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"Like blossoms on slow water": the Power of Metaphor in Seamus Heaney's Poetry and its Translation

Elizabeth Pearce

Rained-on, flower-laden
Coffin after coffin
Seemed to float from the door
Of the packed cathedral
Like blossoms on slow water.
*Seamus Heaney, "Casualty"*¹

- ¹ In considering the translation of poetry, metaphoric networks in a poet's body of work are highly significant, reflecting the poet's essential preoccupations. These networks, within a poem and between poems, also reflect the central aspects of the poet's philosophy, culture and language – the poet's "voice". In terms of the translation of poetry between English and French, it is necessary for the translator to recognise the centrality of these networks, and the transforming nature of their role in the poem: to ignore or omit them, or to embellish them, is to destroy the integrity of the poem, as argued by Paul Bensimon in his article on figurative language and aspects of poetic translation². Antoine Berman's range of "deforming tendencies" in translation further reinforces this view³. These metaphoric networks are at times robust, at times delicate and subtle, reliant on links, allusions and associations within and beyond the poem in order to remain coherent, and to maintain their transforming qualities and their impact. In this study it is argued that metaphoric networks in poetry such as that of Seamus Heaney can be shown to create a way out of an apparent impasse in the poetry – to create a "possibility of release" from an apparently insoluble position, or from a predetermined or limiting form of thinking, as Heaney himself suggests:

[...] if our given experience is a labyrinth, its impassability can still be countered by the poet's imagining some equivalent of the labyrinth and presenting himself and us with a vivid experience of it⁴.

- 2 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.
- 3 In order to illustrate this claim for poetry and its translation, this study will examine three versions of a section of Seamus Heaney's poem "Casualty" in French translation, considering closely the power and scope of the metaphoric network of *water* created in the poem, and in its translation. Heaney's poetry is particularly appropriate as a means by which to investigate the translation of metaphoric networks in poetry between English and French, as it makes extensive use of original metaphoric language, including newly created words, compound adjectives, original metaphors, re-animated clichés, and unusual combinations of standard words. Heaney's extensive use of metaphoric language in his prose writings, combined with his interest in translation and experience as a translator, are additional reasons for the choice. The metaphoric networks within his poems resonate also between them, reflecting his concerns. Central metaphoric networks in Heaney's poetry include notably those based on *wood*, *water* and *boat*. This study however will limit itself to Heaney's central theme of *water*.
- 4 Heaney's preoccupations are human: contemporary, historic, the domestic and the foreign, the emotional and the intellectual, all crossing unpredictable boundaries, or merging unexpectedly. Themes and images recur throughout his work, creating multiple, intricate layers of allusions; these may include historical and literary allusions tying in to the existing and extensive metaphoric networks, that echo through a single poem or often across his entire body of work, in "*une incessante chaîne associative*"⁵. Such is the power of metaphoric networks in Heaney's poetry, and this essential quality of his work needs to be inherent also in the translation. If not, the essence, "the intensity" of the poetry will be destroyed, in Jean Cohen's terms, as emphasised by Paul Bensimon in his significant article on the translation of compound adjectives in *Palimpsestes* 2. Cohen states that:

La poésie, c'est l'intensité, ce que le langage produit en polarisant le signifié par élimination du terme neutre⁶.
- 5 At times, as Bensimon indicates, it is the tendency of the translator to eliminate from the poem not Cohen's *neutral* term, but the *intensity* that is poetry. Bensimon also refers to another significant assertion often cited against the effective translation of poetry, that of Jean Cassou, that "*La poésie, c'est justement ce résidu qui, d'une langue à l'autre, ne passe pas*"⁷. This "residue" is however "the intensity" that is poetry, what is left after the elimination of the neutral. This "intensity" *can* be translated, as may be demonstrated by many examples of translated poetry –including Heaney's "Casualty" in French translation, where in the section of the poem studied and also in one of its translations the "possibility of release" from an apparently insoluble or impenetrable position may be envisaged.
- 6 As well as being immersed in metaphoric language, Heaney's poetry is notable also for its strategy of disrupting the expected, of making strange the ordinary, creating in the reader a sense of the unpredictability and surprise inherent in the mundane. Heaney constantly creates moments of unease in his poetry for the native reader or listener, where frequent small disruptions to the expected sequence of words interfere with the immediate grasp of meaning. This disruption of the expected is Heaney's intention: it is a central aspect of his writing, representing his distinctive, subtle, original and creative voice. In his poetry the disruption of predictability is exemplified by his decisions

regarding for example word order; line breaks; punctuation; disturbing the expectations set up by clichés, "re-animating" them or placing them in unexpected positions or juxtapositions⁸. It is also exemplified by the creation of original word combinations; creation of new words, including compound adjectives metaphoric in scope; alliteration; unexpected rhythm, or rhythm reflecting the atmosphere or context. In addition, Heaney's disruption of predictability is demonstrated by unexpected tone, or tone fusing with the emotional intensity of the whole poem; the impact of the visual and the auditory; and the associated resonances of consonants and vowels.

