

Muscular Metaphors in Anne Enright: An Interview

Hedwig Schwall (KULeuven/Campus Kortrijk, Belgium)

Anne Enright won the Booker Prize for 2007 with her novel *The Gathering*. Shortly after the award ceremony she was the guest of Leuven University and the Louvain Institute for Ireland in Europe, also known as the Irish College, who had invited her to read at the conference on Irish Women's Writing, one of the highlights in the celebrations of the College's 400 years of existence. Enright has written four novels so far: *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), about a TV producer who suddenly finds herself with an angel in the house; *What Are You Like?* (2001), about twins who illustrate the differences between Ireland and England; *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2003), an Enright version of a historical figure, an Irish courtesan who became the mistress of a Paraguayan dictator; and *The Gathering* (2007). She also has two collections of short stories, *The Portable Virgin* (1991) and *Taking Pictures* (2008) as well as a witty non-fiction book, *Making Babies* (2004).

HEDWIG SCHWALL: *It seems to me that throughout your work there is a focus on the interactions between life and death, and in your last novel you even raise the stakes: with a name like Veronica, the living protagonist is supposed to catch a vera icon, a "true image" of her dead brother?*

ANNE ENRIGHT: Indeed, the Vera Icon is at the centre – it shows her relationship to suffering. The name is also 'made up' being half Greek and half Latin, and is in this way like an Irish coffee – a symbol of authenticity which is in itself inauthentic. I mean, that's why I like the word, personally – and it is one of the reasons Veronica doesn't like her name – a passage that was cut.

You make Veronica say that "Maybe this is what they are about ... these infantile confusions ... they are a way of fighting our way out of all this meat" (TG 140) A bit confusing, but the words meat and flesh are all over the novel.

"They" refers forward to the infantile confusions, by which she means different kinds of sex and sexual positions. And there is a lot of meat in *The Gathering* because death makes you think about meat, so meat is on her mind. But her children are made out of twig and blossom, not of meat. So there is a whole vegetarian strand to counter this meat.

The metamorphic aspect, too, seems strongly present in Eliza Lynch. When she is on the boat to Asuncion she thinks of how a dead woman's body feeds a pumpkin that feeds other persons again etc: the eating metaphor is there all the time.

I think Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* inspired me there... but that was a long time ago. I read it coming back from school in Canada. This metaphor has much to do with my personal experience of pregnancy and birth and feeding. Yes, eating is very interesting, and Eliza is very grounded in that. But I am also interested in metamorphosis as it happens in nature: there are these animals in Mexico called *axolotl* which change under some environmental imperative, they become salamanders. They look almost like another species, so it is almost a shift into a different order of being. And there is that story by Primo Levi of a Nazi experiment about where these people break into a house somewhere in Berlin, and find these holocaust figures, and they have these terrible wings on their back. This experiment to change the nature of man is a lovely story, a very strong and very unpleasant story but yes metamorphosis in that sense would be interesting. [See the short story 'Angelic Butterfly', in *The Sixth Day and Other Stories*.]

In *The Gathering* the narrator would like to leave her body (which I don't particularly feel

myself, but I recognize the issue: the body is a problem). Especially in *The Gathering* it is a very strong problem so I suppose that, too, is connected to the theme of metamorphosis. The yearning for some kind of metaphorical shift which is contained already in language. The yearning for metaphor, transcendence – also for death, of course.

Being deep into this motif, do you like reading Ovid?

It's something I pick up all the time, but I never really get through him. But at the moment I am very interested in his exile at the Black Sea, his letters from exile, which are wonderful.

It seems Orpheus and Veronica share the fact that they both explore the realm of death.

Yes, I come back to him a lot in my short stories which are coming out in March. It contains about three Orpheus stories, well at least one, anyway, one definite one. I am writing a story and then I see, ah, yes, I am doing that again, that story again. Also from an early age on I loved the story of Lot's wife. Both of those figures are very strong.

It seems to me you deconstruct reality in choosing heroines for your novels (so far all your novels have female heroes) who are not firmly delineated subjects, but who change (through pregnancy, through passion). As a result, their perception is not focused on being or non-being but on degrees of both. So Veronica notices that Nugent has "this trick of not existing much" (TG 15).

Yes ... There is an Irish saying, if you see someone, a child or an individual, you say "they're all there". Or, if you talk about someone who is mad, you say "He's not all there". But of a child you can say he is very much himself now. That's a personality thing, that you fill your – you fill the vessel of yourself. I'm not sure ... I realize that I am actually moving towards being all interested in irresolute states; the emotions that happen before things become clear, so all these unsettled, unresolved things. I like the restlessness before it is arrested by words. I am interested in all the disturbance that goes before that, in that, sort of, agitation, of not knowing, or nearly knowing.

And I am intrigued by in-between states: I had a very strong sense of my children before they were conceived. And it was very certain, just around that time, that they were on their way ... so I had a sense of their idea of prior... pre-prior existence. Also when someone died, I have had a very strong sense of them being present. Like this is where Liam is like a shout in the room. That is absolutely only my experience... They are lingering in your brain, in your system.

*Another thing that strikes me in your novels is that what is usually unintentional (like dying) is made intentional in your figures, and vice versa. So in *The Gathering* the narrator says about Liam: "It is a serious business, being dead. He would like to do it well." (TG 239) – which struck me as an echo from "Lady Lazarus".*

Ah yes but I love "Lady Lazarus". That poem was very important to me. When I was fifteen-sixteen I read a lot of Plath, and identified very strongly. She is a good poet for an adolescent girl, but now I go for her two happy poems; they are both about her children.

The line before that went: "He is full of his own death. His death fills him as a plum fills its own skin." That sounds like Rilke.

Oh it's absolutely Rilke. The thing about Rilke is that he is just a sacred writer for me. I haven't read him all, I don't "own" him, but I have a copy of the *Duino Elegies* with a parallel text. I would occasionally read it in German and translate little fragments. But of that passage which was stolen – with no apologies – from Orpheus and Eurydike, about whom this poem was, Colm Toibin told me I should read the poem. He said it was Nuala O'Faolain's favourite poem and I would really enjoy it. He knows; we have been through a lot of the same sort of things over the years, friends in common, we know each other's families, so I trust him when he says you should read this or you should read that. And he was right: "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes" is a wonderful poem.

Your protagonists always seem to have a very bodily kind of "knowing", bodies marinated in passions, as when Grace finds

Stephen skulking in bed, "a line of piqued flesh exposed".

Yes I like to explore the French word *sensible*, the Shakespearean "sensible", which is used about the body, about flesh. It is vital to be sensitive through the senses. I've been doing a lot of yoga over the last few years and I am very interested in the physical memory, what the body contains, retains, through the senses. I mean bringing up children for example is not a cerebral act, it is about being close to them. It's a physical relationship, very strongly. The talk is a bonus; so I think we are mostly physical for a very long time. Things originate in the body, memory is steered by the body. In the brain smell and long-time memory are absolutely beside each other. So the flares you get in the brain in response to a smell, the electro-magnetic response in the brain leaks into long-time memory. So this is where we get this smell – as *déjà-vu*. Also it is a sense to which we are helpless. You can't *not* smell something. You can *not* touch something, you can look away, but you can't *not* smell something. It is the most open of all our senses.

I tell my students one of the five senses must be in each of your sentences or people won't know what you are on about. The reader must be physically hooked by each sentence. Yes I have taught occasionally over the years, as writer fellow in TCD, on residential workshops in England, and also as mentor to a few American students from Carlow College in Pittsburgh.

And what about sight, colour? You seem to have something with the colour blue.

I must, yes, I must. Maybe because it is the colour of Mary, it's a cool, cerebral colour.

When Ada comes in and settles in Nugent's brain I did deliberately draw on the virgin blue. That was all very deliberate.

In Eliza Lynch too that colour pops up at all the key moments, and again in The Gathering.

Well, Ada was married in blue; I just like... it's a lovely word.

You make Veronica say: "Belief. I have the

biology of it." What do you mean by that?

It's a feeling in our chest, a feeling in our forehead...

What strikes me is how a "soul" becomes firmly incarnated in your figures. About Eliza Lynch someone says that "she had a pure soul"; the French envoy senses it and she herself finds her destiny when she finds "a place in my soul where I can stand". What is that soul?

When I said she had a pure soul I mean pure sensations. She burns quite clear. But she is also greedy in the extreme. So her purity is a purity of impulse actually, a clarity of impulse.

She is extremely simple, Eliza. So I suppose a pure soul, it probably means "untainted", or uncomplex. I don't know – she is slightly unknowable, Eliza, because she has gone into that – she has become a national object, as Stewart says. That's why the narrative goes back to him, about the rest of her life, and he moves away from her. She is unknowable both to the observer and to herself, as a national object. And she is not a subject any more.

Mmm, that sounds Yeatsian.

Yes I love that, "The Fisherman" of Yeats, "as cold and passionate as the dawn"!

Another feature of your fiction seems to be that your figures have a no-nonsense approach in metaphysical realms, while in daily reality things are almost surreal in their perception. Do you like writers like Lewis Carroll, James Stephens, Flann O'Brien?

Well *Alice* was my favourite book when I was six, it was one of the first books I read.

I read that book fourteen-fifteen times, I read it constantly when I was six or seven. I very early distinguished it from my mother's choice of *The Wind in the Willows*. My poor mother loves the nineteenth century, Dickens and *The Wind in the Willows*, so my path is completely other. The whole *Alice* thing is very much in my childhood, would be associated with my father's very ludic mentality. He was full of games, mental games, opposites and putting things on their head, puns; strategies, you know, teasing in a very benign way. So, yes, I loved

Alice. Stephens – yes, I'd hate the leprechauns and such stuff, but the deadpan surreal aspect is fine. Or if you take him through to Flann O'Brien... most definitely. Stephens has less of a sense of irony than O'Brien who was all irony, all play and mirrors. The best things about O'Brien, though, is that he is astonishingly funny.

