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1

Introduction: On Rewriting
as Dislocation

Wordsworth? . . . no. I'm afraid we're not familiar with
your literature, Lieutenant.

We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean

—Friel 1981: 41

[T]he translation process has much in common with para-
dox, metaphor and discovery. Hence, the creative conse-
quences of the state of translation that is modern Ireland

—Cronin 1996: 4

The remarks above are, in distinct ways, privileged starting points for this study of contemporary poetry and translation in Northern Ireland. Michael Cronin's focus on 'process' is complemented and confirmed by his equation, in the same sentence, of 'translation' with 'metaphor': the two terms have often been construed as synonyms, on the basis of their respective etymologies (Latin and Greek), which lend them a common meaning of 'displacement' or 'transport'. But the transit that the second quotation brings to our attention is hardly linear or uneventful, as suggested by the elements of 'paradox' and 'discovery'. Cronin, whose contributions to translation studies show him especially sensitive to matters of identity and cultural difference (see Cronin 1996, 2000, 2003, 2006), is thus seeking productive analogies for translation, not in a nexus of equivalence or necessary correspondence, but rather in confrontations with perplexity and the unexpected meaning. This sense of perturbed transit is hence brought to bear on the Irish predicament, in its linguistic as much as political and territorial dimensions, by Cronin's description of Ireland as (in) a 'state of translation'. The interlingual process, both active component and telling representation of a historically complex scene – with the epicentre of such complexity in the long unresolved condition of Northern Ireland – thus becomes an apt synecdoche of the unstable relations that define the Irish experience.¹

These troubled relations are also the core theme of Brian Friel's *Translations*, source of the first quotation above and indeed the most famous dramatisation of the fraught connections between language, territory and identity in Irish history. Friel's play is hardly about 'modern' (in the sense of present-day) Ireland, evoking rather the threshold of the transformations that decisively contributed to defining it. His text confronts us with a moment, the early 1830s, that antedates by little more than a decade the social and economic hecatomb of the Famine. The Famine's destruction of traditional bonds between people and land was to be compounded by a drastic reduction in the number of native speakers of Irish, and by the ineluctable course towards the replacement of Irish by English as the language not only of education and official practices, but increasingly also of ordinary daily exchanges. *Translations* dramatises a historical antecedent for that linguistic shift: the particular, imposed anglicisation that took place with the Ordnance Survey (1824–46). Ostensibly aimed at a more accurate mapping of the Irish territory for tax and governance purposes, it had a closer political control as its inevitable corollary. But the aspect that made the Ordnance Survey famous beyond the confines of historiography is also the one that foregrounds the links between language, territory and identity: the initiative of rendering place names into English, the 'translations' from which the play derives its title.²

Hugh, the character to whom Friel attributes the remark quoted above is a hedge-schoolmaster who teaches Latin and Greek in an Irish-speaking rural community where English has hardly penetrated, and under conditions that still exhibit the legacy of the Penal Laws (formally superseded in 1829). His quixotic pride in a supposed closer proximity of his culture to the Mediterranean world (through its Greco-Latin heritage) than to England and Anglophone culture could, indeed, boast a lineage and a substance that historians have not failed to acknowledge. Indeed, evidence abounds of a continued interest in the Classics within Irish culture (and in the Irish language) from the Middle Ages onwards, often materialised in translation, as well as in a habit of equating local figures and circumstances with those represented in Classical texts.³ The schoolmaster's pride is promptly rendered ironical by the fact that his character, who in the dramatic fiction has Gaelic for his mother tongue and Greek or Latin for his professional languages, in fact exists and produces the remark in question in a play in English, the language that has since become the dominant medium of Irish culture and indeed the vehicle for its global circulation and recognition. The irony is first and foremost grounded in the tense relationship (similarity or difference?) between the 'then' of the dramatic action and the 'now' of its reception; but it also involves our present-day awareness that Hugh's boast is endowed by Friel (who situates his play in 1833) with proleptic force, since it anticipates the inclination shown by Irish writers and intellectuals in our time to claim a privileged relationship with other, non-Anglophone,

European cultures, so as to counter the gravitational pull of English culture and literature.

Friel's dramatic fiction of a search for empowerment and self-definition through a relationship with other places thus becomes an enlightening antecedent for recent Irish writing that addresses, referentially and intertextually, the elsewheres that energise Hugh's discourse. This is prominently the case with the translations of texts from 'the warm Mediterranean' – whether ancient, medieval, or modern – in the work of the five Northern Irish poets centrally considered in this book: Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon and Ciaran Carson. Studying them requires a careful acknowledgement of the particularities of their place of reading and writing. This certainly means the political topicality of Northern Ireland, and the formative impact (personal as much as literary) of the ethical, social and linguistic complexities of a place that for so long was afflicted by dissension and sectarian violence. But the consequence of the locale for one's reading and (re)writing can be taken in wider terms, geographically and culturally: it can mean balancing the specificity of the Northern Irish formative location against the acknowledgement that it also belongs in a context, as one instance of a broader practice. One such context is provided by northern European appropriations of texts that originated in the space of Romance and Mediterranean cultures; (needless to say, the current cultural resonance of such texts is fundamentally different when they are read from within any southern culture that happens to see itself as a cultural and linguistic heir and legatee of the past greatness that they epitomise).

The tension between perceptions of what is specific and what is shared acquires, however, a complexity of its own in the Northern Irish situation. This reflects the different ways of seeking legitimation in the specific sense of place (involving a heightened combination of language, power, and belief) that historically characterised the territory's two traditions. Indeed, the nationalist-Catholic tradition predicated its endorsement of an Irish autarky (*vis-à-vis* the rest of the British Isles) not only on the cultural and linguistic particularity of the Gael, but also, fundamentally, on its continued allegiance to a transnational Christendom whose *lingua franca* of many centuries (Latin) also signalled continuity with the Classical past (cf. Stanford 1976: *passim*). Conversely, the unionist-Protestant tradition emphatically grounded the Planter's right and righteousness in steadfast loyalty to the political and religious consequence of the momentous *rejection* of the transnational empire of Christendom that, with the Reformation, vindicated the autarky of the rising nation state and the dignity of the English vernacular (for the pursuit of spiritual and worldly callings alike).

