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# *Irish Poetry and Some Translations, a Personal Approach*

## *Poesia irlandesa e algumas traduções – um enfoque pessoal*

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the process of translating to Portuguese modern Irish poetry across nearly thirty years, stemming from the lifelong experience as a poet and informed by a personal approach to the role of poetry and the practice of translation. Its motto is the need to remember the past, or the claim not to forget in order to avoid the repetition of bad and undesired things. Thus the selected poems by Paul Durcan, Desmond Egan, Eavan Boland, John Montague, and Seamus Heaney address sensitive and resonant subjects such as Gaelicness and Englishness, Catholicism and Protestantism, freedom and oppression, colonialism and independence, post-colonialism, emigration, identity, and representation.*

**Keywords:** *Irish poetry; Translation; Portuguese.*

**Resumo:** *Este texto discute o processo de tradução de poemas irlandeses modernos para a língua portuguesa ao longo de quase trinta anos, decorrente da experiência de uma vida como poeta e guiado pela abordagem pessoal sobre o papel da poesia e sobre a prática da tradução. O mote do texto reside na necessidade de lembrar, ou na afirmativa de que não se deve esquecer o passado, visando evitar a repetição de coisas ruins e indesejáveis. Assim, a seleção contém poemas de Paul Durcan, Desmond Egan, Eavan Boland, John Montague e Seamus Heaney que abordam temas sensíveis e que ecoam: o que é gaélico e o que é inglês, o catolicismo e o protestantismo, a liberdade e a opressão, o colonialismo e a independência, o pós-colonialismo, a emigração, a identidade e a representatividade.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Poesia irlandesa; Tradução; Língua Portuguesa.*

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Before I discuss some Irish modern poems I have translated over the last twenty-five or thirty years, I have to explain some of the things I believe about poetry. First of all, I have been writing poetry for more than 60 years. My first book was published in 1968, my last in 2024. I have also published a novel, three books of short stories and some books of essays.

If you ask me why I am a poet and write poetry, I would answer "because I don't know to do differently". If you ask me about what motivates me to write, I would answer that I write because I do not know how 'not to write'. Writing, for me, is vital: without writing I am not who I am, who I want to be or who I would like to become, if I could improve who I am. Even though I always try to do this, without even knowing if I am what I think I am, I write to be better and to remain that way and to keep myself the way I am – by writing, I survive. That is why I do not believe in poetry that is circumstantially political, or worse, partisan, because if no language is innocent, any poetry is compromised even before it begins to be written. I also do not believe in poetry written to achieve fame and projection – I have never been, and I never want to be, a fame-seeker, enrolled in "the marathon of glory". That is not my "run" in any "Olympiad of Fame".

I believe that every poet has the obligation to make his readers see things around them as if they were seeing them for the first time. Poetry should shock, not console. It should also shake and mess things up, not put things in order. Poetry that does not bother is not poetry. Thus, my choice of poets, my references, are always for those who demand more from me, forcing me to read them more carefully, redoubling my efforts to understand them.

About translation... I do not have nor follow any theory, I just try to do one thing when I decide to translate a poem, make it sound as if this specific poem was written in my own language, Portuguese. Do I translate them in the same way? No, never, for each poem is different, even by the same poet, so I'm always changing – better to say "having to change" – my approach to them. So don't be surprised by my choices of poems to present in translations. Don't be surprised if, because of these choices, I return to subjects that many people would like not to discuss anymore. I have two reasons: if in the same island we have the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, we have a divided country – and this is extremely sad. Secondly, we cannot *forget*, because if we do, bad and undesired things may happen again.

