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***Our Own Language: Scots Verse Translation*
and the Second-Generation Scottish
Renaissance**

Stewart Sanderson

Kepand na Sudroun bot our awyn langage

Gavin Douglas, *Eneados*, Prologue 1.111

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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract.....	3
Introduction: Verse Translation and the Modern Scottish Renaissance	5
Chapter One – Plastic Scots: The Translations of Douglas Young	30
Chapter Two – Gangrel Rymour: The Translations of Sydney Goodsir Smith.....	58
Chapter Three – A Necessary Mask: The Translations of Robert Garioch.....	85
Chapter Four – A Harsklike Singin: The Translations of Tom Scott.....	112
Chapter Five – A Tremendous Project: The Translations of William J. Tait.....	138
Conclusion: Beyond the Renaissance – Language as Anti-Hero	169
Bibliography	196

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of Scots language verse translation in the second-generation or post-war Scottish Renaissance. The translation of European poetry into Scots was of central importance to the first-generation Scottish Renaissance of the nineteen twenties and thirties. As Margery Palmer McCulloch has shown, the wider cultural climate of Anglo-American modernism was key to MacDiarmid's conception of the interwar Scottish Renaissance. What was the effect on second-generation poet-translators as the modernist moment passed? Are the many translations undertaken by the younger poets who emerged in the course of the nineteen forties and fifties a faithful reflection of this cultural inheritance? To what extent are they indicative of a new set of priorities and international influences?

The five principal translators discussed in this thesis are Douglas Young (1913-1973), Sydney Goodsir Smith (1915-1975), Robert Garioch (1909-1981), Tom Scott (1918-1995) and William J. Tait (1918-1992). Each is the subject of a chapter, in many cases providing the first or most extensive treatment of particular translations. While the pioneering work of John Corbett, Bill Findlay and J. Derrick McClure, among other scholars, has drawn attention to the long history of literary translation into Scots, this thesis is the first extended critical work to take the verse translations of the post-MacDiarmid makars as its subject. The nature and extent of MacDiarmid's influence is considered throughout, as are the wider discourses around language and translation in twentieth-century Scottish poetry. Critical engagement with a number of key insights from theoretical translation studies helps to situate these writers' work in its global context. This thesis also explores the ways in which the specific context of Scots translation allows scholars to complicate or expand upon theories of translation developed in other cultural situations (notably Lawrence Venuti's writing on domestication and foreignisation).

The five writers upon whom this thesis concentrates were all highly individual, occasionally idiosyncratic personalities. Young's polyglot ingenuity finds a foil in Garioch's sharp, humane wit. Goodsir Smith's romantic ironising meets its match in Scott's radical certainty of cause. Tait's use of the Shetlandic tongue sets him apart. Nonetheless, despite the great variety of style, form and tone shown by each of these translators, this thesis demonstrates that there are meaningful links to be made between them and that they form a unified, coherent group in the wider landscape of twentieth-century Scottish poetry. On the linguistic level, each engaged to some extent in the composition of a 'synthetic' or 'plastic' language deriving partly from literary sources, partly from the spoken language around them. On a more fundamental level, each was committed to enriching this language through translation, within which a number of key areas of interest emerge.

One of the most important of these key areas is Gaelic – especially the poetry of Sorley MacLean, which Young, Garioch and Goodsir Smith all translated into Scots. This is to some extent

an act of solidarity on the part of these Scots poets, acknowledging a shared history of marginalisation as well as expressing shared hopes for the future. The same is true of Goodsir Smith's translations from a number of Eastern European poets (and Edwin Morgan's own versions, slightly later in the century). The translation of verse drama by poets is another key theme sustained throughout the thesis, with Garioch and Young attempting to fill what they perceived as a gap in the Scots tradition through translation from other languages (another aspect of these writers' legacy continued by Morgan). Beyond this, all of the writers discussed in this thesis translated extensively from European poetries from Ancient Greece to twentieth-century France. Their reasons for doing so were various, but a certain cosmopolitan idealism figures highly among them. So too does a desire to see Scotland interact with other European nations, thus escaping the potentially narrowing influence of post-war British culture. This thesis addresses the legacy of these writers' translations, which, it argues, continue to exercise a perceptible influence on the course of poetry in Scotland.

This work constitutes a significant contribution to a much-needed wider critical re-assessment of this pivotal period in modern Scottish writing, offering a fresh perspective on the formal and linguistic merits of these poets' verse translations. Drawing upon frequently obscure book, pamphlet and periodical sources, as well as unpublished manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland and the Shetland Archives, this thesis breaks new ground in its investigation of the role of Scots verse translation in the second-generation Scottish Renaissance.

Introduction: Verse Translation and the Modern Scottish Renaissance

Introducing the *Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, the poet Charles Tomlinson expressed his hope that the anthology would “reveal some of the outlines of an immense and, as far as past centuries are concerned, a largely forgotten literature.”¹ The *Oxford Book*, published in 1980, marks the growing interest in translation into English throughout the second half of the twentieth century, typified by the Penguin *Modern European Poets* series published in the nineteen sixties and early seventies. It follows George Steiner’s 1966 *Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*² and in terms of the Scottish scene precedes Peter France and Duncan Glen’s *European Poetry in Scotland*,³ published in 1989, as well as Derick Thomson’s *Bàrdachd na Roinn-Eòrpa an Gàidhlig* (European Poetry in Gaelic).⁴ Reviewing Tomlinson’s *Oxford Book*, Steiner noted that

‘English English’ is now under deepening pressure from American, African, West Indian, Anglo-Indian, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand branches of the language. American English and its own numerous offshoots, in particular, is the primary generative force in English as a world-language [...] How long before English poets will be ‘translating’ their American, Nigerian, Australian or Jamaican colleagues [...]?’⁵

As it happens, Tomlinson’s anthology includes an excerpt from Dryden’s adaptations of Chaucer – clearly the movement of poetry between different historical and geographical varieties of English is not a recent phenomenon. It also includes a number of Scottish translators, starting with Gavin Douglas. Tomlinson writes that if “it seems tendentious to open *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* with a Scot, I can only reply that it was Douglas’s work which first established on this island the level at which great poetry can be translated.”⁶ Further on in the chronology, the reader finds an Englishing of Jean Passerat by Drummond, two of Allan Ramsay’s Horatian odes and Walter Scott’s English version of Goethe’s *Erkönig*. From the twentieth century, Tomlinson selects Scots translations by Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Garioch, Douglas Young, Sydney Goodsir Smith and Tom Scott (he also includes part of Edwin Morgan’s English version of Sándor Weöres’ ‘The Lost Parasol’).

