

NATIONALISM IN EXOTIC CLOTHES? POSTCOLONIAL
THINKING, GENDER AND TRANSLATION IN
THE FIELD DAY ANTHOLOGY OF IRISH WRITING

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Abstract:

Field Day has been the most important collective cultural initiative in Ireland since Yeats and Lady Gregory's National Theatre movement in the early twentieth century. Founded in 1980 to articulate a cultural intervention into the crisis in Northern Ireland, it brought together some of the most important cultural figures in Ireland, such as the playwright Brian Friel, the actor Stephen Rea, and the poet Seamus Heaney. While it was originally conceived of as a touring theatre company, the enterprise also became a publishing imprint, and has produced some of the most challenging scholarly work on Irish culture and history. Its most ambitious project was *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, a massive undertaking that looked to compile and rethink 1,500 years of Irish writing. When the first three volumes of the *Anthology* were published in 1991 the egregious lack of women's writing in their 4,044 double-columned pages, and the fact that not one of the editors of the 44 different sections was a woman, were immediately noted. In an embarrassed response, the editors commissioned a second instalment, which was entirely edited by women and devoted to women's writing, and was published in 2002 in two volumes. The focus of

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this article is on the modes of postcolonial thinking that informed these two instalments. The first three volumes were clearly influenced by thinkers such as Said, who published a pamphlet with the group, and considered Field Day an archetypal postcolonial enterprise. Indeed, Field Day is credited with having introduced postcolonial thinking into Irish Studies, a move that was by no means uncontroversial. For many critics, theories emanating from African, Caribbean and Indian colonial experiences had no relevance in an Irish context, and they strongly suspected that Field Day's interest in postcolonial thinking was little more than an attempt by the group to re-dress nationalism in exotic clothes. The blindness to gender evidenced in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* was taken as confirmation of this, as it showed that Field Day was a group that could not see beyond the 'national' question and engage with other urgent issues. In many ways, then, attention to gender and to women was construed in these, at times fiery, debates about the first three volumes as a symbol of progress and modernisation. Particularly in the Republic of Ireland, Field Day was characterised as a group of middle-aged, patriarchal Northern Irish men, who would drag the whole island backwards; who could not provide a viable narrative for it at the end of the twentieth century. However, volumes IV and V of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, (those devoted to women's experiences), are, in fact, even more overtly postcolonial in their outlook than the first three volumes. But rather than looking towards Said, Fanon and Memmi, this second instalment was indebted to Subaltern Studies. Through giving an account of this episode in contemporary Irish cultural history, this article thinks about the problems and possibilities that attended upon this translation of postcolonial thinking from a non-European to a European setting.

Keywords: Irish studies, touring theatre, Field Day.

When the first three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* were published in 1991 the egregious lack of women's writing in their 4,044 double-columned pages, and the fact that not one of the editors of the 44 different sections was a woman, were immediately noted. These facts became the focus for an intense and oftentimes fiery debate, in the course of which the editors of the *Anthology* were taken to task for these omissions in print, on television and radio, and in person at academic meetings. When Seamus Deane, the general editor, was questioned about this on a television programme shortly after the

publication of the three volumes, he made no attempt either to shirk responsibility or to offer some form of justification for the disabling contradictions that the *Anthology* betokened, saying instead: “[t]o my astonishment and dismay, I have found that I myself have been subject to the same kind of critique to which I have subjected colonialism ... I find that I exemplify some of the faults and erasures which I analyze and characterize in the earlier period.” (qtd. in Crowe 2003, p. 43) *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* was, after all, an attempt to catalogue 1,500 years of Irish writing and also to rethink this cultural history in a postcolonial frame, and so the exclusion of women writers struck at the very heart of the exercise.

This blindness to issues of gender has most often been explained as the inevitable result of a project compiled under the aegis of a group – Field Day – that was composed of six Northern Irish men. Field Day was founded as a theatrical company in 1980 by the playwright Brian Friel and the actor Stephen Rea in order to articulate a cultural intervention into the deadly stalemate of the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’. After the unprecedented success of its first production – Friel’s *Translations* – it quickly became a broader cultural enterprise, and a ‘board of directors’ was appointed in the early-1980s that included some of the most important voices in Irish cultural life: Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Tom Paulin, David Hammond and, a few years later, Thomas Kilroy joined Friel and Rea. With the exception of Kilroy, all these directors were from Northern Ireland and, as can be seen, they were all men. With these new directors Field Day became more than just a theatre company, and developed into an important publishing imprint. The publication of the *Anthology* was its most ambitious undertaking.

