View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by OpenEdition

Études irlandaises

35-2 | 2010
Traduction : pratique et poétique

“Through My Dream”: Trevor Joyce’s Translations

John Goodby

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/2012
DOI: 10.4000/etudesirlandaises.2012
ISSN: 2259-8863

Publisher
Presses universitaires de Rennes

Printed version
Date of publication: 30 December 2010
Number of pages: 149-164
ISBN: 978-2-7535-1246-7
ISSN: 0183-973X

Electronic reference
John Goodby, « “Through My Dream”: Trevor Joyce’s Translations », *Études irlandaises* [Online], 35-2 | 2010, Online since 30 December 2012, connection on 05 May 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/2012 ; DOI : 10.4000/etudesirlandaises.2012

This text was automatically generated on 5 May 2019.

© Presses universitaires de Rennes

"Through My Dream": Trevor Joyce's Translations

John Goodby

1 Translation is a condition of being for anglophone Irish poetry; for over two hundred years Irish poets have been drawn to translation, both internal and external; internally, from the Irish language, in the attempt to establish a relationship with the broken past; externally, from other languages, in order to circumvent English hegemony and a marginal geographical location. But while there is a wide range in the motives (and linguistic abilities) behind translation, most poets translate in the manner of their own original work, which is that of most Irish poetry: namely, in the voice of a singular, coherent lyric "I", empirically grounded, expressing itself in language which is largely transparent. Stylistic liberties may be taken by this self, but its integrity is never in doubt. Translation studies calls this "naturalised" or "domesticated" translation; the source text is recreated in the target language so that it reads as if it had been written by a native speaker, and with a fluency which elides its translated status[1]. As against this, however, there is the "literal" or "foreignizing" approach to translation, which foregrounds the otherness of the source text by, for example, carrying non-idiomatic syntactical structures and lexis across into the target language[2].

2 This kind of translation is far rarer, and is associated with avant-garde poetry, which was until recently largely marginalised by mainstream poetic discourse. Nevertheless, the "foreignizing" mode is the one in which Irish poetry translation has had some of its most distinctive successes, including as it does Brian Coffey's inventive rendering of Mallarmé's « *Un Coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard*/Dice Thrown Never Will Annul Chance » (1965) and the work of the greatest translator of the nineteenth century, James Clarence Mangan (who invented the "originals" of some of his "translations"). As David Lloyd has argued, Mangan's translations are "proto-Modernist", and translation, given a keener edge by the translated Irish condition, is one reason for the strength of Irish Modernism. Translation is central to Modernist poetics more generally, of course[3]. For Ezra Pound, its chief practitioner, it was not so much a vehicle for personal expression as

a way of constructing a transcultural, timeless “tradition”; and, insofar as this was Pound’s chief aim as a writer, it was an integral part of his own poetic practice, haunting all his “original” work.

3 Pound’s example informs the translations of the 1930s Irish Modernist poets, one of whom, Samuel Beckett, has been, with Mangan, a major influence on the leading contemporary Irish neo-modernist poet, Trevor Joyce, whose poetic evolution has also been complexly bound up with translation activity[4]. In what follows I will discuss the role of translation in Joyce’s work, drawing on the distinction between “domesticating” and “foreignising” forms. I begin with his version of the Middle Irish *Buile Suibhne/The Songs of Sweeny Peregrine: A Working of the Corrupt Irish text* (1976), which I see as a source for his mature practice as a poet. This is first apparent in his collection *stone floods* (1995), which uses translated Irish, Chinese, and Japanese material. I will then examine Joyce’s use of translated folk materials in *Trem Neul/Across Your Dream* (1999), and his return to Irish translation in *What’s in Store* (2007) and *Courts of Air and Earth* (2008), as well as Central European folk-song in the first of these. Finally I discuss the unpublished work *Rome’s Wreck* (written 2009), in which Joyce translates from one form of English into another.

Buile Suibhne/The Songs of Sweeny Peregrine

4 Joyce’s own earliest poems, collected in *Pentahedron* (1972), are dense lyrics owing something to a reading of Trakl and Vallejo, and perhaps to unpublished early translations of Celan; they are set in an inner-city Dublin of constraining walls, river, hoardings, monuments, a milieu replete with death and decay, and articulate an anxiety concerning the ability of language to represent external reality so profound that it became a dead-end. In an essay of 1997, Joyce partly explained his writer’s block and publication hiatus (which also had to do with personal circumstances and a climate hostile to experiment) by pointing out the similarities between his early poems and mainstream Irish “poetry of expression”. This poetry, he argued, suffered from the problems of “representing” the “reality” of twentieth century history, one exacerbated in modern times by the electronic media overload of images of suffering which demanded an “outraged response, but le[ft] that response... without possibility of external effect”. Mainstream poetry tended to reflect this anguished yet passive relationship, able to respond only by guiltily nudging its familiar images of beauty towards “the bulk dead”. It was therefore condemned merely to “[state] forcibly the horror of its own privileged futility”, to risk arrogating suffering to the individual lyric ego, while offering only an archaic beauty as compensation. Thus, to believe that “language and poetic form are ideally neutral vessels into which the poetic sense may be poured, shuttles to bear towards the reader the burden of an already formed meaning” was to reject invention and resistance, and succumb to the dominant discourses of the corporate, government and military spheres[5]. The difficulty of overcoming the impasse created by these dilemmas may be gauged from the twenty-three year gap between Pentahedron and stone floods.

