

Translating Scottish Literary Texts: A Linguistic Clover-Leaf

Jean Berton

The English language belongs to no community in particular; or at any rate to a community so vast and heterogeneous as to have no common features except common humanity and the English tongue. Scots, by contrast, is a language intensely territorial: one unique to a small and well-defined geographical area [...][\[1\]](#)

J. Derrick McClure's statement – which equally applies to Scottish Gaelic – offers the prospect of a fruitful debate for translators interested in the literature of Scotland. The 'linguistic clover leaf' in the title of this article refers to Scotland's three native languages. We are now beyond the need to prove that Scots, Gaelic and English are together part of the cultural identity of Scotland.[\[2\]](#) Occurrences of Latin, though not totally absent, are now becoming as rare as a four-leaf clover in a field. The complexity of the linguistic case of Scotland can no longer be overlooked even though what is self-evident must be repeatedly asserted, as John Corbett does:

To survey the history of translation into Scots is to explore in microcosm the history of Scottish literature and language, and their relationship to Scottish politics, history and social identity.[\[3\]](#)

The building of Europe – to summarise an involved process – has brought about a clear consciousness of linguistic variety in Europe, and various decisions since the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was signed in Strasbourg on November 5, 1992, have boosted the revival of Celtic languages and other so-called minority languages. Again, the value of those minority languages need no longer be demonstrated. Following the Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights, signed in Barcelona on June 9, 1996, the notion of multilingualism has been superseded by the rise of plurilingualism. As it is expressed in the European Charter of Plurilingualism, currently in development, plurilingualism is a rather common international

phenomenon, and Scotland is well positioned to embrace it as an asset within a European context.^[4]

However, the topic of this article is not plurilingualism in Scotland but how to avoid erasing it when translating Scottish literary texts into French. Even though French linguists have made some progress in Scottish studies, they still face an age-old challenge as far as the languages of Scotland are concerned: 'English' is easily translated into 'anglais', but there is still much hesitation about both 'Gaelic' and 'Scots'. Even so, I will go on translating, as I have for some twenty years, 'Gaelic' into 'gaélique' (if necessary adding 'écossais' to avoid confusing it with Irish Gaelic), and 'Scots' into 'écossais'. I will also continue using 'anglophone(s)' for English speakers, 'gaélophone(s)' for Gaelic speakers and 'scottophone(s)' for Scots speakers.^[5] Such a clarification needs to be made to avoid doubt and confusion.

Hesitations about place-names are frequent, and it is the translator's duty to use names consistently and train their readers to be confident in recognising their significance. Most place-names need not be translated; however, after reading information on the internet about, say, the 'Region Highland', should the translator prefer a Gaelic name or an English name for a specific place? Should he or she choose *Inverness* or *Inbhir Nis* (in the latter case, must the pronunciation of 'inbhir' be explained)? The case of *Fort William*, alias *An Gearasdan*, can be more puzzling. And what can we say about *Edinburgh*, *Embro*, *Dun Eideann*? The name 'Edinburgh' is apparently difficult enough for French students to pronounce and the English spelling generally alternates with the French, 'Édimbourg'. Moreover, in French we have a corresponding adjective – 'édimbourgeois'. But for Glasgow, the corresponding adjective 'glaswégien' is not firmly established. For Inverness, we have to create 'invernessien' and enforce the use of the term. As for Aberdeen, football commentators can be of great help to familiarise the French with 'aberdonien.' The list can be greatly extended, but I shall restrict myself to one further illustration of the major issue of onomastics: my favourite place-name from Scott's *Waverley*, 'Ballybrough'. It is an invented name with a strong symbolical significance – in the narrative, the village is on the cusp between the Gaelic-speaking world and the Scots-speaking world and there seems to be no possibility of translating it literally into the French language other than by 'Villagevillage'.

These few examples serve to raise a key question: with a view to acknowledging the languages of Scotland as a major element of her identity, how are we to translate into French words, phrases, and sentences in either Scots or Gaelic when they are embedded in a narrative in English? The translator may, of course, choose not to translate them and allow the narrator to make the meaning clear (a highly debatable position) or opt to add a glossary with notes, after Walter Scott's manner in the *Waverley* novels, or Peter Urpeth's in *Far Inland*.^[6] Or the translator can decide to translate them and add a footnote stating that the words are in Gaelic or Scots in

the original version, in which case (s)he must have some knowledge of both Gaelic and Scots. There may be a third option which would be to translate using specific markers to indicate to the reader that the language used in the original version is either Scots or Gaelic. So far, no prescription has been made about translating plurilingual texts into French, especially in relation to Scottish literature, as the president of SEPTET (an academic association dealing with translation from English into French) assured me in a personal communication. This article, then, may in fact serve as a first step towards theorising a practice that covers the literatures of all the nations in the British Isles.

Defaucompret: A Landmark in Translation

I begin with some observations on the French version of Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*, by Auguste Jean-Baptiste Defaucompret (1767-1843), the much-praised translator of Scott's novels in the 1820s. A few examples will illustrate my thesis:

'Now,' he said, 'all is over—let the piper play *Ha til mi tulidh*, (we return no more)' and he is said to have expired before the dirge was finished.^[7]

« Maintenant tout est fini ; que le joueur de cornemuse fasse entendre l'air *ha til mi tulidh* (nous ne reviendrons plus). » Et il expira, dit-on, avant que le chant funèbre fût terminé.