The relevant contexts, however, for a critical reading of such complexities and their importance in the work of the poets in question are also defined by features of the present intellectual moment, and especially by the discourses that have prevailed in recent years with regard to the literary construction of

place, self, and other. The epigraphs chosen for this Introduction, and their brief discussion above, have already highlighted a seductive interchangeability between local and textual references. It is important now to recognise that critical readings in which that seduction is manifest are hardly idiosyncratic, but rather congenial to current intellectual tendencies. These include the growing emphasis on spatial dynamics and relations that has come to mark the discrete but overlapping disciplinary domains of literary and translation studies; as regards the latter, this critical emphasis has accompanied the expanding semantic scope of 'translation', and indeed its emergence as an autonomous field of inquiry.

1.1 An 'epoch of space'?

As has often been noted, the humanities and social sciences have been marked since the 1980s by an increasingly influential interest in space. The extent of this influence can be gauged from the breadth and diversity of the theoretical references that inform what is already commonly described as 'spatiality studies'. Such enabling references range from phenomenology and existentialism through structuralism to theories of post- or late modernity. They include Heidegger's reflections on the grounding or emplacement of being (in his later writings on 'Building Dwelling Thinking' – Heidegger 2001: 141–59); also Foucault's pronouncement, in his essay on heterotopias (today often accorded a quasi-prophetic value), on the advent of an 'epoch of space [. . .] of simultaneity [. . .] [and] juxtaposition', which was to follow and supersede the 'great obsession of the nineteenth century [. . .] [with] history' (Foucault 1986: 22); and (to cite a more recent and equally momentous contribution) Fredric Jameson's endorsement of the prevalence of spatial categories as a characteristic of postmodernity, and his 'cognitive cartography' as an enabling model for a sense of place under the global conditions of 'late capitalism' (Jameson 1991: 16 and *passim*).

Despite the variousness of their intellectual and ideological leanings, the combined effect of such contributions to the current interest in space has been to emphasise that places obtain their meanings, not from features that one might dub 'essential', but rather from a process that is both discursive and relational. As proposed by the editors of a collection focused on the late twentieth-century's unsettling of self and location, 'If places are no longer the clear supports of our identity, they nonetheless play a potentially important part in the symbolic and psychological dimension of our identifications'. They go on to add: 'How [. . .] does space become place? By being named [. . .] Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed' (Carter et al. 1993: xii). The acknowledgement that the significance of place is verbally constructed brings with it another recognition: that those forms of location and delimitation that invest space with meaning, instituting places and contributing to the emergence of identities, are based on the

relationships that mutually position and define them (cf. Harvey 1996: 264, 270).

The argument that this process is eminently relational and dynamic rescues the 'spatial imagination' from accusations of being 'reactionary' (an indictment sometimes levelled at spatially determined analyses because of their conventional associations with a logic of stasis, which would construe them as the opposite to the historical 'awareness' afforded by temporally based approaches).⁴ David Harvey endorses the 'dynamic' argument on behalf of the spatial concern when he suggests that the sense of place involves an articulation of permanence and retrospection with an active and prospective import: 'The preservation or construction of a sense of place is [. . .] *an active moment* in the passage from memory to hope, *from past to future*' (Harvey 1996: 306; my emphasis). A non-static understanding of the making of place and identity also converges with views on the concept and realities of nationhood, and its arguable historical transformation into 'postnationality'. A signal example is Richard Kearney's inquiry into the political possibility of 'a postnational model of interdependence', and his characterisation (following Jean-François Lyotard) of 'the postmodern critique of power' as contemplating 'a community where identity is part of a permanent process of narrative retelling', predicated on the 'reminder that every citizen's story is related to every other's' (Kearney 1997: 62–3). Kearney's is partly an analysis of current conditions, partly a vision of an imminent future, but scholars of national images have long pointed out that identity and location have always depended on relations and representations, rather than intrinsic features. In the words of Joep Leerssen, 'national characterizations take place in a polarity between self and Other [. . .] [the relation] between "auto-image" and "hetero-image" tends to show invariant dynamics in various different national and cross-cultural confrontations' (Leerssen 2000: 271).

Besides their plea for a dynamic and relational – as against static and essential – understanding of place and identity, contributions such as those cited above have a common denominator in their focus on discourse: the relations they describe are discursively constituted, and 'narrative' and 'representation' are recurrent keywords in their characterisation. This defines a context in which the study of writing and the study of space cannot but acknowledge and practise their convergence. In other words, the rise of what Edward Soja has called 'a distinctively postmodern and critical human geography' is found to belong within the same moment in intellectual history that has seen the assumption into mainstream literary studies of the poststructuralist emphasis on the inevitably intertextual basis of all processes of signification.⁵ Such developments have involved the acknowledgement that geography cannot go unaffected by the crisis of representation, that is, the demise of the notion that 'writing mirrors the world'; that (e.g.) maps are not a transparent, unmediated access to reality, but rather

'constructed images', 'texts', 'socially produced, as discursive tools by which to persuade others': indeed, 'Maps are too important to be left to cartographers alone'.⁶ Extending the concept of 'text' to embrace the object as much as the inscribed record of geographic study has allowed for the landscape itself (understood as 'a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings') to be treated in similar terms to literary representations of place (cf. Cosgrove and Daniels 1988: 1). And these approximations have been fully reciprocated and met by literary studies – as suggested above, and reinforced by John Kerrigan's reminder that, etymologically, geography is 'earth writing' (Kerrigan 1998).

The notion that the study both of space and text cannot productively happen outside of a relational logic is thus compounded by the argument that such relations – 'interlocal' and intertextual – indeed overlap and intersect; moreover, their correlated dynamics have to be understood as processes that happen *in time* (as forcefully underlined by Harvey's remark on the temporal dynamics of the construction of place). These combined perceptions provide the necessary apparatus for a reading of translations that become a decisive part of the poetic output of their authors precisely by appropriating and rewriting texts that pointedly refer to other places and other times. And, again, Friel's play proves inspiring, since *Translations* combines an interlocal with a transtemporal imaginative design. Some of its characters are vocally conscious that the renaming of their places is grounded in history and change, and find imaginative redress in balancing their nominally compromised location against the elsewhere of long ago. But the play also appeals to its audience's historical awareness of everything that followed the momentous verbal and political intervention (the 'translations') in the space and time that the play evokes, and suggests that evoking such a past moment can contribute decisively to a reflection on identity in the audience's present circumstance. Both production and reception, writing and reading, are thus arguably defined by these relational designs of text, space and time; and a critical attitude informed by this awareness could derive its motto from remarks such as the following:

writing about worlds reveals as much about ourselves as it does about the worlds represented. [. . .]

when we write we do so from a necessarily local setting [. . .]

it is not simply our accounts of the world that are intertextual: the world itself is intertextual. Places are intertextual sites because various texts and discursive practices based on previous texts are deeply inscribed in their landscapes and institutions [. . .]

new worlds are made out of old texts, and old worlds are the basis of new texts.

