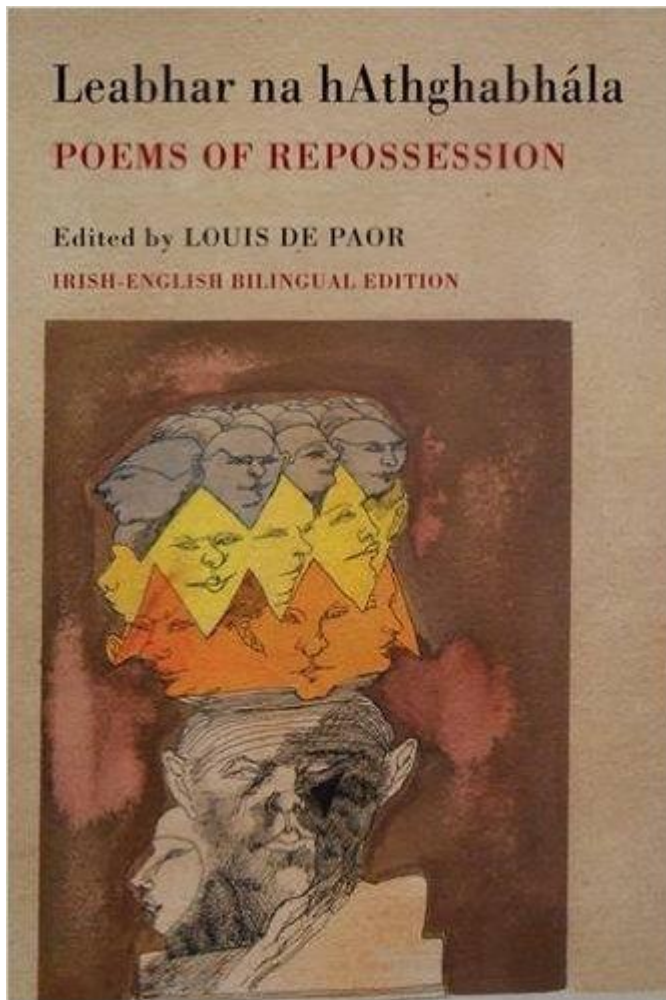


MONTHLY REVIEW

June 2016

POEMS OF REPOSSESSION

20th - century poetry in Irish



This review has become a long essay, so I am separating it into four headed sections:

IRISH AND ENGLISH

TRANSLATIONS

POETS

CONCLUSIONS

IRISH AND ENGLISH

The title of this anthology takes up from another definitive bilingual anthology by Seán Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella, *AN DUANAIRE 1600-1900, Poems of the Dispossessed* (1981), and echoes the title of Ó Tuama's *Repossessions, Selected Essays on the Irish Literary Heritage* (1995).

The editor, Louis de Paor, writes in his Introduction:

More than three decades after Seán Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella introduced a new readership to poetry in Irish from the 17th to the 19th century in their ground-breaking *An Duanaire: Poems of the Dispossessed 1600-1900*, an 'act of repossession' is still required for Irish poetry produced between the cultural revival of the Celtic Twilight and the economic insanity of the Celtic Tiger that brought the second millennium to a close.

The book is dedicated (in Irish) to 'my father and mother and in memory of Seán Ó Tuama'. Ó Tuama was that rare phenomenon, a university professor who was also a true poet, and several 20th century poets in Irish were taught by him. De Paor does not make it clear that the phrase 'an act of repossession' is a direct quote from Ó Tuama, and peculiarly (a Freudian slip?), in his Bibliography he mis-titles Ó Tuama's *Repossessions, Selected Essays on the Irish Literary Heritage* (1995) by leaving the word *Repossessions* out of it.

Disconcertingly, the title of this book is different in Irish from in English. It is *Leabhar na hAthghabhála* – meaning *Book of Repossessions*. *Poems of Repossession* would be *Dánta na hAthghabhála*.

What does this anthology have to do to live up to its 'act of repossession'? What do I personally expect from it? What questions do I start with?

Here are some:

1. How does this anthology compare with the large anthology, in Irish only, *Fearann Pinn – Filíocht 1900 – 1999 (Land of the Pen – Poetry 1900-1999)*, edited by Gréagóir Ó Dúill?

2. How does it compare with the anthology of 20th century poems in Scottish Gaelic, *An Tuil – Anthology of 20th century Scottish Gaelic Verse*, edited by Ronald Black?
3. How do these 20th century poems in Irish Gaelic compare with 20th century poems by Irish writers in English?
4. Are the poets I already know I like fairly represented?
5. Is poetry in Irish Gaelic deteriorating, like so much 20th century poetry in English, into ‘chopped prose’?
6. Who are the ‘real’ poets in this book, and who among them shall I read more of?
7. How do the translations into English stand up?
8. Where do I place myself and other Irish poets who write in English?

This last question may seem absurd. I have never written poems in Irish, nor would I be capable of doing so. I don’t belong in this anthology. No sour grapes then! But I identify myself more as Irish than as English (although I was born in England). I write poems in English, and if I call myself a poet I say I am ‘a poet in English’, or simply ‘an English poet’. The Irish Nobel prize winners of the 20th century, Yeats and Heaney, had (like me) Irish nationality, but I would also call them ‘poets in English’, or even ‘English poets.’ Yes, they may have cashed in, as it were, respectively on the 1916 Rising and the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’, and the prominence of these public events in their poems no doubt gave them a lift to the Nobel prize. Those Irish people (most of us) who live almost entirely in English can take pleasure in being from a small country with a big literature – including prose writers like Joyce and Beckett. But although no doubt Yeats and Heaney would not have accepted being called ‘English poets’, I am determined to stick to my principle. They are English poets. The poets in this anthology are Irish poets.

I must confess that when I glance at the Contents I can see a few names of poets whose poems I personally prefer to those of Yeats or Heaney. Meaning that, although I am not a native speaker of Irish, and I cannot read in it for long without going to a dictionary, some of their poems *move* me more. Sorley MacLean’s poems in Scottish Gaelic also *move* me, with the ‘frisson’ of the sudden apprehension of truth.

Would I call Sorley Maclean a Scottish poet? He was of course a Scot (a British Scot by nationality, which he did not like much, being a nationalist). But in his writing he referred to himself as a Gael. He was a Gaelic poet. As are the poets in this anthology, although since Irish

Gaelic is commonly called Irish, then they are genuine Irish poets. It goes without saying that no 20th century poet writing in Irish or Scottish Gaelic has been awarded a Nobel prize. But they were and are writing in a tradition (see MacLean's key essay on *Realism in Gaelic Poetry*) where the poet and his or her readers (historically there have been proportionately more woman poets in Gaelic than in English) write and experience poems of great intensity. Given the huge self-consciousness of the 20th century, which began intellectually with self-examination in the lights of Marxism and psychoanalysis, and ended in the narcissism we are coming to know via the social media in the 21st century and which leads to totally self-indulgent pseudo-poems, it will be interesting to see how many poems in this anthology stay true to that tradition of realism and intensity.