One of the most trenchant critics of Field Day was the novelist Colm Toibin, and while his characterisation of the group has a tabloid-like sensationalism to it, it nonetheless points to a fairly dominant perception of the enterprise in the immediate aftermath of the publication of first three volumes of the *Anthology*.

There were times in the 1980s when it was hard not to feel that Field Day had become the literary wing of the IRA. In the group’s refusal to

accept that there was another Ireland with problems besides those created by the colonial experience, Field Day became a deeply conservative, backward-looking force in Irish life, six middle-aged men who as individuals were important artists but as a group specialized in missing the point (Toibin, 1995, p. 10).

In particular, Toibin and others accused Field Day of failing to offer any narrative in their works that might relate to the island outside of Northern Ireland, and coterminous with this there is the inference that the Republic of Ireland had progressed, had moved beyond the atavism of the nationalisms that continued to plague Northern Ireland. Its concerns and outlook, it is implied, were at this point more in line with the rest of the Europe and the US, and the issue of gender was emblematic of this shift of emphasis away from the 'national question'. For critics such as Toibin, Field Day's postcolonialism represented little more than nationalism dressed up in exotic clothes; as he has put it, women are not in the *Anthology* not "because of error, but because the governing ideology of the Field Day group is an old-fashioned and unreconstructed version of Irish nationalism which has a deep contempt for the Irish state [i.e. the Republic of Ireland] and anything that has happened within its confines." (Toibin, 1993, p. 123)

While the Northern Irish backgrounds and the ways in which they have moulded the political outlooks of Seamus Deane and the other Field Day directors are undoubtedly salient to an understanding of the emphases found in the *Anthology*, this response to the project is also ultimately insufficient. It is limited because it sidesteps the underlying irony that Deane himself pointed to above: how could a postcolonial group be so completely blind to the issue of gender? As has been seen from the example of Toibin, this question is avoided in these personalised critiques because in locating the blindness to gender entirely in terms of the nationalist outlooks of individual members of Field Day, there is an implicit dismissal of the use of postcolonial thinking in an Irish context. In other words, behind these *ad hominem* critiques there is a more general hostility to thinking about Ireland in a colonial frame. There is the belief that postcolonial analyses exert only

a regressive pull, drawing thinking about the country into decrepit, ossified, Irish-British binaries that it should have moved beyond; in short, they run counter to a narrative of Irish modernisation, which for critics such as Toibin is the central story of late-twentieth century Ireland. Coterminous with this is a more extended criticism of the use of postcolonial thinking in Irish Studies articulated by historians, literary and cultural scholars who argue against its application on what are claimed to be, more or less, 'methodological' grounds. In this understanding, Ireland was not, 'properly speaking', a colony, as it was a part of the United Kingdom and had limited voting rights. Therefore, the application of theoretical models from Africa, India and other colonies has no place in scholarship relating to Ireland. Perhaps the most sustained pursuit of these arguments can be found in Stephen Howe's monograph *Ireland and Empire* (2000). What immediately becomes apparent is that Howe, in common with many other critics of the use of postcolonial thinking in Ireland, takes a resolutely empirical and positivist view of history; precisely the view of history that, along with a hegemonic narrative of modernisation, has underpinned in particular British imperialism, and against which most postcolonial thinking has argued. Empiricism is, as postcolonial scholars have continually unveiled, an ideology that claims not to be ideology but rather to be rooted in a concept of common sense, and so is concerned only with methodology. Such a way of thinking finds expression in Howe's, at times, remarkably anodyne portrayal of Ireland's relationship with Britain, which he at one point describes in terms of "the inevitable asymmetry of relations between a relatively large (and formerly globally dominant) state and a very small one". (Howe, 2000, p. 147) Yet, while Howe puts forward many empirical arguments as to why Ireland should not be considered a colony, he ultimately recognises the futility of this, and with something of a grudging shrug, announces in his conclusion that Ireland does indeed have "[a] colonial past, then, yes; though one that took unique hybrid forms, involving extensive integration and consensual partnership as well as exploitation and coercion." (Howe, 2000, p. 232) In other words, what is finally argued is

that postcolonial thinking tends to flatten out historical experience by being applied in different contexts without due regard for the specifics of these contexts. While this is a very partial reading of postcolonial thinking, and indeed is a charge that could with more justification be laid at the door of empirical thinking, it nevertheless does point towards a problem that must be faced up to by postcolonial thinkers who wish to employ theories that were developed in other historical and social contexts.