5 However, *Sweeny Peregrine*, the composition of which overlapped with that of the lyrics of *Pentahedron*, shows Joyce discovering poetic strategies which were to eventually him lead out of this dead-end. The *Buile Suibhne* describes the fate of Sweeny, king of Dal Ariadha; insulting Saint Ronan, he is cursed and becomes a gealt, or bird-man, living in woods and wild places, unable to re-establish social or familial bonds, until he is finally killed by a

swineherd. The work, in prose interspersed with lyrics, contains several dramatic episodes, although much of its appeal lies in its evocation of the harsh yet beautiful natural world in which Sweeny is forced to subsist. Joyce's version can be usefully contrasted with Seamus Heaney's better-known *Sweeney Astray* (1983), in order to explain its significance for his later work. First, unlike Heaney, Joyce eschews many of the opportunities the original affords for drama. Second, whereas Heaney views Sweeny romantically, as "a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance", Joyce manages to distance Sweeny's sufferings[6]. Joyce's subtitle, "*A Working of the Corrupt Irish Text*" indicates the manner in which he does so; namely, by foregrounding the provisionality of his version, and highlighting the irresolveable cruxes, gaps, and interpolations of the original. Joyce treats these as a kind of proto-modernist disjunctiveness, expressive in a manner beyond that of an individual subjectivity – "[the lacunae] have at least the virtue of reinforcing the sense of Sweeny's stress and distress", he notes. Some verse from the original becomes prose in Joyce's version, while some prose mutates to verse. More, in his most radical break with the original, he heightens this quality by separating the prose and Sweeny's lyrics into two sections, one of prose narrative the second a suite of twenty-two lyrics, dropping some material in the original entirely. The main effect is to make the verse a first-person lament by Sweeny, while the prose purports to be an external and objective account.

6 Following one of Joyce's favourite authors of the time, Flann O'Brien (whose version of the *Buile Suibhne* appears in At *Swim-Two-Birds*), the prose section problematises the narrative in postmodern fashion; for example, Sweeny tells the Man of the Woods his life story, up to and including his own death, "as it is set down hereinafter" – that is, Sweeny foresees and narrates his own fate to a character who is just about to die[7]. Who, then. is telling the tale we are reading? Even more disorienting is the retrospective moment, at the end of the prose section, when we learn that "it is uncertain" how far the tale's scribe, Moling, might have "emend[ed] [this] strange and confused history, and how far later "editors and critics [may] have conspired with him", asking "May we, then, conclude just this: that, after all, we have not here these words which Sweeny, between flight and fall, spoke to the Man of the Wood?" (fd, 16) The resultant narrative seems to exist in a limbo between some originary, pure ur-text, and this denial. Joyce's lyrics convey Sweeny's pain and the starkly beautiful landscape as effectively as Heaney does:

IX
In summertime the blue-grey herons stand
rigid above sharp waters.
In wintertime the wolfpacks
thread the snow-glens with their spoor,
and with their moaning they thread the long wind.
I hear their snow-blurred howling
as I cross the iron lakes
and crack the frost from my beard.
(fd, 25)

7 But while they are clearly in Sweeny's voice, coming after the prose they also concentrate the work's disjunctive effects: "the life God gave/seems somehow dislocated" (fd, 17), as the first poem notes. Since we are told that this is a re-telling of material already worked over, of twice-told, uncertain status, Sweeny's voice is never grounded in any romantic, lyric way[8]. The language is often ironically at odds with Sweeny's madness, and he traverses a mutable landscape, in which place names do not signal understanding or belonging, but alienation and loss. Although we relish its beauty, landscape is not

presented as compensation for Sweeny's plight, as in Heaney; indeed, it intensifies it. The environment penetrates Sweeny, and he is taken over by, rather than undertaking, his exile, "lacerat[ed]", "lanc[ed]", becoming "a cave of pain" (fd, 22, 31). His plight resembles that of the passive lyric "I" of *Pentahedron*, which can neither express its selfhood or map the object world adequately in language. However, the form of the translation, with its persona, destabilised and double narrative, and emphasis on emendation, distances the guilt attached to poetry's aestheticising aspect[9]. Moreover, the bicameral structure was one Joyce would use again to similar effect – in Syzygy (1998), Trem Neul (1999), and elsewhere. In his note to the poem, he describes the relationship between his version and the original by applying to it James Mangan's description of his own inventive translations as "the antithesis of plagiarism" (fd, 236): in the "unoriginality" of translation lay the genuine originality of escape from the lyric ego, a potential "route out of the dilemmas of Pentahedron" as Nate Dorward puts it, "via a modernist poetics of translation[10]".