- 7 It is challenging for a translation to accommodate the range of disruption to language as encountered in Heaney's poetry, as outlined above. The French language may find it particularly difficult to accommodate certain of these aspects of the English language as used by Heaney, especially the irregular word order, and his original composed adjectives. In the act of translation, Antoine Berman's "deforming tendencies" may come into play, such as that of "rationalisation": this may flatten the writer's *intended* disruptions to meaning, imposing an order on the created work "whose 'imperfection' is a condition of its existence"⁹, according to Berman. This particularly applies to the translation of Heaney's poetry: reducing the strength of an intended disruption in a poem's translation diminishes the impact of the poem on the reader. In addition, the translator may "render clear what does not wish to be clear in the original"¹⁰, further reducing the ability of the poem to surprise by the intentional disruption of the reader's expectations. As Ben Belitt has said,

The problem of "ambiguity" is of course a classic one: how to work in a limbo of deliberately enigmatic implications, a crossfire of contexts, and keep ambiguity *ambiguous*¹¹.

- 8 This problem of retaining ambiguity in the translation returns to that outlined by Lawrence Venuti: the widely-held expectation that the translation should be smooth and fluent, the translator's hand invisible¹². Thus it would appear that some translators hold themselves responsible for "managing" the challenging or unexpected qualities inherent in the original poem, rather than allowing these qualities to emerge in the translation.
- 9 The image of water has long been central to Heaney's preoccupations and his creative metaphoric network. This image is often that of the sea, a place of profound questioning and focus in Heaney, where the dynamism and mystery of conflicting forces is most strongly felt. As he himself recognises, "Poetic form is both the ship and the anchor. It is at once a buoyancy and a holding"¹³. Here it is possible to venture, but to remain held. It is this balance that Heaney constantly explores in his poetry. It is in the water too that the labyrinth untangles unexpectedly, where transformation takes place. Heaney's poem "Casualty" is a poem in which water is central, and deeply significant.

Background to Heaney's poem "Casualty"

- 10 The poem "Casualty"¹⁴ is celebrated amongst Heaney's poems as representative both of his achievement as a poet, and as an elegy to a fisherman blown up by a bomb, a reference to his Irish heritage, to "the Irish question"¹⁵. Heaney has been clear about his response to "the Irish question" in his art; not all of his critics have shared his belief in his position. Reviewers have on occasion criticised his apparent bypassing of the political, or his apparently tentative approach to it¹⁶. This has raised the question of what is an artist's responsibility in regard to the politics of his homeland¹⁷? Heaney has dealt with

this question ably in a variety of ways, notably in his essays "Frontiers of Writing"¹⁸ and "The Government of the Tongue"¹⁹, and in his renowned "An Open Letter" to the editors of *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, which was a potent verbal demonstration against Heaney as an Irish poet being included as a matter of course under the heading of "British"²⁰. In this letter Heaney defended his right to a clear and Irish "independent heart". The metaphor of water as used by Heaney in his poetry, in this case "Casualty", will be shown to create a way out of the labyrinth, both politically and personally. Via water, Heaney imagines a movement out and away, an escape from the existing political and social rigidities, through narrative. This movement will need to be followed by the translator, in order to maintain the poem's metaphoric network in the translation, and the subsequent release from the restrictions above.

