“The Crucifixion”: Traumatic History in Paul Durcan’s Ekphrasis

Du trauma dans « The Crucifixion », poème ekphrastique de Paul Durcan

Cathy Roche-Liger

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/polysemes/6186>

ISSN: 2496-4212

Publisher

SAIT

Electronic reference

Cathy Roche-Liger, « “The Crucifixion”: Traumatic History in Paul Durcan’s Ekphrasis », *Polysèmes* [Online], 22 | 2019, Online since 20 December 2019, connection on 24 December 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/polysemes/6186>

This text was automatically generated on 24 December 2019.

Polysèmes

"The Crucifixion": Traumatic History in Paul Durcan's Ekphrasis

Du trauma dans « The Crucifixion », poème ekphrastique de Paul Durcan

Cathy Roche-Liger

- 1 Paul Durcan was commissioned by the National Gallery of Ireland in 1990 to write a book of poems based on the gallery collection. The result of this request and of the poet's passion for painting is a book made up of forty-seven poems printed along with the reproductions of the forty-nine works of art that inspired them. This postmodernist contemporary Irish poet declares in the preface of his ekphrastic book that he wrote *Crazy About Women* "out of [his] experience" of the works of art he selected (Durcan 1991, x). He adds:

The challenge of art is to be inclusive and *Crazy About Women*, born out of a lifetime's romance with the National Gallery of Ireland, is my attempt to be so inclusive as to make the intercourse between what is painted and what is written as reciprocal as it is inevitable. (Durcan xi)

- 2 Such words indicate an intimate conception of *ekphrasis* as a dialogue between the verbal and the visual. It is not limited to the description of a work of art, but includes the poet's personal reaction to the painting, and even his past, which leads to a transformation of the perception of the painting after the reading. He truly transposes the image into words, according to Liliane Louvel's interpretation of the word "transposition", as "a back-and-forth movement, from the text to the image and from the image to the text. A fruitful oscillation".¹ In the same preface (1991, xi), Paul Durcan presents himself as polygamous, having "the two spouses of poetry and picture-making". Talking of "romance" and of an "intercourse" between poetry and painting, his definition of the dialogue between words and images takes on sexual connotations (1991, xi). The artist is crazy about painting and takes his pleasure from the aesthetic experience, appropriating the gallery and its collection. He profanes the museum,² in Agamben's meaning of the word, for whom "to profane means not simply to abolish and erase separations, but to learn how to put them to a new use, to play with them" (Agamben 87). That is indeed what the poet does when he takes the works of art off the

wall, and puts them on the open space of the blank page. The separating frame disappears and gives way to a margin that creates a space enabling him to let his spirit roam freely in front of the paintings, and inviting the reader to do the same. Thus, he creates what Liliane Louvel calls his "apparatus" ("dispositif"), his "painting gallery": a "pilgrimage" through the creation of a hybrid "iconopoem" that paradoxically both imposes a certain vision upon the reader and makes the latter "an active reader-spectator" (Louvel 2010, 212-219).

- 3 "The Crucifixion" is the second *ekphrasis* in Paul Durcan's *Crazy About Women*. Like the other poems in the collection, it exploits what Georges Didi-Huberman calls "the paradoxical fruitfulness of anachronism".³ How does this anachronistic *ekphrasis* lead to the creation of a palimpsest, both covering and uncovering the past with words and images? That is what we will see by demonstrating first how his *ekphrasis* of di Paolo's cross⁴ leads to a rewriting of the Biblical Passion and becomes a denunciation of a traumatic element in Irish history: namely, the Magdalene Laundries. Then, we will study more specifically the other intratextual and intermedial layers of his ekphrastic palimpsest to show how he covers and uncovers traumatic elements of his own past and denounces what has been done in the name of the father/Father and all forms of intolerance. Finally, we will analyse "The Crucifixion" as a meta-iconopoem, both exemplifying the tensions at the heart of *ekphrasis* and reflecting on the notion of enchantment.

An anachronistic *ekphrasis* and a biblical rewriting: covering and uncovering the trauma of the Magdalene Laundries

- 4 "The Crucifixion" is an anachronistic *ekphrasis* of Giovanni di Paolo's cross leading to a rewriting of the Biblical Passion. The poet offers a reflection on the theme of the crucifixion, and creates a "dialectical image", both linked to the Past and the Present: "The present moment of the emergence [of the dialectical image] gives rise to the fundamental nature of the possible connection between Now (moment, lightning) and Then (latency, fossil), a connection of which Future (tension, desire) will bear some signs".⁵ The direct reference to the Passion with the title "The Crucifixion" is maintained throughout the poem thanks to the biblical intertextuality. This creates a tension between the original myth and its contemporary updating. The first two lines of the poem shift the context of Christ's crucifixion, playing with contrasts and similarities. The first line, "Friday afternoon, 3 p.m." (Durcan 1991, 5, l. 1) echoes the day of the week and the time of the original crucifixion. In the Gospel According to St Mark (15: 25), we can read: "And it was the third hour, and they crucified him". With the second line, the poet shifts the place, and Mount Golgotha becomes a "Psychiatric Unit", before turning into a "car park" at the end of the poem (Durcan 1991, 5-7, l. 2 and 47). In the first stanza, where a father is visiting his daughter, he presents the reader with a highly pictorial vision of his daughter, the specific quality of which is heightened by the fact that she is framed by "the window" (Durcan 1991, 5, l. 4). It creates a painterly effect which is the first step of the *ekphrasis* of di Paolo's tempera.
- 5 Just as there are tensions with the story of the original Passion, the poet plays with similarities and contrasts in the description of the daughter. By creating a palimpsest,