Stone floods

8 Yet it would be more accurate to speak not of one, but two Poundian "models" of translation at work in Sweeny. Its back-cover blurb claims: "The model for this exciting and pioneering version is not Synge or Hyde but the Pound of *Cathay* and The Seafarer[11]". This is the translation model Pound devised for trying to realise the past within the present by creating the impression of unmediated rapport with the dead, and both "The Seafarer", and *Cathay*, in which Pound merges his own voice with that of Li Po, are good examples. Revolutionary in its time, however, this model has now become the standard domesticating translation strategy for mainstream poets. But Pound also used a more radical, and in many ways antithetical, translation model. In Canto 1, *The Odyssey* is approached through the medium of Andreas Divus" translation of Homer – Pound translating a translation – signalling the fact that a translation is always already mediated by other texts, is always in some sense a betrayal of its original. It is an approach which, being unavoidably "foreignizing", critiques the notion of direct "rapport" or presence.

9 *Sweeny Peregrine* clearly resembles the *Cathay* model in its lyric second section, but its prose section is Poundian in the alternative sense. The dialectical tension between the two modes forestalls complete identification with Sweeny, and some of the problems Joyce had with the lyric "I" in *Pentahedron*. However, the potential of this "working" for his own poetry were not immediately apparent to him. However, some intuition of it may be discerned in the way that, after 1976, Joyce pursued what can be described as a Poundian course of study in Japanese and Chinese poetry and philosophy, coming to an understanding of the cultural counterweight they represented to eurocentricity and Western binary modes of thinking. Unlike Pound, however, Joyce never uses translation to pass ironic judgement on the present: nor does he succumb to linguistic idealism concerning the ideogram, or the belief that China offered a desirable social model[12].

10 *stone floods* offers a lyric mode which combines the presencing and distancing aspects of these two kinds of translation. The title indicates paradoxical states in which what is fixed and solid becomes fluid; it announces the book's themes of impermeability and porousness, closure and openness, fixity and movement, transgression and control, a concern with purity, dirt and waste, with boundaries and frames. The cover photograph displays a photograph of part of the famous buried terracotta army of Qin Shi Huang Di,

the First Emperor of China. It shows, startlingly, the still half-excavated life-size figures apparently borne along in a river of rock, the effect of rock-as-fluid being to undermine the qualities usually associated with both stone and water[13]. The poems within probe the same paradoxical condition, with translation in the broadest sense playing a central role. Deserts and beaches figure heavily, because sand – a stony substance which flows – embodies the "stone floods" paradox. The themes of these poems stemmed from Joyce's own thinking through of his poetic dilemmas and some, such as "The Opening" (a "threshold" poem), were written as early as 1983, to be followed by "sand" poems such as "The Turlough" and "Strands". But the discovery of Beckett's poetry in 1991-1992, and especially his "*je suis ce cours de sable qui glisse*", which brings together several of these paradoxical conditions, or themes, acted as a confirmation and a validation for work in this vein[14]. This was not simply a question of content: Beckett's work also makes striking structural use of the doubling and parallelism found in many of the stone floods poems. Sand, of course, is the principal ingredient of that ambiguous solid-liquid substance, glass, while its silicon is also used to capture another kind of flow, that of information, in the silicon chip. In this regard it should be noted that Joyce had been fascinated by information technology since taking a job in the computer section of a Dublin cigarette manufacturer in the mid-1970s; on moving to Cork in 1984, he worked for Apple. References to "circuits and gates" in "The Turlough", or to software testing in "Golden Master", flagged up the language of Joyce's daily grind as a Business Systems Analyst for them, but were also part of a Frankfurt School-informed critique of the way in which electronic media was increasingly shaping the contemporary world.

11 Joyce's intention was to expunge or twist conventional narrative in many of these poems, placing the burden of conveying temporal change instead on repetition, either incremental or with calculated variation. "My models for this", he has noted, "were in the refrain structures of folk-song, often mediated through the likes of Yeats or Lorca, and in the interplay of stasis and movement in Chinese parallel verse[15]". Stylistically, stone floods "translates" the fixities of *Pentahedron* into forms which, while repetitive, can be made to embody change – stone floods – overcoming its aesthetic impasse. Thus, while these lyrics often seem intensely personal, they are at the same time non-confessional; they possess a "translationese" quality which hovers somewhere between the verbal densities of, say, Pound or Basil Bunting, Chinese poetry, and folk lyrics. In many, Joyce writes in English as though it is Chinese, without connective particles, using a vocabulary, word-division and minimal punctuation which makes syntax ambiguous, as in "Lines in Fall", which "take on the voice of the first two Autumn Meditations by Meng Jiao (751-814)" (fd, 237):

> Bag of bones cant lie down
> to night
> timbers settling
> crack them up right
> under Orrery Hill ...
> (fd, 103)

12 Here, for example, the "Bag of bones" can't "lie down tonight" (that is, can't get to sleep, or has nowhere to sleep) and/or, more existentially, refuses to succumb "to night", or "night timbers" – the forest of the night – in the sense of accepting "night" (as oblivion), or wishes to avoid nightmares. There is a similar play between the antithetical pairs "settling/crack" and "up right/under" which multiplies meaning depending on how the reader understands the subjects and objects of the verbs, or what the verb is; "crack", for

example, is intransitive with respect to "timbers" for example and, simultaneously, transitively with respect to "them". And who are "them"; the "timbers", or the "bones" of the first line? This kind of fruitful doubleness leads in "The Turlough", towards a modified version of the Japanese renga, in which each verse takes its cue from the one preceding it, usually written by a collaborator, and reflects back on that verse, changing its meaning. Originally renga took its form from the movement of the seasons and the hours in the day; like the turlough itself, which is a limestone lake prone to flash-flooding, it is a body in a perpetual state of change, a poem defined by Octavio Paz as one "which effaces itself as it is written, a path which is wiped out and has no desire to lead anywhere. Nothing awaits us at its end; there is no end any more than there is a beginning: all is movement[16]". Such open-endedness and interconnection are particularly appropriate to Joyce's desire at this point to find a poetic strategy capable of sustaining the seemingly incommensurable complexities of word and world, of undermining linear narrative, and he developed it further in the poem "Chimaera", which actually uses the multiple voices of renga proper.