- 11 "Casualty" reveals the personal connection between two men, one of shared humanity but also of suspicion directed at the educated man by the fisherman, a suspicion of which Heaney is fully aware, noting his "turned observant back". However, this possible impediment to communication and mutual respect does not in fact impede the connection between them. Here Heaney illustrates and explores his notion that "There is nothing extraordinary about the challenge to be of two minds"²¹. This is ultimately a poem that reveals Heaney's ability to explore a complex subject dispassionately. While not polarising the question of culpability, nor shirking it, nor answering it definitively, he opens the question, and leaves it open without judgements: his final statement in "Casualty" is a request to the lost fisherman to "Question me again". The tone of the poem remains calm and detached, while the reader is shocked by the violence; so too however is the narrator, registering that "That Wednesday/Everybody held/His breath and trembled"²².
- 12 Heaney in this poem acknowledges the power of the group both to support individuals and to act collectively in response to a threat, to be "braced and bound/Like brothers in a ring", while hinting at the fisherman's unique human qualities which were not able to be contained by the group – "he would not be held" – but providing answers of their own: "I tasted freedom with him", and the solitary pleasure of distance in "[...] smile/As you find a rhythm/Working you, slow mile by mile, / Into your proper haunt/Somewhere, well out, beyond"²³... Here it is water that allows the liberation from the unanswerable: the "rained-on" coffins "Seemed to float from the door/Of the packed cathedral/Like blossoms on slow water", the coffins becoming floating means of transportation, vehicles, like the fishing boat at the end of the poem where the occupant floating on "indolent fathoms" is worked into his "proper haunt". Helen Vendler states in reference to "Casualty" that "The problem of elegy is always to revisit death while not forgetting life [...]"²⁴. In "Casualty", however, life is not forgotten; death is transcended, as is any contemplation of a "unitary culture", by the movement away from the collective to the individual; away from the weight of coffins via water to one's "proper haunt".

Study of the poem "Casualty"²⁵ in French Translation

- 13 This study will examine closely the first 8 lines of section II of the poem "Casualty" in French translation, a central passage²⁶. For this passage there are three translations under consideration: firstly that by Paul Bensimon²⁷; secondly the version by Deirdre McKeown-Laigle²⁸; and finally the example of Anne Bernard Kearney²⁹.

Casualty
 It was a day of cold
 Raw silence, wind-blown
 Surplice and soutane:
 Rained-on, flower-laden
 Coffin after coffin
 Seemed to float from the door
 Of the packed cathedral
 Like blossoms on slow water.

- 14 This section of Heaney's poem "Casualty" sets the scene, the "cold/Raw silence" reflecting the raw unexpressed emotion, perhaps suppressed, of the emerging congregation. Movement has been slowed by grief, as it is traditionally at a funeral, and here it reflects the walking pace of the "dawdling engine" later in the poem. The original compound adjectives, common in Heaney's poetry, pose a difficulty in French. "Wind-blown" is unusual only in its juxtaposition with the formal, priestly symbols of "surplice and soutane"; it is the "Rained-on, flower-laden" coffins that produce a persistent, slow, compelling rhythm that surprises as these usually heavy coffins "seemed to float from the door/Of the packed cathedral/Like blossoms on slow water". This is a strange and unexpected juxtaposition of light and heavy, both visually and in weight; the weight of flowers opposes the weight of wood, and the weight of suppressed emotion.
- 15 The first translation of "Casualty" Part II to be studied is that of Paul Bensimon.

Victime
 C'était un jour de froid
 et âpre silence, le vent agitant
 soutanes et surplis.
 De pluie mouillés, de fleurs chargés,
 les cercueils, l'un après l'autre,
 semblaient flotter depuis la porte
 de la cathédrale bondée,
 comme des corolles sur une eau lente.

- 16 Bensimon's translation of these 8 lines reflects the rhythm of the original, respecting closely the word order, length of line, punctuation, and observing the intense, significant metaphoric network outlined above, which exists not only within "Casualty" but between this and other Heaney poems. Bensimon is prepared to increase the impact and strangeness of adjectives in his translation by placing them before the noun, not only as a means by which to accentuate and strengthen their impact, but as a method by which to reflect the strange originality of Heaney's extended metaphors, as well as the existing word order, as in "âpre silence", "raw silence". It is usual in English to refer to the cold as "raw", but "raw" is not habitually used as an adjective for "silence"; Bensimon has reproduced the disruption created by Heaney through this unexpected juxtaposition. His inversion of the existing word order of "surplice and soutane", to "*soutanes et surplis*", is presumably in order to reflect at least indirectly the Heaney line endings of "wind-blown" and "soutane" that create an echoing "n" ending, continued in the following line endings by "laden" and "coffin". Bensimon compensates with – if not a direct reproduction of sound in a consonant – at least a closer sound in a complementing vowel ending: "agitait" is partly reflected in "surplis", and then is more directly echoed in the following line with "mouillés", and then "chargés". Here in Joan Fillmore Hooker's terms

the balancing of the mobile, her striking metaphor for compensation in the translation of poetry between English and French, has been used to advantage:

When I wrote of a translation's sharing the "shape" of the original, I was thinking of a mobile, in which parts move in relationship to one another, yet still preserve the fact of relationship in mutual balancing³⁰.