TRANSLATIONS

One immediate difference between *Poems of Repossession* and *Poems of the Dispossessed* is that the earlier book is bilingual not only in providing English translations of poems in Irish, but its Introduction and Notes are also bilingual. In *Poems of Repossession* these are in English only, which I see as abandoning the fort. Perhaps this is because the book has an English publisher, Bloodaxe Books (in Northumberland) 'in Association with' Cló Iar Connacht in Galway. They have certainly done it proud. Although the cover illustration picture (see above) is a pastiche of Irish art, the quality of the book's design, print, and paper is first rate. The anthology includes 25 Irish poets, around 165 poems, and 29 translators, in 543 pages. There is a slight overlap between translators and poets, but the poets are not translating their own poems.

In his Introduction, De Paor (who appears also as a poet and a translator) states:

The translators were encouraged to remain as close to the Irish as possible so that a diligent reader could, if s/he wished, use the English as a temporary support before crossing over to the Irish. Different approaches, however, have also been adopted where a more literal translation might occlude rather than clarify the tone and temper of the original poems in Irish...

And

In some instances, the English versions have become part of my understanding of the poems, an additional vantage point that allows them to reveal themselves in new and interesting ways...

I imagine translators are as difficult to herd as cats, but remaining on the one hand ‘as close to the Irish as possible’ and on the other hand providing ‘different approaches’ and ‘English versions’ which lead the poems ‘to reveal themselves in new and interesting ways’ seem to me inconsistent. The original *Poems of the Dispossessed* was edited by Ó Tuama, ‘with translations into English verse by Thomas Kinsella’. As in the current anthology, the translations were on facing pages to the originals. Kinsella stayed close to the Irish, but not only in translating the sense of the poems. His rhythms and assonance to an extent reflect the originals. His work is consistent and clear – like his own poems (in English). However, I agree with Sorley MacLean’s view that ‘Gaelic poetry that is published with English translations cannot be assessed on its translation alone even by the most honest and perceptive of critics who do not know Gaelic.’

MacLean’s *Collected Poems*, 1989, were published with the Gaelic on the left and the English translations on the ‘privileged’ right facing page where the eye tends to go first. In the more complete *Collected Poems*, 2011, the editors (Christopher Whyte and Emma Dymock) have corrected this, putting the Gaelic on the right. In Paddy Bushe’s translations of MacLean’s poems into Irish Gaelic, the Irish is ‘privileged’ on the right, but the Irish reader will be drawn back to the original on the left since he or she will be able to read much of it anyway. These are not quibbling matters. In *Poems of Repossession* English is privileged in three ways: by being on the right hand pages, by the translations being openly ‘versions’ with the implication of being poems in their own right, and by the absence of Irish from the Introduction and Notes.

Furthermore a variety of translators translates poems by a variety of writers. So we have X’s poems translated by Y and Z, and Z’s by X and Y, and so on. The voice of the poet is translated into several voices.

Surely this raises a whole series of moral dilemmas for the poets (and their executors in cases where the poet is dead). Every single one of these poets is or was fluent and literate in English, and some of them worked in English at a high level, as university professors, scientists, civil servants, teachers, journalists... Why do they not translate their own poems? Few if any of them, to my knowledge, has done so outside this anthology, and none of them has in it. Some have consented to previous translations – for example, both Tomas O Riordáin and Máire mac an tSaoi allowed Valentin Iremonger to translate poems of theirs, and some of his translations are used in

this anthology. Other poets have been translated here and there. The only one I know of who has refused, notoriously, to allow her poems to be translated on principle, is Bidy Jenkinson:

It is a small rude gesture to those who think that everything can be harvested and stored without loss in an English-speaking Ireland. If I were a cornrake I would feel no objection to have my skin cured, my tarsi injected with formalin so that I could fill a museum shelf in a world that saw no need of my kind.

But a few of her poems have slipped through (one in a previous anthology) and several have been translated, atrociously, into French. In this anthology she has ‘given her consent to prose translations’. There are precedents for this, for example the Loeb Classics with prose translations of Latin and Greek poets, and various Penguin anthologies of verse in other languages than English. In these cases, the prose can be used as a crib by people who have partial knowledge of the original language. And the prose crib is at the bottom of the page. I have always found this useful. And it is a way through for the scrupulously exact Bidy Jenkinson. The prose translations are not pretending to be new poems in English, to be ‘harvested and stored without loss.’

But when you translate a poem from one language into a pseudo-poem in another language which you place on a facing page, so that a reader can go through the whole anthology simply reading the facing (privileged, right hand) pages, there *is* a loss – of the original poem.

To me the moral dilemmas for the living poets are:

1. They are handing their poems over to be loosely translated and changed into ‘versions’ which often misrepresent the original.
2. They seem to be acknowledging that a pseudo-poem (only the occasional miraculously inspired translation is not a pseudo-poem) is equivalent to the original, or in effect that an inspired event (the poem) can be replaced by a calculated pseudo-poem. (But if the original is uninspired and calculated, perhaps this replacement does not matter.)
3. Most of them write their poems because they feel compelled to or inspired to – and certainly not for the sake of glory, given the potential readership in Irish of under a million (meaning in practice only those few thousand who read poetry). But the English translations have a potential readership of hundreds of millions (or hundreds of thousands who read poetry). There may be some glory, after all, in being a compatriot of those Nobel prize winners. And at the limit, the poems may earn a bit of money! There are royalties. The poem is read as a ‘version’, but what the hell?

I know there is another side to this. I have translated some poems by Wilhelm Lehmann from German into English. But German and English are close-cousins: words and sentence structures often overlap. And I translated a few poems by my friend Narcis Comadira from Catalan, as part of a translation of a lecture he gave. But I would not call my translations poems, and we were both at the lecture to discuss any differences people noticed. And if someone wanted to translate some of my own poems, I would require the translations to be a prose crib. Or if I knew the ‘target language’ reasonably well, I would have a go at translating the poems myself – into prose cribs. This is where I don’t understand the (living) poets in this anthology. They all know English! Yet they are handing over their poems to be translated into English ‘versions’ by others. Don’t they respect their own poems?

