

# CADERNOS 27

DE LITERATURA EM TRADUÇÃO



Os Muitos Mapas da Irlanda

# Ecological Uses of Translation: Two Poems by Paula Meehan Rendered into Galician

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**Resumo:** Este artigo presenta a tradución cara ao galego de dous poemas da poeta irlandesa Paula Meehan e inscribe esta práctica tradutolóxica nos debates actuais arredor da “eco-tradución” coa intención de alentar a reflexión sobre o interese de reciclar traducións de publicacións anteriores xa esgotadas e, deste xeito, cuestionar a demanda dun crecemento interminable de novas traducións. Unha sucinta discusión do contido dos poemas de Paula Meehan vai acompañada da análise das traducións con atención a aspectos de léxico, sintaxe e patróns de musicalidade, así como, especialmente, á relevancia destes dous poemas irlandeses para a cultura galega que os recibe, na que un número notable de mulleres poetas levan igualmente tempo examinando e reescribindo o canon literario patriarcal.

**Palabras chave:** Paula Meehan; eco-tradución; reciclaxe; Pluriversos; dogma católico; conciencia de claseusness.

**Abstract:** The present article presents the Galician translation of two poems by the Irish poet Paula Meehan and inscribes this translational practice within current debates on “eco-translation” in an attempt to foster further thought on the rationale of recycling former translations from out-of-print publications and interrogate the demand for endless growth of new translations. A succinct

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1 Manuela Palacios wishes to acknowledge the funding received for the elaboration of this article from the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación /AEI and the ERDF through the project “Posthuman Intersections in Irish and Galician Literatures” (PID2022-136251NB-I00).

discussion of the content of Paula Meehan's poems is accompanied by the analysis of their respective translations, in which attention is paid to aspects of lexicon, syntax and sound patterns but, especially, to the relevance of these two Irish poems to the receiving Galician culture in which a conspicuous number of women poets have similarly been scrutinizing and re-writing the patriarchal literary canon.

**Keywords:** Paula Meehan; eco-translation; recycling; *Pluriversos*; Catholic dogma; Class-consciousness.

### **The poems:**

Paula Meehan

#### **The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks\***

It can be bitter here at times like this,  
November wind sweeping across the border.  
Its seeds of ice would cut you to the quick.  
The whole town tucked up safe and dreaming,  
even wild things gone to earth, and I  
stuck up here in this grotto, without as much as  
star or planet to ease my vigil.

The howling won't let up. Trees  
cavort in agony as if they would be free  
and take off – ghost voyagers  
on the wind that carries intimations  
of garrison towns, walled cities, ghetto lanes  
where men hunt each other and invoke  
the various names of God as blessing  
on their death tactics, their night manoeuvres.  
Closer to home the wind sails over  
dying lakes. I hear fish drowning.  
I taste the stagnant water mingled  
with turf smoke from outlying farms.

They call me Mary – Blessed, Holy, Virgin.  
They fit me to a myth of a man crucified:  
the scourging and the falling, and the falling again,  
the thorny crown, the hammer blow of iron

into wrist and ankle, the sacred bleeding heart.  
They name me Mother of all this grief  
though mated to no mortal man.  
They kneel before me and their prayers  
fly up like sparks from a bonfire  
that blaze a moment, then wink out.

It can be lovely here at times. Springtime,  
early summer. Girls in Communion frocks  
pale rivals to the riot in the hedgerows  
of cow parsley and haw blossom, the perfume  
from every rushy acre that's left for hay  
when the light swings longer with the sun's push north.

On the grace of a midsummer wedding  
when the earth herself calls out for coupling  
and I would break loose of my stony robes,  
pure blue, pure white, as if they had robbed  
a child's sky for their colour. My being  
cries out to be incarnate, incarnate,  
maculate and tousled in a honeyed bed.

Even an autumn burial can work its own pageantry.  
The hedges heavy with the burden of fruiting  
crab, sloe, berry, hip; clouds scud east  
pear scented, windfalls secret in long  
orchard grasses, and some old soul is lowered  
to his kin. Death is just another harvest  
scripted to the season's play.

But on this All Souls' Night there is  
no respite from the keening of the wind.  
I would not be amazed if every corpse came risen  
from the graveyard to join in exaltation with the gale,  
a cacophony of bone imploring sky for judgement  
and release from being the conscience of the town.

On a night like this I remember the child  
who came with fifteen summers to her name,  
and she lay down alone at my feet  
without midwife or doctor or friend to hold her hand  
and she pushed her secret out into the night,  
far from the town tucked up in little scandals,  
bargains struck, words broken, prayers, promises,  
and though she cried out to me in extremis  
I did not move,  
I didn't lift a finger to help her,  
I didn't intercede with heaven,  
nor whisper the charmed word in God's ear.

On a night like this I number the days to the solstice  
and the turn back to the light.