- 17 The three sets of compound adjectives referred to earlier, occurring close together, add to the sense of persistent rhythm created by Heaney, and by accumulation render each other more unusual, more strange: "wind-blown"; "rained-on"; "flower-laden". Bensimon has effectively used the verb "*agitait*" here, not only to support the compensation described above, but also as an appropriate translation of "wind-blown"; it does not poeticise or make the movement of the priests' robes graceful, and also has associations of the raw emotion experienced by those witnessing this scene, an apparently simple scene but with great resonance in Heaney's overall metaphoric network. Further, Bensimon's solution for "rained-on, flower-laden", "*de pluie mouillés, de fleurs chargés*", 'with rain wet, with flowers charged', while not creating composed adjectives directly, retains the rhythm and visual impact, neither ennobling nor flattening the images, nor overly lengthening them. There are no "deforming tendencies" in evidence here, although the choice to drop the capital letters of each new line, their retention a traditional poetic custom maintained in general by Heaney, while initially surprising, does not significantly alter the final version.
- 18 Bensimon's translation of the simile "Like blossoms on slow water", '*comme des corolles sur une eau lente*' is apt, and balances, or compensates for, the lack of the composed adjectives above with the creation of alliteration: "cathédrale", "comme", "corolles". This alliteration, while accentuating the rhythm, also reflects that used by Heaney: "cold", "coffin", "cathedral". As a translation of "blossoms", "corolles" retains the notion of petals, but it is marked, more formal and almost botanical; there is however no direct noun equivalent in French for "blossom". Yet "blossom" here is a potent symbol against violence. For these reasons, for the rationale outlined above, and given the fact that other alternatives for "blossoms" are less suitable ways by which to disrupt the normal as Heaney has done in this whole passage, "corolles" is an appropriate choice here; and it does unexpectedly reflect the shape and sound of "blossom"³¹. "Slow water" is another example in this short passage of Heaney disrupting the predictable connection of words: "a slow current" is a term commonly used in English, or "calm water"; "slow water" is a slightly unusual coupling. These lines of Bensimon's translation resourcefully retain the restrained but raw tone and atmosphere of Heaney's poem, its register, its degree of unpredictability, all combining to retain its extensive, original metaphoric network. There is no sign of Meschonnic's tourniquet of "form" and "sense"³²; in Bensimon they are indissociable, and balanced.
- 19 The second translation of "Casualty" Part II to be studied is by Deirdre McKeown-Laigle.

Victime
C'était un jour de silence âpre et froid,
De surplus et de soutanes gonflés de vent:
Chargés de pluie et de fleurs
Cercueil sur cercueil
Voguait hors la cathédrale bondée
Comme fleurs au fil de l'eau.

- 20 In this translation of "Casualty", an ennobling tendency can be detected in the first lines. The "normalising" of the word position, the change of the word order in the first couplet, making a smoother 6 lines of the original 8, loses the originality and slight strangeness created by Heaney. A clear instance of this strangeness is his positioning of "wind-blown" before "surplice and soutane", which creates a surprise at the disturbance of the usual religious formality associated with these items, especially at a funeral. This surprise is removed by the changed word order of McKeown-Laigle, who creates a more regular and predictable metre in these two lines, and a more predictable, "normal" image of the funeral as a result. This predictable and recognisable metre then is discontinued for the rest of the translated passage, and its partial use distracts the reader, setting up a false expectation of regularity to come. The rhythm of this translation has little in common with the slow, persistent and unusual rhythm of Heaney's verse. In a short space various "deforming tendencies" as outlined by Berman can be seen, including the destruction of rhythm in terms of the metre; rationalisation in terms of word order and punctuation; and clarification, making apparent what is subtle in the original³³. Already these tendencies have interfered with the maintenance of the metaphoric network.
- 21 The choice of "gonflés de vent", filled with wind or inflated, further normalises or flattens the strangeness created by Heaney in this movement of robes, as described above. "*Chargés de pluie et de fleurs*", "Charged with rain and flowers", while correct, makes no attempt to consider the significance of the compound adjectives "rained-on, flower-laden", their visual balance in the line, and their place in the extensive, original metaphoric network created by Heaney. The total abandonment of these compound adjectives completely changes the rhythm, making it much smoother and more "normal", not slowed down by grief and shock as in Heaney's poem, nor reflecting the slowness of the funeral procession.
- 22 In addition, McKeown-Laigle has virtually ignored the simile of coffins that "seemed to float from the door/Of the packed cathedral", in Bensimon's own terms "de-figuring"³⁴ the poem by omitting it, thus normalising a phrase that in Heaney is the beginning of a highly charged image as already described: in this translation each coffin "*Voguait hors la cathédrale bondée*". "*Voguait*", drifted or advanced on the water, is a more literary choice than "floated", designating a higher linguistic register than that of the original, an example of poeticising or ennobling; and "the door" of the cathedral has been omitted. The rich associations with "the door/Of the packed cathedral", a door being also a surface on which the dead were initially laid in humble households, along with any associations with wooden boat, human vehicle, are lost, omitted entirely in the translation by McKeown-Laigle. The image of "like blossoms on slow water", "*Comme fleurs au fil de l'eau*" normalises the slight unexpectedness of Heaney's original image to an approximation of "like flowers on the current", a considerably more standard phrase. This version also omits the chain of associations implicit in "blossoms", as detailed earlier. It ignores the fact that Heaney has given this particular image a new and unpredictable strangeness, one that alludes to the slow-moving funeral-goers as "shoaling out of his lane", and to the "dawdling engine" of the boat to come in the poem, omitting an essential part of the marine network. Here the references to the metaphoric network between Heaney's poems, such as looking down from a boat, of floating, of being "willable forward"³⁵, of moving from heaviness to lightness, are greatly reduced, to the point at times of non-existence, at least of marked loss of power.

