

Betwixt and Between



Betwixt and Between  
Place and Cultural Translation

Edited by

Stephen Kelly and David Johnston



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# INTRODUCTION

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE ISLAND THAT IS NOWHERE: OR, CULTURAL TRANSLATION—A UTOPIAN PROJECT?

STEPHEN KELLY

### **Knowing One's Place**

The man who finds his country sweet is only a raw beginner; the man for whom each country is his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole of the world is like a foreign country is perfect.

— Hugh of St Victor (12th century)

Living and working in Northern Ireland, one is more accustomed than is perhaps typical in a developed Western society of the extent to which place, and *placedness*, determines one's sense of identity. As a Belfast boy at school in Derry (or Londonderry, as the city is also called), I'd often hear the locker-room sage announce, "You can take the boy out of Belfast, but not Belfast out of the boy," a remark which usually presaged some further act of derision or horse-play. The extent to which place was a hidden marker in one's DNA was played out, daily, in the raucous music of accents, drawls and obscure vocabularies, as boys from rural areas of Northern Ireland dumbfounded the city slickers with a strange patois of labels, phrases, similes and sayings, simultaneously familiar and alien. And, of course, the "Troubles" imposed its own psycho-geography upon daily life. No-go areas, staked out by flags or painted pavements or gable murals, and interzones of momentary normalcy where members of either community, Catholic or Protestant, intermingled, were clearly and self-consciously demarcated. As Ciaran Carson illustrates in the opening essay of this book, there were, and are, places in Belfast where members of one or the other community dare not go. And daily, Northern Irish life was, and is, bombarded by "external" influences from the Republic of Ireland and the British "mainland". It is perhaps ironic, then, that nowhere else in Western Europe have sizeable majorities of the community claimed such a solid sense of homogeneous identity, whether

“Nationalist” (with allegiances to Dublin and a united Ireland) or “Unionist” (with allegiances to London and the British Crown).

And yet, for a considerable, and arguably growing, number of people in Northern Ireland, identity has become a case of thinking of oneself as “neither/nor” or “and/ both”—as, in other words, betwixt and between. Certainly, in my case—born Catholic, and therefore supposedly Nationalist in temperament—the Irish Republic held little appeal as a child and adolescent. Visiting relatives in Donegal, one was struck by how inalienably different “Southerners” were, despite the distance of a few dozen miles between our homes (the border was of course crucial, as borders always are). Reading Irish writers at a Catholic school, particularly and inevitably Joyce, gave me a sense of Irish identity as exiled from itself, which chimed with my own emerging feelings of ontological uprootedness. Any local allegiances were similarly dispelled when, in the classrooms where Seamus Heaney himself once sat as a boy, Heaney's poetry was recited to us approvingly by the priest-teachers of our school. Our derision for Heaney had little to do with his poetry and more to do with the identification of this place, our school and city and its priests, with the poet. Ours, had we realised, was the post-punk, post-modern arrogance of dissociation; we unconsciously preferred dislocation to attachment. Similarly, my first visits to England provided me with a sense of how insular English identity seemed; how predicated it was on certainties sanctioned by history and heritage, rather than on contested views. The exception—London—seemed extraordinarily, and paradoxically, parochial: an island of multicultural and ethnic pluralism utterly at odds with the rest of England. No more than initial perceptions, my attitudes to Britain or the Irish Republic (or as we used to call it, “Mexico”—i.e., south of the border) more accurately recorded my own sense of *placelessness*, as I felt unable to identify myself with anywhere in particular.

In my case, placelessness was likely a middle-class affliction, and a reflection of my family's situation, as we followed my father, a journalist, from one atrocity to another during the Troubles, into which I was born in 1972. I first recorded my sense—or otherwise—of place in a way familiar to generations of children: by writing my address. I remember the moment because its context seems to me now to have been especially peculiar, to say the least. I had been given special permission—pious little boy, priest-in-the-making that I was thought to be—to sit up late to watch a documentary about the Shroud of Turin, the ingenious medieval fake thought to have been the burial cloth of Christ. At nine or ten years old, the BBC documentary's high seriousness induced in me terror rather than fascination and to distract myself I began to practice writing my address, an exercise we'd been doing recently at school:

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 9 Knockavoe Crescent  
 Strabane  
 Country Tyrone  
 Northern Ireland  
 Ireland  
 The British Isles  
 Europe  
 Northern Hemisphere  
 Earth  
 The Solar System  
 The Milky Way  
 The Universe -

I accompanied the address with a series of concentric circles within circles, visual representations of the spiralling, vertiginous location that I assumed I occupied in the universe. And, given the television's pronouncements concerning biblical time, I wondered where God was in the ever-increasing domain of space. Remembering this strange little episode now, I am reminded of Giordano Bruno's thesis, as paraphrased by Borges, that god is an infinite circle, whose circumference is everywhere and whose centre is nowhere (which, of course, echoes Philo of Alexandria and is repeated by Pascal). And given our recent move—in the middle of the night, in confused circumstances which I cannot clearly remember—to my grandmother's house, where we lived for a few years before moving on once again, my own sense of place seemed portentously similar: I was always in the middle of nowhere.

### **The Problem of Place**

Where are we at all? And whenabouts in the name of space? I don't understand.