Even though Scott's Gaelic quotes are not in the appropriate spelling, their meanings are quite easily accessed by modern readers. However, the mistake in his English translation of 'Ha til mi tulidh' into 'we return...' instead of 'I shall return...' is neither corrected nor noted in the French version ('nous...'). Such a detail suggests that Defaucompret had no knowledge of Scottish Gaelic.

'Warst of a', Robin,' retorted the Glaswegian,—'I mean, ye disloyal traitor—Warst of a!' [...] (p. 271)

– Encore pire, Robin! reprit le bailli de Glasgow, il y a de la trahison. Un traître déloyal! C'est le pire de tout...

Here the translator has no proper word in French to translate 'the Glaswegian'; and the phrase 'le bailli de Glasgow' is not adequate since Scott meant to draw his reader's attention on the Glaswegian's accent expressed in the repeated word 'warst'. The French word 'pire' does correspond to 'worst' but it fails to render the Glaswegian accent in 'warst'.

In the following extract, it is obvious that Defaucompret cannot translate Jarvie's colourful replies and he does not appreciate the several implied meanings in Scots and Gaelic. Furthermore he has no means at his disposal of showing the extent of the linguistic abilities of Rob Roy, who can speak both Scots and English fluently.

'I tell you, Robin,' said the magistrate, 'in my puir mind, if ye live the life ye do, ye shuld hae ane o' your gillies door-keeper in every jail in Scotland, in case o' the warst.'
'Ane o' my kinsmen a bailie in ilka burgh will just do as weel, cousin Nicol—so, gude-night or gude-morning to ye; and forget not the Clachan of Aberfoil.' (p. 276)

– Je vous dirai, d'après mon pauvre avis, Rob, dit M. Jarvie, que, si vous continuez à mener la même vie, vous feriez bien, en cas d'accident, de placer un de vos affidés dans chaque prison d'Écosse.

– Si un de mes parents était bailli dans chaque ville, cousin, cela me serait assez utile. Mais bonsoir ou bonjour, et n'oubliez pas le chemin d'Aberfoil.

In the phrase 'Clachan of Aberfoil', the translator mistranslates 'clachan' into 'chemin' (road) instead of 'Village'. Such a detail betrays the translator's lack of understanding of the Gaelic term, which was also borrowed into Scots. Therefore, we cannot expect him to render the language (and accent) correctly.

The following piece by the narrator shows that an analysis of the 'response of *'Ha niel Sassenach'*' with no subject clearly expressed can suggest several interpretations: 1) *I can't speak English*; 2) *I am not English*; 3) *there isn't any Englishman*. It may also express a polemical accusation through the possibly deliberate confusion between an Englishman speaking English and a Scotsman (Jarvie) speaking Scots.

[...] and to our various enquiries, the hopeless response of *'Ha niel Sassenach,'* was the only answer we could extract. The Bailie, however, found (in his experience) a way to make them speak English. (p. 320)

... et, à chaque question que nous fîmes, on nous répondit constamment: – *Ha niel sassenach*. M. Jarvie, qui avait de l'expérience, trouva pourtant bientôt le moyen de leur faire parler anglais.

The direct and indirect handling of languages is of prime importance. Defaucompret here adds a footnote translating Scott's footnote: 'C'est-à-dire: Je ne sais pas l'anglais. – Éd.' He has dropped 'hopeless' along the way, and turned 'The Bailie' into 'Mr Jarvie', which significantly alters the

politics of Scott's discourse. And the following extract reveals Defaucompret's lack of serious analysis before turning the reply into French:

'If shentlemans were seeking ta Red Gregarach,' he said, 'to be sure they couldna expect to find her without some wee danger.' (p. 347)

– Si les gentilshommes cherchaient les Gregarach, dit-il, à coup sûr ils ne devaient pas s'attendre à les trouver sans courir quelques petits dangers.

The character of Dougal, a Gaelic speaker, cannot master the English language – 'Shentlemans' instead of 'Shentlemen' – but the absence of the article may be meaningful and 'If shentlemans...' should not be translated into 'Si /es gentilshommes...'. Moreover, 'gentleman' is supposed to mean 'English gentleman', since at the beginning of the eighteenth century no Highlander was considered a gentleman. The word, both mispronounced and misused, is connoting social and political meanings which a French reader of the 1820s may not have been able to appreciate.

Furthermore, the phrase 'ta Red Gregarach' obviously meaning 'the Red (-haired Helen) MacGregor' is turned into 'les Gregarach', which is a serious mistranslation. Was Defaucompret misled by the unlenited 'the': 'ta'? (see on page 360 'tat' corresponding to 'that', and 'ta' to 'the'). Elsewhere, 'the MacGregor', meaning Rob Roy himself, is confused with 'les MacGregor', meaning the whole clan. Still, we may find some excuse in the fact that M. Defaucompret was as hard-pressed as contemporary professional translators to visit Scotland and study her vernacular languages.

