

Cultural Transfer in Translation. Seamus Heaney's Poetry: A Case Study

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Abstract

The present article sets out to investigate the rendering of cultural elements in the process of poetry translation, an undertaking that is a strenuous one, given the constraints of form. It looks into and illustrates the many layers of Seamus Heaney's poetry, pointing at the profusion of allusions to cultural aspects that are embedded in the texts, and that ask the translator to decide whether to "foreignize" or "domesticate" the text. These extratextual features that a translator needs to consider are imbricated with the various textual elements, generating effects that are difficult to replicate in translation, making similarity of effect all the more difficult to achieve.

Keywords: translation, cultural transfer, foreignness, equivalence of effect, Seamus Heaney, place name, the bog, sense of place

The translation of poetry has always been a great challenge, so much so that there have often been voices which have claimed that poetry is untranslatable. Robert Frost's well-known statement according to which "Poetry is that which is lost in translation" (Connolly 170) has long been a commonplace among translators. Nonetheless, poetry has always been translated, more or less successfully. Worth mentioning in this context is also Roman

Jakobson's claim that poetry is untranslatable and "only creative transposition is possible" (238).

What we intend to analyze in this article, however, is not the (un)translatability of poetry – as we start from the idea that, despite obvious stumbling blocks, poetry is translatable –, but rather the cultural transfer process that occurs in poetry translation, that adds, in its turn, to the complexity and difficulty of the translation process. As is well-known, this cultural transfer level of the translation process started benefiting from serious attention in the 1990s when the cultural turn set in. Theoreticians started emphasizing the role that culture plays in translation, the influence of social tradition on the translation process, the social context, the subjective dimension of translation, and the necessary shift from linguistic to cultural aspects, all resulting in an increased literariness of the translated text. The subject matter was radically redefined as a verbal message embedded in the web of literary as well as extra-literary signs, related simultaneously to the source and target culture. As Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere pointed out, the reevaluation of Translation Studies could contribute to a better comprehension of "how complex manipulative textual processes take place: how a text is selected for translation . . . what role the translator plays in that selection, what role an editor, publisher, or patron plays, what criteria determine the strategies that will be employed for the translators, and how a text might be received in the target system" (123).

On the other hand, one of the main responsibilities of translators has always been to replicate in the target language the reader responses that the original text had brought about. According to linguist Eugene Nida, a translator is instrumental in transferring the message, its meaning, as well as cultural elements from one language to another, creating a similar response in the target language receivers. This is the reason for which a translation should be precise, coherent, and clear. Nida's concept of "dynamic equivalence" has been a landmark in Translation Studies and in its development as a discipline. However, what we consider very significant is the fact that Nida has also pointed to the importance

of the cultural layer in translation. Thus, he examined correspondence aspects in translation from the perspective of both linguistic and cultural elements, drawing the conclusion that cultural differences could potentially present greater challenges for a translator than linguistic ones. Already in 1964, he contended that lexical issues and cultural aspects are extremely important in the translation process.

Nida's famous concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence referred to the cultural dimensions of the translation process. He argued that a "gloss translation" typically represents formal equivalence meaning that content and form are properly duplicated so that the reader in the target language can "understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression" (159) of the original text. At the opposite pole, dynamic equivalence "tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist to understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message" (159). This shift from textual translation to cultural translation has meant an expansion of the field to include a wide variety of cultural studies methodologies, a clear sign of the multidisciplinary character of modern translation studies.

The role played by culture in the translation process has also been analysed by Peter Newmark in his *Textbook of Translation* (1987). Newmark viewed culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" (94), suggesting in this way that each and every language community has distinctive cultural features of its own. Newmark also dwelt on what he called "cultural words" and set forth a number of translation strategies related to the specific type of text, the needs of the readership as well as the significance of the cultural aspects present in the text. Thus, the transference strategy that, in literary texts in particular, provides "local colour and atmosphere, and in specialist texts enables the readership (some of whom may be more or less familiar with the SL) to identify the referent – particularly a name or a

concept – in other texts (or conversations) without difficulty” (Newmark 96) comes with the disadvantage of hindering comprehension. At the opposite pole, Newmark points to componential analysis, “the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message” (96). In between these two procedures, Newmark mentions and illustrates a series of other techniques such as shifts or transpositions, naturalization, modulation, compensation, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, paraphrase, notes, additions, glosses or synonymy.

