

intersemitic

TRANSPOSITION:

crazy about women,

PAUL DURCAN'S

DESECRATING ART

GALLERY

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Crazy about Women is Paul Durcan's first project focussing on Dublin's National Art Gallery (Durcan, 1991). It evolved from a proposal the director submitted to the poet on the occasion of the eponymous exhibition :

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In the summer of 1990 I was invited by the National Gallery of Ireland to compose a book of poems out of my experience of the Gallery and its collection¹. I accepted the invitation on the basis that the book would not be a coffee table book but a book as well-founded and inexorable as any other book of mine. (*Idem*: x)

Although I have my doubts about the first part of the assertion starting Raymond Keaveney's, the Gallery's Director's introduction, the second half seems better suited to our topic:

Though many of history's celebrated artists drew much of their inspiration from the great corpus of classical literature, particularly its poetry, few writers have used painting as the basis for their creations. The exhibition *Crazy About Women* and this volume which accompanies it is therefore somewhat exceptional, in that it reverses the usual process.[...]

Paul Durcan's specially commissioned series of poems is one man's response to what painting means for him. The pictures he has chosen to write about[are] capable of provoking a rich and varied personal response which works on many levels, aesthetic, historic, cultural and emotional. This collection

reflects the deeply personal response of the poet to the many images contained in the Gallery's collection. (Keaveney, *in* Durcan, 1991: viii)

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The insistence of the director and of the assistant director, Dr. Brian P. Kennedy, on the personal unique response of the writer : "Paul Durcan is fascinated by the potential of paintings to offer us a unique and personal relationship with a visual image. ...[Paintings] prompt the entire range of human emotions and provoke a different reaction depending on our mood as we view them" (Dr. Brian P. Kennedy, *in* Durcan, 1991: ix), interested me as it put to the fore the "plasticity" of the image, its capacity to arouse emotion. If we are to follow Gombrich after Karl Bühler, the functions of language have to be distinguished between expression, arousal and description, or as Gombrich offers between symptom, signal and symbol. These reactions correspond to three different times and modes of response: production, reception, comment, and to three different producers and productions. Expression corresponds to the speaker's or emitter's sphere, arousal to reception as for the function of description it is the result of two partners' interaction.

It is important to distinguish the expression of an emotion from its arousal, the symptom from the signal particularly since common parlance fails to do this when speaking of the «communication» of feeling. [...]

Looking at communication from the vantage point of language, we must ask first which of these functions the visual image can perform. We shall see that the visual image is supreme in its capacity for arousal, that its use for expressive purposes is problematic and that unaided it altogether lacks the possibility of matching the statement function of language. (Gombrich, 1996 : 42)

In terms of what constitutes our leading interest *i.e.* the relation between word and image, painting and poems, we can distinguish between three different times: the artist's time,

resulting in the production of a painting, then the poet's (Paul Durcan in this instance) with the creation of the poem, then the reader's time when the reader, as it were, activates both painting and poem in one unified time. The image caught in-between expression and arousal leaves a gap which allows a certain playful possibility, "du jeu" as Barthes put it, and enables language to develop. The hiatus between arousal and expression, together with the problematic "statement function" of the visual image, engender a fruitful poetic and fictional slippage the viewer (reader) may take advantage of in a true "encounter" such as the experience defined by Blanchot:

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Ce mouvement infini qu'est la rencontre elle-même
(l'événement de l'expérience, l'événement présent de la rencontre)
laquelle est toujours à l'écart du jeu et du moment où
elle s'affirme, car elle est cet écart même, cette distance
imaginaire où l'absence se réalise. (Blanchot, 1989 : 18)

This gap or imaginary distance is what made Paul Durcan's *Crazy About Women* possible. This first publication was followed by a second one dedicated to the London National Gallery and entitled *Give me your Hand* (Durcan, 1994).