Modern-Day Translators and Contemporary Novels

Around ten years ago Professor Sylvère Monod published a modern translation of Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. In Defaucompret's earlier translation, the title had been rendered *La Prison d'Edimbourg*; but Professor Monod's choice of translation was more direct: *Le Cœur du Mid-Lothian*.^[8] In his preface he criticises Defaucompret's translation, mentioning the numerous omissions that cause major distortions in Scott's original narrative.^[9]

A major improvement is to be found in the clear consciousness of the existence of Scots expressed by Scottish characters. However, Professor Monod fails to acknowledge that Scots is a language expressed through many various dialects^[10] – to him those Scottish characters speak some sort of English.^[11] Further, Professor Monod does not distinguish between Scots and Scottish Gaelic – to him Gaelic speakers use 'a harsher language, more "distant" from ordinary English'.^[12] Nevertheless, he tries to tackle the linguistic differences in two ways, besides the addition of footnotes: one is the use of a few 'simple Scottish words' that can be recognised by

the reader (*laird, kirk, cairn, manse*) and which serve to enhance the local colour of the narrative,^[13] the other is coining some phrases or sentences in awkward French so as to produce a feeling of the bizarre.^[14] The final blow comes in the comparison between language and traditional dress – Monod's reader should experience the feelings of an Englishman watching a young Scottish lass in her traditional costume walking somewhere in 'Southern Britain'.^[15] However improved we may judge the latest translation of Scott's novel to be, we can observe that much remains to be done to make it clear to French translators that Scotland has been the host of three languages for centuries and that Walter Scott knew how to handle them with a purpose.

If every educated Frenchman and woman is likely to have read stories by R. L. Stevenson, there must be only a handful of us aware of the kailyard milieu. One of the main reasons is that a text like Ian Maclaren's *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*, for example, poses a challenge to any translator. The narrator uses standard English to describe scenes and introduce various characters: some of them are Lowlanders speaking Doric, and others are Highlanders speaking Scots in their own ways. The following excerpt illustrates the difficulties at issue:

'Ye're no surely frae the Glen, lads?' as the men leaped the dyke and crossed to the back door, the snow falling from their plaids as they walked.

'We're that an' nae mistak, but a' thocht we wud be lickit ae the place, eh, Chairlie? A'm no sae weel acquant wi' the hill on this side, an' there wes some kittle (hazardous) drifts.'

'It wes grand o' ye tae mak the attempt,' said Drumsheugh, 'an' a'm gled ye're safe.'

'He cam through as bad himself tae help ma wife,' was Charlie's reply.

'They're three mair Urtach shepherds 'ill come in by sune; they're frae Upper Urtach, an' we saw them fording the river; ma certes, it took them a' their time, for it wes up tae their waists and rinnin' like a mill lade, but they jined hands and cam ower fine.' And the Urtach men went in to the fire.^[16]

There is an additional difficulty here in that Maclaren himself glosses the word 'kittle' as 'hazardous.' The English term can be translated as 'dangereux', but what do we do with 'kittle'? The solution must cohere with the translation of the whole narrative, where the narrator's standard English contrasts with both Drumsheugh's Lowland accent and wording and both of the Highlanders' idiosyncrasies when speaking Scots, the language of 'the hill on this side'. The complexities of translating this kind of text demand that an integrated approach be developed by the translator.

In his study *The Violence of Language*, cited by Lawrence Venuti, Jean-Jacques Lecercle writes:

A literary text [...] can never simply express the author's intended meaning in a personal style. It rather puts to work collective forms in which the author may indeed have a psychological investment, but which by their very nature depersonalize and destabilize meaning [...].[\[17\]](#)

In the case of Scottish literature, the phrase 'collective forms' includes the living languages of Scotland. Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels set a pattern for Scottish literature in that they brought together at least two of the three living languages of Scotland. Andrew Greig, in *The Return of John Macnab* (1996), emulates Walter Scott indirectly, through the medium of John Buchan's *John Macnab* (1925). Buchan's narrative is set in the west Highlands, and Greig's in the eastern Highlands, and in both cases some knowledge of both Gaelic and Scots does help the reader. To begin with, the name 'Macnab' (the identity assumed by a group of amateur poachers in each novel) is meaningful since, in modern times, priests and members of the clergy of the Roman Catholic church are not supposed to have offspring; therefore, Macnab, literally translating as 'son of the abbot', implies 'non being' or nobody, which enhances the elusiveness of the character in the narratives.[\[18\]](#) Here and there in his narrative, Greig uses Gaelic words which can be easily understood by a Scottish reader, for example:

'Special occasion, *a graidh*'?

'Aren't they all, *m'eudail*'?, she replied poorly mimicking the Lewis lilt [...].[\[19\]](#)

Discussing the correct spelling for a vocative ('a ghraidh' rather than 'a graidh') is of little interest or no interest with regard to this term of endearment. What is revealed in Greig's few references to Gaelic is that language is certainly an issue in Scotland, and part of the characterisation of the protagonist is his membership of a linguistic minority in his own land. Later, the narrator drops a hint:

The chair went spinning. He stood before the large-scale map, and using language only his Maker and some forty thousand other native Gaelic speakers would understand, he searched wildly for the lochan. [...] (p. 288)

The translator should not overlook the issue; all the more so as this particular character, together with the collective 'hero', appear again in a later narrative, *Romanno Bridge*, with their respective characterisations intact.[\[20\]](#)

In her detective novel, *Deadly Code*, Lin Anderson sets part of her story in a Gaelic-speaking environment:

Raasay House, Taigh Mor an t-eilean, 'The Big House on the island', stood in the southwest corner [...] [\[21\]](#)

She clearly means to make use of the linguistic context in the last few lines of the English narrative:

'I love her,' Spike had said. 'Tha gaol agam oirre.'