and presenting us not with a man but with a woman whose "dreadlocks" are her "crown of thorns" (5, l. 7-8), he makes us see di Paolo's cross and the representation of Christ in majesty with a halo or a mandorla. Moreover, the phrase "gold sky outside" (5, l. 9) evokes the golden background of di Paolo's cross. In Liliane Louvel's words, we can see these images twinkling on our inner screen through the sizzling dialogue between the visual and the verbal conveyed by the network of the text (Louvel 2010, 215).

- 6 From the second stanza to the end of the poem, we can hear the daughter's voice. Through her words, the writing of the *ekphrasis* continues and the palimpsest thus created becomes more and more complex. She invites her father to focus on details of her body which evoke elements represented in the painted cross: "Look at my knees [...] / Look at my legs" (Durcan 1991, 5, l. 14 and 16). The repetition of the phrasal verb "look at" stresses the visual aspect of the poem, an *ekphrasis* being the "higher degree of pictoriality of a text", to quote Liliane Louvel's pictorial classification (Louvel 2002, 33-34). Her words have a perlocutionary effect. She becomes not dissimilar to Alberti's *admonitor*, whose function in a painting, with his pointed index, was to guide the spectator's glance.⁶ Furthermore, through details, the daughter erases the separation between her suffering body and that of Christ. According to Georges Didi-Huberman, details are what first enable us to "get closer: we 'enter the detail' just as we enter the elective area of an epistemic intimacy"⁷ (Didi-Huberman 2, 274). By writing the details, Paul Durcan transposes this intimacy and shares it with us.

- 7 The character of the daughter goes on pointing out details: "my head [...] my toes [...] my upper lip [...] the palms of my hands [...] my side [...] my feet" (Durcan 1991, 5-7, l. 19-20, 26, 34, 36 and 38). Through the evocation of her suffering body in the fourth stanza, she makes the reader simultaneously focus on Christ's stigma:

[...] the palms of my hands
Are hurting me
[...] I've got a pain in my side,
[...] my feet are bleeding from being made
To wear shoes that are too small for me (Durcan 1991, l. 34-38)

By playing with the similarities and the contrasts, she creates a double vision and becomes a new crucified Christ. This generally conveys the poet's vision of suffering creatures as new incarnations of the crucified Christ.

- 8 It enables the poet to cover and uncover with words and images a traumatic element in Irish history: namely, the Magdalene Laundries. The Magdalene Asylums were present all over the Anglo-Saxon world, and in Ireland there were first Protestant, Presbyterian and Catholic Laundries, but after 1829 the Irish Magdalene Movement was mostly appropriated by the Catholic Church. This reference is suggested both by the daughter's confinement in the mental hospital and the references to "childbirth": "[...] it's a case merely of childbirth. / [...] I *am* giving birth to the world" (Durcan 7, l. 41 and 46, emphasis in the original). Named after the Bible's redeemed prostitute Mary Magdalene, the Magdalene Laundries' purpose was originally to rehabilitate prostitutes. But among the estimated 30,000 women sent to those institutions, most were "fallen" or "lost" women, rejected by their families because they were in "moral danger"; that is to say because they were too bold or flirtatious, because they had sexual relations outside of marriage, because they had been raped, were victims of incest, or because they were single mothers. The mentally disabled were similarly sent there. By the early twentieth century, these establishments became prison-like, highly

punitive places. The "penitents" were forced to work long hours in those washing houses without pay. Their routine also included lengthy periods of forced silence and prayers. The Magdalene women, once sent to these institutions, never saw their families again, stayed there till they died and were buried in unmarked graves. These places existed throughout Ireland. Though this scandal was publicly denounced in 1993, that is to say after the writing of this poem, the last Magdalene Laundry only closed in 1996.