I fail to say. I dearsee you too.

— James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*

Mine was a privileged sense of placelessness: homeless at home, safe with friends in the eyrie of our own precociousness, and so it is for many supposedly alienated Western people.<sup>1</sup> The sense of displacement, and its attendant experience of alienation, is regularly declared the definitive *conditio* of Modernity. Nevertheless, something about the paradox of displacement—of being-in-nowhere—speaks to the deeply problematic nature of place. What is place? What do we mean, or assume, by it?

“When space feels thoroughly familiar to us,” says the influential geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, “it has become place” (1977: 73). Place, for Yi-Fu Tuan, represents

the domestication of space, its subjection to the organising intentionalities of settlement and habitation—and habituation. But are we ever afforded such an uncomplicated experience of place? As persuasive as such an account of place is—as locked as it is into a geographer’s memory of human settlement—there is the faint whiff of *terroire*, of land and territory sanctified by history and tradition, and therefore of the nation-building projects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Predicated on identification with ethnic singularity, or with the “traditional” occupation of particular geographical zones, the dire productions of the Nation, that wholly artificial model of social organization, still inflict themselves upon us to this day (particularly in the context of Ireland). Indeed, for many it has become impossible to imagine models of social organisation without recourse to the framing concept of the Nation-state—as if nations are somehow natural and eternal, rather than historically contingent.<sup>ii</sup> Federalism and globalization might be presented by their disciples such as Francis Fukuyama as alternative, evolutionary concepts designed to bypass the clash of nations synonymous with nineteenth and twentieth century Europe, but they are in fact supra-national structures which sponsor and guarantee the continuing necessity of the Nation. Without national markets in competition for limited resources, globalization would lose its economic rationales; without economic competition between nations, institutions of labour, education, and production would lose their ability to fabricate and consolidate group identity at national levels. As we have seen so recently in France, the political and economic disenfranchisement of social groups—particularly members of minority ethnic communities—leads inexorably to a crisis in national identity at the elite level of what used to be called bourgeois self-consciousness.<sup>iii</sup> Such crises in identity, then, should be recognised not as crises of social responsibility<sup>iv</sup>, but rather as an emergency in the idea of the Nation as a means of organizing large and ethnically diverse communities of human beings.

This is further demonstrated by the political issue, and ontological condition, of displacement. Displacement was, and is, the condition of countless numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. According to “2005 Global Refugee Trends” published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there were in 2005 a total of 8.4 million refugees (3) and 6.6 million internally displaced persons (8) in the world, with Pakistan and Iran receiving the largest number of refugees.<sup>v</sup> As early as 1943, Hannah Arendt commented that “refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples” (1943: 77). As Giorgio Agamben has pointed out (2000), there is in Arendt’s articulation the recognition of the affront posed by placeless or displaced peoples to the idea of the nation-state. Nation, with its philological origin in *nascita*—birth—implies that for those born within

national boundaries, the Nation itself functions as origin and definition. But for Agamben, the manner in which refugees and displaced peoples have been handled by Western nations is indicative of the incapacity of the Western polis to incorporate them—to *place* them: instead, the refugee is first to be reified as identifiable with a “mass phenomenon” (2000: 17-18) and is then to be dealt with by organisations which themselves bear a discomfiting relation to the idea of the Nation-state, from the League of Nations to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (2000: 18). The refugee’s identity is a non-identity, his or her life is, for the Western political imagination, a non-life; and thus the hankering after “rights” as the last vestige of the refugee’s dignity. Reflecting on another of Arendt’s seminal interventions, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man”, Agamben follows Arendt in suggesting that the aporia represented by the refugee relates to his or her status *outside* the nation-state, as external to the rights granted by the polis: “Here the paradox is that precisely the figure that should have embodied human rights more than any other—the refugee—marked instead the radical crisis of the concept” (18). For Agamben, the notion of “human rights” overlays the “pure humanity,” or *zoē*, of human beings with a series of political and juridical presuppositions, rooted in conceptions of the nation-state, which are radically deconstructed by the existence, by the very possibility, of refugees: “the refugee should be considered for what it is, namely, nothing less than a limit-concept that at once brings a radical crisis to the principles of the nation-state and clears the way for a renewal of categories that can no longer be delayed” (2000: 21-22).

Such a renewal will also require a radical reconceptualization of place. It is perhaps only when we recognise that a specific space is organised imaginatively as a *multiplicity of places*, that we can begin to approach the complexity of thinking about translation’s relation to place. It may be a characteristic postmodern impulse to pluralize in the interest of ethics, but a place is in fact *places*, and places are constituted, to borrow from Hannah Arendt, by “the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings” (2004: 438). “Places,” says Michel de Certeau, “are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reverse, remaining in an enigmatic state” (1977: 108). For Certeau, practice is critical to the constitution of place: therefore the body, its location and its performative habits collaborate to produce place: “a place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions” (117). The places of local community, of national memory, exist only in the plural: they are consensually imagined, realised and maintained. Indeed, one might say that one of the functions of community is to instantiate places as *places*. And reciprocally, communities are themselves constituted by the places they come to inhabit.