The categorizations of cultural words Newmark comes up with are extremely useful, especially from the perspective of the denotative and connotative dimensions of translation. His emphasis on the importance of context as well as of contextual factors have contributed to an enriched understanding of the translation process. Worth mentioning is also the fact that Newmark does not “regard language as a component or feature of culture. If it were so, translation would be impossible” (95). He admits that language may contain a variety of “cultural deposits, in the grammar (genders of inanimate nouns), forms of address (like *Sie*, *usted*) as well as the lexis (the sun sets) which are not taken account of in universal either in consciousness or translation” (sic) (95).

The difficulties inherent in translating culture-specific terms have also been addressed by Mona Baker in her seminal book *In Other Words* (1992). In her investigation of common problems related to non-equivalence, Baker touches on culture-specific concepts, i.e. cases in which “the source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture” (34). Baker correctly emphasizes the importance of sound knowledge of semantics in conjunction with mastery of pragmatics.

Lawrence Venuti takes a step farther and argues that it is incumbent on the translator to transfer the cultural aspects of the original text, while preserving their sense and “foreignness” to the target language culture. In his book *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*, Venuti argues that translation should be viewed through the lens of culture all the more so as the

various cultural values that are prevalent in the target language influence every stage of the translation process.

Venuti comes up with two approaches to translation – domestication and foreignization – that are concerned with the degree to which a translation manages to integrate a foreign text into the target language and culture, as well as the extent to which the work’s “foreignness” is highlighted. Domestication is, roughly speaking, reader-oriented, whereas foreignization is concerned with transferring as much as possible of the “foreignness” of the source language text.

Venuti passionately advocates the foreignization technique, arguing that translation into English had been dominated by domestication, in an attempt to reduce the “foreignness” of the original text and to eliminate all cultural differences. However, Venuti’s terms are highly relative, since what may seem foreign to a certain readership, may appear as domestic to another category of readers.

If foreignization has its risks in prose, it is even more difficult to apply in poetry, where the degree of ambiguity and of elusiveness is very high, foreignization adding, in its turn, to the difficulty of the reader’s effort to make sense of the lyrical text. What is undeniable, however, is the importance of the act of reading in the translation process that Bassnett expatiates on in her analysis of the technicalities of poetry translation presented in the chapter “Transplanting the Seed: Poetry Translation.” She comes up with a subtle critique directed at all critics who dwell on the spirit of poetry (a possible nod at Frost’s statement about the untranslatability of poetry, a dictum which she views as suggesting that poetry is “some intangible, ineffable thing (a presence, a spirit) which, although constructed *in* language cannot be transposed *across* languages”) (57). She also emphasizes the significance of extratextual features which are related, among others, to cultural aspects:

In order to translate poetry, the first stage is intelligent reading of the source text, a detailed process of decoding that takes into

account both textual features and extratextual factors. If, instead of looking closely at a poem and reading it with care, we start to worry about translating the 'spirit' of something without any sense of how to define that spirit, we reach an impasse. (60)

Bassnet expatiates on extratextual factors and correctly argues that the reading of a poem is influenced, to a large extent, by the "dialectic between the constituent elements of that poem on the page and the extratextual knowledge that we bring to it" (60-61). Consequently, subjectivity in the form of cultural knowledge, plays a very important role, especially in literary translation where intertextuality may refer a text to another, or, where cultural realities may be alluded to, bearing on the general meaning of a text.

In recent years discussions of translatability have shifted from a stress on linguistic equivalence through a focus on functional equivalence to equivalence of effect, which, in the case of literature, poetry in particular, is extremely difficult to attain and even more difficult to assess. Given the cultural background embedded in the source language text, equivalence of effect will be difficult to achieve in readers for whom certain cultural allusions or passing references may trigger no association.

As a matter of fact, equivalence of effect has been a concept much used in recent times, especially in relation to cognitive stylistics that views language as a mental phenomenon which theoreticians such as Jean Boase-Beier consider to play a very important role. She has insisted on the importance of background that she defined as knowledge, and this has made her conclude that "context in the sense of background is a psychological entity" (18). This approach should be correlated with findings in pragmatics which emphasize context, reinforcing one of the central problems of translation: the relationship between text comprehension (literary texts in particular), and a specific framework. This relationship, however, has to also consider the way in which texts achieve their effects and the factors (such as states of mind, mental frameworks, etc.) which result in a particular type of understanding.