[...]

Rhona closed her eyes and let the Hebridean wind wash her soul.

'Tha mi 'dol dhachaigh,' she told the wind. 'I'm going home.' (p. 213)

Anderson sees to it that her reader understands the Gaelic words by producing an immediate translation. However the very last line of the novel expressing both Gaelic and English draws the reader's – and the translator's – attention to the actual presence of native languages other than English. To some extent, Lin Anderson's novel voices some linguistic militancy.

As a final example, Peter Urpeth's *Far Inland* also includes expressions in Gaelic. 'Donald knew that it was to be Angus's *marbh-phaisg*' (p. 20). The word is explained in a note at the end of the novel, 'death shroud' (p. 163). Later, "Sorley MacRath – *Fear na Slèibhtan*' it would say on his tombstone' (p. 69); the phrase is translated in a note as 'man of the mountains'. But the translator's work is challenged in the following:

The father spoke as they worked on:

'*Mòine dhubh*, black peat from the *fàd a caoran*. *Mòine bhan*, white peat rich in fibre that would keep a fire in all night.

'*Mòine chruaidh ghlas*, a mix of black and fibre peat that won't crumble like the *mòine dubh* [sic]. (p. 112)

An accompanying note reads: '*fad a' chaorain*, the bottom layer of peat in the bank, that produce *mòine dhubh*' (p. 162). The interested reader will see the different spellings of '*fad a c(h)aora(i)n*' and might expect an explanation. How might the translator respond to this demand? In this dialogue, the novel is verging on the documentary, and that fiction can take on several roles, such as telling a tale and defending a language, makes the translator's task more complex.

These few examples illustrate what might be termed a 'Scottian' mixture of translating strategies – immediate translations into English, notes at the bottom of the page or at the end of the narrative, and a glossary. A Scottish writer may consider it pointless to translate phrases or sentences in Scots, but a translator has to handle the native languages of Scotland with care, since Scots or Gaelic-speaking characters should not unwittingly be represented as fools, as is so

often the case with speakers of non-standard or non-dominant languages. The narrative voice being in the English language, whatever is written in English easily translates into French. But characters' voices, whether in Scots or Gaelic, must find an adequate expression. Furthermore, the text must not be altered for the worse.

Rather than theorise translation from bi/trilingual Scottish literary texts into one single language (French), bearing in mind the work carried out in our laboratory, CIEREC, and published in *Création théâtrale*, I would like to offer here something of a hypothesis that needs to be fully tested.^[22] To start with, standard English text can be unproblematically translated into standard French. Latin can remain as Latin in a French version – French is a Roman language, after all. For example, the Latin quotation that precedes the main narrative in John Herdman's *Ghost Writing* offers readers a significant clue to the meaning of the novel, and can remain unchanged. In the remainder of this paper I shall propose a way of handling shifts into Scots and Gaelic through the control of the phonemic and orthographic realisations of the translation. I focus on only some aspects of each individual language, because there is no space for a thorough phonemic analysis of either Gaelic or Scots. The present proposal should be considered merely a pilot study, to be improved through more extensive practice. Concerning this undertaking, I am quite conscious of the fact that, as Lawrence Venuti observes, 'translation, like any cultural practice, entails the creative reproduction of values'.^[23]

Translating Scots

I start with some general observations on Scots: Scottish vowels are set against standard (or RP) English vowels. English triphthongs are mostly absent in Scots – our/oor; about/about; English diphthongs are usually equal to monophthongs in Scots – my/ma; away/awa. Overall, Scots has fewer phonemes than RP English – 'cannot' in English is 'canna' in Scots. In the vocalic system, monophthongs in Scots are in a more upper-central position in the speaker's oral cavity – poor/puir; one/yin; from/frac; what/whit. Vowels in stressed syllables in English may correspond to long vowels in Scots – head/heid; well/weel. Following those observations, we can suggest that a French translation of Scots vocalic sounds may aim for a preponderance of central vowels. Since, in standard French, diphthongs are not frequent (except when using a Provençal accent!), we are left only with the option of altering the colour of selected vowels. The central vowel 'e', possibly with an accent 'é', can be used more often, even replacing some other vowels.

As far as consonants are concerned, we can observe that Scots predominantly uses k-sounds ('church' in English and 'kirk' in Scots). Therefore, we can mimetically represent North-English (Teutonic/Scandinavian) sounds in Scots through translated speech that also foregrounds k-sounds – in French, 'c' (as in 'cœur') and 'q' (as in 'qui, que') since the letter 'k' is rarely used. The

translator must avoid falling into some mock-Alsatian or German accent (for which k-sounds are turned into g-sounds and vice versa, owing to processes of voicing and unvoicing), which would result in a total failure. This procedure needs to be tested; some steps in this direction are taken below.

