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*"Pawprints in marble":  
Memorialization and Visual Translatio in  
the Poetry of Michael Longley*

by RUI CARVALHO HOMEM

THE COURSE OF Michael Longley's poetic career found a major watershed and a decisive boost in 1991. The circumstances are well-known: after a poetic silence of several years (very little new verse had been published by Longley in the 1980s), the publication of the much-acclaimed *Gorse Fires* launched a new phase in his writing, with the consequence that the ensuing decade witnessed the appearance of two other major collections (*The Ghost Orchid*, in 1995, and *The Weather in Japan*, in 2000), plus a small volume of memoirs (*Tuppenny Stung* 1994). This led to increased critical attention, evidenced by the publication of the first volume of criticism totally dedicated to his work (Peacock and Devine 2000).

Significantly for my present purposes, Longley's more prolific writing in the past decade had as one of its enabling strategies the intermingling of translations (in particular from the classics) with the poet's "original" verse. This coexistence and this textual relationship have been buttressed, mediated, and extended by a range of textual and representational practices arguably akin to translation. This essay will largely rest on the understanding that the relocation in other texts and other authorial voices that translation entails is paralleled by Longley's tendency to seek imaginative stimulus in the experience afforded by other places (*loci* both of a physical and of an imaginative geography). It will further argue that the appeal of such *loci* finds a focus in his increasing attraction to visual representation, both as a source of analogies for his writerly strategies and as a source of objects for verbal representation—whenever that attraction leads directly to the practice of ekphrasis, that is, the writing of poems about instances of the visual arts (cf. Heffernan, Krieger). Longley thus emerges as a practitioner of at least two of the three types of (re)writing identified by Roman Jakobson when he famously analysed translation into "intralingual translation or *rewording*," "interlingual translation or *translation proper*," and 'intersemiotic translation or *transmutation*' (Jakobson 114; italics in the original).

Already in *Gorse Fires*, a few translations from the *Odyssey* proved fundamental for the overall design of the volume. The passages chosen, and

Longley's strategies for rewriting them, in fact confirmed, focused, and refracted<sup>1</sup> his dominant themes: self and family, the home, and the intrusions of death and barbarous violence in the private domain, a domain that remains Longley's preferred standpoint for approaching the Northern Irish Troubles and their ensuing sorrows (cf. Dawe, McDonal). Those translations indeed clarified the coherence of the volume and highlighted the relevance of a sustaining literary tradition by foregrounding the continuities between Longley's *other* poems in the volume and those Homeric moments which, metonymically assimilated into his writing, both queried his self-definition as "a lapsed classicist" (qtd. by McDonald 2000 35) and indefinitely extended the volume's "literary depth of field."<sup>2</sup>

The tendency for translation to become a fundamental structuring mode in Longley's recent poetry was to be confirmed with *The Ghost Orchid*, more than one third of which consists of either translations (again from Homer, but also, prominently, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), or poems arising from the experience of translation, or yet texts which in one form or another refer to previous works—be they verbal or visual. In a way, this practice is the ultimate development of an interest, manifested from the earliest stages of Longley's work, in proposing his poems as so many instances of "reading the past," inscriptions that enable the deciphering of a personal history for which there is no apt analogy but that of other, previous inscriptions:

I can, through mist that misconstrues,  
                     Read like a palimpsest  
 My past ("The Hebrides")  
  
                     the slow sands  
 Of your history delay till through your eyes  
 I read you like a book ("In Memoriam")

Furthermore, and long before the practice of translation acquired structural importance for his work, Longley had declared (in the opening poem of the sequence "Letters," dedicated to fellow poets) his attraction to a writerly stance, represented both as an opening of the self to other voices and as an assumption of identity spatially representable as a colonizer's appropriation of territory:

In order to take you all in  
 I've had to get beneath your skin,  
 To colonise you like a land.

The following stanza would make clear the intersection, in Longley's poetics, of literary affinities and of family relations, both construed and represented as a travelling of souls—since the naming of a child, whose christening is an

1. On the notion of "refraction" in translation studies, see Lefevere: *passim*.

2. I am borrowing a phrase that Harry Clifton applies to the use of a range of literary references in Seamus Heaney's recent poetry—cf. Harry Clifton, "Peat Smoke and Byzantium," *Poetry Review* 91.1 (Spring 2001): (43-45) 44.

immediate occasion for the poem, sets off a train of hauntings, or of metempsychoses:

Lost relations take their places,  
Namesakes and receding faces:  
Late travellers on the Underground  
People my head like a ghost town.