It would be counterproductive to resist Tomlinson’s inclusion of these translators in his tentative canon of verse translation into English on national grounds. That he finds room for Douglas and MacDiarmid, alongside Dryden and Pope, Pound and Lowell, is indicative of a generous sensibility – as with the early modern sonneteers whose metrical imitations Tomlinson resurrects,

¹ Charles Tomlinson, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, ed. by Charles Tomlinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. vii-xvii (p. xvii).

² *The Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*, ed. by George Steiner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

³ *European Poetry in Scotland*, ed. by Peter France and Duncan Glen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989).

⁴ *Bàrdachd na Roinn-Eòrpa an Gàidhlig*, ed. by Derick Thomson (Glaschu: Gairm, 1990).

⁵ George Steiner, ‘A Bounteous Harvest’, *PN Review*, 7.5 (Jan 1, 1980), 19-20 (p. 20).

⁶ *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, p. vii.

these translators remain in sore need of publicity. As well as the forgotten literature of translation into English (understood in the broadest possible sense) the *Oxford Book* hints at a parallel Scottish tradition, frequently overlapping the English one, but with enough particularity that it is hard to attain a full appreciation of it from a southern viewpoint. One might cite, for instance, Hugh Kenner's memorable gesture towards "the culture of an island called England" – in a book with the stated aim of achieving a more nuanced assessment of the international affiliations of Anglophone modernism.⁷ To return to Steiner's slightly subtler point about the heteroglossic break-up of English, one is tempted to suggest that, on the basis of the tradition sketched in the *Oxford Book*, which after all begins with a text written in Scots, the "primary generative force" of the tongue has always been its diversity.

This thesis is concerned with the practice of verse translation into the Scots language, as practised by the poets of the so-called second-generation modern Scottish Renaissance. The term 'verse translation' is understood to mean the creatively interpretative carrying across of poetry from one language to another, reflective of a desire to fashion a more than merely functional equivalent in the target tongue. Often, this wish that the translated poem should exist as a successful literary work in its own right manifests itself in tight metrical and rhyming structures. As regards the term 'second-generation Scottish Renaissance', while rarely defined absolutely in the secondary literature, this descriptor is a useful one, placing the post-war writers in continuity with the interwar, first-generation Scottish Renaissance, but also distancing them from it to some extent. The present introductory chapter will therefore map out this interwar background and by so doing prepare the ground for the chapters to come.

The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the Scottish Renaissance as a term at first "applied to the notable revival of literary innovation in Scotland" in the early twentieth century, which was initially "projected as a goal, partly in emulation of the Irish Literary Renaissance and in response to European modernism".⁸ As regards its roots and wider extension, the label "Scottish Renaissance" was first used by MacDiarmid in the August 1922 number of *The Scottish Chapbook*, in the context of a book review comparing the multilingual situation in Scotland to that pertaining in Belgium, arguing that instead "of two languages, Flemish and French, we have Braid Scots, Gaelic and English" and urging unity as opposed to division upon linguistic grounds.⁹ In April 1924, MacDiarmid's friend, the French scholar Denis Saurat, announced the movement internationally: "Un nouveau mouvement

⁷ Hugh Kenner, *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1988), p. 3.

⁸ Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1263?rskey=aIdnrm&result=1> [accessed 01/03/2015].

⁹ C.M. Grieve, 'Book Reviews', *The Scottish Chapbook*, 1:1 August 1922, 28. Reprinted in Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939: Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance* (Association for Scottish Literary Studies: Glasgow, 2004), p. 53.

littéraire se prononce en Écosse, qui est une des choses les plus intéressantes et les plus riches en promesses dans le groupe des littératures anglo-saxonnes à l'heure présente.”¹⁰ Which is to say (my translation): “A new literary movement has appeared in Scotland, which is one of the most interesting and promising things in the group of Anglo-Saxon literatures at the present time.” Essentially, ‘Scottish Renaissance’ signifies a strong concern with language, place, radical politics and literary experimentation. At its broadest the term denotes a cultural trend. On a more concrete level, it is an invaluable concept for scholars negotiating the complicated networks and alignments of individuals and particular works which characterised the Scottish artistic landscape in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. As regards its application to specific individuals and works it is often, needless to say, a term to be taken with a certain pinch of critical salt. Indeed, as R.D.S. Jack put it in his 1997 essay ‘“Translating’ the Lost Scottish Renaissance’, if “you are invited to a Renaissance conference in English Literature, you expect it to deal with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors. If you are invited to a Scottish Literature ‘Renaissance’ conference, it will deal with twentieth-century authors.” Jack goes on to argue that, as well as the metaphorical neatness of attempting to ‘translate’ or carry across the neglected Anglophone Castilians of early-modern Scotland, whom he suggests have to some extent been written out of the canon by nationalist anthologists, critical focus on translation emphasises the fact that both Scottish Renaissances happen to be “the periods during which Scottish writers most enthusiastically sought to imitate the finest European works”.¹¹

In his pioneering 1964 study *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance*, Duncan Glen discusses the post-war generation principally in terms of its relation to MacDiarmid, boldly titling his penultimate chapter “The Renaissance Continues”.¹² Throughout Glen’s study, the importance of Scots is emphasised. Robin Fulton, in his 1974 book *Contemporary Scottish Poetry*, takes a contrary line, arguing that to “go no further back than a couple of decades, it is incontrovertible that the bulk of the most important Scottish poetry has been written in English” and invoking “the incompleteness of Scots as a language”.¹³ While Fulton does not address the concept of a putative second-generation Renaissance in detail, he clearly believes that, since at least the later nineteen fifties, the linguistic situation has changed profoundly.

Glen valorises the multilingual internationalism which, he believes, the post-war generation inherited principally from MacDiarmid, while Fulton celebrates the cosmopolitan upswing of poetry in English which became increasingly dominant from the late nineteen fifties onwards. With regard to the persistence of the Renaissance model of modern Scottish literature, one notes that the various

¹⁰ Denis Saurat, ‘Le Groupe de “La Renaissance Écossaise”’, *Revue Anglo-Américaine* (April 1924), 1-2. Reprinted in *Modernism and Nationalism*, pp. 53-54.