I was intrigued by this overt example of "word and image" relation so clearly working as such and I thought this was indeed a thought-provoking instance of the studies we all pursue. I was not disappointed and I will offer you some of the reflections Paul Durcan's work brought to mind and enabled me to pursue the research I carry on the subject. My purpose is to reflect on the word/image relationship, the way it works and the values at stake via a particular materialization of it. I will make seven moves as in a game of chess.

First move : Durcan's Gallery, a "dispositif"

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The first point I want to make deals with the kind of "gallery" Paul Durcan offers us as we turn the pages of his Collection. In the manner of the grand tradition Durcan elaborates an art gallery of his own which copies the trajectory one adopts while walking through the rooms of Dublin's National Gallery. This is a subject Roger de Piles broached in his famous *Cours de peinture par principes* written in XVIIth century classical France. In this celebrated work, de Piles writes about painting he sees as a pilgrimage one has to make when moving on from one part to the other, from one genre to another:

Car la peinture doit être regardée comme un long pèlerinage, où l'on voit dans le cours du voyage plusieurs choses capables d'entretenir agréablement notre esprit pour quelque temps. On y considère les différentes parties de cet art, on s'y arrête en faisant son chemin, comme un voyageur s'arrête dans les lieux de repos qui sont sur sa route. (Piles, 1989 : 90)

The relationship between painting and pilgrimage insists on the movement one has to make. The architectural gallery was a typical feature of French châteaux as well as of English Houses for instance, and they provided a private space where ladies in particular could take some manner of exercise. The gallery as, for instance, that of the château d'Oiron, not far from where I live, was often dedicated to a particular subject developed in a series of frescoes or tapestries. In Oiron, the frescoes depict the episode of the Trojan war dealing with Helen's elopement. Thus while looking at the frescoes the viewer-walker reconstitutes the story and builds up a narrative of his/her own. Juxtaposing poems and paintings, Durcan also offers the viewer-reader a series of works which constitute his "dispositif" a term we could borrow from Agamben, and we could translate as "apparatus". Writing about Foucault, Agamben notes:

Il est clair que le terme, dans l'usage commun comme dans celui qu'en propose Foucault, semble renvoyer à un ensemble de pratiques et de mécanismes (tout uniment discursifs et non discursifs, juridiques, techniques et militaires) qui ont pour objectif de faire face à une urgence pour obtenir un effet plus ou moins immédiat. (Agamben, 2007: 20)

He gives a wider definition a few pages later: "J'appelle dispositif tout ce qui a, d'une manière ou d'une autre, la capacité de capturer, d'orienter, de déterminer, d'intercepter, de modeler, de contrôler et d'assurer les gestes, les conduites, les opinions et les discours des êtres vivants." (*Idem*: 31). An apparatus is then a way of constraining people, of exerting power over them. It is also a network "le réseau qui existe entre ces relations" as Foucault, quoted by Agamben, put it (*Idem*: 18). In Durcan's case the apparatus works both ways: it is the answer to a particular constraint, that of the Gallery commission (and with the term gallery we once more find ourselves in an architectural structure which imposes movement to the visitor) and it also exerts a constraint on the viewer, that of a programmed reading. It is a praxis and also an *oikonomia* which is an economy of the visible. The *oikonomia* of an image was developed by the doctrine of the Trinity when, to each part of the triad, a function was allocated. The theological inheritance, that of the apparatus linked to *oikonomia* translated by the Latin theologians by dis-positio as Agamben recalls (*Idem*: 26) shows the link between Durcan's work and its religious heritage. This I will prove in the following lines. Let it be remembered too to what extent image is linked to presence/absence to incarnation embodied by the figure of Christ as God's son and modelled unto his image. >>

