Children’s Literature in Translation

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Published by Leuven University Press

McMartin, Jack and Jan Van Coillie.
Children’s Literature in Translation: Texts and Contexts.

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Two languages, two children’s literatures

Translation in Ireland today

Emer O’Sullivan

Abstract

The Anglosphere has a reputation for being unreceptive to fiction in translation, and this also applies to Ireland. Some of the reasons for the relative paucity of translations in Irish children’s literature in English are indeed the same as for other Anglophone countries, but the situation and development of children’s literature in Ireland differ so significantly from theirs that it calls for a more differentiated look. Ireland is not just an Anglophone country; the first official language of the state is Irish, a Gaelic language, spoken daily today by only a small percentage of the population. It is therefore a case of one country with two languages and two children’s literatures, each with their own tradition, into which books are (or are not) translated under different conditions. While Irish-language publications (including translations) have been heavily state subsidized since Irish independence in 1922, those in English have to survive in economic competition with the huge publishing conglomerates on the neighboring island. This chapter discusses the conditions under which both traditions have developed and examines contemporary Irish publishers who issue translations into English and Irish.

Introduction

“The Anglophone world is notoriously unreceptive to fiction in translation” (Parkinson 2013, 151). This statement also applies to Ireland, the most western Anglophone country in Europe, but it does not tell the whole story.¹ Some

¹ Although Ireland was included with Britain in the “Literature across Frontiers” study which discovered that the proportion of translations of literature between 1990 and 2012 was somewhere around the 4 percent mark (Büchler and Trentacosti 2015), this general finding cannot be taken to apply specifically to Ireland, where the figure is significantly lower. The only publishers regularly issuing translations into English are the Dedalus Press, which specializes in contemporary poetry, and the international publisher Dalkey Archive Press, which has links to Ireland. Little Island is
of the reasons for the relative paucity of translations into English in Irish children’s literature are indeed the same as in other Anglophone ones, and these are well documented (by Gillian Lathey in the previous chapter, for instance). But the situation and development of children’s literature in Ireland differ so significantly from theirs that it calls for a more differentiated look.

For a start, Ireland is not just an Anglophone country. The first official language of the state is Irish, a Gaelic language, spoken daily by only a small percentage of the population. So it is a case of one country, two languages, and two children’s literatures, each with their own tradition, into which books are (or are not) translated under different conditions. While Irish-language publications (including translations) are heavily state subsidized, ones in English have to survive in economic competition with the huge publishing conglomerates on the neighboring island. In order to illuminate the place of translation in each of these coexisting children’s literatures today, this chapter will sketch the conditions under which they have developed since Ireland became independent in 1922. It will start by looking at publishing for children in Irish, which was fostered from those early days on, and will give an account of important contemporary developments as well as issues relating to translation into that language.

Almost sixty years were to pass before an indigenous publishing industry of any size existed for its Anglophone counterpart, and the reasons for this, as well as a brief account of Irish publishing for children in English from 1980 onwards, will follow. While translations were vital for the project of revitalizing the Irish language, this was not, of course, the case for English, and hardly any books for children were published in English translation before 2010, when a small independent press, Little Island, was set up with the express intention of publishing emerging Irish writers and children’s books in translation. This courageous enterprise is the focus of the final section of this chapter, which will offer insights into the difficult conditions pertaining to children’s literature in English translation in Ireland.²

² I am very grateful to publishers Siobhán Parkinson of Little Island and Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin of Futa Fata, and to Walker Books’ agent in Ireland, Conor Hackett, for generously giving of their time and answering my questions on translating in Ireland in personal, telephone and email interviews.
Irish children’s literature in Irish

The sole language of the majority of Irish people through most of the country’s history was Irish. It came under severe pressure after the English conquest in the seventeenth century and, by the late eighteenth century, large numbers of the Irish population – and virtually all the urban population – had adopted English. The more remote and underdeveloped regions of the west and south of the island remained Irish-speaking. These were the areas most affected during the Great Famine of 1848–1849, when the starvation and emigration of millions further hastened the demise of the language. During the rise of political and cultural nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was a revival of interest in the Irish language, and the translation of its literary legacy into English became “an agent of aesthetic and political renewal” (Cronin 2011, 54). After independence, Irish became the official national and first language of the country but was never again to become the language of the majority, despite various official measures such as making Irish compulsory in schools. In the 2016 census, 1.7 million of the 4.7 million inhabitants of the Republic of Ireland answered ‘yes’ to being able to speak Irish, but just 73,803, or 1.7 percent of the population, said they spoke it daily outside the education system (Central Statistics Office 2019). There are no monoglot speakers of Irish today.

