



Carvalho, Paulo Eduardo. *Identities Rewritten. Figurations da Irlanda no Teatro Português*. Lisboa: Instituto de Literatura, 2009.

From afar, from somewhere beyond the river, echoes of lingering voices
And the unhurried sounds of a hammer gave joy not only to me.

("Study of Loneliness", Czeslaw Milosz)

In one of the most dazzling compositions of the *Human Chain*, 'Death of a Painter,' the Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney discreetly examines the ongoing metamorphosis, which is present in the very core of human experience. Paying a posthumous homage to the Welsh painter Nancy Wynne Jones, Heaney translates her hypnotic impulse to 'possess and to be possessed' by the Irish landscape (*The Guardian* 29 Nov. 2006). As Heaney states, from her 'coign of vantage in the studio' the reader, through the voice of the poet, is able to observe how the glare of the artist is capable of bracing the landscape, while re-signifying it privately and publically. While this is a truth irrevocably acknowledged in Ms. Jones' case, it is also a truth irrevocably acknowledged in Paulo Eduardo Carvalho's case. As a literary critic, translator and theatre director he has, throughout his life, been in possession of and possessed by the Irish theatre. *Identities Rewritten: Figurações da Irlanda no Teatro Português* represents a life-time enterprise: making the globally acclaimed Irish theatre tread Portuguese boards concomitantly reflecting the Irish and the Portuguese's dramatic experiments.

Not only does the book present the reader with a thorough theoretical debate as regards translation for the specific genre of theatre, but also a critical and enthusiastic scrutiny of the Portuguese productions of the most important twentieth-century Irish playwrights. The book is organized in two parts: 'Aproximações' (Approximations) and '(Des)encontros' ([Dis]encounters). The author defends the hypothesis that the Portuguese appropriation of the Irish theatre is not simply a literary exercise which dismisses its cultural and historical background. Rather, it is a continuous process of re-discovering of myths and abstractions made by writers in order to comprehend how the conflicting Irish identity has been staged.

On the account of a political and cultural search, which is specifically characteristic of the Irish theatre as Nicholas Grene first pointed out, the first two chapters are concerned with a theoretical debate which is aligned with Cristine Zurbach's plea that translation for theatre ought to be performative. In addition to that, Carvalho believes that translation should take on board intercultural aspects of society, including its fetishistic status in a globalised world. Historicising and interconnecting different critical approaches, the critic reaches the conclusion that there are two different types of

translation: one that is basically linguistic and the other that is intersemiotic and involved in a process called dramatic movement. Drawing on Patrice Pavis' systematization, the author believes there are four phases in a stage translation. The first is linguistic, the second is dramatic, the third is scenic and the fourth is receptive. More than a sterile classification, those steps prove to be of utmost importance because they provide the translator with tools to understand theatre as the linguistic laboratory of a nation. Thus, moral, ethical, political and historical values are portrayed against the backdrop of language.

Complementing the first chapter of the first part, the second chapter offers an overview of the actual state of affairs in Portuguese theatre. Weighing on the legacy of the twentieth century, the author highlights the centrality of the figure of Jorge de Sena, whose intake on translation helped Portugal and its playwrights to renew and advance their dramatic procedures. For him, translation was not purely a matter of national denial, but of national renewal and assertion. Since Portuguese society had to cope with a gruesome dictatorship which lasted for forty-eight years, starting from 1926 with the implementation of the Novo Estado, Portuguese stages had also to muddle through a grievous censorship. For Diniz Jacinto and Luiz Francisco fascism and despotism were not only responsible for artistic stagnation, but also theatrical mediocrity. However, against all the odds, theatre could forge a relative experimentalism and renewal with the translation of American and Irish plays. Carvalho stresses the centrality of the translations of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, and also the audacious performances of groups such as 'Teatro Juvenia' and 'Teatro Novo'. As regards those two pioneering playwrights, the critic quotes Ernesto Sampaio's article in the nineties apropos of Cathleen Ni Houlihan and the Celtic Revival: for the journalist, they captured the cultural zeitgeist of Irish Nationalism without rendering it back to dichotomist views.

Throughout the book, the author examines the theatrical and aesthetical reception of Irish writers in Portugal. Surprisingly enough he pays heed to the fact that Synge was substantially more relevant to Portuguese theatre than Yeats. In an extensive chapter dedicated to translations, performances and critical essays about the writer, Carvalho draws a map of how intellectuals and artists absorbed Synge's poetic popularity. To him, the most favourable points of the translations of *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea* are the maintenance of their dialogical fluidity and scenic virtues, which translate the author's treatment of peasants' language and Irish symbolic landscape. At the same time that Synge makes his remarkable debut in Portugal, the spotlight on another influential writer, Sean O' Casey, is considerably diminished by censorship. His realistic portrayal of working classes did not seem to entice authorities and had to be undermined in their translation. Carvalho claims that those translations, which were not officially published, should be more carefully studied. In his viewpoint, the legacy of Sean O' Casey's theatre is socially valid and deserves a bigger role in academic studies. Amongst the playwrights chosen, Carvalho also notes how Samuel Beckett's production

has also allowed Portuguese directors to experience a unique form of theatre. Because Beckett constructs a meta-theatre, through the progressive work of translation, the directors understood that the Irish preoccupation with language was also a modern problem of representation.

Reaching a more recent bulk of production, the author seeks to understand how Brian Friel was translated into Portuguese. The first and foremost reason for that, in his case, is that even though Friel is deeply concerned with political aspects of Irish society, his plays touch most deeply the human experience. In addition to that, Friel's theatre established a dialogue and an artistic continuation with the work of J. M. Synge. Having also been involved in the five productions of Friel's plays, Carvalho affirms that the performative moments have encouraged him to take in a discursive approach on his work. Similarly, Frank McGuinness and Dermot Bolger are meaningful to the Portuguese stage because they expose the desire of transcendence in a world constantly corrupted by private interests. Devoting a whole chapter to playwrights such as Jennifer Johnston, Marie Jones and Marina Carr, Carvalho disapproves of the scarcity of translations and performances of plays written by women. For him, it is not simply a flaw in Portugal, but a reverberation of the dubious aspect of women in Irish art: although they are quite often a theme, they are not the subjects of their own plays. The last chapter concludes with recent authors Connor McPherson and Martin McDonagh, Mark O'Rowe and Brenda Walsh. Representing the impact of postmodernity in Irish theatre, those writers solidified the relationship of Portuguese public with Irish productions.

To sum up, Paulo Eduardo Carvalho's work proves to be a paragon not only for academics, but also for theatre directors and producers who wish to translate Irish dramaturgy to their local context. In this sense, the book is a valuable tool of analysis, mainly because in each chapter the writer discusses real linguistic and performative problems of translation. Thus, translation is not a static monad, but a dialogical work in progress, which is further readapted and readjusted throughout the production's season.

Viviane Carvalho da Anunciação