Anthology of Young Irish Poets, Ingrid Casey (ed.)

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/9012>

DOI: [10.4000/etudesirlandaises.9012](https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.9012)

ISSN: 2259-8863

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Caen

Printed version

Date of publication: 24 September 2020

Number of pages: 135-137

ISSN: 0183-973X

Electronic reference

Natasha Remoundou, "*Anthology of Young Irish Poets*, Ingrid Casey (ed.)", *Études irlandaises* [Online], 45-1 | 2020, Online since 24 September 2020, connection on 16 November 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/9012> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.9012>

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of economics on theatrical productions are mentioned several times, the lack of funding is never seen as potentially problematic or damaging for the community of theatre practitioners. If anything, the emergence, during the post-Celtic tiger period of austerity, of the self-employed “theatre-maker”, who “has written a play” and who is now “producing, acting in, directing, marketing and otherwise staging their own works” (p. 201) is hailed as unambiguously positive.

Hélène LECOSSOIS

***Anthology of Young Irish Poets*, Ingrid Casey (ed.), Athens, Vaxikon Publishers, 2019, 124 p.**

With great anticipation and curiosity I received the *Anthology of Young Irish Poets* published in 2019 by Vakhikon and edited by Irish poet and visual artist Ingrid Casey who undertook the task of harvesting representative new Irish poetic voices for the purposes of this collection. The volume reflects the need to maintain representational gender balances by showcasing modern Irish poetry as a “living art” (p. 7) with agents of this representation eleven Irish poets: Doireann Ní Ghríofa, Ingrid Casey, Alice Kinsella, Rob Buchanan, Dylan Brennan, Colin Dardis, Stephen Sexton, Jessica Traynor, Elaine Feeney, Seán Hewitt, and Annemarie Ní Churraáin. Casey’s springboard for collecting the content of this anthology evolved from the digital platform of social media following an open call that invited Irish poets to express interest in featuring their work in this publication. The radical process of scouting new creative writing talent through social media spaces does not just provide new sets of tools to both writers and readers; it expands a nuanced rethinking of sites of agency and the democracy of representation while revolutionising poetry as an art form that remains powerful in the digital age.

The poetic ideograms anthologised here from the North, the South but also from migrant poets across the Irish borders, construct a co-operative aesthetic repository that bridges the past with the present in political terms. The anthology opens up a bold poetic universe that, while emanating from a solid literary tradition that maps modern Irish writing, is retested as a linguistic, historical, and social transmitter of the art of empathy in the 21st century. Against this aesthetic backdrop and its multivalent artistic aims, Manuela Palacios’s introduction and Lucy Collins’s concluding note both reiterate the pioneering aim of the trilingual anthology to present a generation of emerging Irish poets to a Greek audience. With the Greek translations, the volume naturally becomes the textual meeting ground for Greek readers opposite contemporary Irish poetry and culture; translated into Greek from English and Gaelic, the anthology acquires an intercultural force located both in the terrain of language and in the conscious engagement with issues that resonate with readers from source and target cultures. An anthology that decidedly

addresses biopolitical issues like the environment, homelessness, violence, sexuality, and migration in a consistent debate between tradition and modernity could not resonate more with a Greek readership.

