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SPECTRUMS WITHIN SPECTRUMS:

Examining Self-Translation in the Context of Broader Translational Practices in Irish-to-English Translation

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1. Introduction

Despite the most researched (migrant) self-translator, Samuel Beckett, hailing from, and most closely associated with Ireland, the *other* language of Ireland has been largely overlooked in Self-Translation Studies. Alongside their English-speaking compatriots, self-translation has also been practiced by Irish-language poets; minority-language speakers living, working, and writing in a majority English-speaking country. Definitions of self-translation tend to embody the approach in its simplest form as «the process and the product of an original text translated by its author into another language» (Laver and Mason 2018: 79). Yet can self-translation in Ireland be so neatly confined to these parameters and can Irish-language practices be considered as self-translation and self-translation alone?

In reality, self-translation in Ireland is not as exclusive as it is portrayed and, instead, frequently engages a diversity of agents, and takes on multiple roles in the writing and editing processes of Irish-language poets. Based on an ongoing PhD project, this paper proposes that self-translation by contemporary Irish-language poets cannot be confined to a standard definition of self-translation, but also exhibits other practices such as *collaborative self-translation* (cfr. Manterola Agirrezabalaga 2017) although not exclusively, and that those who engage with self-translation and the Irish language do so using a diverse range of approaches as the result of historical, political, and cultural factors. In order to explore these ideas, this paper will look at self-translation carried out by three contemporary

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Irish-language poets over the course of their careers: Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, and Louis de Paor[1]; the current situation for self-translation and "self-translators" in an Irish-language context; and argue the case for a spectrum of translational engagement.

As will become evident in this paper, Irish-language poets are bilingual Irish and English speakers, and we are lucky, therefore, to have a wealth of resources available in English. However, some sources are in Irish and any translations – unless otherwise stated – are my own.

2. Context: the Irish language

Before looking at self-translation, it is important to first investigate the current and historical context of the Irish language to better understand how and why contemporary Irish-language poets have the opportunity to self-translate into English today.

The Irish language (*Gaeilge*) is an Insular Celtic and Goidelic language most closely related to Scottish Gaelic and Manx. It is one of the oldest languages in Europe, and is widely believed to have been spoken in Ireland for over 2,500 years, although the earliest written evidence of the language dates to approximately 400-600 CE (Conradh na Gaeilge n.d., Doyle 2015: 11). Christianity was first introduced to Ireland in the 5th century, and by the 7th century CE Irish monks had adapted the Latin script to their own native tongue. Some of the earliest surviving Irish-language marginalia come from this period, making Irish the oldest written vernacular north of the Alps (Doyle 2015: 11, Údarás na Gaeltachta n.d.).

Irish is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland[2], and an official language of Northern Ireland, although it remains a minority language in both jurisdictions, with English the *de facto* vernacular. The Irish

1 Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, and Louis de Paor were chosen for this paper as their engagement with varying methods of translation is being examined in my ongoing PhD thesis. Not mentioned here is the fourth Irish-language poet also considered in my thesis, Biddy Jenkinson, who has famously refused to have her work translated into English in Ireland (Jenkinson 1991: 34), and to which the second chapter of my thesis is dedicated.

2 English is the second official language of the Republic of Ireland (Government of Ireland 1937: art. 8.2). It should also be noted, however, that Irish is one of three indige-

language's status as a majority and community language, and its replacement by English would begin to occur in the 12th century CE with the Anglo-Norman Invasion. However, language shift would accelerate when efforts to colonise Ireland in the late-16th and early-17th centuries by the English (and later British-) crown increased, resulting in the confiscation of lands once held by disloyal Gaelic Earls and the endowment of these lands to loyal Protestant English and Scottish "planters" during the Plantation of Ulster (Doyle 2015: 63, Mac Mathúna 2016: 154). Although Irish was still spoken by the majority of the rural population, and would be for some time, English was now unequivocally the language of administration and judicial matters.

Discussions of language shift from Irish to English tend to focus most intensely on the 19th century because of multiple societal and political changes which occurred at that time, and the rapidity at which the shift occurred (Mac Mathúna 2016: 155, 164). In 1831, monolingual English-language primary education in Ireland through National Schools was introduced, and Irish as a language of study or instruction was not permitted under British rule until 1878 and 1883 respectively (Ó Murchú 2001, cited in Dunne 2020: 10). In 1845 a potato blight struck Ireland, disproportionally impacting the predominantly Irish-speaking areas of Ireland in the west and south of the island who had to rely on the staple crop. Consecutive years of poor crops and poorer management of the disaster by the British government would result in the deaths of at least 800,000 and the mass emigration of nearly 2 million more between 1845 and 1855 (Glynn 2012, Doyle 2015: 125). It is around this time too that societal perceptions of the Irish language emerged, with Irish associated with low social status and agrarian life, and English with business, opportunity, and emigration (Rice 2020: 5, Údarás na Gaeltachta n.d.). Although scholars are divided on the exact number of Irish-speakers in Ireland at the beginning of the 19th century, Doyle (2015: 129) draws the conclusion that about half of the population of Ireland spoke Irish, but that this number dropped to just 23% by the 1851 census, with an even smaller percentage using Irish on a daily basis.

