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Preface

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Preface

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- 1 The present volume of *Études Irlandaises, Translation: Praxis and Poetics* addresses the issue of translation on the island of Ireland in diverse and multiple forms, focussing both on the practical dimension of the translation act – with articles on lexicography, the practical implications of Irish within the EU, the presence of the Irish Language within the chamber of the Northern Irish Assembly, the effects of technology on the practice of translation – and on the poetic dimension to translation, with a range of articles on the translation of poetry¹.
- 2 *Études Irlandaises* appears at a time when interest in translation is intense, sometimes for very different and conflicting reasons. Under the terms of the Official Languages Act, official texts within the Republic of Ireland have to be made available in both English and Irish². Irish has also become the 21st language of the European Union and as such translation and interpretation services in Irish are now provided within the European Parliament and Commission³. The enlargement of the European Union at the end of 2004⁴ and Ireland's decision to open its borders to the citizens of the 2004 accession states has also meant that large language groups from these other states came to Ireland. To the official bilingual signage in Irish and English, unofficial notices in Polish or Estonian in supermarkets or garages were added, “Przed wyjściem zgaś światło” appearing almost as often as “Brúigh” “Push”. The arrival of these new migrants involved a degree of unforeseen logistical implementation at all levels of the public service, from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in schools⁵, to the provision of interpreters in the courts and hospitals. As the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) outlined in its 2008 report, more needs to be done to improve translation services for migrants⁶. Their press release, referred to below, follows an extensive piece of research presented in 2007 by Mary Phelan from DCU. Her advocacy paper is available on the website of the Irish Interpreters' and Translators' Association⁷; it stresses the need for a clear framework for interpreters who work in the public service in Ireland and also highlights the need for adequate training programmes. A recent series of articles by Carl O'Brien in the *Irish Times* illustrate the problems that arise as a result of this lack of training⁸, and the case study published in the same issue enumerates no less than 214

errors made in the translation of a refugee's statement. The agency responsible has since closed down⁹.

- 3 In the present straitened economic circumstances, spending on translation has been decried as wasteful, and frequent articles in the press, both north and south of the border, have aligned themselves with this view¹⁰. Most worryingly, the NCCRI itself, which commissioned many challenging reports, was among the first victims of Irish government cutbacks, and ceased to exist in December 2008¹¹.
- 4 The facilitation of the translation process is under attack, so, it is argued, why should anyone spend money on translation when everyone on the island of Ireland speaks English? This monolithic, monolingual form of thought refuses to acknowledge the complexity of language issues in Ireland. Yet, it is only through dialogue, which acknowledges both past diversities and present multiplicities that one can hope to move forward in harmony. As Abdelkebir Khattibi says, "any form of thinking that is not minoritarian, marginal, fragmentary and incomplete, is always a form of ethnocidal thinking¹²".

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- 5 The articles contained within the Praxis section of the volume are devoted to a variety of topics and explore the issue from a range of angles.
- 6 Liam Mac Amhlaigh examines that most basic of tools for a translator, the dictionary. In his article, he studies the development of lexicography in Ireland throughout the last century. His article highlights the way in which the history of Irish lexicography mirrors the history of the Irish state.
- 7 Liam Mac Amhlaigh and Diarmait Mac Giolla Chríost both underline the impetus of the import of new technology in the facilitation of the task of the translator. Mac Giolla Chríost shows the democratic nature of the translation process as implemented on Facebook. He also draws attention to the introduction of Irish into the chamber of the Northern Assembly and to the act of self-translation required of NIA members who choose to use Irish; the economy of treasury also resulting in a consequent economy of time for the members in question, the time spent in translation divides the time available to the member in two.
- 8 Seán Ó Riain investigates the use of Irish within another assembly at the heart of Europe and traces the acquisition of the status as an official language of the European Union for the Irish language. He outlines the evolution of terminology, citing precise instances and alerts us to the awareness of the emotional impact that hearing the Irish language within the European sphere can have on an Irish listener. He has included an extensive bibliography on the topic.
- 9 Stiofáin Ó Cadhla brings his skill as an ethnographer to the case of the Mam Trasna murders. This case relating to the bludgeoning to death of the Joyce family continues to fascinate lovers of true detective stories, and as recently as February 2010 an article was devoted to the affair in the *Galway Advertiser*¹³. The affair also preoccupied James Joyce who wrote an article on the event for *Il Piccolo della Sera*, on September 16, 1907. Joyce highlights the role of the interpreter in the affair:

Both the old man and the other accused did not know English. The court had to resort to the services of an interpreter. The interrogation that took, place through

this man, was at times comic and at times tragic. On the one hand there was the officious interpreter, on the other, the patriarch of the miserable tribe who, unused to civic customs, seemed quite bewildered by all the legal ceremonies¹⁴.