We can use, as a case study [24], James Robertson's *The Fanatic*, translated by Yves Bouveret as *Le Fanatique*. [25] Generally speaking, the narrator's English voice frames and displays the Scots voices of the characters. In Robertson's *The Fanatic*, modern Scots, at the end of the twentieth century, runs parallel with seventeenth-century Scots; the author's intention is evidently to demonstrate that modern Scots has the same value as seventeenth-century Scots and that the period from the Union of 1707 to 1997 – when the English language had to be considered prevalent – can now be dismissed. The chapter titles only indicate dates so as to help the reader fully grasp the structure of the narrative.

Example 1.

Not many folk were about, but those that did hurry past had to step around him, giving him dark looks. *Whit's the daft laddie daeing goaving up at the jail there? Dis he ken some puir body locked up inside?* (*The Fanatic*, p. 45)

En passant près de lui, les rares piétons devaient le contourner et lui jetaient des regards mauvais. *Qu'est-ce qu'il a ce jeune idiot à reluquer la prison? Peut-être qu'il connaît un pauvre type qui y est enfermé?* (*Le Fanatique*, p. 59)

Following the phonemic constraints described above, I would change Bouveret's 'idiot' for 'crétin', because it has both the 'é' vocalic sound and the 'k' consonant. I would also modify 'la prison' for 'c'te prison' because the vowel in 'c'te' (= a reduced form of 'cette') is more central than in 'la'. Because the character speaking here belongs to the lower classes, I would alter '... un pauvre type qui y est enfermé' into '... un pauv' mec qu'on aurait mis au trou', for the vowel of 'mec' is more central than that of 'type' and the digraph 'tr(ou)' is a harder sound than 'enfermé'. In the slang phrase 'mettre au trou' (send to jail), the vowel '(tr)ou' is fairly central but can be transformed into '(tr)eu' for a more central sound, still leaving the word intelligible. Overall, then, Bouveret's rendering would be altered to give:

Qu'est-ce qu'il a ce p'tit (for 'jeune') crétin à reluquer c'te prison? P'têtre qu'il connaît un pauv' mec qu'on aurait mis au treu?

Example 2.

Now he was wondering about a trip to view the prison: 'Would my lord Lauderdale object tae my gaein ower, dae ye think? I wouldna want tae gie offence by speirin if it was only tae be refusit.'

'Whit for are ye wanting tae gang tae the Bass, John?' said Sir Andrew.

(The Fanatic, p. 61)

Maintenant il envisageait de faire le voyage pour voir la prison:

– Est-ce que Lord Lauderdale s'opposerait à ce que je m'y rende, à votre avis ? Je ne voudrais pas déplaire en demandant une permission qui me serait refusée.

– Et pourquoi diable veux-tu visiter le Bass, John? dit Sir Andrew.

(Le Fanatique, pp. 76-7)

Here characters belong to the upper classes but still speak Scots. By replacing the soft 'y' by 'jusque là-bas' I can add a 'k' sound. For the same reason, I would replace 'à votre avis' by 'qu'est-ce que vous en pensez'. The section 'une permission qui me serait refusée' could be turned into 'une permission qui serait rejetée' so that the front 'u' ('refusée') sound is replaced by the central 'e' ('rejetée').

Sir Andrew's reply can do without the 'diable' which can be misleading, and 'visiter' does not translate 'gang' properly. I suggest the casual: '– Et qu'est-ce qui fait que tu veux te rendre au Bass, John?'

Example 3.

'Jean, Jean,' said Mitchel. 'Ye may gang hame noo. Hurry noo, afore ye freeze.'

'I'll no freeze,' she said. I'm weill happit. It's no me that'll freeze.'

He was about to pass her when she reached up a hand and touched his cheek.

(The Fanatic, p. 106)

– Jane, Jane, dit Mitchel. Vous pouvez rentrer maintenant. Dépêchez-vous avant de geler.

– Je ne gèlerai pas, dit-elle. Je suis très bien. Ce n'est pas moi qui gèlerai.

Il s'apprêtait à la dépasser quand elle leva la main et lui toucha la joue.

(Le Fanatique, p. 126)

Mitchel is an educated man, whereas Jean is not. The first name 'Jean' has to be translated because it is a female name in English and Scots, and a male name in French: 'Jeanne' would be definitely French, whereas 'Jane' remains English or Scottish and causes no confusion. Mitchel's words are in standard French and are to remain neutral. The translator could find some idiosyncrasies in Mitchel's speeches (corresponding to his 'noo') such as 'e' sounds replacing 'ou' vowels: 'Vous pouvez...' becoming 'Veu pouvez...', 'dépéchez-veu'. Of course, his way of speaking must be coherent from one end of the novel to the other. Jean's speech is harsher: she is reputed to be a witch. I would turn her sentences into something less correct: 'J' gèlerai pas. Chuis ben contente comme ça. C'est pas moi que j' vais geler.' Later in the narrative, when she is interviewed in prison, her speech can be made to sound truly pathetic without altering her register.

Example 4.

Tammas's bulk filled the doorway of the cell, blocking out what light might have got in. 'Ye hae a visitor,' he whispered. 'I'm shutting yese in till jist afore the boat leaves. They think she's ower wi a servant o Maister Fraser's.' (*The Fanatic*, p. 150)

La masse imposante de Tammas obstrua l'entrée de la cellule, empêchant le peu de lumière qu'elle laissait passer de pénétrer à l'intérieur.

