

Commented Translation of Short Stories by Desmond Hogan: Three Tales of Exile

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Abstract: *The subject of this master's degree dissertation is the commented translation of three short stories by Desmond Hogan, a contemporary Irish writer still unpublished in Brazil. All three stories deal with the issues of exile and diaspora, of crucial importance in Irish literature. I start out by introducing the author, and proceed to describe the Irish context that conditioned both the themes and the formal aspects of Hogan's work. The author is then located within the history of the modern Irish literary space, from the early nationalistic manifestations and the high modernism of Joyce and Beckett to the present. In the second part I present my translation of the three short stories in a bilingual format. In my comments, I try to interweave experience and reflection by using the ideas of Henri Meschonnic as presented in his poetics of translation. I identify different aspects of Hogan's poetics – semantics, rhythm and punctuation – and indicate the manner in which these elements were echoed in the translated text. Lastly, I comment my translation of selected passages.*

Keywords: *Desmond Hogan, literary translation, Irish literature, Irish exile and diaspora, Henri Meschonnic, poetics of translating.*

The theme of this dissertation is the commented translation of three short stories by Desmond Hogan, a contemporary Irish writer still unpublished in Brazil. All three short stories deal with the issues of exile and diaspora, of crucial importance in Irish literature. I start out by introducing the author, and proceed to describe the Irish context that conditioned both the themes and the formal aspects of Hogan's work. The author is then located within the history of the modern Irish literary space, from the early nationalistic manifestations and the high modernism of Joyce and Beckett until the present.

To that end, the work was divided in two parts entitled, respectively, "Literary System and System of the Work", and "Translation", corresponding to Context and Text. In the first part, the topic "The Author" starts out by introducing Desmond Hogan (1950-), the great marginalized author of the literature of Ireland who, until now, has been the object of few academic studies, not only in Brazil but also in English-speaking countries. This omission may be due, first of all, to Hogan's elusive, almost autistic

personality, marked by a profound distaste for the limelight of fame, and also to the fact that, after a brilliant debut in London in the 1980s he disappeared without a trace for almost a decade, an interval during which he should have affirmed himself as an author of the first magnitude. Resorting to the few available sources, notably to Robert McCrum's *The Vanishing Man*, published in *The Guardian* in 2004, and also to Hogan's work itself, I present his biographical data and recount his appearance in the Irish literary scene of his time, the 1970s and 1980s, when he, with his unique style, both lyrical and modernist, at once cosmopolitan and deeply Irish, emerged as one of the most promising writers of the new generation. In the 1980s, his first novel, *The Ikon Maker* (Co-Op Books, Dublin, 1976) and his first short story collection, *Diamonds at the Bottom of the Sea* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1979), were receiving enthusiastic reviews, being given second editions and starting to be published in the United States. In 1989, however, Hogan suddenly left London and took up a nomadic lifestyle that sent him traipsing aimlessly around Europe. His work became sporadic and erratic. In 1995, Hogan's lover died of AIDS in Berlin. In that same year, after publishing *Farewell to Prague* (Faber and Faber, London), a tortuous book, almost incoherent in some passages, that sold less than five thousand copies, Hogan disappeared without a trace. For years no one knew his whereabouts. We now know that Hogan, with his mental health seriously impaired, returned to Ireland and settled in Galway, his native county, where he sought the company of travellers and ended up living in a disintegrating car abandoned in a field. It was in these circumstances that Hogan, reduced to utter poverty, appealed to his friend Anthony Farrell, who had already sheltered him in London, and was now the publisher of Lilliput Press, in Dublin. With Farrell's help, Hogan was able to slowly rehabilitate himself and return to writing and publishing. So as to better locate Hogan within the literary context of his country, and also to describe him as an author, I included subtopics dealing with his own declarations of political opinion, specially regarding Irish politics of his time, and also his own account of his readings, in which he cites the authors who exerted the greatest influence on his worldview and on his prose style.

Still in the first part, the topic "The Irish Context" examines, from a comparatist and dialectical standpoint, the historical environment in which Hogan lived and that conditioned both his themes and the formal aspects of his literary output, focusing on what Antonio Candido, in his *Formação da Literatura Brasileira* (1981), calls the "work-circumstance relation" (18), the methodological attitude aiming at "simultaneously focusing the work as its own reality and the context as a system of works". According to Candido, this perspective demonstrates, for instance, how specific elements of nation-building and national identity influence the author's treatment of his theme, transforming mere conditioning factors into intrinsic elements of the literary work. In Candido's analytic methodology, "what is external matters neither as a cause nor as meaning, but as an element that plays a certain role in the structural constitution, thus becoming *internal*". (*Literatura e Sociedade*, 2006. 14).

After isolating the recurring theme of the Irish exile in Hogan's work, central to the three stories chosen for translation, I try to historically locate the significance of the issues of exile, expatriation and diaspora, so overwhelmingly present both in the history of Ireland and in Irish literature since late nineteenth century. Hogan's fiction is a narrative of Irish exile, of its remote and recent catalysts, and of its consequences, happy or otherwise. The Irish writers in exile, starting with James Joyce, tended to concentrate on their native Ireland, on the world they had left behind, in remembrances of an obsessively recurring past. Hogan, in his own very peculiar way, made his prose cross the Irish Sea and focus on the deep and intimate relation between past and present, between home and abroad, that marks and colors the lives of his characters.