¹¹ R.D.S. Jack, ‘“Translating’ the Lost Scottish Renaissance’, *Translation and Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1997), 66-80 (p. 66).

¹² Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1964), p. 205.

¹³ Robin Fulton, *Contemporary Scottish Poetry: Individuals and Contexts* (Macdonald: Loanhead, 1974), p. 154.

editions of Maurice Lindsay's *Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance* retain their subtitle into the second half of the nineteen seventies.¹⁴ Introducing the revised and updated 1966 edition, Lindsay argued for the continued relevance of the label, writing that while it originally "implied close association with efforts to revive and strengthen Lallans and Gaelic [during] the past twenty years, however, it has taken on a wider significance." Admittedly, "[few] young writers of any consequence today employ Lallans. Every new census reveals a further decline in the number of those who speak, let alone read, the Gaelic." Fortunately, whatever language it is written in, the poetry celebrated in Lindsay's anthology "reflects a variety of experience and an integrity of expression which enable it to stand comparison with the output of any previous period of Scottish literature." Moreover, these "qualities, and not the question of which of Scotland's three languages her writers choose to use, are what constitute the real Scottish Renaissance." Over the page, Lindsay excludes "'pop', beat, poster [and] concrete verse" from this rather conservative narrative of apparently open-ended cultural renewal, since to him such experimentation seems in the main "to be simply a play-about with typography which, however interesting visually, is in no way memorable as poetry."¹⁵

There have been and still are many different accounts of the beginning, end and continuing influence of the modern Scottish Renaissance, some more open to minority languages and formal experimentation than others. As late as 1991 one finds William Neill asking Iain Crichton Smith whether he saw "the 'Scottish Renaissance' continuing, or has Scottish literary output changed direction in recent years?"¹⁶ Crichton Smith replied that, on the contrary

I see now a third wave of the Scottish Renaissance: There were first of all MacDiarmid, Gunn, Grassie Gibbon et al: then MacCaig, Mackay Brown, Morgan and others [followed now by Gray,] Kelman, MacIlvanney, Massie and many others. The new wave is on the whole prose-centred, urban-centred, Glasgow-centred mostly. It often adopts the Glasgow dialect and is very political. The first wave was political too [...] but the second was not. I believe we are now living in a major expansion of Scottish consciousness, in literature, art etc., I see no reason why it shouldn't continue.¹⁷

The second wave, English-language writers Crichton Smith mentions by name are relatively well-known. This thesis is primarily concerned with the "others". Its findings would also question Crichton Smith's suggestion that, while MacDiarmid and other major interwar writers like Gunn and Grassie Gibbon were politically as well as aesthetically motivated, those who came after them were not.

¹⁴ *Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance 1920-1945*, ed. by Maurice Lindsay (London: Faber & Faber, 1946); *Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance*, ed. by Maurice Lindsay (London: Faber & Faber, 1966); *Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance 1925-1975*, ed. by Maurice Lindsay (Manchester: Carcanet, 1976).

¹⁵ *Modern Scottish Poetry* (1966), pp. 19-20.

¹⁶ William Neill and Iain Crichton Smith, 'An Interview by William Neill with Iain Crichton Smith', *Poetry Ireland Review*, No. 31 (Winter-Spring 1991), 47-56 (p. 47).

¹⁷ 'An Interview by William Neill with Iain Crichton Smith', p. 47.

Crichton Smith was at times a radically engaged writer, as was Morgan. Although MacCaig and Mackay Brown rarely articulated their opinions with anything like MacDiarmid's belligerence and bombast, their writing is not without its political implications (regarding land reform and the oil boom, for instance). As the coming chapters will explore in greater detail, the Scots-language side of the second-generation Renaissance was as radical in some of its claims and intentions as any twentieth-century literary movement. Rather than get bogged down in overly insistent periodisations and demarcations of generational space, this thesis uses the term 'second-generation Scottish Renaissance' in order to highlight the links (as well as the differences) between a group of writers who have, all too often, fallen through the cracks in the critical floorboards. It also proposes that this neglect belies the importance and quality of much of their work, to which the often marginalised art of translation was central. These poets are united by their strong concern with the linguistic politics of Scottish literature, as well as a sense of international affinities and late-modernist, rather than postmodernist, aesthetics.

As regards Scots translation itself, the broader historical context of this practice has been sketched by John Corbett, in his *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation: A History of Literary Translation into Scots*.¹⁸ Having discussed Scots literary translation from Douglas on, Corbett writes of the modern revival that the "renewed impetus towards a broad range of translations into Scots – of any kind – can be credited to Christopher Murray Grieve, 'Hugh MacDiarmid.'"¹⁹ Surveying subsequent twentieth-century developments, he locates the flowering of modern Scots translation in the work of the second-generation writers who were, initially, energised by MacDiarmid's example. Corbett writes that

it was not until the close of the Second World War and the final stages of the dissolution of Empire that a recognisable coterie of writers in synthetic Scots really began to make their mark. Much of the translation of these twentieth-century 'makars' was as aggressively contemporary as MacDiarmid's, and, like MacDiarmid, they were keen to demonstrate that Lallans was a suitable Scottish medium for rendering the best of European culture.²⁰

Seen from this angle, the Scottish Renaissance appears a surprisingly Arnoldian project, with stated notions as to the relative value and seriousness of different types of art. It was, in any case, a MacDiarmidian undertaking, which combined political radicalism with an anarchic zeal for high culture. Investigating the work of the younger poet-translators who followed in MacDiarmid's wake, this thesis explores an important aspect of his legacy. It is, however, equally concerned with the points at which the second-generation verse-translators diverged from his example. Their writing, as the individual chapters of this thesis demonstrate, demands to be read on its own terms. Focussing on a

¹⁸ John Corbett, *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation: A History of Literary Translation into Scots* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999).

¹⁹ *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, p. 127.

²⁰ *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, p. 133.

relatively short period, broadly the second half of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the immediate post-war decades, this thesis deals with individual poets in much greater detail than most previous criticism. Looking closely at the translation of verse into Scots during this period, it argues for its importance as a creative strategy at this decisive moment for Scottish poetry as a whole.