Places are thus always contingent upon the human actors who inhabit them.<sup>vi</sup> A space might be inhabited by multiple communities and be constituted as a series of very distinct places by each group. Crucial, then, to the process of delineating place are the perspectives derived from tradition, memory, history, trauma and from spatial practices such as agriculture, architecture, ritual and performance. “Where we are—the place we occupy, however briefly—has everything to do with what and who we are (and finally *that* we are),” says philosopher Edward Casey (1993: xiii). Place is political: our identities, our histories and our desires wrap their roots around the spaces we occupy—they provide us with the soil within which we lazily seed our life-narratives, but such soil can be contested. The deep, arguably intractable, problems which waylay our attempts to understand the imaginative construction of place are perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the fraught context of Palestine. Palestine demonstrates how multiple conceptions of place can be instantiated, albeit deeply problematically, in a single geographical space. As Edward Said notes, memorialization is critical to such a process:

For Palestinians 1948 is remembered as the year of the nakba, or catastrophe, when 750,000 of us who were living there – two-thirds of the population – were driven out, our property taken, hundreds of villages destroyed, an entire society obliterated. For Israelis and many Jews throughout the world 1998 was the fiftieth anniversary of Israel’s independence and establishment, a miraculous story of recovery after the Holocaust, of democracy, of making the desert bloom and so on. Thus, two totally different characterizations of a recollected event have been constructed (1994: 249).

In their claims to the territory of Palestine, Zionists drew successfully on the gamut of European academic disciplines, from archaeology to biblical studies, all consciously or unconsciously in service to a colonial, and broadly Christian, account of Palestine as either a place of origin for a biblical people—the Jews—or as a barren terrain to which the survivors of the Holocaust had a logical claim. In imagining Palestinian places, Western politicians and thinkers simply erased the indigenous Palestinian presence in favour of a series of Zionist myths—in contravention of the geo-political fact of Arab occupancy and of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised to address the issue of a Jewish state without violating the rights of Arabs (250-256). We continue to live, tragically, with the consequences of the conceptualizations of these places. For Said, the only viable solution to the Palestinian problem is to admit the plurality of place and to develop political models with which to accommodate it:

Israelis and Palestinians are now so intertwined through history, geography and political actuality that it seems to me absolute folly to try and plan the future of one without that of the other. The problem with the American-sponsored Oslo

peace process was that it was premised on a notion of partition and separation, whereas everywhere one looks in the territory of historical Palestine, Jews and Palestinians live together. This notion of separation has also closed these two unequal communities of suffering to each other... Yet, there can be no possible reconciliation, no possible solution unless these two communities confront each's experience in the light of the other (1994: 257).

But what would such a confrontation look like? What form and practice of language is capable of recognising the individual suffering and mutual interdependence of these peoples and their places?

### Translation and Utopia

The shadow of the forces capable of shattering a given order is already the shadow of an alternative order that could be opposed to the given order. It is the function of utopia to give the force of discourse to this possibility.

— Paul Ricoeur, *Ideology and Utopia*

With such conditions upon the very definition of place, and given the moral and political seriousness of even attempting its articulation, one might well ask how translation, as practice and ethical regime, can hope to make an intervention. Disavowing the philological quest for origins, translation—in its fluidity, uncertainty and provisionality—is a *mobile* practice, resisting fixity and rootedness, as David Johnston's essay in this volume powerfully articulates. It enacts a model of culture similar to that imagined by the anthropologist James Clifford:

If we rethink culture... in terms of travel, then the organic, naturalizing bias of the term "culture"—seen as a rooted body, that grows, lives, dies and so on—is questioned. Constructed and disputed historicities, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view (1997: 25).

As we have seen, a place is always already a *history*, as narratives of location—traditions—are the means by which space becomes, is translated into, place. But as Clifford suggests, "thinking historically is a process of locating oneself in space and time. And a location... is an itinerary rather than a bounded site—a series of encounters and translations" (11).

One might therefore assume that translation rejects place, for to translate is resist rootedness in favour of itinerancy. But I want to suggest that, conscious of its perceived status as a second-order discourse, as a *version*, the translated text occupies a space between original and reproduction and thus evades the value-claims attached to either position. As Richard Jacquemond argues,

Translation is not only the intellectual, creative process by which a text written in a given language is transferred into another. Rather, like any human activity, it takes place in a specific social and historical context that informs and structures it... In the case of translation, the operation becomes doubly complicated since, by definition, two languages and thus two cultures and societies are involved (1992: 139).

Admittedly, while socially and historically located, the translated text enacts a Borgesian doubleness, its identity simultaneously “and/ both” *and* “neither/ nor”. It cannot be said to be solely, or wholly, of one culture or another. Its status is precisely utopic: “each interpretation,” says Wolfgang Iser, “transposes something into something else. We should therefore shift our focus away from underlying presuppositions [regarding interpretation] to *the space that is opened when something is translated* into a different register” (2000, 5; my italics). “Translation,” says Willis Barnstone, “as with all transcription and reading of texts, creates a difference” (1993: 18). For Lawrence Venuti, “a translated text should be a site at which *a different culture emerges*, where a reader gets a glimpse of a cultural order and resistency” (1995: 305; my italics). Through a glass darkly, then, the translated text bears a relation to its originary circumstances: it exists in a refracted relation both to its “native” language, and the language it recreates—as an itinerary of exchanges between languages, cultures and agents. We would be better to think of the translated text, recalling Clifford’s terms, as a site where “constructed and disputed *historicities*, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view.” In its paradoxically placeless place,<sup>vii</sup> the translated text—indeed the entire project of cultural translation—has a utopian trajectory, and thus an essential political dimension.