Trem Neul

13 The poems of stone floods are recognizably in traditional free verse lyric forms, despite the radical disruption of narrative through parataxis, condensation, and Chimaera's limited collaging of texts. In its wake Joyce felt dissatisfaction that these forms did not sufficiently register the "flow" of information in the modern world. As he put it: "I was forced to recognize ... [with stone floods], that the 'lyric' mode ... I practiced was quite as prone to exclude the incoherent world as was the mannered narrative I so distrusted. I had also encountered [John] Cage for second time, and with more understanding of how the play of ambient noise across the receptivity of his spaces might circumvent those exclusions and admit what might otherwise not be acknowledged[17]." In a series of poems written soon after stone floods, Joyce attempted, by the use of aleatory sampling and collage techniques to break up the unitary "finish" of his lyric voice, devising forms in which impurity, in the sense of meanings which Joyce himself could not wholly control, could enter his poetry. Several intercut the texts of others – Tom Raworth, Randolph Healy, Michael Smith – with Joyce's own, and can be read in more than one way. Others use a variety of external structures, such as the shamanic "Summons of the Soul" in the ancient Chinese The Songs of the South, in "Data Shadows", or a palindromic Medieval musical form, the cancrizan, in the more complex Syzygy (1998). In each case, Joyce tries to create a form in which unforeseen effects can occur within more or less rigorous imposed procedures.

14 *Trem Neul* (1999) (Irish for "through my dream") is no exception to this trend. It is a longish, complex collage work in which Joyce finds new ways of using the concept of translation. The poem is bicameral, like Sweeny, but in two columns down each page: on the left hand side a column of prose, on the right a column of free verse. J. C. C. Mays has claimed that the two narratives these present "can be read in two ways simultaneously, downward or upward[18]". In practice this is difficult, since both columns have their own punctuation schemes and do not encourage "reading across" the gap between them. However, his claim that while the left-hand column is "peopled with named characters who... inhabit a western part (of Ireland?) [and whose] sources are presented in their original form... undigested", while the right-hand column presents people who "speak...

in what seems to be an eastern (Chinese?) landscape", is a suggestive one. Is Joyce here obliquely aligning his two main translation sources? Both narratives splice together snippets from a host of texts, many of them translations – by R. Luria, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Alain Prochiantz among others – as Joyce constructs what he has, perhaps with tongue in cheek, called "an extended auto-biography in prose and verse from which everything personal has been excluded, and whose spaces instead are crowded with the memories and apprehensions of others[19]".

15 Sections of the right-hand column read as if they were excerpted from a Teach-Yourself language book, or were being addressed to someone who had just learnt the basics of a language ("What will be the issue/of this?/What will they do / in this matter?/Had we been early/we should have/arrived/by this time.") (fd, 194). The narratives occasionally touch, glancingly, but shed no consistent light upon each other; they exist separately, although both concern memory and forgetting, loss, change, preservation and destruction. Joyce has argued that his work is "in part, an attempt to recoup part of the history of my world from what Beckett terms 'the uniform memory of intelligence' – that is, to test the ways in which narratives construct plausibility, become discourses, and this because of 'the dominance of contending master-narratives in the interpretation of the Irish past and...my present world[20]'". Yet a major source is familial: Patrick Weston Joyce (1827-1914), the nineteenth century translator from Irish and author of Irish *Names of Places* and numerous works on Irish history, folklore and music, and a great-uncle of Trevor Joyce. A brief memoir by Joyce in the Catholic Book Bulletin supplies the work's primary left-hand column narrative, that involving the only named figure in the piece; this concerns a fiddler named Ned Goggin, who was caught in a snowstorm in the winter of 1838, and forced to seek shelter in P.W. Joyce's home. He heard Goggin perform "The Tuning of the Colours", but forgot the tune until many years later when the memory passed through him, "trem neul, as the song-writers would say – "through my dream"... and I woke up actually whistling the tune". The learning and forgetting of the air, and then its retrieval "trem neul", are crucial to *Trem Neul*'s concern with memory (and false memory, which it tried to create in the reader) and how the mind works. Again, it seems to me, the poem is about translation, carrying across (from one culture or medium to another), in a metaphorical, broader than usual sense.