Sorley MacLean translated his own Gaelic poems into English verse of a sort in his *Collected Poems*, 1989. But I say ‘verse of a sort’. They make no attempt to repeat the rhythms of the originals, they stick closely to the original sense. They are like prose cribs, although set out like verse, matching line for line as is useful in a crib. He never pretended these English translations were poems (in fact he said they were not). And at least he made them himself. He protected the original meaning, he was not going to let anyone else muck around with it. I wish the living among these Irish poets had either followed MacLean’s model and translated their own poems, or followed Bidy Jenkinson’s model and permitted a prose crib only.

But in this book we also have Bidy Jenkinson translating poems by other poets into something that looks like verse. This worries me. She, of all people, is playing the game.

I may have been distracted into too long a discussion of translation. But this, along with an overview of the history of poetry in Irish in the 20th century, is a major theme of De Paor’s Introduction. The Introduction has nothing whatsoever to say about the characteristics of poetry in Irish: its metrics, its structures. An English speaking reader might enjoy a summary of this, and even a guide to pronunciation. He or she may glance at the left hand page and look for rhymes, for example (in case the poet is old-fashioned enough to use them), and see none. But Irish poems do not rhyme. The equivalent of rhyme is assonance. When I open the book at random I find a quatrain by **Eoghan Ó Tuairisc** (1919 – 1982):

Ná tóg orm, a Chríost,
Go ndearnas an ghadaíocht

Is foirm do cheatal ghlinn
A dhealbhú dom aisling.

Here ‘Chríost’ and ‘ghadaíocht’, ghlinn’ and ‘aisling’ form assonating couplets.

The translation is:

Forgive me, Christ,
That I committed theft
Adapting the structure of your clear chants
For my apparition.

Which is a bit of a damp squib. An ‘aisling’ (some readers will already have seen the word in English texts) is not only an apparition, she is a dream-woman, or a woman in a vision. The emotional point of the line – that the writer is using Christian verse forms to a pagan end – is blotted out by the thin word ‘apparition.’

The quatrain in English not only settles for a feeble equivalence to a key word, it reads as a sentence of prose – but not honestly, since it *looks* like a poem. The original quatrain consists of two assonating couplets and all four lines (taking into account the ‘schwa’ vowels that give ‘orm’ and ‘foirm’ two syllables) are in seven syllables, a very ancient metre in Irish, adding emphasis to the stealing of form (not structure) from clear chants. Oh well, in Robert Frost’s famous definition, ‘Poetry is what gets lost in translation’.

POETS

In going through *Poems of Repossession* I shall only discuss those poets to whose poems I find I respond. If I don’t mention a poet, this does not mean active dislike. For example, I probably *should* discuss Nuala ní Dhomhnaill who forms a triad, along with Máire Mhac an tSaoi and Biddy Jenkinson, of well-known 20th century woman poets in Irish, but I find it hard to come to terms with her poems which seem to surge passionately through life but are to my mind amorphous and hard to grasp compared to the clear utterances of the other two. So I can’t discuss them.

The anthology is in chronological order. But not in the usual way:

To give a sense of how the dialogue between different authors and their work developed over the course of the century, the poets appear in sequence according to the year in which their debut collections were published rather than the order of their birth

I am not sure how a dialogue can develop between authors and their work, but perhaps a dialogue is being imagined between any two authors about their work. (The words ‘dialogue’ and ‘between’ require a two-way discussion, not a discussion ‘among’.) I doubt if, people being mortal, such two-way discussions could ‘develop over the course of a century’. I have to give up on this reason for what to me is a rather confusing sequence where, for example, a poet born in 1934 comes five authors after one born in 1956.

De Paor writes more lucidly in his introductions to the poets, which are careful and scholarly. They are in English only. These are Irish poems in an English package.

The first poet in this anthology is **Pádraig Ó hÉigearthaigh** (1871-1836) who also appears early in Ó Dúill’s anthology, an emigrant who worked in a cotton mill in Massachusetts and in 1905 wrote a moving elegy (almost a ‘keen’), ‘Ochón! A Dhonncha’ / ‘My Sorrow, Donncha’, on the death by drowning of his young son. The poem is a reminder of how many of the great poems in Irish are one-offs. Such one-off poems exist in other languages but perhaps they are more often ignored. In this case the translation is an old one, by Thomas Kinsella, who sets a standard for clear and simple verse translations hewing closely to the original.

Liam S Gógan (1891-1979) was a museum-keeper and lexicographer in Dublin (he worked on Dinneen’s Irish dictionary) who has been considered over-literary, since he made no attempt to imitate the spoken Irish of the Gaeltachts (Irish-speaking areas, mainly on the Atlantic coast of Ireland) and drew on older literary sources. The translations of Gógan’s poems, by David Wheatley, convey this arty flavour, with regular metre and sporadic rhymes – and a disturbing misprint where floodwater is described as ‘laying bare the beauty / of the surrounding plane.’ (Gógan’s word in Irish is ‘machaire’ which does mean ‘plain’.) The poem is about ‘the ship of state’ in the form of a barge being listlessly dragged by an old horse along a stagnant canal. The language is intricate and I dare say a challenge, but the poem ends with three curious lines:

and the only sound you hear
is the boat shuffling

and the horse ambling along.

These translate only two lines in Irish:

is ní clos ach tuairt an chapail
is falaireacht an bháid.

If a reader like me is using the translation as a crib, so as to avoid having to look up unusual words in a dictionary or unusual sentences in a grammar, it is a nuisance to have two lines translated by three. And the translation inverts the order of boat and horse. The original (where by the way the first letter in each line is in upper case) means: ‘and nothing is heard but the thump of the horse and the ambling of the boat.’ Can boats amble? I think so, if they don’t pursue a straight line. And the ambling might even make a sound of swishing water. ‘Falaireacht’ (ambling) is a justifiable risk in the original. But in the English version (I’ll stop calling it a translation) we have the horse, not the boat, ambling. And the boat is ‘shuffling’ – with a sound! But the word Gógan uses is not an equivalent of ‘shuffling’. ‘Tuairt’ means a thump, a thud, or even a crashing sound. The translation would make sense and respect the economy of the original as:

No sound but the thud of the horse
And the ambling of the boat.

So why mess about with it? Gógan, whose work I had not known, seems nothing if not precise. I shall have to work my way through Gógan with the dictionary.

There are 12 poems, including one very long one, by **Máirtín Ó Direáin** (1910-1988). In contrast to Gógan, he made a point of drawing his language from the Gaeltacht where he was born and grew up – on the largest of the Aran Islands. There is a tension between his Aran life and his Dublin life as a civil servant, but even when his poems become intellectual they are impassioned. For example, in a poem about Berkeley’s idea that the world was a dream in the mind of God, Swift refuses to let Berkeley over his doorstep, and Dr Johnson kicks a stone to ‘refute’ the idea – but Ó Direáin is finding some consolation in it. Ó Direáin could feel trapped in either Dublin or Aran, but in many of his poems he breaks loose in a celebration of life itself – e.g. the long poem ‘Ó Morna’ about a womanising tyrant who spreads havoc, a gargantuan figure, originally out of Irish myths of the demi-god Goll Mac Morna.