Talking of James Stephens reminds me of his Irish Fairy Tales. Did fairy tales ever appeal to you?

Well yes I had fairy tales but I was more interested in Greek and Norse mythology. Particularly Norse mythology, that was around the time when I was ten or eleven, I knew absolutely everything there was to know about it.

Which motifs appealed to you there?

I was very interested in heroism, and quite masculine tales of heroism. Heimdal, the Rainbow god, had nine mothers – there's loads of great ideas in all of them. Greek mythology is very rapine but that was briefly interesting, I don't know why I stuck to the Norse...

Catholic mythology, or theology, also seems to provide a system of thought that plays a considerable role in your books. In The Wig My Father Wore you talk about original sin and grace, in The Gathering about forgiving and resurrection, albeit indirectly...

Yes, yes, absolutely... All of these things actually exist on the same level. The Greek myths do some of the same things as Catholic theology, they just pull very ancient narrative responses, so they are really very useful structures. But figures like Liam, they predate Christianity altogether. He is the lost one, the scapegoat. In a very original sense, he is the sacrificial boy.

On the other hand you like enlightened spirits like Voltaire: in Eliza Lynch you mention Candide.

Oh, yeah, I loved *Candide*. When my sister went to college I was eleven and I read her books. My teacher in my secondary school went around and asked everyone what they were reading and I said quite coolly Thomas More's *Utopia*, and she just blinked and said 'and what about you?' to the next girl. But my sister had

these black Penguin's World's Classics, she was studying English and history, and I just read the thinner ones, and *Candide* was fabulous.

How old did you say you were?

Eleven. It is absolutely perfect for that age. There are no hard words in it, no problem. And the cruelties – I was used to that from the Greek myths.

Did you ever read the mystics?

Yes. Julian of Norwich, Theresa of Avila. I actually *have* their books but I haven't read them yet. Something I was interested in at one stage is martyrs. They are great. I love Catholic martyrs and hermits and all of this... these are all good fun. They were very present in my childhood, and their stories were always gruesome. And I liked that very much.

No sentimentalism for you but a few good incisive stories, sweat and blood and the like.

Yeah, blood and anguish. Well, certainly no *Wind in the Willows* and the like, put it that way. I didn't *do* *Wind in the Willows*. We also grew up with weekly mass, a man up on a cross who was incidentally dead. I didn't filter things as a child, obviously.

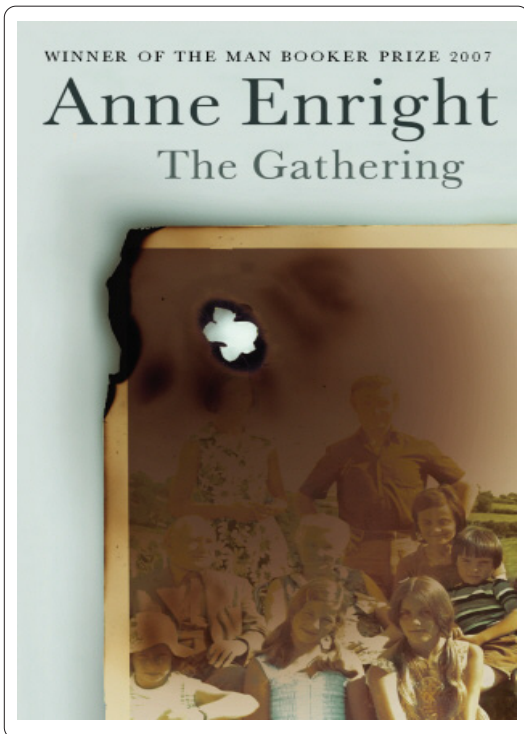
Liam is the black sheep of the family yet the nature and extent of his doings remain vague. He has the aura of being evil, yet the narrator says "The problem with Liam was always a hundred small things." (TG 124) How do you see "evil"?

I don't believe in evil. I don't think it exists. It is a bogeyman of a word. *The Gathering* is interested in where our ideas of the monstrous and of evil originate. In this case it is with Nugent. Veronica says "I don't believe in evil." I believe that we are human and fallible and we fuck things up in human ways. But her image of Nugent is almost mystical, I mean because it is so soaked with nausea and terror, her fear of him is very primal.

And yet he is such a dry figure, a Paudeen with his greasy till?

Indeed he doesn't have a lot of love to give around. He is small-minded and banal. And I think that a lot of discussions of evil confuse

our actions with our thoughts and dreams and nightmares. We usually just think of evil as thinking monstrous thoughts, but evil actions are fairly simple things. This goes back to the letter of St James actually, faith or deeds. And I am very much of the deeds school. I mean personally. I don't mind about people's intentions, it is actually what people do what matters. Whatever they feel is beside the point, as far as I'm concerned.



You say at some point in The Gathering "We were...the Firbolgs of Griffith Way." (TG 157) That Irish mythology provides you with dark figures like the Firbolgs comes in handy, I suppose, but what about Griffith Way? Does it exist or did you want to just have his name in?

I did, yes. There is a Griffith Avenue in Dublin and there are a number of roads on the way to Finglas Road, but there isn't a Griffith's Way, no. But I once wrote an essay about Arthur Griffith. I don't know much about him, but

Griffith wrote, in response to Yeats's defence of Synge's "Pegeen in her shift": "Everybody knows that Irish women are the most virtuous in Europe". So I just remembered this phrase from school history and so Arthur Griffith has always remained a minor hate figure – for me.

Well you differ from Joyce then, Griffith was one of the few Irishmen he respected.

He is probably more complex than I give out, yeah.

Talking of Joyce: the first passage that comes to my mind is where you turn Joyce into a joke, as in The Wig My Father Wore, when "snow is general" all over Ireland, except it is the snow of blurred broadcasting.

Yes I pilfer freely from Joyce, I have no problem doing that. Some journalist asked me "How do you put yourself up against Joyce like that?" He thought it very presumptuous. Some of the older male writers in Ireland do this "old father old artifice" thing but I think you might as well not bother because Joyce was so wonderful. It is not a competition with Joyce, there is no question of who is his "heir" in the way that Heaney might, for example, be seen as the "heir" to Yeats. Or a writer who says it is difficult to write in the shadow of Joyce, this to me is nonsense. Joyce did not throw a shadow, he cast a great light. He made it possible to write about anything at all.

In Making Babies you say that being a woman in Ireland in the 1980s was not exactly an easy thing. You left Ireland when you were sixteen go to and study in Canada. Did that bring a major change in your outlook on things?

Well, first I was going to go as an *au pair* to Germany but then I heard of this scholarship to this college called Pearson College, in Canada, which is actually an international school. Everyone was on a scholarship that was to promote peace and understanding. All these clever people from around the world who like to climb mountains and sing around camp fires. I didn't like to climb mountains but I also didn't become a lawyer like most of the others, but I had two years of free... of fantastic education.

And when I say free I mean free, I could do whatever I liked I didn't have to do exams for university entrance, *I had* university entrance. So I studied German, but with the native speakers, not with a class of non-Germans. I didn't turn up for classes all that much. But I had a wonderful English teacher who is still a friend of mine, who paid absolute attention to every word on the page. We had to do essays, and on every second line there would be a red mark, as much comment sometimes as what you had written, so he was the first person who made me structure a sentence. And I responded very well to that, I enjoyed that. It was fantastic. So then after two years of this I came back to study philosophy in Dublin – Existentialism. It was a pain in the ass. I never went to the philosophy lectures, I spent all my time in the student theatre. Locke, Berkeley and Hume were incredibly tedious, but the really interesting people came late: the psychoanalysis course in year four. The course I liked most was Freud. Especially *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*; that was one of our textbooks, which is great, fantastic. I like all his death work. So I read all of Freud and Rollo May, the existential psychoanalysis; I also loved reading Melanie Klein, and Adam Phillips. I also had a Lacan phase when I read at the university of East Anglia, in my late twenties. But I enjoy Freud more because he is really funny, whether he knows it or not ... (*laughs*) I read him in German, as far as I could – which was not much. Remember I spent most of the time in the theatre.

Sometimes it seems to me that you have something of Wilde's epigrammatic style. Like in The Gathering when Tom, as a result of a Jesuit upbringing, is described as "selfish in the poshest possible way" (TG 71).

(*Broad smile*) Yeah, Wilde, I love Wilde. The Booker happened on Wilde's birthday. Somebody said it's Oscar Wilde's birthday. As a child, I loved his fairy tales all right – like "The Happy Prince". When I went to college we did a lot of seventeenth-century comedy, Restoration comedy, and Oscar Wilde would be very much part of that tradition. So, certainly in theatrical terms, I really enjoyed all of that.

Remember we spent all our time in the theatre. With our gang we staged a play a week, basically. We had fantastic fun. I would act or direct or do the lighting... I got the job at RTE because, apart from getting good academic qualifications, I had worked in the summer in the theatres, had done some professional work as an actress... One of my circles in Dublin is still all these people who were involved in the theatre, as is my husband.

Conversations, especially in The Wig My Father Wore and in The Gathering, are often nonsensical – Grace's father being on a different wavelength, or when Kitty and Veronica meet. I suppose you picked this ability of dialogue up in the theatre?