Seamus Heaney's Poetry in Romanian Translation. A Case Study

Seamus Heaney has been one of the most important modern poets of the English language and one of the most difficult to translate. Surprisingly enough, the poet whose writings have been characterized by “lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past” (Russell 19), according to the Nobel-prize nomination, has had only 40 poems translated into Romanian in the form of a volume. These poems collected under the representative title *Țara mlaștină și alte poeme*, translated by Dan Sociu and masterfully illustrated by Tudor Jebeleanu, were published by Polirom Press in 2009 and included poems belonging to eight volumes of Heaney's poetry.

What is interesting and may come as a great challenge for the translator is the amount of cultural information present in Heaney's poetry, which does not travel easily in translation. Heaney has been a poet who was shaped and deeply influenced by the place in which he was born and lived until young adulthood – count Derry in Northern Ireland. References to his birthplace surface time and again already in his first volumes of poetry. In his later volumes, Heaney wrote on topics such as the Northern Irish bog or mutilated bodies preserved in the bog – things which may not be so easy to comprehend by a foreign reader. Furthermore, as an Irish poet, Heaney could not be indifferent to sectarian violence, which pervaded life in Northern Ireland all through his lifetime. He alluded to the so-called Northern Irish Troubles which ravaged Northern Ireland, and this requires, again, an understanding of the historical context. Thus, his *North* collection of poems (1975) expressly depicts the sectarian violence and hatred during the Troubles which shaped life in Northern Ireland for about thirty years. This unending cycle of cruelty and violent events occasions, in Heaney's poetry, references to a variety of historical contexts as well as aesthetic allusions to the Viking era or the discovery of the bog bodies of Northern Europe.

Already in his second collection of poems, *Door into the Dark* (1969), Heaney takes up the metaphor of the bog which he will return to, time and again, in his next volumes, though from different perspectives. He starts from the geographical fact of the bogs which “are among the most characteristic landscape features in Ireland, covering one-sixth (1.34 million ha) of the total land area, a higher proportion than in any other European country, except Finland” (Aalen et al. 106). Another specifically Irish aspect that a reader should keep in mind is that the bog has had a particular significance to the Irish, to a degree not found anywhere else in Europe. Hence, the practice of writing about bogs, that may look odd to a reader belonging to a different culture.

Heaney’s first poem about the bog was entitled “Bogland” and differs radically in tonality from the other poems in which he alludes to the bog. This is a serene piece – like most of Heaney’s pieces included in his first two collections of poems, written shortly before the eruption of the Troubles in 1968 –, in total contrast to the dark atmosphere of the future bog poems. It is undeniable that the shadow of the Troubles looms large over Heaney’s later poems, and marks a point of rupture starting with *Wintering Out* (1972).

“Bogland,” which gives the title of the Romanian collection of translated poems, seems to be nothing but a delineation of the Irish rural landscape. Bogland was all around Heaney’s childhood home, so much so that the poet came to perceive it as “the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it” (*Preoccupations* 54). The unearthing of “the skeleton / Of the Great Irish Elk” (41) and of butter “recovered salty and white” is miles away from the mangled human remnants mentioned in Heaney’s future bog poems. The atmosphere is serene, and though the lines do not follow a particular rhyme pattern, there are still instances of rhyme throughout the text. Heaney employs slant or half rhymes in this poem which is noticeable in the repetition of a vowel or a consonant sound throughout a line or across several lines of poetry. By resorting to sporadic rhyming, Heaney lends the poem some rhythmic coherence, without forcing a specific framework on it. The poem illustrates in an exquisite

manner the actual intricacy of free verse poetry. For instance, the second stanza is connected due to similar vowel sounds as in “elk” and “skeleton”; or, “missing” and “millions” in the fifth stanza. These consonances and assonances are, invariably, lost in translation:

They've taken the skeleton	Au dezgropat din turbă
Of the Great Irish Elk	scheletul Marelui Elan Irandez
Out of the peat, set it up	I-au aranjat, o ladă uimitoare
An astounding crate full of air. (41)	plină cu aer. (19)

Another challenge for the translator is represented by the rendering of words with moral connotation as in the line which refers to the earth – “The ground itself is kind, black butter,” that is more difficult to handle. Sociu comes up with “Pământul însuși e unt negru și bun,” but the moral connotation of “kind” does not fare well in translation.