O sun,  
centre of our foolish dance,  
burning heart of stone,  
molten mother of us all,  
hear me and have pity.

\*(from the poetry collection *Mysteries of the Home*, reprinted by kind permission of Dedalus Press and Paula Meehan).

### **The Exact Moment I Became a Poet \***

for Kay Foran

was in 1963 when Miss Shannon  
rapping the duster on the easel's peg  
half obscured by a cloud of chalk

said, *Attend to your books, girls,  
or mark my words, you'll end up  
in the sewing factory.*

I wasn't just that some of the girls'  
mothers worked in the sewing factory  
or even that my own aunt did,

and many neighbours, but  
those words 'end up' robbed  
the labour of its dignity.

Not that I knew it then,  
not in those words –labour, dignity.  
That's all back construction

making sense; allowing also  
the teacher was right  
and no one knows it like I do myself.

But: I *saw* them: mothers, aunts and neighbours  
trussed like chickens  
on a conveyor belt,

getting sewn up the way my granny  
sewed the sage and onion stuffing  
in the birds.

Words could pluck you,  
leave you naked.  
your lovely shiny feathers all gone.

\*(from the poetry collection *Dharmakaya*, reprinted by kind permission of Carcanet Press and Paula Meehan).

## The author

Paula Meehan is a poet and a playwright. Her award-winning poetry books include *Dharmakaya* (2000) and *Painting Rain* (2009), from Carcanet Press in Manchester and Wake Forest University Press in North Carolina. *Geomantic* (2016), *As If by Magic: Selected Poems* (2020) as well as some of her plays for radio in *Music for Dogs: Works for Radio* (2008) have been published by Dedalus Press. From 2013 to 2016 Paula Meehan was Ireland Professor of Poetry and her lectures were collected in the book *Imaginary Bonnets with Real Bees in Them*, published by University College Dublin Press in 2016. A collection of critical essays on her poetry and plays, edited by Jody Allen Randolph, was published by the U.S. journal *An Sionnach* (2009).

## The Galician translations:

### Fala a estatua da Virxe de Granard\*

Pode ir un frío glacial nesta época do ano,  
o vento de novembro varre o país todo.  
As súas sementes de xeo penetran ata os miolos.  
A vila enteira recóllese segura e soña,  
mesmo os animais se agocharon na terra, e eu  
chantada aquí nesta gruta, sen sequera  
unha estrela ou un planeta que me alivien a vixilia.

O ouveo non cesa. As árbores  
anóxanse boqueando como se puidesen ceibarse  
e liscar – viaxeiras fantasmais  
no vento que arrastra testemuños  
de vilas guerreiras, cidades fortificadas, calellos de gueto  
onde os homes se dan caza invocando  
os diversos nomes de Deus como beizón  
das súas tácticas de morte, das súas mañas nocturnas.  
Máis preto de nós o vento singra sobre  
lagos moribundos. Escoito como se afogan os peixes.  
Noto o sabor da auga empozada mesturado  
co fume da turba nas graxas de lonxe.



Chámanme María – Bendita, Santa, Virxe.  
Relaciónanme cun mito dun home crucificado:  
a flaxelación e a caída, e de novo a caída,  
a coroa de espiñas, a martelada de ferro  
no pulso e no nortello, o sagrado corazón sanguento.  
Chámanme Nai de toda esta dor  
aínda que non copulei con home mortal ningún.  
Axeónllanse diante miña e as súas pregarías  
voan como faíscas dunha fogueira  
que refulxisen un intre, esmorecendo logo.

Por aquí pode facer bo tempo ás veces. Na primavera,  
no inicio do verán. As nenas en traxe de comunión  
non compiten coa exuberancia das matogueiras  
de pirixel bravo e flor do espiño, nin co recendo  
dos campos que se deixarán para a herba seca  
cando a luz se prolongue cara ao norte levada polo sol.

Ou o engado dunha voda no solsticio de verán  
cando ata a mesma terra convoca a emparellarse  
e de boa gana ceibada estes mantelos de pedra,  
azul puro, branco puro, como se lle roubasen a cor  
ao ceo dun neno. O meu ser  
clama por se encarnar, por se encarnar,  
maculado e desamañado nun leito meloso.

Mesmo un enterro outonal pode ter o seu boato.  
As sebes grávidas co peso da froita  
bugallo, escambrón, baga, roseira brava: as nubes apúranse ao leste  
con aromas de pera, froita agochada na alta  
herba das hortas, e algunha alma vella desce  
onda os seus. A morte é unha sega máis  
anotada no teatro da sazón.

Pero nesta Noite de Defuntos non hai  
tregua na severidade do vento.  
Non me sorprendería se todos os mortos saísen



do camposanto para se uniren exaltados ao vendaval,  
unha cacofonía de ósos implorando xuízo ao ceo  
e que os libere de seren a conciencia da vila.