Palacios points out that the selected poems are representative of a new generation of Irish poets who “dig” into the present often through the past in order to “restore” (p. 9) Irish identity to the landscape and the temporality it belongs to. Writing both as the inheritors of a traumatic past distinguished by institutional violence, social disenfranchisement, borderlines, fringes and peripheries constructed by the hegemony of Church, state, and the legacies of the Troubles, but also as members of the generation of the Celtic Tiger era that witnessed its own subsequent downfall, the Irish poets featured propose poetry as a cosmopolitan event and a means of renegotiating collective memory in the present. Yet, the historical past that as Collins argues “is not a foreign country” (p. 123) stands at the background in dialogue with contemporaneity without defining it. The varied themes of the poems are illustrative of the broad cultural scope of the poetic imagination, experience, and right to write and rewrite tradition “without being bound by it” (p. 123): myth, family, love, memory, the role of the poet, social and political responsibility and autonomy, the position of women, and language are the overarching keywords that embody imagery, sound structures and contexts. In narrating the stories that need to be (re)told, the poet is confronted with the paradox of language: “when I open my mouth / my tongue flies away” (p. 18) Ní Ghríofa writes. From the outward-looking free-verse poems that gaze acutely at the world beyond the Irish spatial borders (blurred, Brexit-complicated), the poets are animated by literal and imaginative border-crossings and travels from America, Paris, and Amsterdam to Oaxaca, the Brazilian Amazon, and Kuwait. Then, the profoundly inward-looking odes revisit the familiar topography of the maternal body: “your mother’s voice / calling you home across the fields” (p. 76) as Traynor writes in “I could name a country”. The natural landscape exposes the empirical memory but also a sense of the self and its vulnerability to the contingencies of an unfathomable world. Palacios and Collins discuss the recurrent juxtaposition between the private self and the natural world in the poetic ecologies proposed by Hewitt, Dardis, Brennan, and Kinsella where the material body takes centre stage within a shifting social and sensory environment that provides consolation but often alienates. Simultaneously, these are individually synthesised polyphonic odes that scrutinise inherited mythologies like Casey’s “Molly Bloom goes to Yoga” or Buchanan’s “Archipelago”. The contemporary Irish literary idiom marks its own intrinsic form reinvention via a visceral language uncompromising in the breadth and depth of its scope and critique, reenergising the role of the contemporary poetic identity captured in Feeney’s “Whisht” as an “uncertain shadow / miles shy of who I am, or once was” (p. 86).

In conclusion, I would like to dwell on Palacios’s observation regarding the power of (self/ auto)translation to cultivate, expand, and reshape the written word by dismantling, teasing out and then by rebuilding the poems from English to Irish and vice versa. In the case of the commissioned Greek translations of this anthology, the questions raised are even more complex for they do not simply problematise

notions of authenticity in search of a “respectful” version or practice that is equivalent to what Ní Ghríofa calls “untranslatable” (p. 22) in her poem “Jigsaw”; in fact, these questions make us often wonder if we are talking about two or three altogether different poems. If something disconcerts in this anthology it is primarily that it falls short of allowing the translated word to be further cultivated, fertilised, and remolded in the Greek language because the translation work mediating source and target poems has not been given enough time. This is particularly evident as regards those aspects of language that demand and do not negotiate that the translator, as a mediator of representation, interpretation and communication between languages and cultures, is *at-home* in the Hiberno-English diction and its “multiple souls” conjured in semantics, allusion, style, word-play, and sound structures. Such lack of knowledge and experience of idiomatic expressions of everyday language in Ireland as it is spoken and more importantly felt – in its inherent ambiguities – breaches what translation theory terms the basic reliable representation norm. Not being attuned to these linguistic/textual dimensions of the distinctive cadences that characterise contemporary Irish writing, still does not justify the translator’s linguistic decisions to translate a “shirt” as “skirt” (p. 104-105), nor “doing a great impression” as “making a great impression” (p. 70-71) or “predators” as “descendants” (p. 38-39) in Greek. In this light, the translation works *inter alia* against other meanings and other themes that are far removed from the heart of certain poems, fundamentally distorting the atmosphere created by the poetic source. It would have also been compelling to see the anthology including poetic voices representative of writers of colour and from minority ethnic groups who live, write, and publish poetry in and about Ireland. The anthology, still, is valuable for anyone with an interest in Irish writing in general (particularly engaging and resonant to a Greek audience is the fact that many of the featured poets rely on classical references in their work) as it makes available to Greek readers a new generation of contemporary Irish writers beyond W. B. Yeats and other dead male poets.

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