The majority attitude to the language is ambivalent. Most pay lip service to it as an important part of their cultural heritage but are not inclined to invest any significant effort into using it; some regard it as a relic from the past, to be spoken by a turf fireplace in a remote cottage. However, a recent urban revival movement, encouraged by changes in legislation in 2011 with regard to patronage of new schools, has seen a dramatic rise in the number of Gaelscoileanna, Irish-medium schools. A survey in 2018 revealed that 23 percent of parents would choose a local Gaelscoil for their children if it was available. And while it is unlikely that Irish will ever again be spoken by a majority on a daily basis, this increased demand for Irish-medium education reflects an interest in the language indicating that the downward trend might, at the very least, have been arrested. “Irish is a lot cooler than it used to be,” says publisher Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin (interview with Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin), citing as an example new work by the Belfast hip hop duo Kneecap.

As with other languages in need of revitalization and dissemination, such as modern Hebrew, literature in translation played and plays an important role in reviving and fostering the Irish language. In 1926, the publishing house An Gúm [The Scheme] was established under the aegis of the Department of Education with the task of publishing literature in Irish, especially
educational textbooks. While only six Irish-language books were in print in 1893 (Kiberd 2018, 44), An Gúm produced 1,465 publications in that language between 1926 and 1964 (Kennedy 1990, 14),\(^3\) aided by “an ambitious policy of translation” (An Gúm n.d.). Translations of over 250 classical and popular titles by British, American and European writers were published during the 1930s alone, and many of their translators went on to become creative writers themselves, making the need for translations gradually less acute.

A situation in which a single state-funded publishing house operates under no commercial pressure and with little competition is, however, not conducive to ensuring high production values, and many children’s books issued in Irish towards the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries were unattractive by comparison with books in English. The recent rise in the number of Gaelscoileanna also meant a rise in the number of readers of Irish and an increased demand for reading material for them, as well as for the children of native speakers in the Gaeltacht, the primarily Irish-speaking regions.\(^4\) The feeling in general among parents, teachers, publishers and translators was that there was a need for contemporary Irish-language children’s books that were as attractive and exciting as their English-language counterparts. Walker Books agent Conor Hackett, for instance, named the unappealing material in Irish on offer to his primary school children at the beginning of the decade as one of the elements that motivated him to seek to issue Irish translations of Walker picture books (interview with Conor Hackett). These factors combined to herald an exciting new wave of Irish-language publishing for children in the first decade of the twenty-first century. A number of small, new, innovative, independent Irish-language presses were established − Futa Fata (2005), An tSnáthaid Mhór (2005), Páistí Press (2011) and others – which mainly targeted the 12–15 percent of children who are either native speakers or attend Gaelscoileanna. Translations issued by some of these presses, as well as by individual British publishing houses, helped significantly to raise the profile and production quality of children’s books in Irish.

The source language(s) from which works are translated has been a hotly debated issue. As translator Maire Nic Mhaolain remarked in 2019 (Irish Translators’), in the past “translation from English to Irish [was considered]

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\(^3\) This included 1,108 general literary works, 230 pieces of music and 127 textbooks. A selection of covers of the translations and other publications by An Gúm can be seen in the “Free State Art: Judging Ireland by its Book Covers” virtual exhibition of the Burns Library.

\(^4\) The translator Máirín Ní Ghadhra (2016) wrote: “Children who take to reading in the middle classes of national school can read up to a book a day, and the challenge for those of us rearing native speakers in the Gaeltacht in [sic] to ensure a regular supply for them.”
almost a betrayal of our native writers,” although today “the old attitude is going, if not gone.” When An Gúm began to publish translated picture books, they were mainly bought in from the USSR and former Eastern Bloc countries “partly because they were comparatively inexpensive, but also for ideological reasons: they were not original English-language publications” (Coghlan 2013, n.p.). There was a long-standing policy that state support for translation into Irish only funded translations from languages other than English, the reasoning being that, as most readers of Irish, being bilingual, already had access to books in English, funding translation from other languages added to the diversity of material available. The economies of scale of the Irish-language book market are such that publishers depend on this state funding in order to survive (selling 8,000 copies of a book in Irish would, according to Conor Hackett, be exceptional (interview with Conor Hackett)), and all translation into Irish is supported by grants.5 A refusal to support translation of English source texts meant that they were unlikely to be translated.