Courts of Earth and Air/What's in Store/Rome's Wreck

16 *Trem Neul* has as oblique and opaque a relation to Joyce's translation-derived poetics as anything he has written. In 2008, however, he published some direct translations, of Irish poetry. *Courts of Air and Earth* collects the previously-published *Sweeny Peregrine* and "Cry Help" (a working "from the Irish of Aoghán O Rathaille" from stone floods), but also includes new work: "Love Songs from a Dead Tongue", a sequence of eighteen Gormlaith poems "Worked from the Late Middle Irish"; the folk song "Sean O'Duibhir of the Glen"; and two lyrics from the *Dánta Gradha* anthology (one, the famous' I will not die for you' translated twice). Like the second section of *Sweeny*, the Gormlaith "workings" are not translations in the usual sense; neither faithful renderings or modern versions, they hover between tradition and modernity. Pungent, concrete, stark and spare in style, they also flag up the corruption of their originals, as in the first part of *Sweeny* (perhaps since "corruption is fertility", as *Trem Neul* claims); thus, the third poem includes the interpolations "[This is doubtful]" and "[This translation is difficult][21]". Overall, the

additional translations indicate a wish to fill the gap between *Sweeny*, which possibly dates to as early as the eighth century, to O Rathaille in the eighteenth, when the Gaelic tradition was at its last gasp.

17 If this was a more or less straightforward use of the mode perfected in *Sweeny*, however, work in Joyce's 2007 poetry collection, *What's in Store* was anything but. In this case, the material is made more difficult to interpret because of the volume's complex arrangement and its mixture of original poetry and different types of translation. To complicate matters, all of the Irish poems in *Courts of Air and Earth* except *Sweeny* were included in *What's in Store*, differently arranged. At the centre of *What's in Store* is a longish prose poem, "Stillsman". On either side are nineteen separate sections of different kinds of poem. The most important of these are thirty-six word poems, original lyrics clustered in nineteen groups of between three and twelve. Most of the other poems are translations, however; "Outcry" (in two parts, on either side of "Stillsman") is "a working of some of the surviving poems by Juan Chi (210-263), while 'Capital Accounts' is 'worked from' Ch'ang-an: Ku-i by Lu Chao-lin (635-684)[22]". There are also two groups of folk-songs, "Folk Songs from the Finno-Ugric and Turkic Languages" and "Folksongs from the Hungarian[23]". One of the first group of folk-songs contains a version of the book's title and gives a good idea of the brevity and limpid beauty of these pieces:

In the dark wood
swifts don't fly.
What's a blue dove
doing there?

With no mother,
with no father,
for you, what lies
in store?
(Store, 17)

18 Like the Hungarian folk-songs which balance them in the second "half" of the collection, these apparently artless lyrics focus unsentimentally on the brevity of youth, the vulnerability of love, and the inevitability of death. In this sense, they tell of what's "in store" for everyone. This is a quality they share with the material in Courts of Air and Earth too (there are also stylistic resemblances between the Central European and Irish translations). It is no surprise, therefore, that What's in Store opens with "Folk Songs from the Finno-Ugric and Turkic Languages" and closes with "Love Songs from a Dead Tongue" ("Folksongs from the Hungarian" and "Anonymous Love Songs from the Irish" also occur at roughly the same points within their respective "halves" of the book). Apart from "Stillsman", the exceedingly heterogeneous material in the book is not strictly demarcated – some sequences, indeed, have no titles – and Joyce has claimed that "the whole book is constructed like one long poem, with the sort of checks and balances, diversions and obsessive foci one might expect from that[24]". A major impetus for What's in Store, and something of its structure, was, again, the work of P. W. Joyce, and also of his brother Robert Dwyer Joyce. R. D. Joyce was best known for Ballads of Irish Chivalry (1872), and it is possible to discern in his adaption of traditional Irish folksongs to produce Fenian propaganda a foreignizing stance on translation, in contrast to his brother's "domesticating" contextualisation of his own translations, although one would not wish to push this too far[25]. What is clear is that Joyce is interested in the way that cultures "translate" their concerns by using analogues taken from previous historical

periods: 1798 as a way of writing about a hoped-for Fenian rising, for example. As Joyce has explained of the book's Finno-Ugric and other material:

> Th[is] comes largely from the same interest as spurred "Tocharian Music" (a poem in stone floods): awareness of how the history of nomadic and "oral" cultures (or those strains within literate cultures) is written from the outside, by the settled, the lettered. Remember the Irish proverb at the start of Rome's Wreck, which is translated at the very end of the last sonnet. The Irish were seen as vagrant by the English.

19 "Tocharian Music" deals with the fate of the Tocharians, a Central Asian people who were unique in being the only known Indo-European language speaking group to migrate eastwards, rather than westwards, from the Indo-European linguistic source. The poem tells of their rebellion against the Chinese in the sixth century CE:

> Eleven thousand
> died in the reprisal
> and the city laid waste
> the airs dispersed
> only the names survive
> (fd, 108)

20 The Tocharians were dispersed; only fragments of their language now survive. Crucially for Joyce, however, the dispersal of their dancers and musicians, for which they were famed, meant that the Tocharians had a profound influence on the poetry and music of the Golden Age of Chinese T'ang Dynasty culture a century later. What the poem reflects on, in part, is the return of the repressed, the marginal, the impure. As in the traditions of the West, art may be seen both as complicit with power, and definitive of cultural difference from power. Opening and closing *What's in Store* as it does, this material exists at the margins of the book (but is give the first and last word in it), and frames the material emanating from "literate cultures", including Imperial China. This oral culture is "within" the book and "literate cultures" too; it is the dirt, or leaven, depending upon point of view, in all human cultures. The dialectic between nomadic/"oral" and settled / literate, and the dilemmas involved in the latter representing the former, are therefore woven into the book.