Drawing on the outstanding analysis of the "Irish paradigm" presented by Pascale Casanova in *La République Mondiale des Lettres* (1999), I examine the Irish literary space, from the early manifestations of literary nationalism – The Irish Renaissance and the Gaelic League – to the works of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, two of the major exponents of European High Modernism, who rescued Irish literature from its former peripheral and subsidiary status and raised it to the forefront of the Western canon. Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw, and also Joyce and Beckett, are presented as Irish writers who, for different reasons, in different circumstances and with different attitudes, left their home country and emigrated – Wilde and Shaw to London, Joyce and Beckett to Paris. Next, I proceed to an account of the development of Irish literature from High Modernism to the present day, focusing on what Antonio Candido calls "literary continuity" – "a kind of torch relaying from one runner to the next, that ensures collective movement in time and defines the outlines of the whole" (1981. 24), concluding with an analysis of Desmond Hogan's place within the Irish tradition.

Next I include the topic "The Narrative of Exile in Desmond Hogan: Fiction and History", adopting a hermeneutic perspective and describing how the Irish exile, an experience that is part of Hogan's own life, is portrayed by him in fictionalized form, and also the interplay between particular and general, between subjectivity and fact, conjured by Hogan in his narratives. To that end, I use the ideas of Philippe Lejeune, the French expert in the autobiographical genre, who says that, in a broad sense, all writings that make the reader feel that he is confronted with the narrative of the author's personal experience can be considered autobiographical (*L'autobiographie en France*, 1971). I also resort to the ideas of Paul Ricoeur, the French hermeneutical philosopher, who draws a parallel between historical narrative, on one side, and poetry and fictional narratives on the other, arguing that both are refigurations of time in the act of reading (*Temps et récit*, 1983). In order to describe Hogan's narrative style I use passages from the "tales of exile" as examples of how he intertwines his own personal experience with the Irish exile epopee, inventing particular plots that come together in the weaving of a vast, collectively shared history. Although based on his personal experience, Hogan's narratives are never confined to the strictly biographical. Rather, they spread out in a polyphony of voices, crossing barriers of generation and gender, bearing witness to a

crucial chapter in the history of the Irish people. In each line, the reader feels the presence of first-hand experiences narrated in voices that bear names and identities other than the author's own.

As to plot, "Marigold Fire" and "The Airedale" start out on the same note: two unnamed boys, aged around ten, both living in small towns in rural Ireland, discover a whole new world of possibilities in the families of a classmate, who was as different from his own family as possible – artistic, creative, interesting. These friends and their fascinating families, however, one day move out of town, leaving both boys sunk in a perplexed void. They come to realize, however, that they had been given a legacy of infinite perspectives, and also the certainty that something different and better existed in some distant place – the first intuition of the exile that would come later.

The plot of "The Airedale" is more complex and extended in time: the protagonist, now an adult, one day unexpectedly leaves the seminary where he was studying to be a priest and hops on a plane to London, where he eventually enrolls in a film school. It is as a film-maker that he returns to Ireland years later, one of his films having been nominated for an award at a film-festival. There he meets his childhood friend, now a doctor, and conspicuously active in the Irish gay liberation movement. His film did not win the award, and his friend was now a stranger to him. Nevertheless, there was a shared past that could not be forgotten, and the acknowledgement that his classmate's family had given him a new home, and a life he would not otherwise have had. On his way back to London, the protagonist finds himself overwhelmed with gratitude: "Thanks for giving me birth".

In "Elysium", the story of Mary Mullarney's exile is more intricate and described in greater detail, involving not only personal hurts, but also an involuntary clash with the bloody politics of the country she had tried to leave behind. Fleeing from a disastrous marriage, Mary arrives in London with three small children and no place to stay. Forced by circumstances, she finds herself as part of the hordes of squatters who then peopled whole neighborhoods of the city. There were people from Ireland everywhere. Mary then settled in a large, dilapidated but still perfectly habitable house. She and her children were not alone, though. Raymond, a shy, gentle boy from Belfast was camped in one of the rooms. A tender, sexless friendship sprouted between the two. They would drink wine by candlelight and tell their stories, but Mary sensed a reticence in Raymond's account of his own life. She got a job as a cleaning-woman, Raymond, who never left the house, would look after the children, and they lived happily together. But one day an Irish bomb exploded in London, and the city once more turned hostile toward people from Ireland. The police closed in on the squatters and one Christmas morning they burst in and arrested Raymond, whose true story was then revealed. Imperatives of tribal loyalty and family authority had entangled Raymond in an inescapable web of violence and he, unwillingly, had been burdened with the task of placing an explosive device somewhere in an English town. He has been in prison for ten years when Mary tells her story.

In the second part of my project I present my translation of the three short stories in a bilingual format. In my comments, I try to interweave experience and reflection by using the ideas of Henri Meschonnic, as presented in his *Poétique du Traduire* (1999). I identify different aspects of Hogan's poetics – semantics, rhythm and punctuation – and indicate the manner in which these elements were echoed in the translated text. Lastly, I comment my translation of selected passages.

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