Seamus Deane's work on the *Anthology* exhibits some of the pitfalls that attend upon the task of translating postcolonial thinking from one context to another, and these are manifested in the manner in which he overlooked issues of gender. However, rather than viewing this as a motive for dismissing a postcolonial reading of Irish literary and cultural history *tout court*, what needs to be engaged with are the specific ways in which postcolonial thinking has informed Deane's analysis. This might be accomplished by focusing on the insistence on the trope and act of translation that is to be found in Deane's 'Introductions' to the sections he edited in volumes I-III of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Moreover, this differentiated approach is urged in particular by the perspective cast on these volumes by the publication of volumes IV and V of the *Anthology* in 2002. These are dedicated to Irish women's experience and, crucially, are compiled in a more explicit and self-confident postcolonial register. Indeed, on one level, the intellectual formation of this second instalment of the *Anthology* exposes the wilfully limited outlook of those critics of volumes I-III who claimed that they could not conceive of how postcolonial thinking might have any relevance to feminist and gender issues. In particular, the most noted critic of Field Day, Edna Longley, had in 1992 sarcastically offered as possible titles for what was then supposed to be the supplementary volume, (it grew to two volumes over the course of its long gestation): "The Mad Woman in the Annex" and "Nationalism and Feminism Kiss and Make Up". (Longley, 1992, p. 119) But while the editors of volumes IV and V did employ postcolonial thinking, the mode of postcolonial thinking that they turned to was a radical departure from the first instalment, as these later

volumes were unambiguously informed by the approaches of Subaltern Studies scholars. The first instalment, on the other hand, was more influenced by writers such as Memmi, Fanon and, in particular, Said. So it is from the vantage point of this more differentiated, even conflictual, conception of the use of postcolonial thinking in the *Anthology* as a whole that this essay looks to uncover how Deane's reading of Said might have resulted in a blindness to the issues of gender that were so clearly manifested in volumes I-III.

Deane announced the *Anthology* project in the last paragraph of his 1984 Field Day pamphlet *Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea*, in the context of calling for a

revision of our prevailing idea of what it is that constitutes the Irish reality. In literature that would take the form of a definition, in the form of a comprehensive anthology, of what writing in this country has been for the last 300-500 years and, through that, an exposure of the fact that the myth of Irishness, the notion of Irish unreality, the notions surrounding Irish eloquence, are all political themes upon which the literature has battened to an extreme degree since the nineteenth century when the idea of national character was invented. (Deane, 1985, p. 58)

While the first instalment of the *Anthology* covers 1,500 years of Irish writing, its focus is unsurprisingly on literature since roughly 1600; in other words, from the time in which Ireland was decisively colonised. These three volumes are divided into 44 different sections each of which is individually edited. The sections follow a chronological order, and vary from broad sweeps such as 'Latin Writing in Ireland (c.400-c.1200)', to sections devoted to specific writers such as Swift, Burke, Yeats, Joyce and Beckett. Each of these is preceded by an introductory essay penned by the editor(s) of that section, and these provide an outline of the intellectual matrix of the three volumes. With twenty two editors contributing to these introductions, some of whom would not identify with the label

postcolonial, a clear univocal voice does not by any means emerge. So, while an analysis of Deane's introductions is the focus of this reading, it has to be underscored that this is necessarily a partial view of the volumes. At the same time though, Deane's work forms a definite spine through these volumes: besides his crucial 'General Introduction', he is the sole editor of nine of the forty four sections and he co-edits two others. These cover a vast area of Irish literature, from Burke, Goldsmith and Thomas Moore to nineteenth-century poetry and song and Joyce. Furthermore, four of the sections he edits are devoted to political writings which cumulatively cover a span from Cromwell to the 1980s.

Throughout almost all these sections Deane returns in a troubled manner to what he describes in his 'General Introduction' as an "axis of translation" which he perceives to be running through Irish culture and which has produced the dominant notions of 'Irishness' that, as he claimed in the citation above, the *Anthology* was created to combat.