- 23 In the translation of "Casualty" by Deirdre McKeown-Laigle it is evident that a range of deforming tendencies has intervened in the passage overall. A certain order has been imposed on the poem, and the original qualities of the language have been "rationalised" from 8 lines to 6; the "rough edges" of Heaney are smoothed and "poeticised", "ennobling" the poem, rendering the whole more recognisable as "poetry", and thus less recognisable as itself; rhythms have been destroyed, including the alteration or removal of punctuation and re-placement of words, and the "smoothing" of the metre. All of these result in the destruction of significant metaphoric networks, removing important layers of meaning in the text; and all result in homogenisation, unifying in the poem what was originally diverse. Overall, in this translation many of the recognisably "Heaney" qualities of the poem have been removed. In the Bensimon translation they have by contrast been retained.
- 24 The final translation of "Casualty" Part II to be studied is by Anne Bernard Kearney.

Accident
C'était un jour de froid
Silence à vif, où le vent
Gonflait surplis et soutanes:
Chargés de fleurs, ruisselants de pluie,
Les cercueils un par un semblaient
Sortir en flottant de la porte
De la cathédrale bondée,
Comme des pétales sur une eau lente.

- 25 This translation appears immediately to be striving for a smoother and more recognisably "poetic" rhythm than that of the original, a metre more in keeping with a traditional French view of poetry. This smoother effect is largely achieved through the normalising of what Heaney has made strange, by the translator's elimination of the verbal surprises, the abruptnesses, the de-familiarising of the familiar, all of which intentionally disrupt predictability. These are generally created by Heaney in this passage through word order or word placement on a line.
- 26 "*Silence à vif*", while retaining the physically acute and intense qualities of "raw", loses the surprise of the placement of the adjective at the beginning of the line before the word "silence", achieved in the original poem and also in Bensimon's version. "Wind-blown/Surplice and soutane" is normalised to "*le vent/Gonflait surplis et soutanes*", eliminating the surprising impact created by Heaney's placement of the subject of "wind-blown" on the new line. This is representative of a general tendency here to normalise the strange, sometimes abrupt and unpredictable qualities of Heaney's poem, to poeticise: the order of the images "Rained-on, flower-laden" has been reversed to "*Chargés de fleurs, ruisselants de pluie*", for no apparent purpose it would seem but to "ennoble" the poem through placement of the flowers, a traditionally "poetic" image, in a more prominent position at the start of the line. The choice of "*ruisselants de pluie*", "streaming with rain", appears to be also an ennobling choice for "Rained-on", a simple description of reality by Heaney, enhanced here by the translator. A further change of word order in the line has again reduced the original force: Heaney's "Coffin after coffin" on one line increases the impact of the number of coffins (known to be thirteen), as does the repetition; both of these are essential to the subtle gathering force of the metaphoric network; while "*semblaient/Sortir en flottant de la porte*" reduces the impact of the beginning of this simile, originally

appearing strongly on one line, as in Bensimon's version. "Like blossoms on slow water", "*Comme des pétales sur une eau lente*", does however work towards supporting the metaphoric network established by Heaney: it maintains the slight strangeness of "blossoms", by avoiding the generalised option of "flowers"; and avoids the standard version of referring to the water's "current".