Thus, we are talking about a country that is still politically and religiously and, at times, also culturally divided. If we remember that the English conquest and domination brought English as a language imposed by the ruler, on a cultured, traditional people, rich in their traditions

and folklore, in their literature, especially their epic and lyrical poetry, we can only fully evaluate the evil of colonialism if we remember that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, 90% of the population of Ireland still spoke Irish, and that only ten percent of the population spoke English. In contrast, at the end of the same century, the opposite extreme was observed: 90% of the population spoke English and only 10% continued to speak Irish. The Gaelic League, founded in 1893 by Eoin MacNeill, Douglas Hyde and others, sought to revive Irish as a spoken and literary language. The Republic of Ireland, independent since 1922, instituted compulsory teaching of Irish in schools, although maintaining both languages, Irish and English, as the country's official languages. A great Irish poet, Michael Hartnett, who died in 1999, once said: "I think in two languages, I dream in two languages, and it breaks my heart!"

We all know how Irish literature reflects all of these issues, or we tend to believe we do. I don't have an answer about these questions; I only want to read with you two short and three longer poems by great modern Irish poets who, in one way or another, reflect about these themes, at the same time as they make us think about all these problems: Gaelicness and Englishness, Celtic religion and Christian religion, Catholicism and Protestantism, freedom and oppression, colonialism and independence, post-colonialism, identity and representation. Too many things to be taken into account. But I justify myself: as said above, *we have to remember*, we cannot allow ourselves to forget.

Let's start with a poem by Paul Durcan, born in Dublin, in 1944. It's called "Ireland 1972". The year was one of the most violent in the conflicts between the IRA – Irish Republican Army and the Protestant and pro English government in Northern Ireland. The poem says:

> Next to the fresh grave of my beloved grandmother
> the grave of my first love murdered by my brother.

It's a rhymed couplet and I translated it like this:

> Próxima à recente tumba de minha avó amada
> A do meu primeiro amor, por meu irmão assassinada.

In this poem, as short as it is violent,[1] the contradictions that Irish society was experiencing in the seventies and are experiencing (perhaps – and only perhaps – in an attenuated way) today, are clearly exposed in the poem. Those contradictions include family division, taking the

family as a representative cell of society as a whole, and in which brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers as well are separated by religious hatred and political opposition (represented, in the poem, by the brother who murders his other brother's first girlfriend), reflecting the acuteness of the unresolved situations in which Irish society still finds itself involved: the past (represented by the grandmother) and the present (represented by the first dead girlfriend) and the impossibility of carrying on with social and family existence (represented by the two graves, which accentuates the idea of death eternally present) when this same existence is constantly and perpetually threatened.

This poem takes us to another one, by Desmond Egan:

> The Question of Northern Ireland
> two *wee girls*
> were playing tig near a car...
>
> how many countries would you say
> are worth their scattered fingers?

I propose a translation like this:

> duas *menininhas*
> brincavam de pique-esconde perto de um carro
>
> quantos países, diria você,
> valem seus dedos espalhados?

The reading of a poem by Eavan Boland will lead us to reflect a little more about all these aspects of Irish life long ago (perhaps not that long ago), the time the poem was written, and nowadays. The poet was born in 1944 in Dublin where she also died in 2020. She began her career as a poet with the publication, in 1967, of the book *New Territory*.[2] Several others books have followed this one and her reputation as a great poet only grew along the years. Among her best-known poems we can recall "Mise Éire", the second poem in the book *The Journey and Other Poems*, published in 1986, by Arlen House in Dublin. This title means, in Irish language, "I Am Ireland". The expression in Irish became a famous motto during the Easter uprising against the English domination, in 1916.

**Mise Eire**

I won't go back to it –
my nation displaced
into old dactyls
oaths made
by the animal tallows
of the candle –

land of the Gulf Stream,
the small farm,
the scalded memory,
the songs,
that bandage up the history,
the words
that make a rhythm of the crime

where time is time past.
A palsy of regrets.
No. I won't go back.
My roots are brutal:

I am the woman –
a sloven's mix
of silk at the wrists,
a sort of dove-strut
in the precincts of the garrison –

who practices
the quick frictions,
the rictus of delight
and gets cambric for it,
rice coloured silk

I am the woman
in the gansy-coat
on board the 'Mary Belle',
in the huddling cold,

holding a half-dead baby to her
as the wind shifts east
and north over the dirty
water of the wharf

mingling the immigrant
guttural with the vowels
of homesickness who neither
knows nor cares that

a new language
is a kind of scar
and heals after a while
into a possible imitation
of what went before