The intertextual is thus joined by the intrafamilial in the network of relationships that define both the poet's personal and writerly selves. Family and literary lineage mirror and metonymize each other in a poetics whose critical description will increasingly crave for words prefixed *inter-* and *trans-*.

The predominance of these relational nexus in Longley's writing thus allows for an understanding of translation as, conceptually, the model par excellence for a praxis that so persistently rests on dis-locations, both temporal and spatial. Etymologically, "translation" derives from Latin *translatio*, a "transportation" that supposes a dis-location and a re-location. Even in the many instances of "translation proper" in Longley's recent work, the perception of a "transportation" is crucial for the accomplishment of their semantic and their structuring import. In *Gorse Fires* and *The Ghost Orchid*, passages from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are transported from their Homeric textual *loci* to be relocated in Michael Longley's diction, and the conditions of this *translatio*—for example, the use of Ulster Scots in "Phemios & Medon" or the notoriously anachronistic title "Ceasefire" given to the passage in which King Priam visits Achilles to beg for the body of Hector—also transport, or extend, their scope of reference from the temporal and local situation of ancient history and/or myth to the recent and present-day Northern Irish Troubles with their narratives of sorrow and hope. Parallel to such indirect pronouncements on a domain of public and political concerns, some of the versions from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (the very theme adequate to the transformative consequences of translation) that punctuate *The Ghost Orchid* are domiciled in Longley's poetic discourse on family, home, sex, and marriage, with its characteristic *topoi*. Instances of the latter include the complex attraction and terror evoked by female sexuality and genitalia in "Spiderwoman" (a poem which revealingly opens, "Arachne starts with Ovid and finishes with me" [13]), or the autobiographically based rapport with twinship, plus the obsession with filiation and the death of the father as they are foregrounded in "Phoenix": "a double-yolk inside each shell," "His cradle, his father's coffin" (30). As if to leave no doubts regarding the overlap of these translations from the classics with Longley's "original" output, and the design which it serves, the poem facing "Phoenix" across the page, titled "Poseidon," pursues and renders even more explicit this poet's long-standing strategy of bringing home the classics:

Standing behind the god Poseidon I can see  
Through his buttocks to the scrotum's omega.  
When I helped Grandpa George into the bath  
The same view led me to my mother and me.

One of the effects served by this persistent summons of myth and the classics is that of borrowing their cultural monumentality to magnify family history beyond its smallness and anonymity; the recurrence of this summons, the deliberate and apparent simplicity of the method, and the way both these features produce a sense of emotional genuineness prevent the whole design from sliding into bathos or into caricature—which means that even when a risible effect is inevitable and deliberate (as with the Poseidon analogy for “Grandpa George”), it remains at a benign and endearing level. That magnification, supported by references retrieved from a literary and cultural memory, assists the personal and familial record, that would otherwise be erased by death, in becoming memorable—or rather, since mortality is largely the issue, memorialized.

A memorializing drive can arguably be read behind Longley’s frequent representations of the tomb, which, one should add, tend to read like home, a space of serenity and cocoon-like peace. One would just have to consider ten of the fourteen lines of “Tutankhamun” (a poem from his second book, *An Exploded View*):

That could be me lying there  
Surrounded by furniture,  
My interest vested in  
The persistence of objects,  
An affectionate household;  
The surrender of the bolt,  
The wheeze of dusty hinges  
Almost pleasurable  
After the prolonged slumber  
At my permanent address;

An elegy, from the same volume, for the Northern Irish painter Gerard Dillon evoked the artist’s powers of apprehension as (among other features) those of “An ear to the ground listening for / Dead brothers in layers” (Poems 95). Later, in *Gorse Fires*, both the attraction to the “prolonged slumber” and the image of the layered dead would be confirmed, albeit half-ironically, to commemorate the “Couchette” shared by the whole family on a long train journey:

With my wife, son, daughter in layers up the walls  
This room on wheels has become the family vault.  
They have fallen asleep, dreams stopping and starting  
As my long coffin wobbles on the top couchette.