In the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, a new body, Foras Na Gaeilge [Irish Institute], was set up in December 1999. It was responsible for the promotion of the Irish language throughout the whole island of Ireland, with the activities of earlier state organizations — including An Gúm — being transferred to the new organization. After much debate they decided to revise the English language ruling, which resulted in a substantial amount of material being translated from English, some even issued by British publishers. The first popular title was *Harry Potter agus an Órchloch*, translated by Maire Nic Mhaolain and issued by Bloomsbury UK in 2004.6 An Irish translation of Eoin Colfer’s *Artemis Fowl*, also by Nic Mhaolain, was the next popular title to follow, published in the Penguin Ireland imprint in 2006. In 2012, Conor Hackett headed a project to issue translations into Irish of Walker’s most popular picture books by Irish authors or illustrators, and ten books in total by Martin Waddell, Sam McBratney, Chris Haughton, Niamh Sharkey

5 In the case of non-Irish publishing houses, only the translation costs are covered; indigenous publishers receive more substantial support. Foras na Gaeilge is the main funder of publishing in Irish today. The Arts Council also funds individual projects and An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), an organization that supports Irish-medium education, also assists publishers financially (interview with Mac Dhonnagáin).

6 Bloomsbury commissioned translations of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* into Welsh, Latin, Ancient Greek, and Irish, obviously with the educational market in view. They may not have been as commercially successful as hoped, as the only language into which the second volume of *Harry Potter* was translated is Welsh. The Irish bookseller Des Kenny said that *Harry Potter* had to be “the fastest children’s classic to find itself in the Irish language,” and that the initial print run of 25,000 was not only remarkable but also a vote of confidence in Irish by an English publisher (Siggins 2004).
and others were published under Walker’s Éireann imprint. The fact that the books were already recognizable and successful gave them a commercial edge when sold in an Irish-language version, and this, according to Hackett, even led to some bookshops committing to maintaining a permanent children’s Irish-language section. He expressed the hope that the strength of these books would “also direct attention of the market to the wealth of Irish language publishing from indigenous publishing houses” (quoted in O’Loughlin 2012), mentioning especially the quality picture books by the publishing house Futa Fata, which was already making its mark on the Irish-language market around that time.

Two important effects of translating popular British children’s books into Irish is that they motivate young readers to read in Irish and raise the perceived status of the language. Since 2010, Cló Iar-Chonnacht, one of the largest private Irish-language firms, has issued several of the *Horrid Henry* [Đónall Dána] series by Francesca Simon and Tony Ross as well as eight Blyton *Famous Five* [An Cuigear Croga] volumes in translation. Máirín Ní Ghadhra, the translator, remarked:

> You are trying to ensure that children who are learning Irish as a second language in the education system will be able to read the book and – more importantly – enjoy it. (...) The perception of Gaeilge [Irish] as old-fashioned (...) can now be put to bed. (...) It is about providing more books to children who read Gaeilge, books that their peers read in English. And it is about persuading the children that their language is equally as cool as the one spoken by readers of Enid Blyton’s *Famous Five*, *Horrid Henry*, *Dork Diaries* and Roald Dahl. It is also about demonstrating to those who have a mortal dread of our native tongue that Gaeilge is accessible, fun and trendy. (Ní Ghadhra 2016)

And booksellers were keen to stock known books by Blyton, David Williams or Jeff Kinney in Irish translation, as “brand awareness is very high” amongst booksellers whose proficiency in Irish is not great (interview with Mac Dhonnagáin).  

However, the vast number of books translated from English after Foras changed their policy led to the Irish-language writers’ organization, Aontas na Scríbhneoirí Gaeilge, lobbying to have the volume restricted, as they felt these translations undermined the development of original work in Irish.

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7 Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin believes that probably less than 2 percent of Irish booksellers speak or read Irish with confidence (interview with Mac Dhonnagáin).
The rules were once more revised, and today established publishers can apply for support for up to a maximum of 20 percent of their output to be translated – from any language, including English.