(Barnes and Duncan 1992: 2–3, 7–8)

1.2 Place and text, home and elsewhere

This study of poems and translations by contemporary Northern Irish poets combines an acknowledgement of such currently influential notions with close attention to their particular relevance for a culture that has long brooded on the emplacement of identity. This cultural particularity should also be assessed in the light of the conditions proper to regions and small nations, vindicated as they have been – their smallness often construed as an ethico-political entitlement – vis-à-vis the homogenising challenges posed by global conditions.⁷ In literary terms, this involves reading the authors to be studied as (in Robert Crawford's phrase) 'identifying poets', '[who] construct for themselves an identity which allows them to identify with or to be identified with a particular territory' (1993: 1–2). But Crawford concurs with the nexus of definition by relation and dislocation emphasised above when he adds, 'it is those writers who look abroad who are often [the] most valuable territorial voices [. . .] [with their] transforming open-ness to the other' (1993: 13). As, in another context, Fintan O'Toole has put it, 'Ireland is something that often happens elsewhere' (1994: 27).

In the generation that preceded the first poets studied in this book, this defining tension between home and elsewhere, same and other, particular and universal, found a memorable formulation in the work of Patrick Kavanagh. Long before the discourse of difference and relational identities became current, Kavanagh (whose influence on Heaney has often been acknowledged, notably by Heaney himself) claimed dignity and self-confidence for the local anchoring of identity. In his essay 'The Parish and the Universe', he hailed that trust in 'the social and artistic validity of [one's] parish' which he styled 'parochialism', as against the 'provincialism' of those who permanently appeal to the values of a metropolis for validation of what they are and do (1967: 282). And yet Kavanagh's 'parochial' claim for centrality is not a form of cultural solipsism; his denunciation, throughout his prose writings, was explicitly aimed at the self-abasing fascination of Irish writers with London and its literary establishment, and does not preclude searching the broader panorama of literary history for enabling analogues to his favoured authorial stance. Indeed, Kavanagh himself summons the Classics to empower the triumphant close of 'Epic', a poem on the imaginative clout of the local reference (in all the specificity of its names):

I inclined
 To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin
 Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind
 He said: I made the Iliad from such
 A local row. Gods make their own importance.

(Kavanagh 2005: 184)

Besides a small number of poems (that include 'Epic' but also 'On Looking into E. V. Rieu's Homer', another paean to the imaginative consequence of the Classics and also a tribute to a famous translator of Homer), and a few other incidental allusions, Kavanagh did not become noted for a systematic appropriation of the Classics. And yet the close connection, in those few pieces, between his claims for the dignity of 'the parish' and the culturally energising import of the Ancients, despite or because of their remoteness, has become an important dimension of Kavanagh's value as inspiring precursor. Irrespective of whether the allusion is deliberate or not on Friel's part, audiences familiar with Irish literature are bound to be reminded of Kavanagh's *dicta* when a character in *Translations*, with the ease of one who does not doubt the centrality of his place in the world, casually refers to the 'parish of Athens' (Friel 1981: 13).

Again, Friel's play about English soldiers and administrators, (dis)placed in Ireland, translating the Gaelic place names as they map the territory, and in the process facing a blend of collaboration and resistance from locals whose literacy and imaginative empowerment come from sustained use of Ancient Greek texts, prompts a reflection on the complex relevance of translation, as concept and practice, for considering the physically limited and historically fractured space of Ireland: 'Great hatred, little room', as Yeats famously remarked (1990: 288). Constraint and release, hindrance and enablement, vie with each other for prevalence when one tries to characterise the interlingual practices that have marked the Irish experience. Linguistic dispossession and forced anglicisation (epitomised in John Montague's image of the 'grafted tongue'⁸) loom large on the negative side of the equation. But, for Irish poetry, translation has historically proved a liberating device, affording a way out of the dysphoric inwardness induced by a consciousness of trauma and discontinuity – a consciousness that, in Thomas Kinsella's famous diagnosis of the late 1960s, afflicts 'every writer in the modern world', but in Ireland derives particular poignancy from that 'calamity', 'the death of a language' (1967: 15, 10).

Kinsella's commitment to the translation and circulation of Gaelic texts was his chosen strategy for reconnecting 'with the significant past' (15). But a belief in the potential of verbal transits (both as practice and concept) to offer imaginative redress straddles several poetic generations and indeed proves ubiquitous. Just a few years after Kinsella's remarks on the predicament faced by 'The Irish Writer', Seamus Heaney, then already the best-known poet writing out of the complexities of Northern Ireland at the height of the Troubles, was to include in *Wintering Out* a series of poems that memorably troped political, cultural and territorial dispossession as a linguistic affair, imaginary verbal transactions with the value of a vindication, since (as in 'A New Song') it is from a sense of release and positiveness that 'river tongues' issue and 'rise / From licking deep in native haunts / To flood' wider, repossessed territories (Heaney 1972: 33). When poets take

the further step of writing under names other than their own, that release may coincide with an extended verbal and imaginary scope, afforded by a diction and a referential range that can be markedly distinct from those that characterise 'their own' writing. Translation (or, in some cases, poems couched in the diction of highly differentiated *personae*) can extricate the lyric voice from its historical and cultural circumstance, allowing it to vaunt in its sufficiency while it paradoxically denies itself by assuming another diction and another set of references. But the release brought by translation does not always equate the particular relief of self-effacement, of yielding to unqualified alterity. Poets may want (and pointedly *have* wanted) to repress the politically motivated voice within themselves; but this voice may be unfettered through the assumption of an enunciation with an *ostensibly* distinct source and another's name. Passing itself off as the mere rendering of another poet's pronouncements, the committed voice may then enjoy a new lease of freedom, *while retaining the recognisable diction* of its 'holder', the poet-translator who authors the target text.