And more recently a poem in *The Weather in Japan* would further extend this yearning for the posthumous in the direction of the homely, since the envisaged tomb is indeed a barn—Longley’s sense of the circularity of life and death, and of the family as the site of the grand trans generational continuum, leading to a longing for inhumation in the very seat of the alimentary, promoted from its plainness to a monumental dimension:

I would lie down with you here, side by side,  
Our own memorials in what amounts to  
The Shakers' cathedral, this circular hay barn,  
The two of us fieldmice under storeys of hay,

Tons of hay, a column of hay that changes  
The ceiling into a gigantic waggon wheel  
Or a rose window made entirely of wood  
Which we can see through as far as the sky.  
(*"The Shaker Barn."*)

None of the poems just quoted are translations or report in any ostensible way to other authors or other texts, but there is an obvious aspect in which they entail a *translatio*: their semantic and rhetorical effect depends on an imaginative relocation of the self in other places. In "Tuthankhamun," it is the exotic otherness of Egypt and of a tomb occupied from ancient times; in "Couchette," that paradoxical analogy for a tomb (the supreme instance of stasis) that is a railway carriage, a travelling vault *en route* to Italy (a natural and cultural space to whose potential for Longley's recent poetry, this essay will return); in the poem last quoted, a barn of a New World radical sect. But the second and last stanza of "The Shaker Barn" is also a fine example of the strong visual investment that characterizes Longley's recent poetry and the memorializing drive behind its strategies of representation.

For at least a decade Michael Longley has shown an attraction to artifacts produced by traditional North American sects—artifacts that have a marked visual appeal, and strongly connote the experiential domain of home and family: the rugs and quilts that have so often appeared in his recent poetry. One of the closing images of "The Shaker Barn" was in fact anticipated in "An Amish Rug," a poem in *Gorse Fires*: "You may hang it on the wall, a cathedral window" (19). Indeed, taking the two poems together helps emphasize how Longley's verbal reconstruction of the barn's ceiling into a "rose window" enhances his bemused attraction to the complex relation between the ethical and the aesthetic evinced by such artifacts: the chastity of a definite design (required by a rigorous ethic), and of "utilitarian" art, versus the gratification of the senses through vivid color. The title poem of a small collection published in 1998 (and later incorporated into *The Weather in Japan*) was also the name of an Amish quilt, *Broken Dishes*, whose pattern was reproduced on one of the first pages of the collection; and more than half a dozen poems in *The Weather in Japan* offer representations of these homely artifacts and of their consequence on the poetic subject. That consequence is indeed one of solace, a solace sought in visual patterns (often enriched in their homeliness by warm colors), in a sense of design, in the definiteness of forms. The metapoetic implications of this (for a poet so consistently concerned with form, as well as with the emotions of private experience) at times becomes explicit, as with two lines from "The Yellow Teapot" that immediately precede one of those "lists" that loom so large in Longley's poetics, here to be endowed with an incantatory and a soothing value: "then [I] stitched together

this spell,/ A quilt of quilt names to keep you warm in the dark:" (44). The poetic emplacement of these quilts, as they are remembered or imagined in their domestic environment and in the family histories they metonymize, may underline the placidity of light, of the discoveries of a childhood, of a shared and lived bliss: "Communion is blankets and eiderdown and sheets" ("Broken Dishes"); "Her first memory is of light all around her / As she sits among pillows on a patchwork quilt" ("The Sunburst"). But, also characteristically, the placidity may well be that of death, as when someone is imagined making "A quilt that will cover the sea bed and the graves / Of submariners in their submarines" ("The Sewing Machine"), lending a homely comfort to the bleakest of graves. The deathly and the metapoetic may come together again in these quilt poems with the close of the three-line piece "The Design," an *interrogatio* for which Longley's poetics tacitly offers itself up as the reply:

Sometimes the quilts were white for weddings, the design  
Made up of stitches and the shadows cast by stitches.  
And the quilts for funerals? How do you sew the night?

If the quilts offer a visual (and tactile) solace, they also, cover beds—where one is conceived, born, spends an important part of one's life, maybe generates other lives, and ultimately dies. They thus embody a memory carried over from past to present and future by the very process of family transmission, a process that foregrounds death as the most blatant fact of life. In short, the quilts are decisive for memorialization, even if at a homely rather than monumental level: but are these levels not conflated within the cultural and aesthetic regard that construes "The Shaker Barn" as a cathedral? From another angle, they are a particular focus of a broader attraction to the visual arts in Michael Longley's recent poetry.

A brief consideration of other poems concerned with visual representation and visual perception will yield further confirmation of the thematic emphases so far underlined. A useful starting point may be one of the pieces on the poet's experience of having a portrait painted, "Sitting for Eddie". The poem departs from the suggestions made by the model to the painter as to decorative elements that might go into the picture:

I had suggested a spray of beech leaves behind me  
Or a frieze of birds—bittern, lapwing, chough —  
Or a single carline-thistle representing flowers  
Pressed between pages, stuffed birds behind glass, our  
Still lives, Eddie's and mine.