21 As Joyce notes, the parallels between the Tocharian language and Irish, a language almost, but not quite, crushed by an imperial centre, are pertinent to these considerations. In his latest work, *Rome's Wreck*, another striking use of translation (and a redefinition of it), Joyce performs an act of what Roman Jakobson called an "intralingual translation" – that is, "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language" – on Edmund Spenser's sonnet sequence *Ruines of Rome* (1591)[26]. This work, consisting of thirty-two sonnets, plus an envoi, is itself a translation from the French of Joachim du Bellay, and was a significant contribution to the golden age of the English sonnet. In his "translation" Joyce retains the form's fourteen-lines, and observes the volta, but changes Spenser's rhymed iambic pentameters into unrhymed hexameters and, more remarkably, irreverently reduces his rich Renaissance language to a series of single vocables. A comparison of the opening lines of the first sonnet gives the general idea:

> Spenser:
>
> Ye heavenly spirites, whose ashie cinders lie
> Under deep ruines, with huge walls opprest,
> But not your praise, the which shall never die

> Through your faire verses, ne in ashes rest ...
> Joyce:
>
> Hey, you great ghosts, you ash and deep
> set dust that hefts the weight of walls,
> your fame lives on in walls that won’t
> now leave you limp there in the dumps...

22 Joyce’s periphrastic ingenuity matches the many challenges he has set himself, particularly when polysyllabic proper nouns are involved: thus, “Such as the Berecynthian Goddesse bright/In her swift charret...” becomes “Think a she god, quick in her cart/of war”. The object of the exercise, however, is serious enough; to take the language of the imperialist planter Edmund Spenser, possessor of 30,000 confiscated acres at Kilcolman, proponent of the brutal subjugation of the native Irish (and their poets), and strip it bare; to render it alien to itself, just as Ireland was made alien to its own inhabitants by the war and dispossession which accompanied the Plantations. The result is not so much pidgin mockery, however, as a form of Basic Poetic English that has its own gravity and humour. It also resembles, of course, the pared-back language of the “workings” of Irish poetry and the versions of Hungarian, Finno-Ugric and Turkic folksongs. Spenser the settler on the land of others, the first professional print poet in English, has himself been made dispossessed, made nomadic and “oral”, through Joyce’s translation.

23 Spenser’s final sonnet, the thirty-third, is an “Envoy” which is additional to du Bellay’s sequence. In it, Spenser praises du Bellay, and looks to a future in which Rome has been “revived” by du Bellay’s work, as a result of which du Bellay himself enjoys immortality. Joyce, however, does not acknowledge his source, Spenser, in the same way. Instead, he translates the thirty-second sonnet, in which the poet looks to the future and his own possible fame, but alters its final lines. Spenser’s sestet runs:

> Nath’les my Lute, whom Phoebus deignd to give,
> Cease not to sound these olde antiquities;
> For if that time doo let thy glorie live,
> Well maist thou boast, how ever base thou bee,
> That thou art first, which of thy Nation song
> Th’olde honour of the people gowned long.

24 Spenser anticipates a future in which, by praising Rome, his own efforts to raise the dignity of English poetry in the vernacular will be recognised too. This is a basic Protestant humanist aspiration. But, by an irony Spenser could not have foreseen, the empire has retrospectively written back; Joyce’s “translation” of the *Ruines of Rome* is the future to which Spenser looked, and the English poet’s poem, like his language, has become part of the “Nation song” of Ireland. Joyce has therefore to write himself into the translation. He concludes it with a version of the Irish proverb which provides his work’s epigraph: “*Maireann lorg an phinn, ach ní mhaireann an béal a chan*”, which translates literally as “the mark of the pen lives, but the mouth that sang does not (live)”:

> I use the tools I’ve got: hard words
> passed down, passed on, may speak on some
> days when the live voice breaks.
> Not all words bear the weight. I mean;
> but they may not. And these? Pen’s mark
> lives on, but not the mouth that sang.

25 The anti-imperialist point broadens to a general one concerning art's melancholy capacity to outlive the artist: Horace's vitas brevis, ars longa, Keats's Grecian Urn. It may be that Joyce is also reminding us of another aspect of Spenser, namely his obsession with mutability. *The Faerie Queene* runs into sand in the Mutability Cantos, in which the Goddess Mutability is silenced, but wins the debate: and to admit to the ceaselessness of change is to acknowledge the ultimate futility of imperial permanence and grandeur. In this sense, *Rome's Wreck* is a brilliantly ingenious and yet literal reminder to Spenser of his most profound insights, even as it takes us back to Joyce's own fascination with translated states, a version of stone that floods, dreams to be travelled through, nomads who become emperors, in writing which translates the idea of translation itself in order to create one of the most remarkable bodies of poetry in contemporary Irish literature.

NOTES

1. Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, London, Routledge, repr. 2007, p. 146-148.

2. As the latest anthology of translations of poetry from the Irish edited by Gregory Schirmer shows, there is still widespread ignorance of, or resistance to, the translation strategy opposed to this one. This contains work by Mangan, but no twentieth century translations that are the products of a foreignizing aesthetic. See, Gregory Schirmer, *After the Irish: An Anthology of Poetic Translation*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2009.