Ah, yes, but it is the Hegarty family speech. It sounds Pinteresque, maybe Beckettesque. But it is mainly the family thing.

As your own style is so condensed, I am bound to ask how you relate to poetry, say, contemporary Irish poetry?

People say to me you should write poetry but I couldn't do it. I don't know what a good poem is. Many poems are just very nice sentences. And they don't do anything. And I want a poem to *do* something. But yeah I read Irish poetry. I really like Sinéad Morrissey, I like to listen to her read, and I enjoy Ciaran Carson as well. Leontia Flynn is a nice poet, she's got her first collection out; but Sinéad is beautiful. Eavan Boland, she has a wholly different kind of relationship to metaphor than I do but obviously she really knows what she's doing.

Derek Mahon is a wonderful poet also, Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney... it's like an absolute cornucopia.

And what is your position in this cornucopia?

One of the pathways I have been negotiating as a writer has been my relationship with the real. So all these words like surreal, like *hyperréalisme* in French, I like hyperrealism, as a description of what I do. Ideas of 'realism' are very culturally determined. Realism in France is Zola, realism in Ireland is naturalism, so it's very

culturally specified what “the real” is. And I am very impatient with the real. I find that language’s ability... language strains towards metaphor. And I follow on. And then sometimes I might make the metaphor radical, like I have an angel knock on the door instead of saying he looked like an angel. So it is linguistically determined, my relationship with the real. But I do want to ... I don’t want to frighten the horses. My impulse is towards lives as people live them. My impulse is towards the real. That’s where I am trying to get.

It’s like Picasso’s work – Cubism is very interesting. He was a genius because he was a Cubist, he took things apart. The blue period is more sentimental but I personally like the Minotaur drawings, they are my favourites. I’m conscious that experimentation for its own sake is not the right way to do things. But when people say your writing is surreal or unreal, actually that is only a function of language itself. Language itself, obviously, is not real. It doesn’t want to be real.

But it is a tool that you need in order to get to reality.

Yes, exactly. I haven’t figured out a good line on this but I play around with, I am subject to these forces.

Could your sentences be like a hunter’s dogs who are sent out sniffing for game, for reality?

Mmm... I probably follow my sentences, more than the other way around. I am very sentence-led. But yes to a certain extent I do marshal the sentences, but that is more a matter of rhythm.

There is also something I said about writing on a keyboard like writing on a sprung floor. And I want that kind of feeling of muscularity. Bounce. I like a bit of bounce in a sentence, a little bit of a spring in it. While writing by hand

is all very lyrical, it is slightly flat. But typing is all in the rhythm, it’s like dancing on something with a bit of a spring. Writing has something physical, too. For my twenty-first birthday I got a typewriter, I *loved* that.

What strikes me in your writing is how you seem to turn spaces inside out.

Oh, yeah, all that is very feminine use of space. I have a very deliberate feminine aesthetic when it comes to the relationship between inside and outside. It has to do with motherhood, maternity, leakage... I use the word “leak” a lot... it’s a deep-seated word, experience... leakage is beyond our control.

One of my favourite moments is in *Caspar Hauser*, when he comes to a tower where he had once stayed and they say, that’s where you were, for those few weeks, after you came out of the woods. And he says, I can’t have been there, that place was all around me. And it was bigger. Because he was inside it – so it was all around him. So now, he can see it over there and they can point to it over there, and he can’t get his head around it. Literally. So I like all those topological problems very much.

I very much liked the topological element at the end of The Gathering, when Veronica is at Heathrow, expecting a kind of falling which, combining the literal and metaphoric sense, sounds rather positive.

Yes, Veronica is going to hit her life, well that is more or less the story of her life, she is not going to destroy her physical self, but there is this stage where she says ‘I would like to leave my body’. But so she is going back, she is going back into her life. And she may have another baby.

And I am looking forward to reading another volume of your stories. Thank you very much for this interview.

John Eppel

Zimbabwe

A native of Lydenburg, South Africa, John Eppel has lived for most of his life in Zimbabwe, of which he is also a citizen. He is a teacher of English at the Christian Brothers College, Bulawayo, and over the past forty years has published both fiction and poetry. For further information, see, for instance, the *Zimbabwe – Poetry International Web* at <www.zimbabwe.poetryinternationalweb.org>.

AN AWKWARD GAIT

Papa, Daddy, Uncle, Dear Old Man:
what is it about dictators that we
coddle them with terms of affection?
The lion will slaughter, and even eat,
cubs of his rivals. No subordinate
stands in the way of the dominant
white-browed sparrow weaver, the ballast
of whose gonads gives him an awkward flight.

Why do we admire Generals, pity
vendors? Why do we revere lions,
laugh at hyaenas? What is it about
the clenched fist, the conical tower, church
steeple, pyramids, codpieces, that we
adore? Now this Autocrat, the ballast
of whose honorary doctorates gives
him: Uncle, Dear Old Man: an awkward gait.

VIA DOLOROSA

“How far is it from Olive Mount
to the place they call
Golgotha?” asks the teenage girl
with a tennis ball-

sized foetus in her womb, rugby
ball-sized baby wrapped
in swaddling offcuts on her back;
vitality sapped

by stinking fistula, tetters,
itching warts, herpes...
“It’s also known as Calvary.”
Whenever she sees

a man she buckles like a card-
board box, and trembles.
They found her by the Trade Fair grounds
where the river spills

its horror on Bulawayo;
where broken bottles and plastic
bags, used condoms, faeces, mutate
into a spastic

objective correlative. “Skulls,”
she keeps muttering,
“the place of skulls; how much further?”
She begins to sing:

“How far is it from Olive Mount
to the place they call...
place they call...” then she goes silent,
and resumes her fall.

They flopped them on a wheelbarrow,
and trundled the three
along Via Dolorosa,
to eternity.

WAITING

I count the falling frangipani leaves.
Early April, the nights are growing cold;
the scent of wood smoke sours as neighbours burn
their household rubbish; every now and then
a discarded aerosol can explodes
triggering memories of another time,
another place, another war.

So quickly do they change from fluid green
to yellowish, to desiccated brown;
and yet, the drop, the clatter, ages takes;
takes ages: either way. In terminal
cymes some flowers remain, as white as wax,
mingling the bitter sweets of paradise
with odours of anxiety.

Like sharpening blades on steel the plovers cry
as homeless people wander near their nests
waiting for news, waiting for results. Who
will it be? These falling leaves remind me
that the day has come and gone for ballots
to be counted, results announced; and I'm
afraid that change will never come.

Poems © John Eppel, 2008 (first publication)

An Interview with Les Murray

Massimiliano Morini (Udine, Italy)

Les Murray (b. 1938) is widely regarded as Australia's leading poet, a reputation that has steadily increased since the appearance of his first collection, *The Ilex Tree*, in 1965. His writing has gained many literary awards and has been translated into numerous languages. His verse novel *Fredy Neptune* (1999) was, for example, translated into Italian by Massimiliano Morini, whose interview with Murray presented here was conducted principally by fax.

MASSIMILIANO MORINI: *After some varied and rather adventurous decades, in 1986 you came back to live in your birthplace, Bunyah. How does belonging to this particular place – to this very small place, I believe – affect your poetry? Was Bunyah present in your writing when you were living in Sydney? Is it with you when you travel around the world on your literary errands?*

LES MURRAY: Bunyah is a large pastoral valley rimmed by hills of evergreen forest, especially on the southern side. It has a crossroads, a public hall and a tennis court, plus a tin shed for the volunteer fire brigade's lorry; it also had a post office for many years, and even a primary school for a few. Something like a hundred people live there, mostly cattle and horse breeders plus folk who go to work in towns twenty to fifty km. away, and retirees and self-employed people. I grew up there in a time when everyone was either a dairy farmer or a forest worker and there were no outsiders. The natural world first impressed itself on me there, and left me with a deep empathy that would become more conscious in the decades to come. Stories from Bunyah and its wider region were my school of human understanding and behaviour, and the cultural and financial poverty inflicted on small farmers stirred a loyalty I have never shaken off. On the other hand, when I went back with my family to live at Bunyah, themes and problems from childhood re-emerged and pushed me over the line from chronic to acute depressive illness. It's a common but rarely discussed reason for repatriation: you go home in order to go mad. Old bad stuff that needs resolution calls you

home, as surely as the beloved shapes of hills and paperbark trees. Bunyah was my lodestar of difference when I lived away, and it goes with me in a natural way wherever I travel.

In your essay 'On Sitting Back and Thinking about Porter's Boeotia' (1978), you define your poetry as 'Boeotian', in opposition to the 'Athenian', urban art of Peter Porter and others. The definition has been very successful, and I myself have proposed Lettere dalla Beozia as a title for an Italian collection of your essays. Does the label still apply, or has it become a straitjacket?

I was a bit tongue-in-cheek with that Boeotian essay – and Germans tell me it reiterates a theory of theirs from the late 18th century. I wasn't out to oppose Peter Porter so much as the programmatic Australian critics of the Sixties and later who put me down for continuing to write from a bush perspective rather than seeking to document the new Australia of suburbs and borrowed urbanity. They seemed to impose a demographic imperative, which I resisted. My Boeotianism never became a straitjacket for me, so much as for some of my dimmer critics!

How is your work 'Australian'? How is it 'English'? Do you think that coming from a former province (however far in the past the date of unofficial independence) means possessing a freshness that the colonial 'centre' lacks?