These are then the features that the poet, when it comes to self-representation, recognizes as helping define him; crucially, they are also objects of representation that Longley's readers will promptly remember from poems dealing with the world of nature and with its consequences for poetic self-awareness. An analogy is thus suggested between verbal representation in Longley's poems and the visual representation of the poet against his referential environment in Edward McGuire's painting; as a consequence of this analogy, the

contiguity between the poet and some of his preferred referents (a metonymy, or series of metonymies) also reminds the reader that the lyric is traditionally a space for self-representation, even when the eye is directed toward other objects or beings. Even more obviously, the relationship that is thus proposed between poem(s) and painting is one of substitution, that which defines a metaphor—a word (one might briefly add apropos of this relocation of the poet in another medium) whose Greek etymon means “transportation,” the equivalent of Latin *translatio*.

If the poem begins by recalling the poet’s suggestions in a way that might hint that the painter hardly followed them, the hint is never confirmed within the poem—unless one takes as such the simile that tells us, on line six, that the decorative elements suggested “get into the picture like noises-off.” Only hindsight, though, may turn this inference into a certainty for the curious reader who will have gone to a trouble no reading of the poem per se will require: that is, to check the poem against its visual referent. A monograph with reproductions of Edward McGuire’s work (Fallon 1991) will promptly show that the floral and still-life elements mentioned in the poem recur in his paintings, and specifically in most of his portraits—*other than* that of Michael Longley, conspicuous within a series of portraits of Irish writers precisely for being *without* a decorative framework. Familiarity with the pictorial referent will thus confirm or enable a reading that will highlight that the poem is as much about the poet’s portrait as about what that portrait is *not*, in a nexus that is both intermedial (poem checked against painting) as intramedial and interpictorial (portrait checked against other portraits). This nexus ultimately depends, of course, on the imaginative consequence of McGuire’s work, even of McGuire’s life and surroundings, on the poet’s consciousness. Since McGuire painted a whole series of portraits of Irish writers, that consciousness of his work will integrate a sense of tradition, and of the complex matter of canonization and of the making of literary reputations. It will hardly be irrelevant and devoid of irony that the portrait of whose background most readers of Irish poetry may be reminded by Longley’s suggested leaves-and-birds decoration is the one McGuire painted of Seamus Heaney in 1974 probably the painter’s best-known portrait for the very fact that it figured on the back cover of Heaney’s *North*<sup>3</sup>; and this is an irony that will only be balanced, rather than cancelled, by an awareness of how integral the poet’s (declined) suggestion is to his favourite natural referents.

Indeed, whether they figure or not in the painting that prompted the poem, those referents, other than the poet himself, which are named in “Sitting for Eddie” will be relevant to our reading—since our object is Michael Longley’s ekphrastic poem, rather than its own pictorial referent. The poem’s first two lines suggest the natural environment of the west of Ireland that looms so large in many of Longley’s poems, inviting the reader to relate to the (ver-

3. Heaney would also celebrate the painting of that portrait in his “A Basket of Chestnuts,” *Seeing Things* (London: Faber, 1991) 24-25.





Edward McGuire, *Seamus Heaney* (1974)

bally constructed) picture as a still of the poet against the background of a living world. But the third and fourth lines, by inflecting attention in the direction of the inert objects from nature that also punctuate Longley's poetic universe, make clear that the poet at no moment yields to the illusion that the painting (or the poem) will ever be interchangeable with the world of nature, a living world and the world of the living: it will rather be comparable to the glass cases in a natural museum, its art(istry) an analogue to the work of the taxidermist. The way the world of nature is thus evoked through its remains alludes to one of McGuire's figurative interests (e.g., his 1954 *Still Life—Skull*—Fallon 109) which Longley indeed shares, as his readers may remember from Jim Allen's illustration for the cover of *Poems 1963-1983* (in the Penguin edition), showing precisely a glass case with just a few exhibits—bone, feather, fossilised eggs.

That interest is further confirmed in Longley's opening lines in "Water-colour," a poem dedicated to another portrait of his (by Jeffrey Morgan), also included in *The Ghost Orchid*:

Between a chicken's wishbone on the mantelpiece  
And, on the window sill, a dolphin's skull, I sit

These lines, in fact, may corroborate something about Longley's verbal representation of visual representations of himself already suggested a propos of "Sitting for Eddie": if and when the reader views Morgan's portrait (recently made better known by being reproduced on the cover of Peacock and Devine's *The Poetry of Michael Longley*) s/he will realize that the very first visual element described, that "chicken's wishbone on the mantelpiece," is in fact not in the picture—it would be within the field of vision of the poet while posing, but not of the painter, and consequently not of the viewer. Such poems are conspicuously, then, about "sitting for" the painters rather than (just) about the outcome of those sittings, and they become a relational record of both the painter's and the poet's points of view—a richer and more complex enactment of the ekphrastic design.