It is not necessarily true that something always gets lost in translation. It is necessarily true that translation is founded on the idea of loss and recuperation; it might be understood as the action that takes place in the interval between these alternatives. This conception lies at the heart of much Irish writing, especially in the modern period, and has close affinities with the modern theories of writing as a practice. The belief in the originary essence, agency or condition and the desire to do something with it – recover it, convert it, adapt it, destroy it – silently patrol the boundaries of both Irish protestant and Irish catholic nationalisms and hold in custody the accompanying visions of literature and politics. The system of thought that turns on the axis of translation is by now so internally coherent that it seems to many that it must be externally valid. It ain't necessarily so. (Deane, 1991, p. xxv)

Indeed it ain't, but perhaps for reasons other than those that Deane had in mind at this point. To show this, the first task here is to unpack

this dense argument in order to understand Deane's conception of how translation links Irish politics and culture. This might begin by examining the surprising way this statement traces a direct relationship between translation and ideas of originality and authenticity: the notion of an "originary essence", which forms the bedrock of constructions of Irish identities, revolves, it seems, on the "axis of translation". Deane would appear to be suggesting that this concept of authenticity is a chimera, an invention or production of translation practices which sponsor it and which, in the process of creating it, set up custodial borders between various identities. However, it might also be said that "modern theories of writing" (to cite Deane) from Benjamin to Derrida and beyond, have also employed translation for precisely the opposite ends, as a way of placing under question conceptions of authenticity and purity. Of even more direct pertinence is the fact that Field Day's own dramatic productions regularly employ the idea and act of translation to deconstruct Irish identities. Nonetheless, while Deane does occasionally register the contradictions generated by translation, he ultimately proposes a history of translation in Ireland that sees the act as reinforcing division; a narrative in which any reversion to translation as a means of bridging cultural divisions in Ireland is, in the final analysis, considered to have reinforced colonial cultural hegemony. In his account, Deane describes two moments when translation's formative role in the construction of Irishness came to the fore. The first was in eighteenth century and concerned the efforts of the Anglo-Irish to forge for themselves an independent, interstitial identity between the British and the Irish. The second emerged in the nineteenth century in the wake of the changed political landscape brought about by "the French Revolution, the rise of the United Irishmen, the 1798 Rebellion and the Act of Union in 1800" (Deane, 1991, p. xxiv-v), and was a more sustained effort to promote a concept of reconciliation between the traditions on the island. In short, both moments had the objective, in Deane's eyes, "of finding in culture a reconciliation of those forces and interests that remained steadfastly opposed in politics." (Deane, 1991, p. xxiv) In other words, translation was the means through which political

problems were transformed into cultural or artistic quandaries that were therefore theoretically amenable to a form of resolution through translation.

The assertion of the existence of a cultural (and largely literary) tradition, embracing both groups, depended to an extraordinary degree on a successful act of translation. Ferguson and Thomas Davis are only the best-known names of those who made the assertion and risked testing it by putting their faith in the possibility of translation as a means of cultural conciliation. (Deane, 1991, p. xxv)

This possible resolution never involved a working through of cultural dichotomies, but rather a form of reconciliation based on what was seen as a raising-up of the 'native' Irish culture through translation so that it might, through the very fact that it could be rendered in English, aspire towards, if never a parity of esteem, at least a sufficient worthiness to be considered 'civilised'. This became not only the bedrock upon which the Anglo-Irish literary Revival was founded in the late-nineteenth century, but it was also a mode of thinking that underpinned the philosophy of cultural nationalism.

As long as this idea of translation survived, Irish nationalism, in alliance with philological scholarship, could give culture precedence over politics, in the belief that the civilizing and ecumenical spirit of the first would soften the harsh realities of the second. (Deane, 1991, p. xxv)

So for Deane, this style of translation has engendered the mindsets that have produced the conflict in Northern Ireland and the conservative post-colonial Republic of Ireland: "[n]ationalism, cultural or political, is no more than an inverted image of the colonialism it seeks to replace. It too is an act of translation or even of re-translation." (Deane, 1991, p. xxv)