In the poem, Ó Morna ‘never mastered the worm on his thigh.’ In the original: ‘Ach an chruimh ina chom níor chloígh’.

You can *see* the alliteration of the initial aspirated ‘c’. The poem throbs with alliteration, assonance, and strong stresses for 25 stanzas of 6 lines each, and is a tour de force, with subtle as well as dramatic shifts in emotion. And you can *see* the assonance in the third line of:

Ná le fíor na croise á ghearradh
Ar bhaithis chaillí mar theist an fhir
A chuaigh in uaigh sa gcill sinn.

In the translation, by De Paor and Celia de Fréite, where the rollicking length of the poem perhaps makes quibbles about local meaning less vital:

Or the sign of the cross the crone makes
On her forehead in testament to the man
Interred in that graveyard.

Nevertheless, ‘interred in that graveyard’ misses the poignant music and the action of ‘A chuaigh in uaigh sa gcill sinn’ – literally ‘Who went to the grave in that churchyard’.

Ó Direáin is often poignant, and as in all true poems, sound and sense become one. Beside him, many supposedly great 20th century poets in English (I’m thinking of T S Eliot) are dried up and wishy washy. But – see that poem on Berkeley – Ó Direáin was not an unthinking vitalist. He *thought* in his poems as well as felt.

Irish is a more economical language than English, perhaps because its grammar allows compression. And perhaps this is why the English ‘versions’ in this book often require more lines – although for crib purposes I think a better procedure would be to extend the lines.

Here is the start of one of O Direáin’s typically concise and moving poems. I am going to take the liberty of setting out the translation (by Peter Sirr) in lines that match those of the poem. Where the re-organised translation takes two lines to translate one line, I am going to insert a slant – / – to indicate this.

Mí an Mheithimh

Ní tusa domsa mí an tséin
Ach mí an léin is an duifin,
Ní súilíní gréine a thugair
Ach súilíní cuihmne a fhillean

Amhail bhainfeá an glas
De chomhad an chroí
Nó an leac de nead na gcuimhní...

June

You're not for me / the month of good omen
but the month of affliction, / the month of gloom.
you don't bring me / beads of sunlight,
but instead recollection's froth
as if you picked the lock
that secured the heart's file
or shifted the slab / from the lair of memories...

Seven lines instead of eleven!

Seán Ó Ríordáin (1916 - 1977) lived all his life close to death. He had almost died of tuberculosis as a child and spent many years in and out of hospitals. He faced himself as he was, as poets do. He wrote about painful things, for example the burial of his mother, without sentimentality. He wrote a remarkable poem about a man called Turnbull who sees the pain in the eyes of an old horse and whose eyes *are* the horse's.

D'fhéachas ar Turnbull is d'fhéachas air fá dhó
Is do chonac ar a leacain
Na súile rómhóra bhi balbh le brón –
Súile an chapail.

Again, the English reader can *see* the assonances, within and at the end of the lines of this formal quatrain. And the translation (again by David Wheatley) makes a good job of it:

I looked at Turnbull and saw set under his brow
As I looked him up and down twice
The two, too-big eyes speechless with sorrow:
The horse's eyes.

There is much pain in Ó Ríordáin's poems, but it can be mingled with affection and humour, as in a remarkable poem, too long to quote here, and impossible to take a sample from, it is so intricate: 'Siollobadh' / 'Syllabbling' (neatly translated by Wheatley). It describes the 'syllabbling' of a ward nurse's movements, of the pulses she takes and notes down, and of the chimes for the Angelus prayers – all this in 'the monastery of flesh.'

Ó Ríordáin is fortunate with his translators, perhaps because his writing is so clear, or because he has attracted real poets in English, for example Valentin Iremonger (1918 - 1991). Here is Ó Ríordáin's poem 'Reo', then its translation in this anthology by another poet, Mary Ó'Donoghue (b.1975), and finally Iremonger's translation. Both poets manage to stick fairly closely to the original while producing something like poems that can stand on their own. (As I have said above, this is a rare situation). But curiously while 'Reo' means simply 'frost', O'Donoghue turns it into 'Ice' and Iremonger (taking more licence) into 'Frozen'

Reo

Maidin sheaca gabhas amach
Is bhí seal póca romham ar sceach,
Rugas air le cur im phóca
Ach sciorr sé uaim mar bhí sé reoite :
Ní héadach beo a léim óm ghlaic
Ach rud fuair bás aréir ar sceach:
Is siúd ag taighde mé fé m'intinn
Go bhfhuaireas macasamhail an ní seo –
 Lá dár phógas bean dem mhuintir
 Is í ina cónra reoite, sínte.

Ice

As I went out one frosty morning.
I saw a handkerchief on a thornbush.
I grabbed it to stuff it in my pocket.
But it slipped, frozen, from my grip.
No living cloth leaped from my fist
But something that died last night on that bush.
And I went prodding my mind
Until I found the very image:
 The day I kissed a relation,
 Stretched, frozen, in her coffin.

Frozen

On a frosty morning I went out
And a handkerchief faced me on a bush.
I reached to put it in my pocket
But it slid from me for it was frozen.
No living cloth jumped from my grasp

But a thing that died last night on a bush
And I went searching in my mind
Till I found the occasion's equivalent –
The day I kissed a woman of my kindred
And she in the coffin, frozen, stretched.

Which translation does the reader prefer? I think both are good, but I find I prefer Iremonger's, and it is also slightly closer to the original, e.g. in lines 3 and 4 which are word by word equivalents as well as being true to the simplicity of the original.

Máire Mhac an tSaoi (b.1922) has had a very public life as the daughter of a 1916 rebel and wife of a well-known diplomat, and as a diplomat herself as well as a scholar and a writer of prose and poems. Although she was born in Dublin and her father was from Belfast, she has stated, 'I was formed by the Munster Gaeltacht'. She spent much of her childhood there. She is still going strong at the age of 94.

Her poems are hard and clear but with a depth of feeling. She faces herself. As she writes in a poem to her father, Seán MacEntee:

Comhaos mé féin is an stat,
Is níor chun do thola do cheachtar.

I am the same age as the state
And neither turned out as you wished...