- 27 Overall however, Heaney's unique rhythm has been disturbed in this translation of "Casualty", breaking existing associations and rhythms while creating others: as a result this translation significantly reduces the impact of Heaney's original images and words, essential to the construction of the recognisable metaphoric network already described. Through the process of poeticising, of subtle ennobling, combined with the general lack of recognition of the importance in Heaney's poetry of disrupting predictability, homogenisation has occurred. It is interesting to note that Anne Bernard Kearney herself in the introduction to her Heaney translations states that one of the difficulties of translating Heaney into French resides in:

[...] la résistance de cette langue... à rendre avec grâce les images si concrètes, si tactiles de la voix de Heaney, ses sonorités pleines de frictions, de grondements sourds et de douceurs inattendues³⁶.

- 28 Bernard Kearney makes the presupposition about the nature and function of poetic translation, and thus of poetry, that it is to be rendered "with grace", a presupposition not shared by Bensimon. From a close examination of a broad range of Heaney's poetry, including the close reading of "Casualty", grace is an option for Heaney, not an imperative.
- 29 It is evident that the French language is indeed resistant to Heaney's original, innovative language. Bensimon has clearly been aware of and receptive to the varied, subtle poetic properties of Heaney's text in his translation of the passage from "Casualty", and as a result has retained the extensive and powerful metaphoric networks created by Heaney. He has used a broader variety of strategies to render Heaney in French, focusing less on the need to "*rendre avec grâce*" than to maintain the original metaphoric networks, thus avoiding the deforming tendencies encountered elsewhere. In his translation Bensimon has used understated forms of compensation where necessary in order to maintain the delicate balance of Hooker's mobile, and to achieve an equilibrium reflecting Heaney's own.
- 30 The raw intense emotion and tone of "Casualty" is ultimately eased and resolved by the movement towards water, with coffin and boat both serving as vehicles of transcendence. The metaphoric network of the section of the poem studied, especially as symbolised by the coffins seeming to float "Like blossoms on slow water", reflects the references to water and its movement later in the poem. These include references to the mourners following the coffin as "shoaling out of his lane"; references to "the habitual/Slow consolation" of the boat and its engine; and references to the water "purling", as you "find a rhythm/Working you, slow mile by mile [...]". Ultimately, the movement of water has taken the reader by stages from the complex emotion and politics of death, as represented by the image of "blossoms on slow water", past "slow consolation" to "I tasted freedom with him", into one's "proper haunt". Further, not only is this metaphoric network of water significant within this poem, "Casualty"; it is also highly significant across a range of Heaney's poems, from "the deep, still, seeable-down-into water" of the poem "Seeing Things I" to Heaney's childhood sofa that "achieved flotation" in "A Sofa in

the Forties". It is evident that in Heaney's poem "Casualty", and at times in its translation, water can open up a way forward, a way out, of the human and political complexities and unanswered questions of "that bombed offensive place" – to the openness of the end of the poem, including its final line, "Question me again".

Conclusion

- 31 In the analysis of this section of "Casualty" it has been demonstrated that these powerful and original metaphoric networks can be maintained in the translation, without damage, at times with considerable resilience and imagination; and alternatively, they can be de-figured, broken or rendered invisible by a range of deforming tendencies. At times the labyrinth and its impassability *has* been countered by the poet's, and it can be claimed the translator's, "imagining some equivalent of the labyrinth and presenting himself and us with a vivid experience of it", as Heaney claims. Bensimon's translation has demonstrated an understanding and appreciation of the complex linguistic and figurative aspects of the poem, and also of Heaney's philosophy and his culture. Bensimon's translation follows the metaphoric network and significance of water; its flow is not broken.
- 32 Heaney's poetry is clearly outside the French poetic tradition; it is firmly planted in his Irish tradition. By not respecting the figurative landscape, and poeticising the language, the translator may tear a poem from its "*terreau littéraire natif*" and install it "*dans la tradition poétique française*", as highlighted by Bensimon in reference to the translation of a well-known English ballad³⁷. The problem of the French language being resistant to the "Heaney" qualities of the poetry may be a real question for the translator; but the act of ennoblement is not a solution. Paradoxically perhaps, if the poetry is left in its "native literary ground" when translated, with its metaphoric networks intact, then migration across cultural and linguistic boundaries between English and French may be allowed, rather than impeded. In "Casualty", in two of the three cases studied, the translator's act of breaking the metaphoric network of water prevents it from flowing across these boundaries.
- 33 The image of coffins leaving the cathedral "Like blossoms on slow water" is symbolic of Heaney's ability in this poem to lighten physical and emotional weight and political complexity via water and its floating, liberating qualities. So too may the translation unravel and lighten these weights and complexities, by respecting the metaphoric networks, and avoiding possible "deforming tendencies" that may haul the poem away unnecessarily from its Irish heritage. Heaney himself indicates a way through the translation labyrinth via the imagination in another of his poems, suggesting the unexpected power of metaphor to create solutions in poetry, and in its translation:
[...] *whatever is given Can always be reimagined*, however four-square, Plank-thick,
hull-stupid and out of its time It happens to be³⁸.