Durcan's "apparatus" or "dispositif", has its own structure working on the "disposition" of 49 pictures of 47 paintings and 2 sculptures, accompanied by 47 poems. They either face one another or follow one another, a variation is brought about by the insertion of an image inside a poem (breaking it up as it

were). Separations are achieved thanks to the motif of an Irish harp printed in the centre of a page, a solution which imparts rhythm to the work. The Harp is the trade mark of the publications of the National Gallery of Ireland. I will not enter into this although it is of primary import but it would be beyond the scope of this paper. The point I want to make is the following : by resorting to his apparatus, Durcan impresses on the reader's mind a particular way of looking at his word/image arrangement, creating an object we may also call an iconotext or better an iconopoem. The latter builds up the fiction of a gallery which is a selection of some of the paintings of the Dublin Gallery. For it is the result of an elaboration (and we can hear labo(u)r in it) of a choice, of a "mise-en-œuvre", the origin of which lies in the painter's own whim, springing from the stimulation triggered by this painting rather than by this other one. It is the fiction of a narrative as conjured by the poems and their images. This we will have to bear in mind when we consider what I call "the pictorial third". So much for the relationship between space and Durcan's project. What about time then?

Second move: "After" the great masters, from sacred to profane

Durcan's project, of course, was a work carried out "after" the paintings. And then, the three times we evoked "after" Gombrich, come up to our minds. The use of "After", in such occurrences as "After Brueghel", in the numerous poems choosing Brueghel's famous *Fall of Icarus* — Martin Clüver finds over 40 instances of them (Clüver, 1989) — triggered my reflection. The ambiguity of the term is telling. Of course, it means the poem takes after the painting and will purport to offer a description (an *ekphrasis*) of the painting *à la mode* of the poet, its re-invention. It pays homage to the generating power of image which is at the origin of a discursive construc-

tion. But it also clearly evidences the anachronistic link between poem and painting : the poem was written "after" the painting. Blanchot pointed to the ambiguity of time related to the image of experience and the very thing itself:

Les choses ne sont malheureusement pas aussi simples. Toute l'ambiguïté vient de l'ambiguïté du temps qui entre ici en jeu et qui permet de dire et d'éprouver que l'image fascinante de l'expérience est à un certain moment, présente, alors que cette présence n'existe à aucun présent, détruit même le présent où elle semble s'introduire . (Blanchot, 1989: 18)

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Consequently, as writing about painting looks back onto the image, the critic cannot dispense with anachronism as a precious critical tool. This was one of the major concerns of George Didi-Huberman's critical stance in some of his works when he remarked on the absence/presence of the subject in its representation: "c'est là et c'est perdu".

Comprendre une image ? L'expérience nous enseigne qu'il faut se mettre, en la regardant, à l'écoute de sa teneur temporelle, cette polyrythmie dont elle est toute tissée. Or les modèles historiques standard - passé et présent, ancien et nouveau, obsolescence et renaissance, moderne et postmoderne - échouent à décrire cette complexité. (Didi-Huberman, 2002: quatrième de couverture)

Hence the necessity of anachrony as a tool in Art History and the recognition of the ghostlike quality of the image as "survivor", as "revenante". The concept of *Nach leben* for Warburg, then for Didi-Huberman insists on the role of memory in the pictures of our culture. Of course, this also confirms the difference Gombrich makes between expression (on the artist's part) and arousal (on the receiver's end), for arousal is "differed" in terms of time. Writing "after" a painting both means deriving from it and expatiating on it, adding one more

layer of fiction-as-interpretation to it, as well as one additional layer of time. So much then for the moment, for the relationship between time and Durcan's project.

We can draw one of our first conclusions : intersemiotic transposition is a combination of space and time defying Lessing's forceful separation between the arts of time and the arts of space he theorized in his *Laocoon*. In Durcan's gallery, both time and space are put to work combining the two arts and evolving a new « object », the result being a true iconopoem offering a fine instance of hybridity. Speed, the combination of time and space, as one measures space in terms of time ratio, and rhythm, that of the flux of the voice and of a walk, enable us to think this artistic object beyond the age-old word/image opposition, beyond the *paragone*. When "art objects" as Jeanette Winterson demonstrated in her eponymous work (Winterson, 1996), that is when art makes a point and thinks art with its own means.