Her father was a political rebel but a religious Catholic, and she in turn was a rebel against him – and the State. It was not the usual thing in mid-20th century Ireland to have a passionate and difficult love affair with a university professor, about which she wrote brutally honest poems, and then to marry (after a delay) a famous diplomat (Conor Cruise O'Brien) who had left his wife to live with her. She clearly knew how to hold her own with powerful men. But her manner was more that of an intellectual than a femme fatale. She is one of the few poets I know of who can write about politics – because in her case it is personal. In facing herself she lived her own conflicts, and the conflicts of others. Here is a typically honest and for me oddly moving poem:

Gan réiteach

Ní heolach dom cad é, eagla an bháis,
Is nuair a labhair do chuala na trompaí
Is chonac an pobal fiáin is an fhuil sa tsraid,
Is do bhí lasair thóirse agus gaoith
Fé na bratacha I gcaint an Fhrancaigh mhná.

Is do scanraíos, a dheoranta is a bhí,
Gur deacair liom scarúint le teas ón ngréin ;
'Mo chreach !' adúrt, 'is fada ins an chill
Don gcolainn is is uaigneach sa chré' –
Ach d'iompaigh sí a súile mora orm,
Lán de mhíthuisicint uaibhrigh, is níor ghéill.

Intractable

'Fear of death, what's that?'
And at the words I heard the trumpets sound,
Saw frenzied crowds, blood on the streets.
A torch flamed and the wind shook out the flags
In the Frenchwoman's speech.

I startled. Alien to me
To turn from the sun's warmth;
'Alas!' I said, 'The body spends a long time in the grave
And it is lonesome there' –
She looked at me, eyes blind with arrogance
And didn't yield.

This poem is translated by Bidy Jenkinson who is typically concise, but here she (the author of a poem called 'Eve in her Garden') cannot, perhaps, resist doing a bit too much weeding. My own rule in writing is 'Spell everything out!' With everything spelled out, the last four lines are:

'Alas!' I said, 'It's long in the grave
For the body and it's lonely in the clay' –
She turned her great big eyes on me
Full of arrogant misunderstanding, and didn't yield.

But on the whole, Bidy Jenkinson's conciseness fits Máire Mhac an tSaoi's. Four out of the fifteen of Máire Mhac an tSaoi's poems in this book are translated by Jenkinson. I wish there

were more. One of them in particular, where Jenkinson adds her own twist, but too long to quote properly here, is ‘Cad is bean?’ – ‘What is woman?’ which ends:

Tá gann, tá cúng, tá suarach,
Gan sásamh n ndán di
Ach an déirc is an tsíoraithis –
Dar marthain! Is gránna.

Mean, tight and narrow. She
Is never easy, relentlessly
Demanding, abusive,
And utterly reprehensible.

In view of the De Paor’s part dedication of this book to the memory of **Seán Ó Tuama** (1926 – 2006), it is surprising that there are only 4 poems by him. To my mind he deserves 15 or 20. De Paor states:

The preoccupation with origins, with continuity between past and present that is both cultural and familial, and the attempt to find redemptive human meaning in a world where religious belief no longer provides consolation in the presence of death is central to Ó Tuama’s most achieved work.

I wonder what the *less* ‘achieved’ work is. Perhaps, in De Paor’s eyes, some of Ó Tuama’s deeply penetrating love poems, since none of them is included here. Ó Tuama wrote the definitive studies in both Irish and English on Irish poetry and prose from the Middle Ages onwards. In *An Grá in Amhráin na Daoine / Love in the Songs of the People* and in *Repossessions* he traces the input from the courtly love traditions of France and of Norman England to Irish poetry, and the roots of that poetry in its pagan and early Christian Gaelic past. Several of the poets in this anthology, including De Paor, studied under Ó Tuama. How odd that this academic writer on love is not allowed his own love poems here. Instead there are four beautiful poems which are in effect elegies: ‘On the drowning of a young man’; on the death of the famous hurley player Christy Ring; ‘in memoriam’ of four writers; and on the house in Cork where he grew up and where his parents lived out their lives.

In Ó Dúill’s anthology there is a love poem by Ó Tuama, *Beannacht Abhaile* meaning *Safe Home*, which surely would fit in this anthology. In the 1960s when Ó Tuama was attending a seminar at Harvard a woman asked him what his ‘field’ was. Ó Tuama replied: ‘My field? I suppose my field is love.’ As Robert Welch, who reports this in his introduction to Ó Tuama’s

Rogha Dánta / Selected Poems (1997), goes on to say that as well as having written the definitive books on love poems in Irish ‘Ó Tuama is himself a very serious love poet’, and that love ‘is an obsession’ for him. One of his poems is ‘Cluiche’, which means ‘Game’, but Ó Tuama gave the title in English as ‘Love-Game’. As Welch inimitably puts it, ‘Cluiche is a little piece of Catullan ferocity, as well as a bleak modernist evocation of erotic agony and violence.’

Cluiche

Ba cluiche ciúin gan sceana é:
do shoilsigh sí an fásach ina timpeall féinig
agus ghéillis;
nuair a shéid a píobairí
céad fáilte romhat in aerfort fairsing oíche sheaca d’atais;
ach ina dhiaidh sin d’ordaigh sí tú chrapadh,
is dhein a buitléir tú tharraing trí pháobán chunga múnlaigh
féach an bhfáiscfí rian gach solais as do shúile.

Love-Game

It was a quiet game with no knives:
she lighted up the desert all about her
and you submitted;
on a night of frost her pipers blew
a hundred welcomes in a spacious airport,
and you swelled up in tune;
but afterwards there came the shrinking:
her butler dragged you through narrow sewage pipes
and squeezed the vestiges of light from both your eyes.

The under-representation of Ó Tuama’s poems in this anthology partly dedicated to him is baffling.

Tomás Mac Síomóin (b. 1938) is a biologist with whom as a neuropsychologist I can feel a natural affinity. And I admire his devastating study of how post-colonial Ireland has betrayed the Irish language, *The Broken Harp* (2014). But until now I have missed his poetry. There are 3 poems here. ‘Ceol na dtéad’ / ‘Music of the Strings’ is a strikingly imaginative poem about Orpheus which tails off in a string of dots.... into nothing. But that is the point. There is a 2 page long extract from ‘Brúdlann Thomáis’ / ‘Thomas’s Bestiary’ which plays dazzlingly with words and typography, but I lose track in it in both languages. And there is ‘Aibiú’ / ‘Maturing’ in which

the island of Little Aran is seen in starkly opposing lights, positive and negative, but each crystal clear. I see there are 11 poems by Mac Síomóin in Ó Dúill's anthology, so that is where I have to go to have a proper look. And when I do I find the same precision. One poem, 'Scáthanaíocht' – a word not in my dictionary (Ó Dónaill's) but I assume it is 'Mirroring' – shows an intricate pattern of assonance along with concise description. These are cerebral poems, but intense with feeling. And here is an exquisite short poem (not in this anthology, but in Ó Dúill's) which I'll risk translating into prose but line by line:

Éan Maidne

An dúil go huile
i gcorp éin
cruinnithe

Mianach an éin
i ngach
gléshiolla.