3. See David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987.

4. In 1967 Joyce and Mike and Irene Smith co-founded New Writers" Press (NWP); in the decade that followed it published translations of Borges (the first in English), Machado, Quevedo, Vega, Vallejo, the *Dánta Gradha*, St John of the Cross and Huerga, and carried in its house journal *The Lace Curtain* (1969-76) a plethora of translated poetry by (among others) Bartusek, Andrade, Jiménez, Colinas, Bachmann, Desnos, Trakl, Neruda and Benn, as well as Irish poetry in translation by Mhac an tSaoi, Ó Direáin, and Mac Síomóin. For an account of these activities see Trevor Joyce, "New Writers" Press: The History of a Project", in Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis, eds., *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1995, p. 276-306.

5. Trevor Joyce, "The Point of Innovation in Poetry", in Harry Gilonis, ed., *For the Birds: Proceedings of the First Cork Conference on New and Experimental Irish Poetry*, Sutton: Mainstream Poetry/Dublin: hardPressed Poetry, 1998, 18-26.

6. Seamus Heaney, introduction, *Sweeney Astray*, London: Faber, 1984, n. pag. This articulates Heaney's own concerns of the time of course, as reflected in *Station Island* (1984), especially its "Sweeney Redivivus" sequence, and the criticism collected in The *Government of the Tongue* (1989).

7. Trevor Joyce, *with the first dream of fire they hunt the cold*, Dublin: New Writers" Press/ Exeter, Shearsman Books, 2001, 13. Hereafter *fd*.

8. As J.C.C. May claims, he is "the etiolated subject at a second or further remove [who] sings with the kind of lucid detachment achieved by the American Objectivists... Put another way, Joyce is not in control of the persona Sweeny – he identifies and resists identification, by turns – but he is in full control of the lines of poetry and this rescues him from excess". J.C.C. Mays, 2002, 57-8.

9. It's relevant here to note that Patrick Crotty's new Penguin anthology of Irish poetry includes only Sweeny's final lyric; stripped of context, its references to God and Christ read not as a distantiating palinode and possible pious corruption, as intended, but rather as representing an *echt* religious conversion. In this way, mainstream poetic discourse misreads and seeks to "domesticate" Joyce's estranging translation strategy.

10. Nate Dorward, "On Trevor Joyce", review article on *with the first dream of fire they hunt the cold*, *Chicago Review*, 48: 4 (Winter 2002/3), 3.

11. The blurb is probably by Mike Smith, Joyce's editor, not by Joyce himself.

12. For Pound the deconstructive ambiguities inherent in the Chinese written character, and the lack of logical connectives in Chinese, allowed access to "a prolonged and rich heritage of intensity, precision, objectivity, visual clarity, and complete harmony with nature – all key elements of Modernism itself." Pound was fascinated by the fact that the Chinese written character eliminates the fixed concepts of agent and agency, its syntax allowing "agents to act as recipients as well, and vice versa", and this – so he believed – had the potential to undo the binaries that hobbled Western thought and linguistic systems. Through immersion in a non-Western culture, particularly that of China, a measure of linguistic-cultural purity and social order could be accessed: in his words "China is solid", it is "a new Greece".

13. For a fuller description of these aspects of the collection, see John Goodby and Marcella Edwards, "glittering silt": the Poetry of Trevor Joyce and the Myth of Irishness", *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 8:1 (2002), 173-98.

14. je suis ce cours de sable qui glisseentre le galet et la dunela pluie d'été pleut sur ma viesur moi ma vie qui me fuit me poursuitet finira le jour de son commencementcher instant je te voisdans ce rideau de brume qui reculeoù je n'aurai plus à fouler ces longs seuils mouvantset vivrai le temps d'une portequi s'ouvre et se refermeSamuel Beckett, *Collected Poems in English and French*, London: Calder and Boyars, 1977, p. 56-57.

15. Trevor Joyce, "Why I Write Narrative", 1999, sent as a personal email to the author; posted on The Narrative Site, online Poetry Center San Francisco State University.

16. Claude Roy, *Renga: A Chain of Poems by Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti and Charles Tomlinson*, New York, Braziller, 1971. See also Edwards and Goodby, 2002, p. 190-193.

17. "Why I Write Narrative". Cage's works are noted for their use of aleatory composition techniques and incorporation of ambient noise; in fact, for Cage there is no such thing as "noise" in the sense that any sound, depending on the context in which we listen to it, can give aesthetic pleasure. Trevor Joyce's later work resembles Cage's in the sense that it tries to marry extremes of formal constraint with procedures which allow for unforeseen irruptions of material from outside the structure figuring the struggle between the information-saturated lifeworld and the artist's attempt to create meaningful form.

