

INTRODUCTION

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In an essay mapping the space of poetic imagination, Seamus Heaney, Irish Laureate of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature, reinforces the Joycean notion that the clarity of individual artistic vision may depend on one's (self)reflexive displacement from one's cultural roots, whose creative energies can best be tapped from a distant vantage point, situated on "the viewing deck of Europe" (Heaney 2012, 19). Echoing Stephen Dedalus's diary notation in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which condenses the idea that Irishness is inescapably both a pole of departure and a horizon of expectation for the exilic artist,² Heaney's title – "Mossbawn via Mantua. Ireland in/and Europe: cross-currents and exchanges" – juxtaposes the birthplaces of the ancient poet Virgil and his own, showing the significance of cultural translation, with its logic of de- and familiarisation, for re-envisaging one's poetic identity through the unexpected lens of otherness. As Heaney says, "the Irish home ground can be reviewed in the light of certain European perspectives – classical, medieval, and modern. These planes of regard allow us to get a closer view of that ground by standing back from it and help to establish a different focus, a more revealing angle of vision" (2012, 19). "From Mossbawn via Mantua" could, indeed, be seen, as an apology of translation, which can activate the imagination by ferrying the poetic self into the "home grounds" of others, or into a multiplicity of linguistic homelands other than his own. The "shortest route from self to self is through the other", as Richard Kearney shows, pointing out the ontological dimension of translation, which refers to how one conveys one's identity to others or, to come closer to Heaney's sense, to how one comes to understand one's identity

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The author of this brief introduction to the history of the Irish Studies MA programme in Cluj wishes to express her gratitude to Professors Liviu Cotrău, Virgil Stanciu and Sanda Berce for the detailed information they offered during separate interviews in the months of May and June 2018. Special thanks must also go to Dr. Liliana Pop, Dr. Erika Mihálycsa and Dr. Rareş Moldovan, for the patience with which they have guided my reconstructive efforts, and to Professor John Fairleigh, for his inspiring account of the beginnings of the Irish Studies MA in Cluj. Not least, I am grateful to Professors Declan Kiberd and Christopher Fox from the University of Notre Dame for the opportunity of talking about Irish Studies as a Global Enterprise at the Irish Seminar organised by the Keough-Naughton Institute in Dublin, in June 2018.

² "[T]he shortest way to Tara was VIA Holyhead" (Joyce 2000/1916, 211).

via others (2004, xii-xv). In Heaney's case, one route of passage from European to Irish destinations, one avenue of translation back to Mossbawn is that of a detour via the poetry of the Romanian Marin Sorescu, whom he locates in a so-called province of the Hyperboreans, "inhabited by different twentieth-century poets of Russia and Eastern Europe, poets who helped me make sense of my own situation in the turbulent Ireland of the 1970s and 80s" (2012, 21).