The metaphor of the bogland, that points to the stratification of history, will be later approached in “The Tollund Man” (belonging to *Wintering Out* (1972)) and a number of other poems, based on imagery and information provided by P. V. Glob’s illustrated archaeological study, *The Bog People*, which shows corpses that were exhumed from the Scandinavian bog. Many of these victims, according to the study, were victims of ritual sacrifice, a fact evident on the Tollund Man who has a noose around his neck, or the slit from “ear to ear” on the Grauballe Man that Heaney refers to in his poems. The poet would confess in relation to these pictures: “The unforgettable photographs of these victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocity, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles” (*Preoccupations* 57-58). The struggles Heaney alluded to were, obviously, the Irish Troubles, to which the poet reacted in his own way, by creating images that would suggest the violence of the times: “From that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to

being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament" (*Finders Keepers* 23-24).

"Tollund Man" is quite problematic in translation due to the ambiguities with which Heaney infuses the original. Thus, in the first part of this tripartite poem, in which the poet offers a description of the "Tollund Man," based, to a large extent, on the picture included in Glob's *Bog People* (191), the reader comes across a suspended sentence that can be interpreted in various ways. The strange syntax together with the confusing punctuation of the sentence that contains a deferred main clause, introduced only at the end of the sentence, creates the illusion that it is the poet himself who stands naked "except for / The cap, noose and girdle" and that the poet has become the bridegroom to the goddess (Russell 65). The translator, however, chooses to order the ideas of the original and offers a single reading of the sentence by foregrounding the main clause which he places at the beginning of the sentence, making it clear to the reader that it is the Tollund Man who is subject to the goddess. "I will stand a long time" which appears as line 11 of the original, becomes line 5 in translation and the whole ambiguity of the original is, intentionally, sacrificed.

Heaney changes planes, and, from the ancient story of the sacrificial victims from Jutland, moves into contemporary Northern Ireland. He contemplates himself asking the Tollund Man to germinate, as in ancient rituals, the bodies of past and present victims of violence. His prayer to him (which risks blaspheming his Catholic faith) to bring back to life the corpses of those who died during the Northern Irish Troubles, as well as those of "four young Catholic men who were killed in a sectarian attack by Protestant paramilitaries in early 1920s Ireland" (Russell 65), is highly unsettling.

This part poses, again, problems for the translator who chooses to develop some ideas that are not present in the original, out of the desire to probably make the original clearer to the target language reader. Thus, he introduces into the text the image of the entrails ("măruntaie") which is a very powerful image for the bodies that were "trailed" as well as the noun "railway" ("traversă"), which, however, is quite ambiguous in Romanian, being employed

in a large variety of contexts. Thus, line 30 does not have any equivalent in the source language but is obviously inserted for the equivalence of effect that the translator aims at. “The tell-tale skin” does not find its equivalent in translation, and the “teeth” become noisy (“gălăgioși”) which does not work very well in the target language:

I could risk blasphemy, Consecrate the cauldron bog Our holy ground and pray Him to make germinate	Aș risca blasfemia și aș consacra cazanul acesta al mlaștinii ca pământ sfânt și m-aș ruga lui
The scattered, ambushed Flesh of labourers, Stockinged corpses Laid out in the farmyards,	să facă să germineze carnea terciuită a muncitorilor, cadavrele lor desculțe întinse în curți,
Tell-tale skin and teeth Flecking the sleepers Of four young brothers, trailed For miles along the lines. (48)	gălăgioșii dinți împrăștiați pe traverse și măruntaiele celor patru frați, mile întregi de-a lungul șinelor. (30)

“Punishment” develops the same topic of the victims of violence, this time from a different perspective. This poem, belonging to *North*, foregrounds a female character – The Windeby Girl –, as the sacrificial victim. This character, taken up from Glob’s study, also appears in the sonnet “Strange Fruit.” Heaney’s “little adulteress” was punished for infidelity by death – the usual punishment administered in the North of Europe in ancient times. Similarly, contemporary Catholic girls would be tarred on account of their fraternizing with British officers. What is interesting about this poem is that “[r]ather than looking at the violence in Northern Ireland from a cross-sectarian point of view, “Punishment” offers a perspective on intra-tribal Catholic violence” (Nice 43). This cultural knowledge embedded in the text is crucial for a correct perception of the poem. Heaney blames himself for being only an ‘artful voyeur’ of the girl’s exposed body – in other words, for

simply aestheticizing her body, turning this violent scene into art –, indirectly admitting that “he failed to stop the paramilitary punishment of her ‘betraying sisters’ in Northern Ireland, tarred and feathered for fraternizing with British troops” (Allison 235).