For obvious reasons, this poetics of translation as unconstraint has a particular relevance with regard to the work of Northern Irish poet-translators through (and in the wake of) the Troubles, spawning a practice of vicarious pronouncement on historical adversity, sectarianism, and the various political dysfunctions in the recent history of the territory of their personal and cultural origins.⁹ This textual practice becomes in fact an important body of evidence for the particularly 'living and special' sense that (according to Edna Longley) applies to the concept of intertextuality when considered with regard to Northern Irish poetry; for in that body of literature, it emerges 'not as a theoretical dead letter, but as a creative dynamic', precisely because it offers a wealth of evidence that 'no poet or poem ever quite stands alone. Each has a place within various systems of cultural and aesthetic relations.'¹⁰ Further, the notion that textual dynamics of various sorts prevail to an unusual extent in the writerly practices characteristic of contemporary Northern Ireland can be seen as a specific realisation of the tropes of liminality and transit that some commentators (focusing on the cultural upside of the panorama of strife that the North presented to the world throughout the Troubles) have favoured in their political and cultural characterisation of that territory. One such description was offered (again) by Edna Longley in her controversial remark, produced in the late 1980s, on the North as 'culturally a corridor, permeable to influences from Dublin – Glasgow – London'.¹¹

The context for such a remark was one of enhanced controversy over the relative unity or plurality of the body of writing that bears the name of 'contemporary Irish poetry', a controversy that to a large extent has coincided with the question of whether the political and social reality of partition finds a correspondence in the realm of poetry.¹² The renewed cultural energy shown by Northern Ireland (Belfast, in particular) from the 1960s, which

proved especially visible in the realm of poetry – with the attention generated by the early work of Heaney, Mahon and Longley – fostered the critical notion of a ‘Northern Poetic Renaissance’, which in turn led to sometimes virulent discussions that were as much about the polity as the poetry. This double focus reflected the island’s rich variety of political positions and their literary implications; and the controversy was decisively boosted by the coincidence in time between the rise to prominence of the 1960s poets and the post-1969 Troubles – although, as both the poets themselves (in interviews or memoirs) and various commentators have pointed out, the surge in poetic production in fact predated the civic crisis (cf. Brearton 2003: 94, 101). The notion of a ‘Renaissance’ certainly abetted the recognition of the generation of Northern poets with whom it was associated, although they have hardly ever endorsed it in unqualified terms, and some in fact have denied it. On being asked, in an interview published in 1991, whether ‘the literature from the North should be considered separately from the literature of the Republic’, and whether he believed in a Northern ‘renaissance’, Mahon quipped, ‘You can’t renaſce something that was never naſce. There is, however, as always, an Irish renaſcence’ (Scammell 1991: 5). The latter remark highlighted how frequently the model of the early twentieth-century Revival, with its hopes of a combined upward dynamics of literature and the nation, has been conjured in Ireland, at the risk of banality: by the middle years of the century, Patrick Kavanagh had already offered the satirical proclamation, voiced by the ‘devil Mediocrity’ in his mock-epic ‘The Paddiad’, that ‘a great renaissance is under way’ (Kavanagh 2005: 151).

As suggested above, however, most objections to the acknowledgement and celebration of a ‘Northern Renaissance’ concerned not so much the fatuity of any such construction, but rather the separateness that inhered in the notion; and it therefore inevitably rekindled discussions centred on matters of identity and nationality (with all the risks that Claudio Guillén once highlighted, by pointing out how easily debates on ‘national literature’ have ‘led to determinism, ethnomania, and various reactionary attitudes’ – 1971: 500). As regards the writers, the notion of a distinctive post-1960s Northern Irish poetry proved especially disturbing to poets from the preceding generation, who for various reasons will have felt excluded by (or from) it. A poet like John Montague, who had his roots in the North but had pursued his writing both in the South and abroad, seeking in fact an international validation to counter the provinciality of mid-twentieth-century Ireland, reacted to critical representations of a poetically re-energised Northern Ireland by reminding readers of his precedence, as a forerunner of themes and modes of writing that were now celebrated as new: ‘I have described myself as the missing link of Ulster poetry’ (O’Driscoll 1989: 60). For a Dublin poet like Thomas Kinsella, the sense of a generationally and regionally determined exclusion was compounded by the clash between arguments for an Ulster specificity in poetry and his own active concern with contributing to ‘healing’ Ireland’s ‘mutilated’

literary tradition. As seen above, this concern found a fundamental weapon in translation from the Irish, practised in ways that better allow readers to recognise recurrence and continuity. This was a project whose best-known realisation remains *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986), edited by Kinsella, who was also the translator of most of its many pieces rendered from the Irish – an anthology that remains to date ‘the last attempt [. . .] to cover Irish poetry as a whole’, since ‘most recent anthologies have given up the attempt to be all inclusive’ (O’Donoghue 2005: 183).

Significantly, Kinsella’s Introduction included one of the most damning pronouncements on the notion of a distinct ‘Northern poetry’: ‘The idea of such a renaissance [. . .] has acquired an aspect of official acceptance and support. But it is largely a journalistic entity’ (1986: xxx). The crucial link between the virulence of these debates, in the 1980s and early ‘90s, and the lingering issue of partition is reflected in the promptness with which territorial references emerge in pronouncements by major protagonists in the polemics. Kinsella went on to dismiss ‘a provincial Ulster poetic Renaissance addressing its work toward the British mainland and finding an identity there’ (cited in Johnston 1991: 26); Edna Longley grounded her argument for the specificity of Ulster poetry on a consciousness of the pull of three capital cities as an enabling force, ‘the tension of Belfast-Dublin-London’ (1987: 4); and Terence Brown, even while ascribing the particularity of that body of poetry to its dominant formal model, could not but represent the ‘Northern Renaissance’ as dislocation and relocation: ‘the well-made empirical lyric found in the northern counties of Ireland a [. . .] new territory in which to be rejuvenated. The Northern Renaissance was a renaissance for a particular kind of poem’ (1988: 215).¹³

The two decades that have elapsed since the height of this controversy have largely deflated it: a changed political atmosphere (more recently, the declared end of the Troubles era) has combined with the intense attention of professional and non-professional readers to entitle Northern Irish poetry as a hardly questioned object of discrete critical consideration – a critical construction, no doubt, but as such no different from any of the other constructions on which the work of criticism depends. The terms of the polemics briefly outlined above remain, nonetheless, especially cogent for this book’s concerns: as epitomised in Terence Brown’s remark, the controversy often combined an attention to a particular arrangement of and in language with a heightened sense of transit that invites recognition of the links between identity and place. Indeed, to varying degrees, each of the five poets whose translations are read in the chapters below reveal a sharp attention to the dynamics of language; as highlighted by their poems as (in some cases) by their critical prose and other forms of commentary, the attractions of an authorially deflected utterance become closely implicated with the spatial reference. The latter dimension is patent in Seamus Heaney’s recurrent interest in ‘The Sense of Place’, ‘Place and Displacement’ or *The Place of*

Writing (to cite just three titles from the bulk of his essays, also known for the critical self-commentary they frequently offer, embedded in discussions of other writers); but it is also variously present in the obliqueness of Derek Mahon's representations of places in and beyond history, and in his probing of the sources and entrenchments of sectarian conformations; in the variety of inscriptions that compound the poignancy of Michael Longley's sites of memory and mourning, alternating as heritage and nature; in the liminality (playful or otherwise) of Paul Muldoon's writing, the frontiers and indecisive territories over which his poetry, essays, libretti recurrently joke and brood; and in the palimpsestic topographies, the urban spaces erased and reinscribed with which the work of Ciaran Carson has been juxtaposing Belfast and the world.