And yet, the shortest way to his "own personal territory" can be not only via Mantua, but possibly also via Romania, the "home ground" of Sorescu, singled out as one of the "writers living in Soviet regimes who dealt obliquely and allegorically with the political conditions in their different countries. They were poets who maintained their self-respect by refusing to be co-opted by the Party and who managed instead to write poems true to their own imaginative selves" (Heaney 2012, 24). Thus, even before the fall of communism in the province of "my Hyperboreans" (Heaney 2012, 24), Irish and Romanian poets built interconnecting bridges enabling them to translate their creative visions, engaging in numerous joint publication projects. Such was the volume *The Biggest Egg in the World*, published by Bloodaxe Books in 1987, "hatched in Belfast by a clutch of poets", including Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Paul Muldoon, who "cooked up these poems in tribute to the Romanian master chef" and produced "not hard-boiled translations but lightly scrambled versions" of the original texts (Sorescu 1987). One poem in this collection, "Fountains in the Sea", from the Romanian poet's 1982 collection *Fântâni în mare*, features the authorial signature of Seamus Heaney and is a re-translation or an act of re-imagining the aquatic tropes that suffuse Sorescu's original version. Predicated on images of overabundant water that seeps, flows and escapes confinement, "Fântâni în mare" encapsulates the affinity between the two poets' imaginary universes, illuminating the correlations between the polystratified structure of Heaney's bogland, a capsule of time layers, and the marine imagery of Sorescu's vertical fountains gushing forth into the immensity of the sea. The notion of human solidarity and community that builds up under the pressure of history will have most likely appealed to both artists: "But to keep the whole aqueous architecture standing its ground/ We must make a ring with our bodies and dance out a round/ On the dreamt eye of water, the dreamt eye of water, the dreamt eye of water" (Sorescu/Heaney 1987, 76). *The Biggest Egg in the World* was not the only Irish-Romanian project of translation that foregrounded the idea of poetry as a collaborative enterprise that can shed mutual light on one another's cultural territories. Celebrating the potential of translation, as "interlinguistic hospitality", to "inhabit the word of the Other, paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling" (Ricoeur qtd. in Kearney 2014, xvi), the next two volumes I will be briefly referring to are further evidence to the rewarding work of translation in mediating the encounter between writers whose "home grounds" are positioned at the western and the eastern extremities of the continent.

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In 1996, enlisting the efforts of scholars, representatives of cultural foundations and ministerial officials from both Romania and Ireland, Professor John Fairleigh from the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast conceived the project of simultaneously publishing two distinct collections of poetry, one in English, printed by Bloodaxe Books, and one in Romanian, printed by Univers Press in Bucharest. *When the Tunnels Meet* comprises a selection of poems by major Romanian poets conveyed into English by their Irish confreres, while *Flăcări himerice* is an anthology of contemporary Irish poetry (Ciaran Carson, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Eilean Ni Chuilleanain, among others) conveyed into Romanian by writers such as Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Ana Blandiana, Ileana Mălăncioiu and Denisa Comănescu. Many are the galleries, cross passages and shafts burrowed across the space of poetic imagination in the two anthologies of translated poems, evincing a reciprocal effort of knowing oneself through the other, of welcoming the difference of the other into this realm of intercultural dialogue. John Fairleigh, who offered hospitality to the dialogical encounters between the Irish and Romanian poets in these poetic anthologies, was to also play an important role in fostering academic exchanges between Ireland and Romania and in setting up the Irish Studies MA programme in Cluj, a city with a prestigious academic tradition.

In the mid-1990s, when the divisions between the two Irelands were giving way to more integrative strategies of reconciliation, within the framework of Europeanisation, the moment was auspicious for launching the development of Irish Studies as a global field of inquiry. While the interest of Romanian academics in teaching Irish Literature was considerable, Irish writers were still approached under the broad umbrella of British or even English literature. Hence, the need to acknowledge the identity of a literary tradition in its own right by appointing, in the first instance, an Irish lecturer who joined the English Department faculty at Bucharest University, Professor Eve Patten being the first academic who performed this work of cultural ambassadorship, with support from both the British Council (representing Northern Ireland) and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. The next step was to invite Romanian academics with a solid interest in the Irish content of their literature syllabi to conceive self-standing, one-semester courses on Irish Literature. As John Fairleigh recalls, "the university in Cluj was distinctive for a particularly strong commitment to the Irish material by both faculty and students. Soon discussions began with Cluj with Professors Liviu Cotrău and Adrian Radu about responding to the enthusiasm – and even demand – from students for a designated MA in Irish Studies. Professors Cotrău and Radu were invited back to Ireland, together with their colleagues Professors Sanda Berce and Bill Stanciu, for a round of meetings to discuss support for the proposed MA and there was a widespread

positive response, led by then President Mary McAleese and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs” (Fairley 2018).