**Eu Sou a Irlanda**

Não voltarei a isso –
minha nação deslocada
em velhos datílicos,
juramentos feitos
sob os sebos de animais
da vela –

terra da Corrente do Golfo,
da fazenda pequena,
da memória destruída,
das canções
que enfaixaram a história,
das palavras
que criam o ritmo do crime

onde o tempo é tempo passado.
Um marasmo de remorsos.
Não. Eu não voltarei.
Minhas raízes são brutais:

Eu sou a mulher –
uma puta suja com uma mistura
de seda nos pulsos,
um certo andar afetado de pomba
nos recintos do quartel –

que pratica
os rápidos atritos,
os rictos do prazer
e fica pálida por isso,
como sedas cor de arroz.

Eu sou a mulher
com o casaco de jérsei
a bordo do "Mary Belle",
no frio opressivo,

apertando contra si seu filho semimorto
enquanto o vento vira para o leste
e para o norte sobre a imunda
água do cais

misturando o som gutural
imigrante com as vogais
da nostalgia de quem não
sabe e nem se importa em saber

que uma nova língua
é um tipo de ferida
que cicatriza após um tempo
e torna-se tolerável imitação
do que foi vivido antes.

My reading of "Mise Éire" recognizes the poem as a summarized History of Ireland through the point of view of a woman – the poem is a feminine reading of this history but, most importantly, it is a feminist reading of it.

It is evident that the "it" in the first line of the poem is Ireland, and that this experience was already lived by the poet, especially if sung in old poetic measures, such as the dactylic foot, in which a strong syllable is followed by two weak syllables, very common in the tradition of ancient poetry written in Irish. The voice in the poem does not want to go back to those old forms of poetry, but also not to the past, to a more recent past, to times not capable of providing better living for all.

This is perhaps the reason why the History of Ireland summarized by the poem unveils so much violence. The reference to these songs or poems means that they hide the wounds to heal them but create, at the same time, more antagonisms. Secondly, they also elude or deceive, through those rhythms, the crimes and atrocities committed by the English domination against the Irish people or by the Irish themselves, in civil and/or religious war. To the poet, these old kind of old poems from the past are not useful nowadays. That's why the memory of times past makes Ireland a country in which time seems to have stopped and does not look to its own future. Thus, the poet says, she will not return to it, refusing to live in this or that past, since it has "brutal" roots.

The voice in the poem borrows from Irish folklore the figure of an old woman, through whom Ireland is always represented, and unites it with the metaphorical figure of the woman prostituted by the English (represented by "precincts of the barracks", which are the English military garrisons), dirty and humiliated. By prostituting herself, Ireland becomes ill or deceives herself with frivolities ("rice-coloured silks" the poem says).

The themes of woman and mother, through which several poets portrayed Ireland,[4] is subverted by Eavan Boland, in the figure first of the dirty prostitute who surrenders herself to the English, then of the mother who, on the ship going to America, holds her half-dead son close to her, in a clear indication that, for the poet, the motherland does not take good care of its own children, the Irish people. Here, the poet touches on a permanent theme in Irish life: that of emigration; in the specific case, that of women emigration. Ireland suffered (I don't know if it still does) one of the biggest emigration processes in the world.[5] Taking into account the size of the country and its number of inhabitants (70,238 km$^2$; in 2023, 5.308 million inhabitants), we can suggest the possibility of it having been (possibly still being) the largest in

the world (9 to 10 million people). Eavan Boland therefore touches on a crucial aspect of this emigration, that of women who until the eighties in the twentieth century were estimated at 30,000 per year.[6]

It becomes easier, therefore, to understand the reason why the poet refuses to return to the idealized past, positioning herself against a contradictory present, with its still unresolved problems, returning to the theme of the mother tongue, with which the poem is related.