It’s a commonplace that the political capacities of utopia were greatly, perhaps fatally, diminished in the twentieth century. The ostensible failure of the great, liberatory, socialist projects and the seemingly inexhaustible capacity of Capital for reinvention suggest that the task of imagining political alternatives has been exhausted. Utopia has a bad name.<sup>viii</sup> If, as Reinhart Koselleck suggests, “the field of usage of ‘utopia’ is certainly multivalent” (2002: 84) it has come to have an overwhelmingly negative connotation:

It is striking that writers of utopias only reluctantly call themselves ‘utopians’ and that the term, despite its genealogy dating back to Thomas More, seldom appears in the titles of literary utopias. A good author of good utopias evidently has very little desire to be a utopian, in the same way that Machiavelli was no Machiavellian, or that Marx did not want to be a Marxist (2002: 84).

Philology is never innocent, as the meaning of utopia for its inventor, Sir Thomas More, suggests. As Tudor neologism, “utopia” is a paragon of Renaissance humanist aspirations, because it fuses a Greek adverb—*ou*, meaning “not”—with a Latin noun, *topos*, “place”. The word efficiently performs the Renaissance project of reducing historical complexity and cultural specificity to an easily exploitable caricature of a “classical” past. In many ways, the island of Utopia, that island which is literally *no-place*, functions as a thought-experiment in the restitution of classical political and social ideals (the Utopians, after all, are supposedly descended from the Greeks, and Hythloday even reports to More the astonishing aptitude for the Greek language displayed by Utopian scholars (2002: 75)). Readers who come to More’s *Utopia* expecting the ur-text of modern political idealism are generally disappointed, because More is clearly ambivalent, to say the least, about the desirability of Utopian ways of life—what Christopher Kendrick terms their “tribal communism” (1985: 25). And further, the assumption that the subject and character of the *Utopia* are somehow at odds with More’s activities as a Tudor politician is equally problematic; as Fredric Jameson remarks, “even a no-place must be put together out of already existing materials” (2005: 24), and More’s political activities are not nearly as antagonistic to the views of *Utopia* as was once thought. Stripped of its exotic or fantastic setting, the social imaginary of *Utopia* is arguably of a kind with other, earlier attempts to assert a traditional, conservative, thoroughly Catholic, model of social organization, such as William Langland’s fourteenth century satire, *Piers Plowman*.<sup>ix</sup>

There at its beginning, then, the apparent undoing of the utopian *esprit*. But perhaps critics of *Utopia*, and critics of utopian zeal, misrecognise the generic origins of More’s text and its literary and political heirs. In his recent book on the political imagination of speculative fiction, Fredric Jameson complains that the determining genre of Book II of *Utopia*, “travel narrative”,

marks Utopia as irredeemably other, and thus formally, or virtually by definition, impossible of realization: it thus reinforces Utopia’s constitutive secessionism, a withdrawal or “delinking” from the empirical and historical world which, from More to Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, problematizes its value as a global (if not universal) model and uncomfortably refocuses the readerly gaze on that very issue of its practical political inauguration which the form promised to avoid in the first place (2005: 23).

Utopic narratives record, then, the impossibility of political renewal. But Jameson arguably forgets the Platonic origins of More’s text, and therefore of utopian discourse in general. I earlier characterized the *Utopia* as a “thought-experiment” precisely because, in its description of the ideal Commonwealth, the *Utopia* functions as a series of translations and re-imaginings of the polities

of contemporary Tudor England, as Plato's *Republic* had done for Athens. Ingeniously exploiting the emerging genre of colonial reportage, which Shakespeare later problematizes to devastating effect in *The Tempest*, More's text does not withdraw from political realities but rather *dislocates* them. It is, I want to suggest, in its imaginative capacities for dislocation and displacement of the "empirical and historical world" that the utopian imagination reveals its relation to translation—and its political energies. For the great theorist of utopian literature, Louis Marin, it is precisely in this sense that utopian discourse exercises its political interests: "utopia is a critique of the dominant ideology insofar as it is a reconstruction of contemporary society by means of displacement and a projection of its structures into a fictional discourse".<sup>x</sup> But it is critical that utopia is not perceived as wholly distinct from the "real" world; as Stephen Greenblatt remarks of More's text, "*Utopia* presents two distinct worlds that occupy the same space while insisting on their impossibility of doing so" (1980: 22). It is precisely the performance of this tension between two worlds—between the world of the text and the world of the reader; between the real and the unreal—that grants utopian discourse its peculiar power. For Paul Ricoeur, utopian discourse appropriates this creative tension from the referential capacities of fiction itself. "Fiction has," says Ricoeur, "a double valence with respect to reference: it is directed elsewhere, even nowhere; but because it designates the non-place in relation to all reality, it can indirectly sight this reality ... This ... is nothing but the power of fiction to *redescribe* reality" (1991: 175). Utopia functions for Ricoeur as an optic through which the world-making capacities of semantic innovation in language enact a powerful phenomenological, and concomitantly political, role:

The central idea must be that of nowhere implied by the word [utopia]... and by Thomas More's description of it. It is indeed starting from this strange spatial extraterritoriality—from the non-place, in the literal sense of the word—that we are able to take a fresh look at our reality; hereafter, nothing about it can continue to be taken for granted. The field of the possible extends beyond that of the real... From "nowhere" emerges the most formidable challenge to what-is (my italics) (1991: 184).