Some of the most crucial translations or re-translations were produced by nineteenth-century Celticists such as Matthew Arnold

and Ernest Renan. Celticism is, in Deane's account, a vital link between what he thinks of as the more 'constitutional' approach to the 'Irish question' taken by Burke, Goldsmith and Moore and late-nineteenth century cultural nationalism. As such, Celticism was a conduit through which Irish nationalism turned decisively towards culture and away from foregrounding political grievances. It is a racial theory that is entirely consistent with Orientalism, as it portrayed the Celts as child-like or feminine and in need of the protection of a more mature, masculine race. But certain privileges were inscribed within this farrago of oppositional racial and sexual stereotypes that were considered to be held exclusively by the Celt and that were needed by the Saxon; in short, the Celt guarded the flame of the spiritual life that was seen to be under threat of being extinguished in the industrialising metropolises. Deane's focus is particularly trained on how the late-nineteenth century Irish literary Revival was informed by the 'compensatory' aspects of Celticism and so participated in this racial discourse by promoting the notion of a spiritual Irish race, with the result that "[t]he colonized culture was turning into a colonizing culture, a place with a missionary future in a drear modern age." (Deane, 1991, p. 9) In this manner, Deane provides a postcolonial history of Irish political and cultural life that emphasises how the post-colonial elites re-translated colonial discourses that were products of a certain conception of the act of translation.

As mentioned, the Celticist moment in Irish cultural life has profound correspondences with Orientalism, which is particularly evident in the figure of Renan, who participated in both enterprises, and Deane's attitude to Celticism, not unsurprisingly, is clearly informed by Said's reading of Orientalism. Indeed, the links between Said and Field Day were more than theoretical: Said contributed to the enterprise's pamphlet series with the 1988 pamphlet, *Yeats and Decolonization*, and the penultimate page of his 1995 'Afterword' to *Orientalism* cites at length from the 'Preface' to the collection of the first six Field Day pamphlets, *Ireland's Field Day*. By mining these links, it becomes apparent that the fulcrum of Deane's "axis of translation" is informed by a mode of argumentation that is similar to the one that Said mounts

against Renan and his brand of philological Orientalism. Said, for instance, conceives of Renan's Orientalist endeavours in Frankenstein-like terms: in his "philological laboratory" (Said, 2003, p. 146) he dissects what he presents as the dead and ossified Semitic languages in such a way that this action provides, through a form of oppositional comparison, an aura of life for European languages. (Said, 2003, p. 145-146) Similarly, Deane presents the activities of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish "philological scholarship" (Deane, 1991, p. xxv) in an equally Gothic fashion. On the one hand, Anglo-Irish eighteenth-century translators such as Charlotte Brooke garnered and reworked the desiccated fragments of the defeated Gaelic culture in order to help acclimatise themselves to their interstitial role in Ireland between Britain and the native Irish. (Carpenter and Deane, 1991, p. 961-964) On the other hand, nineteenth-century poets and translators, from both unionist and nationalist vantage points, looked to transmit the energy of the expiring Irish language into English, thereby effecting an "ultimate reconciliation between the English language and that essential spirit". (Deane, 1991, p. 5) As he put it elsewhere, in his 1985 *Celtic Revivals*, "[t]he 'primitivism' of ancient Gaelic poetry was widely thought to be in itself a guarantee of authentic feeling with the corollary [...] that English literature could well do with a new access of 'primitive' energy to restore to it a lost, pristine vigour." (Deane, 1985, p. 14) Writing in the same book about Thomas Kinsella's poetry, this process of rejuvenation is phrased in more explicit vampire-like terms, with the English language reviving itself "on the corpse of the Irish language it destroyed." (Deane, 1985, p. 144)

Not only is Deane's rhetoric informed by Said's, but he also locates himself in a critical position that is similar to that occupied by Said, and is subject to a comparable intellectual bind. What is ironic about this location is that it is one that might well be thought of as that of the translator, as can be gauged from Said's description of it:

The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily one is able to judge it, and the whole world as well,

with the spiritual detachment *and* generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance. (Said, 2003, p. 259)