Why look at the Scottish Renaissance at all? Why the second-generation writers in particular? Why look specifically at their Scots translations? What is it these little-known poems can say to a twenty-first century readership? The answers to these questions are linked, and find their best expression in the more detailed expositions of text and milieu which form the body of this thesis. One point to bear in mind is that the Scottish Renaissance, both before and after the Second World War, was strongly concerned with the reinvigoration of an apparently marginalised native tradition. On the one hand, translation into Scots connected with the writings of originary figures such as Gavin Douglas. On the other, it was a stay against alleged and actual provincialism, allowing poets to engage with texts and movements from many times and places. A second key point is the centrality of a revisionist approach to Scottish language to many Renaissance writers. In this regard, Gaelic-Scots translation was extremely important, as later chapters will show. As regards Scots, which unlike Gaelic exists to some extent in a continuum with English and is therefore constantly in danger of being elided into it, translation was particularly important in terms of writers' desire to develop the formal and conceptual possibilities of the tongue (as, indeed, it had been for Douglas). It was also central to their attempts to claim a greater degree of prestige and cultural authority for Scots than had hitherto been the case (for instance, by translating canonical European poets such as Villon and Baudelaire into the tongue). For all of this, the influence of Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978) was decisive.

MacDiarmid was the central interwar figure in Scottish letters, who in his creative and critical work did more than anyone else to establish the parameters for subsequent developments. Building on the achievement of proto-Renaissance figures such as Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) and Patrick Geddes (1854-1932), MacDiarmid gave dynamic shape to existing currents in Scottish culture. He was by no means the only major Scottish writer of the nineteen twenties and thirties. Edwin (1887-1959) and Willa Muir (1890-1970), Lewis Grassie Gibbon (1901-1935), Neil M. Gunn (1891-1973) and William Soutar (1898-1943) are all important figures. However, especially as regards poetry and political opinion, his influence over the younger generation was broadly more pervasive than any of the writers just named – frequently as someone to react against as much as celebrate.

Much of MacDiarmid's importance – and by analogy much of the interest of the Scottish Renaissance movement itself – derives from the manner in which he was able to fuse the formal ingenuity and intellectual adventurousness of international modernism with a strong commitment to localism. Unlike the rootless cosmopolitans Eliot, Joyce and Pound, MacDiarmid kept an

autochthonous sense of home close to the centre of his project, no matter how wide-ranging (some might say far-fetched) his work sometimes became. He combined this rootedness with a restless internationalism. For instance, one of C.M. Grieve's first public appearances in print, in the *Dunfermline Press* of August 1922, contains the well-known line: "If there is to be a Scottish Literary Revival the first essential is to get rid of our provinciality of experience and to avail ourselves of Continental experience."²¹

Scots translation turned out to be a good way of availing oneself of continental experience, from the versions of Stefan George and Dmitry Merezhkovsky collected in *Sangschaw*²² in 1925 to the translations from Rudolf Leonhardt and the anonymous "Cretan" published in *Penny Wheep*²³ the following year. In his *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*,²⁴ also published in 1926, MacDiarmid made Scots translations of lyric poems integral to the wider composition. These versions, free translations and poems 'after' or 'suggested by' are central to *A Drunk Man*, which many would argue remains the most ambitious successful long poem in Scots in modern times. They are, in the order of their appearance, a poem "freely adapted from the Russian of Alexander Blok"; a poem "from the Belgian poet Georges Ramaekers"; a poem "adapted from the Russian of Zinaida Hippus"; a poem "suggested by the German of Else Lasker-Schüler"; a poem "suggested by the French of Edmond Rocher"; a quotation (in French) from Mallarmé; various references to Dostoevsky; a direct incorporation of lines by Robert Buchanan; Italian lines from Dante with Scots interpolations and "Wicksteed's" English translation in a footnote. While the versions in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* are better known, MacDiarmid also made use of translated texts in his long poem, first published in 1930, *To Circumjack Cencrastus*.²⁵

As well as setting a high creative bar for Scots verse-translation in the twentieth century, MacDiarmid made frequent critical interventions in this area, constantly stressing the need for Scottish writers to familiarise themselves with other literatures from around the world. A longish passage from his 1943 autobiography, *Lucky Poet*, bears quotation in full:

Nothing is more marked in recent Scottish poetry than the keen concern of the writers involved with the whole range of welt-literatur and their many-sided knowledge of it. They have translated into Scots a great body of poetry from German, French, Russian, and other European languages. Translations from the Russian of Boris Pasternak by William Soutar, from the Russian of Alexander Blok and the German of Rainer Maria Rilke by myself, from the German of Heine and others by Professor Alexander Gray, from the Dutch of P.C. Boutens and others by Emeritus-Professor

²¹ C.M. Grieve, 'Scottish Books and Bookmen', *Dunfermline Press*, 5 August 1922, p. 6. Reprinted in Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism* (Association for Scottish Literary Studies: Glasgow, 2004), p. 23.

²² Hugh M'Diarmid, *Sangschaw* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1925).

²³ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Penny Wheep* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1926).

²⁴ Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1926).

²⁵ Hugh MacDiarmid, *To Circumjack Cencrastus; or The Curly Snake* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1930).

Sir H.J.C. Grierson, and from a great array of French poets from Ronsard to Baudelaire by Miss Margaret Winefride Simpson, are included in this tale of recent renderings into Scots, and healthy intromissions with the whole range of European literature, which have been a notable feature of our recent literary history, like a veritable return to the Good Europeanism of our mediaeval ancestors. The younger poets have carried the work of their immediate predecessors still further in this way. George Campbell Hay has made a great many translations from the Irish and Welsh, and Douglas Young effects translation into Latin, French, Attic Greek, Romaic Greek, German, and other tongues, and translates from the Greek, the Russian, and the Lithuanian into Scots or English.²⁶

This passage is something of a manifesto. In a valedictory survey of the past two decades' achievements, MacDiarmid emphasises the importance of translation into Scots, as well as translation in general, to the overall wellbeing of poetry in Scotland. He itemises a few of the recent translations which he considers to have been especially noteworthy, before pointing forward, indicating that the younger generation is both prolonging and extending this project of systematic translation.²⁷ Needless to say, in MacDiarmid's offhand use of the term *welt-literatur*, his apparently authoritative distinction between Attic and Romaic Greek and his statement that Young "effects translation", there is much to suggest a certain programmatic arrogance. There is much, indeed, which might incite resistance among the "younger poets", rather than uncritical acceptance of the cultural narrative MacDiarmid propounds. Both responses will be evidenced and explored in later chapters.