In Paul Durcan's case, I first planned to concentrate on some of his poems and chose those he devoted to religious subjects. But after having studied one of them I found so many points to make that I decided to set it up as an example of my topic. I mean "The Holy Family with St John" attributed to Francesco Granacci. What struck me in Durcan's re-use or recycling of paintings with religious subjects is his will to desecrate them. His words truly are iconoclastic, a paradox for a poet who draws his inspiration from painting. The reader going through Durcan's gallery slowly understands that it all makes sense, that the new narrative derived from the ancient paintings is one of profanation often verging on blasphemy if not on the absurd.

Once more, one of Agamben's small books (small in size only) comes in handy. In *Profanations*, Agamben writes that profanation consists in putting back in the profane sphere what was destined to the sacred one. It all consists in rendering to all what was restricted to the sacred *locus*, the *sacer* of the templum.

Alors que consacrer (*sacrare*) désignait la sortie des choses de la sphère du droit humain, profaner signifiait au contraire leur restitution au libre usage des hommes. [...] Pure, profane libérée des noms sacrés est cette chose qui se voit restituée à l'usage commun des hommes. Mais l'usage n'apparaît pas ici comme quelque chose de naturel: on n'y accède au contraire qu'à travers la profanation. Il semble donc qu'il existe une relation particulière entre "user" et "profaner" [...]. (Agamben, 2006: 95-96)

By lifting some of the paintings out of their "sacred" *locus* set apart from the world, I mean that of the museum, and by using them in a way different from their original sacred function as religious paintings, Durcan « uses » them for his own purpose and desecrates them. He recycles them into a new work of art and to make sure the reader understands the profaning nature of his art he coherently inscribes their thematic in an iconoclastic mundane momentum.

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Just one point to complete what I meant above : the function of the museum is also changing in time. It used to be a kind of crypt, even of graveyard of works of art as a space, set aside by definition. Nowadays what is called museal space is more and more staged in a "scenographic" will, verging on modern art installations. Art galleries thus also profane what ancient museums used to be by using museum space in a profane way : they give back to the public not only what was privately owned but they also truly "exhibit" its contents in a money-earning "dispositif". (*Idem*: 110-111)

Paul Durcan's book also enables the reader to hold these masterpieces in his private sphere, to peruse them comfortably at home.

The Holy Family with St John (Durcan, 1991: 10-11) will serve my purpose and exemplify what I mean.

Third move: The (not so) Holy Family: Durcan's desecrating enterprise

Durcan's apparatus strictly combining word and image, by matching poems and paintings turns out to achieve a debunking process, particularly so concerning religious paintings, but not only. In true postmodern manner, Durcan both debunks and celebrates the Great Masters he chose to inspire his more or less ekphrastic poems. As I already advanced above, his apparatus plays again the drama of the fight between iconophiles and iconophobes. Paradoxically for one so immersed in images, they are rendered to all and put back in the sphere of common usage.

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The Holy Family with St John is of course one of the *topoi* of the genre. It is a sacred instance of Mary's role as a mother. Yet, right from the start, the ambiguity of Mary's function introduces the « jeu » or gap necessary for a poet to draw inspiration from. For Mary is truly separated from the other women because of her virginity and of her sacred mission as God's son's mother. Thus she is removed to the sacred sphere, although her paradoxical function, that of giving birth in a human way to the infant, legitimately should ascribe her to the profane sphere. Sacred as God's mother, she also is truly human, precisely, as a mother. In this painting, Mary is represented tenderly holding her baby son, while he is actively playing with John the Baptist, who is just a little older. The image shows them as two playmates but also underscores their holy status by crowning them, as well as the Virgin and Joseph advancing in the background with golden haloes. The superimposition of the sacred and the profane is inscribed in the religious image. Durcan will insist on the profane signs to render unto the common usage this sacred object.

The particular status of Christ as God's son made in His image will be theorized in the *oikonomia* doctrine evoked above. Let it be remembered that it was translated as *dispositio* (a term

of rhetoric, close to dispositif too) to settle the uncomfortable doctrine of the Trinity. The image figures at the centre of this discussion as Christ was made unto God's image as His incarnation, as Byzantine icons used to be considered.