I don't think my work is 'English' at all, even when I occasionally use an English locale or setting. I used to make more of the freshness argument than I mostly do now; I think there is

some truth in it – but perhaps more in gardening than in literature! See the appended poem, with its Aboriginal reference that has become a jocular commonplace here: sacred (or secret) women’s business versus sacred or secret men’s business are terms in Aboriginal English for various segregated rituals, whereas in the wider community golf or sports cars can be referred to as sacred men’s business, for example.

What is your view of language in general, or of poetic language in particular? Do you believe (with Orwell and many poets) that words must express and even conjure up things, or do you see yourself as more of a ‘language’ poet?

I have no particular view of poetic language, beyond the need to avoid and subvert received usages that would shape our thinking into line with approved attitudes and world-views. Never let your lines serve a Line. I have a considerable distrust of ‘literary’ usages for this reason, and a preference for evocative, even tactile language with a dimension of the dream attendant upon it.

On a related note (and with another arbitrary distinction): are you more interested in stories, people, beasts, or objects?

All of the above, and many more. I was raised by an oral storyteller, my father, and have to guard against an excess of narrative.

In 1986 you edited an Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry. Do you see yourself as a religious poet (as distinguished – perhaps? – from a religious person writing poetry). And if so, as what kind of religious poet?

Somewhat to my surprise I’ve remained an unobtrusively religious person – a fairly middle-of-the-road Catholic who tries not to pontificate but who does write a small amount of religious verse. I wasn’t always Catholic, but came from fairly staunch Calvinist origins – see the poem ‘The Gaelic Long Tunes’, for example. With this background, even though it’s now distant I have to guard against judgementalism and moral snobbery, which creep up on me when I’m depressed.

À propos: a joke of young Peter Murray’s yesterday went ‘Presbyopia? Isn’t that an inability to see the fun in anything?’

In ‘Some Religious Stuff I Know about Australia’ (1982), you write that a poet’s ‘strange poem’, the odd man out in a poet’s oeuvre, is often more illuminating than his/her more characteristic writings. I myself love your Translations from the Natural World, even though they force me to horrible exertions as a translator. How do you see that collection in the context of your overall production?

I rejoice that you’re fond of *Translations from the Natural World*, that Purgatorio dei traduttori. I’ve been sleepwalking for years towards depiction of the world thru animals’ eyes, and had reached something of a peak with ‘Bats’ Ultrasound’ and ‘The Cows on Killing Day’. These led me into a full-blown attempt at writing the inwardness of non-human lives, as a big sequence, and this fitted my mood at the time very well. I was in a horrible way with acute depression and badly needed to escape out of my own wracked head for a period, into company I would like better than the human or especially my own! *Translations* kept me busy over much of 1990 and 1991 experimenting with many approaches, syntaxes, styles – ‘Cattle Ancestor’, for example, mimes the style of Aboriginal myths rendered into English for non-initiate people; a rendition of the settling of Australia by non-indigenous species, including white humans. I think the whole sequence was a high point in my poeting, the best of my many investigative sequences, and made better when I tossed out certain poems and incorporated Bats and Cows in their stead. Margitt Leibert’s parallel English-German edition next year may be the best yet, when it comes out; it’s properly rounded out and tidied up. I hope you’ll forgive the stresses the sequence will have forced on you – as the English language has by now forgiven me for the melting and stretching agonies I imposed on it.

I alluded to my difficulties with Translations from the Natural World – one of which being that while I was beginning to be happy with

my versions, the publisher who had asked me to produce an Italian version was absorbed by a bigger firm. Apart from these publishing problems, are you able to predict the difficulties your translators will encounter?

I have sometimes thought I could predict the difficulties translators would likely have. Some have later told me I consistently predicted the *wrong* problems.

One reviewer of my version of Fredy Neptune said that the translation was good, but certain lines called for a poet's – not a simple translator's – intervention. Being a translator and a poet, what do you think of the 'poets must translate poetry' commonplace? More generally, do you have a theory of translation?

My main theory of translation horrifies all who hear it: no line, and no poem, should contain more syllables than the original. My only other belief is that it is always possible to attain equivalence of sound and sense if one really tries, and if that result is attained, it doesn't matter whether the translator is also a poet or not.

As a translator of your poetry, I have met with very different forms of verse. What is your idea of structure? In your poems, does form create content, or vice versa? More generally, how do your poems manifest themselves? And is the final version more the result of hard work or sustained intuition?

Content calls for the structure it wants, and won't flow till that structure is found. I rarely venture into the realms where form summons content, though I know they exist. My poems often manifest first as a sort of cloud of sound and sense that hardens into form as it is written down – if the form is already too markedly present, it tends to mean that I've waited too long before writing the poem down, and it is likely to sound cut-and-dried. Deliberate subversion of the form is then necessary, and sometimes rescues the piece. Any hard work I do is generally at the service of intuition, which is my ruling principle.

With Fredy Neptune (1998), you wrote a

very long verse novel. While I know that the oral storytelling techniques of rural Australia have influenced your conscious stylistic choices, did you have any verse or prose novelists in mind as well?

No, I deliberately turned off my memory of all literary models, beyond odd quotes, and remembered I was writing through the mind of an intelligent man from a time when most Australians got no more than a primary school education, and never read any literature, except maybe the Bible. And Catholics didn't generally read that either, but merely *heard* it, in church, half the time in Latin. All Latin was likely to sound religious to such a person, which is why Fred cries out the botanical name of a West Australian tree (*agonis flexuosa*) when he is sorely injured on the Newcastle harbour dredger.

Fredy Neptune is a kind of work which requires a lot of research (and, as a reader and translator, I have to say that the American part is even more plausible than the Australian sections). Do you like that sort of preliminary work?

I only did small bits of actual research, for Fredy, such as consulting a Thirties Baedeker for the prewar streets of Dresden. The essential things I could draw upon were deep immersion in the speech of rural and suburban Australians born around the beginnings of the 20th century, a fair grasp of older colloquial German from the same period, plus all the general reading I'd done over most of my lifetime – a very large proportion of that was all sorts of history. I had to set some benchmarks, such as never letting my American slang get too modern. I set the very early 1930s as its limit. Very determined efforts at gentrification in Australian society since the Sixties have caused a lot of language amnesia here, and set up resistance to the manners and speech of an unfashionable past. This has caused an aversion to the poem here, unmatched elsewhere. I'm guessing it will pass as recent shibboleths become old hat in turn.

A few years ago, at a dinner table in Palermo, you told me that you were waiting for another character to tell you his/her story,

like Fredy Boettcher. Did anybody turn up?

No new figure like Fredy has turned up yet to commission a new tale. I have the stirrings of an idea, but no human figure to carry it, so far.

J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis used to say that since nobody wrote the books they wanted to read, they had to write them themselves. Which books (or, which poems) would you like to read?

As a lazy creature, I'm happy if others write the books that delight me. I remember when Gulliver and Huckleberry Finn were new

discoveries, way back in my childhood, and I still get that sort of enchantment from a book, roughly once a year, a real discovery. One I remember today was Eric Rolls' *A Million Wild Acres*, which re-set the compass of my thinking about Australian forests and landscape, as well as literary style: it's an oblique ancestor of *Fredy*. You'll have read my essay on it, in *A Working Forest*. It's a book I probably couldn't have written, a book of exact and exhaustive research. Today I should be at Rolls' memorial service, he having died just this week at the age of 84, but I can't go because of a sore left foot; I can't even kick myself properly!

Les Murray

Southern Hemisphere Garden

This autumn grove, in the half world
that has no fall season, shows a mauve
haze all through its twig-sheaves
and over a rich spangled ground
of Persian leaves.

Inroads of sun
are razzle gold and textile blonde
out to the greens and blady-grass baulks
mown in drought along the pond.

Thoth
the many ibis lift for the night perches,
the nankeen heron has moved to Japan
but ink-blue waterhens preen long feet
or, flashing undertail
like feathers of the queen protea, run
each other round the brimming rain dam
whose inner sky is black below shine
as if Space were closer, down.

Back this summer
of the out-of-season Christmas snow
that scotched the bushfires in Victoria
I was out under green leaf-tressed
deciduous, hooking a pole saw
high and snapping down water-dressed
abortive limbs from beneath China
and Europe and America.

Now lichens up
the yeast boughs of those trees are bazaar
trinkets on the belly-dance troupe
at the rural show, who circled sidestepping
to the tappets of a drum.

“Sacred women’s business,”
they laughed after, adjusting coins
over their floured and bake-oil skins,
strolling, antique, unaccusingly bizarre.

Poem © Les Murray, 2007 (first publication)

Geoffrey Moorhouse

Encountering Helsinki

Geoffrey Moorhouse is a travel writer and historian. Some of his twenty-two books have been translated into Scandinavian (and numerous other) languages, though not, as yet, into Finnish. Notable titles include *Calcutta* (1971), *To the Frontier* (which received the Thomas Cook Award for the best travel book of the year, 1984), *Hell's Foundations: A Town, Its Myths, and Gallipoli* (1992), *Om: An Indian Pilgrimage* (1993), and his Tudor trilogy: *The Pilgrimage of Grace: The Rebellion that Shook Henry VIII's Throne* (2002), *Great Harry's Navy: How Henry VIII Gave England Seapower* (2005), and *The Last Office: 1539 and the Dissolution of a Monastery* (March 2008). See also "'I Am a Writer Who Travels': An Interview with the English Travel Writer Geoffrey Moorhouse," University of Tübingen, 1999 <<http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/tcibs/moorhouse.html>>.