What must be recognised, says Ricoeur, is the ability of utopia "to establish new modes of life, but also its fundamental capacity to deal directly with the paradoxes of power" (1991: 185).

## **Betwixt and between: utopia and the place of translation**

In the friendship I speak of, our souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them and cannot find it again.

— Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*

And there has hardly been a more urgent need to imagine “new modes of life.” At a moment when identities threaten to ossify into the dangerous polarities of West and East, of secularity and religion, of freedom and submission, we are desperately in need of new languages, new narratives, new critical practices. What I want to suggest is that translation, and reflection upon the conditions and dynamics of translation, is a pre-eminent means of investigating the possibility of new forms of politics expressive of the pluralities of place, of identity, of history. Translation inhabits that “strange special extraterritoriality” described by Ricoeur, and as such it is precisely and forcefully utopic.

What might a politics of place be like, as imagined from the perspective of translation? Returning to the question of Palestine, and specifically to the problem of Jerusalem, I am intrigued by the (thoroughly utopian) suggestions of Giorgio Agamben. Reflecting on the crisis in the nation-state represented by the refugee, Agamben sees a potential model of spatio-political organisation in the simultaneous claims of Arabs and Jews to the places of Jerusalem:

One of the options taken into consideration for solving the problem of Jerusalem is that it become—simultaneously and without territorial partition—the capital of two different states. The paradoxical condition of reciprocal extraterritoriality (or, better yet, aterritoriality) that would thus be implied could be generalized as a model of new international relations. Instead of two national states separated by uncertain and threatening boundaries, it might be possible to imagine two political communities insisting on the same region and in a condition of exodus from each other—communities that would articulate each other via a series of reciprocal extraterritorialities in which the guiding concept would no longer be the *ius* (right) of the citizen but rather the refugium (refuge) of the singular (2000: 23-24)

The paradox of a city under conditions of exodus strikes me as a particularly compelling image of the *betwixt and between* inhabited by the translator. As the present moment witnesses crises in multiculturalism in Western nations which provoke suspicion of alterity and force populations into rooted, fixed political postures dependant upon the diminishment of civil liberties and as the nation-building projects of Western governments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and East Timor slide into internecine violence and factionalism, there has never been a more urgent need for a language and practice capable of containing and expressing

contraries, whether of place, tradition, or language. Might translation offer itself as the metalanguage, and meta-practice, for such a new, aterritorial, politics?

To conclude, I wish to imagine the contributions to this volume as a series of responses to the conception of translation as a utopian political practice broached in this essay. Luis Angosto's essay illustrates the centrality of translation—specifically cartographic translation—to the delineation of land rights among the Pemon people of Venezuela. Angosto documents the careful negotiations between regional native and “central” government, as cartographic narratives of Pemon territory draw both from indigenous discourses of territorial possession and internationalized vocabularies of cartographic representation. While Angosto warns the utopian translator that “translations are made by agents who have to conform to politically-loaded, codified idioms... that certainly influence their outcomes” (108) his essay demonstrates that the translation of place plays a crucial role in political representation and illustrates the status of the translator *between* cultural agents and modes of power. Similarly, Said Faiq warns of what might be termed, following Nietzsche and Foucault, the “will-to-power” of translation's domestication of “foreign” linguistic and cultural situations. The extent to which the discursive regimes of the translated text might be freighted with distinctly political and colonial ideologies compromises any claims to innocence on the part of the translated text or its translator. Faiq's essay poses urgent, and difficult, questions for many of the volume's contributors, warning that translation might in fact be yet another technology of domination.

In a revealing discussion of the translation of Northern Irish “Troubles” fiction for a French audience, Patricia Gibson extends Faiq's warnings about translation as a master discourse with its own ideological presuppositions. In her account of the decisions made by French translators, she examines the means by which the “invisible translator”, in Lawrence Venuti's term, is unmasked by the inevitable intervention of the translator's subjectivity and by pressures of publication and audience expectation. The utopian promise of an intercultural encounter suggested by the *theory* of translation is hereby reduced to the rather more pedestrian and touristic work of reduction of cultural nuance and historical complexity. Extending to the point of Benjaminian allegory Gibson's analogy of the translator as tourist guide, Jonathan Harden's extraordinarily rich and allusive account of the hermeneutics of place—in his example, Belfast—invokes the practice and ethics of performance as a rejoinder to the pretensions of translation. Counter-pointing the performance of space by the city dweller (be it the revolutionary Henry Joy McCracken in Ulster playwright Stewart Parker's account or the ordinary inhabitants of contemporary, “city-break” Belfast) with

the tourist, whose urban experience is often mediated by the tour guide or postcard, Harden suggests that the plenitude of place—its multiple histories, perspectives and interpretations—defeats any attempt to “translate” it for the casual, touristic, visitor. A superficial reading of Harden’s essay might assume a rather pessimistic attitude to the aspirations of cultural translation. But to do so is to misrecognise its challenge to the reader, or visitor, who relies on the translation-as-crib. There is, rather, in Harden’s essay the invitation to get one’s hands dirty: to see the complexity of place and the politics of translation from “street-level”.