After 1870, «the decline [in the Irish language] continued, but side by side with this there began an attempt to arrest the decay and to encourage people to learn it» (Doyle 2015: 107). Interest in the Irish

nous languages on the island of Ireland, alongside Traveller Kant and Irish Sign Language (Dunne 2020: 7).

language would increase, firstly because of international interest in the language as a subject of study, but more importantly, as the result of the national *Gaelic Revival* which saw a renewed interest in all aspects of Irish and Gaelic culture including the Irish language (Mac Mathúna 2016: 170). By the turn of the 20th century, Ireland sought to distance and distinguish itself from Britain, to create its own distinct identity with the Irish language at its core, and to seek independence. In 1922, an Irish Free State, made of 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland was formed, before the Republic of Ireland gained full independence from Britain in 1949. The six remaining counties continue to be part of the United Kingdom as Northern Ireland.

Today, there remains an asymmetric linguistic environment between Irish and English in Ireland. Although Ó Catháin (2016: 41-42) states that «one could readily conclude that the language is in a healthy state» as the result of its status as first official language in the Republic of Ireland, as an official and working language in the European Union since 2007, and with a publicly funded TV channel and radio station, Irish remains in a precarious position as a «definitely endangered» language (UNESCO n.d.), leaving Ireland an essentially English-speaking country. In the last census taken in the Republic of Ireland in 2022, 40% of respondents – approximately 1,874 million – stated that they could speak Irish, although nearly 554000 (~29.6%) of these respondents indicated that they only spoke Irish within the education system, where Irish is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education (An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh 2023). In the last Northern Irish census in 2021, 12,4% of respondents (228600) stated that they had «some ability» in Irish (Mac Éinrí 2019: 211-212, NISRA 2022: sec. 6).

The latest statistics from both north and south of the border paint a very clear picture of the Irish language in the 21st century: that despite an increase in the number of Irish speakers[3]; and a notable resurgence and renewed interest in the Irish language amongst the younger generations (cfr. Crummy 2024, Ní Choistealbha 2024), the Irish language remains one of a pair in Ireland, with no monolingual speakers of the language left and a wholly bilingual language community. This does mean however, that anyone who speaks Irish today – or who has spoken the language in the

3 There was an increase of 6% (112577 people) from 2016 in the Republic of Ireland, and of 10,7% (184900 people) from 2011 in Northern Ireland (An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh 2023, NISRA 2022: 6).

last century – has made an active choice to do so, with self-translation, therefore, always an option and possibility for contemporary Irish-language users.

3. Irish-language self-translation: absent or a case of bad publicity?

Although much research has been carried out on the practice of self-translation in minority-language contexts (cfr. Gentes 2016, Manterola Agirrezabalaga 2017), information on Irish-language self-translation remains piecemeal. At first glance, it may be assumed that this correlates to how frequently self-translation is used in an Irish-language context, especially in comparison to languages which Irish is most related to, such as Scottish Gaelic, where self-translation is much more commonplace, or, arguably, the norm (Krause 2007: 1, 2013: 127). Writing on translation and the Irish language in the last half of the twentieth century, Alan Titley (2005: 322) notes that «very few of the Irish poets have translated their own work». Collaborative translation with other poets or "poet-translators" appears to the more common and celebrated practice. Indeed, this habit has been commented on: in discussing self-translation more broadly, the Scottish Gaelic poet and scholar Meg Bateman proposes «*the Irish practice* of using translations made by others, who in recreating a new poem in the other language, maintain the distinctiveness of the original» (2022, my emphasis) suggesting that she sees collaborative translation as a distinctly separate and Irish practice, and self-translation as the more common and standard practice in Scotland and with Scottish Gaelic.

As an apparently uncommon approach to translation in Ireland, therefore, self-translation has not been widely studied, only recently[4] coming to the fore in the doctoral research undertaken by Hannah Rice (2020). Most

[4] Grutman (2009: 258) identifies another much-earlier article which references self-translation in an Irish context – Brown 1992: 153-167. However, this article – despite its title – mentions the term only twice in its text, and uses "self-translation" in terms of intralingual, and to some degree intersemiotic translation, rather than the usual and assumed interlingual translation (Jakobson 1959: 233). In other words, Brown uses the term not to describe 'self-translation' – translation of one's own work from one language to another – but 'a translation of the self'.

research on Irish-language self-translation, however, prefers to focus on "self-translators" – particularly poets – and this in relation to their output rather than on self-translation itself as a practice, such as Gráinne McCluskey's (2020) master's dissertation on the translation approaches adopted by Gearóid Mac Lochlainn; Linda Revie's 2020 article 'Paradoxical Self-Translations: Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's Remarkable Admission'; and Trish Van Bolderen's on-going investigation into (self-)translation in Doireann Ní Ghríofa's *A Ghost in the Throat* (2020). Further information, while not focused on self-translation in an Irish-language context, also comes from Corinna Krause's 2013 critical study of self-translation in Scottish Gaelic poetry, which, in order to fully study the case of self-translation in a minority-language context, looks at other Celtic languages, including Welsh and Irish, but this, however, being only a small section within the introduction of that article (pp. 130–132).