1.3 The scope of translation

In recent years, the concept of translation has been extended to include processes and practices that go far beyond questions of interlingual transit. This tendency in fact predates the theoretical contributions resulting from the emergence of 'Translation Studies' as a characteristically porous field of academic inquiry. Early pleas for a broader understanding of 'translation' included Octavio Paz's *dictum* 'when we learn to speak, we are learning to translate' (1971),¹⁴ and George Steiner's influential work *After Babel*, which claimed, amongst other things, that 'translation is formally and pragmatically implicit in every act of communication, in the emission and reception of each and every mode of meaning' (1992: xii). Recent contributions have at times transcended the verbal communicational model to construe translation as an 'interdiscipline', or rather, as a macro-model for an indefinite range of ways of accessing and circulating information – at its most extreme, encompassing any quest for knowledge and all semiosis. Translation conferences cater for large academic and professional audiences under titles such as 'Translation (Studies): A Crossroads of Disciplines' and 'Translation and Interpreting at the Hub of Disciplines',¹⁵ a comprehensiveness that has also appealed to scholars of Irish literature, as proved by Robert Welch's belief that 'All legitimate intellectual inquiry is translation of one kind or another' (1993: xi).

However, this indefinite extension of the concept of 'translation', which becomes invested with a vocation for totality, inevitably brings with it the risk of a loss of heuristic and operative value. The vagueness of such an all-inclusive concept may prove a liability rather than an asset for critical discussion of a body of writing whose potential for *signifying* depends on recognition of the generic distinctions that structure and enable the web of its intra- and intertextual relations. This is an important *caveat* that needs to be borne in mind when attempting to derive critical insights from theoretical considerations that have shown themselves remarkably prone to random

but resounding analogies: the protean object of Translation Studies has, at different times, been described in terms that range from the somatic and physiological (e.g., sex and the circulatory system) to the commercial (e.g., the form of real-estate business known as 'time-sharing').¹⁶

The rise of Translation Studies to disciplinary prominence has also involved a certain amount of self-justification; indeed, it has retained and reproduced a discourse of legitimation that has persisted far beyond the obstacles that first prompted it. This has characteristically focused upon the subaltern position of translation in the academic world, and its narrative of disciplinary growth and emancipation remains its rhetorical trump card even when the tale is retold from positions that are no longer marginal to the academic establishment. A case in point is *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, a 1985 landmark collection of essays. Introducing the collection, editor Theo Hermans characterised 'the position occupied by Translation Studies in the study of literature [. . .] [as], at best, marginal', marked by 'barely veiled condescension' or 'neglect' (1985: 7) – despite the fact that many of the contributors were already academically and institutionally influential players in a variety of sub-domains within literary studies. Indeed, it was precisely their academic distinction and influence that lent credibility to the programmatic design announced in the title of Hermans's Introduction, 'Translation Studies and a New Paradigm'.

The centre vs periphery model, with its Foucauldian resonance (e.g., Foucault 1995: 195–228), is just one of a number of recurring notions that show Translation Studies' indebtedness to tendencies in contemporary 'theory'. At the same time, some of these notions have been applied to complex political situations like that of Northern Ireland – so often described in terms of tensions that destabilise conventional perceptions of centrality/peripherality and authenticity. The target of Hermans's rather vehement denunciation was a centre of academic power whose very logic is easily assimilated to the entities against which a non-metropolitan culture defines itself. Indeed, the rise of Translation Studies was strongly aided by the querying of 'national literatures' as self-centred and self-contained objects of study that also proved fundamental for the legitimation of comparative literary studies. This congeniality is compounded by the significant overlap between the study of national literatures and a dominantly canonical rationale, as illustrated by the resistance of traditional literary historiography to acknowledging translations as an integral part of a nationally defined literary system and hence a worthy object of study. The minor status traditionally accorded to translated works certainly reflected a sharp hierarchical distinction between 'original' and 'derivative' writing, and the concomitant opposition between the uniqueness of authorship and the secondary role of the translator. Again, such distinctions were decisively eroded by the combined effect of various strands within poststructuralist theory, such as deconstruction's exposure of the fallacy of a sense of origin,

with the Derridean insistence rather on the inevitability of 'repetition' and 'deferral' (the play of *différance*), the foundational notion of intertextuality that all writing is always already rewriting, and the much-echoed Barthesian proclamation of 'the death of the author.'¹⁷

These counter-hierarchical, countercanonical and decentring notions, which have become conceptual landmarks in contemporary literary studies since the late 1960s, were crucial for the academic legitimization of translation. They also prove critically productive for a consideration of writerly practices in a peripheral territory such as Northern Ireland, torn between allegiances that can easily polarise (politically and culturally) around London and Dublin, and which seek either to confirm such attachments or deny them by developing elective textual affinities with a literary elsewhere. Other related critical contributions may be more specific, such as those derived from the so-called 'cultural turn' that brought Translation Studies closer to the study of cultural conformations in their integrity (i.e. in their relations). As argued by influential commentators, 'cross-cultural relations [. . .] all [. . .] appear to be modes of translation'; 'the study of translation is the study of cultural interaction'.¹⁸

The currency of the 'cultural turn', and its close association with the perceived coming-of-age of Translation Studies, owe much to the insights of two scholars in particular, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere: in different ways, their work underlies the reading strategies that inform this book. Bassnett's contributions have sometimes taken the form of claims for disciplinary comprehensiveness, such as when she argued that the initial relationship of containment between comparative literature and translation studies had been reversed: 'the revised view of the translation-comparative literature position makes Translation Studies the principle discipline, with comparative literature as an important branch of that discipline' (Bassnett 1991: 136). Her triumphant assertion, in 1996, that 'there has never been a better time to study translations' (Bassnett 1996: 22) not only acknowledged the success of the discipline (arguably also a form of critical enablement, to the extent that it further encourages translation criticism), but also implicitly recognised that the time had passed when translation could be plaintively described as the underdog of the academic world. As for Lefevere, his vast influence¹⁹ has centred upon a cluster of concepts that he proposed or fostered and which have enjoyed increasing currency. These include an insistence on translation as one of various forms of 'rewriting'; a development of the notion of 'manipulation', highlighting the affinities between translation and canon formation; and, above all, the notion of 'refraction', an optical metaphor that Lefevere applies to a process of semantic and rhetorical inflection. This involves a combination of 'misunderstandings and misconceptions' that paradoxically extend the consequences of any text when it is rewritten and thus made to cross the spectrum of cultural features and expectations that characterises the target system – that is, the context

within which the translated text 'arrives' and is assimilated (Lefevere 1985, 1992, 2004).