En noites como esta lembro a rapaza  
que chegou con quince veráns,  
e se deitou soa aos meus pés  
sen parteira nin doutor nin amiga que a collese da man  
e apuxou o seu segredo contra a cerna da noite,  
lonxe da vila presa nos cativos escándalos,  
nos tratos cerrados, nas palabras rotas, nas preces, nas promesas  
e aínda que me chamou in extremis  
eu non me movín,  
nin movín un dedo para axudala,  
non intercedín ante o ceo  
nin murmurei a palabra máxica nos ouvidos de Deus.

En noites como esta conto os días que faltan para o solsticio  
E a volta á luz.

¡Oh soll,

centro da nosa insensata danza,  
corazón ardente de pedra,  
fundida nai de todos nós,  
escóitame e ten piedade.

\*(Galician –galego– translation by Manuela Palacios and Arturo Casas, formerly published in Manuela Palacios González ed. *Pluriversos: Seis poetas irlandesas de hoxe*. Santiago de Compostela: Follas Novas, 2003).

### **O momento exacto no que me fixen poeta \***

a Kay Foran

Foi en 1963 cando a señorita Shannon,  
mentres batía o borrador no garfo do taboleiro  
medio oculta nunha nube de ziz,

Dixo *Prestádelle atención aos vosos libros, rapazas,*  
*ou, facédeme caso, acabaredes*  
*na fábrica de confección.*

Non era só porque as nais dalgunhas  
rapazas traballasen na fábrica e confección  
nin porque o fixese a miña propia tía,

e moitas veciñas, senón  
que aquela palabra “acabaredes” roubáballe  
a dignidade ao traballo.

Non é que entón me decatase disto,  
non con esas palabras –traballo, dignidade.  
Iso é todo unha reconstrución,  
o desexo de comprender; mesmo admitindo  
que a mestra tivese razón  
e ninguén o sabe mellor ca min.

Pero: eu *vinas*: nais, tías, veciñas  
espetadas como polos  
sobre unha banda transportadora

a piques de ser cosidas como a miña aboa  
cosía o recheo de sarxa e cebola  
nas aves.

As palabras podíante depenicar,  
deixarte espida  
sen as túas fermosas penas.

\*(Galician –galego– translation by Manuela Palacios and Arturo Casas, formerly published in Manuela Palacios González ed. *Pluriversos: Seis poetas irlandesas de hoxe*. Santiago de Compostela: Follas Novas, 2003).

## About Paula Meehan's poems:

“The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks” was first published in the collection *The Man Who Was Marked by Winter* (1991) and was soon considered as an exemplary poem for its effective intertwining of refined poetic qualities and an overt denunciation of the social and religious oppression of women. The speaker is the statue of the Virgin, who rebels against the role she has been ascribed in Catholic dogma and confesses her inaction when a fifteen-year-old girl gave birth to a child and both were found dead at the feet of the statue after a pregnancy that had been kept secret. This event refers to the actual case of Ann Lovett in 1984 (Boland 2018), and the poem constitutes an outstanding example of women writers' engagement, especially after the 1970s, with the denunciation of patriarchal structures and Catholic constrictions imposed on women.

“The Exact Moment I Became a Poet” was included in the poetry collection *Dharmakaya* (Carcanet 2000). It illustrates both an epiphanic moment about the importance of language nuances to convey power relations and Paula Meehan's longstanding engagement with class conflict and the discrimination against the working class. Readers are often curious about the specific experiences that spark a poet's decision to become a writer. In this poem, the choice of a moment in a child's school life evinces the role of the education system in social segregation.

## A commentary on the Galician translations

These Galician translations by Manuela Palacios and Arturo Casas first appeared in the, now out-of-print, anthology *Pluriversos: Seis poetas irlandesas de hoxe* (2003) which gathered poems by six contemporary Irish women poets: Eavan Boland, Paula Meehan, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Mary Dorcey, Medbh McGuckian and Anne Le Marquand Hartigan. Of the six poets, two have recently passed away: Boland (2020) and Hartigan (2022). The rationale of the anthology was to include poetry that was relevant to contemporary Galician writing, especially concerning the parallel emergence of women writers in both communities after the 1970s and their critique of national, Catholic, sexual, medical and linguistic constrictions on women's lives and literary aspirations. The anthology had a bilingual format with the Irish poems –most in English, except those by Ní Dhomhnaill, which were in Irish– set on facing pages with their respective Galician translations.