It took me a long time to get to Helsinki, though the city first crossed my horizon decades ago, when I was quite a small boy. I celebrated my eighth birthday the very day before the USSR invaded Finland in November 1939, when we ourselves had been at war with Nazi Germany for several weeks. I have never forgotten the darkness of that frightening time, though the worst of it was yet to come; and I remember well how my family followed the fortunes of the gallant Finns with admiration and bated breath as their small nation defied the invaders, who were represented in the English Press as "Bolshevik hordes". There were pictures and newsreels showing Finnish soldiers in white overalls and hoods, repulsing (at first) the Red Army as it came at them across frozen Lake Ladoga, which cinema audiences up and down England actually cheered in their enthusiasm for the underdog.

Within twelve months everything became very confusing indeed to a newly-minted eight-year-old, as political and strategic alliances changed, and the Bolshevik hordes of last year were suddenly translated into "our gallant Soviet allies" of this. Precociously, I asked my schoolteacher how this contradiction in terminology could be and was told that it was something to do with perspective, which wasn't much help. And in the even greater and more frightening confusions of the next few years, I'm afraid the Finns and their predicament slid from my sight into the obscurity of whatever was going on in the uttermost part of Scandinavia, while we, too, were fighting for our lives against another apparently irresistible foe on half a dozen fronts.

There they stayed, more or less, for decades, coming into focus now and then mainly through individuals. First and above all, of course, there was Sibelius,

whose *Finlandia* made my heart thud when, as a teenager, I first heard the Halle Orchestra under Barbirolli play it in Manchester. A few years later I got to know Eero Saarinen when he was designing the American Embassy in London, and somewhere I still have the piece of his notepad on which he sketched for me his architectural solution to turning a corner elegantly. Then there has been the superb Jussi Jääskeläinen, sometime of Mikkelä, lately a marvellously agile goalkeeper for my football team, Bolton Wanderers. Other than that, there was the village largely populated by emigrant Finns on the other side of Cape Ann in Massachusetts from where I once worked as a fisherman. And my knowing that Finnish was one of the linguistic peculiarities that didn't fit into Sir William Jones's sensational discovery of the Indo-European language system at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Also my awareness of the Erikson sailing fleet in the Åland Islands, which I read about when I was at school and becoming besotted with the sea: I promised myself then that one day I would visit Mariehamn, but it hasn't happened yet. The nearest I got to Finland until quite recently was Stockholm to the west and Leningrad (as it still was) on the other side. But last November, I finally made it to Helsinki (and appropriately, perhaps) as a birthday treat from my partner, who had a lecture to give at the university there.

She has known, and become fond of, the city across many years, and had spoken of it warmly as a place effulgent with light; which it certainly wasn't as we flew into the glum dusk of a cold wintry afternoon. Nor was the sun seen much in the next four days, which means that my first impression of Helsinki is associated with four layers of clothing, an ushanka, a heavy scarf and thick gloves, biting winds, overnight snow and lowering skies; also with wonderfully warm buildings the moment you step through their front doors, which is not always the case where we come from. Nor is the highly efficient shifting of snow from the airport's runways and surrounds, which I shall return to later on.

I found myself in a city which veered in appearance between the eloquence (often majestic) of public buildings which I wouldn't have been surprised to come across in St Petersburg, and the angular austerity of apartment and office blocks which were bleaker on the outside than I might have expected in a country with such a high reputation for design. Much of downtown Helsinki felt like a slightly tedious cross between the brownstone terraces of Manhattan and Brooklyn, and the Stalinist Functional of That Other Place, its attractions to be found wholly inside such buildings, invisible from the street. I was struck particularly by the huge ornate ceramic stoves, built from floor to ceiling in the university guesthouse, each one stylishly different from those in neighbouring rooms. And I enjoyed the intimate bustle of the wine bar/restaurant on Aleksanterinkatu, in which we fortified ourselves for Christmas shopping at Stockmann's with mulled wine and salmon soup. Classy department stores are much of a muchness all the world over in the twenty-first century, except that

each one has some distinctively local cachet that singles it out and lingers in the memory afterwards. At Harrod's it is the liveried and morning-suited flunkies who dance attendance on London's well-to-do. At Macey's it is the standard New York "Have-a-nice-day", delivered by the shopgirls through all but clenched teeth without a speckle of warmth. Stockmann's seems to go in for stuffed reindeer and their hides in an understandably big way; just as, in New Zealand (another small country the rest of the world tends to bypass except when it feels like a dose of stunning scenery), the shopper's abiding memory is of being invited to purchase sheepskin rugs, jackets, gloves, hats – just about everything sheepish apart from underwear – at every till and turn.

I've mentioned architectural eloquence and there was much of this. There can be few seaports in the world whose waterfront is dominated as dramatically as Helsinki's is by the two carefully counter-pointed cathedrals, the one a vividly pan-European Classical composition whose green-domed rotunda and lesser cupolas are a cooler version of the gilded globes which top the roofline of its



fussier brick neighbour half a mile away, the pair of them exemplifying the not always subtle extremes in doctrine, temperament, ritual and atmosphere that characterise Christianity more than almost any other religion on earth. Ascend into the Tuomiokirkko and you are invited to pause and contemplate the verities with Lutheran reticence, without the distraction of much in the way of iconography or anything

else apart from a magnificent organ: clamber up its hill into the Uspenski, and you are transported to the crowded devotional artwork, the instinctive emotion and the lavish liturgies of Orthodoxy. Can there be another city in which this curiously dissimilar harmony co-exists so demonstrably in close proximity? Or where it is so laborious even to reach the main entrances to both its principal churches? I was left gasping by the penitential multitude of steps leading up to each front door.

But the weather and the fact that most of our four days were focused on the university campus, meant that my acquaintance with the city was limited in the extreme: even when I dared to play truant, the temperature did not encourage my usual habit of strolling observantly from street to street, to see what awaits me around the next corner. And no recourse to public transport (even when it is enhanced by some of the bonniest tram-drivers in creation, as it is in this capital) can ever compete with this as a way of getting to know a place. So my first experience of Helsinki can scarcely be described even as sketchy, but it did

shed new light on Finland and the Finnish *Zeitgeist* in a totally unexpected way and from a most unlikely direction.

For one of our invitations was to attend a celebration, organised by the Irish Embassy, to mark the centenary of the poet Louis MacNeice; which speaks volumes about the way the Irish have changed and become more tolerant of their differences these past few years, given that MacNeice was not only a Belfast man, but the son of an Anglican bishop to boot, which not so long ago would have disqualified him from the slightest recognition by any Dublin Government. The event took place in the lofty main hall of the Ritarihuone, whose walls are crammed with the heraldry of the old Finnish nobility. For a couple of hours or so, there were discourses on the poet and his place in literature, there was a deal of reading from MacNeice's work and from other pieces that were thought relevant, there was music. And there was one electrifying moment which changed the way I had looked at the Finns before, insofar as I had considered them much at all from my insularity at the other end of northern Europe.

It was billed in the programme as *Song: The Wounded Hussar* (Trad: sung by Jorma Mäkitalo) and the young man who sang gave a performance that was not so much bravura (though it was certainly that) as highly improbable. I have heard such singing before, but only in the Gaeltacht, that part of remote western Ireland which cherishes its Irishness more fiercely than anywhere else in the Republic, and which assiduously does what it can to preserve and extend the Gaelic language in order to increase Irish self-consciousness. Probably no more than forty per cent of all Irishmen and women have even a limited understanding of Gaelige nowadays (and the monoglots are confined to very old people in the most isolated parts of the West), even though it has long been the first official language of their country, the more familiar and commercially useful English coming second in this particular pecking order: but summer schools are regularly held in Galway, Kerry and elsewhere along the Atlantic seaboard, attracting dozens of young people from other parts of Ireland and beyond who wish to discover and emphasise their deepest Irish identity. The Irish Government hopes that one day its educational policies will make the entire nation bilingual, which is a marvellously European ambition that my own country, alas, appears not to share for its own citizens.

And this young Finn was singing his mournful (and challenging) Celtic ballad as to the manner born, in great yarling periods, with his head thrown back and his eyes closed in something close to ecstasy, as though he were strutting his stuff at some wake in the county of Mayo; with every syllable perfectly pitched and articulated in a tongue that was indisputably foreign to his own. How on earth, I wondered, could this astonishing transposition be: how could a young Scandinavian so completely shed his native identity and assume that of a people who – linguistically and in other ways – were so ineluctably alien to his own? If

it came to that, what on earth were the Dublin Irish up to, parading in Helsinki the memory of a distinctly Anglo-Irish poet forty years after his death?

The answer to the principal question was that Herra Mäkitalo has spent a great deal of time on the West Coast of Ireland, attending the aforesaid summer schools and generally immersing himself in Irish culture. But why would he want to do that, I asked two old friends of Susan's, who took us home to supper the night before we left? It was because there was a great affinity between the Finns and the Irish, I was told, unsuspected by most outsiders but very powerfully felt by both nations. And this kinship had been formed because each recognised in the other someone whose country had a long and shared grievance with their own: each of them had been obliged to live in the shadow of an often aggressive neighbour who at various times in the past had threatened their very existence, their cultural heartbeat no less. The Irish have had to put up with the British, the Finns with the Russians. I was familiar enough with the Irish problem and the feelings it had engendered. I was more surprised than I should have been that Finns are still extremely anxious about the potential threat from their East.

So there was much food for thought as we sat beside the Christmas decorations (including a full-scale sleigh with reindeer, naturally) and waited for our plane home from Vantaa. Where we were treated to a spectacle unfamiliar at British airports, when nine snow-ploughs, each much bigger than the average combine harvester, rolled slowly into sight and proceeded to move steadily in echelon, nose almost to tail, around the entire airport circumference, extending their clearance of the white stuff with every circuit they made; so that, within an hour or so, there was scarcely a snowflake to be seen anywhere. Ah, these Finns, we agreed; how they could teach us a thing or two. But next time I must visit in the spring or summer and see Helsinki in a different light, where its Baltic grey glows instead of dully reflecting a gloomy sky. And, yes, one day I will get to Mariehamn.