- 9 These institutions were already an issue in *In the Land of Punt*, a book Paul Durcan created in collaboration with the Irish painter Gene Lambert. The young woman of the poem becomes a martyr. Claude Gandelman (37) points out that in the word martyr's etymology, there is the idea of someone showing (their faith in) God:

To be a Christian, in the utmost acceptance of the word, is to be, above all, a '*montreur*' [someone who shows something, an *admonitor*], not showing a *Deus absconditus* (who, by definition, can't be shown) but an incarnate God, the incarnate God, Christ. Such is indeed the idea inherent to the etymology of the noun *martyr*. By the death of the martyr, of the '*montreur*', it is the act of showing itself which is hypostasised. The martyrdom aims at being a simple *index* pointing to the true God.

8

Paul Durcan plays with this notion of martyr/martyrdom. When showing her suffering body, she points out what has been done in the name of the father/Father and denounces it.

An ekphrastic palimpsest denouncing what has been done in the name of the father/Father

- 10 From the second to the last stanza of the poem, we hear the daughter's plea to her father in the poem. This becomes a denunciation of what has been done in the name of this poetic father, the poet's father, and the Father "who [is] in heaven". The term "father" is repeated nine times, both without a capital letter as in line 2 ("you are my father"), or with a capital F when she directly calls him "Father", in lines 20, 21, 25, 29, 42, 43, 48, and 63. Each time, it is put into relief, either because it is situated at the beginning or at the end of the line, or because it is between commas. It is also repeated in her question in Aramaic which is a direct quotation of what Christ asked God on the cross: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" ("Father, Father, why have you forsaken me?") This question is in the first line of the third stanza and it is translated in the last line of the same stanza: "Father, why have you dumped me?" The brutal change of register gives a greater intensity to the daughter's plea. Moreover, the two versions of the same question opening and ending the stanza create a "framing-effect" ("effet de cadrage"), to use Liliane Louvel's term (Louvel 2002, 33-34). This frames the slightly grotesque representation of the young woman:

I am a woman, Father
In spite of the fact that I've got hairs on my upper lip.
Will you not accept me for what I am—
A woman with a woman's soul—a roodscreen? (Durcan 1991, 5, l. 25-28)

- 11 The grotesque dimension conveyed by the hairs on her upper lip contrasts with, and echoes, the humorous presentation of her legs in the previous stanza: "are my legs / Not sheer as nylon stockings in glossy advertisements?" (Durcan 1991, 5, l. 16-17). The tensions between humour and gravity as well as those between the original Passion and

its contemporary Irish version are a source of intensity. Just after having completely identified with Christ, uttering his exact words without quotation marks, she distances herself from him, insisting on the fact that she is a woman. Nonetheless, she turns herself into a roodscreen, that is to say the ornate partition between chancel and nave that would originally have been surmounted by a sculptural representation of the Crucifixion. She therefore both defines herself as an incarnate human female body and as a rood, a cross, a crucifix. She is a living representation of the Crucifixion.

- 12 As is often the case in the rest of Paul Durcan's work, the apparently blasphemous notion consisting in transforming Jesus Christ into a woman is not a way of calling into question the poet's Catholic faith, but of denouncing what is truly blasphemous and obscene: here, the atrocities that have been committed in the name of God in the Magdalene Laundries. Likewise, the poet criticizes the role played by the Catholic Church of Ireland in the Irish divorce referendum in "The Divorce Referendum, Ireland, 1986", writing:

He remarked icily: 'It is the wish of the Hierarchy
That today the clergy of Ireland put before you
Christ's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage
And to remind you that when you vote in the Divorce Referendum
The Church's teaching and Christ's teaching are one and the same' [...]
I knew the anger that Jesus Christ felt
When he drove from the temple the traders and stockbrokers
I have come into this temple to pray
And be healed by, joined with, the Spirit of Life
Not to be invaded by ideology.
I say unto you, preacher, and orators of the Hierarchy,
Do not bring ideology into my house of prayer.
(Durcan 1987, 27, l. 16-20 and 25-31)

- 13 Similarly, in "Forefinger", published in his 2012 book entitled *Praise in which I Live and Move and Have my Being*, he turns the Pope's admonishing forefinger into a penis to denounce his intolerance, as opposed to the true Christian values of love and mercy that Paul Durcan seeks (Durcan 2012, 82-83). The title of this book is a quotation from the Bible and, as Paul Durcan declared in his interview with Pat Kenny,⁹ it is a way to express his faith in one God.¹⁰ The denunciation in "The Crucifixion" also echoes the criticism of what has been done in the name of the Father and of any form of intolerance in *In the Land of Punt*.
- 14 Both Paul Durcan and Gene Lambert wanted to point out facts and elements which were not public knowledge and not as widely known as they are today. When he was confined from 1964 to 1967, Paul Durcan met many priests incarcerated in asylums by their bishops because they did not share the same views. The poet claims he was himself confined because he did not meet his family's expectations. As for the painter Gene Lambert, he was rendered physically handicapped after a car crash, became actively interested in the rights of disabled people, and wanted to show how poorly they were treated in Ireland. Both artists wanted to fight intolerance through art, exploring the way people consider mental and physical disability, or any kind of difference, including that of the artist. They wished to denounce censorship, and the way the political circles and institutions run by the Church were dealing with disability. They created a book composed of seven poems and acrylic paintings sharing the same titles. Gene Lambert said: "It is the result of a general process of interaction and

discussion. We didn't know how it was going to turn out. It was not preordained. We were making both [poem and painting] and changing both while discussing".¹¹