The irreducibility of language, or of “the foreigner to the self”, animates Angelo Bottone’s introduction to Paul Ricoeur’s theory of translation. As Bottone points out with reference to Ricoeur, “if the purpose of language is communication, then the number of languages is an obstacle to its own purpose” (224). Translation therefore fulfils the pragmatic need to make intelligible the plurality of linguistic signification. But, as one might expect of Ricoeur, there is full recognition of the ethical implications of translation-as-practice, and Bottone’s account of translation as a form of linguistic hospitality offers us a means of addressing the ideological trajectory of translation prescribed by Said Faiq. Indeed, for Bottone, the accusation of “ethnocentrism” by critics like Faiq “resists the desire for translation by refusing it” (226). Bottone provides us with a means of imagining the recreative energies of translation: of its capacity to intervene, forcefully, between existing linguistic positions and cultural traditions.

Elena Di Giovanni’s essay explores a similar sense of the possibilities of intercultural encounter, this time with reference to what she calls the “transrepresentations” of Indian culture in the Italian media. For Giovanni, the representation of India in advertising transcends what might be read as its initial racial stereotyping in order to provide Italian audiences with a basic form of cultural encounter; as such, the infiltration of Indian music, cuisine and other cultural forms into Western culture provides us with a glimpse of the complex and ad hoc ways in which cultural encounter takes place. However, in a related essay, Ira Torresi argues that advertising’s concern with localization—its need to maximise identification with products at the level of local culture—requires the reification of shared norms and aspirations. Torresi rightly chastises translation scholars for paying attention primarily to the linguistic rather than the semiotic aspects of non-verbal representations of culture and her account of the localization of cultural norms can be aligned with Venuti’s sense of the “domesticating” strategies of translation. Read in parallel, Torresi and

Giovanni's essays offer an interesting snapshot of the current scholarly politics of cultural representation in relation to translation.

Mandana Taban and Michelle Woods offer another comparative investigation, this time of the engagement of Czech and Iranian "New Wave" cinemas with practices of film censorship. The careful, and often dangerous, negotiations of filmmakers with the arbiters of culture necessitates strategies which are often resistant to translation for non-native audiences but which function as powerful rejoinders to proscriptive political policies: "the indirect, the unsaid expresses a modality of translation within the domestic languages the purpose of which was not simply to evade censorship but to engage with its practices, uniformity and uni-lingualism" (105). Emerging from Taban and Woods' essay is a view of translation once again at odds with Faiq's description of it as a technology of power. Power, and the representation of power, is also at the heart of essays by Katarzyna Kociolek, Marie-Christine Press, Kathleen Shields and Carmen Szabo. Both Kociolek's account of the work of Black British artist Keith Piper and Press's essay on French-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira illustrate how translation might take a proactive role in articulating and critiquing the polarities of identity. Press and Kociolek demonstrate how the artist-as-cultural translator functions to foreground difference and thereby demonstrate its political limitations, geographical determinations and racial presuppositions. The translator becomes, in the contexts of Black Britain and post-colonial France, an agent of political action. The representation of the situation of translation in contemporary France in Kathleen Shield's essay contrasts with that of Press; for Shields, French is a "rich multifunctional language, capable of absorbing new influences and creatively adapting to changes in the society" (235); one wonders whether artists such as Sedira would agree. Again from a post-colonial perspective, Carmen Szabo explores the cultural politics of translating for the theatre in Northern Irish contexts—specifically with reference to Seamus Heaney's play *The Cure at Troy*. The dynamics of adaptation and appropriation inherent to translation allow Heaney, and the Field Day project as a whole, to renew native literary and dramatic conventions by refracting Northern Irish political issues through the lens of Greek tragedy. The result, Szabo suggests, is an attempt to out-manoeuvre the "master-discourses" of British colonialism. However, one might ask, as Szabo begins to, whether Field Day's political imagination has been supple enough to contend with Northern Irish political realities where only one half of the community might recognise themselves as colonized subjects.

Szabo's is one of several essays exploring the implications of translation for the theatre. Katja Krebs's essay assesses the emergence of the theatre translator

with the assistance of Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production and extends Bourdieu by imagining translation as a liminal activity between linguistically-determined fields. Her essay demonstrates the need to recognise and analyze the agency of the translator in the elaboration of national cultures. In David Johnston's extraordinarily suggestive and wide-ranging essay, the translator's status as go-between leads to reflection on the endlessly creative mobility of translation: its resistance to ontological and metaphysical fixity: "Cultural identity," says Johnston, "is cast in terms of substantial belonging, what one is deep down because of the map... But translation, like good writing, is surely more about what cannot be easily mapped, more a contribution to the unchartable process of becoming and of changing" (268).

