded with apples Two or three of which rolled out A sound among those of a world Where a bird sang On the stone slab of the threshold.

- 27 The ambiguity of the word “pommes” [apples] which might be “pommes de terre” [potatoes], given the proximity of the word “terre” later in the poem, allows Carson to opt for the word “windfall” in the fetch poem that follows the translation. The noise generated in the original poem by the sound of the falling “pommes” is the source of the fetch and the term “windfall” allows Carson to select the rhyme “tumbriel” for a cart or a barrow, a word resonant with the revolutionary fervour of “La Terreur”. It is not too far a stretch to liken “La Terreur” to “The Troubles” where the abstraction of the qualifying nouns, which name the events, are filled with the terrifying violence that both terms evoke.

To Dream

Under a muttering of thunder
 Or the memory of a bomb
 Come from afar
 This man tilts
 The full of a tumbriel
 Of windfalls
 Into the cellar bin
 He has to come to
 In the dark to hear
 A rumbling sound
 Of load on load
 Coming in to trouble
 Someone else's sleep,
 Whoever that man be
 That came to dream him.
 (Carson 2014, 75)

- 28 Carson is Follain's Other, or vice versa, because of the punctuational equivalence implied by the colon, which could be expressed in mathematical terms by an equals

sign. “*L’autre: The Other*” is the title of Carson’s preface to *From Elsewhere*. However, Carson is never happy with the duality of the colon. As we have seen in the earlier examples, he likes to complicate things, to add “Another” unknown (X+Y) to the equation.

- 29 This is the case with the second poem in the volume “*Sans le langage: Without language*” (Carson 2014, 20-21). The fetch that responds to this poem, whose title, one imagines, is heavy and portentous for a poet like Carson. He calls the fetch “In Memory”, and it is Carson’s tribute to Seamus Heaney. Carson acknowledges it as such in his notes where he says it is indebted to Seamus Heaney’s “Personal Helicon”.
- 30 The poem can be seen as a form of transcreation – in other words a personal rewriting, not just of one poem (Follain’s) but of two, a holy trinity of poets Follain+Carson+Heaney= “In Memory”. The original poem includes the definite article “*Sans le langage*”. In his translation, Carson chooses to eliminate the definite article and translate the poem as “Without Language”. The loss of the determinate article is not without significance because it shifts the poem from the particular to the general, and gives Carson’s translation a wider remit.
- 31 Follain’s poem evokes noises as a replacement for speech; in Carson’s fetch those noises become the echoing of the syllables of Heaney’s poem, “Personal Helicon”:

Now that the man
he would become
is dead
that unfathomable
darkness
echoes
still.

- 32 The concluding lines are a tribute to Heaney, but they also send sonic echoes out into the past, connecting Heaney, not just with Carson, but with the generations of poets who relished the act of translation. It connects the poem to the classical tradition also, to Mangan and Brooke and Prout, all those translators who made other traditions available through their work. And beyond, to innovators like Ezra Pound, Robert Lowell, and Baudelaire himself, who also translated Poe.

Conclusion

- 33 Yet, it would be simplistic to reduce *From Elsewhere* to issues of transcreation, intertextuality, and translation. What is at stake in the collection, with its learned teasing preface, and its knowledgeable veil of notes and acknowledgements, is Carson’s *ars poetica*. The precise use of the Future Perfect tense (“Now that the man/he would become/is dead”) situates us in Carson’s compositional present, via the temporal adverb “now”. Language in this fetch is reduced to echoes; and it is in these echoes that Carson finds inspiration; echoes which include Heaney, but also Follain, Mangan and Benjamin.
- 34 It is tempting to view Carson’s work as a form of “transnational poetics”, to borrow the term used by Jahan Ramazani, in his 2009 volume of the same name. It is true that Carson’s poetry can be viewed through a postcolonial, almost post-national prism. However, this too, I would argue, is reductive. Does Carson, like Benjamin, hanker after an “ur-language”, the original pre-babelian state? Or perhaps it would be fairer to view

From Elsewhere and Carson's poetics in terms of the language envisaged by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, a *private language* (PI, 246) that he shares with us readers from time to time. By doing so, Carson and his readers are able to fly the nets of national languages and the ideological constraints that tie both reader and writer down.

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NOTES

1. In the case of O'Faolain, his identity was translated from John Whelan, as he was born in Cork in 1900, to Seán Ó Faoláin as the nationalist schoolboy who studied at Daniel Corkery's knee, before going to Harvard and becoming the hybrid Sean O'Faolain (Irish spelling but absence of diacritics and the addition of an apostrophe for good measure).
 2. Carson reads French, having taken it for A-level. This emerged in a conversation with Ciaran Carson during *Festival de la poésie*, Paris, June 2013.
 3. This is, more often than not, for reasons of copyright, or simply for reasons of economy.
 4. David Yaffe, in his study of Dylan's work, brings together mescaline and Rimbaud suggesting people were waiting for Dylan to sing "like a Woody Guthrie on mescaline and Rimbaud". *Bob Dylan Like a Complete Unknown*, Yale University Press, 2011.
 5. See BERTRAND, Jean-Pierre. 2015. *Inventer en littérature: du poème en prose à l'écriture automatique*. Paris : Le Seuil.
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ABSTRACTS

This article makes a parallel between Ciaran Carson's bilingualism and his search for linguistic equilibrium in his work. It suggests that this elusive search is influenced by Walter Benjamin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Four works are examined: the poetry collections *The Alexandrine Plan*, *In the Light Of*, and *From Elsewhere* and the novel *Exchange Place*. Each of these volumes is influenced by a creative impulse that, it argues, stems from a desire for balance in language. The article examines the translational process of Carson in his translations of a variety of French poets (Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Follain); it highlights different methods employed by Carson at various stages of his career, including versions, straight translations, and transcreation. It details the intertextuality at play in the novel *Exchange Place*. In conclusion, it contends that at the heart of Carson's oeuvre is the desire to invent a private language, freed from the linguistic constraints associated with national languages.

Le bilinguisme de Ciaran Carson serait à l'origine de sa recherche pour un équilibre linguistique dans son œuvre. Cet article trace l'influence de Walter Benjamin et de Ludwig Wittgenstein dans quatre ouvrages de Ciaran Carson : les recueils *The Alexandrine Plan*, *In the Light Of*, *From Elsewhere*, et le roman *Exchange Place*. Chacun de ces volumes est propulsé par une impulsion créative qui viendrait d'un désir de la part du poète d'aspirer à une harmonie langagière. L'article se consacre à l'étude du processus traductionnel de Carson dans ses relations avec l'œuvre de trois poètes français, Rimbaud, Baudelaire et Follain et démontre que Carson déploie une variété de stratégies tout au long de sa carrière, allant de la traduction au sens bermanien du terme, à la version marquée par une utilisation lowellienne de la traduction avant d'aborder la transcréation dans son recueil le plus récent. L'auteur de cet article se penche également sur l'intertextualité qui est présente dans le roman *Exchange Place*. Enfin, l'article suggère que le désir d'inventer une langue privée, libre des contraintes imposées par des langues nationales, serait au cœur de l'œuvre carsonienne.

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