The description of the mother who mixes "the guttural immigrant sound with the vowels of nostalgia", or the longing for the homeland, are a clear reference to the near death or near disappearance of Irish as a language spoken by the Irish people, replaced by English as the dominant language. It seems, in the poet's opinion, that Ireland is not aware of or refuses to recognize the near death and near disappearance of its native language, which is a constant and extremely dangerous threat to its own culture, as well as the culture of any country. Without their own language, people loses identity and culture. The new language, the English Language imposed by the dominant colonizer and colonialist country, England, constitutes a powerful weapon, fatally wounding the conquered and dominated country. This pain, even if a healed wound, always reappears, because, if it heals, it leaves a scar that does not disappear.

Therefore, anything that can be believed as possible life will never be more than a "tolerable imitation of what was experienced before". If the native language and culture of the Irish people were altered by imposed transformations, what is left of their life will never be more than a mere imitation. At the end of the poem, the reader understands that in the first line of the poem "I won't go back to that –" and can finally see that the poet claims not only that she cannot return to the past, but that she cannot return, even if metaphorically speaking, to the present, since the Ireland she could and would return to no longer exists.

The fourth poem I want to present to you is by a poet born in New York, in the United States, in 1929, the son of immigrant Irish parents, who was sent to Northern Ireland, to live with some aunts, when he was just four years old. It was there that he grew up, was educated and lived most of his life. He died in Nice, France, in 2016. His first book of poems, *Forms of Exiles*, was published in 1958. His name was John Montague and his poem is called "A Grafted Tongue/Uma Língua Enxertada," and it says:

**A Grafted Tongue**

(Dumb,
bloodied, the severed
head now chokes to
speak another tongue –

As in
a long suppressed dream,
some stuttering garb-
led ordeal of my own)

An Irish
child weeps at school
repeating its English.
After each mistake

The master
gouges another mark
on the tally stick
hung about its neck

Like a bell
on a cow, a hobble
on a straying goat.
To slur and stumble

In shame
the altered syllables
of your own name:
to stray sadly home

And find
the turf-cured width
of your parents' hearth
growing slowly alien:

In cabin
and field, they still
speak the old tongue.
You may greet no one.

To grow
a second tongue, as
harsh a humiliation
as twice to be born.

Decades later
that child's grandchild's
speech stumbles over lost
syllables of an old order

**Uma Língua Enxertada**

(Muda,
ensanguentada, a cortada
cabeça agora se engasga
para falar uma outra língua –

Como
num longo suprimido sonho,
alguma gaguejante e adul-
terada provação minha)

Uma irlandesa
criança chora na escola
repetindo seu inglês.
Depois de cada erro

O mestre
grava uma outra marca
na tabuleta de madeira
pendurada em seu pescoço

Como o cincerro
numa vaca, uma peia
num bode desgarrado.
Para desarticular e fazer errar

Com vergonha
as alteradas sílabas
de seu próprio nome;
para vagar triste de volta à casa

E descobrir
que o monte de turfa curtida
da lareira de seus pais
lentamente cresce indiferente:

Na cabana
e no campo, eles ainda
falam a velha língua.
Não se pode saudar alguém.

Para fazer
crescer uma segunda língua, uma
tão cruel humilhação quanto
duas vezes ter nascido.

Décadas depois
a fala do neto daquela criança
ainda hesita sobre perdidas
sílabas de uma velha ordem.[8]

This poem is the fifth in a series of six poems entitled "A Severed Head", which is part of the long epic book *The Rough Field*.[9]

In this poem (and in the series to which it belongs) Montague wants us to understand that language is intimately connected to being or self, to family and national identity. For him, not only is the conflict of language related to these elements of "being" or "self", but language itself becomes a necessary unaltered element of identity. The language referred to in the title is not "acquired" or "borrowed", but "grafted", that is, forced into the identity of the speaking subject against his/her will.

The poem deals with the idea of a child having to go to school and learn how to speak a "grafted language". Of course, the English language imposed by the dominant oppressor, England – since 1171, when Henry II invaded and dominated Ireland.