The innovative Futa Fata is an interesting case study for these contemporary developments. When it began publishing in 2005, it translated a number of picture books from French, originated by Belgian publisher Mijade, and also a few from German. Since 2016, it has published an Irish version of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney and books by David Walliams, all of which have succeeded commercially. Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin explains: “We print in the 2,500–3,000 range and we reprint regularly. For a language with a base population of around 75,000 daily speakers, that’s pretty good going. The commercial success of the books has helped our company to get on a more secure financial footing” (interview with Mac Dhonnagáin). But the concern of Irish-language writers prompted Futa Fata “to take a change of direction in our approach to translation” (*ibid.*). Its emphasis is now on replacing translations with original work, and it has done well in selling its quality picture books on the international market, which is highly unusual for an Irish-language publisher. The only picture books it has translated recently are by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, as they sell very well in Irish. The striking and original picture books issued by Belfast publishing house An tSnáthaid Mhóir have also enjoyed international success.

There are a few anomalies peculiar to translating into Irish. Unusually for a literature in a first national language, a difficulty in producing attractive reading material for older children and young adults in Irish is connected to the fact that the vast majority learn it as a foreign language, so their level of linguistic competence is not apace with their intellectual and emotional development (Uí Mhaicín 1996, 132). A recent innovative move by publisher Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin to address this anomaly involved having translations done of a series of short novels for children aged eight to twelve, originally commissioned from recognized UK writers and illustrators such as Malorie Blackman, Frank Cottrell Boyce, Cathy Brett and others by Barrington Stoke, a dyslexia-friendly, reluctant-reader publisher. These 5,000–7,000-word-long stories, where the content is appropriate for eight- to twelve-year-olds but the reading age is lower, have proved so popular in schools that Futa Fata is now planning to publish a similar original series of short novels in Irish. This further step by Futa Fata to replace translations with original work is also a good example of translation having had a sustainably positive influence on the target literature and directly influencing indigenous production.

An anomaly of a different kind can be found in the translation of certain kinds of historical children’s novels. English is the source language of Marita
Conlon McKenna’s much-lauded *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (1990), set during the Great Famine in the mid-nineteenth century and one of the few contemporary Irish novels to be translated into Irish. But the target language, Irish, is the one that would actually have been spoken by the fictional children in the setting of the novel. Alan Titley thus found the translation into Irish, *Faoin Sceach Gheal* by Maire Nic Mhaolain (2000), superior to the original. Conlon McKenna’s book, he writes, “is superbly interesting in itself, but the Irish translation succeeds in drawing us back into the maw of time and recreating the conditions of talk and conversation and atmosphere which existed during the famine in a way that the English version simply cannot do” (Titley 2000, 104). The paradox of this situation can be summed up by asking which of the two translation strategies – in Lawrence Venuti’s terminology ‘domestication’ or ‘foreignization’ – have been applied here. On the one hand it could be declared a domesticating one, because it apparently brings the text closer to the culture of the target language. However, it does so not by virtue of cultural adaptation but by rendering an already Irish story in one Irish source language into, according to Titley, a ‘more Irish’ story in the other Irish target language.

From the early Irish translations in the 1920s onward, a trend favoring cultural adaptation – domestication in the more traditional sense – has prevailed. Caoimhe Nic Lochlainn identifies a clear domestication policy in translations into Irish starting with *Eibhlís I dTír na nIongantas*, the first Irish version of *Alice in Wonderland* by Pádraig Ó Cadhla in 1922, which relocated the text to Ireland, changed the name of the protagonist to the Irish Eibhlís, and inserted (non-parodied) traditional Irish myths and poems in place of Carroll’s parodies. And she sees it continuing up to the 1994 translation of Blyton’s *The Secret Mountain* as *Eachtra San Afraic* [An Adventure in Africa] by Tomás Mac Aodha Bhui, which renders it as a “self-consciously anticolonial and often overtly didactic text” (Nic Lochlainn 2013, 85). Nic Lochlainn concludes: “While manifestations of domestication are not always as evident as in these texts, this methodology has clearly found a foothold in Irish translations for children, without any properly articulated justification” (ibid., 86). In the most recent Blyton translations issued by Cló Iar-Chonnacht, the names of the characters of the Famous Five were not translated or domesticated.