Lefevere equates refraction with all the textual dynamics, crucially including processes of transformative assimilation, on which the life of a literary culture depends: 'refractions are what keeps a literary system going' (Lefevere 2004: 252). It is a broad concept, which refers not only to what happens in translation, but also to the reception of 'criticism [. . .], commentary, historiography' and other forms of cross-cultural reading and rewriting (241). This makes refraction a particularly useful concept for considering the inter- and intratextual practices of writers who are also critics and (under their own name, or through translation) practitioners of various genres. Further, an awareness of the complementary relations that take place within the generic range of those writers also contributes to an understanding of the dimension of compromise in the processes of refraction, and of the constraints that define the target system. Of particular relevance to the concerns of this book, in view of the tensions that have beset Northern Irish culture throughout most of its recent history, is Lefevere's alertness to the complex factors that determine and shape the assumption of any translated writer into a given culture: 'The degree to which the foreign writer is accepted into the native system will [. . .] be determined by the need that native system has of him in a certain phase of its evolution' (Lefevere 2004: 243).

This sharp sense of necessity and circumstance, foregrounded by Lefevere's conceptual and terminological emphases (e.g., 'the native system', 'acceptance'), is characteristic of a target-culture-oriented understanding of translation. Indeed, the passages just quoted highlight Lefevere's culturalist contribution to 'descriptive translation studies', the theoretical framework that has come to prevail within the discipline since the 1980s. Deriving its name and some of its founding notions from groundbreaking work by Gideon Toury and Itamar Even-Zohar, the 'descriptive' orientation rather obviously seeks its defining antithesis in the *prescriptive* concerns that characterised earlier approaches to translation, and it is crucially based on a view of translation as indissociable from other forms of textual production and relations within 'the literary polysystem'.²⁰ A key principle of descriptive translation studies (one which this book endorses and critically pursues) is that translations are 'facts of the target system' (Toury 1985: 19), versions that in this case come to integrate the poetic work of their authors and hence the literary (poly)system within which they write and publish, in the full variety of its literary and cultural relations.

This concentration on the target system has a specific methodological implication: it deflects one's reading from a concern with matching target text against source text, from predicating one's critical work on expectations of strict equivalence – and judging it accordingly. And this is also a case in which my methodological attitude, itself a reflection of broader critical and intellectual mores, converges with strategies that prevailed at the

genesis of the texts in question. Indeed only a few of the poet-translators considered here are thoroughly knowledgeable in what are (nominally) the source languages of the texts they render – be they Classical Greek, Latin, medieval Italian, or modern languages. As they usually acknowledge themselves, they often produce their versions aided by other translations, in their own or a third language; in some cases it is explicitly conceded that theirs was a strictly intralingual translation, a literary English rendering of earlier English versions (often of an academic type).

This practice, whose currency on the literary scene, Irish or otherwise, has often been critically noted – with varying degrees of (dis)approval²¹ – lends a sharper edge to the *dictum* that translations are ‘facts of the target culture’. Realising that a significant part of the work of the Northern Irish poet-translators consists of intra-lingual versions in fact adds to the complexity of the relational reading to be carried out. Since the actual source texts for such intralingual renderings are earlier English versions, these (the translations that have materialised the tradition of bringing the texts in question over into English) join the poems that the poet-translators publish under their own names on a grid of texts to which their translations creatively relate *in the target language*. As for the *primary* source texts (those with which the relation is *interlingual*), they certainly retain their relational relevance, but paradoxically relegated to a *secondary* order, both because of the indirectness of their appropriation and the prevalent focus on the target system proper to a descriptivist programme. Should one feel outraged by an assessment of translations that focuses on same-language relations, one can always derive some comfort from the realisation that this somehow approximates (albeit from a radically different perspective on authorship and the canon) the conditions of reception in many different periods. That is to say, for generations of readers, the ‘classics’ (Ancient or Modern) they cherished were scarcely perceived as translations: in their cultural experience, the ‘classics’ were always already in the readers’ mother tongue (cf. Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 9).

A critical attitude predicated on effacing traditional distinctions between ‘original’ and ‘derivative’ texts and on the understanding that poets’ translations are to be read on a par with their ‘own’ poems, may, however, clash to some extent with other notions that have recently enjoyed substantial critical favour. A case in point is the expectation that, out of respect for the cultural difference of the translated text, its condition *as a translation* be duly signalled by the translator; this also involves decrying the ‘domestication’ of texts rewritten in such a way that they read as if they originated in the target language. Pleas on behalf of ‘foreignising’ translation, as put forward by Lawrence Venuti from the early 1990s, are largely a retrieval and adaptation to the present-day ethics and politics of alterity of a discussion that has long marked the history of translation theory (a discussion that probably had its

most characteristic presentation in Friedrich Schleiermacher's 1813 essay 'On the Different Methods of Translating'): whether the translator should aim to offer the reader an experience of familiarity or strangeness.²² Venuti's quarrel with translations that are predicated on the translators' self-effacement and 'invisibility' (creating the illusion of a 'transparent' appropriation, cancelling the text's otherness), and his endorsement rather of strategies that highlight the translators' intervention, may at first reading seem congenial to the rewritings carried out by highly *visible* writers (whose names are often more prominent on the books' covers than those of the original authors). But his critically influential argument on behalf of 'foreignizing translation [which] seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation', countering its drive to 'bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar' (Venuti 1995: 18), will appear to be irremediably at odds with versions that call attention to themselves precisely by starkly domesticating the appropriated texts in the translators' recognisable voice. The acts of textual and cultural appropriation carried out by contemporary Northern Irish poet-translators inscribe the texts with a diction and a set of meanings that they could only have by originating in the target culture.