The proper narrative of the poem begins by the introduction of an "Irish child" (and we will not know if a boy or a girl, thus universalizing the experience of learning a new language and the pain of it) who will have to learn "its English". The child will also suffer punishments for making mistakes when speaking English. And the poem informs us that the child's mistakes are "recorded" on a small tablet hanging around his neck, and this is the reason for more suffering, for it becomes an impediment to the personal development of the child. This small tablet, like the tablet mentioned by Flann O' Brien in his only novel written in Irish language, *An Béal Bocht*,[10] is the symbol of another language, that of the brutality with which England imposes its domination.

As we can read in *Trouble Archives*: "Montague here suggests that the imposition of English on native Irish speakers has deprived them and their descendants of their natural way of being. He does not say this contributed to the Troubles but he describes it as part of the legacy of grievance."[11] The rest of the poem touches the relationship of that "Irish child" with family and society, intensifying its suffering. Not having a language of its own, the Irish child will only be what England think Irish people are, a "savage" one. Like the Irish character, Captain Macmorris, says in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, when asked about his nation: "What ish my nation? Ish a/ villain and a bastard and a knave and a rascal. What/ ish my nation?" (Henry V. Act III, Scene II), If this is what English people think of Irish people, "villain, bastard, knave, rascal", then they are savage.

And now we come to the last poem, "Exposure," by Seamus Heaney. I translated it in 1995, when its author won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

**Exposure**

It is December in Wicklow:
Alders dripping, birches
Inheriting the last light,
The ash tree cold to look at.

A comet that was lost
Should be visible at sunset,
Those million tons of light
Like a glimmer of haws and rose-hips,

And I sometimes see a falling star.
If I could come on meteorite!
Instead I walk through damp leaves, Husks, the
spent flukes of autumn,

Imagining a hero
On some muddy compound,
His gift like a slingstone
Whirled for the desperate.

How did I end up like this?
I often think of my friends'
Beautiful prismatic counselling
And the anvil brains of some who hate me

As I sit weighing and weighing
My responsible tristia.
For what? For the ear? For the people?
For what is said behind-backs?

Rain comes down through the alders,
Its low conductive voices
Mutter about let-downs and erosions
And yet each drop recalls

The diamond absolutes.
I am neither internee nor informer;
An inner émigré, grown long-haired
And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,
Taking protective colouring
From bole and bark, feeling
Every wind that blows;

Who, blowing up these sparks
For their meagre heat, have missed
The once-in-a-lifetime portent,
The comet's pulsing rose.

**Revelação**

É dezembro em Wicklow:
Amieiros pingando, bétulas
Herdando a última luz,
O freixo é frio de se olhar.

Um cometa que estava perdido
Deveria ser visível ao entardecer,
Aqueles milhões de toneladas de luz
Como cintilações de espinhos e roseiras,

E às vezes vejo uma estrela cadente.
Se eu pudesse vir num meteorito!
Ao invés, caminho entre folhas úmidas,
Cascas, os restos gastos do outono,

Imaginando um herói
Em algum curral lamacento,
Seu dom como pedra de funda
Rodopiada pelos desesperados.

Como é que eu acabei assim?
Muitas vezes penso nos belos conselhos
Prismáticos dos meus amigos e nos
Cérebros bigorna de alguns que me odeiam

Enquanto me sento pensando e pesando
Minha responsável tristia.
Para que? Para o ouvido? Para o povo?
Pelo que é dito pelas costas?

A chuva desce pelos amieiros,
Suas baixas e condutíveis vozes
Murmuram sobre decepções e erosões
E todavia cada gota relembra

Os absolutos do diamante.
Não sou internado nem informante;
Um émigré interno, cabelos longos
E pensativo; um soldado no mato

Que escapou do massacre,
Camuflando-se co'a coloração protetora
Do tronco e da casca, sentindo
Cada vento que sopra;

Quem, explodindo estas faíscas
Por seu parco calor, perdeu
O prodígio de uma vez na vida,
A rosa pulsante de um cometa.