Published in the fourth year of the Second World War, the *Lucky Poet* passage comes at a critical point in European and Scottish cultural history. MacDiarmid cites the "Good Europeanism of our mediaeval ancestors." If the experience of two industrialised wars had not already done so, the coming revelation of the concentration camps would soon render appeals to an idealised European past ambiguous at best. In 1936 MacDiarmid had been involved in the foundation of the SNP. What does an awareness of the death camps – which Adorno and Horkheimer suggested were less a deviation from the Enlightenment than its logical culmination – do to the possibility of an enlightened civic nationalism in the land of Hume and Adam Smith? As for the other side of totalitarianism, how would the Gulag Archipelago have affected MacDiarmid's ability to pen hymns to Lenin, had he seen it with his own eyes? These are hard questions, but once poetry has been declared barbaric in its inability to do justice to experience, it is important to weigh one's defence of it carefully. The post-war writers discussed in this thesis did, by and large, retain their faith in what Heaney called the redress of poetry, a form of negative capability. Douglas Young (1913-1973), Sydney Goodsir Smith (1915-1975), Robert Garioch (1909-1981), Tom Scott (1918-1995) and William J. Tait (1918-1992) all seem to have felt their translations made important, meaningful connections between languages

²⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self Study* (London: Methuen, 1943), p. 354.

²⁷ Several years before, MacDiarmid had published a similar passage in the *Scottish Educational Journal* under the pseudonym James Maclaren: James Maclaren, 'Scotland and Europe', *Scottish Educational Journal*, 30 March 1934. Reprinted in Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue*, vol. ii, ed. by Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp. 367-369 (p. 369).

and cultures. Were they naive in this view? It finds a powerful query in the writing of poets like Paul Celan and Tadeusz Różewicz, writers who had borne witness to some of the darkest moments in human experience.

In the *Lucky Poet* passage, MacDiarmid takes care to position himself as one member of a larger movement. Certainly, he was by no means the only Scottish poet to translate verse in the interwar decades. Margery Palmer McCulloch writes of this widespread practice that

the translations which brought European authors to English-speaking readers in the early years of the twentieth century were of great importance to a Scottish modernism committed to look outwards from Scotland. In addition, individual Scottish writers such as MacDiarmid, Edwin and Willa Muir, William Soutar, J.K. Annand and Alexander Gray became involved in translation or, as so often in the translation of poetry, in the adaptation into Scots of existing translations of European poets.²⁸

McCulloch suggests that the work of figures like MacDiarmid and the Muirs can profitably be understood in terms of international modernism, given that their sustained engagement with language, tradition, literary form and contemporary thought places them in a continuum with their better known Anglo-American counterparts. She also proposes that many of the cultural productions of the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties are best understood as constituting a Scottish late modernism – and that, moreover, this definition might help critics to recuperate the post-MacDiarmid generation of Scots-language poets from the dustbin of literary history. Forcefully, McCulloch argues that “this supposedly fallow period during the Second World War and in the immediate post-war years was in fact full of activity, and that it needs to be taken account of for a more complete understanding of Scottish culture in the years after World War One, and especially for an understanding of the extent of Scottish modernism.”²⁹

Whether or not one accepts McCulloch’s definitions of Scottish modernism and late modernism unreservedly, her work has contributed enormously to debates around twentieth-century Scottish writing by identifying a number of unifying trends and links to literary cultures outwith Scotland. As well as highlighting the distinctive aspects of the Scottish response to modernity, her approach situates this response within global discussions around modernism, which in recent years have turned increasingly towards minor or neglected aspects of the tradition. This is obviously of significance for critics trying to understand the Scottish cultural landscape in greater detail. It may also be of interest for scholars focussed primarily on other aspects of the modernist inheritance. As Michael Levenson writes in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*: “A coarsely understood Modernism is at once an historical scandal and a contemporary disability.” Moreover, the influence “of the first thirty years of the century over the next fifty was so great that the

²⁸ Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Scottish Modernism and its Contexts 1918-1959: Literature, National Identity and Cultural Exchange* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 42.

²⁹ *Scottish Modernism and its Contexts*, p. 214.

achievement of a distance from Modernism remains an event in contemporary culture.”³⁰ Both these remarks would seem to militate in favour of a closer consideration of the importance of modernism for modern Scottish literature, as well as its afterlife in the post-war era.

Neither MacDiarmid nor Muir are referred to in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. As Levenson’s introduction reasonably acknowledges, no single companion can cover every aspect of so enormous a subject. Nonetheless it is interesting to note that while the Scottish scene is effectively written out of a volume whose focus is explicitly British and American, it is in fact discussed with some sensitivity in *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*. In a chapter addressing modernism throughout Britain, Marina Mackay describes the Scottish Renaissance as “a movement coterminous with high modernism, but not often read alongside it.”³¹ Referring specifically to Catherine Carswell, Grassie Gibbon, Neil Gunn, MacDiarmid, the Muirs and the younger MacLean (a good candidate for Scottish late modernism), Mackay argues that these writers shared a desire to “unite the regional and continental”. She also suggests that, like the Irish Revival and the Harlem Renaissance, “the Scottish Renaissance took as its premise that cultural regeneration is the necessary precursor to political regeneration.”³² Above and beyond the specifics of Mackay’s essay, it is intriguing to find these writers discussed in a pan-European survey, while a major companion to Anglophone modernism omits to mention even MacDiarmid. Emphasising the importance of an internationally-minded, multilingual approach to the study of Scottish writing, these presences and absences also underline the need for further consideration of the nature and chronological limits of modernism in a specifically Scottish context.

Roderick Watson has proposed that much twentieth-century writing in Scots can be approached via the term demotic modernism, since from MacDiarmid to W.N. Herbert modern Scots literature “has been characterized by two contradictory impulses: an interest in direct and demotic utterance, and a move towards a degree of linguistic estrangement.”³³ Arguing that the demotic is particularly evident in the work of later writers like Leonard and Kelman, Watson associates later Scottish Renaissance poets such as Goodsir Smith more closely with the “aesthetic-cultural”, modernist impulse.³⁴ Watson also stresses the creative potential of “translation, imitation, and the point at which different discourses and literary traditions meet”.³⁵ In terms of the linguistic landscape

³⁰ Michael Levenson, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

³¹ Marina Mackay, ‘Great Britain’, in *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*, ed. by Pericles Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 94-112 (p. 104).

³² ‘Great Britain’, p. 104.