- 15 Just as Paul Durcan plays with blasphemy to underline what is truly blasphemous, they play with the obscene to highlight the obscenity of intolerance. Throughout the book, sending people to asylums because of their differences is repeatedly compared to a deportation, by associating them with the Nazi deportations in "Rose-In-The-Box" or "Nuremberg Courts", and using the phrase "The Welfare Transport Company for Invalids Ltd." in "First Love" or "Crucifixion" for instance. In "Crucifixion", the poet links the imagined crucifixion of his father to "hospital consultants": "At the foot of the cross there were a coterie / Of hospital consultants dicing his garments". This prefigures the responsibility of the "doctors" in the martyrdom of the daughter in "The Crucifixion". This imagined Passion of the father in *In the Land of Punt* is a way for the poet to reverse the roles and to denounce his own martyrdom in the psychiatric institutions his father sent him to. The actions of the father in "The Crucifixion" (*Crazy About Women*) in the light of "Crucifixion" (*In the Land of Punt*) and of the poet's past become a criticism of what was done to the poet in the name of his father.
- 16 Thanks to the palimpsest effect created by intratextuality, we can make out the father's hermaphrodite figure in Gene Lambert's *Crucifixion* beneath the crucified representation of the daughter. The wish of the daughter to be crushed under her father's wheel indirectly points to the responsibility of the father too, thanks to the Biblical intertextuality: indeed, the "gleaming hub" of the wheel echoes the gleaming of the centurion's lance which wounded Jesus Christ. Moreover, with the image of the "badger's jaws" in the first stanza of "The Crucifixion", we can see the crocodile in Gene Lambert's *First Love* appear. The crocodile was present in a former version of the poem "First Love" to be then replaced by that of "Kampala Implacables".¹² The badger, the crocodile or the "Kampala Implacables" are different images of the same monster conjured up by the father's head, that is to say by his decision to confine his son or his daughter. They are personified representations of the asylum or of the Magdalene Laundry.
- 17 Through her series of questions, the daughter of "The Crucifixion" does not only denounce what was done in the name of her father, but also in the name of Paul Durcan's father, and in the name of God. We can see in this daughter a persona of the poet. Each question of hers echoes the other. One of them is repeated three times: "Father, have you never seen the waterfall at Powerscourt?" (Durcan 1991, 5-7, l. 20, 42, 63). Because the waterfall is at Powerscourt, a place near Dublin, it transposes this new crucifixion into an Irish context, which reinforces the indirect allusion to the Magdalene Laundries. The Irish context is reinforced by the reference to "Thomas Street", a street in Dublin (5, l. 30, 32). This is also an intertextual biblical reference to Saint Thomas's doubts. These doubts find an echo in "the doctors'" refusal to believe the young woman (7, l. 34-41). The noun "Powerscourt" is equally meaningful. It suggests a court of justice, a place of power, and here the daughter is a victim of her father's law or decision.
- 18 Nevertheless, the daughter of the poem has contradictory feelings for her father which are conveyed through a reversed rewriting of the Oedipal myth. We can see that when she expresses the wish to be in his arms or when she rephrases Christ's word into "why have you dumped me?" (Durcan 1991, 5, l. 29). The verb "dump" makes their separation due to her confinement sound like the end of a love story. Throughout his work, Paul

Durcan rewrites the Oedipal myth, making it more and more complex. In "First Love" (collected in *In the Land of Punt*), the son, on the one hand, feels sexual excitement when observing and describing his father, and, on the other hand, dreams of killing him:

Our geography is a star-crossed love affair.
 Inside every small boy there is a small girl.
 Inside every young father there is a young mother.
 I was in love with my dad from the start.
 When I saw him leafing naked in his bath [...]
 I yearned to cup the fish of his penis
 In my two hands and tip-toe down to the seafront
 And re-enact the serenade of the loaves and fishes. [...]
 I climbed up the Tree of his Penis to the apex
 Of his head [...]
 He was my beanstalk and I was his Jack. [...]
 And yet still he looks foolish—and so pretty.
 Marat, I want to murder him in his bath.
 And yet still he looks foolish—and so pretty.