Let's begin by saying that this poem is the last in the poet's fourth major book, *North*, published in 1975. "Exposure" was written in 1973 and it belongs to a series of six poems entitled "Singing School" (we can recognize William Butler Yeats behind this, as in the poem "Sailing to Byzantium")

In my opinion this is not a poem which exposes something, it is a confession the poet makes after receiving or finally comprehending a revelation. What he questions in the poem is his role as a poet from North Ireland emigrating to the South, to the Republic of Ireland. In 1973, when Heaney moved with his family from Northern Ireland to Wicklow, he felt himself as if abandoning his place and the poetry he was writing at that point of his life and suffering a kind of turning point in his life.

The affirmation in the first line of the poem that "it's December in Wicklow" not only states a geographical circumstance, it also states a human circumstance: he is in the South, in the Republic of Ireland, and it is winter, the coldest time of the year in Ireland. He had bought a cottage there, the Glanmore Cottage, and it was in that winter of 1973 that everyone in the world expected to see in the sky a comet, the Kohoutec. Nobody saw it. Much publicity surrounded the discovery of this comet, but it became synonymous, as journalist would say, with 'spectacular disappointment'. Everybody tried to see it, nobody could.

What is Heaney pointing out here? Somehow he fills he is a failure or a disappointment – like a falling star, always a vision only. If he could come on meteorite would it solve the problem? No, of course not. It could call attention to him, but would not resolve his problem. From here on the poem becomes more and more personal. Heaney was not, up to now in his poetry, an "I poet". He is usually detached from his poetry. In "Exposure" he talks about himself and writes the poem in the first person albeit imagining himself as a hero. But what kind of hero he can be? It is then that he asks the key question, "How did I end up like this?"

What is the purpose of been a poet, he seems to be asking us his readers? Why does anyone become a poet and write poetry; why poets do it? If people remains indifferent to it, why do poets write poetry? To become famous? Is writing poetry merely creating beautiful sounds and rhythms? That's why he returns to Ovid and his imposed exile. But he says that his own exile is a "responsible *tristia*", because it is self-imposed, albeit an exile nevertheless.[12]

"Exposure" becomes then a self-revelation poem and a confession. It seems Heaney feels that he has come to the end of some personal and poetic obligation. What to do from now on, he seems to ask himself, since he feels has abandoned North Ireland to come to the South, to Ireland.

Heaney's moving from Northern Ireland to The Republic of Ireland makes him feel some guilty, but the killing up north at that time won't stop whether he goes back to it or not. He then disregards his friends and also his enemies' opinions. It is at this moment that he remembers Ovid and his poem *Tristia*, (sorrows or lamentations) about the Latin poet's exile in Tomis – Constanţa in Romania today. Heaney tells his *tristia* (his exile) is responsible, that is: first, he himself is responsible for this; secondly he is trying to make it become meaningful. At this moment he asks the crucial question in the poem: "How did I ended up like this?"

His answer to the question is to say that although he is "an inner émigré", he is not a soldier camouflaged and running away from his duties ("a wood-kerne/ escaped from the massacre"). After all, he is "neither internee nor informer" – which means that he has not been arrested by the British in the North and he is not a traitor, he has never been an informer against those fighting up North. Then comes the revelation, his is a poet with all the responsibilities that this "being a poet" brings to him. His comprehension of his "responsibility as a poet" makes him ask about the reasons why he is a poet and a citizen, a friend, a husband and a father: "For what? For the ear? For the people?", he asks in stanza 6.

The 'exposure' he experienced that very cold night in December in Wicklow is not that of a man looking up at the sky to see a comet there. After all, no one could see it anyway. As the poet he realizes he is, he is the one who does not miss "The once-in-a-lifetime portent,/ The comet's pulsing rose."

He went on being a poet. And he got much recognition for being a poet, up to the point of becoming one more Irish writer to win the Nobel Prize, in 1995. The others were Yeats, in 1923, and Beckett, in 1969. He could not have escaped his 'destiny', if we can say such a thing (or worse, believe such a thing).