³³ Roderick Watson, ‘Alien Voices from the Street: Demotic Modernism in Modern Scots Writing’, *The Yearbook for English Studies*, Vol. 25, Non-Standard Englishes and the New Media Special Number (1995), 141-155 (p. 141).

³⁴ ‘Alien Voices from the Street’, p. 151.

³⁵ ‘Alien Voices from the Street’, p. 154.

of modern Scots translation, this demotic impulse might be associated with the desire to domesticate into the contemporary vernacular, while the contrasting drift towards estrangement might be linked to the more foreignising tendencies of literary Lallans. Without going so far as to claim the later Scottish Renaissance as a modernist movement in any straightforward sense, the findings of this thesis do suggest that the inheritance and textual afterlives of modernism were highly influential for the writers in question – and that this is particularly evident in terms of their work as translators. With more conservative interwar figures like Soutar and Gray (not to mention Grierson and Simpson, both cited by MacDiarmid in the *Lucky Poet* passage) the situation is slightly different.³⁶ A brief survey of these interwar translators serves to contextualise subsequent developments.

A high-ranking civil servant and latterly Professor of Political Economy at Edinburgh and Aberdeen, Sir Alexander Gray (1882-1968) remains a fascinating, if equivocal, figure as regards the Scottish Renaissance project. A Dundonian ten years MacDiarmid's senior, Gray was far more of an establishment – and indeed aesthetically conservative – writer than his younger contemporary, whose death – rather symmetrically – followed his own by a decade. Gray published a number of volumes of translations from German and Danish. The first, of these, *Songs and Ballads Chiefly from Heine*³⁷ appeared in 1920. In 1932 Gray published *Arrows*,³⁸ comprising Scots versions of German ballads and folk songs. He continued to produce translations after the war, publishing *Four-and-forty*³⁹ in 1954 and *Historical Ballads of Denmark*⁴⁰ in 1958.

Another key interwar translator, Margaret Winefride Simpson (1888-1971) is a sadly neglected figure. The only female translator MacDiarmid cites in the *Lucky Poet* summary, she is included in Dorothy McMillan and Michel Byrne's *Modern Scottish Women Poets*,⁴¹ but not France and Glen's *European Poetry in Scotland* (nor, one might add, *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*). She certainly merits inclusion in any future anthology of Scottish verse translation from European languages, having published a number of collections of poetry – including dozens of

³⁶ McCulloch links J.K. Annand (1908-1993) with the interwar Renaissance, rather than the post-Second World War continuation. Given his extensive post-war activities, notably the foundation of the magazine *Lallans* in 1973, not to mention the publication of his key volumes *Poems and Translations* (Preston: Akros, 1975), *Songs from the Carmina Burana* (Loanhead: Macdonald, 1978), *A Wale o Rhymes* (Loanhead: Macdonald, 1989) and *Selected Poems: 1925-1990* (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1992), it is perhaps possible to view him as a writer who – like MacDiarmid – spans both periodisations. The posthumous reissue of *A Wale o Rhymes* as *Bairn Rhymes* (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1998) was another significant event, highlighting Annand's strong sociolinguistic concern with children's literature and the promotion of Scots.

³⁷ Alexander Gray, *Songs and Ballads Chiefly from Heine* (London: Grant Richards, 1920).

³⁸ Alexander Gray, *Arrows: A Book of Ballads and Folk-Songs Attempted in Scots* (Edinburgh: Grant and Murray, 1932).

³⁹ Alexander Gray, *Four-and-forty: a selection of Danish ballads presented in Scots* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1954).

⁴⁰ Alexander Gray, *Historical Ballads of Denmark* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958).

⁴¹ *Modern Scottish Women Poets*, ed. by Dorothy McMillan and Michel Byrne (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005), pp. 45-46.

versions from French, Gaelic, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and German.⁴² Her biographical entry in *Modern Scottish Women Poets* states, somewhat laconically, that she was “Born in Buckie and educated in Flanders, Belgium.”⁴³ Zsuzsanna Varga, discussing the Scottish reception of Portuguese literature, writes that Simpson’s translations “may serve as an interesting example and challenge for future translators to follow.”⁴⁴ Tellingly, Jeffrey Skoblow links her with Violet Jacob and Helen B. Cruickshank, among other now little-known poets in Scots. He notes that the fact that

many of these transitional, turn-of-the-century voices belong to women is a striking feature of the Scots line, but female voices of note are scarce thereafter, until much more recently – another striking feature, which gives to modern Scottish poetry a distinctly masculinist air, a kind of burden which grows more problematic as the century unfolds.⁴⁵

The overwhelming preponderance of white, heterosexual male voices in Scottish poetry was increasingly challenged from the nineteen sixties on. Moreover, there was no point at which Scottish women were not writing, for all that the poetry of the middle century is certainly marked by a “distinctly masculinist air”. Why was this the case, given that – as Skoblow suggests – the first-generation and proto-Renaissance poets were more diverse, at least in terms of gender? Surely one would have expected the opposite demographic shift to occur as social attitudes changed, even very slightly, between the nineteen twenties and early sixties? A tentative response to these questions might begin by noting that, throughout the twenties and thirties, MacDiarmid and his associates were less of a unified movement than a loose group of individuals sharing some of the same political and artistic aims. Like the later Movement, the first-generation Scottish Renaissance was to some extent a journalistic creation – of which the *Lucky Poet* translation extract is typical. At this point, MacDiarmid needed every writer he could find. An indicative case would be his *Northern Numbers* anthologies, the first and second of which began with substantial selections of poetry by John Buchan, with the first number also containing work by A.G. (Andrew Graham) Grieve, C.M.’s brother. Buchan was dropped for the third number; Andrew Grieve never made it into the second.⁴⁶ As MacDiarmid’s own ideologies and artistic commitments gathered force, the polite quatrains and

⁴² *Day’s End: Poems in Scots and English* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1929); *The Amber Lute: Poems from the French* (Edinburgh: Grant and Murray, 1932); *The Wind’s Heart: Poems from the Gaelic, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and German* (Edinburgh and London: The Moray Press, 1934); *Aisles of Song: Poems in English and Scots and Translations from the French, & in Scots and English* (Edinburgh and London: The Moray Press, 1937).

⁴³ *Modern Scottish Women Poets*, p. 302.

⁴⁴ Zsuzsanna Varga, ‘Sporadic Encounters: Scottish-Portuguese Literary Contacts Since 1500’, in *Scotland in Europe*, ed. by Tom Hubbard and R.D.S. Jack (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 203-219 (p. 215).