© Geoffrey Moorhouse, 2008 (first publication)

Stan Smith

Journeys to War

Publishing history

This is the first publication in full of the ‘Journeys to War’ sequence. The sequence will appear later this year, together with a sonnet sequence on family history, in the collection *Family Fortunes* (Nottingham: Shoestring Press, 2008).

‘Aeschylus’, ‘Sir Philip Sidney’, ‘Keith Douglas’, ‘Ezra Pound’, Stan Smith’ and ‘End Times’ first appeared in *Stand* (7.4, Autumn 2007), pp. 37-40.

‘W. B. Yeats’, ‘Louis MacNeice’ and ‘Beckett’ were published in *An Sionnach: A Journal of Literature, Culture, and the Arts* (3.1, Spring 2007, Creighton University Press, Omaha NE), pp. 164-6.

‘Louis MacNeice’ first appeared in *The European English Messenger* (15.1, Spring 2006). It was also published, together with ‘Auden and Isherwood’, ‘Keith Douglas’, ‘Ezra Pound’, and ‘Stan Smith’, in *English: The Journal of the English Association* (56.216, Autumn 2007) pp. 364-7.

‘Byron’ has previously appeared in *Speaking English: Poems for John Lucas*, ed. Andy Croft (Nottingham: Five Leaves Press, 2007), p. 130.

Journeys to War

Aeschylus, Gela, Sicily, 456 B.C.

‘This is the battle for everything’
– *The Persians*

The Pythian tells me I should wear a wig –
effeminacy appropriate for a Persian
but not my scene. We made them dance a jig
at Marathon, and then at Salamis
our salty Attic wit gave them immersion
classes in all things Greek. For all their big
imperial talk of building bridges, us
and them, Europe and Asia, we weren’t fooled.

And I came home, not carried on my shield
but carrying it up-raised over my head
– Apollo’s *Mezzogiorno* shafts are deadly.
They say I invented tragedy. But *Eris*

has spawned antagonists since the Age of Gold:
eagle and tortoise, chalk, cheese, Hellene, Mede.

Sir Philip Sidney, Zutphen, Holland, September 22 1586

I never liked the C**tess much. It was just
a convention, literary or political,
something one did. Oh yes, she was a star,
a tart more like, a set of asterisks,
a pregnant nullity, all things to all,
and rich in being poor. In Paris that year
I saw the truth of things scribbled in blood,
Tekel upharsin running down the walls.

Forget convenience, take the risk.
If our most holy cause survive we must
clutch at the moment, build those dykes
of *alliance* against the Papist flood.
In Europe lies our help, in politics,
not poetry. Give that man my flask.

*'Lines on the Restoration of His Majesty, King Charles II,
Rightful King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland,
Defender of the Faith'. Andrew Marvell reflects, Hull, May 8, 1660*

In those dark days ordain'd by Fate
When liquefaction of the State,
Rebellion's pyroclastic flow,
Had pitch'd all Elevation low,
Standards ran ragged, rude feet fell
Upon the Muses' citadel.

Now broken lines are fresh restor'd
And reinstated Rule's sharp sword,
Post-bellum detumescent days
Of lyric grace and easy lays
Proclaim no insurrection's scann'd
To interrupt Rhyme's royal stand:
Rough strife's harsh jangle must amend
When sense in silken chords is penn'd.

John Milton, Bartholomew Close, West Smithfield, December 1660

Nearer uncivil strife in Marvell's Garden
Tan in those heathen haunts where by the Celt
Were Ireton's ire and Cromwell's wrath first felt
A Drogheda or Dunbar, or Preston where
From his high horse the Presbyter was thrown
And slaughter'd those who Heaven's will withstood
Till rills ran red with Covenanters' blood,
Or where at Naseby Cromwell snatch'd the crown
From the usurper's head, that none should wear
Save that the sovereign Commonwealth decreed,
Now must I kneel, beg the pretender's pardon,
Proud yet to justify that treas'nous Deed,
Tho' apostates chang'd their spots when angels fell:
Better to serve in Hull than reign in Hell.

Byron at Missolonghi, April 1824

The midges hereabouts can be ferocious.
Out on the salt pans that girl with the doe eyes
Gave me the eye from behind her thingummyjig.
The Albanians are bloodsuckers like the flies
but by God their girls can go. And their bite's atrocious –
the mozzies I mean for God's sake! – some are big
as the terns out in the gulf, or Zeus's swan –
And their breasts are like swansdown, out of the sun
that turns their heads brown as the hillsides – one
is speaking of the girls, in Heaven's name!
They turn *my* head. Of afternoons the sun
sits on the water like a sheet of flame.
The cut-throats here will never come to good,
there's fever in the air, and in the blood.

Auden and Isherwood in Hankow, March 12 1938

At the Three Gorges a fine site for a dam.
At noon today, we heard the news from home:
Hitler's invaded Austria. I am
unsurprised. Two years ago in Iceland rumours

of Franco's insurrection spoiled our lunch.
Now, smirking, Christopher reminds me doom
is droller than sea-dingles. We had a hunch
that this would happen, just our luck. To whom,

one asks, should we address our protests now?
Not that bitch History, who has moved elsewhere,
nor Chamberlain. To be seen off by a bomb
as pointless and provincial in Hankow
as being run down in Burton by a tram.
When history happens, seems we're never there.

*W. B. Yeats Meditates on Civil War,
Cap Martin, Alpes maritimes, late 1938*

'In dreams begin responsibilities'

Delirious with that doom I sought to forge
A nation from the rusting heaps of time
Scattered about an island where fierce storm
Had battered down all things, a dream so large
It could not but be shattered by the truth
That dreams are for the power-crazed, self-deceived,
Who fabricate a tale to flatter youth
And leave old age to comfort the bereaved.
What could I do, in such dyspeptic days
But seek redress among the embittered horde
For all the wrongs a proud, dispassionate
And courteous people had endured
From tavern riff-raff? Was it then too late
To stare into the Sphinx's stony gaze?

Louis MacNeice in Barcelona, December 1938

When they ration the acorns you know it's all over.
An army has no stomach for such a fight.
The sirens sound the all-clear and the sky is bright;
trucks in the square have the patience of a lover
who knows it will be all right on the night.

But as December dries the final leaves
a woman hugs her silent child and grieves,
eyes big with famine, for the future not the past,
knowing it won't come out all right at last.

Someone is being tidy in the bars:
the ashtrays harbour not a single stub.
Over it all hang the impeccable stars,
Orion rising, with his hunter's club.
The city waits. The cold gnaws. It is over.

Samuel Beckett in occupied Paris, August 1942

Shinning down that drainpipe he recalled
Dublin in flames in 1916 with
his da in the Wicklow Hills and brother Frank.
He stood quite still, holding his father's hand.
The smoke rose up in columns, then blown sideways
drifted across the Liffey. It was all
very quiet. Silent flames flickered from Bank
and Post Office. He didn't understand
what it was all about. It was a play
as enigmatic as a megalith
or the long-chambered tombs his father showed him
so unimaginably long ago. The street
was empty, but for a chained-up bicycle.
He should move. He could make it on his feet.

Keith Douglas, Wadi Zem Zem, 27 October 1942

The lone and level sands stretch far away.
Except that down south the Quattar Depression
means that our tanks can't make a breakthrough, must
go round the long way. All the time the Stukas
like carrion comfort circling for their prey.
Reveille is at six. The other day
I saw a dead man in the dunes. He was
– what uniform did he wear? I quite forget –
sun-dried, beside his burnt-out tank, quite flat,

with no more substance than a bathroom mat.
One of ours, though, so we dug him under,
keeping his dog-tag. All that shit and dust
reminds us, should we need it, of our just
deserts, that this is what we come to. Soon.

Ezra Pound broadcasts from Rome Radio, Spring 1943

‘An amiable sort of madman’
– *Mussolini, after meeting Pound*

The jew fifth columns are losing us this war,
them and the gooks in Washington DC
(read: ‘Dirty Communists’). The kikes and Russo-
philes are strutting round the roost, the Reds
no longer under but snoring in your beds
having given it rough to jewgirl Roosov-
velt, *Weltschmerz* up the ass. My fellow Americans,
listen to the voice of reason here in Rome,
rise up and kick the gangsters out. Musso
showed how. In twenty years of Order, *il Duce*
drained the Pontine marshes, crushed the balls
of Cosa Nostra, ’Ndrangheta, all
those Commie faggots who robbed the people raw.
Reclaim America, bring the war home.

Stan Smith, Extracts from a Diary, Naples to Rome, 1944

March 23

Spent all day shovelling ashes off the road.
Vesuvius chucking it out. Never seen such a sight,
roads covered three feet deep. A weird light.
In the afternoon started coming down again.
A dull brown cloud, sky blotted out. Then rain.

4 April

Sat on a petrol barrel at the crossroads
waiting. Weather sunny. Just a lemon to eat.

19 September

Accident today Corso Umberto Rome.
Walked out in front of me. The poor young Pole.
There was nothing I could do. So far from home.
The bike a write-off. Terribly upset.

14 October

Letter arrived with bad news about Mam.
In tears. Wrote to her. No idea how ill.

25 October

Got birthday greetings and Dad's telegram.