In Irish-language scholarship, research is even more rare, with only one article mentioning self-translation appearing in the *Corpus of Contemporary Irish*, a collection of Irish-language texts published online by reputable sources including journals, news outlets, and publishing houses since the year 2000 (*Corpus of Contemporary Irish* 2024). In fact, there was no official Irish-language term for "self-translation" until I requested it in November 2023. Thankfully, *féinaistriúchán* is now the official Irish-language term and can be found on the Irish-language terminological database *tearma.ie*[5]. This paper, therefore, sits at the coalface of Irish-language Self-Translation Studies, and it is hoped that it will add to a knowledge and understanding of self-translation in an Irish-language context for readers within (Self-) Translation Studies, and to hold a mirror up to the translators and poets who use the Irish language in their work.

That being said, the Irish language is not without its share of "self-translators", or rather, those who have engaged with self-translation in their careers in some regard. Writer and broadcaster Breandán Ó hEithir translated his novel *Lig Sinn i gCathú* (1976) to English as *Lead Us Into Temptation* (1978). Novelist Pádraig Standún has translated six of his own novels into English (Heussaff 2011: 38). Writer Ré Ó Laighléis self-translated his novels *Ecstasy and Other Stories* (1996), *Terror on the Burren* (1998), and *Hooked* (1999), but, according to Anna Heussaff (2011: 36), «ní aistriúchán

5 The entry for "self-translation" can be found at: <https://www.tearma.ie/q/f%C3%A9inaistri%C3%BAch%C3%A1n/ga/> (last access: 20-08-2025).

ar an teacs Gaeilge a dhéanann sé, ach an scéal a scríobh as an nua i mBéarla» (trans: «it isn't a translation of the Irish text which he undertakes, but rather writing the story in English afresh»). Most recently, Anna Heussaff translated her novel *Buille Marfach* (2010) as *Deadly Intent* (2014) under the pen name Anne Sweeney (Heussaff 2014: 14-17).

In Irish-language poetry there is much more evidence of self-translation, likely helped by a number of external factors for the genre. Poetry remains a leading genre in Irish-language publishing, and continues to be the most-translated genre in Ireland, and has been since the 1980s when poetry received a «surge of translation activity» (Ní Fhrighil 2020: 309) and when Irish-language poets began to engage more consistently with translation (Nic Dhiarmada 2005: 601, 604, Titley 2005: 321). Since the beginning of this period, self-translation has been undertaken by some of the most well-known and respected contemporary Irish-language poets: English translations by Michael Davitt appeared in his *Selected Poems / Rogha Dánta* (1987) and *Freacnairc Mhearcair / The Oomph of Quicksilver* (2000) alongside allographic translations; Michael Hartnett translated his bilingual Irish-English poetry collection *A Necklace of Wrens* in 1987; poet and author Cathal Ó Searcaigh includes self-translation in *Crann na Teanga/ The Language Tree* (2018) and *Errigal: Sacred Mountain* (2023)*;* and poet and translator Gabriel Rosenstock produced multiple bilingual collections including *Bliain an Bhandé / Year of the Goddess* (2007), and *The Road to Corrymore / Bóthar an Choire Mhóir* (2021). In the latest (at time of writing) edition of the *Loch Raven Review* (19(2) 2023), nine of the fourteen poets included in the issue had translated their own Irish-language poems into English: «a much higher percentage of self-translation than any previous issue of the *Loch Raven Review's* translation section» (Corcoran 2023).

There are also poets who self-translate as part of a larger conversation between Irish and English in their work. Poet, terminologist, and translator Colm Breathnach has translated many of his own poems including *The Speckled Land* where he describes his life in Ireland living «[…] // between two words // between two tongues // between two worlds» (Breathnach 2007); Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh (2010, n.d., cfr. Gallery Press 2018) has translated some of her own poetry, although the majority of translations of her work into English are allographic. Writer, poet, and translator, Diarmuid Johnson (n.d.) «occasionally […] translates his own work from Irish into English»; with Aifric Mac Aodha also translating her own poetry but, «acknowledg[ing] translation as part of her linguis-

tic situation and adopt[ing] it as a determining element in her poetry» (Theinová 2017: 205).

