



Mutran, Munira H. (Org.), *O Mundo e suas Criaturas. Uma Antologia do Conto Irlandês*. São Paulo: Associação Editorial Humanitas, 309 pp.

Maureen Murphy

O Mundo e Suas Criaturas. Uma antologia do Conto Irlandês (The World and its Creatures. An Anthology of Irish Stories) is one of the translation initiatives that has emerged from the colaboração amigável between students and graduates of the University of Sao Paulo Irish Studies program and ABRAPUI Irish Studies colleagues. These collaborations have produced other anthologies: *Guirlanda de histórias: Antologia do Conto Irlandês* (1996), annual Bloomsday programs that have involved multilingual readings of *Ulysses* and especially the *ABEI Journal*. *The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies* feature that presents multiple translations of Irish texts.

The reader is neither surprised that editor Munira H. Mutran, an animal lover herself, proposed a collection on the theme nor that she has provided “Nota sobre *O Mundo e suas Criaturas*,” a postscript with an historical and literary context for her theme and that she has selected stories that are informed by their place in the writers’ oeuvre, by their literary value, and by their variety of narrative conventions and styles. The focus of the collection is a consideration of the relationship between humans and animals, narratives that could complement studies of the affective relationship between animals and people like *Melancholia’s Dog. Reflection on our Animal Kinship* (2006).

Mutran traces the long presence of animals in Irish literature. The Irish epic *Táin Bó Cualigne* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley) was fought over a brown bull. Poems of the Early Christian era feature such creatures as blackbird (“The Blackbird by Loch Neagh”) and a cat hunting mice in the ninth century (“Pangur Ban”), and a poem from fifteenth century *Duanaire Finn* describing a cage used for trapping birds. There is a visual counterpart to “Pangur Ban” in the cat and mice that appear in the Chi-Rho page of the Book of Kells. (Mutran provides her own visual gallery) “O Mundo e suas Criaturas na Arte” to complement her *O Mundo* texts.

Mutran points out that animals are well represented in the world’s mythology and in every genre of its literatures from an Old Testament Psalm (#8) to Donne’s flea, Blake’s tiger and lamb, Poe’s raven and Yeats’s swan. She identifies the creatures of modern Irish literature beyond those in the short stories, its oral tradition: the creatures of the international tale types that have been collected by Irish folklorists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as animals who roam the poems of contemporary poets such as Moya Cannon, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. To Mutran’s mention of Heaney’s “St. Kevin

and the Blackbird “ as an example of inter-species literature, one might add the ultimate inter-species relationships: Ní Chuilleanáin’s “The Girl who Married the Reindeer” and Ní Dhomhnaill’s “Parthenogen,” poems based on Irish legends of women with animal spouses or seal women with human husbands.

Liam O’Flaherty is the most represented writer with eight stories: “O Congro” (“The Conger Eel”), “Os Três Carneirinhos” (“Three Lambs”), “Esporte: Matar” (Sport: The Kill), “O Coelho Preto” (“The Black Rabbit”), “A Morte de Vaca” (“The Cow’s Death”), “O Gato Preto” (“The Black Cat”), “A Tola Borboleta” (“The Foolish Butterfly”) and “O Primeiro Vôo” (“His First Flight”). While this reader prefers the stories of Aran life among them “Spring Sowing,” “Poor People,” “Going into Exile,” and “The Touch,” many critics prefer the simplicity and the clarity of the animal stories. O’Flaherty himself called “The Cow’s Death” “the best thing I have done.” For Mutran, the story provides parallel between human and animal life that provide metaphors for the situation of our existence. O’Flaherty also contrasts the empathy of the woman for the cow “for she too was a mother” with the response of the men who drive the cow away, seize the stillborn calf and drags it away.