Durcan's poem, made up of four stanzas of six (rarely rhyming) lines each, achieves this work of profanation by a process of multiple reversals: reversal of point of view, reversal of subject, and of the function of the objects and details contained in the painting. This pattern of reversal underscores an iconoclastic project when sacred and profane are turned upside down.

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Fourth move: Reversal of point of view, *ekphrasis* "à la Durcan"

As Anne Goarzin (Goarzin, 2006) perceptively saw it, the point of view is reversed in the poem. What stands in the foreground in the painting and is the main subject comes second whereas what appears in the background as a tiny detail occupies the foreground and frames the poem. Thus the main witness of the scene sees it from the rear as the man in the boat describes himself as an image of frailty, as "a leaf in driftwood"

My oar is dragging and my boat
Is turning full circle
To drift sideways onto the family shore. (Durcan, 1991: 11)

The approach is sideways and not from in front, the boatsman has to come full circle to approach the shore, thus also reminding one of post modernism choice of minor characters versus great subjects and narratives. Indirectly once more the Holy Family is designated by hypallage as standing on a shore which becomes "the family shore" by contagious metonymy. The main witness is defined by what he lacks, himself being "a man without a family".

The same witness will be the main focalizing authority in the text. The first and the last stanza both starting by referring to his point of view: "my oar", "I row back to Trim". Thus the poem is neatly framed by two stanzas under the control of the same narrator-focalizer, which is a way of mimicking what a picture frame is, a way of enclosing the image of both separating it from the wall and the world of the viewers of building up what Derrida called a parergon, an in-between structure, a link and a separation. In the same way the witness casts a last look back onto the scene:

Back out there on the river- a pretty emotional picture.
What is it a donkey sees in man? (*Ibidem*)

The last line, stands in a chiasmus like relation to the very last line of the first stanza "In the human family's animal beauty". It neatly locks up the poem with a final humouristic trait underscoring the interchangeability of human and animal of immanence and transcendence.

Irony also plays a part in the pattern of reversal as the closing stanza sees the very humble boater entering no other place but an Irish pub in Trim². The whole network of Durcan's apparatus is at work here: the poem is a closely knit set of repetitions holding it tightly together. Thus Trim, the capital of County Meath quoted in the last stanza echoes line 10 in the second stanza: "Whose trim penis peers out like a bullfinch from a bough". Triviality and irony are ways of profaning the sacred subject as the name of the pub exemplifies: The Judge and Jury of course evoke Christ's main function: sent to earth as the Redeemer he will also, together with Mary and St John, preside over the destinies of human beings on Judgement Day, being both Judge and Jury.

The Virgin Mary who stands at the centre of the composition, dominates the episode as the use of pronouns "Her young fellow", "her husband" shows. Yet it has to be remarked that no

name figures in the poem: "her" appears without any previous mentioning of the character of Mary. Christ, St John, Joseph, are only designated in relation to "her". This is also a way of depriving the characters of their sacred quality as mythical characters and of restituting them to the common sphere by making types of them and not individuals: Christ is "her young fellow all ebullience", St John the Baptist "his young playmate" St Joseph "her husband the carpenter, sweetest of men".

Fifth move: From sacred conversation to profane conjugal love

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One more turn of the screw and Durcan goes farther in his profaning poem. In the third stanza the narrator develops the theme of the conversation another *topos* of religious painting. Here no *sagrada conversazione*, for Joseph "and his donkey [...] are conversing with one another"

Putting their heads together, attentive to one another,
Donkey doing his alert best to believe his ears
Having stopped in his hoofprints to take it all in,
What the husband is confiding about his sensational spouse:
Her toes, her knuckles, her eyebrows:
The human family – what it knows. (*Ibidem*)