It could be argued, therefore, that self-translation in an Irish-language context is not as uncommon as has been suggested, but rather, that it suffers from bad publicity. In fact, there is likely to be much more self-translation in the contemporary Irish-language world than what is described here, and as many self-translators again, with some no doubt inadvertently omitted in the argument given above. As evidenced previously, there is very little research on Irish-language self-translation in English or in Irish, and even less on the methodology in other published literature either as a topic of discussion or in epitexts to any particular poetry collection or work. In some cases, it has been quite difficult to even determine if self-translation has occurred, and has only been confirmed through a close study of surrounding texts (i.e. paratexts), copyright, or even in the absence of any credit, as is the case in Michael Davitt's *The Oomph of Quicksilver* (2000) where, when no translator is mentioned, poems were translated by Louis de Paor and the author. Furthermore, very rarely are Irish "self-translators" credited as such in the wider Irish-language literary sphere. Only one of the poets mentioned in this paper has self-identified or been called a "self-translator", with another even denying that title (Mac Lochlainn 2023, Revie 2020: 324). It may be then, that for poets in an Irish-language context, self-translation does not always a self-translator make.

It appears then, that self-translation in Irish is under-appreciated or even disregarded as a legitimate option for published translations between Irish and English. As evidenced above, all modern Irish speakers are (at least) bilingual as the result of over 800 years of English and British influence and colonialism, with English now the majority language and vernacular of Ireland. As such, Irish poets can engage with self-translation with ease, but because everyone can do it, it is not always considered a legitimate option; rather as a 'just because' (Ní Dhomhnaill 2004: 166), or as the option when there are no other options, particularly with the prevalence and prestige associated with collaborative translation with well-known poet-translators , and the feasibility of this option in a small community and minority-language context. My conclusion, therefore, is that despite Irish-language poets (and writers to a greater extent) engaging with self-translation, there remains not only a lack of research on self-translation in an Irish-language context, but also a lack of publicity or regard for the

approach at grassroots level, with Irish-language poets and others more likely to engage with allographic translation for published work rather than self-translation.

4. Case study: Irish-language poets

The focus of this paper is a study of self-translation through the engagement of three further Irish-language poets: Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Louis de Paor, and Gearóid Mac Lochlainn. Each used self-translation to some degree in their literary careers, either at the beginning of their career; throughout and alongside allographic translation; as a step in the editing process; or as a defining feature in their work. This paper proposes that the Irish-language poets given above engaged with self-translation using a range of approaches, and, oxymoronically, engaged a diversity of agents beyond the ST author, blurring the lines between self-translation and collaboration. It is the aim of this paper to investigate how these three Irish-language poets, well-known, or less well-known for their self-translation have engaged with the method, and to suggest that these Irish-language self-translation practices may not be so easily categorised.

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill is «the most successful of all the [Irish-language] poets who emerged since 1970 [...]» (Titley 1990) and arguably the most well-known outside of Ireland and the Irish language as the result of her early adoption of translation (Ní Fhrighil 2010: 143). To date, Ní Dhomhnaill has published four monolingual Irish poetry collections; seven bilingual Irish-English collections; and one monolingual English collection of translated poetry. Alongside her poetry, Ní Dhomhnaill has written prose, children's literature, and for magazines, journals, and newspapers, and has worked as an editor on several poetry anthologies (cfr. Delanty *et al.* 1995). She has won numerous awards for her work, has taught at New York University, Boston College, and Villanova University.

At the core of Ní Dhomhnaill's poetry is self-reflection, and the exploration and resolution of «mórcheisteanna pearsanta agus sóisialta» (the big questions, both personal and societal) (Ní Fhrighil 2010: 145). Her approach in confronting herself and these questions «blend[s] a pre-modern

oral tradition with contemporary affairs and concerns» (Dillon 2018: 407), with the poet drawing heavily from Irish folklore, *dinnseanchas*[6], and myth, and retelling these stories from a modern and female perspective, with her own life and experience creating a palimpsest over her foundations of myth and legend (O'Connor 2006: 436, Ní Fhrighil 2010: 143).

To readers aware of Ní Dhomhnaill, it may seem strange to include her in this paper. Ní Dhomhnaill is far more well-known for her collaboration with the biggest names in Irish literature in English and Irish including Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. In fact, Ní Dhomhnaill denies that she is a self-translator, proclaiming that «I don't self-translate as I am not a poet in English» (cited in Revie 2020: 324), further denying that she is a bilingual poet, although stating, «I can write prose in English no bother, and even jingles and verse […] but *never* poetry» (quoted by O'Driscoll 1995: 103, original emphasis).