- 19 The mother of the oedipal myth becomes the father and the son the daughter in "The Crucifixion" (Durcan 1991, 5-7). In "First Love", the mother becomes the father who is also a mother, and the son is also a girl. Furthermore, the rewriting of the Oedipal myth becomes more complex because it is doubled by the rewriting of the English folktale of Jack and the Beanstalk, and of the Bible—the loaves and fishes referring to Jesus' miracle. The image of the poet is therefore superimposed onto that of Oedipus, Jack and Jesus. Likewise, the figure of the poet's father is superimposed onto that of Laius, of Jocasta, and of Marat. This creates a palimpsest effect similar to the one in "The Crucifixion", for under the image of the daughter we can see di Paolo's Christ, all representations of Christ, Christ himself, the poet, but also the father as represented by Gene Lambert in *First Love* and *Crucifixion*. But the palimpsest is not only composed of pictorial representations. Under the words of the poem which conjure all those images, we can read The Bible, the Oedipal Myth, or other poems by Paul Durcan.
- 20 Finally, through Paul Durcan's Oedipal rewriting in "First Love", we can observe that the poet refuses fixed identities, and blurs the frontiers between genders. This is part of the living form of enchantment he wants to create, an enchantment where fixed representations move again and talk, where things and people are constantly metamorphosed. Let us now see how his covering of historical and personal trauma in word and image, and his artistic way of trying to recover from the past, lead to a reflection on art, and on its failure to enable the poet to come to terms with it, since it creates another form of confinement on the page, the death-like fixedness he wishes his art to escape from.

A meta-iconopoem

- 21 The woman in the poem expresses the tensions between the desire for movement and the desire for immobility that are at the heart of *ekphrasis*, as Murray Krieger conceptualizes it:

The first asks for language—in spite of its arbitrary character and its temporality—to freeze itself into a spatial form. Yet it retains an awareness of the incapacity of the words to come together at an instant (*tout à coup*), at a single stroke of sensuous immediacy, as if in an unmediated impact. [...] The exhilaration, then, derives from

the dream—and the pursuit—of a language that can, in spite of its limits, recover the immediacy of sightless vision built into our habit of perceptual desire since Plato. It is the romantic quest to realize the nostalgic dream of an original, pre-fallen language of corporeal presence, though our only means to reach it is the fallen language around us. And it would be the function of the ekphrastic poet to work the magical transformation.

The second of these impulses, on the contrary, accepts a modest, unpretentious, demystified language that claims no magic, whose arbitrariness and temporal succession can escape the frozen momentary vision that, in seeking the momentous, would belie the fleetingness of the moment in an anti-pictorial blur. (Murray 10)

- 22 The daughter's wishes exemplify those contradictory impulses. First, she expresses a desire for fixedness, by asking her father: "take me in your arms" (Durcan 1991, 7, l. 50). Should he do so, the father and the daughter would then create a sort of tableau vivant of a reverse pieta, the father holding in his arms the crucified daughter. She also expresses the desire to become a bi-dimensional representation when she says in the last stanza:

I want to stretch out
On the gold-paved path
In a dream of velvet loneliness (57, l. 57-59)

- 23 "The gold-paved path" is an echo of the "gold sky" of the first line and of di Paolo's golden background. This is also a meta-remark commenting on Paul Durcan's process in the book. He took off the tri-dimensional cross, hung vertically on the museum's wall, and he turned it into a photograph, a flat, bi-dimensional reproduction laid on the page, in a horizontal position when we read the book. When she adds: "From head to toe, / Under the gleaming hub of your right front wheel", she also expresses the wish to be killed by her father, a death quicker than her slow martyrdom (7, l. 61-62). Furthermore, it is another meta-remark on the nature of artistic enchantment, the frozen nature of which the poet considers to be a death sentence, echoing his fear of being contained. That is why he creates an opposition between the horizontal, fixed crucifixion and the vertical waterfall through the daughter's repeated question: "Father, have you never seen the waterfall at Powerscourt?" (5-7, l. 20, 42, 63). The image of the waterfall is a visual reminder of Christ's blood falling down in Giovanni di Paolo's cross.

Powerscourt Waterfall, County Wicklow
Creative Commons ©

- 24 It brings to mind our postlapsarian world but also, by opposition, the enchanted prelapsarian world. The rush of the waterfall becomes the symbol of the living enchantment the poet wishes to create. This echoes the contradictory nature the daughter claims. Indeed, she both insists on being a "woman", a vertical living entity, and a "roodscreen" (5, l. 28). If we don't take the word roodscreen literally but decompose it, we have on the one hand a rood, a crucifix, a representation of the crucifixion, and on the other hand, a screen, a flat pictorial or cinematic support. In being both a live and enchanted representation, she personifies this paradoxical new form of enchantment to which the poet aspires. He expressed a similar aesthetic wish when he chose the following quote by Francis Bacon as an epigraph for *A Snail in my Prime*: "I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them, like a snail, leaving a trail of the human presence and memory trace of past events as the snail leaves its slime" (Durcan 1999). Through this quote, the poet expresses his will to capture the moving trail of the human presence through life on the page, just as Bacon did in his paintings.
- 25 The daughter in the poem also brutally expresses her desire for movement, for leaving the representation: "Throw out the window / Your pretty shrew" (Durcan 7, l. 54-55). It is as if in escaping the window which frames her, fixes her into a pictorial representation, she could escape her fate and her suffering. This echoes the poet's wish in the *ekphrasis* "The Martyrdom of St Sebastian, after Andrea Mantegna" (Durcan 1990, 115-116). This poem was inspired by the 1480 version of the scene Mantegna painted three times.¹³