On the other hand, Longley's self-insertion in a small ossuary of mementoes from the world of nature also foregrounds the implications of his use of the phrase "still lives" in "Sitting for Eddie": his choice of an ungrammatical plural form (the plural of the pictorial genre "still life" is "still lifes") shows that his theme is life and death, not just the world of art and the framework of a specific genre of painting. Alert as Longley is to the philological, he will not miss either that the equivalent phrase to "still life" in several other European languages (Romance languages, in particular) could be rendered as "dead nature" (as in French "nature morte," or Portuguese "natureza morta"). The poem carries an elegiac intent from its dedication, "*in memory of Edward McGuire*"; an earlier poem honouring a dead painter, "In Memory of Gerard Dillon," suggested the inevitability of a visual artist's living on in one's memory within an inescapable visual framework: "You are a room full of self-portraits, / A face that follows us everywhere". But the closing line of "Sitting for

Eddie" may propose an extension of such an elegiac design to the model, rather than just the painter: "Me turning into a still life whose eyes are blue." Longley thus acknowledges that his *translatio* into an object of visual representation in fact produces a "nature morte," presenting him, as it were, inhumed in the painting, or rather sharing the showcase of a pictorial frame with "stuffed birds" and dry flowers—a visual, and then verbal afterlife: the painting and the poem that ekphrastically renders it "bear his memory" (cf. Shakespeare's Sonnet I) and become his memorial.

The close implication of visual (self-)representation and the production of a stasis which becomes assimilable to death informs several other recent poems by Michael Longley, in particular in *The Weather in Japan*. Such poems also tend towards the elegiac, often commemorating the loss of loved ones by friends who are explicitly named—as is the case with "Maureen Murphy's Window" and "Björn Olinder's Pictures," which share the same page in *The Weather in Japan*. In the former, Longley's attraction to the image of the glass showcase is confirmed in the way the objects displayed in front of a window become indistinct from the outdoor scene displayed by the window:

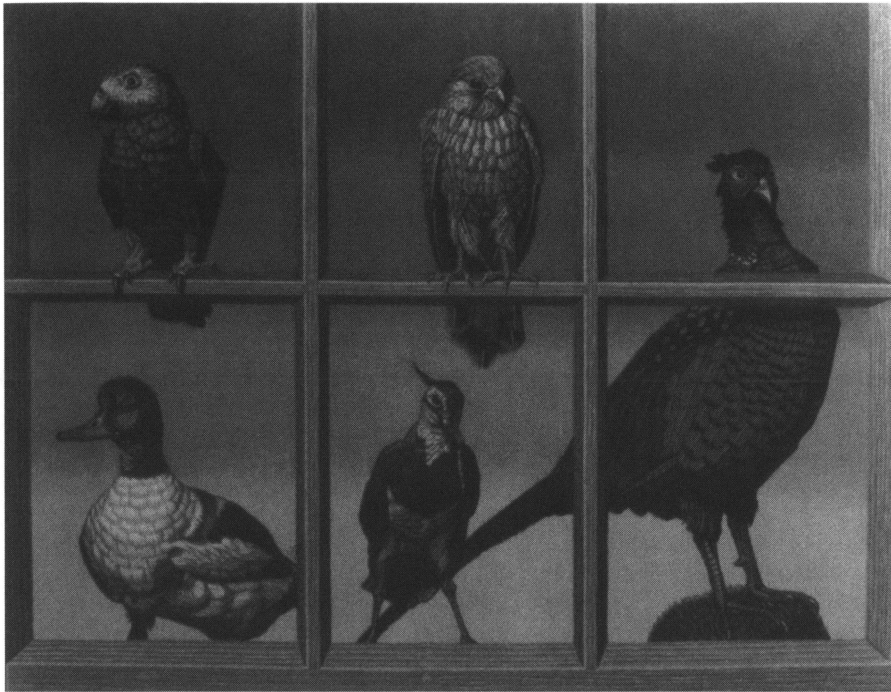
Because you've built shelves across the big window, keep-  
Sakes and ornaments become part of the snowy garden.