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8 Nic Lochlainn translates a 1923 review written in Irish, which writes appraisingly: “Padraig O Cadhla takes this little girl and, with the magic wand of the Irish language, makes her so Irish that you would swear that she had always been living in the Ring Gaeltacht” (Nic Lochlainn 2013, 75). The retranslation of *Alice in Wonderland* by Nicholas J. A. Williams in 2003 is also domesticated; see Titley (2015, 309).
However, as translator Máirín Ní Ghadhra (2016) remarks, “efforts were made to make the script as relevant to Irish children as possible.”

These forms of domestication can be especially problematic in translations from English to Irish, where all potential readers are bilingual, and could theoretically be familiar with the ‘foreign’ elements changed or eliminated in translation, especially if the text is a classic or popular one (Nic Lochlainn 2013, 86). Nonetheless, there would seem to be one area where this does not hold true: picture books. While Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler are very well known in Ireland, Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin finds that Irish-speaking children are not necessarily familiar with the original books. He thinks this is because in Irish-speaking homes, people tend to read in Irish to young children, as parents “want the child’s experience of Irish in the early years to be as full and as fun-filled as possible” (interview with Mac Dhonnagáin). This they can achieve reading Mac Dhonnagáin’s own translations of Donaldson (apart from being a publisher, Mac Dhonnagáin is also a songwriter) or the poet Gabriel Rosenstock’s rhythmic, often alliterative translations of the Walker picture books. Mac Dhonnagáin believes that these rhyming books therefore have the potential to be perceived and remembered by many children as original Irish works.

He also points out a further, significant aspect which underscores how the translations of these kinds of picture books can dovetail with older forms of oral Irish culture:

Rhyming stories also integrate beautifully with our ‘agallamh beirte’ [dialogue for two] tradition, the (...) dialogue dramas very popular in Gaeltacht communities. Irish is basically an oral culture with an enormous heritage. Certain elements of the tradition are thriving – our thing is to connect that oral, performative energy with the world of books. (ibid.)

Irish children’s literature in English

Until the 1980s, almost all English-language books for children in Ireland – including those by Irish writers – were imported from the UK. The last two decades of the century saw an astounding proliferation of domestic publishing activity encouraged by Arts Council subsidies introduced in 1980, by the school curriculum putting greater emphasis on reading and, later in the decade, by the increasing affluence which would lead to the phenomenon known as the ‘Celtic Tiger.’ The growth peaked in the mid-1990s, when seven Irish publishers were regularly issuing books in English
for young readers. The declared intention of many of these publishers was to produce Irish books for Irish children. At a time when traditional notions of Irishness were being challenged in a rapidly altering society, home-produced children’s literature was a vital forum in which Irish identity could be examined (see O’Sullivan 2011). This spectacular growth was followed by a gradual decline. Of the seven (English-language) publishers for children active in the Irish market in the 1990s, only two were still in regular operation in 2007. The main reason lay in “the economics of publishers surviving in a small market” (Coghlan 2004, 1099). Paradoxically, as Valerie Coghlan points out, the very strength of the Irish market in the 1990s and the availability of Irish authors led to UK publishing conglomerates such as Penguin Random House setting up publishing divisions in Ireland (ibid.). This, in turn, further hastened the decline of local publishing. A vital problem for Irish publishers was that, although they had linguistic access to a larger market, they made “virtually no impression on bookshops in Britain” (Webb 2003, 10). Claire Reniero made a revealing comparison between the sales of two books by Irish authors in 2002, one published by an Irish publisher, the other by a British publisher. *The Love Bean* by Siobhán Parkinson was the most promoted book by The O’Brien Press, the largest children’s publisher in Ireland, and was the best-selling book for young adults that year, but Eoin Colfer’s *Artemis Fowl*, published by Penguin in Britain, sold over ten times more copies (Reniero 2005, 106). This says a lot about the comparative scales and possibilities of the Irish and British markets and explains why most Irish authors publish, when they can, in Britain, where they have access to the world market (see Keenan 2007; O’Sullivan 2011). Since 2005, Siobhán Parkinson’s English novels have been published in Britain, mainly with Puffin and Hodder.