And yet these appropriations are prominently *not* the gratification of mainstream taste, the accommodation to sameness that Venuti associates with domesticating strategies. On the contrary, making Sophocles, Dante or indeed modern canonical authors (writing in modern languages) sound like Northern Irish writers confronting the predicament of their time and place in their characteristic diction is a counter-hegemonic gesture, often a form of 'radical witness' (to borrow Seamus Heaney's phrase – Heaney 1988: xix). This in fact shows that, in order to make critical sense of the textual body considered in this book, Venuti's domesticating vs foreignising model is bound to prove inadequate – mostly because of the cultural standpoint that determined its founding assumptions. Indeed, Venuti's denunciation of a politics of translation that erases difference and normalises texts reflects the insider's experience – and ultimate resentment – of a majority culture, with its gravitational pull, its intractable self-confidence, a culture that (in its mainstream) is little used to minding linguistic diversity and even less to inquiring into the texts and representations of alien cultures and literatures: in short, features that Venuti identifies as determining most translation and publishing policies in contemporary America (Venuti 1995; Venuti 1998). Writing in English, Northern Irish poets partake of the global centrality of an Anglophone literary culture – while on the other hand the place of their formative experience, persistently the dominant referential territory of their writing (even when no longer of their abode), carries a ballast of conflict, entrenchment, divergent politics of language, and uncertainties regarding identity that sets them firmly on the outside of that centripetal and self-confident culture (even when they enjoy global fame).

1.4 Culture of shadows

The territory that predominantly grounds these poets' imagination, haunted by the spectres of recent and remote violence, often resisting attempts to shed light on sensitive areas of history and collective memory, is therefore home to a 'culture of shadows' (to adapt a notion that has been coined for translation history).²³ And it is surely ironical that a culture that was subject to various oppressions, despite having achieved a visibility rarely granted to other oppressed communities, should bear so many conspicuous examples of translations of culturally central texts carried out in such a way that they sharply bring out the shadows of the target culture.²⁴ This has also involved regular appropriations of texts that represent descents to the realm of the dead and ghostly revisitations: it is hardly by chance that the text which will better allow us to interconnect our reading of the first and last of the poet-translators studied in this book, Heaney and Carson, is Dante's *Inferno*. Memorable tableaux of a world of shadows are thus regularly refigured through the 'afterlife' of texts (to borrow Benjamin's felicitous phrase – Benjamin [1923] 1999: *passim*).

Contemporary Irish poetry, taken within its boundaries – before one even considers the additional set of relations, the other voices and 'shadows' that are brought into it by translation – arguably comes across as an already haunted setting. The mutual awareness that its current protagonists have shown is enriched by a no lesser awareness of ghostly presences, those of renowned and influential literary predecessors. Such awareness helps account for the totemic value that a term like 'tradition' has long acquired in Irish critical discourse; and, insofar as it can foster a sense of empowerment, inhibition, or both, it has led to suggestions that a Harold Bloomian notion of influence might find its 'natural' laboratory in a literary scene so strongly marked by that play of desired and spurned parental and filial relationships which has tended to organise around Yeats and Joyce as alternative father-figures.²⁵ Diagnoses of a complex sense of lineage have more often been produced with regard to the mid-twentieth-century writers, whose chronological proximity to those forebears enhanced such complex responses; but the post-1960s poets manifest, in their various ways, a sharp and indeed broader awareness of those they write *after* – in the potentially triple sense of posterity, derivation, and minority. Practitioners of the lyric might reasonably be expected to relate more promptly, be it in appreciative or reactive ways, to Yeats, as the most canonical exponent of the genre in the tradition; but contemporary Irish poetry also contains abundant examples of attempts to exorcise his shadow by deliberately summoning an alternative precursor. This has often been Joyce – a case of the forebear's prevalent genre proving less important than cultural congeniality;²⁶ if Yeats's notorious championing of the Protestant Ascendancy, and his generally outrageous politics, have allowed him to be construed (in the

words of Thomas Kinsella) as standing for 'the Irish tradition as broken', Joyce's subversiveness, and his scepticism regarding nationalist shibboleths (including the matter of the Irish language), have not prevented recognition of his ability to epitomise defining features of the Irish Catholic mindset. This, together with the more libertarian traits of his ethics and politics, has led to Joyce being hailed as standing for the tradition 'as healed – or healing – from its mutilation' (Kinsella 1967: 14), or indeed as 'a great democrat of literature' (Montague 1982: 52). In broader terms, his fundamental concern with the wealth and plurality of language(s), a defining trait (semantic as much as formal) of his legacy for contemporary writing, combines with his personal and literary history of exile and cosmopolitan mobility to ensure his centrality with regard to the present study's concerns.

Kinsella's and Montague's pronouncements, several decades ago, on matters of tradition and continuity can also remind us that, for more recent poets, the search for an enabling forebear has often prompted affinities with literary figures of the intervening generation, either because such mediating figures proved able to exorcise Yeats, or to assimilate and inflect his voice so as to make it an empowering force for the present-day poet. As regards the Northern Irish poets whose careers began in the late 1960s or later, this mediating role began by being ascribed to mid-twentieth-century figures whose values, outlook and referential scope arguably correspond to the dominant cultural traditions in the community. For a poet like Seamus Heaney, the appointed mediator was Patrick Kavanagh, through his vindication of localism and an ordinary, non-idyllic, non-mythologised rurality as a worthy referential domain for poetry; for those like Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, originating in distinct urban and Protestant backgrounds, the sceptical, brooding Louis MacNeice, with his *odi atque amo* stance towards Ireland, and his cosmopolitan ballast of represented experience.

Such (s)elective affinities can also partly be accounted for by the formative consequence of the 'well-made lyric', to which (in Terence Brown's already mentioned thesis) these poets are joint heirs – since this particular allegiance arguably restricts the range of their assimilation of the lessons of Anglo-American Modernism, recognised at their most obvious in a formal transgressiveness that is hardly characteristic of their verse. But these all too neat distinctions and lines of descent, primarily applied to the work of this generation, are hardly continued in the more recent developments that have marked both their work and that of more recent poets. The closeness between the inflection in Heaney's work from the late 1980s and the changed emphasis in his critical celebration of Kavanagh (from rural champion of the local muse, with a strong element of socio-historical awareness, to unconstrained lyric proclaimer of a sense of wonder²⁷) is a revealing instance of altered congenialities. Likewise, Mahon's and Longley's acknowledgements of MacNeice's example, firmly established in their contributions of several

decades to restoring MacNeice (otherwise read as an 'English' poet) to his Northern Irish birthright,²⁸ has evolved in its core emphases, accompanying the extension of the imaginative scope and literary affinities of 'MacNeice's spiritual sons' (Dawe 1995: 161). This tendency for a widening of the range of possible models, also increasingly plurilingual and pluricultural, becomes even more marked in the work of Paul Muldoon and Ciaran Carson – both, in their different ways, defined by the appeal of balancing an often playful gallery of international references against the perplexities posed by Ireland's languages and cultures.