In his first and still one of his best books, *Death of a Naturalist*, there is a poem entitled "Digging" which ends with this stanza:

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

We, as his readers, must always be grateful for his digging poems throughout his life.

## Notes

My readings and translations of Boland's "Mise Éire" and Montague's "A Grafted Tongue" was possible through information I found in the Internet. Unfortunately, due to viruses in my computer, I have lost everything, names of the essay, its author and the site where I had found it.

My reading and translation of Heaney's "Exposure" would never be possible without some references I found in prof. Darcy O'Brien's essay "Seamus Heaney and Wordsworth: A Correspondent Breeze," published in *The Nature of Identity – Essays Presented to Donald E. Hayden by the Graduate Faculty of Modern Letters at The University of Tulsa* (Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA: Tulsa University Press, 1981, p.37-46. I read Heaney's poem for the first time in this essay, but didn't give it much attention until 1995 when Heaney won the Nobel Prize.

In its original form, everything said here about Durcan, Egan, Boland and Montague was published in Portuguese in an extended essay included in my book *Leituras de poesia e outras leituras* [*Readings in Poetry and Other Readings*]. Goiânia, Brazil: Kelps, 2012, p.25-34.

I translated Heaney's "Exposure" and published it, with a presentation of the poet and the poem, in "Opção Cultural", *Jornal Opção*, Ano I, nº 58, 15-21 out., 1995; Goiânia-GO.

All the translations presented here were revised and sometimes modified.

1 It recalls us a famous and violent short story, Liam O'Flaherty's "The Sniper", published for the first time in 1923, in London, in a socialist small journal, The New Leader.
2 As a matter of fact, she had three booklets of pamphlets published before: 23 Poems, Autumn Essay and Eavan Boland Poetry/Prose Joseph O'Malley (Dublin: Gallagher, 1962, 1963, 1963, respectively).
3 "Mise Éire" is the title of a poem in Irish language written in 1912 by Irish poet and Republican revolutionary Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), in which Ireland is personified as an old woman who lost her past glory and was betrayed and sold by her children. Patrick Pearse was shot dead by the English army after the Easter Rising on May 3, 1916.
4 For example, both Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats did it. See Yeats' short play Catheleen Ní Houlihan, written in 1902.
5 Perhaps a moment to recall an important Irish novel, Brooklyn, by Colm Tóibín, published in 2009, as well as the 2015 film adapted from it by Nick Hornby and directed by John Crowley, with Saoirse Ronan in the role of Eilis Lacey, the girl who thinks she has no future in her small city in Ireland, and goes to the United States as an emigrant.
See MPI Migration Policy Institute: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/ireland-diaspora-immigration
6 See Note 9 bellow

7 It's important to notice that the poet writes "old order", not "old language" (emphasis added).
8 First edition: (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1972).
9 An Béal Bocht/The Poor Mouth is the third written novel by Flann O'Brien (1911-1966), but the second to be published, in 1941, because of the rejection by publishers of his second novel, The Third Policeman, which was published posthumously only in 1967. A translation of An Béal Bocht to English appeared in 1996, The Poor Mouth, translated by Patrick C. Power (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1996). In The Poor Mouth the teacher not only marks the mistakes made by the students in the tablet, he also changes all their names to "James", to make it easier for him not to have to memorize the student's Irish names. This makes the brutality of the dominations even bigger, for it deprives the children of their identity: without a name they became no one, nothing.
10 See <http://www.troublesarchive.com/artforms/poetry/piece/a-grafted-tongue>
11 This is a reference to Latin poet Ovid's book Tristia, written when he was in exile. "Tristia" in Latin means "sad things" or "sorrows". Because of what Ovid himself calls "a poem and an error" (carmen et error) the Roman poet, most respected and praised by his previous books, mostly Metamorphoses, fell in disgrace with the Roman Emperor Augustus who exiled him to Tomis, on the Black Sea, in the year 8 A.D. Ovid was born in 43 B.C. and died in 17 or 18 A.D. without ever returning to Rome. Tomis is today the city of Constanţa in Romania.

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