Set up nearly two decades ago, in October 1999, the *Irish Studies* MA programme in Cluj was, and still is, one of the few (if not the only) postgraduate degrees in Central and Eastern Europe, offering a dynamic, interdisciplinary perspective on Irish culture, history and literature and appealing not only to Romanian, but also to foreign students interested in this study field. Initially styled as *Irish Writing and Its Contexts*, the Irish Studies programme was the result of the tremendous visionary and logistic efforts of a group of academics from the Faculty of Letters in Cluj, led by Professor Liviu Cotrău, Head of the English Department at that time, in collaboration with the British Council, Belfast, the Institute of Irish Studies from Queen’s University, Belfast, University College, Dublin, and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin. Structured by literary genre, the Irish Studies MA programme came under the umbrella of the Department of English Language and Literature in Cluj-Napoca and provided a substantial array of courses with a focus on Irish Literature. Run by Dr. Liviu Cotrău, *Irish Literary Issues* introduced students to essential frameworks for conceptualising contemporary Irish literary issues in light of their socio-cultural and historical contexts. Taught by Dr. Virgil Stanciu, the course on *Irish Drama and Film* surveyed the history of dramatic and cinematic representations of Ireland, across a vast timescape, from seventeenth-century Anglo-Irish playwrights to late twentieth-century film directors of world renown, such as Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan. Approaching the works of emblematic Irish authors, such as Jonathan Swift, James Joyce, Flann O’Brien, Elizabeth Bowen, Patrick O’Connor, John McGahern, Sebastian Barry and Jennifer Johnston, Dr. Sanda Berce structured her course on *Irish Prose Writing* as a comprehensive overview of the individualising stylistic and thematic features of Irish fiction that have in time contributed to the emergence of a distinctively Irish literary canon. Delivered by Dr. Adrian Radu, the course on *Irish Poetry* charted the complex poetic landscape of Ireland, examining the multifaceted cultural identities gaining shape across the North/South divide in the poetry of Ciarán Carson, Seamus Heaney, Louis MacNeice, Paul Muldoon and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. Dr. Rareş Moldovan, a graduate of the MA and PhD programmes at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, provided students with an introduction to *Study Skills* development. Professors Edna Longley (Queen’s University, Belfast), Terence Brown (Trinity College, Dublin), Robert Welch (University of Ulster, Coleraine), and Declan Kiberd (University College, Dublin) were trendsetting module consultants for an otherwise far-ranging and in-depth exploration of Irish creative accomplishments, a project of intercultural translation to which the pioneering academics from Cluj dedicated themselves wholeheartedly.

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Over the following years, particularly after 2008, the growing team of Irish Studies professors were engaged in fruitful lines of research and have expanded the programme's interdisciplinary curriculum, which now addresses a broad spectrum of issues pertaining to Irish literature, film, history, politics, and media, conveyed through advanced courses on: the poetry of *W.B. Yeats* and *Irish Feminine Writing* (Dr. Liliana Pop); *Medieval Literary Themes* (Dr. Adrian Papahagi); *James Joyce* (Dr. Erika Mihálycsa); *Samuel Beckett* and *Irish Literature and Film* (Dr. Rareş Moldovan); *The Irish Novel* (Dr. Elena Păcurar); and *Irish Gothic Fiction* (Dr. Carmen Borbely). Worth a special mention is the fact that the *Irish Language* is also part of the course offer at the University of Cluj (Dr. Adrian Radu). In addition to this, over the course of the two decades since MA programme was founded, many generations of students have been privileged to attend lectures and conferences given by our Irish guests, visiting lecturers, writers and artists, who have taught intensive modules on *James Joyce* (Dr. Brian Cosgrove, National University of Ireland, Maynooth), *The History of Ireland* (Dr. Jonathan Bardon, Queen's University, Belfast), *Northern Ireland Today* (Dr. David Harkness, Queen's University Belfast), and *Irish Media* (Lelia Doolan, Chairwoman, Film Board Ireland). Other scholars who have taught the students in Cluj over the past years include: Professors Cormac Begadon, Eleanor O'Leary and Lawrence Taylor from Maynooth University, Professor Nicholas Allen (University of Georgia, Athens), Philip O'Ceallaigh (writer), Guy Woodward (Trinity College), and Dr. Julie Bates (Trinity College). In March 2017, Professor Declan Kiberd, accompanied by two of his colleagues from the University of Notre Dame, Diarmuid O'Giolláin and Mary O'Callaghan, presented the Inaugural Keough-Naughton Global Seminar in Cluj, recognising the openness of the MA programme at Babeş-Bolyai University towards forming new connections with Irish Studies centres in Europe and across the world.