Johnston's shifting, rootless translator provides one paradigm for utopian translation. In Anne-Marie Wheeler's essay on the relationship between feminism and nationalism in Québec, we are made privy to a utopian political dialogue between feminism and the separatist movement. As Wheeler asserts, traditionally "for women in formerly colonized nations, the question becomes one of recognizing the ways in which the interests of "national culture" have rendered them especially complicit in the perpetuation of their own subordination" (198). However, "in its Québécois translation, nationalism has gained a likeness to dynamic (feminist) utopianism, and lost its association with some of the essentialist traps of its practical application" (207). Québécois separatism becomes, in Wheeler's reading, a complex domestication of European political models in which women play an arguably uncharacteristic, proactive role. For Franke Matthes, the rootlessness of the migrant provides opportunities for self-creation and self-transformation not available to the confidently rooted citizen of the nation. Echoing Johnston's assertions about the mobility of the translator, Matthes argues that reflection in German on the conditions of home by the Turkish novelist Emine Sevgi Özdamar "enables her to develop her own version of a literal as well as emotional 'home', a home situated in movement rather than in a particular place" (167). Judith Pryor's study of the Treaty of Waitangi revisits issues of national identity, self-determination and minority ethnic rights as well as the often radical incommensurability of cultural beliefs and cosmologies. The Treaty, designed to designate the land-rights of Māori peoples in light of British occupation, remains a highly contested document and is singularly important as an instance of the impact of translation on practical politics; for Pryor "attending more carefully to the *justice* of acts of treaty translation... may provide the conditions for both parties to the treaty to enter into dialogue with each other concerning injustices of the past and pathways to the future" (146). Pryor's concern with the justice of translation—and its attendant ethical necessity—is echoed in Paul

Rankin's essay on the controversies during and after a meeting of the Spanish and English football teams. In a now infamous incident, the Spanish manager Luis Aragonés was alleged to have made racist remarks to a Spanish player regarding Thierry Henry, the French striker who plays in England. In a deconstruction of responses to the incident in the British press, Rankin reveals the extent to which translation, or rather mistranslation, can serve to reassert cultural stereotypes and models of national superiority. Rankin's essay thus functions as a rejoinder to facilely optimistic celebrations of the cultural encounters supposed by translation, while at the same time arguing that translation studies should strive to enable "possibilities for comprehension, both of the intercultural other and, ultimately, of ourselves" (90).

We begin where this volume began: in Belfast. Originating at a conference at Queen's University Belfast co-organised by the School of Languages, Literatures, and Performing Arts, the School of English and the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry, the volume commences with a reflection on the city by the Heaney Centre's director, the award-winning poet, novelist and translator, Ciaran Carson. Carson's elegant account of the interculturality of Belfast, rooted in a characteristic act of memorialization reaching back from Carson's childhood in a divided Belfast to the first appearance of the city in literature, counteracts the laziness of the contemporary media's representation of Belfast as Europe's most racist city. It also chastises the reflex so typical of Belfast's divided communities to claim ownership of a single, supposedly authentic, version of the past. Issues of the poetics of memory and memory's relationship with place and translation are revisited in John Thompson's Afterword. This time reflecting on the history of London, from the Middle Ages to the psycho-geographies of writers such as Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd, Thompson develops a theme which is implicit throughout many of the essays: the constituting role of memory in our understanding of place and its implications for translation. In concluding the volume, Thompson brooks new questions for our understanding of cultural translation, calling for a radical historicization of interculturality and cultural translation. Informed by a sense of past models of and opportunities for cultural encounter, translation studies might better police the quiet pieties of nationalism, ethnic singularity and cultural homogeneity which have so destructively determined the politics of the last two centuries. In this, cultural translation might begin to instantiate, as real political practices, what I have attempted to describe as its utopic destiny.

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<sup>i</sup> And for some non-Western intellectuals; one thinks most recently of Orhan Pamuk's account of his identity as simultaneously rooted in and alienated by the city of Istanbul. See Pamuk 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> On the political necessity of the nation-state see Norman 2006; Tamir 1995 and Kymlicka 1996. For the claim that nations have an ontological status which transcends their inhabitants, see Miller 1995 and Ruben 1985. There are, clearly, alternative structures for social organization and collective identification: the city offers itself as a pre-eminent model. However, the trajectory plotted by analysts such as Mike Davis suggests that our ever-enlarging cities are themselves no longer capable of sustaining either their inhabitants or the political identities which might be projected upon them. See Davis 2006. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's appropriation of "multitude" from Spinoza offers an optimistic, if difficult-to-realise, alternative to the idea of the nation-state. See Hardt and Negri 2005; also, Malcolm Bull's critique (2005). Finally, the networks of cyber-culture also pose problems for national cohesion, as Chinese authorities continue to discover in their (hopeless) attempts to censor their citizens' access to the World Wide Web.

<sup>iii</sup> Ironically, this is also why, as a model of social organisation, the Nation thrives so successfully – is, paradoxically, so much more self-confident – in states of war, where industrial activity is singularly bent to the consolidation and maintenance of identity. One might also say that this is why perpetual war, as a state of political being, is so attractive to advanced Western democracies in the present moment. See RETORT 2005, *passim*.