14275065 DRIVER S SMITH
854 QUARRYING CO. RE.
MOTHER DEAD FUNERAL 21 OCT.
ISAAC SMITH WARRINGTON

Robert Lowell dreams the future, Boston, 1968

Inflamed by Milton, we lie in Mather's teeth,
good little Pilgrims all, in God's name napalm
the devil's territories, our epic dream
of Pax Americana, the world safe
for Coca Cola, Big Macs, Wal-Mart, Freedom
(‘you want fries with that?’) and here we come,
preparing the way of the Lord with fife and drum
and Johnny Appleseed and Minute Men,
while Dr Strangelove rides Apocalypse
on a white horse from White House to Doomsday.
Pity the planet, for what lies beneath
our lethal love as Lawrence saw is Death,
kissing adieu with Agent Orange lips.
The world lies all before us, Urizen.

End Times: Conversion Poem, Anon, 2006

Tonight we shall be whole in Paradise,
the bomb that blew us into holy shreds
rewinding time, an eloquent device,
refreshes us like heavenly newly-weds.

No God but God. His prophets, we proclaim
vengeance is ours, He shall repay at last,
and all is righteousness done in His Name.
Soon, soon, my brothers, the evil empire's passed,

the dead shall waken, martyred in their blood,
as to that destined vale the Chosen come
to share the cup, drink of His sacred Blood.
When He returns, His final Kingdom Come,
enraptured and redeemed, the Lord be praised,
at Armageddon we shall be Upraised.

Notes

Aeschylus (525-456 BC) is credited with inventing modern tragedy by introducing a second actor, the antagonist. He fought in the Persian Wars, which his play *The Persians* reports from the point of view of the defeated enemy. Hellenic warriors were instructed to come home from battle either carrying their shields or carried on them. He is reputed to have been killed by a Sicilian eagle dropping a tortoise onto his bald head, mistaking it for a rock. The Pythian is the Priestess of the oracle at Delphi.

Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella* ('star-lover and star') pays literary court to Penelope Devereux, the wife of Lord Rich, later Countess of Devonshire. 'Asterisks' means 'little stars' in Greek. While staying in his father-in-law Sir Francis Walsingham's house in Paris in 1572, Sidney witnessed the St Bartholomew Day Massacre of Protestants by Catholic mobs. In 1580, he angered Queen Elizabeth by arguing against a projected marriage of political convenience with the Duke of Anjou, heir to the French throne ('alliance' in French means both alliance and wedding-ring). He subsequently spent time in Europe trying to forge an anti-Catholic coalition with Dutch, German and Bohemian Protestant powers. On 22 September 1586 he suffered a mortal wound fighting for the Dutch against the armies of Philip II of Spain at Zutphen. The famous anecdote runs that, wounded, he offered his water flask to a soldier dying nearby, with the words 'Thy need is greater than mine.' *Mene Mene tekel upharsin*, expansively translated by the Authorised Version of the Bible as 'God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Thy kingdom is

divided, and given to the Medes and Persians', was allegedly written by a ghostly hand on the wall of Belshazzar's palace, quite spoiling his Feast (see *Daniel* 5).

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) was MP for Hull from 1659 until his death. Though he had been, from 1657, a companion of Milton's as Latin Secretary to Cromwell, he prospered under the Restoration through astute alliance-building. He interceded with the newly restored Charles II to save Milton from execution as a regicide, thereby making possible the production of *Paradise Lost* as the indisputable English national epic, and, in the process, the resurrection of blank verse.

Drogheda, Dunbar, Preston and Naseby were decisive victories of Cromwell's New Model Army. 'The Presbyter' is here a generic name for the Scottish Covenanters, Calvinists fiercely opposed to Cromwell's Independents. 'That treas'rous Deed' is both the execution of Charles I, and the document signed by the Regicides authorising it in the name of the English people.

Many of the villages in western Greece and the Peloponnese, in the melting pot of the Ottoman Empire, were inhabited by ethnic and linguistic Albanians, and some remain so to the present.

For 'History', Hankow, Burton-on-Trent and the *Anschluss*, see W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (1938), 'Travel-Diary', 2.

For Louis MacNeice in Barcelona, see *The Strings are False* (1965), ch. XXXV, and *Autumn Journal* (1939), sections xxiii and xxiv.

For Beckett's time with the French Resistance, see James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (1996).

The battle of El Alamein began on October 21 1942 with the Eighth Army assault on Rommel's lines. Douglas died in action in Normandy on June 9 1944, three days after the initial landings, aged 24.

In the first half of 1943 the Eighth Army entered Italian-ruled Tripoli, the Germans were decisively defeated at Stalingrad, British and US armies linked up in North Africa, and, on May 12, the German army in Tunisia surrendered to the Allies. Pound mistakenly believed US President F. D. Roosevelt to be Jewish, assuming his actually New York Dutch patronym to be a German-Jewish one. Roosevelt's Protestant ancestors on both sides arrived in the New World in the seventeenth century. He inherited from his mother, who was of French Huguenot stock, a strong anti-semitic streak of his own. For Pound's scabrously anti-semitic, self-proclaimedly 'patriotic American' rants on Rome Radio and Radio Milan, see the transcripts of his broadcasts to US troops in North Africa and Italy in C. David Heymann, *Ezra Pound: The Last Rower* (1976), pp. 115-126. Pound avoided execution for treason after the War only by being declared insane and confined to St Elizabeth's Mental Hospital, Washington D.C. from 1946 to 1958, where he was frequently visited by his young admirer Robert Lowell.

For Robert Lowell's anti-war activities and his own periods in and out of mental hospital, see Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (1982), and the poem 'Waking in the Blue'. Cf here the opening of 'Man and Wife': 'Tamed by Miltown, we lie on mother's

bed'. Cotton Mather (1663-1728), about whom Lowell wrote, a Boston Puritan pastor who gave enthusiastic support to the Salem Witch Trials, was the author of the influential hagiographic history of the New England settlements, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), which discovered typological prefigurations of America's manifest destiny in the events of The Bible. 'The Devil's Territories' was his name for New England under its indigenous native-American inhabitants.

For Lawrence, see D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), ch. 7, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne':

Always the same. The deliberate consciousness of Americans so fair and smooth-spoken, and the under-consciousness so devilish. Destroy! destroy! destroy! hums the under-consciousness. Love and produce! Love and produce! cackles the upper consciousness. And the world hears only the Love-and-produce cackle. Refuses to hear the hum of destruction underneath. Until such time as it will have to hear.

For Urizen, William Blake's tyrannous Judeo-Christian archetype of instrumental rationality, conceived in response to the turbulence of American and French Revolutions, and the patriarchal enemy of Luvah, the principle of love, see *The Illuminated Books of William Blake, Volume 6: The Urizen Books* (1998), ed. David Worrall.

Stan Smith (1907-1980), who described himself as a 'pup-tent poet', served in the Royal Engineers in North Africa, Italy and Austria, 1943-46, as a driver and despatch rider in both First and Eighth Armies. His unpublished poem, 'The Road to Rome', speaks of 'Dull grey skies, drizzling rain, / Rumble of guns, cries of pain, / Burnt-out tanks, squelching mud, / The road to Rome bought dearly with blood.' This sonnet sequence is dedicated to his memory.

Poems and notes © Stan Smith, 2007

The Pleasures of Translating: An Interview with Domenico Pezzini

Roberta Facchinetti (Verona, Italy)

After several years as a lecturer at the Catholic University of Milan, Domenico Pezzini was appointed Associate Professor of English at the same University and then full Professor of English at the University of Sassari. He moved to the Faculty of Arts at the University of Verona in 1990, where he taught until his retirement last year at the age of 70. He started translating very early in his career and soon gained recognition as an expert in this field. Since then he has also been acknowledged in Italy and abroad as a scholar, publishing extensively on his chosen field as well as translating from Latin and Old, Middle, Early Modern and Modern English. His scholarly writing has focused on such diverse authors as Aelred of Rievaulx, Julian of Norwich, R. S. Thomas and Elizabeth Jennings, and his favourite areas of study include spiritual friendship in mediaeval Latin and vernacular literatures, the relationship between religion and poetry, and mystic writings in Italy and Europe. His latest work, *The Translation of Religious Texts in the Middle Ages: Tracts and Rules, Hymns and Saints' Lives*, will appear soon under the Peter Lang imprint. In addition to writing articles and books on the history of English, Professor Pezzini has contributed entries to encyclopaedias, some of which might count as true research articles, and he is also a skilled writer of essays and reflections in his own language. He also contributes regularly to Italian newspapers, in particular as an art critic. This interview for the *Messenger* by Professor Roberta Facchinetti was conducted in Italian.

ROBERTA FACCHINETTI: *Skimming through the list of your scientific publications, we have the feeling that the study of translation techniques is one of your major interests, if not the main one; would you like to tell us where and how such interest originated?*

DOMENICO PEZZINI: I must say that it all started while writing my thesis, the topic of which was the reconstruction of the South Northumbrian dialect of the 10th century as it can be derived from the gloss to the Rushworth Gospels, mostly a dialectal variety of the more famous Lindisfarne Gospels. My main objective was the identification of grammatical features (spelling, phonetics, morphology), but I was immediately intrigued by the way the glossator had rendered some terms that I would qualify as 'technical', since they are peculiar to Christian language, like *synagoga*, *phariseus*, *gratia*, and so on. I soon realised that the glossator had interpreted such terms starting from their etymology. Thus, he had carried out some sort of 'inculturation' – for example, he

had rendered the word *synagoga* as *sammung* (*gathering*). Although in my thesis this aspect had been touched on marginally, it was this very semantic aspect of the text and the issues related to the transferral of meaning that triggered my curiosity, especially because it was here that the translator appeared to be carrying out a sort of hand-to-hand with the text.