Yet Ní Dhomhnaill *has* engaged with self-translation, primarily at the start of her literary career: in 1974 for Eoghan Ó Tuairisc's anthology *Rogha na Fhile* (cfr. Ní Dhomhnaill 1974: 57); translating seven of her own poems in her first bilingual collection, and with another self-translation, *Admháil Shuaithinseach / A Remarkable Admission*, appearing in 1996 (Ní Dhomhnaill 1996: 426). The majority of Ní Dhomhnaill's self-translations appear in her *Selected Poems/ Rogha Dánta*[7] (1988/2004), her fourth collection but the first published bilingually. Her self-translations appear at the end of her collection, separated from the other fifty poems translated by fellow poet Michael Hartnett and are given their own section, «Translated by the Author» (Ní Dhomhnaill 2004: Contents).

It is interesting that Ní Dhomhnaill collates the poems and translations, calling them her «fourteen poems» (1988/2004: 166), regardless of whether they were written first or translated after, suggesting that Ní Dhomhnaill sees the Irish poems and their English translations as equal to each other, in keeping with international descriptions of self-translation as defined by Grutman and Van Bolderen (2014: 330), that authors «are not "simply" translating but instead [are] creating "second originals"». Yet, the

6 "Place lore"; «poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology» (Heaney 1980: 131).

7 A monolingual edition was published first in 1986 under the title *Selected Poems*, before appearing bilingually in 1988 and reissued in 1989, 1993, 2000, and 2004. For the 2000 edition, Ní Dhomhnaill's "Afterword" was added and it is here that the majority of information on the poet's self-translation comes.

fourteen poems are referred to as translations in the contents, conversely inferring that these translations should be viewed as "normal" translations, effectively sweeping their self-translated nature under the carpet.

Reflecting on the collection and its translations twelve years after the publication of *Selected Poems / Rogha* Dánta (1988), Ní Dhomhnaill (2004: 166) explains how her self-translations came to be included in this collection:

> [They] [...] were translated by myself and included just because they were there, as I didn't want to give Michael [Hartnett] the added burden of doing them again. I had translated them myself a few years previously for the annual tour of Scotland by Irish poets [...] which I had taken part in before I knew any poets writing in English.

The inclusion of these self-translations appears to be an afterthought then; an inclusion because they were already available, and so as not to impose too greatly on Michael Hartnett. It is an action that feels very natural for Ní Dhomhnaill as «[her] attitude towards translation is pretty *laissez-faire* [...]» (2004: 166, original emphasis). Thus, in much the same way that she takes a self-described relaxed view towards the translation of her work by other poets, so too does she regard her own translations.

In regards to translation, however, Ní Dhomhnaill is best known for her collaboration, but even in this regard, self-translation is never far removed, with the poet preparing English self-translated cribs for all of her translators (Qwarnström 2004: 65). It is unusual, however, that Ni Dhomhnaill categorises her published last self-translation, *A Remarkable Admission* as one of these «"crib[s]" or rough translation[s]» (Ní Dhomhnaill 1996: 426), especially when she usually writes her English drafts/cribs in prose, leaving it to the discretion of the translator to «put [it] into poetic shape» (Revie 2020: 335). Regardless of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's opinions of her cribs and her self-translations, however, it remains that the poet has used self-translation to expand her readership; as a tool for collaboration with poets and translators; and appears to treat them with the same *laissez-faire* attitude as her allographic translations, using them as she sees fit (Qwarnström 2004: 66).

Louis de Paor

Louis de Paor is an Irish-language poet, writer, and scholar. To date, he has published eighteen collections of poetry (eleven monolingual Irish collections, and seven bilingual Irish-English), has edited literary maga-

zines, selections of poetry, and anthologies, and has written extensively on the translation of Irish-language poetry and on twentieth-century Irish literature. He is the current Professor and Director of the Centre for Irish Studies at the University of Galway. In his poetry, de Paor depicts his own urban and suburban experience in Ireland and Australia (where he lived from 1987 until 1996), exploring domesticity; family life; and drawing on early Irish mythology, folk tradition and belief; while exploring themes of history, (collective) memory, language loss, and politics (de Paor 1996: 67, 2016: 469).

De Paor's relationship with translation and the translation of his own work has changed over the course of his career. Initially refusing to be translated into English in Ireland after Biddy Jenkinson's own declaration to do so (cfr. Jenkinson 1991: 34), and then *deferred* translation to English, allowing Irish speakers to read his work monolingually without interference from English (McCluskey 2020: 46), de Paor is still lauded as «one of the exceptions» (Titley 2005: 322) in Irish poetry to have translated their own work, having begun self-translating at the beginning of his career in 1987 (de Paor 2023). His first two bilingual collections *Aimsir Bhreicneach / Freckled Weather* (1993) and G*obán Cré is Cloch / Sentences of Earth and Shore* (1996) were published in Australia, and monolingual Irish and bilingual editions of his collection *Corcach agus Dánta Eile/Cork and Other Poems* were published simultaneously in Australia and Ireland in 1999, three years after his return from Australia.