Andrea Mantegna, Saint Sebastian, c. 1480, tempera, 255 cm x 140 cm
Creative Commons ©

26 In the last stanza, we can read:

But I would if I could
Unfreeze the frame where it stopped at pain.
May not Saint Sebastian step down, hit his drive,
Pitch his next shot pin high, hole his putt?
Still he will perish from the dream of love. (Durcan 1990, 116, l. 59-63)

- 27 This wish to de-frame the work of art, to escape immobility, appears after the poet turned his father playing golf into Saint Sebastian, the patron saint of athletes. Therefore, the poet crucified his father just as his father had made him suffer by putting him in various psychiatric institutions. By turning his father into a martyr or wishing to bring movement back to the representation of suffering, he tries to recover from his own past trauma with words and images, and come to terms with it. Both "The Crucifixion" and "The Martyrdom of St Sebastian" are meta-poems offering a reflection on enchantment, and the representation of suffering. Though the poet tries in both poems to change his past in order to recover from it, he also expresses his own incapacity to completely "unfreeze the frame", and escape from his own suffering.
- 28 In covering the past with words and images in "The Crucifixion", Paul Durcan creates a complex ekphrastic palimpsest to try to recover from his own past. His *ekphrasis* of Giovanni di Paolo's work, that is to say his dialogue between the verbal and the visual, turns into a palimpsest equally composed of pictorial and verbal elements. Metamorphoses are central in his rewriting of written myths and in his transposition of pictorial representations. Christ becomes a woman and his crown, dreadlocks; Mount Golgotha, an asylum and then a car park, and so on. This writing of unfixed elements is the poet's way of trying to escape from the death-like fixedness art can turn into. Paradoxically, while trying to escape from it and to create instead a living form of

enchantment, he expresses his fear of not being able to do so, his own limitations. He already voiced them in "The Martyrdom of St Sebastian", or in a poem that we can read as a self-portrait, "The Butterfly Collector of Corofin", when he writes:

If only I could go back to being a caterpillar again
 But there is no going back:
 No going back for an old butterfly like me;
 My life is a process of being crushed gradually to death.
 Then, I will be collected by the Great Collector Himself:
 He, the invisible One, in the Country of the Long Grass
 Casting wide his vast sieve-mesh net.
 But what then? Does he put us all under glass
 For ever—for the benefit of the keen-eyed arch-angels
 Labelling us by our names and addresses:
 E.g. Eamonn de Valera, Áras an Uachtaráin
 Or Molly Malone, The Coombe, Dublin?
 No, the idea does not bear thinking about:
 To be transfixed for ever in a cruel unrest.
 I want only to be a caterpillar again. (Durcan 1978, 39, l. 17-31)

- 29 If Paul Durcan did not completely come to terms with his past through art, "[...] now he must hibernate in the cell of his bedroom / And survive the tragic winter of his innate contradiction" (1978, 39, l. 34-35) to put it in his own words. Nevertheless, we think he managed to create a new paradoxical form of enchantment that is not fixed in his books, but exists already through the words and the mouths of others,¹⁴ when Dearbhla Molloy and Dermot Crowley read his poems during their "Give Me Your Hand" show, or, more whimsically, when Sean O'Brien wrote a poem entitled "On Not Being Paul Durcan" (O'Brien 43-44). More recently, his "spiral of tongue" (Durcan 1999, 267, l. 75) was reenacted through a poem by Nuala Ní Chonchuí in "a Durcanesque / polka of long poems and harem-scarem / happenings around the bookstacks". In the process of that dance, he becomes part of her:

Our bodies collided into man-woman as we swung,
 our clothes and skin sewn into each other, [...]
 Paul spun me down the winding stairs
 up across the bow of the Ha'penny Bridge,
 and, spinning together, all our pages flew.¹⁵

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Profanations*. Transl. Jeff Fort. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Zone Books, 2007.
- Auden, W.H. *Collected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991.
- Crowley, Dermot and Dearbhla Molloy. "Give Me Your Hand". Performance trailer, 2011: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHuUS8dDuPI>) and Irish Repertory Theatre website (<https://irishrep.org/show/2011-2012-season/give-me-your-hand/>)
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Devant l'image. Question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art*. Paris : Éditions de Minuit, 1990.

- Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*. Paris : Éditions de Minuit, 2000.
- Durcan, Paul. *Sam's Cross*. Dublin: Profile poetry, 1978.
- Durcan, Paul. *Going Home to Russia*. Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1987.
- Durcan, Paul and Gene Lambert. *In the Land of Punt*. Dublin: Clashganna Mills Press, 1988.
- Durcan, Paul. *Daddy, Daddy*, Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1990.
- Durcan, Paul. *Crazy About Women*. Dublin: The National Gallery of Ireland, 1991.
- Durcan, Paul. *A Snail in My Prime, New and Selected Poems*. London: The Harvill Press, 1999.
- Durcan, Paul. *Praise in which I Live and Move and Have my Being*, London: Harvill Secker, 2012.
- Durcan, Paul and Pat Kenny. RTÉ radio 1, 5 April 2012.
- Gandelman, Claude. *Le Regard dans le texte, Image et écriture du Quattrocento au XX^e siècle*. Paris : Méridiens/Klincksieck, 1986.
- Krieger, Murray. *Ekphrasis. The Illusion of the Natural Sign*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.
- Lambert, Gene. Private Communication with Cathy Roche-Liger, 6 March 2011.
- Louvel, Liliane. *Texte/image. Images à lire, textes à voir*. Rennes : PU de Rennes, 2002.
- Louvel, Liliane. *Le Tiers pictural. Pour une critique intermédiaire*. Rennes : PU de Rennes, 2010.
- Marin, Louis. *De la représentation*. Daniel Arasse, Alain Cantillon, Giovanni Careri, et al (eds.). Paris : Éditions du Seuil/Gallimard, 1994.
- Ní Chonchúir, Nuala. "Dancing with Paul Durcan". *The Irish Times*. 3 December 2011, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/dancing-with-paul-durcan-1.7328>, last accessed 11 December 2019.
- O'Brien, Sean. *Ghost Train*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.

NOTES

1. "La trans-position implique un mouvement d'aller-retour, du texte à l'image et de l'image au texte. Une oscillation fructueuse" (Louvel 2010, 28).
2. We use the term museum both to refer to the *National Gallery of Ireland* and to Agamben's meaning of the word: "the impossibility of using has its emblematic place in the Museum [...]. The Museum occupies exactly the space and function once reserved for the Temple as the place of sacrifice. To the faithful in the Temple—the pilgrims who would travel across the earth from temple to temple, from sanctuary to sanctuary—correspond today the tourists who restlessly travel in a world that has been abstracted into a Museum" (Agamben 83-84).
3. "La paradoxale fécondité de l'anachronisme" (Didi-Huberman 2000, 20).
4. Giovanni di Paolo, *The Crucifixion*, c. 1410, tempera on panel, 163 x 99 cm, *The National Gallery of Ireland*, Dublin.
5. My translation of the following sentence: "Le présent [...] [du] surgissement [de l'image dialectique] donne la forme fondamentale du rapport possible entre le Maintenant (instant, éclair) et l'Autrefois (latence, fossile), rapport dont le Futur (tension, désir) gardera des traces" (Didi-Huberman 117).
6. About the *admonitor*, see Claude Gandelman 34, Louis Marin 349, or Liliane Louvel 2002, 137.
7. My translation of "s'approcher : on 'entre dans le détail' comme on pénètre dans l'aire élective d'une intimité épistémique."

8. My translation of the following passage: "[...] être chrétien, dans l'acceptation suprême de ce terme, c'est être, avant tout, un 'montreur', et 'montreur' non d'un *Deus absconditus* (par définition 'in-montrable') mais d'un Dieu incarné, du Dieu incarné, le Christ. C'est bien cette idée, en tout cas, qui est contenue dans l'étymologie du nom *martyr*. Dans la mort du martyr, du 'montreur', c'est l'acte même de montrage qui est hypostasié. Le martyre veut être un simple *index* qui montre vers le vrai Dieu."
 9. "Today with Pat Kenny", broadcast on RTÉ radio 1, April 5 2012 (1 hour 12 minutes and 16 seconds into the program).
 10. It is an extract from *The Acts*, 17:28. Let us underline the multiple meanings in this title: it is part of the poet's constant Biblical rewriting and reworking. It can be seen as a way of reaffirming his faith in God. This passage from *The Acts* being an extract from a poem quoted by Saint Paul, it is both a pun on his first name and an example of his intertextual tendency. Moreover, the word "praise" can be a reference to "poetry", if we refer to W.H. Auden, and a way of celebrating poetry itself. The title can also symbolize the journey the book implies and relates, an itinerary through which Paul Durcan reveals himself, and pays tribute to strangers, friends or admired artists.
 11. Private interview of Gene Lambert by Cathy Roche-Liger on March 6 2011.
 12. Gene Lambert, *First Love*, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 78 inches, IMMA, Dublin, in Paul Durcan, Gene Lambert, *In the Land of Punt*.
 13. Andrea Mantegna, *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, 1480, tempera on canvas, 255 x 140 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris. <http://www.louvre.fr/oeuvre-notices/saint-sebastien-0> (last accessed 21 December 2019, 2018).
 14. We refer here to a kind of enchantment similar to the one that W.H. Auden describes in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats (*d. Jan. 1939*)". W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, London: Faber and Faber, 1991, 247-249.
 15. Nuala Ní Chonchuí, "Dancing with Paul Durcan", published in *The Irish Times* on Saturday 3 December, 2011.
<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2011/1203/1224308506114.html> (last accessed 21 December 2019).
-