The visual interpenetration of outside and inside is, in fact, reminiscent of Edward McGuire's *Window*, a 1974 painting in which stuffed birds perch on the frames of a lattice window, protruding through it. The verbal rendering of a visual frame in terms close to a *trompe-l'oeil* effect or to a holographic scheme (suggestive of a play between the bidimensional and the tridimensional), which in the opening lines of "Maureen Murphy's Window" concerns inert objects, promptly finds an equivalent in the sphere of being when a ghostly presence is imaginatively inserted in the scene, surrounded by "keep-/Sakes and ornaments," to some extent like the poet saw himself both in the McGuire and the Morgan portraits. Such a presence will also be absence, though, subject to a play of emplacement and displacement, commuting between outdoors and indoors, and "translated" by the memory of loved ones back and forth between the realms of the dead and of the living:

I imagine your dead husband moving in and out  
Through window and shelves without breaking a thing.

Memory and verbalization retrieve the dead, but the experience of vision (in both its senses) is crucial to the process—since, even before realizing itself through depiction and/or inscription, it defines an eminently sharable experience at the level of perception, as the latter poem ("Björn Olinder's Pictures") simply but forcefully presses home:

I have learned about dying by looking at two pictures  
Björn Olinder needed to look at when he was dying



Edward McGuire, *The Window*, (1974)

Seeing allows the observer to (re)cognize the gaze of the dying, simply by acknowledging its object. And, in both poems, the scene contemplated may stand for a posthumous space and time—but it also offers itself up in metascriptural terms, a blank surface awaiting inscription or (im)printing which will derive its coloring or its form from our mementoes, our small homely memorials:

The footprints we and the animals leave in the snow  
Borrow the blue from the blue glassware you collect.

beyond the headland  
A glimpse of immaculate sand that awaits our footprints.

The neatness of such land- and mindscapes reminds us that, visual arrangement serves an avowed concern with order and with the solace it may afford. But such solace, which Longley's representations here associate with still-

ness, crystal-clear environments, and impeccable surfaces, does not entail an emotional asepsis. A connection between two poems from *The Ghost Orchid* and *The Weather in Japan* may prove enlightening. In "Sitting for Eddie," the "spray of beech leaves," and in particular that "frieze of birds" which two lines below yields to "stuffed birds behind glass," are an important aesthetic and representational meeting point with his painter, reflecting both Longley's commitment to the natural world (and the imaginative consequence of its remains) and Edward McGuire's sustained interest in the meticulous representation of birds, often drawing on his collection of (precisely) stuffed birds. But the poet's suggested framework for his portrait may signal a broader network of cultural affinities, as well as the clear definition of an aesthetic and moral stance. "Birds & Flowers" will be the title of a poem in *The Weather in Japan*, a title derived from a picture—another still life—that the poet received from the poem's dedicatee, a Japanese friend. But "Birds & Flowers" makes clear that the placidity evoked by the "nature morte," in tune with Longley's seduction by the ceremonial and the formal in Japanese culture (manifest in his two latest collections), will not have to mean the denial of an emotional commitment, a freezing of the emotions. The dedicatee is quoted, in a context that leaves no doubt as to the poet's empathy, as having written: "I have been a man of home these years, (...) often / Surprised to know so much passion hidden in myself" (64).

The extent to which Longley, so much a poet of the emotions of home, life, and death, may be ventriloquizing in this quoted self-description should be taken into account when considering the way he addresses "stillness" and its deathly implications. Concomitantly, one should acknowledge the way in which his penchant for verbal renderings of the visual in his recent poetry rests on a close connection between "stillness," formal neatness, and a sympathy for predominantly figurative representation. It will hardly be an accident that the page facing "Sitting for Eddie" in *The Ghost Orchid* offers the reader a satiric version of the opening of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, a denial (in the ironical voice of the practitioners of postmodernism) of that literary decorum whose self-evidence the Horatian text takes for granted, and for which it famously offers visual analogues:

We postmodernists can live with that human head  
Stuck on a horse's neck, or the plastering of multi-  
Coloured feathers over the limbs of assorted animals  
(...)  
To relieve the boredom we introduce to the woods  
A dolphin, a wild boar to the waves.

From the futile plasticity of freely changing forms, the ironical self-denouncing voice swiftly goes on to expose the denial of literal representation, and the playful assumption of the incongruous and the hybrid, as thinly disguised technical incompetence posing as inventiveness—

If a retired sailor  
 Commissions a picture of the shipwreck he survived,  
 We give him a cypress-tree because we can draw that.

