

# Recounting and translation: not qui(e)t(e) poetry<sup>1</sup>

*Jim Haslam*

Absorbing the scene,  
Let us reflect on the translation of suffering.

How should it be assessed?<sup>2</sup>

Hardly by affirmation, or even celebration.  
The smirk of the devilish.

It's true that great things can come from suffering.  
Not a good reason to enhance it.

Are we to detect beyond the suffering  
Alignment with a disturbing questioning?  
And thus, an encouragement of the same?  
The small boy of a former work  
Contrasts with the older, bike by his side,  
In Keane's *God and Ulster*  
A confusion. Asking why?<sup>3</sup>  
A question here repeated

Hundreds of years ago  
Benevolent enlightened thinkers envisioned the world as one  
Instead, we have witnessed the crazed horrors of War and  
related conflict  
And the dream of something better? Why not?

Socio-economic and political struggles  
A sense of not belonging, being muffled and cut off

(If not absolutely)  
A worrying mutability, as Maddock might appreciate<sup>4</sup>  
A myriad of things out of joint

Lost opportunities and possibilities  
To be rescued and realised?

Is it that we are reminded, humanity that is,  
Of the importance of being humane?  
Deepening social commitment  
And indeed, a deeper commitment to ourselves  
Part of a striving, too, for a counter to suffering  
That we (and *mea culpa*) have engendered  
But facing a reality,  
Seeking to change it  
Forging disagreement  
Between one view of this order  
And another  
And moving on from there

*But there comes an interjection*  
*How many are you?*  
*And is it in target?*

Bentham thought bookkeeping would do it  
But we should know by now  
That dear old Jeremy

<sup>1</sup> Many interpretations may be considered to run together in the 'not qui(e)t(e)' of the title. Dropping the bracketed letters suggests 'not quitting' - a sense of continuing a struggle and not giving up. Dropping the second bracketed letter and confirming the first leaves 'not quiet', if this does not mean that the 'poetry' here has no moments of silence. The poem's struggle reflects here anxieties, worries, concerns or agonising as in the French inquiet, and noise explicit or implicit. And of course, there is 'not quite' as the more evident alternative. Many critics would agree here, whether they are referring to poetic form or (less controversially) poetic quality (still the author is, to return to the first mentioned interpretation, not quitting).

<sup>2</sup> If the focus here is a more specific one much applies also at a more generic level in relation to suffering.

<sup>3</sup> The specifics here are not important (either for the text here or in Keane's work). The point is the boy's confusion and unease. See Keane, John (1990). *The other cheek? Paintings of Northern Ireland*, 23 March – 22 April 1990. London: Flowers East and David Lee.

Is not to be so quickly or poorly judged.  
Bookkeeping for *him*  
Was a most expansive thing  
To be expanded in its limits  
And not be *confined* to numbers  
Which might scarcely feature  
In its narratives  
And counter narratives <sup>5</sup>  
(Albeit this does not negate the relevance of the numerical;  
And Marilyn Waring long just wanted to shake up the  
counting).<sup>6</sup>  
Are accounting's limits, then, bound up in Art?  
  
Here on one border  
We reflect on the border between Accounting and Art

And possibilities of a ReCounting  
Beyond that categorising and those numbers  
That here as well as elsewhere  
Dominate our thought<sup>7</sup>  
  
And a deep understanding  
Of just how old the confusion is  
Despite the possibilities  
That seem buried under layers of history  
Why?  
  
From suffering to illumination?  
And from this to action?

<sup>4</sup> Maddock, Bea (1978). *Mutable*. Melbourne. Visual Arts Board of the Australian Council. Australian Contemporary Art Acquisition Programme.

<sup>5</sup> See 'Jeremy Bentham, accountant' – Chapter 2 of Gallhofer, Sonja and Haslam, Jim (2003) *Accounting and Emancipation: Some Critical Interventions*. London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Waring author of (1988) *If women counted: a new feminist economics* (with a foreword by G. Steinem; San Francisco: Harper & Row) published also under the title *Counting for nothing: What men value and what women are worth*.

<sup>7</sup> See Gallhofer, Sonja and Haslam, Jim (1996) *Accounting/Art and the Emancipatory Project: some reflections* (in *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, 9, 5, 23-44; see also Gallhofer and Haslam, 2003, *ibid*).