NOTES

1. Seamus Heaney, "Casualty", *Field Work*, London, Faber and Faber, 1979.
2. Paul Bensimon, "Figure, figuralité, dé-figuration, sur-figuration: aspects de la traduction poétique," *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, 12/1, 1999, p. 76. See also George Steiner's categories of "diminution" and "magnification" in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 1975, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 422.
3. Antoine Berman, *La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du lointain*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1999, p. 52. Berman outlines no less than thirteen *deforming tendencies* to be observed in translation; see those of "rationalisation" and "ennoblement" especially.
4. Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, London, Faber and Faber, 1995, p. 2.
5. Cited by Paul Bensimon, "Ces métaphores vives... La traduction des adjectifs composés métaphoriques," *Palimpsestes* 2, 1990, p. 101, in reference to Paul Ricœur, *La Métaphore vive*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1975.
6. Jean Cohen, "Théorie de la figure", *Communications* 16, 1970, p. 14, as cited by Paul Bensimon, "Ces métaphores vives... La traduction des adjectifs composés métaphoriques", *Palimpsestes* 2, 1990, p. 88.
7. Jean Cassou as cited by Paul Bensimon, "Présentation", *Palimpsestes* 2, 1990, p. 1.
8. For a discussion of re-activated clichés see Isabelle Génin, "Des métaphores pas si mortes. Redynamisation des métaphores figées dans *Moby-Dick* et ses traductions françaises", *Palimpsestes* 13, 2001.
9. Antoine Berman, "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign", *The Translation Studies Reader*, Lawrence Venuti (ed.), London, Routledge, p. 288. Translated by Venuti from Antoine Berman, "La Traduction comme épreuve de l'étranger", *Texte* 4, 1985, p. 67-81.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
11. Ben Belitt, *Adam's Dream: a Preface to Translation*, New York, Grove Press, 1978, p. 29.
12. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 5.
13. Seamus Heaney, "Crediting Poetry: The Nobel Lecture, 1995," *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*, London, Faber and Faber, 1998, p. 466.
14. Seamus Heaney, "Casualty", *Field Work*, London, Faber and Faber, 1979.
15. The fisherman was an acquaintance of Heaney (Louis O'Neill), a Northern Catholic who ignored a curfew on the day of the funeral of the thirteen victims of "Bloody Sunday" in 1972, and was destroyed by a bomb set by his own people.
16. According to Richard Kearney, "Heaney has been criticised for refusing to adopt a clear political position, for not nailing his colours to the mast, particularly with regard to the 'national question' [...]. The point is, however, that Heaney is a poet, not a party politician." Richard Kearney, *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Poetry*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988, p. 102.
17. See Cliona Ní Ríordáin-O'Mahony, "Pour une poétique de la responsabilité: l'œuvre de Seamus Heaney", Doctorate, Université Lyon 2 Louis-Lumière, 2002, p. 426. Ní Ríordáin

claims that the lyricism and intensity of Heaney's poetry is increased by the tension between his private and public life, producing what she sees as "*la phase ultime, l'aboutissement de la poétique de la responsabilité*".

18. Seamus Heaney, "Frontiers of Writing", *The Redress of Poetry*, London, Faber and Faber, 1995, pp. 186-203.

19. Seamus Heaney, "The Government of the Tongue", *The Government of the Tongue*, London, Faber and Faber, 1988, pp. 91-108.

20. Seamus Heaney, "An Open Letter", Derry, Field Day Theatre Company, 1983.

21. Seamus Heaney, "The Frontiers of Writing", *The Redress of Poetry*, London, Faber and Faber, 1995, p. 202.

22. Seamus Heaney, "Casualty", end of part 1.

23. Among the last lines of "Casualty".

24. Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney*, London, Fontana Press, 1999, p. 60.

25. Seamus Heaney, "Casualty", *Field Work*, London, Faber and Faber, 1979.

26. While acknowledging the significant debt owed by this study to Paul Bensimon's article based on the poem "Casualty", this study will not consider directly the passages referred to in his analysis. See Paul Bensimon, "Traduction des figures de style dans un poème de Seamus Heaney," *Les gens du passage*, Christine Pagnoulle (ed.), Liège, Université de Liège, 1992, pp. 103-108.