Morning Bird

All the desire
in the body of a bird
drawn together

The essence of the bird
in each
bright note.

But this is not as simple as it seems. The word 'dúil' has two dictionary meanings: 'desire' and 'element'. And 'mianach' means 'ore', and by extension 'essence'. And the noun 'siolla' in the compound 'gléshiolla' means 'syllable' in a word, and 'note' in music. So the poem has an underlying meaning of: 'All element / in the body of a bird / concentrated. // The ore of the bird / in each/ bright syllable.' At least in my reading, the first layer of meaning emphasises the spiritual / emotional absorption of the bird in its song, and the second layer its physical / material absorption.

I have run this by a friend who writes in Irish, Torlach mac Con Mídhe, and he suggests that the first layer is 'the living meaning or essence all concentrated in the body of a bird; the character of the bird in each bright note', and the second layer is that of the desire. We agree there are two layers, only I put the desire first and he puts the essence first.

There is a lot packed into the song of this particular bird...

Again I prefer Ó Dúill's judgement to De Paor's. Mac Síomóin is seriously under-represented in this anthology.

So is **Caitlín Maude** (1941 – 1982). She was a teacher, actress, and traditional *sean-nós* singer who died young. I don't know her work but the two poems here are striking. The first is a longish modernistic poem, 'Mo dháimh' / 'My kin' with images jerking all over the place in irregular lines and rhythms. There is a sizzling line by line translation of it by Bidy Jenkinson who also translates the second poem, 'Amhrán grá Vietnam' / 'Vietnam love song', which begins:

Dúirt siad go raibh muid gan náir
ag ceiliúr ár ngrá
agus an scrios seo inár timpeall

an seabhac ag guairdeall san aer
ag feitheamh le boladh an bháis

They said we had no shame
parading our love
in the midst of this desolation

a hawk hovering
waiting for the smell of death

This is the real thing. Again, I'll have to go to Ó Dúill who I see includes 5 of her poems.

Michael Davitt (1950 – 2005), while at University College Cork founded the poetry magazine *Innti*, in 1970, in which many young Irish poets, with the encouragement of Seán Ó Tuama, first published their poems. There are 14 of his poems here. They are mostly about people and places and include some love poems. Here especially, translators make a difference. Paul Muldoon destroys 'Chugat' / 'Towards you' by being clever-clever and translating 'uaireanta meallain an fharraige mé' as 'sometimes the sea puts one over on me.' Admittedly the word 'meallan' presents a problem for the translator, since it has two strands of meaning: 'entices' or 'charms', and 'deceives'. But then that is the point of the line. Prose is clearer when each word has just one meaning. In poems ambiguity adds another layer of meaning. Davitt is thinking of both meanings. And he is not such an eedjit that the sea can 'put one over' on him.

‘An dúil’ / ‘Desire’ is somewhat better translated by Brendan Kennelly, although in the stanzas that end the poem, ‘seasheen’ would be better as ‘sea sheen’, or better still as what the line ‘sua Chuan an Fhir Mhóir’ says in Irish, literally ‘complexion of Great Man’s Bay’. Great Man’s Bay is a harbour near Carraroe, in Connemara. The line creates a problem in translation, but it is essential to the many-layered meaning which occurs in this poem, as in many others by Davitt. It conveys the thought that the woman’s complexion, flushed by the sea climate where she lives (and she has just got out of bed: the beginning of the poem refers to the new day), is also like the flush due to having been in the embrace (‘cuan’ is a harbour or a haven) of a big man (‘mór’ means either great or big). Perhaps she has been dreaming of a big man in bed – or perhaps of Davitt? The line opens realms of possible meaning. But (as so often in this book), meaning is thrown away so that a translator can show off with a word like ‘seasheen’. Anyway:

Is gear go mbeidh do corp ina sheasamh arís,
sua Chuan an Fhir Mhóir
ar do chraiceann binn.

Braithim tú ag socrú braillín
do sheanleapan iarainn isteach fén dtocht
ar thaobh amháin.

Inniú, a dhúil, thar aon ní, níl tú ar fail –
ná raibh éinne le dúiseacht ar maidin agat
ach mo scáil.

You’ll be out and about soon,
Connemara seasheen
on your sweet skin.

I see you tucking a sheet in
under the mattress
of the old iron bed.

My desire, more than anything, you’re not here now:
may no one wake at your side tomorrow
but my shadow.

Like his exact contemporary and fellow Cork man Davitt, **Liam Ó Muirthile (b.1950)** writes about people and love. Here, with the translation by Maurice Riordan, is the ending of

Codladh na hoíche / Night's sleep when he has been unable to sleep and rather than keep his woman awake he moves to another room:

Ach éirídh me as.
Fágfaidh mé agat do chearta suain féin
is cuimhneoidh mé I seomra eile
ar an marc a d'fhág sreang dheilneach I ngan fios
ar ghlúin do choise deise
is tú ag dul thar chlaí cois Laoi fadó,
ach ní thiocfaidh mé idir tú
agus codladh na hoíche níos mó.

Taistealóidh mé arís
críocha uachtair agus íochtair do choirp
ach an uair seo faoi mar a bheinn
ag leanúint mapa turasóireachta
is do chomhartaí sóirt go léir
i gcúinne eochair na dtreoracha.

Ní bhraithim aon phian aon bhrón
ach i lár na hoíche cloisim
an scread a ligeann seanchlár adhmaid dúr
nuair a tharraingítear tairne lúbtha.

Ach, I'll put it behind me.
I'll leave you to your rightful rest
and in another room
I'll dwell on the scar left by a sly barbed wire
on your right knee as you climbed
over a ditch beside the Lee long ago,
but I won't interfere
with your night's sleep any longer.

I'll roam
the upper and nether regions of your body
only this time as though
I'm following a tourist map
with all your identification marks
in the box of symbols in the corner.

I feel no pain no sorrow,
but in the dead of night I hear
the screech an ancient roof-beam makes
when a twisted nail is drawn out.

The tenderness of this, and the concrete details of description – the barbed wire scar, the twisted nail – remind me of the ‘Dánta Grá’, the medieval love poems Ó Tuama wrote about. The best of English love poems are like this too, but the easy conversational tone seems to me very Irish.

Ó Muirthile also writes about people he knew in his childhood – such as a woman who had cut his hair on a chair in the middle of the street, and who laid out corpses, who once on a walk stopped and stood with her legs apart pissing on the ground. And he can write true poems about politics – again, I suppose because it is personal:

‘Daoine boga sibhse theas,’ arsa cara,
‘Muidne thuaidh cruaidh,’
Ach tráth ba ghá na gníomhartha a dhéanamh
d’fhásamarna gan dua ár leagan den challaire aduaidh.