18. J.C.C. Mays, "Scriptor ignotus, with the fire in him now", *the Dublin Review* (Spring 2002), 62-3.

19. Trevor Joyce, dustjacket of with the *first dream of fire they hunt the cold*.

20. Trevor Joyce, "Why I Write Narrative'.

21. "*Love Songs from a Dead Tongue*, Worked from the Late Middle-Irish"; the Gormlaith poems, "probably composed around the year 1200, but manuscript copies continued to be made even as late as the nineteenth century." "They speak in the voice of the famous queen Gormlaith (d. 948 AD), whose three husbands were all kings." Eleven of the originals were published in Osborn Bergin's *Irish Bardic Poetry* (1970), and another six come from a scholarly paper by Anne O'Sullivan, "Triamhuin Ghormlaithe", published in *Ériu* in 1952. Joyce observes "As far as I am aware this extended sequence of the Gormlaith poems had not previously been published together... prior to my gathering them into this set." Trevor Joyce, *Courts of Air and Earth*, Exeter: Shearsman, 2008, 95. Hereafter *Courts*.

22. Trevor Joyce, *What's in Store: Poems 2000-2007*, Dublin, New Writers' Press/Toronto, The Gig, 2007, 311-312. Hereafter *Store*.

23. As Joyce explains in a note, his sources are the lyric sheets supplied with Hungaraton LPs. The Finno-Ugric and Turkic languages in question are: Tatar, Voytak, Cheremis, Mordvinian, Chuvash and Bashkir.

24. From email correspondence with Trevor Joyce, 27/11/2009.

25. *What's in Store* also includes (Trevor) Joyce's version of "Seán O'Duibhir a 'Ghleanna'" or "John O'Dwyer of the Glen", another lineal ancestor, hence his translation of the ballad. R.D. Joyce used 1798 as an analogue for the hoped-for Fenian rising of his own day (in, for example, "The Wind that Shakes the Barley"); this is echoed for Trevor Joyce in the use of Han Dynasty history to figure Tang Dynasty realities in the source he uses for "Capital Accounts"; thus, part of his process of "translation" is to provide another layer of history (as Pound did in Canto I), applying that retrospective application to his own time, the working being done during the invasion of Iraq. From email correspondence with Trevor Joyce, 23/9/2010).

26. Jeremy Munday, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

ABSTRACTS

Almost all Irish translators work with what Lawrence Venuti calls a "domesticating" model of recreating a translated poem as if it had been originally written in the target language. However, some of the most important Irish translators of the past, notably James Clarence Mangan and Brian Coffey, have used what Venuti terms a "foreignizing" strategy which, on the contrary, highlights the difficulties and resistances of the source text to transparent re-presentation. The two approaches roughly correspond to two modes of translation evident in the work of the most influential anglophone poetry translator of the early twentieth century, Ezra Pound. In his translation of the *Buile Suibhne* as the *Poems of Sweeny Peregrine* (1976), which cites Poundian precedent, the contemporary Irish neo-modernist poet Trevor Joyce (b. 1947) uses both modes to produce a destabilised, postmodern "working" which exploits the original's gaps, scribal interpolations and narrative contradictions, as well as poignantly rendering its expressivist

lyrics. Radical translation strategies can be seen to inform other aspects of Joyce's work, from his use of Japanese and Chinese forms and materials in Stone Floods (1995), to cut-up and collage in *Trem Neul* (2000), and from folk-song and poetry from the Finno-Ugric, Hungarian and Irish in *What's in Store* (2007) and *Courts of Air and Earth* (2008) to, most recently, the unpublished *Rome's Wreck*, which "translates" Edmund Spenser's "The Ruines of Rome" (1591) "intralingually", to use Roman Jakobson's term, that is, from one form of English into another.

Presque tous les traducteurs irlandais travaillent à partir d'un modèle que Lawrence Venuti appelle « domesticating translation ». Ils tentent de recréer le poème comme s'il avait été écrit dans la langue cible. Cependant, certains parmi les plus grands traducteurs irlandais du passé, notamment James Clarence Mangan et Brian Coffey, ont utilisé une stratégie que Venuti appelle « foreignizing translation » qui, à l'opposé, souligne les difficultés et les résistances que le texte source oppose à une représentation transparente dans le texte cible. Ces deux approches correspondent en gros à deux modes de traduction visibles dans le travail d'Ezra Pound, le poète-traducteur anglophone qui a exercé le plus d'influence au début du XXe siècle. Dans sa traduction de *Buile Suibhne*, *The Poems of Sweeny Peregrine* (1976), qui cite le précédent poundien, le poète neo-moderniste irlandais Trevor Joyce (né en 1947) se sert des deux modes pour produire une version déstabilisée et postmoderne du texte source, qui exploite les blancs, les interpolations du scribe et les contradictions narratives, tout en traduisant de manière intense l'expressivisme de l'original. Des stratégies radicales de traduction ont également influencé d'autres aspects du travail de Joyce, de son utilisation de formes et de sources japonaises et chinoises dans *Stone Floods* (1995) à sa technique du coupé-collé dans *Trem Naul* (2000), et de son utilisation du chant folklorique et de la poésie d'origine finno-ougrienne, hongroise et irlandaise dans *What's in Store* (2007) et *Courts of Air and Earth* (2008) à son travail récent *Rome's Wreck* (non encore publié) qui « traduit » « The Ruines of Rome » (1591) d'Edmund Spenser de façon "intralinguale' (terminologie de Roman Jakobson), c'est à dire d'une forme de la langue anglaise vers une autre.

INDEX

Mots-clés: folklore, poésie, traduction
Keywords: poetry, translation, Joyce Trevor

AUTHOR

JOHN GOODBY

University of Swansea