De Paor's relationship with self-translation would change and develop over the course of his career, however. In an interview given in 2000, de Paor admitted that he «found it more difficult, as time has gone on, to be […] able to translate what I [am] thinking about in the Irish», and reflecting on this period of his career, de Paor describes how he felt «uncomfortable» (de Paor 2023) self-translating his poems, and with the English versions of his Irish poems:

> […] [I] felt that these were inadequate due to a lack of dexterity on my part in the manipulation of English as a medium for poetry. If my poems were to be rehoused in English, I wanted them to speak as clearly as possible in their second language, to exploit the full range of possibilities available while remaining true to themselves (de Paor 2014: *Introduction*).

By the publication of *Ag Greadadh Bás sa Reilig / Clapping in the Cemetery* (2005), de Paor's engagement with self-translation would change:

> […] I wasn't happy anymore with my own English versions, and I asked friends to help me - […] and the first thing that was said to me, Biddy [Jenkinson] I believe, she said, "you take lots of liberties with yourself, why don't you start with a literal translation, and we'll have that as a source text and we can play with that". So they took my English and brought it closer to my Irish than I myself had been able to before (de Paor 2023, my translation – E.C.).

Ag Greadadh Bás sa Reilig / Clapping in the Cemetery (2005) would be de Paor's first bilingual work not solely translated by him, instead working with Biddy Jenkinson, the Irish-language poet and translator; musician and filmmaker Kevin Anderson; and Mary O'Donoghue, an Irish writer, poet, and translator based in the United States, with de Paor's subsequent bilingual collections[8] translated by a combination[9] of his «co-conspirators» (de Paor 2005: 231) and himself. For de Paor, self-translation has never been off the table, but has become part and parcel of his translation, editorial, and publication process, continuing as he is, to be named among his translators in all subsequent (to date) bilingual editions[10].

Gearóid Mac Lochlainn

A study of self-translation and the Irish-language would be incomplete without investigating Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, the only poet in this paper who may be outrightly described as a "self-translator". Mac Lochlainn is a (performance) poet and musician whose writing and readings «owe something to Padraic Fiacc, something to Ciarán Carson, and a lot to Bob

8 *Agus Rud Eile De / And Another Thing* (2010); *The Brindled Cat and the Nightingale's Tongue* (2014); *Crooked Love/ Grá Fiar* (2022).

9 De Paor, Biddy Jenkinson, Mary O'Donoghue, and Kevin Anderson translated *Ag Greadadh Bas sa Reilig / Clapping in the Cemetery* (2005); *Agus Rud Eile De / And Another Thing* (2010); and *The Brindled Cat and the Nightingale's Tongue* (2014) and de Paor, Jenkinson, and Anderson translated *Crooked Love / Grá Fiar* (2022).

10 De Paor, Biddy Jenkinson, Mary O'Donoghue, and Kevin Anderson translated *Ag Greadadh Bas sa Reilig / Clapping in the Cemetery* (2005); *Agus Rud Eile De / And Another Thing* (2010); and *The Brindled Cat and the Nightingale's Tongue* (2014) and de Paor, Jenkinson, and Anderson translated *Crooked Love / Grá Fiar* (2022). In *Ag Greadadh Bas sa Reilig / Clapping in the Cemetery* (2005) de Paor is named first amongst his translators as the author; in *Agus Rud Eile De / And Another Thing* (2010), he is named last («with the author»); named first in *The Brindled Cat and the Nightingale's Tongue* (2014); and last in *Crooked Love / Grá Fiar* (2022).

Marley» (Mac Póilin 2018: 235). At the heart of Mac Lochlainn's poetry is his own life and experiences living in Belfast; a Belfast «of smoked-filled pubs, late night drinking sprees, chaotic, self-destructive, lost lives» during the Troubles, and with his poems a «tumble of images and puns» taking inspiration from sources as wide ranging as ninth-century sagas, Spaghetti Westerns, reggae, blues, jazz, Irish traditional music and song, and the Irish language itself (Mac Lochlainn 2011, Mac Póilin 2018: 236-7).

Of Mac Lochlainn's five[11] published collections of poetry, two are monolingual Irish and three bilingual Irish-English. Mac Lochlainn's first bilingual collection *Sruth Teangacha / Stream of Tongues* (2002) was «both a culmination of his work to date and a new departure in self-presentation» (O'Connor 2009: 73), translating poems from the poet's first two monolingual collections for the first time and allowing the poet to further his own macaronic[12] and – at times – «subversive» (Mac Lochlainn 2002: back cover) translation style, and to more deeply understand the role of translation in his compositional practice and more generally in his life as a bilingual Irish-English speaker and poet in West Belfast during the Troubles and immediately after (O'Connor 2009: 74). Poems, translations, and languages with *Sruth Teangacha* are not relegated entirely to facing pages, but create «a split screen "interlanguage"» (Mac Lochlainn 2011: inside cover) of Irish and English. It is interesting also that for Mac Lochlainn, his perceived audience is a bilingual one, but even readers who must rely on the English translations «are forced to read some Irish Gaelic [sic] in order to engage with the poem, thereby becoming, for a transitory moment recipients of Irish Gaelic [sic] poetry» (McCabe 2021: 205).