<sup>iv</sup> As they are often presented; for example, in France's case, the cause of recent instability has been said to be the French policy of integration; integrationism, in turn, is

thought to be a failed model of the Nation's responsibility to its citizens. This is to put cart before horse; given the utopian trajectory of this essay, I want to argue that the failure is with the idea of the nation itself.

<sup>v</sup> See:

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/statistics/opendoc.pdf?tbl=STATISTICS&id=4486ceb12> Accessed May 2006.

<sup>vi</sup> Or who have inhabited them. For the "humic" role of the dead in the constitution of place, see Pogue Harrison 2003, 17-37.

<sup>vii</sup> Liminality does not do the place of translation justice, as David Johnston's essay, below, observes.

<sup>viii</sup> See also Jacoby 2005 for a survey of anti-utopianism in twentieth century thought and for robust defence of the political potential of utopian discourse.

<sup>ix</sup> On the medievalism of More's Utopia, see Jameson 2005 and Kendrick 1985. More's reification of peasant life in particular chimes with late medieval anxiety about fully-fledged capitalist economies which no longer celebrate fealty as the mechanism of social relations.

<sup>x</sup> See Marin: 1990, 198.

## CHAPTER TWO

# BELFAST: BETWIXT, BETWEEN, BEHIND THE NAME

CIARAN CARSON

### I

It's some time around 1954—more than half a century ago—and I am peering between the rusted iron bars that fence one side of the entry behind Bombay Street, that adjoins St Gall's Public Elementary School in Waterville Street, in the Falls Road district of Belfast. I can feel the cold iron on my cheeks as I inhale the chemical tang of the strip of dark water that lies below. It oozes from the black mouth of a culvert and disappears down a black hole. It will take me some years to discover that this exhausted stream is the Farset river, which, corrupted, is one element in the name of Belfast, the city where I have lived all my life.

Nowadays, the accent is generally on the first syllable, but you can still hear older citizens of Belfast, and country people, pronounce it as Belfást, in accordance with its derivation from the Irish name *Béal Feirste*. *Béal* is a mouth, an opening, an approach to; *feirste* is the genitive of *fearsad* (metathesized from Old Irish *fertas*), which, as we shall see later, can mean any number of things; and historically the name Belfast has been a source of some confusion. John Dubourdieu<sup>i</sup>, writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, says that it 'is supposed to have derived its present name from Bela Fearsad, which signifies a town at the mouth of the river, expressive of the circumstances, in which it stood', apparently confusing *béal* with Irish *baile*, a town. Some years later George Benn<sup>ii</sup> comments:

The utmost obscurity and perplexity, however, attend the derivation of the name... Bealafarsad, which means, according to some, hurdleford town<sup>iii</sup>, while others have translated it, the mouth of the pool. Either of these facts might

receive some corroboration from local facts, but as it is a matter of complete hypothesis, there seems to be further room for further speculation.

Ward, Lock & Co.'s *Guide to Northern Ireland* (no date, but it has a 1950s look), has yet another version:

While the bell in Belfast's civic coat of arms is a feeble pun, the word 'fast' refers to the 'farset' or sandbank (also the now-covered-in High Street river). 'Bel' in Celtic means 'ford', i.e. Bel-feirste, the 'bel' or 'ford' of the 'farset'.

More latterly, Deirdre Flanagan<sup>iv</sup> notes that 'despite authoritative glosses on the appellation "Belfast" since the times of Joyce, its etymology remains largely misunderstood, especially by the general public, who take it to mean the mouth of the river called the Farset'<sup>v</sup>. The uncertainty about the name is reflected in its various English orthographical transmogrifications over the centuries: Belferside, Bealafarst, Bellfarst, Kellefarst (*sic*, presumably a scribal error), Bellfarste, Belfast, Belferst, Belfirst, Belfyrst, Belfarst, Befersyth, Beserst (another scribal error?), Belfast.

Flanagan then draws our attention to numerous sources to corroborate her assertion that the name derives from the ford or sand-bank in the river Lagan, at whose mouth Belfast is built, and ends by offering 'approach to the ford' as the most satisfactory meaning. And Jonathan Bardon<sup>vi</sup> agrees substantially with Flanagan:

The name literally means the mouth of, or approach to, the sandbank or crossing. The Farset stream, entering the Lagan almost at its mouth, takes its name from this sandbank crossing: *fertas* translated can mean a sandbank, a sandbar, a crossing-place or a ford. In the early Christian era this region was ruled by the Ulaid, a warrior caste of the Erinn, though it is likely that most of the inhabitants were the mysterious Cruithin, a people closely connected with the Picts of northern Britain. It was a battle between the Cruithin and Ulaid, recorded in the *Annals of Tighernach* as having been fought at the 'Fearsat' in 666 AD, that gave Belfast its first mention in history; later the *Annals of Ulster* explained: 'The Fearsat here alluded to was evidently at Belfast, on the river Lagan...'

Belfast: a confluence, a disputed territory, a war-zone.

## II

It's half a century ago, and I've just left my home at 100 Raglan Street to go to school. It will take me some years to discover that the street is named for FitzRoy James Henry Somerset, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Raglan, otherwise known as Lord Raglan, the commander of the British forces in the Crimean War of 1854-56. I