

# Derek Mahon's Latin Adaptations: A Gathering of Alternative Voices

*Ahmed Badrideen*

**Abstract:** Commentators on Mahon have made us familiar with the idea that translation of modern foreign literature for him is a means of escaping and rejecting cultural nationalism and serves his interest in bilocation which runs throughout his poetry. A different kind of politics, however, appears to be entailed in the translation of classical texts or, indeed, adaptation. As a storehouse of archetypes, classical literature is often appropriated for allegorical ends, to comment on or structure the present as Eliot observed in his discussion of the mythic method in *Ulysses*. Broadly speaking, then, if with modern and foreign translations the contemporary poet seeks a kind of vocalic diversity, with the classical translation or adaptation he or she seeks a representative voice, an echo which comes paradoxically before not after the utterance. This article, which explores Mahon's Latin adaptations recently collected in *Echo's Grove*, will look at the ways in which the poetry of the Romans might be representative for the Ulster poet, focusing particularly on how the adaptations align with Mahon's alternative vision. Through close reading this article seeks also to explore the poetic artistry of Mahon's adaptations. It will show that not only does Mahon 'update' the classics, but that he is also an astute translator who seeks to recreate and share the qualities and value of the original.

**Keywords:** Mahon; Latin; adaptation; Ovid; Propertius.