There is some sign today of the Irish market picking up, and new or rebranded publishers, such as Gill, are now publishing in English for children. Speaking at Publishing Ireland’s annual trade day in November 2018, Oliver Beldham of the metadata service provider Nielsen Book Research said sales of Irish-published Anglophone books were rising with “the Children’s market (...) now larger than Fiction and at its highest point in ten years!” (Publishing Ireland 2018). However, as Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin claimed, “[t]here are now more books for children published in Irish than English in this country. (...) [B]ecause we are working in Irish, we’re more immune to the very challenging competition that Irish publishers working in English face” (quoted in Gleeson 2011).
It is nonetheless difficult for Irish publishers in English to compete with the large British market. From the perspective of the publisher she has now become, Siobhán Parkinson writes:

Children’s publishing is fun, it is important (…) but it is not remotely lucrative, at least not for a small publishing house on the edge of Europe, working in the shadow of a world centre of children’s publishing. Our proximity to London, with its enormous publishing conglomerates and its output of several thousand children’s titles a year, is of course problematic. London sets the tone, London sets the prices, London dominates the market – and London is not particularly interested in what is happening in a tiny market like ours. And that makes it very difficult for small publishers to make any inroads into the British bookshops. (Parkinson 2015)

During the publishing boom from 1980 to 2005, almost no translations into English from other languages were issued. Poolbeg Press brought out an English version of a Christine Nöstlinger novel in 1992, and Wolfhound Press issued translations of three novels by Belgian author Ron Langenus. Apart from an English version of the Irish classic *Jimeen*, The O’Brien Press published two titles from French. However, it did not consider this excursion into foreign waters as an importer rather than an exporter of books a success, and “no longer has an active interest in sourcing children’s books for translation” (Parkinson 2013, 153). The reason, apparently, has to do with the difficulty in finding satisfactory translators.

**Little Island Books**

In 2010, in the aftermath of the collapse or withdrawal from children’s publishing of almost every English-language Irish publisher but The O’Brien Press, a new independent player arrived on the scene: Little Island. It was set up to publish both emerging Irish authors and – something totally new for this branch in Ireland – books in translation. Several Little Island books have since won or been nominated for awards, and the press itself won the Reading Association of Ireland Award in 2011. The publisher, commissioning editor and translator Siobhán Parkinson is well known as an award-winning and much-translated writer for children and teenagers in English and Irish. She was Ireland’s first *Laureate na nÓg* [Children’s Laureate] from 2010 to 2012 and has edited Irish and international journals on children’s literature.
Little Island publishes eight to ten books a year for children and young adults – two of which are, on average, translations. The commitment to publishing books in translation began with Parkinson’s own interest in translating, and she believes “passionately in the importance of making books available to children that bring them the message that not everyone interacts with the world through the medium of English” (Parkinson 2015). Connected to this cultural aim is Little Island’s translation policy:

We do not set out to localize the books we translate, or to erase the markers of the originating culture. On the contrary, we encourage translators to leave personal and place names in the original language, for example, so that readers are aware that they are reading a book that was written out of a different language and culture.9 (Parkinson 2013, 156)

In stark contrast to the domestication strategy at work in the Irish translations discussed above, this policy clearly favors a foreignizing strategy. The only exception concerns the titles, because, as Parkinson comments, they are “an important marketing tool, and a title that is faithful to the original but is unlikely to appeal to our market is self-defeating” (ibid., 157).

Parkinson challenges the reasons put forward to explain the notorious unreceptiveness to fiction in translation in English-speaking countries. She agrees that there is some truth in the claim that the general public is intimidated by authors with foreign names that are difficult to pronounce, but points out that “English-speaking football fans are quite comfortable with foreign players’ and managers’ names” (ibid., 152). Publishers often complain about the difficulty in sourcing and assessing suitable titles and in identifying appropriate translators (see Lathey 2017, 233). Parkinson, who gives a detailed insight into how she goes about this herself, believes that “it is not difficult to build up a network of international children’s books contacts, for instance by attending the Bologna book fair, by joining the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) and keeping in touch with organisations like the International Youth Library (IYL)” (Parkinson 2013, 154), whose annual White Ravens catalogue recommends a selection of 200 children’s books in all languages for translation. Finding titles to publish is, in her opinion, “a mixture of adventure, luck and skill” (Parkinson 2016),

9 Parkinson elaborates on this for young readers in a chatty mode on the Little Island website: “Reading a book that comes from a different country is a bit like travel – it broadens the mind. And we at Little Island are all in favour of nice broad minds – they are so much more interesting than minds that never read a book originally written in French or German.” See http://littleisland.ie/.
and she advises publishers: “The secret is not to feel that you have to find THE German or French or Swahili book – that way madness lies; the secret is to find A German or French or Swahili book that you love enough to want to publish it for Irish and other Anglophone children” (ibid.).