The story is of further interest to this collection for its own translation history. O’Flaherty published the story first in English in *The New Statesman* (June 30, 1923); two years later he translated the story into an Irish version, “Bás na Bó,” for *Fáinne an Lae* (July 18, 1925). The story was included in O’Flaherty’s collection *Dúil* (1952) which has become a canonical text for literature in the Irish language. The Irish versions are more focused, have less repetitions and more precise diction. The anthropomorphic elements of the story: the cow wondering where the trail went and her stupidity are missing in the Irish version. In “Bás na Bó” the cow reacts to her missing calf with a mother’s instinct; she moves clumsily but never stupidly. Mail Marques de Azevedo’s translation of “The Cow’s Death” and Heleno Godoy’s translation of an episode from *The Poor Mouth* are interesting for the way that, occasionally, a Portuguese word is an interstice between the English and Irish texts: “errante” is closer to the sense of “a muc cheachráin” than the simple “rambling” (*Poor Mouth*).

Brazilian readers of *O Mundo* might be interested to know the basis of Flann O’Brien’s satire in “O Dia em que Nosso Porco Desapareceu.” (The novel *An Béal Bocht* was published in 1941; its English translation *The Poor Mouth* appeared in 1973.) The English government did not have a cash scheme to promote English; they used the National Schools where the language of instruction was English, but the Irish government had such a capitalization scheme for Irish speaking families. There are stories of children shuttled to and fro so they could, like the piglets, increase the population of little Irish speakers in a household. (One night I witnessed children materialize in a childless household.) The “porco errante” satirizes the folklorists and linguists who went to Irish-speaking regions to record local dialects and collect oral tradition and who particularly sought the exotic.

Mutran has organized her stories by elements: earth, water and air. “A Morte da Vaca” and “O Dia em que Nosso Porco Desapareceu” are grounded in the Irish countryside. Seán Ó Faoláin’s “A Truta,” one of the water stories, is a coming of age story that tenderly describes the tender concern of a nine year old girl for a trout that has been trapped in a hole in a rock at the side of the road. At the end of the story, the girl rejects her mother’s morality story about the fish, and she releases it in the river. Embedded in the story are the traditional beliefs about the trout’s association with magic and wisdom and captive stories of trout in wells.

In Oscar Wilde’s symbolic “O Rouxinol e a Rosa,” the first of the stories of the creatures of the air, it is the nightingale, not the student or indeed his beloved, that understands the mystery of love. The theme of Wilde’s story appears again in his poem “Humanidad.” In this as in the other stories of *O Mundo* the writer appreciates what

Seán O’Faoláin called in *The Short Story-a Study in Pleasure* “de vôo da imaginação,” an imaginative flight which he judged to be “único teste da grandeza de um conto.”

O Mundo concludes appropriately enough with Maria Helena Kopschitz’s translation of Samuel Beckett’s “Pássaro Passa” translation of Samuel Beckett’s surreal “Afar a Bird” from his *Collected Short Prose*. While Beckett has been widely translated by Brazilians from French as well as English, Maria Helena Kopschitz’s Beckett translations, some done as collaborations with the late poet and translator Haroldo de Campos have been pioneering contributions to Beckett Studies in Brazil. (*ABEI Journal* No. 8 is dedicated to Dr. Kopschitz in recognition of her work for Irish Studies.)

“Afar a Bird” appeared first as one of Beckett’s: short *foirades* (fizzles or farts), but critics like Kumiko Kiuchi see the writer’s bird songs as functioning as an intermediary between human and non-human language, between sound and music. Taking the point, in 1981, the Polish musician Tomasz Sikorski’s composition “Afar a Bird,” *W Dali Ptak* (1981), scored for “three voices”: a reciter (whispering), a clavichord and a pre-recorded keyboard.

Like translation that mediates between the borders of languages, Munira H. Mutran’s collection *O Mundo e suas Criaturas* demonstrates the rich reading that an encounter between Portuguese translators and English texts can produce, an encounter enriched by the metaphor between human and non-human lives and relationships.

The translators, respectful of the language and culture of the original texts, have provided a collection that is an interesting introduction to Irish literature and a valuable collection of readings for students.