Creating a fertile ground for bridging the cultural histories of Romania and Ireland, much like the Hyperborean poets invoked by Seamus Heaney in the essay mentioned above, the faculty and the students in Cluj have cultivated exchanges and collaborative projects with other universities where Irishness is defined through the clarifying prism of its European and global dimensions: take, for instance, the grants offered to our students in past years by Queen's University, Belfast, and University College, Dublin, or the Erasmus agreements with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth; Karel Josef Safarik University in Kosice, Slovakia; the University of Pecs, Hungary; the University Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona, Spain; and Trinity College, Ireland. Moreover, the Irish Studies MA programme has trained numerous young researchers, who then pursued their research as doctoral and post-doctoral students both at their *alma mater* and in academic centres in Ireland, the United Kingdom and the

United States. Our students and graduates continue the work of Irish-Romanian cultural translation within a global milieu, confirming, as programme director Dr. Rareş Moldovan states, the fact that “the MA in Irish studies [...] represents a model of how to organise and develop studies in an area that seems a niche, but in fact provides ample ground for wide-ranging cultural analysis and scholarship [...]. The programme, we believe, continues to be a flagship for the Faculty of Letters. With it, the University and Cluj more generally have become a hotspot for the appreciation of Irish culture, and this is a trait that I hope will continue in the years to come.” (Moldovan 2018).

With hindsight, at the end of this brief foray into the two decades since the launching of *Irish Studies* at Babeş-Bolyai University, we can say this has been a history marked, so far, by two celebratory moments that have entrenched the importance of re-envisioning Irish culture from the other end of the European “viewing deck” that Seamus Heaney was describing in his essay. The first consisted in awarding Her Excellency, Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, an Honorary Professorship by the Faculty of Letters in Cluj in 2008, in recognition of the dedicated support the Belfast-based academic had constantly provided to the Irish Studies MA programme ever since its inception, catalysing inter-university exchanges and ensuring the much needed logistic, cultural and material resources for the Romanian students and faculty. Speaking to an enthusiastic audience, President McAleese highlighted the importance of translation as the true European interlanguage, confessing that “I arrive for the first time in Romania on the first State Visit by an Irish President to a country which geography, but especially history, conspired to keep at a distance from Ireland. And here I find an M.A. course in Irish Studies, a showcase if ever there was one of that indomitable human spirit, that curiosity about the otherness of others that transcends all natural and artificial barriers and reminds us so powerfully of all that we have to offer each other if only we take a chance and reach out to one another” (McAleese 2008). The second moment occurred in 2017, when Babeş-Bolyai University conferred the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* to Professor Declan Kiberd, for his outstanding contribution to the advancement of the Irish Studies field throughout the world and, in particular, in Cluj. In his Address on the *Irish Revival* delivered on 16 March 2017, Professor Kiberd acknowledged the fact that “[t]his great university pioneered the pursuit of Irish Studies in Romania through the later decades of the last century. Its leaders and scholars had the vision and audacity to take Ireland, a small island on the very edge of Europe, as a test-case of the modern world” (Kiberd 2017). What all this shows is that Dublin/Belfast can be reimagined via Cluj, as the history of effervescent cultural relations connecting scholars from Ireland and Romania attests.

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