—a debasement that the satirical drive will take to its scatological nadir, an *Ars(e) Poetica(l)* indeed:

Ultimate post-  
 Modernists even in the ceramics department we  
 May have a vase in mind when we start, or a wine-jug,  
 But, look, as the wheel goes round, it ends up as a po.

This laughing exorcism of hybridity and of representational unruliness might conceal the extent to which the metamorphic is in so many respects central to Longley's imagination in his recent poetry. Such perception cannot but be prompted by the Ovidian presence throughout *The Ghost Orchid*, that authorial hybrid or conflation (e.g., "Arachne starts with Ovid and finishes with me"—[13]) which is proper to translation, this time enacted on narratives whose theme is a *translatio* of forms:

There's the chameleon that feeds off wind and air  
 And takes the colour of whatever it's standing on.  
 ("According to Pythagoras")

The key to Longley's poetic rationale in the midst of this apparent contradiction is, again, his persistent concern with balance and design, that which confirms Douglas Dunn's vindication of "rational and benign order" as "an intellectual priority" for this poet (Dunn 32; see also Redmond 22). And in such acknowledgment one should include Longley's heightened sense of emotional and ethical purpose. This combination entails that, when "translated" into Longley's original pieces, the metamorphic is rescued from what "After Horace" proposes as a wanton representational joyride—and its deliverance is realized in particular by the memorializing drive, with an appertaining sense of ceremony which, even when it becomes monumentally marmoreal, does not invalidate the vividness of the emotional commitment.

An example of this "rescue" might be sought in "Ocean". The opening lines of this poem from *The Weather in Japan* promptly associate its title with "Merce Cunningham's *Ocean* / In the Waterfront Hall," a ballet performance that delights the poet and yet sees him, by the end of the first stanza, in the equivocal situation of "feel[ing] like a frogman on dry land." But evocation of an ocean of another time and two places (Belfast, but also a World War II scenario in the Pacific) will combine aesthetic enjoyment with a memory that is both public and private, and which will organize and enhance the meaning(fulness) of the performance in the otherwise free play of the poet's inner eye. It is precisely that memory that accounts for the dedication, "*Homage to James "Mick" Magennis VC*"—"a Catholic from the Falls Road" and "the only Northern Irish combatant who won a VC in the Second World War" (Edna Longley 281). And that turns the poem (again), as well as the personal epiphany that it records, into a memorial (a verbal equivalent to the

public memorial erected in tribute to Mick Magennis, in October 1999, at Belfast City Hall—

There was room for only one midget submarine  
In the roof space where my mind had floated, and where  
Swimming from the Falls Road Baths to Singapore  
Mick Magennis emerged in his frogman's suit,

Oxygen leaking in telltale bubbles up to heaven,  
His expression unfathomable behind the visor  
But his modest thumbs-up confirming that, yes,  
He had stuck limpet mines on the cruiser *Takao*.

Alongside dog-paddling, ballet-dancing polar bears,  
Penguins like torpedoes, dolphins in twos and threes,  
Sea otters, seals, Mick was formation-swimming and  
At home in the ocean's cupola above my head.

It is as if, instead of drifting in a sea of free-floating visual signifiers, the poet's mind was offered a buoy or an anchorage by this memory of someone whom history "translated" from one's neighbourhood to distant places, as also from anonymity to an amphibian heroism that allows him to be imaginatively "translated back" (or rather brought "home") into an "oceanic" performance enjoyed at a "waterfront" concert room of civic importance in his home city. Once the local war hero joins the choreography, with his ballast of signification, penguins become easily analogous to "torpedoes"; and the "dog-paddling, ballet-dancing polar bears," the "dolphins in twos and threes" evolving on that stage serve more than the evanescent delight—"to relieve the boredom" to which were consigned, in their incongruity, the "dolphin (...) [in] the woods" or the "wild boar [introduced] to the waves" that the last stanza of "After Horace" so risibly had dismissed.