– Vous avez de la visite, chuchota-t-il. Je vous enfermerai jusqu'au moment où le bateau sera sur le point de repartir. Ils croient qu'elle est venue avec un domestique de Mr Fraser. (*Le Fanatique*, p. 177)

Here, Tammas is a brutal man who will rape Lizzie before the boat leaves. We can expect him to use the 'tu' form with his prisoner, Mitchel. 'Vous avez de la visite...' can be turned into the less soft 'T'as d' la visite...'. 'Je vous enfermerai' ('yese' should be translated somehow) can be modified into 'J' la consignerai avec toi'. The expression 'jusqu'au moment où le bateau sera sur le point de partir' sounds too proficiently French for this character, and can be safely reduced to 'jusqu'au départ du bateau'; and the second vowel in 'bateau' can be made more central: 'bateu'. In Tammas's last sentence, we can improve on the translation of 'They think...', not in using 'ils pensent...' but, while saving the k-sound of 'ils croient...', inserting a relatively common grammatical error in the verb: 'Ils croient...' becoming 'Ils croivent...'

Example 5.

'Hih,' said the mirror. 'Where d'ye think you're aff tae? I want a word wi you.' (*The Fanatic*, p. 220)

– Salut, dit le miroir. Où vas-tu comme ça? J'ai à te parler. (*Le Fanatique*, p. 257)

The mirror is an important secondary character in the novel, infusing a degree of comedy into the narrative. What seems to suit its 'speech' best is the extreme reduction of vowels. In the phrases a number of 'que' ('k'-sounds) can be easily fitted: '– Hé dis donc!, dit le miroir. Où qu' te crois qu' te vas comme ça? I' faut qu' ch' t' cause.'

These few suggestions illustrate a strategy that would need to be applied to the whole novel before assessing the effect produced on the reader, who through them should be made aware of the changes in registers, accents and rhythms that accompany shifts between English and Scots. The translator's strategies may be visible only to the professional scholar; however, they will prove effective if the reader of the French text enjoys the linguistic subtleties as much as the reader of the original.

Translating Gaelic

Observing speech in Gaelic, generally speaking, we can note predominant sh-sounds (palatalisation), r-sounds close to the French uvular 'r', and also what can be likened to g-sounds (mainly fricative velarisation). In order to avoid creating an ersatz 'Chti' accent or an Auvergne-like accent, typified by sh-sounds, we can restrict the use of additional 'ch' to produce the appropriate sound to those s-sounds preceding what in Gaelic are called 'narrow' vowels, that is to say 'e' and 'i': 'sérénité' – 'chérénité'; 'civil' – 'chivil'; whereas s-sounds in 'sur, sous, sot, sa, sans, sain, son' will remain unchanged.

The phenomenon of lenition is bound to confuse the average French reader, and is best silently abandoned. We can make use of palatalisation, or slenderising, creating j-sounds and centralising vowels except where it might cause misunderstanding. Also, some vowels can be lengthened and be visually doubled, such as 'fataal', 'rapiide', 'aprèès'.

Voiced consonants can be unvoiced: 'v' > 'f'; 'b' > 'p'; 'd' > 't'; yet, to avoid producing something that appears to be a German accent, usually revealed by a double inversion between voiced and unvoiced consonants, the translator may decide not to voice unvoiced consonants – f-sounds thus remaining unchanged. Thus, 'varié' can become 'fariéé', but 'facile' can only be modified as 'faciile'. Expressions containing two voiced consonants may be half-modified: 'observer' can be turned into 'opserver', where only the unvoicing of 'ob-' operates, whereas 'inadvertance' can be turned into 'inatvertance', where the '-ad' is unvoiced, but not '-ver-'.

Here again, the translator will assess the effect that can be produced on the 'target' reader and make the appropriate decisions so as not to alter the quality of the character. Since this paper is

meant to be an introduction to the art of translating plurilingual texts, there is no room for longer extracts to be shown, so as to assess the transposition of the Hebridian lilt into French.

However, we can study some samples from the case of Fionn Mac Colla's *The Albannach*, a novel that, surprisingly, seems never to have been translated into French.

Example 6.

[...] Oh, Annie! I seem to have forgotten the beastly Gaelic word for the female breast! I wonder if you could supply the necessary information. Cìoch? Oh, yes. Many thanks. I had forgotten until you reminded me!

[...]

'Tha oidhche bhriagha ann, there's a beautiful night in it,' said he as he went stumping past.

'It's a devilish cold, wet, stormy night that's in it,' said Murdo loudly as he swung down the hill.

[...]

'It's a fine eeffening, Murdo,' says he in his high-pitched voice [...] [\[26\]](#)

The first word 'Cìoch' is explained in the reply and need not be translated. The phrase '*Tha oidhche bhriagha ann*' is immediately translated into English, but the translation is literal and cannot be turned into French directly. The idiomatic expression '(that's) in it' may lead us to use the structure 'c'est ... que ...': 'a stormy night that's in it' can be turned into 'c'est une nuit de tempête que voilà'. The phrase 'fine eeffening' (*belle soirée*) can be turned into 'pelle soirée'...

Example 7.