The traditional treatment of the episode is turned upon its head as its subject never is Joseph's confiding in an animal, but the close association of Christ and St John who will later baptize Him. From the sphere of the sacred once more, the viewer-reader is dis-located and resettled in the private sphere where a husband is supposed to be detailing his wife's body to an animal's alleged "attentive" ear. The use of clichés: "putting their heads together", "doing his alert best to believe his ears", "having stopped in his hoofprints to take it all in", shows the insistence of the poem to use common parlance although

humour introduces subtle changes *via* the addition of an adjective (alert) or the substitution of a word (hoofprints for tracks) and common knowledge "to believe his ears" as one knows a donkey has very long ears indeed, often used to signal stupidity. The Virgin is reified when reduced to her body parts: "her toes, her knuckles, her eyebrows" as one follows the viewer's eyes'3 trajectory from bottom to top. It also guides the spectator's glance who looks anew at the painting to detail the parts evoked. Thus the "apparatus" shows itself for what it is, a way of constraining the spectator to look at the painting in the narrator's, as the agent of the poet's, way.

The title of the painting, another kind of frame the golden frame, could then be: "The Human Family with a Donkey"³. The substitution of human to Holy and of the donkey to ST John confirms the desecrating process at work here. The *in absentia* manipulation is suggested. The great painting by an Old Master has been demoted to "a pretty emotional picture", a very iconoclastic phrase indeed, especially in such a traditionally religious minded country as Catholic Ireland. This is confirmed by the desecration of some of the details.

Sixth move: Desecration through the debunking of sacred attributes.

Durcan pays minute attention to details showing that he has studied the painting at full length giving it "time to rise" as Daniel Arasse advocated, a fact acknowledged by the Assistant Director, Dr. Brian P. Kennedy in his Foreword:

Most visitors to the National Gallery of Ireland spend less than a minute before any painting. Paul Durcan has encouraged us to stay longer, to learn more. Paintings can enrich us physically, mentally and spiritually, but to experience this requires time. (Kenendy, *in* Durcan, 1991: ix)

The usual attributes of Holiness: halos are turned into profane objects: when first detailing the image in a mock-*ekphrasis*, the narrator notes: "Horseshoe sandals, frisby halos". Although no sandals appear in the image, but we can clearly see what a horseshoe sandal might be (on the mode of two leather thongs), its aim once more is to fuse animal and human attributes. This was already suggested in the last line of the first stanza: "I revel/ In the human family's animal beauty" As for the frisby halo the analogy of shape allows for such a zeugma and points to the playful quality of the writing stance in keeping with the next stanza about "his young playmate". Of course, anachrony and profanity may make the reader laugh, but also shock the true believer. The halo once more is the object of desecration in the very last stanza when: "I drink a long slow black pint with a halo on it". This time, the sacred halo has become the round mark on the foam of a good pint of Guinness. In the same stanza, the Virgin's dress colour, crimson is used to describe the feeling of well-being which slowly overpowers the very profane drinker: "Feeling crimson with every sip, crimsoner and crimsoner, /Gold in my belly." Crimson cheeks, the happiness induced by a golden drink, and the Holy Communion is desecrated for this is the sacred moment when one drinks Christ's blood under the guise of wine.

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The narrator even dares allude to what can be seen but not spoken of : St John the Baptist's penis: "his young playmate whose trim penis peers out like a bullfinch from a bough" the object of the only comparison in the poem.

The sex of angels, here the sex of a saint, the private life of the Holy family turned very human indeed as seen by a boatsman and by a donkey, the distance achieved in the last paragraph accelerating the spatial dis-location, from Italian Renaissance purporting to set a scene in the Holy land, to Ireland in the twentieth century, all this contributes to the profanation of the Holy picture. This is when the content of Joseph's confidences to the donkey and the reading of the last

two lines of the third stanza and of the fourth stanza cast a different light on the poem's meaning: "The human family – what it knows" echoes the last interrogation: "What is it a donkey sees in a man?". The question of knowing and seeing, of seeing as knowing is put to the fore. Portrait of the artist as peeping Tom? This is when Durcan's final and ultimate desecration takes place. The Holy family is the object of a stolen suggested gaze charged with eroticism which, I will try to show, tallies with the nature of the word and image relationship.

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Seventh move and checkmate: Durcan's iconopoem, an instance of erotic intersemioticity.