To some extent, "Ocean" is exceptional because in it a memorialization (of a figure associated with war history, and for a long time unjustly ignored on both sides of the sectarian divide), with its appertaining achievement of moral and emotional serenity, takes place through the verbal representation of a ballet performance, a dynamic work of art. This contrasts with the stasis, the transcendence of dynamics that Longley sometimes seems to long for (cf. Wheatley 127; McDonald 47, 50), in particular when celebrating (as so often is the case) figures and gestures indissociable from a memory of war and suffering. "The Horses" may be exemplary of this notion that, before the gore and pain of history, only a *translatio* into stasis will bring the dignity and solace that art and due commemoration require and afford. That is here achieved through the effect of a verbally rendered gaze that gains a Medusa-like quality and yet cannot suppress the emotional poignancy and the passion of "hot tears" streaming from beings "immovable as a tombstone":

For all of the horses butchered on the battlefield,  
Shell-shocked, tripping up over their own intestines,  
Drowning in the mud, the best war memorial  
Is in Homer: two horses that refuse to budge

Despite threats and sweet-talk and the whistling whip,  
 Immovable as a tombstone, their heads drooping  
 In front of the streamlined motionless chariot,  
 Hot tears spilling from their eyelids onto the ground  
 Because they are still in mourning for Patroclus  
 Their charioteer, their shiny manes bedraggled  
 Under the yoke pads on either side of the yoke.

The *translatio* of animal figures into art in Michael Longley's poetry is not confined, though, to the commemoration of history and war, however haunting the epic scenario may prove. The lyrical involvement in the world of nature that, as remembered in connection with "Sitting for Eddie," has always remained fundamental for this poet, be it in living forms or in their fossilized, stuffed, or embalmed afterlife, also assists the theme of memorialization in Longley's latest volume. Its usefulness at the level of representation has indeed expanded, as much as the poet's referential scope has spread from the west of Ireland to Italy. The landscapes, flora, fauna and heritage of Tuscany, in particular, have in recent years increasingly made it (to quote a characteristic phrase of Longley's) a "home from home" ("The West," "Migrations")—a phrase that identifies a place "where origins and destinations meet" (McDonald 1992 67). In the relative brevity of its twelve lines, "The Hare" may be the poem in *The Weather in Japan* that best epitomizes this extension of the poet's imaginative space, whilst registering its consequences for the relationship between writing and posterity in Longley's work. The poem departs from an observation close in tone to some of the animal poems in *Gorse Fires* and close in lexicon and imagery to the animal analogies on which rested the four-line opening poem of *The Ghost Orchid*—as mere juxtaposition will promptly show:

Trying to tell it all to you and cover everything  
 Is like awakening from its grassy form the hare:  
 In that make-shift shelter your hand, then my hand  
 Mislays the hare and the warmth it leaves behind.

Through a grille of rushes and yellowing grass  
 You watch me come and go at Carrigskeewaun,  
 Until I loom over your form like Mweelrea,

Your draughty lackadaisical basket still warm,  
 Still warm the earth that was rough and ready  
 Even when you were born, your blue eyes open.

These first two stanzas of the latter poem have everything to do with roots, with the intimate relationship established with location, with one's places and placenames; the two stanzas that follow, and that bring the poem to its close, concern rather a dis-location—but also a re-location, and the fruitful imaginative consequence of references that are combined and then inscribed:

You juke and disappear behind the cottage,  
 Then lollop after me to Lucca and join  
 Elephant, wild boar, dromedary on the façade.



You leave pawprints in marble and your grassy  
 Boat-shape with its inch of improvised rigging  
 Sets sail past the cottage and the cathedral.

Transported to another setting, one that stands for a rare combination of *loci amoeni* and of a dazzling heritage of art and architecture, the hare crosses over from nature to art, one more contribution to the outlandish fauna on a much-admired façade<sup>4</sup> whose coexistence ironically echoes the “assorted animals,” the “dolphin,” and the “wild boar” in “After Horace.” To the extent that he offers us the represented metamorphosis of a living being into a carved stone image, the poet becomes the practitioner of an art of death—his mind’s gaze that of a male Gorgon, his creation that of a reverse Pygmalion (a reference made all the more relevant by the poem’s erotic undertow, highlighted in particular by its juxtaposition with “Form”). But the poem does not end on petrification. The hare’s *translatio* from earth to stone, from life to a marmoreal, tomblike stasis on the façade of a Tuscan church, inscribes it in a time-honored design, one that will not go unaffected by this addition, newly arrived from Ireland and from the cottage to imprint ancestral marble with its paws. The metascriptural implication is clear, as clear as the ultimate ambition of this poetics of gazing, transporting and inscribing. Indeed, the closing lines leave no doubt that the hare’s ultimate travel, its afterlife in the consciousness and the memory of readers, will find it, rather than petrified, engaged in the perpetual motion of its ever-repeated commutation between flesh and marble, cottage and cathedral, an embodiment of the dialectics of life and art spanning time and space—in the same manner that verbal and visual here find their “classical” descriptions as arts respectively of time and of space being confounded, interchanged and hence enriched.

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