A relevant factor in Parkinson’s own selection of titles is the fact that she speaks German, which not only gives her access to literature in that language but also “serves as a useful gateway language” (Parkinson 2013, 154) to, for example, Swedish, Danish and Dutch. Since 2010 Little Island has published fifteen translations: nine from German, translated by Parkinson herself, and one each from Swedish, Finnish, Brazilian Portuguese, Irish, French and Latvian, the latter, like Irish, one of the least translated European languages (Büchler and Trentacosti 2015, 16–17). The books in translation get financial support, to varying degrees, from the countries of origin, as it would not be possible for a small publishing house to translate a novel from another language at a cost of thousands of euros without significant subsidy. Little Island has therefore naturally tended to look towards countries that do subsidize translation. Germany is reasonably generous, according to Parkinson, but the Scandinavian countries are even more so. However, as the list of languages/countries of origin of the translations shows, it is not the amount of subsidy alone that dictates her selection. Little Island has, for practical reasons, published far more German than Scandinavian titles (interview with Siobhán Parkinson).

Just as the range of languages has expanded over time, so too has the range of genres. The first two translations were German novels by Renate Ahrens and Burkhard Spinnen, translated by Parkinson, and they, and those that followed, were predominantly fiction for children aged nine and up. But the generic and formal scope has now expanded to include picture books for younger readers, poetry and non-fiction. The eclecticism of the list reflects the serendipity involved in finding suitable books, but also the publisher’s experience gathered in terms of how successful they are. The consequence of this is that Little Island is currently giving fiction a rest to focus on other forms. Examples of two recent books which are a new departure are All Better, a collection of entertaining poems on the topic of being sick or injured written by one of Latvia’s foremost poets, Inese Zandere and illustrated by Reinis Pētersons. It was translated literally and then retold by the award-winning Irish poet Catherine Ann Cullen. And the funny, illustrated non-fiction picture book Declaration of the Rights of Boys and Girls (2017) by Élisabeth

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10 To protect Irish-language publications and give them a head start before making them available in English, an embargo of two years is imposed before a translation may be published.
Brami and Estelle Billon-Spagnol, originally published in French, which in the Little Island translated version is issued not as two separate books, as in the original publication, but innovatively as a flipbook to be read from either end. In the case of the recent picture books, Parkinson has said that Little Island neither expected nor sought any subsidies for the translation due to the very small amount of text (interview with Siobhán Parkinson).

With a wide range of source languages, genres and age groups addressed, it would be foolish to try to find a common denominator, other than the fact that all these Little Island books are translations. However, it is striking that there is hardly a title among them which does not display some degree of humor or wit, a feature dominant in Parkinson’s own work as a writer. And in that, they perhaps reflect the publisher’s own enjoyment in her work, about which she says: “It is tremendous fun and hugely worthwhile" (Parkinson 2016).

**Conclusion**

Two languages, two literatures. While children’s literature in Irish has traditionally had to struggle with factors which limit its potential reception, such as the sometimes backward image of the language and the fact that most Irish people learn it as a second language in school, it would seem to have been experiencing a very dynamic phase over the past decade. This is thanks in part to translations, towards which it has always been open. Irish children’s literature could not survive without generous state subsidies, which reduce the commercial risk for publishers issuing translations. Anglophone children’s literature published in Ireland, on the other hand, has always had to compete under difficult commercial conditions with the mighty neighboring British publishers. Publishing translations into English in Ireland is a brave venture indeed, but one which the independent publisher of Little Island, Siobhán Parkinson, feels passionate about. In this, she echoes some of the enthusiasm of recent new independent publishing initiatives in Britain documented by Gillian Lathey (2017).

During the boom of Irish children’s literature in English, there was huge European and worldwide interest, with ensuing translations, aided by Ireland being showcased as the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1996. Irish publishing in English has not been correspondingly welcoming to voices from abroad, but at least a step is being taken in this direction today by a single, courageous and creative independent publisher – an important symbolic step, even if only on a relatively small scale.
Bibliography


