

**FOUR IRISH POETS**  
*Quatre poètes irlandais*

Edited by  
Clíona Ní Riordáin

TRANSLATIONS BY

Paul Bensimon  
Isabelle Génin  
Yves Lefèvre  
Anne Mounic



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## Preface

### Four Irish Poets

**F**EW PEOPLE REMEMBER that the first published work of James Joyce is a collection of poems, *Chamber Music*, which appeared in 1907. His later collection of poetry, *Pomes Penyeach* published in Paris in 1927, bears witness to his passion for trans-linguistic puns, and also to his interest in translation. As proof of this, one has only to recall the obsessive attention with which he supervised the French translation of *Ulysses*, and his constant meddling in the labour of his translators<sup>1</sup>. The portrait of four artist-poets which Dedalus Press, a propitious name for a publishing house, proposes in this anthology attests to the vitality of contemporary Irish poetry. The vitality is based on the essential orality which characterises both the Irish poetic tradition and Joyce's prose. The oral essence of poetry is more marked in Ireland than possibly anywhere else; this is without doubt linked to the bardic tradition, with its reliance on assonance as an aid to memorisation. In Irish poetry, the private nature of poetry is perhaps less important than poetry seen as a form of public art, which includes the recitation of favourite poems and poetry readings given by the poets themselves—as is the case this evening—or by readers. The Irish attraction for this type of event is without an equivalent in France. Reading aloud enables the rhythm of verse and the natural rhythms of speech to coincide, in a palpable, tangible, and audible manner. Pat Boran like Katherine Duffy, Mary Montague like Gerry Murphy, each in their own manner, each with their own personal nuances, illustrate this fundamental affinity between the poem and the human voice. In a bilingual anthology, with the translated text facing—and mirroring—the original poem, the perception of the poem is enriched.

## *Préface*

### *Quatre poètes irlandais*

**P**EU DE GENS se souviennent qu'avant d'être romancier James Joyce fut poète. Sa toute première œuvre est un recueil de poèmes, *Chamber Music*, qui date de 1907. Le recueil de poèmes, *Pomes Penyeach*, publié en 1927 à Paris, témoigne de son intérêt passionné pour les jeux de mots translinguistiques et pour la traduction. Il n'est que de rappeler la minutie obsessionnelle avec laquelle Joyce supervisait la traduction française d'*Ulysse* et s'immisçait dans le labeur de ses traducteurs<sup>1</sup>. Le portrait des quatre artiste-poètes que la Dedalus Press, au nom tellement propice, nous présente dans cette anthologie atteste la vitalité de la poésie irlandaise contemporaine. Cette vitalité ne repose-t-elle pas sur l'oralité essentielle qui marque aussi bien la tradition poétique irlandaise que la prose joycienne ? L'oralité essentielle de la poésie est peut-être plus patente en Irlande qu'ailleurs ; cela n'est pas sans rapport avec la tradition bardique fondée sur l'assonance comme aide à la mémorisation. La poésie irlandaise relève moins de la sphère privée que d'un art public qui inclut *la mise en voix* de poèmes favoris et le récital de poèmes, soit par les poètes eux-mêmes—c'est le cas ce soir—soit par des récitants. La prédilection pour ce genre d'événement est inconnue en France. La lecture à haute voix rend palpable, tangible, audible, la coïncidence entre le rythme du vers et les rythmes naturelles de la langue. Pat Boran comme Katherine Duffy, Mary Montague comme Gerry Murphy, illustrent, chacun à sa manière, chacun avec des nuances personnelles, cette affinité fondamentale entre le poème et la voix humaine. Le vis-à-vis du texte original et de la traduction, et l'effet de miroir ainsi produit, établissent des rapports qui enrichissent la perception du texte poétique.

Readers should be grateful to Dedalus Press for creating this extra dimension. According to Antoine Berman, a literary work reaches *completude* through its translation into another language, through the *trial of the foreign*. The poetry of Pat Boran, of Katherine Duffy, of Mary Montague, of Gerry Murphy, emerges with flying colours from this trial, the trial of the foreign to find a new home in the French language.

Clíona Ní Ríordáin, Paul Bensimon  
Paris, 16 June 2011

<sup>1</sup> The translators of the present anthology can complain of no such treatment at the hands of the poets.

Les éditions, Dedalus Press, doivent être vivement remerciées de rendre ainsi possible cette dimension supplémentaire. Selon Antoine Berman, l'œuvre littéraire parvient à sa complétude par la traduction dans une autre langue, par *l'épreuve de l'étranger*. La poésie de Pat Boran, celle de Katherine Duffy, celle de Mary Montague, celle de Gerry Murphy, traversent avec éclat cette épreuve, l'épreuve de l'étranger.