A major inspiration for Mac Lochlainn's decision to translate and his subsequent translation style was fellow poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh who recommended he publish bilingually, and the translations of Ó Searcaigh's collections *Homecoming/ An Bealach 'na Bhaile* (1993) and *Out in the Open* (1997) by poet and academic Frank Sewell (Mac Lochlainn 2002: 187, 2023). In fact, Mac Lochlainn makes explicit reference to Sewell's preface in his own Author's Note in *Stream of Tongues* (2002), explaining that Sewell's

[11] *Babylon Gaeilgeoir* (1997) and *Na Scéalaithe* (1999) (monolingual Irish); *Sruth Teangacha/ Stream of Tongues* (2002), *Rakish Paddy Blues: A Macaronic Song* (2004), *Criss-Cross Mo Chara* (2011) (bilingual Irish-English).

[12] «Verse in which the mark of the second language or dialect is visible» (Ó Muirithe 1980: 12).

suggestion that translations be considered «cover versions» (Sewell 1996: 15) was the basis of his own *modus operandi* and that he «tried to extend [this] analogy [...] treating the "translation" as focused improvisation around given motifs [...] [and] to view my "translations" as Jazz meditations on the original Irish poems [...]» (Mac Lochlainn 2002: 187).

Mac Lochlainn's aims for his translations as «an attempt to minimise the loss of music [...] that occurs with "straight" translation [...] [and] a playful jibe thrown out at the monoglot who seeks truth in translation» (2002: 190) speak to Grutman and Van Bolderen's (2014: 324) assessment of self-translation as an approach which offers the author increased agency to take poetic licence with the translation of their work to a much greater degree than is normally accepted of a 'standard' translation, while also acting as an opportunity for conversation between Mac Lochlainn's languages, allowing him to «wed the Yin and Yang of Gaeilgeoir [Irish speaker] and Béarlóir [English speaker] that exist simultaneously in myself» (2002: 188).

However, Mac Lochlainn did not engage solely in self-translation, but worked with other agents for his bilingual collections who allowed him to «jam and "duet" with them as [he] exercised and exorcised» (Mac Lochlainn 2002: 187) these ideas of "cover versions" and a "freer" attitude to translation. Initially hesitant to share responsibility of translations with another agent (Mac Lochlainn 2023), Mac Lochlainn's first bilingual collection *Sruth Teangacha/ Stream of Tongues* (2002) was translated by the poet but with a considerable number of allographic translations also present[13]. Mac Lochlainn, however, maintained an active role in all aspects of the translation process; refining, adding and omitting, with the final and finished English translations left at his discretion. Furthermore, this collaboration remained only a step in his process; a sounding board for his performance poetry. Nor was it seen as a reciprocal or equal collabora-

[13] There are forty-nine poems included in *Stream of Tongues* (2002) with almost as many collaborative self-translations (18) included in the collection as there are self-translations (19), with the rest (11) being allographic translations with one translator who is not Gearóid Mac Lochlainn. One poem, *Amhrán Lácóta / Song in Lakota* (Mac Lochlainn 2002: 59) is displayed in the contents of *Stream of Tongues* (2002) in the same manner as Mac Lochlainn's poems and their translations, however it is in Lakota and does not have an English translation, thus affecting the final tally of translations. Nine poet-translators were engaged for *Stream of Tongues* (2002): Ciaran Carson, Pearse Hutchinson, Rita Kelly, Séamas Mac Annaidh, Medbh McGuckian, Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, Rónán Ó Snodaigh, Gabriel Rosenstock, and Frankie (Frank) Sewell.

tion. Mac Lochlainn recounts how some of his translators were surprised at his unusual practice, with Ciaran Carson objecting to later alterations of his translations as «not being "standard procedure"», although accepting the poet's practice when he was finally able to see the published book and CD (Mac Lochlainn 2023). Frank Sewell was also initially ambivalent about the translation process and the changes made to his translations, but says, «then I saw that, overall, Gearóid's collabs / 'jams' were part of a larger project of his, part of what the overall book was pointing towards» (quoted in McCluskey 2020: 87).

For Mac Lochlainn's second and latest (to date) bilingual collection, *Criss-Cross Mo Chara* (2011), the poet decided to step away from collaboration and return to self-translation, with only two allographic translations present in the collection, thus giving Mac Lochlainn the freedom to try a new bilingual format and experiment in his macaronic style to a greater degree (Mac Lochlainn 2023).

5. Self-translation: a spectrum within a spectrum?

Having looked briefly at three Irish-language poets who have engaged in self-translation in some manner in the course of their careers; their reasoning for it; its evolution; and – ironically – the involvement of other parties in this *self*-translation, can we call all these methods "self-translation" and solely self-translation?