⁴⁵ Jeffrey Skoblow, ‘Scottish Poetry’, in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Neil Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001; 2003), pp. 318-328 (pp. 319-320).

⁴⁶ *Northern Numbers: Being Representative Selections From Certain Living Scottish Poets*, ed. by C.M. Grieve (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1920); *Northern Numbers: Being Representative Selections From Certain Living Scottish Poets. Second Series*, ed. by C.M. Grieve (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1921); *Northern Numbers: Being Representative Selections From Certain Living Scottish Poets. Third Series*, ed. by C.M. Grieve (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1922).

subtly feminising sensibility of female poets like Angus, Cruickshank, Jacob and Simpson were to some extent left behind. The post-war Rose Street milieu in which the second-generation Renaissance writers moved and published was, to say the least, strongly homosocial (or, as Robert Crawford has more memorably put it, “a shithole of gender politics”⁴⁷). The increasing visibility of female poets and translators from the late nineteen sixties on typifies the seismic shift in twentieth-century Scottish poetry as it entered the third key stage in its development.

William Soutar (1898-1943) remains a compelling, even tragic figure in the canon of twentieth-century Scottish literature. In the October of the year *Lucky Poet* was published, Soutar died, having spent the last thirteen years bedridden at his parents’ home in Perth. Despite this paralysis, Soutar wrote a great deal between 1930 and 1943. His poetry, both Scots and English, and his *Diaries of a Dying Man*,⁴⁸ edited for publication in the nineteen fifties by the poet and academic Alexander Scott, constitute an impressive oeuvre; heroic when the circumstances conditioning its production are considered.

As with Gray and Simpson, Soutar was, at least compared with MacDiarmid, relatively conservative in his aesthetics. At home in the English tradition as well as the Scots, he rarely attempted free verse, preferring to fashion neat ballad quatrains or intricately wrought iambic stanzas. As with many Scots poet-translators in the twentieth century, he would make regularly metrical versions, as opposed to using the original as a springboard for more outlandish formal experimentation. *Theme and Variation*, his single collection of translations, mainly from English versions of poems in other languages, but with some Scots poems from English originals, is an unobtrusive, elegant work.⁴⁹ J. Derrick McClure, surveying the history of European poetry in Scotland, compares *Theme and Variation* to MacDiarmid’s translations in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. McClure argues that both works are

radically dissociated, both verbally and culturally, from their originals and integrated into the translator’s work in innovative and idiosyncratic ways, [...] [Soutar] working like MacDiarmid from a nonce selection of poems mostly unrelated except through the accidents of his reading, produced a unified selection of Scots poems which, in most cases, far surpass their models (that is, of course, the English translations and not the Russian or other originals) in literary merit.⁵⁰

Comparing Soutar to MacDiarmid on the grounds of a certain similarity as regards translation technique and anthology selection in a particular collection, McClure indicates a potential bridging

⁴⁷ Robert Crawford, ‘In Bloody Orkney’, *London Review of Books*, vol. 29 no. 4 (2007), pp. 23-25. Available from: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n04/robert-crawford/in-bloody-orkney> [accessed 23/2/2015].

⁴⁸ William Soutar, *Diaries of a Dying Man* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1991).

⁴⁹ *Theme and Variation* remained unpublished during Soutar’s lifetime and has never been issued as a single volume. See: William Soutar, *Poems in Scots and English selected by W.R. Aitken* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), pp. 99-117.

⁵⁰ J. Derrick McClure, ‘European Poetry in Scots’, in *Scotland in Europe*, ed. by Tom Hubbard and R.D.S. Jack (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 89-104 (pp. 95-96).

point between the two poets. While Soutar and MacDiarmid were as different in terms of sensibility as two early twentieth-century poets working in Scots might reasonably be expected to be, there is a notable overlap between their respective approaches to translation. As Soutar's diary reveals, the two men were in close contact in the nineteen thirties. Indeed, MacDiarmid edited his friend's first *Collected Poems* after his death.⁵¹ This contested edition is generally held to have seriously misrepresented Soutar's achievement. However, as McClure points out, MacDiarmid elected to include all thirty-six of the variations in his edition, whereas the 1988 Scottish Academic Press selection omits eight of these.⁵² In an article specifically devoted to *Theme and Variation*, McClure goes on to suggest that Soutar's achievement in this area places him firmly alongside so distinguished a translator as Drummond of Hawthornden. Making this comparison, McClure emphasises the degree of license both Drummond and Soutar felt entitled to take with their originals.⁵³ In this sense, too, the modern Scottish Renaissance might be said to replicate its early modern namesake. Working in the main from English cribs, MacDiarmid and Soutar comprehensively rewrote foreign poets, using their productions as armatures for sometimes barely recognisable (though frequently remarkable) poems in Scots. This contrasts with the younger poets discussed in the coming chapters, who mostly worked directly with the original languages from which they were translating (Garioch is a notable exception).

The Shetland-born academic Sir Herbert Grierson (1866-1960), MacDiarmid's third translator in *Lucky Poet*, was a hugely influential figure, whose pupils at Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Oxford included many subsequently important literary figures of the day (notably Soutar, Garioch and Sorley MacLean). His critical work on the English poets of the seventeenth century brought writers like Donne, Herbert and Marvell to a twentieth-century readership after a lengthy spell in the shadier recesses of the canon.⁵⁴

Grierson's 1948 English Association presidential address, titled *Verse Translation: With Special Reference to Translation from Latin*,⁵⁵ testifies to his strong interest in this area. Postdating MacDiarmid's *Lucky Poet* summary of first-generation Scottish Renaissance translators by five years, Grierson's address is nevertheless an important and revealing document. In it, he shows himself to be appreciative of the role translation has played in the historical development of poetry. He is, however, chary of valorising translation as a creative end in itself: "In a talk some years ago on the radio upon the debts we owed to translation exception was at once made of translation of verse which was waved

⁵¹ William Soutar, *Collected Poems* ed. by Hugh MacDiarmid (London: Andrew Dakers, 1948).

⁵² William Soutar, *Poems of William Soutar: A New Selection* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988).

⁵³ J. Derrick McClure, 'William Soutar's *Theme and Variation*: The Gamut of Literary Translation', in *Terranglian Territories*, ed. by Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 141-159 (pp. 158-159).