- 10 For Joyce, the whole affair was symbolic of the relationship between Ireland and England:

The figure of this bewildered old man, left over from a culture which is not ours, a deaf-mute before his judge, is a symbol of the Irish nation at the bar of public opinion. Like him, Ireland cannot appeal to the modern conscience of England or abroad. The English newspapers act as interpreters between Ireland and the English electorate which, though it lends an ear every so often is finally irritated by the eternal complaints of the Nationalist deputies who, it believes, have come to the House with the aim of upsetting the order and extorting money¹⁵.

- 11 Patrick Zuk draws our attention to another symbolic construct, invoking another medium. The translation of a desired national imago to music, through the opera commissioned from A. J. Potter and Donagh MacDonagh. This fascinating study shows another element of the dialogue between England and Ireland, where one is defined in counterpoint to the other:

[...] Irishness is largely defined through contrast with negative British stereotypes. Patrick and the Irish labourers are portrayed as decent and peaceable, conditioned by their Catholic faith to be tolerant and live in harmony with immigrants from other countries. The only indigenous Britons that they encounter are Teddy boys, who gained widespread notoriety only a few years before the opera was written through their involvement in race riots in London instigated by 'Keep Britain White' mobs¹⁶. MacDonagh allows this minority sub-culture to represent British society, or, at any rate, the British working class, in its entirety¹⁷.

- 12 These essays, taken as a whole, make at once an emotional plea and an intellectually stunning case for the continued need for interpreters of language and culture who will heighten understanding on a global level.

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- 13 The essays on literary topics here all illustrate the intense creative impulse that can emerge from the translation process. It is in essence a dialogical form. Many poets, Lowell and Heaney, to name but two, see translation as a project, a form of exercise, a discipline that will ensure that, for them, writing as an activity must continue. In Heaney's case, his translation of *Buile Suibhne* enabled his invention of the mask of Sweeney the birdman. In later years, Heaney has elaborated on his vision of translation referring to it initially as a "raid" (where you raid the text in a predatory fashion for the elements that interest you as a poet) or a "settlement" in which you occupy the source text and so are more respectful of its forms. More recently, in an address made to students in the University of Amsterdam, Heaney has also punned ingeniously on the term "translation", talking of trans-lation and trance-lation, where the latter emphasises "the work's character and entrancement¹⁸".

- 14 Heaney's poetry attracted attention in France from an early stage, through the advocacy of academics like Jacqueline Genet and Adolphe Haberer. His work has been translated in a variety of anthologies and most recently by Patrick Hersant, whose translations of *Seeing Things* (La Lucarne) and *The Spirit Level* (L'étrange et le connu) appeared in 2005 (Gallimard). Elizabeth Pearce's article examines different approaches to translations of Heaney's poem "Casualty". She examines the density of his metaphorical language and underlines the importance of maintaining this in a translated version: "If the metaphoric

networks are likewise maintained in the translation, then the translation too will allow the ‘possibility of release’ – allowing migration across cultural and linguistic barriers between the two languages.”