‘You in the south are soft’, a friend says,
‘we’re of tougher mettle up north.’
But when the times called for action
we had no problem growing our own version
of the loudmouth from the north.

Colm Breathnach (b. 1961) is another Cork man who writes powerful love poems. Maybe it stems from the local presence of Professor Ó Tuama writing books about Irish love songs... There seem to be more love poems out of Cork in the 20th century than out of all England. Even Bidy Jenkinson, from Dublin, studied under Ó Tuama. And Máire Mhac an tSaoi spent much of her childhood down the road in Kerry. But one explanation may be the language itself. Irish seems closer to the emotions than modern, largely commercial English.

Breathnach writes elegantly and simply, and he does not seem afraid, as so many modern poets are, to allow music into his poems. Here is the first half of a poem (with another clear translation by Mary O’Donoghue) :

‘Madonna’

glac a bhfaighir
anois uaim, a dúirt sí
is ghlacas isteach im dhá ghlaic
gach ar bhronn sí orm

bhronn sí orm a súile
go gcifinn mé féin ag súraic
ar a chíoch bán

thug sí na cíocha dom
go dtálfainn ar an leanbh
gurbh é mise é tráth

is raid sí chugam
le croí maith mór
a hóige
is chuireas amú é
in aon trathnóna amháin

take all you get
from me now, she said,
and I gripped in both my hands
everything she granted me

she gifted me her eyes
so I’d see myself sucking
one her white breasts

breasts she gave me
to nurse the child
I was back then

she threw me
with a big open heart
her youth
and I mislaid it
in just one evening

You can *see* the music in the assonances and alliterations of the Irish text. But through that music the poet is facing something dangerous. Is this Madonna his mother, his wife, or both?

The profusion of strong love poems in Irish, by both men and women, astonishes me. Their presence makes this anthology a necessary one.

English poets of the 20th century, whether Irish or British in nationality, have written many less love poems in comparison. Sorley MacLean, whose love poems in Scottish Gaelic are the most intense collection in the century, wrote indignantly to his friend Hugh Mac Diarmid about how T S Eliot was being hailed as a great poet but had never in his life written a love poem. Robert Graves, probably the greatest English love poet of the century, often defined himself as Irish, and although he did not know Irish Gaelic, he steeped himself in the historical texts of prose and poetry translated by the Irish Texts Society. (He had inherited a whole library of them from his Anglo-Irish father).

I have left **Biddy Jenkinson** (b.1949) to the last (although in the chronology of the anthology and of birth she comes before Breathnach) because for me she is definitive of what Irish poetry can now be at its best. She is in a class of her own – which is to say, in no discernible class at all. She has written short stories, books for children, and two volumes of light-hearted detective stories in which the great lexicographer Father Patrick Dineen functions as a kind of Sherlock Holmes (in one story they work together on a case). She has not written much about poetry and makes no proclamations about it, although when she was guest editor of Poetry Ireland Review (in English), she put the cat among the pigeons by suggesting that many of anonymous early medieval Irish nature poems, the glory of Old and Middle Irish, which have been assumed to be ‘monastic’ – written by monks – may have been written by women. She seems to like putting cats among pigeons.

Her refusal (with occasional exceptions) to have her poems translated into English is notorious, as is her writing under a pseudonym (in Irish an ‘ainm cléite’ – literally a ‘nom de plume’). But it is often hard to know on which side of a fence to find her. There is the pseudonym, but a quick search of the Internet will reveal her ordinary name. She is often described as a recluse, but she appears at conferences, readings and festivals. One moment she is ‘Eve in her garden’, and the next she is the ancient Irish figure of Mis who when her father was killed at the battle of Ventry drank his blood, went mad and fled into the mountains from which at last she was rescued by the harper Dubh Ruis who calmed her by playing his harp and opening his trousers. (One of Biddy Jenkinson’s books of poems, *Mis*, is about the madness – or is it? – of Mis) One moment her

poems are almost classically formed, and the next they approach free verse. In her poems there are no taboos, yet she has described herself as a *dreoilín*, a ‘wren’ in the sense of a little old lady. She has appeared on one Irish television programme sitting on a park bench reading her poems, and in another programme chatting with a butcher on Baggot Street about cuts of meat. She has written about the moon coming out of the clouds hunting poets. In some of her poems she lives both modern life and ancient myth at once. But her poems are not predictable.

Here is one of the shorter of her poems in this anthology:

‘Codail a laoiach’

Siúlann an ré thar do chodlach ag taighde cnámh.
Tá scáil an chloig mar mhéarnail ghlas faoi do ghiall
agus loganna do dhá shul mar dhorchlaí an duibheagáin
a fhir chaite a luíonn lem ais
ghan gheit
ghan srann.
Mise a fhaireann do shuan is nílim intrust.
Ní dhéanaim análu thar do cheann sa dubhoíche
ach cleachtaím bás ort.
Cuartáim go rúnda
le scian na gealaí
an chnámh gheal dhílis
an chuid sin díot
nach n-imeoidh.

‘Sleep my prince’

The moon walks over your sleep exploring bones. The shadow of the clock is green phosphorescence under your chin and the sockets of your eyes like corridors of darkness, exhausted man who lies beside me without stirring, without snoring. I am the one who watches over your sleep and I’m not to be trusted. I do not breathe for you in the black night but practise death on you. I search in secret with the moon as my knife for that white faithful bone, that part of you that will never go away.

In contrast to this poet-hunting mode is the last stanza of a tender love poem, ‘Cáitheadh’ / ‘Spray’.

Mar gur geal an lá, gur geal an spéir, gur dáimh liom gach dúil bheo
is nach bhfágfainn broigheall dubh ar leac
dá bhféadfainn é mhúscailt.
Tá an fharraige ard, an ghrian go hard is táimse lán de ghrásta

Is feam i lár na feamainne ag rince leis go sásta.

For the day is fine, the sky is bright and I am full and friendly and I'd leave no sea shag crucified if I could plume its feathers, swelling sea and shining sun and... oh my dear, be merry, the sea staff through the sea membranes is slowly stirring.

Note the full rhymes of the last two lines and their internal rhymes. This is one of her more formal poems – not, I think, that she is planning the forms beforehand. In a real poem the sense makes the form.

This selection of 13 poems includes a long narrative ‘Gleann Maoiliúra’ about the battle of Glenmalure which comprises 6 poems. Bidy Jenkinson states frankly that this was written in ‘a poetic trance’. This is a poet who lives the miracle of poems coming to her, but who knows how to welcome them and tidy them up. As in the last line of ‘Eabha ina Gáirdín I nGleann na nDeor’ / ‘Eve in her Garden in Glandore’ (not in this anthology):

Cuirim pabhsae ag fás
ar leac na bpianta

I put a posy to grow
on a slab of pains.