It appears that Irish-language poets investigated here engage with self-translation in a way that may be more akin to *collaborative self-translation* as described by Manterola Agirrezabalaga (2017), and which reflects in some capacity Dasilva's classifications of authorial collaboration (2015, 2016, cited by Manterola Agirrezabalaga 2017: 194-95). Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill engaged with self-translation, and arguably «self-translation revised by an allographic translator» (Dasilva 2016: 26, cited by Manterola Agirrezabalaga 2017: 195). Louis de Paor began self-translating at the beginning of his career, but by the turn of the millennium had moved towards «self-translation in collaboration with an allographic translator» or even «allographic translation revised by the author» (Dasilva 2016: 26, cited by Manterola Agirrezabalaga 2017: 195). Gearóid Mac Lochlainn initially translated his own poetry and returned to self-translation, but again, collaborated with

other agents to create allographic translations, retaining his position as ST author, with the final and finished translation left at his discretion.

For Manterola Agirrezabalaga (2017: 207), «solo self-translators can be located at one end of the spectrum, while authors who do not participate at all in the translation of their original works are at the other end», suggesting that, rather than a homogenous practice, self-translation encompasses a range of approaches which all include the original author, but which may also include other participants. My ongoing PhD project compliments and expands on Manterola Agirrezabalaga's assessment, and suggests that not only have Irish-language poets engaged with self-translation in a variety of manners, but that engagement with translation as a whole may be viewed on a spectrum, with opportunities and engagement with translation changing, and with self-translation an integral part of this translational landscape. Irish-language poets have refused to be translated, have self-translated, collaborated with other poets or translators, have engaged in trans-editing, and have even decided to stop writing in Irish and switch to English. Like we have seen with self-translation, Irish-language poets engage, and have engaged with translation in various manners, and within each of these methods, there remains various approaches or intensities of engagement, with many of these decisions overlapping, and borders between approaches thus hard to define.

For Irish-language "self-translators", therefore, there exists a *spectrum within the spectrum*; of various approaches to self-translation brushing up against other methods of translation. Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill engaged in self-translation, but ultimately used it as a means of collaboration with translators and poets working in English, and in the hope of building a larger and international audience; blurring the line between self-translation and collaboration. Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, too, engaged with collaborative self-translation with Frank Sewell and others, but arguably not as intensely as Ní Dhomhnaill and to a lesser degree, self-translating more throughout his career and using collaboration as a "sounding board" and step in the process of his own self-translation. Louis de Paor has used multiple modes of engagement throughout his career, but here, straddles refusal, self-translation, and collaboration, having initially refused to be translated, employed "deferred" translation to English, then self-translation, and finally collaborative self-translation, truly spanning the spectrum of translational engagement, but nevertheless engaging with each approach in a manner where it is hard to separate them from each other. Needless to say, translation

– whether it be self-translation, collaboration, or something in between – pushes against homogeneity and neat categorisation, but it is hoped that a broader conceptualisation may at least open discussion for the place of self-translation amongst other approaches to translation, and the interplay which may be possible.

6. Conclusion

The Irish language is not well-known for its self-translation, despite the ease at which it could be accomplished, and evidence to support its presence in contemporary Irish-language literature in general, but particularly in poetry. Self-translation is not absent in an Irish-language context, but neither is it popular, particularly in comparison to other approaches which are more actively used, and compared to similar minority-language contexts. Irish writers and poets, including Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Louis de Paor, and Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, have used self-translation across their careers and in a multitude of ways in their writing and editing processes, supporting the need to view approaches to self-translation – and translation in general – not as a homogeneous and static option, but as a spectrum of approaches.

It is clear that much more work is needed in the area of Irish Self-Translation Studies, not just in terms of academic research, but also in bringing awareness to Irish-language poets, writers, and speakers that self-translation is a viable and legitimate option, and not only to be considered as a last resort or a "just because". This paper represents an initial step in exploring self-translation and the Irish language, and is the product of an ongoing PhD project. It is my hope, however, that this paper has gone some way to lay the foundation for further research on Irish-language self-translation[14].

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Abstract

Ellen Corbett

Spectrums within Spectrums: Examining Self-Translation in the Context of Broader Translational Practices in Irish-to-English Translation

This paper investigates self-translation in an Irish-language context and gives evidence to support the argument that the approach is more common than has been suggested by other scholars, as it is widely understood, and despite the current bilingual and asymmetric linguistic landscape of Irish speakers in Ireland. Taking the careers of Irish-language poets Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, and Louis de Paor and their engagement with self-translation as a

case study, this paper concludes that Irish-language poets have adopted diverse approaches to self-translation, challenging a homogenous view of the approach and suggesting a spectrum of self-translation and translational engagement, and demonstrating the necessity of further study on self-translation in this minority-language context.

Keywords: self-translation, féinaistriúchán, Irish, Gaeilge, collaborative self-translation, poetry, Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Louis de Paor.