This rich framework of allegiances and cross-influences includes but also supersedes the dynamics of descent suggested by such notions as the poet's assumption or rejection of 'the burden of the past', or the power struggle between 'strong precursors' and 'latecomers' (to cite two of the most famous pronouncements on the tense handing down of poetic legacies).²⁹ On the contemporary poetic scene of Northern Ireland, authorial awareness of contemporaries or potential successors is possibly as important as the concern with predecessors: 'anxieties of succession' (to borrow Edna Longley's phrase – 1996) vie with 'anxieties of influence' for predominance in the power dynamics that shape the tradition. The textual forms that evince this unusual degree of mutual awareness, ranging from tribute to parody, include dedications (of books or single poems), explicit or covert allusion, literal or truncated quotation, and verse letters.³⁰ This practice of writing *to* and *about* one another, within a relatively small though high-profile literary scene, has its varying degrees of irony and indirection extended when a number of figures on that scene bring in the additional mediations that translation involves – complicating even further the perception of who (and in what tone) writes *after* whom.

Insistence on this 'after' formula, with its various and already mentioned implications, also reminds us of how specious it would be to pretend that all protagonists on this scene enjoy identical status and authority, as if a complex construction of authorship and mutual acknowledgment inevitably fostered a democracy of literary recognition. The effects of canonicity can be mitigated by writerly generosity (of which several of the poets in question have often given unmistakable signs), but they are nonetheless patent in the intensity and manner with which the poets' mutual awareness is manifested. Further, the perplexities of canon construction can contribute strongly to the distinctiveness of poetic voices; literary reputations are often as important, or more so, than the poets' cultural origins (Catholic or Protestant) for determining a difference in poetics – whether we are considering their 'original' writing or their translations. And exacerbating the distinctiveness of one's writing can prove decisive for evading the shadow of a contemporary who has risen to global fame. The place held by Seamus Heaney in the grid of inter-authorial relationships between contemporary Northern Irish poets is in many ways exceptional. Strictly a contemporary of Longley and

Mahon, and only a few years older than Carson and Muldoon, the national and international impact of his work have led to a prominence that easily becomes analogous (in the reactions that it prompts) to precedence.³¹ In the face of chronology, Heaney therefore often seems to emerge, in textual responses to his presence in the tradition, as a predecessor *after* and *against* whom one writes: the latter preposition implies in this case contrast rather than antagonism, involving an assertive and self-defining relation towards a canonical reference; and the impulse towards this *counterwriting* can also be gratified in an indirect and mediated way, through translation of other canonical authors whose voices are pitted against that of the major contemporary *qua* predecessor.

An acute consciousness of Heaney's presence on the part of other contemporary Irish poets is matched by recurrent manifestations of Heaney's own awareness of his canonical status, and the privileges and demands that it involves. This awareness includes a backward look and a sense of the contemporary: as regards the former, some of the attention that this book devotes to Heaney's assumption of 'the burden of the past' will highlight the extent to which his work's evolving emphases can be gauged by inflections in his relation to Yeats. It is as if the condition of unofficial laureate, imposed on Heaney as early as the mid-1970s (the moment when Robert Lowell dubbed him 'the best Irish poet since Yeats'³²), had concentrated on him the responsibility of connecting his generation to the past – a responsibility enhanced by the painful consciousness of discontinuity that has beset the Irish tradition. The tendency for each of Seamus Heaney's utterances to be followed by a spate of critical views has not excluded his options as a translator: his choice of texts, his strategies for rendering them, and what they reveal of the poet's stance on life, history, politics. And, in general, Heaney's consciousness of himself as a writer, of the trajectory of his work, and of the persistent attention that he has obtained, have all regularly become an object of his own poetry. It is precisely this alertness to constant scrutiny that allows for an awareness of predecessors to be balanced against an awareness of contemporaries and successors, a sharp sense that he shares the poetic scene with a variety of others whose writing (and translations) show the marks of his canonical presence.

This authorial consciousness of self and others has strongly determined the content and methods adopted in the chapters that follow. It also largely accounts for the decision to focus on five poet-translators from Northern Ireland whose work is a privileged textual territory for recognising the forms taken by mutual poetic awareness. It is certainly ironical that several of these practitioners of textual dislocations, while retaining an often emphatic interest in the locations of their personal origins, have left Northern Ireland to live elsewhere; however, as John Goodby argues, 'residential' definitions of literary identity can hardly be sustained – and even less so in a tradition that has thrived on the achievements of notable exiles.³³

Opting out of a comprehensive survey inevitably involves exclusions; but the sharper critical perspectives afforded by a cohesive object should contribute to a clearer understanding of the broader poetic scene. Moreover, this concern with cohesion has to be balanced against the arguments for discreteness and evolution that are abundantly offered by the respective *oeuvres* of Heaney, Mahon, Longley, Muldoon and Carson: those aspects of their writing that emerge as both distinctive and unstable, and thus help define a ground for critical discrimination, will therefore receive as much attention in this study as the recurrent and shared dimensions of their poetics. This will certainly bear on their options as translators.

This Introduction has offered a preliminary argument for the imbrication of original writing and translations as a specificity of contemporary Northern Irish poetry; the chapters below, however, will also inquire into the variety and difference of the individual textual appropriations that help shape that poetic corpus. Different poet-translators are bound to make different choices at different stages in their respective careers, and the weight that translation acquires in the economy of their writing will likewise differ. Beyond such recognition, this study will probe into the extension of the poetic range, in diction as in representation, afforded by the various translational practices to be considered. The daring and ingenuity of an appropriation, by which a poet-translator makes another's utterance his/her own, is certainly one of the attractions of poetry translation; but it is strongly rivalled by the gratifications brought by difference, the awareness of how plural imagination and diction can be. This alertness to translation as a source of variety, a practice that sets up a tension between two distinctive voices to generate new meaning potential (rather than more of the same), has strongly determined the choice of authors and texts explored in the ensuing chapters.

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