'It's a pair of scissors you'll be wanting there, worthy man,' shouted Murdo one afternoon as he was passing Domhnull Bàn's croft, and the man himself at the cutting.

'Yes, indeed,' says he, turning round. 'It's the slow business this.'

(*The Albannach*, p. 60)

The Gaelic phrasing of sentences in English forces the translator to make use of some awkward French, without going as far as using *anacoluthons*, or abrupt changes in syntax within any one sentence:

'and the man himself at the cutting' (the man is cutting barley) > 'et notre homme qui maniait sa faux.'

'Yes, indeed [...]' > 'Ouii, c'est ben vrai, dit-il en se retournant. C'est un long travail, que tout ça.'

If the last sentence is reversed ('Pour faire tout ça, il faut savoir prendre son temps') we lose the sense of the Gaelic phrasing.

Example 8.

Damn your patronising impudence, thought Murdo, and took the hand the tall fellow held out with exaggerated spontaneity, like a part rehearsed, as if he had never heard of Anderson, not even at the other side of the street a minute ago.

'How do!' said Murdo to him and then added, for MacAskill's benefit, "Bheil Gàidhlig agaibh?"

'Tha,' said MacPherson. 'Sgiathanach a th'annam.'

After they had exchanged a few trivialities MacAskill said in what was meant to be an off-hand manner, 'Mr MacPherson iss tchust in town for a couple of nights and we were haffing a little celepraytion. Would you care to tchoin us?' (*The Albannach*, p. 178)

The obvious differences between the narrator's description of Murdo's thoughts and the dialogue must be made clear in the French version:

[...]

– 'chanté !, lui dit Murdo. Il ajouta à l'intention de MacAskill, ' Parlez gaélique ?

– Oui. Et MacPherson de préciser, 'Sgiathanach a th'annam. (C'est de Skye que je suis).

Après un échange de banalités, MacAskill dit d'une manière qui se voulait spontanée:

– M. MacPherson fient d'arrifer en file. Il est là pour teux chours et nous faissons une petite fête. Ça fous tirait te fenir ?

In McAskill's final turn, the phrase 'in town' would usually be translated as 'en ville'; unvoicing the initial consonant in this instance would change the phrase to 'en fille' (*in girl*). The result being absurd and bound to distract the reader, I choose to depalatalise 'fille' and write it 'file'. Since, elsewhere, 'fient' obviously stands for 'vient' and 'arrifer' for 'arriver', the reader should find no difficulty in understanding 'ville' on reading 'file'. In this case, the translator must at the same time rely on the reader's ability to identify the patterns and interpret accordingly.

In some stretches of text, Gaelic place-names and family names abound. They call for some explanation, for a French reader who will be unfamiliar with the meaning of structures such as

Calum Bàn Mac Ruairidh 'Ic Ailein Mhòir. Onomastic information is often symbolic or part of the narrative:

'Say Achadh nan siantan [to a Gaelic man] and he will be seeing a little plain between great mountains and the rain driving down on it. But will a man of you tell me what Achbay or Achnasheen will mean in the Beurla [...]?' (*The Albannach*, pp. 70-1)

For such instances, the translator can decide on the most appropriate choice between footnotes and a glossary. We may ultimately concur with Walter Scott in deciding on both short footnotes and a longer glossary with notes at the end. The translator's aim is never to put the reader off a piece of fiction with an abundance of encyclopaedic notes that diminish the pleasure of reading a story.

To conclude this brief pilot study, we may recall Venuti's statement:

Translation can be considered a form of authorship, but an authorship now redefined as derivative, not self-originating. Authorship is not *sui generis*; writing depends on pre-existing cultural materials, selected by the author, arranged in an order of priority, and rewritten (or elaborated) according to specific values.^[27]

Venuti's point is illustrated by Iain Crichton Smith's translation into Gaelic in 1969 of Rimbaud's poem, 'L'adieu', from *A Season in Hell* (1873).^[28] Crichton Smith must have been aware of Norman Cameron's translation of the poem into English (1949) to carry out his own translation.

L'ADIEU – L'automne déjà! Mais pourquoi regretter un éternel soleil, si nous sommes engagés à la découverte de la clarté divine – loin des gens qui meurent sur les saisons.

FAREWELL – Autumn already. But why long for an everlasting sunshine, if we are engaged in the discovery of a divine light – far from the people who die according to the season?

SORAIDH – Am foghar mar tha! – Ach dé 's aobhar do d'chianalas airson grian bith-bhuan ma tha dòchas againn ri solus diadhaidh a lorg fada bho na daoine a tha bàsachadh a réir nan aimsirean.

The last element in Crichton Smith's translation, 'a lorg fada bho na daoine...', does not precisely correspond to the French element 'loin des gens...'. The translator's choice can be considered a 'rewriting' of the original sentence. What matters, in this instance, is how close a Scottish reader's

perception of the Gaelic version can be to a French reader's perception of the original, given the gap of about a century between Rimbaud to Crichton Smith.