Paul Bensimon, Clíona Ní Ríordáin  
Paris, le 16 juin 2011

<sup>1</sup> Les traducteurs de la présente anthologie tiennent à souligner qu'ils n'ont subie aucune pression de la part des poètes comparable à celle que Joyce infligeait à ses traducteurs

## PAT BORAN



PAT BORAN was born in Portlaoise in 1963 and lives in Dublin where he has worked as a broadcaster, editor and festival organiser. In 2005 he took over the long-established Dedalus Press which had previously published many of his own books. The recipient of the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Award in 1989, he is the author of the poetry collections, *The Unwound Clock* (1990), *Familiar Things* (1993), *The Shape of Water* (1996) and *As the Hand, the Glove* (2001), as well as *New and Selected Poems* (2007), editions of which have appeared in Italian, Macedonian and Hungarian. His non-fiction includes the popular writers' handbook, *The Portable Creative Writing Workshop* (1999/2005), *A Short History of Dublin* (1999) and the Bisto Book of the Year shortlisted children's title, *All the Way from China* (1998). He has edited a number of poetry anthologies, including *Wingspan: A Dedalus Sampler* (2006) and *Flowing, Still: Irish Poets on Irish Poetry* (2009) and is a former editor of *Poetry Ireland Review*. He presents *The Poetry Programme* on RTÉ Radio 1 and the Dedalus Press 'AudioRoom' podcast, available iTunes. In 2007 he was elected to membership of Aosdána, the Irish academy of artists and writers, and in 2008 received the Lawrence O'Shaughnessy Award for Irish Poetry.

### ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Yves Lefèvre teaches various aspects of literary translation at the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3. He has translated selections of poems by Leanne O'Sullivan and Vona Groarke as part of an ongoing series of translation workshops at the university.

## Children

Children in ill-fitting uniforms  
drive adults to school, and children  
argue the cost of tobacco  
in the Newsagent's nearby.

You must have noticed them.

And in the mornings they rise to slaughter pigs,  
cook breakfast, solve crosswords at the office ...  
Or they send tiny adults into minefields,  
barefoot, with pictures  
of Khomeini around their necks,  
their old toes searching the sand  
for death.

And children queue for Bingo  
on Ormond Quay, on Mary Street,  
and douse their leaking take-aways with vinegar.

And children talk and smoke incessantly  
in Eastern Health Board waiting rooms,  
always moving one seat to the right,  
someone's parents squabbling over trinkets  
on the worn linoleum.

And it is always children  
who will swear for their tobacco—children  
with beards and varicose veins—  
and children, dressed as policemen,  
who pull their first corpses from the river.

## *Les enfants*

Des enfants en uniforme mal coupé  
conduisent des adultes à l'école, et des enfants  
discutent du prix du tabac  
chez le marchand d'à côté.

Vous les avez certainement remarqués.

Et le matin, ils se lèvent pour tuer des cochons,  
préparer le petit-déjeuner, faire des mots-croisés au bureau ...  
Ou bien, ils envoient des adultes miniatures aux champs de mines,  
pieds nus, avec des images  
de Khomeiny autour du cou,  
leurs vieux orteils fouillant le sable  
à la recherche de la mort.

Et des enfants font la queue pour le Bingo  
sur Ormond Quay, sur Mary Street,  
et arrosent de vinaigre leur plat-à-emporter dégoulinant.

Et des enfants parlent et fument sans arrêt  
dans les salles d'attente du dispensaire,  
se décalant toujours d'une place vers la droite,  
les parents se disputent pour des babioles  
sur le lino usé.

Et c'est toujours des enfants  
qui râlent pour du tabac – des enfants  
avec de la barbe et de la couperose –  
et des enfants, habillés en policiers,  
qui sortent leur premier cadavre du fleuve.

And who is it who makes love in the dark  
or in the light, who haunts  
and who does all our dying for us,  
if not children?

We leave their fingerprints  
on everything we touch.

Et qui donc fait l'amour dans le noir  
ou dans la lumière, qui hante  
et qui se charge de mourir pour nous,  
sinon les enfants ?

Nous laissons leurs empreintes  
sur tout ce que nous touchons.

## KATHERINE DUFFY



Katherine Duffy was born in Dundalk in 1962. Her first poetry collection, *The Erratic Behaviour of Tides*, was published by the Dedalus Press in 1998, and poems from that collection have since appeared in various anthologies. Her second collection of poems, *Sorrow's Egg*, was published in early 2011, and it is from that collection that the poems here have been taken. Duffy also writes fiction and in 2006 received the Hennessy New Irish Writer of the Year award. Her fiction in Irish has won many awards and she has translated stories by leading Irish language authors into English. She lives in Dublin where she works as a translator in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

### ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Anne Mounic is the author of *Jacob ou l'être du possible* (Caractères, 2009) and of the forthcoming *Counting the Beats: Robert Graves' Poetry of Unrest* (Rodopi, 2011) and *Monde terrible où naître : La voix singulière face à l'Histoire* (Honoré Champion, 2012). She has translated Robert Graves, Stevie Smith and Vincent O'Sullivan, amongst other poets.

## Aria

An odd carolling wakes me,  
keening from left field,  
from somewhere else entirely.

Is it wind in the wires?  
A banshee?  
A child

with a clunky puzzle,  
at last I match the sound  
to you, your shoulders lapsing,

drowning in flowers. Your alveoli,  
divas in the murky stadia of your lungs,  
are singing their story—

a wild clear note  
that darkens, spooling out  
to eerie coloratura,

the music of damage,  
now playing  
in the arena of morning.

## *Aria*

Une curieuse mélodie me réveille,  
une plainte venue de nulle part,  
ailleurs, tout à fait.

Est-ce le vent dans les fils électriques ?  
Les cris de la fée ?  
Un enfant

et sa question ardue, maladroite,  
enfin j'associe le son  
avec toi, dont tombent les épaules,

se noyant dans les fleurs. Tes alvéoles,  
divas sur les troubles stades de tes poumons,  
chantent leur histoire –

claire note farouche  
qui s'assombrit, se déroulant  
jusqu'au frisson de la colorature,

la musique des tissus lésés,  
qui joue à présent  
dans l'arène du matin.