As James Clifford has pointed out in an astute critique of *Orientalism*, Said's use of European and enlightenment modes of thinking to argue, not about the condition of the Oriental, but precisely against the way in which the West has been constructed, is symptomatic of the "condition of homelessness"¹. (Clifford, 1980, p. 223) A similar note of homelessness can be heard in Deane's critical enterprise, as can be evidenced, for instance, in his "Introduction" to Friel's 1984 *Selected Plays* where he suggests that the "ultimate perception" of Friel's protagonists "is that fidelity to the native place is a lethal form of nostalgia, an emotion that must be overcome if they are [...] to grow up." (Deane, 1984, p. 13) As a critical viewpoint, homelessness has great merit, but at the same time it is a precarious position, particularly in a postcolonial critique, as it may well seem at times to ape the otherworldly, uninvolved, aesthetic and empirical styles of criticism that it written against. Most of Deane's critical work is marked by a productive tension between a homeless critical intelligence and the demands created by political situation of 'home', and indeed the ambition of the *Anthology* was to convey this dynamic. As he put it in *Heroic Styles*, the *Anthology* he wanted to produce would participate in a thorough deconstruction of the stereotypes of Irishness, but would also articulate a new conception of being Irish: "[e]verything, including our politics and our literature, has to be rewritten –i.e. re-read. That will enable new writing, new politics, unblemished by Irishness, but securely Irish." (Deane, 1985, p. 58) While some of the more heavy-handed criticism that greeted the *Anthology* held that Deane and Field Day erred entirely by being, it might be said, too "securely Irish", a more careful reading of the Introductions reveals that Deane and most of the other editors are almost exclusively occupied with dismantling the construction of Irishness.

This focus produced a series of contradictions at the heart of the first three volumes, which might be summarily examined by thinking about the project in terms of the 'domesticating' and 'foreignising' impulses in these volumes, to draw upon and adapt the noted distinction in Translation Studies proposed by Venuti². Placing Deane's critical strategies under these lenses, it could be said that he strives to foreignise Irish identity. As is most brilliantly evident in the paradoxical pyrotechnics of his "Introduction" to the section on Joyce in volume III, Deane is amply aware of the tensions, contradictions and pitfalls that attend upon this ambition. Particularly, there is the danger of 'orientalising' Irish experience by foreignising it, not of course in terms of Orientalist stereotypes but rather by rendering all Irish experience fundamentally 'textual', which as Said has pointed out, was a defining quality of Orientalism. (Said, 2003, p. 92-94) Indeed, the underlying irony of Deane's sustained berating of Irish nationalism for its cultural bias – his sense that this was the missed opportunity in Irish history as it confirmed a turning away from the political and social that was inaugurated under the logic of colonialism – in the context of an anthology of major Irish writers is never assuaged. Moreover, as Said argues, anthologies were one of the classical means employed by Orientalists to portray the Orient. In Said's account, anthologies are examples of colonial domesticating translations; he notes that their didactical and pedagogical aims are fulfilled by a methodology of extraction and authority, whereby only a "small set of powerful examples" (Said, 2003, p. 125) are required for the Western reader to understand the Orient. Such a chrestomathy is compiled in the self-belief that it makes the Oriental culture readily available for the West, so that those who wish to know about it can find everything there, moreover in a form that is overlaid with the anthologist's Western interpretation and rationality. Deane attempts to forestall the domesticating implications of compiling extracts from representative Irish figures by framing the fragments in terms of a foreignising narrative of Ireland. The problem is that while this foreignising narrative aims to find a balance between the claims of home and the

perspective of homelessness – to maintain, in other words, the creative tension of translation – it revolves on the fulcrum of his theoretical model of the “axis of translation”, which displays a fundamental distrust of the operations of translation in Irish culture. Vigorously opposed to the notion of ‘origins’ that he sees as having been underwritten by the dominance of the idea and practice of translation in Irish culture, Deane nonetheless calls for another act of translation: a rereading and rewriting of the notion of Irishness, which would involve nothing other than a foreignising of this idea, in the sense that this operation should show the foreign nature of this concept. Looked at in this manner, the crux of this critical manoeuvre becomes evident. In re-inscribing foreignness into the concept of Irishness, Deane never outlines how he might reconstruct the ‘domestic’ through the retranslation that he proposes, or to put it another way, his “Introductions” do not read the texts in the sections he edits in a way that acknowledges domestic agency in Irish experience, and this creates a curious aura of the tomb around the first three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. This, it might be said, is an alternative logic of the “axis of translation”. While individual texts might be usefully hollowed out and reread through such a critical procedure, pursuing this strategy through several hundred years produces a fatally uneven account of Irish literature, with the result that the extracts chosen from the perspective of a rather elitist view of Irish culture form a formidable cryptic carapace, at the centre of which resides the troubled spectre of the Irish ‘domestic’³. It is precisely because these volumes are almost exclusively concerned with foreignising public expressions of Irishness that the experiences of Irish women are likewise buried and rendered invisible on their pages.