However, in the case of *The Albannach* by Fionn Mac Colla, or of *Homers* by Iain Finlay MacLeod, it seems all but impossible for the translator (and editor) to avoid writing out a prefatory note explaining the different ways of rendering English, Scots & Gaelic phrases and sentences. Today, there's no denying that only a handful of 'professional' readers from a French-speaking area can grasp the differences in the languages of Scotland expressed in a piece of fiction. Nevertheless, since a fair number of French readers can detect phonemic variations in a text written in French, it is worth trying to create a comparative set of variations when translating such a text into French. Such an experiment, with the necessary comments, explanatory footnotes, phonetic transcriptions, and detailed introduction, may prove useful in establishing a 'template' for successive translators to improve upon.

NOTES

[1] J. D. McClure, 'Is translation naturalisation? Some test cases from Scots', in J.J Simon & A. Sinner (eds), *English Studies 3: Proceedings of the Third Conference on the Literature of Region & Nation*, Part I (Luxembourg: Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg, 1991), 193-213.

[2] I have written elsewhere on the relationship of literature and national identity: a paper on 'Les anthologies et histoires littéraires de la Renaissance écossaise, un enjeu d'identité', was presented at a conference in Nantes in October 2007 and published in B. Sellin, A. Thiec and P. Carboni (eds) *Écosse: l'identité nationale en question - Scotland: Questioning National Identity* (Nantes: CRINI, 2009).

[3] John Corbett, *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation: A History of Literary Translation into Scots* (Clevedon, Somerset: Multilingual Matters, 1999), p. 1.

[4] For information on European language policy, see <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/>

[5] 'Scottophone' with a double 't' because this neologism is created on 'Scots' which is the reduced form of 'Scottis'. Another neologism sharing the same root is 'scotophile' (loving Scots, the Scots, and/or Scotland), which is often spelled 'scotiphile'. In other contexts, of course, 'scotophil' refers to *scotophilus*, a species of bat.

[6] Peter Urpeth, *Far Inland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006).

[7] Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, ed. by Ian Duncan (1817; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 39. Further page references are to this edition.

[8] Walter Scott, *Le Cœur du Mid-Lothian*, trans. S. Monod (Paris: Gallimard, 1998)

[9] [Elle] souffre surtout de trop nombreuses omissions et simplifications; [...] elles interdisent à son travail de rendre pleine justice à l'œuvre de Scott, (Monod, p. 27).

[10] Scott met en scène des personnages écossais qui parlent un anglais fortement marqué de

caractéristiques écossaises: vocabulaire, syntaxe et prononciation constituent presque un dialecte, sinon un patois, celui du sud de l'Écosse, c'est-à-dire de la région des Lowlands ou Basses Terres. (Ibid. p. 27).

[11] Car l'écossais des personnages de Scott est tout de même proche de l'anglais d'Angleterre, et compréhensible sans grand effort pour la plupart des lecteurs anglophones dans le monde (Ibid. p. 28).

[12] [...] à la frontière des Highlands, où la langue est plus rugueuse, plus éloignée de l'anglais ordinaire (Ibid. p. 28).

[13] J'ai donc essayé d'introduire dans le français utilisé par ces personnages, d'une part un petit nombre de mots écossais simples, [...] parfois discrètement expliqués lors de leur première apparition, comme laird, kirk, cairn, manse; ils sont destinés à assurer sans trop de dommage, espère-t-on, la présence d'un minimum de couleur locale; (Ibid. p. 28).

[14] [...] quelques tournures de phrases un peu plus raides ou d'une gaucherie délibérée, pour donner le sentiment de l'étrangeté; (Ibid. p. 28).

[15] [...] c'était bien l'impression [...] que devaient produire un Écossais, et surtout une jeune fille écossaise vêtue de son costume national, lorsqu'ils se promenaient dans le sud de la Grande-Bretagne (Ibid. p. 28).

[16] Ian Maclaren, *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1894; Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007), p. 183.

[17] Lawrence Venuti, *Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 10.

[18] I discussed this point a paper given in Avignon in 2007, 'John Macnab et l'envers du décor, dans *John Macnab* (1925) de John Buchan et *The Return of John Macnab* (1996) de Andrew Greig', subsequently published in *Etudes Ecossaises*, 12 (2009), 201-214.

[19] Andrew Greig, *The Return of John Macnab* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), pp. 24-5.

[20] Andrew Greig, *Romanno Bridge* (London: Quercus, 2008).

[21] Lin Anderson, *Deadly Code* (Edinburgh: Luath, 2005), pp. 97-8.

[22] Danièle Berton & Jean-Pierre Simard, *Création théâtrale: Adaptation, schèmes, traduction* (Saint-Etienne: PUSE, 2007)

[23] Venuti, p. 1.

[24] I gave a paper on this novel in Nantes in 2006, 'L'étrange et le miroir dans *The Fanatic* de James Robertson', subsequently published in *Etudes Ecossaises*, 11 (2008), 275-289.

[25] See James Robertson, *The Fanatic* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000) and Yves Bouveret (trans.), *Le Fanatique* (Paris: Métailié, 2003).

[26] Fionn Mac Colla, *The Albannach* (1932; London: Souvenir Press, 1971), pp. 56-7.

[27] Venuti, p. 43.

[28] Arthur Rimbaud, *Une Saison en Enfer/A Season in Hell*, trans. by Norman Cameron (London: John Lehmann, 1949) – translated into Gaelic as 'Soraidh' by Iain Crichton Smith, in *Gairm*, 18 (1969-70), 311-312.