In this selection the prose translations provide a contrast with the widely varying forms which the poems impose, and draw attention to the fact that these are poems, not prose. I hope that now Bidy Jenkinson has allowed these prose translations she will relent and allow a new Collected Poems to appear in this format. (I hope with her usual valiant publishers, Coiscéim – meaning ‘Footstep’ – who have kept poetry in Irish alive since 1980).

In AD 575 St Columba (then a Bishop, not a saint) called a Convention, at Dromceat (‘Daisy Hill’) in County Derry, which was attended by 1400 poets. His goal seems to have been to weed some of them out. There were so many poets in Ireland at the time that it was said they amounted to a third of the population. No doubt this was an exaggeration, but the number of 1400 was probably not. Every local chief had paid hangers on who composed poems in praise of him and his family. (A few of the more daring risked their heads and wrote about love affairs with the chief’s wife. Perhaps they were the *real* poets.)

In Ireland now, given the number of festivals, poetry competitions, poetry workshops and university courses on how to write poetry, small magazines, and unlimited self-publication on the Net, I imagine there are at least 1400 self-styled poets – and growing, given the hysterical cheer-leading and mutual admiration of the social media. Perhaps they will soon approach the number of 30,000 which, in 1960s Italy, Eugenio Montale drew out of the air in describing what he called the ‘Sunday poets.’ Poetry seems to be becoming a group activity: no need to seek the poet out on a lonely mountain top or hidden in a city of millions. And instead of flattering chiefs, the 21st century 1400 flatter each other. Their verse is not disturbing. It is not, as Laura Riding defined poetry, ‘an interruption in the life of habit.’ It *is* habit! It is safe, and it is *nice*. Thomas Hardy wrote about his idea of the poet (himself): ‘Let him be gone! He disturbs the order here!’ The 1400 like the order very much, thank you – and stagey indignation is just another part of the order.

How can one find the real poems in this mass of false poems? Luckily it is not that difficult, since the so-called poems of the 1400 neither look like, sound like, nor feel like real poems – which require first an involuntary poetic trance, and second craftsmanship in getting them exactly right. And in Ireland one can be sure that almost all the 1400 write in English. Who bothers to read poems in Irish? Too much hard work! Let alone write it – unless it comes naturally because Irish is your language.

Irish poets are less in the public eye than English poets in Ireland, and they do not have to play it so safe. Ireland being more volatile than England, a place where enmities are not necessarily disguised by politeness, the English poets in Ireland probably have to play it more safe than the Irish ones. Yeats saw this as he played ‘the sixty-year old, smiling public man.’

Who gets into an anthology of over 100 Irish poets (Ó Dúill’s)? More or less everyone who publishes. But that’s all right: the reader is free to pick and choose. Who gets into one of 25 Irish poets (De Paor’s)? Probably the safe poets – or the safer poems of the unsafe poets. I wonder who the wild men and women of 20th century Irish poetry are. Perhaps they are among the 75 to 80 that Ó Dúill includes but De Paor does not. For example Ó Dúill includes unsafe poems by Ó Tuama and Mac Síomóin. But the only poet whose work I know who is included by Ó Dúill and not De Paor is Brendan Behan (1923 – 1964). He was not a safe *man*, for sure. But the few poems he wrote in Irish (which he studied in jail) are exquisite, and strangely delicate given his wildness. I can think of another poet who is in neither anthology, Paddy Bushe (b.1948) – a scholarly man,

not a wild one, who as well as producing the volume mentioned earlier, of Sorley MacLean's poems in Scots Gaelic and Bushe's translations in Irish Gaelic, has written some very original poems in Irish.

Here I am already answering some of the questions I posed at the beginning of this essay.

1. How does *Poems of Repossession* (PR for short) compare with *Fearann Pinn* (FP)? It is fish and fowl. PR is a more attractive and expensively produced book, but FP has many more poets and poems. PR provides translations, many of which are dodgy 'versions'. FP does not. They will have different readerships. I dare say that in future I'll return to both.
2. How does PR compare with *An Tuil* (AnT)? AnT also provides translations on facing pages, either by the poets themselves or by its editor, the prodigious Ronald Black, in verse form but sticking close to the text. As for comprehensiveness, AnT leaves both PR and FP 'hors de combat' on the side-lines. It is 820 pages long, contains 110 poets, and almost 400 poems (I did not count exactly) – of which around 40 are by Sorley MacLean who towers over the scene like the range of the Cuillinn mountains he wrote about so often. There is an erudite 35 page introduction (in English) by Black, and 100 pages of notes (also in English) on the poets and their poems. Furthermore, the book is beautifully designed and as glossy and attractive as PR. In a competition among the three anthologies, it would win hands down. I cannot claim to have read through it, but I am not sure so many of these poets are as intense as the Irish poets I have discussed above. There is a lot of prosaic description and reasoning in verse. But, as in Ireland, there are some notable woman poets – Meg Bateman, and the sisters Morag and Catriona NicGumaraig (Montgomery). They have what MacLean (citing the Italian critic Benedetto Croce) called 'the lyric cry'. Again, my impression is that this lyric cry is stronger among the Irish poets I have discussed here – although in MacLean's own poetry it is stronger than in almost anyone's.
3. How do the poems in PR compare with those of 20th century English poets in Ireland (as defined in the principle I stuck to earlier)? To my mind, there are more good poems in this anthology than in anthologies of so-called Irish verse in English (including that of the Nobel prize winners). But then my mind is my own.

4. Does PR leave anyone out that I would include? I miss Behan and Bushe, and I probably do not know about the others.
5. Has Irish poetry deteriorated into the chopped prose which now rules the stagnant waves in English poetry? Decidedly not! Perhaps this is because the Irish language and tradition are still open to emotion – which imposes rhythm and music on thought. (The American poet Trumbull Stickney, 1874-1904, in a PhD thesis in French, defined poetry as ‘la pensée musicale’). Furthermore, the Irish tradition of assonance rather than rhyme makes it easier to avoid the stock of hack rhymes that exists in English, and originally it was to avoid these hack rhymes that many English poets turned to the free verse which has now become the norm.
6. Who are the real poets? I have found with pleasure some I did not know of, and I have discussed them above.
7. How do the translations stand up? I had not wanted to discuss them so much but I found I had to. Most of them don’t stand up at all, but there are a few gems.
8. Where do I place myself and other Irish poets who write in English? I think that if we know how to read in Irish (even with a dictionary) we can find an affinity with poets who have been under less temptation than we have in English to sell out and write ever-so-sensitive non-poems in chopped prose.