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

Pot simți strînsoarea
ștreangului pe grumaz,
în jurul gâtului, vîntul izbind
în pieptul ei dezgolit.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs. (*North* 30)

Îi umflă sfîrcurile cît
boabele de chihlimbar,
îi zgîlție instalația
fragilă a coastelor. (57)

The repetition of the nasal [n] in conjunction with the assonance in “rigging” and “ribs” is cleverly rendered into Romanian by means of similar alliterations, which, though different (the sibilants [s], [ʃ], [z] in “strînsoarea,” “ștreangului,” “grumaz,” as well as the repetition of the [g] in “grumaz,” “gît,” “dezgolit”) allude to the musical effects of the original, aiming at the similarity of effect that Boase-Beier emphasized at the level of style.

Equally interesting and challenging is “Strange Fruit” which contains a “series of narratives of victims past and present,” as earlier drafts “featured a dense intertext of Catholic devotional narratives, including the martyred Oliver Plunkett’s head that is displayed in Drogheda, Ireland” (Russell 79). Nonetheless, the published version foregrounds only the bog girl’s head, though the mention of Diodorus Siculus (who seems to have offered the story of a Roman soldier who was killed by Egyptians on account of his inadvertent killing of a cat, their most revered animal), may confuse the reader. The poem also nods, in its title, at the famous jazz song from across the ocean, recorded by Billie Holiday in 1939. The lyrics of the song, which is a protest against the lynching of Black Americans, draw a parallel between the victims of violence and the fruit of trees.

This time, the translator sacrifices the form of the poem, probably inadvertently, since the original sonnet form is rendered as 15 lines in translation. The first two lines, which act as a couplet in the original, are rendered as three lines, and the sonnet form disappears altogether:

Here is the girl's head like an
exhumed gourd.
Oval-faced, prune-skinned, prune-
stones for teeth. (32)

Aici e capul fetei ca o tărtăcuță
dezgropată,
Cu fața ovală, pielea ca pruna uscată,
Dinți ca sîmburii de prună. (55)

What is impressive in this poem about this “murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible / beheaded girl” is that Heaney broaches the question of violence from a different perspective: he wonders, in the undertext, about the violence inflicted on a body upon exhibiting it publicly (“made an exhibition of”), as well as about the ethical implications of the act of displaying it. This aspect, however, is lost in translation where the idea of the exhibition disappears altogether in “au scos la lumină cîrlionții / au scos la aer frumusețea ei coriacee” (55). The foregrounding of staring in the original – the viewer staring at the girl, and the girl “*outstaring* axe and beatification” (my emphasis) does not work in translation either, since the outstaring is translated as “a face praf,” and in its repeated form as “a face praf și pulbere” in an interesting crescendo suggesting the violent emotions inscribed in the source language text, which, however, fails to render the original’s exchange of gazes with all its implications.

Another area of Heaney’s poetry where cultural knowledge is a reading prerequisite is represented by his place-name poems. In his 1972 article entitled “The Sense of Place,” Heaney contended that although “the nourishment which springs from knowing and belonging to a certain place . . . is not just an Irish obsession,” this is especially the case in Ireland “because of the peculiar fractures in our history, north and south, and because of the way that possession of the land and possession of different languages have rendered the question particularly urgent” (*Preoccupations* 136).

Heaney has constantly expressed his preoccupation with the importance of the Irish landscape. In an interview with literary critic Seamus Deane, Heaney suggested that he intended to create a “cultural landscape” in his poetry:

Yes, I think I came to this notion in the writing of the *Wintering Out* collection, particularly in the place name poems: ‘Anahorish,’ ‘Broagh,’ and so on. . . . one could be faithful to the nature of the English language for in some sense these poems are erotic mouth-music by and out of the Anglo-Saxon tongue, and, at the same time, be faithful to one’s own non-English origin, for me that is Country Derry. (838-839)

By going into the origin of local place names, Heaney pointed to the intricacy of the topography of his youth, in relation to the topic of Northern Ireland more broadly. It is meaningful that, in his prose volume entitled *Preoccupations*, Heaney devoted an entire essay to Mossbawn, emphasizing the role of tradition and of belongingness to a certain place:

Moss, a Scots word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and *bawn*, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses. Mossbawn, the planter’s house on the bog. Yet in spite of this Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss Bann, and *bán* is the Gaelic word for white. So might not the thing mean the white moss, the moss of bog-cotton? In the syllables of my home I see a metaphor of the split culture of Ulster. (35)

Such references to a history which has been very tense, and which has been marked by continuous conflicts with the English, and all the implications deriving from Ireland’s status as a component of the British empire, may be difficult to understand by a reader who does not have solid knowledge of the Irish past, all the more so as this knowledge is often encoded in metaphors or figurative language. This history is often inscribed in the landscape so much so that allusions to the landscape often mean allusions to a painful history. Furthermore, Heaney’s poetry abounds in references to

dinnseanches, the old Celtic poems which point to the original meanings of various place names, representing a kind of mythological etymology.

Place, as has already been suggested, is foregrounded in a number of place-name poems – “Anahorish,” “Broagh” and “Toome” (all belonging to *Wintering Out*)–, which are places situated in the vicinity of Mossbawn, where Heaney spent his childhood, and to which he also dedicated a poem. Heaney attended primary school in Anahorish, and though the name does not appear on current maps, it appears as the title of a poem dedicated to a place the poet fondly remembers. Heaney celebrates, in this way, a topographical legacy coming from a distant past and points to the musicality of a name which came to be an integral part of his identity. He points at the Gaelic etymology of the word for which he provides a transliteration at the beginning of the poem – “My place of clear water.” Anahorish is the poet’s Arcadia, his paradise, “the first hill in the world” (16).

It is interesting that Heaney also touches in this poem on the connection between language and landscape, as the sounds which make up the word Anahorish are viewed as similar to natural features. Thus, the place-name becomes a metaphor of the place, while its phonetic features become the subject matter of the poem. It is also “a statement of linguistic and cultural resistance to the encroachment of the British presence in Ireland” (O’Brien 93).

Much of the erotic mouth-music inevitably is lost in translation, no matter how gifted the translator may be:

My “place of clear water,”
The first hill in the world
Where springs washed into
The shiny grass

Al meu “loc cu apă curată,”
Primul deal din lume
Unde izvoarele curgeau
În iarba strălucitoare

And darkened cobbles
In the bed of lane
Anahorish, soft gradient
Of consonant, vowel-meadow. (16)

Și bolovanii întunecați
În patul cărării.
Anahorish, dulce povârniș
De armonie, pajiște de vocale. (37)

The translator seems to have missed the connection between the place and its name, between sound and landscape that Heaney suggests, as he translates “consonants” as “armonie.” On the other hand, the subtle music created by the alternation of specific consonants (the soft sibilants [s] and [ʃ] in “springs,” “washed,” “shiny,” “grass”) and semivowels ([w] in “world,” “where,” “washed”) is, inevitably, lost in translation. As a matter of fact, Heaney uses combinations of vowels and consonants to form a poem that has a mesmerizing effect on the listener. He comes up with a number of assonants by means of which he creates internal rhymes. He also repeats them at various intervals creating alliterative effects which suggest beats or hissings or frictions which transform the assonant melodies. Thus, the hissing sounds in the first stanza (“spring,” “washed,” “shiny,” “grass”) approximate the sound of the water washing the grass.

Many of the musical effects of the original, however, find their way in translation. The translator has resorted to alliterations in an effort to create musical effects comparable to those brought about by the original (the liquid consonant [l] in “primul,” “deal,” “lume,” the plosive [p] and sibilant [ʃ] in “povîrniș,” “pajiște”).

There is, however, one major difficulty related to the translation of the cultural word “kenning” (“mound-dweller”). A “mound dweller” used to be a being that lived inside a mound. “Locuitori-în-perete” may be quite ambiguous in Romanian and quite a far cry from what Heaney suggested in his poem.

Another place-name poem is “Toome Road” (translated as such in Romanian, as a result of the application of the strategy of foreignization), belonging to the volume *Field Work* (1979). The poem zooms in on Toome or Toomebridge, the name of a town located between Counties Antrim and Derry, the area where Heaney grew up. Firmly rooted in Heaney’s rural origin, as well as in the effects soldiers had on rural communities and their environment, the poem suggests that militarization impacted rural communities as well, not only urban environments such as Belfast. In addition to it, as Heaney confessed in various interviews, the

poet did see American soldiers training for World War Two battles in his parish in the 1940s.