ABSTRACTS

This paper will consider "The Crucifixion" by Paul Durcan in the light of trauma. "The Crucifixion" is the second ekphrasis in *Crazy About Women*, a book of poems commissioned by the National Gallery of Ireland in 1990 and inspired by the Gallery's collection. This paper demonstrates how this anachronistic ekphrasis leads to the creation of a palimpsest both covering and un-covering the past with words and images. Paul Durcan's ekphrasis is both a profanation, in Giorgio Agamben's meaning of the word, and a dialogue between the verbal and the visual, leading to a recovery of the past through a rewriting of the biblical Passion. It leads to an uncovering of traumatic elements from the past, both from Irish history and Paul Durcan's story – namely, the Magdalene Laundries and the poet's internment in psychiatric institutions, due to his father's decision. It is a denunciation of what has been done in the name of the father/Father. Through this palimpsest, the poet superimposes di Paolo's cross with images of a young girl, a reversed pieta, and of the waterfall at Powerscourt, an estate located in County Wicklow, Ireland. In doing so, he uses what Georges Didi-Huberman calls "the paradoxical fruitfulness of

anachronism", thus creating both humorous effects and tensions which increase the intensity of the poem. Finally, intratextuality adds new layers to the palimpsest. That's why a parallel is here drawn between "The Crucifixion" and a book Paul Durcan created in collaboration with the Irish painter Gene Lambert, *In the Land of Punt* (1988), especially the two poems and paintings entitled "First Love" and "Crucifixion"—for the aim of this collaboration was also to denounce those who did not tolerate difference along with their actions like censorship or internment.

Cet article a pour thème principal le trauma dans le poème de Paul Durcan intitulé « The Crucifixion ». Ce poème ekphrastique est le second de *Crazy About Women*, un recueil de poèmes commandé par la *National Gallery of Ireland* en 1990 et qui s'inspire de la collection du musée. Cet article démontre la manière dont cette ekphrasis qui joue de l'anachronisme mène à la création d'un palimpseste qui recouvre et découvre le passé à l'aide de mots et d'images. La manière dont le poète l'écrit est à la fois une profanation – telle que Giorgio Agamben définit ce terme – et un dialogue entre le verbal et le visuel qui mène à une redécouverte du passé par le biais d'une réécriture biblique de la Passion. Ce dialogue mène au dévoilement d'éléments traumatiques passés, appartenant à l'histoire irlandaise et à l'histoire personnelle du poète – c'est-à-dire les couvents de la Madeleine et l'internement du poète dans des institutions psychiatriques suite à la décision de son père. Il s'agit d'une dénonciation de ce qui a été accompli au nom du père/Père. Dans ce palimpseste, le poète superpose l'image de la croix de di Paolo à celle d'une jeune fille, une piété inversée, et à celle de la chute d'eau de Powerscourt située dans le comté de Wicklow en Irlande. Ce faisant, il utilise ce que Georges Didi-Huberman nomme « la paradoxale fécondité de l'anachronisme ». Enfin, les effets intratextuels ajoutent de nouvelles couches et une nouvelle épaisseur à ce palimpseste. C'est pourquoi cet article s'achève sur un parallèle entre « The Crucifixion » et un ouvrage que Paul Durcan a créé en collaboration avec le peintre irlandais Gene Lambert, *In the Land of Punt* (1988), et plus spécifiquement avec deux tableaux et poèmes intitulés « First Love » et « Crucifixion » – puisqu'un des buts de ce projet était de dénoncer ceux qui ne tolèrent pas la différence ainsi que leurs actions, comme la censure ou l'internement.

INDEX

Keywords: ekphrasis, palimpsest, anachronism, rewriting, trauma, crucifixion, Magdalene Laundries, intratextuality, index, myth

Mots-clés: ekphrasis, palimpseste, anachronisme, réécriture, trauma, crucifixion, couvents de la Madeleine, intratextualité, index, mythe

AUTHORS

CATHY ROCHE-LIGER

Cathy Roche-Liger wrote the first French thesis on the Irish poet Paul Durcan in 2011, focusing on his pictorial poetics. She has published several articles about Paul Durcan, and other contemporary Irish poets such as Michael Longley, John Montague, Harry Clifton, Trevor Joyce or Geoffrey Squires. She is particularly interested both in poetry and in the interactions between the visual and the verbal. She is a member of the FoReLL B1 research group, University of Poitiers (France), which specializes in "Forms and Representations in Literature".