In volumes IV and V of the *Anthology* there is an entirely different engagement with the experience of the Irish domesticity. The imbrications of women and the domestic are, of course, most readily associated with the notion of ‘separate spheres’, whereby the woman was granted a devolved dominion over aspects of the family’s private life, while the man dealt with public affairs. The dismantling of this construction was the first aim of feminism. But as Mary O’Dowd notes

in volume V, while “[t]he distinction between the public world of men and the domestic world of women was endorsed by ecclesiastical and political leaders throughout the period [...] it was in reality a concept which was never rigidly observed.” (O’Dowd, 2002, p. 5) In other words, these volumes do not accept the terms of this binary, and instead look to articulate a broader conception of power that would also account for women’s lives within the domestic sphere; a shift in emphasis that is suggested by the subtitle for these volumes: ‘Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions’. What emerges in these volumes is a repositioning of the political and cultural valence of the domestic through a radical rethinking, and thinking together, of the marginal and the traditional. The editors of volumes IV and V, in a classically subaltern manner, exploit and revalue the resources of what has been regarded as the marginal, and in the process give voice to 1,500 years of Irish domestic experience, in a way that not only deconstructs the patriarchal binary of separate spheres, but also puts under question, and so opens a dialogue with, the intellectual matrix that created volumes I-III. Whereas the first three volumes ultimately did not interrogate the construction of ‘private’ Irish identities from the perspective of the ‘public’ expressions of Irishness, volumes IV and V constantly put under question the construction of ‘public’ forms of Irishness through its collection of what would be considered in canonical terms marginal texts: letters; journals; pamphlets; journalism; legal, political, medical and religious documents; and oral ‘texts’. Moreover, these volumes further disrupt the notion of canon formation by being organised in a thematic rather than a chronological manner (however a chronological order is to be found within the sections). The majority of these themes would be considered canonical marginal, such as, the experiences of women in religious life; sexuality; oral traditions; philanthropy; and education, to name but a few. The second instalment is also even more of a collective effort than the first, and it does not have an identifiable general editor; indeed, the ‘Preface’ to these volumes is, unlike Deane’s ‘General Introduction’, unsigned. It is also given in English and Irish, an indication of the alternative and more relaxed relationship with the

politics of translation that characterises these volumes, which are more 'at home' between the two languages.

When Deane first proposed an extra volume to compensate for the lack of women and interest in the field of gender that was expressed in the first instalment, this offer was, as noted above, derided by some critics as merely reinforcing women's supplementary role. Nonetheless, the editors of volumes IV and V have described the aim of these volumes precisely in terms of "supplementing and interrogating the 1991 *Field Day Anthology*". ("Preface", p. xxxiii) In other words, they lean towards a more Derridean understanding of the notion of supplementarity, whereby a deconstruction of the interaction of the supplement with that which is considered to be sufficient onto itself unveils that the marginal makes possible and constitutes the defining features of the plenitude. (Derrida, 1997, p. 141-164) In just such a manner, volumes IV and V supplement the first instalment by rethinking the notion of the domestic and re-inscribing a radically altered notion of the domestic into the history of Irishness that is articulated in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. As such they not only offer an enabling postcolonial version of the Irish domestic, but also interrogate and put into performance the whole *Anthology* project.

Notes

1. This should properly be under doubled quotation marks as Clifford is here turning back on Said his own notion of "a generalized condition of homelessness", which he wrote about in 'Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims' (*Social Text*, 1, 1979, pp. 7-58).
2. A short summary of how Venuti views these two modes of translating can be gleaned from this gloss on Schleiermacher's strictures on translating. "Schleiermacher allowed the translator to choose between a domesticating method, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home, and a foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, to send the reader abroad" (Venuti, 1995, p. 20).

3. As Edna Longley put it, it is problematic to “canonize and deconstruct in the same gesture, to place a sign of erasure over four thousand pages” (qtd. In Callaghan, 1994, p. 41).

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