The poem “The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks” was selected because of its relevance to Galician women’s lives regarding Catholic dogma and its impact on women’s bodies, reproductive rights, sexuality, secrecy and social surveillance. In an interview with the poet and translator Keith Payne, he comments on the much-challenged notion of fidelity in translation:

Tense abusado moito da noción de fidelidade e resulta recorrente de máis. Deberíamos considerar a fidelidade ao acto poético, ao poema, á experiencia do poema, ao público lector, á longa historia da experiencia poética nas dúas linguas, ás sutilezas sociais que envolven tanto o poema como a tradución, sen reducir a tradución a unha mera cuestión lingüística. (In Palacios 2022, p. 261)

It was actually the fidelity to the “long history of poetic experience in both languages” that mainly guided our translation of Meehan’s poetry.

As with most translations, the change of language entails new poetic effects, especially regarding sound patterns such as rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance, etc. The switch from a Germanic language such as English to a Romance language such as Galician also brings about important changes in the lexicon and in the tensions between the poetic units of lines and stanzas and the syntactic unit of the sentence. All these challenges were taken into thoughtful consideration. Conversely, Meehan’s poem is written in free verse, which facilitates the translation task because of the flexibility of rhythms and the absence of end rhymes.

From the very start of the poem, alternative expressions need to be searched for in Galician: “bitter” turns into “glacial”, still matching November weather conditions; the idiomatic expression “to the quick” changes into a parallel expression about inside body organs “ata os miolos”; the notion of arranging the bed covers around a human body and the alliteration of /t/ in “town tucked up” are necessarily given up, but the idea of the town self-indulgently seeking protection, indifferent to the misery of others, is maintained in “recóllese”, and the alliteration shifts to the /s/ sound in the words that follow: “recóllese segura e soña”. The surprising effect of the colloquial expression “stuck up here”, which constitutes the first signal in the poem of the Virgin’s rebellion against the role she has been ascribed by Catholic dogma, finds a felicitous equivalent expression in “chantada aquí”, which maintains the same conversational register and conveys the same disaffection with the assigned function. “Wild things” could have been translated as “seres salvaxes” (wild beings) but not as “cousas salvaxes” in Galician; besides, “salvaxe” sounds excessively aggressive in this rather objective description of a winter landscape in

which the Virgin herself would desire to take the wild creatures' place and seek protection underground, so we opted for “animais” instead. Divergences are often compensated with correlations and on the same line the caesura, with all the ambiguity it entails due to the contiguity of the animals and the Virgin, is respected: “even wild things gone to earth, and I” / “mesmo os animais se agocharon na terra, e eu”. This way, the intrigue provoked by the line break and the remarkable effect of the following colloquialism find their correlative in the Galician translation.

The poem “The Exact Moment I Became a Poet” is not especially challenging for translation into Galician in what regards lexicon, imagery and syntax. The swift rhythm of the source text may be slightly slowed down in the Romance language, however, due to the many polysyllabic words in the target text. As in the previous poem, Meehan makes use of certain daily expressions the equivalent of which is easy to find in Galician. This way, “end up” is aptly rendered as “acabaredes”. More importantly, line breaks, alongside the intrigue they often entail until the enjambement is completed, have been respected throughout the translated version.

Such are the kinds of variations, transformations and correlatives practised in the translation of both poems, translations that are reproduced here only after the anthology *Pluriversos* (2003) in which they were first published became out of print. In his book *Eco-Translation*, Michael Cronin affirms that “the insatiable logic of I[nformation and] C[ommunications] T[echnology] development is driven by and drives an economic model of endless, material growth” (6). Cronin vindicates translation as a “craft”. The reproduction here of a translation from an out-of-print publication aims to resist the mirage of endless translation growth and to consider translation, as Cronin does, to be “potentially more amenable to the cyclical rationale of recycling than to the linear logic of extractivism” (4).

## The translators

**Manuela Palacios** is *Profesora Titular* of English at the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. She has directed five research projects on contemporary Irish and Galician literature that have been funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, and has edited and co-edited several books –those with an asterisk are poetry anthologies in translation– in relation to this topic: \**Pluriversos* (2003), *Palabras extremas* (2008), *Writing Bonds* (2009), *Creation, Publishing and Criticism* (2010), \**To the Winds Our Sails* (2010), \**Forked Tongues* (2012), \**Six Galician Poets* (2016), \**Migrant Shores* (2017), \**Αυθολογία Νέων Γαλικιανών Ποιητών – Antoloxía De Poesía Galega Nova* (2019) and, more recently, *Us & Them: Women*

*Writers' Discourses on Foreignness* (Frank & Timme 2023). Her other publications include translations of European and Arabic poetry and fiction, monographs on Virginia Woolf's pictorial imagery and Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and articles on ecocriticism.

**Arturo Casas** is Full Professor of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature at the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. He has a wide set of research interests including Aesthetics, Literary Theory, Literary History, and twentieth-century Galician and Spanish poetry. Additionally, he is a member of the Institute of Comparative Literature Margarida Losa (Universidade do Porto) and of the Grupo Intermedialidades, coordinated by Pedro Eiras.

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