- 15 Trevor Joyce has also translated *Buile Suibhne*. Yet, as John Goodby suggests, his translation employs what Laurence Venuti has termed the “foreignizing” mode of translation, associated with avant-garde poetry. For Goodby, Trevor Joyce’s engagement with the *Buile Suibhne* text prepared the terrain for much of the subsequent output. Goodby also makes the connection to that other master of modernist translation, Ezra Pound, arguing that Pound is a strongly felt presence in Trevor Joyce’s work:
[...] after 1976, Joyce pursued what can be described as a Poundian course of study in Japanese and Chinese poetry and philosophy, coming to an understanding of the cultural counterweight they represented to eurocentricity and Western binary modes of thinking. Unlike Pound, however, Joyce never uses translation to pass ironic judgement on the present: nor does he succumb to linguistic idealism concerning the ideogram, or the belief that China offered a desirable social model¹⁹.
- 16 In Goodby’s view, translation has helped Trevor Joyce create some of the most remarkable collections of poetry that exist in Irish Literature today.
- 17 Biddy Jenkinson has also been hailed as a remarkable poet: according to Ciaran Carson she is one of the foremost Irish writers writing in Irish or English. The poems presented here provide an insight into the varied style and preoccupations of the poet. Her lucid use of language, her ability to code-switch moving from French to English to Irish, from the love poem, to the meta-textual realm of the poem “X” and back to the ironic slant on contemporary Ireland give a glimpse of the supreme dexterity of a poet who is at home both within the realities of the present world while also comfortable with the mythological pre-lapsarian Ireland to which she harks back in some of her poems. No wonder that Máire Mhac an tSaoi has suggested that Biddy Jenkinson has been through this life before!
- 18 Irish poets have long been at home in France and sought inspiration from French literature, in many memorable cases. Maryvonne Boisseau renders homage to this tradition of fruitful interaction in her article on one of the most iconic of French poems, “Le Bateau ivre” and its various incarnations in the work of Irish poets.
- 19 The interview that Michael Cronin graciously granted to the journal examines many of the issues raised in the essays in both the Praxis and Poetics section of the volume. Addressing on the one hand multicultural, multilingual Ireland and the role of technology in that world, he also turns his attention to the translation of poetry and the implications for instant translation in the composition of poems in Irish.
- 20 It is hoped that the Translation volume of *Etudes Irlandaises* will mark another stepping stone in the exploration of the phenomenon of translation within Irish society, acknowledging its importance and signposting the way ahead. In doing so, it will accord fitting recognition to the crucial utterance embedded at the heart of Michael Cronin’s interview : “[...] translation like any other human phenomenon is multiple and contains within it genuinely creative and progressive forces but it also contains within it forces that are limiting and disabling²⁰.” It is my hope that the collective scholarship of this volume will enable us to grasp the dualistic, contradictory nature of the theme of translation and allow us to go forward with a clearer-sighted, enriched comprehension of the nature of the treasure trove and minefield of translation on the island of Ireland.

NOTES

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2. See [<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2003/en/act/pub/0032/index.htm>], accessed 15/09/10.
3. See [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/spotlight/irish_en.html], accessed 14/09/10.
4. See [http://europa.eu/pol/enlarg/index_en.html], accessed 15/09/10.
5. See INTO discussion document on English in the primary school [<http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/LanguageInThePrimarySchool.pdf>] accessed 14/09/10. The situation has changed since the document was published as teacher pupil ratio has increased, owing to government cutbacks.
6. See press release [http://europa.eu/pol/enlarg/index_en.html], accessed 16/09/10.
7. See [http://translatorsassociation.ie/component/option,com_docman/task,cat_view], accessed 14/09/10.
8. See [<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/frontpage/2010/0607/1224272005465.html>], and [<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0607/1224272004732>], accessed 15/09/10.
9. [<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0607/1224272004781.html>] consulted 14/09/10.
10. See for example in Northern Ireland: [www.taxpayersalliance.com/media/2009/05/bbc-news-cost] and [<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/tuv-apologise-for-calling-irish-a-leprechaun-language-14555428.html>], accessed 14/09/10. In the Republic of Ireland see articles such as [, accessed 14/09/10.
11. For media reaction to this decision see [http://www.nccri.ie/pdf/recent_coverage_about_nccri.pdf], accessed 15/09/10.
12. Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Magreb Pluriel*, Paris, Denoël, 2003, p. 18.
13. See the account given recently: [<http://www.advertiser.ie/galway/article/22145>], accessed 10/09/10.
14. James Joyce (translated by Conor Deane) in Kevin Barry (ed.), *James Joyce Occasional Critical and Political Writing*, Oxford, Oxford World Classics, 2000, p. 145.
15. James Joyce, *op. cit.*, 146.
16. See Alan Travis, "After 44 years secret papers reveal truth about five nights of violence in Notting Hill", *The Guardian*, 24 August 2002.
17. Cf. *infra* p. 85.
18. See an account of the event [www.student.uva.nl/meng/home.cfm/28B30569-24A4-4D79-A61C815194CBE0C6], consulted 10/09/10.
19. Cf. *infra* p. 155.
20. Cf. *infra* p. 31.

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