27. Seamus Heaney, "Victime", translated by Paul Bensimon, *La Poésie Britannique 1970-1984, Études Anglaises, Cahiers et documents no 7*, Bernard Brugière (ed.), Paris, Didier Érudition, 1986.

28. Seamus Heaney, "Victime", translated by Deirdre McKeown-Laigle, *Poésies d'Irlande*, Denis Rigal (ed.), Marseille, Sud, 1987.

29. Seamus Heaney, "Accident", translated by Anne Bernard Kearney, *Poèmes 1966-1984*, traduits par Anne Bernard Kearney et Florence Lafon, Paris, Gallimard, 1988.

30. Joan Fillmore Hooker, *T.S. Eliot's Poems in French Translation: Pierre Leyris and Others*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1983, p. 24.

31. Heaney's choice of the word "blossoms" here is significant, and has certain connotations. "Flowers" on the coffins are predictable as the formal, generally hot-house flowers laid on coffins, elegant and funereal. "Blossoms" by contrast can be any simple flowers; "blossom" itself appears naturally in spring, symbolising spring, nature, and innocence. There exists also the connotation of "to blossom", to flourish, adding further weight to Heaney's extended network. "Petals", while possessing some of these qualities, are not marked with this broad range of connotations, and tend to be separated from the whole flower.

32. Henri Meschonnic, *Poétique du Traduire*, Lagrasse, Éditions Verdier, 1999, p. 138.

33. Antoine Berman, *La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du lointain*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1999, Chapter 2.

34. Paul Bensimon, "Traduction des figures de style dans un poème de Seamus Heaney," *Les gens du passage*, Christine Pagnoulle (ed.), Liège, université de Liège, 1992, p. 106.

35. See Seamus Heaney, "The Settle Bed", *Seeing Things*, London, Faber and Faber, 1991. In Heaney's poetry, the image of the boat on occasion moves from the expected immersion in water to its unexpected floating in air, transcending the foreseen. The image of the

boat or vehicle can also encompass furniture, as in "The Settle Bed", and in Heaney's "A Sofa in the Forties", *The Spirit Level*, London, Faber and Faber, 1996.

36. See "Notes de la traductrice", *Seamus Heaney, Poèmes 1966-1984*, traduits par Anne Bernard Kearney et Florence Lafon, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, p. 21.

37. Paul Bensimon, "Figure, figuralité, dé-figuration, sur-figuration: aspects de la traduction poétique," *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, 12/1, 1999, p. 77. In reference to the translation of Keats' ballad, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", Bensimon speaks of the translator's addition of "[...] un marqueur de poéticité, qui contribue à assurer la transmissibilité du poème et sa réception en tant que 'beau' poème. Ce marqueur arrache la ballade keatsienne à son terreau littéraire natif et l'installe dans la tradition poétique française, en renvoyant spécialement à l'époque classique".

38. Seamus Heaney, "The Settle Bed", *Seeing Things*, London, Faber and Faber, 1991. Emphasis added.

ABSTRACTS

The translation of poetry between English and French is dependent on the recognition of the centrality of metaphoric networks, not only within a poem but between poems in a poet's body of work. In order to translate Seamus Heaney as the serious, contemporary Irish poet that he is, it is necessary to have an understanding and appreciation of his philosophy, his culture, his language, and of the metaphoric networks between these levels within his poetry. If for example the metaphor of water can create a way out of an apparent impasse in Heaney's poetry, so then will this need to be achieved in the translation – the metaphor of water itself migrating across cultural and linguistic boundaries between the two languages.

La traduction de la poésie entre l'anglais et le français dépend de la reconnaissance du rôle capital des réseaux métaphoriques, non seulement dans un poème isolé mais entre les poèmes qui constituent l'œuvre du poète. Afin de traduire Seamus Heaney comme le poète irlandais sérieux et contemporain qu'il est, il faut bien connaître sa philosophie, sa culture, sa langue et les réseaux métaphoriques qui opèrent entre ces niveaux dans sa poésie. Si, par exemple, la métaphore de l'eau peut créer la possibilité de sortir d'une impasse apparente dans la poésie de Heaney, le même phénomène doit se retrouver dans la traduction – la métaphore de l'eau elle-même migrant à travers les frontières culturelles et linguistiques entre les deux langues.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Heaney Seamus, poésie, linguistique, traduction

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