Despite the fact that there is no regular rhyme scheme, one notices internal rhyme (“chill gates,” “wet slates”); consonances (“sowers of seed”) and assonances are also made ample use of. Furthermore, from line 6 to line 9, there are two sets of rhyming couplets. Then lines 12 and 13 rhyme, leading to the final rhyming couplet. The description of the tanks entering Heaney’s locality early in the morning is vivid and memorable, notably the mock-casualness of the “warbling” vehicles, that nonetheless are invading the home of the poet. The modern tanks turn into ancient “chariots” in line 15, an image that lends the poem a long perspective, of centuries of wars that brought about so much suffering. The poet resorts to monosyllables to create a certain rhythm, and to the plural in [z] which also lends musicality to the poem (“cars,” “tyres,” “branches”).

The onomatopoeic warble works very well in English in association with the sound of rubber tyres on the asphalt. It is translated as “a vibra” which borrows some of the features of a song, though not all. The word is repeated at the end of the translated poem – this time a close reflection of the English adjective “vibrant”–, giving the poem circularity and intimating the never-ending cycle of violence. However, what is more problematic are lines 10 to 14 where an additional line (line 14) is created in the target language, due to the disparity at the lexical level between the two languages – long Romanian words vs. short English words–, this resulting in an imbalance at the level of structure between the English original (17 lines) and the Romanian one (18 lines). Furthermore, the Romanian phrase “cu noaptea-n cap” (which suggests the idea of waking up very early) has slightly different connotations than “the small hours visitant” (which suggests rather the furtive character of the action). A translation closer to the original might have been “care vine-n miez de noapte,” which also implies the cover of darkness, so necessary in the context:

... Whom should I run to tell	... La cine s-alerg și să-i spun
Among all those with their back doors	dintre cei care-și țin poarta
on the latch	încuiată
For the bringer of bad news, that	pentru cel care vine cu vești rele,
small hours visitant	acel vizitator
Who, by being expected, might be	cu noaptea-n cap care, fiind
kept distant? (15)	așteptat,
	poate fi ținut la distanță. (63)

The musicality and playful tone of the folk ballad with which the English poem begins, is lost altogether ("one morning early I met armoured cars / In convoy, warbling along on powerful tyres"). The soldiers cannot sever the poet's connection to his homeplace which acquires sacred connotations since it is described as an omphalos: "it stands here still, stands vibrant as you pass, / The visible, untoppled omphalos" ("încă rămîne aici, vibrează cînd treceți / invizibilul, nerăsturnatul centru al lumii"). Strangely enough, "visible" is translated as "invizibil," which changes entirely the meaning of the original.

Worth discussing in this context is also the repetition of the word "omphalos" in Heaney's poetry. Translated as "centre," the word loses much of the force and spiritual significance it holds in English, where, apart from the basic meaning of "central point," it also alludes to the "a sacred conical object, especially a stone (in the ancient world)," preserving the significance of the Greek original word ("Omphalos"). A third type of usage is, in literary works, "another word for navel." For Heaney the word sounds like an incantation, as he suggests in his meditation on Mossbawn in his prose volume *Preoccupations*:

I would begin with the Greek word, omphalos, meaning navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and repeat it, omphalos, omphalos, omphalos, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door. (17)

The poem “The Other Side” (belonging to *Wintering Out*) may serve as an appropriate conclusion to our analysis. Pointing to the political, ideological, as well as religious, divide that is part and parcel of Northern Ireland identity, the poem delineates a Protestant neighbor, exploring the differences between the two main Irish religious groups – Catholics and Protestants –, in an effort to find common ground. Heaney delineates a Presbyterian farmer who, before dropping by, waits until his Catholic neighbours have said their prayers. The poem points at barriers, at divides between people and communities. It plays, as Heaney suggested at some point, “with the notion of separation, of two sides of the march drain being like the two sides of the divided community of Northern Ireland – two sides divided by the way they pray, for example, and in little subtle but real ways . . . by the way they speak” (*Finders Keepers* 57). The poems intimates, ingeniously, that a bridging of the divide is possible, that one should try to reach out to the Other, in spite of all the differences that may set us apart.

What better way to reach out to the Other if not via translation? The divides separating us – be they linguistic, cultural, ideological, political –, can certainly be bridged via translation. How solid these bridges will be is left to each of us to decide.

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