The subject of the discussion between Joseph and his donkey is "about his sensational spouse: her toes, her knuckles, her eyebrows" which can be seen as as many details of a feminine blason as detailed by an adoring lover. The Virgin is turned into an erotic object, the object of Joseph's and the reader's desire. The image of the Virgin also is the sub-ject (put to the fore) of a very profane conversation, the subject of a transmutation into words, of a discursive construction as Foucault would have put it. In "The Incarnation of the Eucharist", one of the other poems of the collection we find these telling verses: "Every moonburst / We have intercourse, you and I, It is a eucharist union". In this instance carnal love is equated with the sacred communion. Other numerous examples might be found as well, proving the system at work here. This is what Durcan's "apparatus" reveals and together with it it tells us something about the word/image relationship.

In the introduction to *Crazy about Women* Durcan states that *Crazy about Women* was "born out of a lifetime's romance with the National Gallery of Ireland and is [his] attempt to be so inclusive as to make the "inter-course" between what is painted and what is written as reciprocal as it is inevitable" (xi). In

Durcan's own art gallery, intersemiotic transposition is conceived as inter-course (walking/writing as an in-between trajectory, remember the pilgrimage) as a re-lation (a link, re-ligere) on the mode of the erotization of painting by the text, of the seduction of image by text and vice versa. As if Lessing's memory subliminally came up to the surface, he who wrote this famous male chauvinistic phrase about the differences between painting and poetry, submitting the "feminine" image to the "masculine" language: "paintings, like women, are ideally silent, beautiful creatures designed for the gratification of the eye, in contrast to the sublime eloquence proper to the manly art of poetry". (Lessing, [1766] 1962: 21)

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Paul Durcan truly is "in love" with the paintings. He takes possession of them and brings us close to them as close as possible. He appropriates them by remodelling them and plucking them off their visual habitat. Durcan's iconoclastic poems, indeed written "after" the paintings, prove his deep and long-term engagement with them. The apparatus sets the relationship between painting and poetry, the intersemiotic transposition, on an irenic mode, another way of giving life back to what had been stored away (and often forgotten) in a museum or art gallery. Perhaps too, those iconopoems are a form of "commerce" (in the French meaning borrowed from the XVIIth century use) regulated by an *oikonomia*, and not only a fight between the two as in the paragone, but the commerce which culminates in the poem the result being an erotic creation, a transaction or an the interartistic negotiation in which the loser is the winner. If we are to believe Gombrich, "the form of a representation cannot be divorced from its purpose and the requirements of the society in which the given visual language gains *currency*". Granacci's *Holy Family* met the requirements of Renaissance society whereas Durcan's family is adapted and revised to suit his society. A reverent rendering of the image would pass off as outmoded, ossified, inefficient and meaningless, as subservient

to a tradition. It would not be a work of art for it would not be paradigm-breaking, inventive or creative, i.e. a tame image whereas Paul Durcan's is nothing but tame. Durcan uses the "noise" in-between emission/reception/object and thrills his reader. He has had his "experience", his encounter (Blanchot) and *intercourse*, with the pictures hanging in the National Gallery of Ireland. He then invites the reader to imitate him and have his own. By performing his/her own "pilgrimage" in the gallery, the reader/viewer will weave a story of his/her own seduced by the magic of the paintings. As Gombrich recalled: "the correct portrait, like the useful map, is [...] not a faithful record of a visual experience but the faithful construction of a *relational model*" (Gombrich, 1996: 111). Thus the spectator will add to the infinite web of meaning Paul Durcan's networks cast over the brilliant colours of paintings, waiting to be awakened by a master of words. *Crazy about Women* indeed, and about painting as well. <<

NOTAS

[1] The book consists of 47 poems, 47 paintings and 2 sculptures.

[2] Trim, Baila Atha Troim in Irish, is the capital of County Meath.

[3] A fact already acknowledged by Anne Goarzin, *op. cit.*



FIG. I
The Holy Family with St John _ Attributed to Francesco Granacci



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