After that incipit, which turns did your research take?

Undoubtedly, since the gloss is the 'interpretation' of a term, it is an interesting – though limited – topic of study. My following step was the analysis of the translation of full texts, starting from their specific literary genre and from their declared or predictable purpose. For personal reasons, largely because this field had been very familiar to me for a long time, I focused on religious texts. I started by studying the translation of liturgical Latin hymns, then I widened the scope of my research to the prose of spiritual treatises and of monastic rules – sometimes adapted to lay people as well – and

finally I ventured into the domain of the legends of saints, which is a peculiar narrative genre.

Could you tell me what conclusions you think you have reached?

As is well known, the first and most important thing is that the medieval translation has some well-defined features that we cannot ignore, otherwise we run the risk of evaluating the translated texts wrongly. These features become indispensable interpretative patterns, of which the first and most important is the principle that ‘translating’ a text in the end coincides with ‘producing/creating’ a new text. With reference to this, the following criteria are crucial: (a) the new aim of the text – for example when it is transferred from a religious audience to a secular one – and (b) its new use, that is, from liturgy to preaching. A Latin hymn, written in a solemn, highly theological way, undergoes significant transformations in the hands of the friar who quotes it in his sermons: the ideas remain intact but the language changes, since visual and dramatic elements may be emphasized, metaphors explained, abstract or difficult terms reduced or even removed. The rigorous adherence to the original is of no or lesser importance; this concept does not seem to be relevant in medieval culture. What is pivotal is the attention to the addressees for whom the ‘new’ text is produced by means of a sort of adaptation that takes on different forms.

Which forms, for example?

I have already mentioned lexical changes. Other practices are syntactic simplification and the interpolation of sentences summarizing what has been said or anticipating what comes after. Many of these procedures are justified by the oral destination of the text, which is envisaged to be read aloud within a small community of religious or lay people. We also find contradictory choices; indeed, in some cases the cuts are noteworthy, thus leading to a translation which is basically a summary of the original; in other cases there are abundant expansions which lengthen the text to a large extent. A hymn may be expanded, as it is somehow glossed in order to favour its

exploitation as a meditative text; however the expansion may touch on monastic rules as well, which are diversely adapted to the new users. Since the narrative genre lends itself well to various forms of amplification, for example by the addition of many pictorial and dramatic details, we may see a short *exemplum*, which is compressed into, say, 20 lines in the original text, being expanded up to more than 200 lines once the translating process is completed. Such choices are sometimes made with great freedom within the same text, in so far as one chapter may be very reduced while another, in contrast, may be greatly expanded.

Do we know any other forms of ‘translation’ of a text?

Yes; the most common is the ‘compilation’. This consists of assembling a text either as an anthology of chapters from a larger book or as a collage, in which excerpts from separate sections are thematically arranged and combined so as to shape a continuous work. This activity is carried out with great skill and a reader does not notice that the text is, in actual fact, a patchwork. Some works, owing to their modular specificity, lend themselves well to this. For example, I happened to study a *Life of the Virgin Mary* contained in a manuscript in Oxford – which I hope I will manage to edit soon – that was compiled entirely with materials from the *Revelations* of St. Birgitta of Sweden. That was done not only by merging passages from different chapters and books but also by dividing a chapter into three or four parts, placed strategically in a new frame of discourse.

You have also edited a number of texts in Middle English; how important is the direct contact with the manuscript and how useful has that been to understand translation practices?

Anyone working on medieval texts knows only too well how necessary it is to work hands-on with the codes. It is exactly in that way that we come to grips with the work of a translator and/or of the amanuensis, when the two are different. Moreover – and this is a recent research field of mine – in the manuscript we can trace a sort of ‘hidden’ translator as well,

that is the reader. It is exciting to identify the reactions of readers to the text in some marginal notes or glosses interspersed within the lines. Indeed, readers somehow participate to the translation activity. Sometimes they correct one or more words, either because the originals have turned obsolete, or to bring the semantic value closer to that of the original language, generally Latin. On other occasions the reader's intervention is more extensive. I very much enjoyed, for example, studying the numerous corrections traced in the MS BL Arundel 197, full of deletions, rewritings on the cancelled sections, additions of words or of entire chunks of texts. All this enables us to shape the personality of the reader/re-translator with reference to at least three aspects: (a) language (grammar forms), (b) meaning (widened or reduced), and (c) religion (different theological feelings and attitudes). Undoubtedly, this requires having at one's disposal the Latin text that was originally exploited and at least another, more literal translation, as a check. In my case, when studying this manuscript, I had to transcribe five more manuscripts, three containing the Latin text, of which only one was the nearest probable source text used by the translator, and two other translations in Middle English. It is not an easy task, but one becomes more and more engrossed in it, as if meandering in a detective story.

Besides editing texts in Middle English translated from Latin, you have also regularly translated a wide variety of other texts. Is there a relationship between the two activities?

I believe it is difficult to identify the main issues of the translating process without practising translation in the first place. I started translating relatively early. With reference to English, I dealt with the Anglo-Saxon poem *Dream of the Rood*, with lyrics from the 13th century on the Passion, and with the *Book of Showings* by



Julian of Norwich. They are three extremely different types of texts, which require great skill and flexibility. In the *Dream of the Rood* I needed to maintain the density and conciseness typical of Old English, thus avoiding any possible expansion that runs the risk of disjoining the text, as in some Italian translations deriving almost certainly from Modern English versions of the original, rather than from the original itself. I did the same with some sonnets by Hopkins. In contrast, 13th century lyrics exhibited a relatively simple language, and hence it has often been possible to reproduce the rhythm of the original verse. With the long text by Julian of Norwich I learnt from experience to become more and more attentive to syntactic architectures on the one hand and to lexical consistency on the other. I actually realised

that some key words occurred frequently. Hence they had to be translated always in the same way. Because of this, once I had finished the translation, I started over again from the very beginning, so that the Italian reader could fully perceive the actual verbal net of the original. With reference to syntax, I thought it necessary to comply with (a) the wide, calm flow of the sentences, but also of the binary and ternary clauses, (b) the verbal echoes, and even (c) alliterations, when possible. The text has its own music that must be respected. By accident, maintaining such 'music' seems easier in Italian. Indeed, some English-speaking friends were good enough to tell me that in my translation it was easier to identify Julian's relaxed rhythm than in contemporary English versions. In contrast, I once read a modern French translation that made me literally hiccup, since Julian's calm, fluid, paratactic discourse had been broken systematically into very short and fast moving sentences, which sounded totally incongruous in that kind of text.

Did you rely on a specific theory while translating?

To be honest, no, I did not, although I read some literature on the topic. As a matter of fact, interest in medieval translation is relatively recent. A certainly relevant stimulus to that has come from the series of conferences called ‘The Medieval Translator’ started in Cardiff in 1987 thanks to Roger Ellis. I attended all of them as a speaker, from the first to the latest one, which was held in Lausanne in 2007. As to ‘theory’, I have become more and more convinced of two things. Firstly, one should be aware of the risks we run when generalising on the translation practices of the medieval period since – as my friend Roger Ellis once pointed out – what you find in a page might suggest a theory, but that theory may be contradicted in the following page. Secondly, before attempting any sort of theorization, we need to carry out minute, subtle, and precise analyses of the text, and we can even conclude that, to some extent, every single text has its own theory. In any case, right from the beginning of my studies the following has been clear to me: studying a translation purely in terms of ‘faithfulness’ to the original, by highlighting omissions and/or expansions without trying to find any possible reason for such changes, may make us unable to grasp the real sense of the translating practice in that context and at that time.

Did you translate from Medieval Latin as well?

Yes, quite a lot. I have translated (a) the four classical ascetic works by Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167): *Spiritual Friendship*, *The Mirror of Charity*, *On Jesus at the Age of Twelve*, and *Rule of Life for a Recluse*; (b) the *Sermones Diversi* by Bernard of Clairvaux (1110-1153), and (c) the *Sermones* by Isaac of Stella (1110-1169). The style of these writers is of dazzling beauty. Every single page is a challenge to grasp the perfect geometry of

syntactic structures and the musicality of assonances, verbal echoes, internal rhymes; everything is written in a rhythm that chants and enchants. With the passing of the time, I have become more and more convinced that the original text deserves the utmost respect. The principles that have inspired me may be formalized as follows: (1) extreme literality with reference to the lexicon, particularly when the word has an iconic content that must be preserved, or when repetition contributes to giving a coherent structure to a passage; (2) extreme economy when rendering the sentence, which should not be dissolved in the paraphrase but rather preserved through the brevity typical of authors like the ones mentioned above, who write in prose as if it were poetry; and (3) full respect for syntactic hierarchies, which means reproducing both the parataxis and the relationship between main and subordinate clause, as in the original.

Have you ever thought of translating modern English texts?

I have already mentioned some of Hopkins’ sonnets, which I translated and analysed in an essay. More recently, in 2005 I translated and published fifty poems by R. S. Thomas, and in 2007 a similar number by Elizabeth Jennings, both of them great poets virtually unknown in Italy. The issues typical of these texts are certainly different from those we encounter in Latin or Medieval English writers, although, in these cases as well, my preference is still for ‘literalness’. However, independently of any possible difference, the following is indisputably common to all the works I have dealt with: no approach to the text equals in depth that of the translator, where reading skill and writing skill meet. Hence, in every single study of language the practice of translation should always be there, both when learning to read and when learning to write.