⁵⁴ *Metaphysical lyrics and poems of the seventeenth century: Donne to Butler*, ed. by Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

⁵⁵ H.J.C. Grierson, *Verse Translation: With Special Reference to Translation from Latin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

aside as impossible. In a sense, I suppose, it is.”⁵⁶ Grierson quickly moves beyond this well-worn caveat, symptomatic of the peripheral position of much translated literature, to address the central position of translation in medieval poetry, with regard to which he proposes the term “variation”, familiar from Soutar. Referring briefly to the English Renaissance, Grierson praises those parts of *The Faerie Queene* which are in fact unremarked versions of the Italian poet Tasso. In all of this, he is careful to laud the results, as opposed to the process, of verse translation. Suffice to say that few serious scholars of translation would now concur with his argument that “On the whole, I think one may say, the poet of original and genuine inspiration will seldom be content with what is just translation.”⁵⁷ Scholars of Scottish Literature might also take umbrage at his treatment of Alexander Gray’s translations into “the Scottish dialect” (conceived as one among many such English dialects) which Grierson praises for its “immediate suggestion of simplicity, the rural minstrel, the kind of poetry which wanders through local papers but which a Burns suddenly exalts.”⁵⁸ The comparatively little-known second-generation poets discussed in this thesis wrote a Scots which often suggested anything but pastoral simplicity. Indeed, each of them sought in their own way to modernise their own language through translation. Employing various forms of synthetic Lallans, Young, Goodsir Smith and Scott sought, as MacDiarmid had, to create a language capable of expressing contemporary experience. Drawing upon the speech of many different areas of Scotland and many periods of Scottish linguistic history, they hoped to express the nation as a whole. While much of Garioch’s work does this as well, particularly in his later writing he seeks to do justice to his native Edinburgh Scots. This is still an act of synthesis and linguistic reimagining, but one which aims to express a local place and community, rather than the whole nation. Tait goes even further in this respect, writing in a Shetlandic form of Scots which, while it remains a literary construction, is closely linked to the writer’s desire to address his insular culture in its own language.

Grierson’s references to what is “just translation” and the impossibility of verse translation in general gesture towards one explanation for these poets’ fringe status in the canon of twentieth-century versifiers. As well as writing an often recondite, frequently experimental Scots, they were all energised by the process, as well as the results of verse translation. Grierson’s remark can be compared with Frost’s famous assertion that poetry is that which is lost in translation, as well as with Shelley’s arresting image of the violet in the crucible:

Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed or it will bear no flower – and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Verse Translation*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ *Verse Translation*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ *Verse Translation*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘A Defence of Poetry’, in *Poems and Prose*, ed. by Timothy Webb with George E. Donaldson (Everyman: London, 1995), pp. 247-279 (p. 252).

This would seem to be a rather pessimistic view of translation – surprisingly so given that Shelley was himself a major translator from Greek, Latin, German, Italian, Spanish and French. On the other hand, the potential for the plant to bear a flower is admitted, however tentatively. The curse of Babel may be real, but it is conceived as a burden to be borne, as opposed to something unbearable. Discussing Shelley’s theory and practice as a translator, Timothy Webb identifies a strong current of Platonic essentialism in his thought on the subject – as might be expected given that the poet himself translated *The Symposium*.⁶⁰ Again, throughout the *Defence*, Shelley takes it as a matter of course that the development of poetry is reliant upon interlingual exchange and cross-pollination, writing for instance that “the superstructure of English literature is based upon materials of Italian invention.”⁶¹ Webb argues that despite the difficulties inherent in any attempt to bring violets and crucibles together, “for Shelley translation fulfilled a number of personal needs. It soothed him in time of distress. It tided him over periods barren of inspiration. It gave him a framework for his poetry.”⁶² As this thesis demonstrates, translation fulfilled all these needs for the later Scottish Renaissance poets, not to mention helping them claim cultural authority and internationalise their own national tradition. In addition to the more personal factors identified by Webb, Jeffrey C. Robinson suggests that something similar helped to motivate the translations of Romantic poets like Shelley and Leigh Hunt:

Shelley’s generation of poets considered translation as part of an effort to contact the poetries of other ages and other nations and cultures, countering the English tendencies towards parochial nationalism and localism [...] The poets in Leigh Hunt’s circle, including Shelley, were very interested in translation as an element in their progressive poetic and political programme of cultural expansion.⁶³

Here one would have to add the caveat that, while certainly resistant to limiting parochialism, the Scottish Renaissance was not trying to counter nationalism and localism through translation – quite the reverse. However, the nationalism of MacDiarmid and his successors was of a different order to that espoused by the early nineteenth-century English establishment. While there is undoubtedly an uncomfortable side to the Scottish Renaissance – epitomised for many readers by MacDiarmid’s flirtations with various forms of totalitarianism – it remained, generally speaking, a progressive programme of poetic and political expansion. As with Shelley and Hunt, this poetic progressiveness becomes especially apparent when one considers the large amount of energy these writers put into engaging with other languages and cultures through translation.

Grierson was undoubtedly a man of his time, whose critique of translation has had less far-reaching consequences than his work on metaphysical poetry (the same might be said of his own

⁶⁰ Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 28.

⁶¹ ‘A Defence of Poetry’, p. 270.

⁶² *The Violet in the Crucible*, p. 49.

⁶³ Jeffrey C. Robinson, ‘The translator’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, ed. by Timothy Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 104-122 (p. 105).

English renditions of the Dutch poet P.C. Boutens, one of which features in *Verse Translation*). His efforts in this field, particularly as an anthologist, constitute a key canonical intervention at a time when the Anglophone tradition was undergoing radical reinterpretation. Eliot's donnish essays, Pound's polemical tracts, MacDiarmid's causeries – all sought to draw attention to little-known writers and cultural moments in the service of a contemporary revolution of taste. In his influential *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, the New Critic Cleanth Brooks argued that the “significant relationship between the modernist poets and the seventeenth-century poets of wit lies here – in their common conception of the use of metaphor” and that, unlike the Victorians, both groups of writers believed “things are not poetic per se, and conversely, that nothing can be said to be intrinsically unpoetic.”⁶⁴ Lallans or synthetic Scots is, in essence, a heterogeneous – and sometimes violent – yoking together of apparent contraries. To bring together words deriving from many different source texts, historical periods and places within Scotland is a creative tactic comparable to other forms of modernist collage. There is a recognition of this in MacDiarmid's discovery of a “moral resemblance – between Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. *A vis comica* that has not yet been liberated lies bound by desuetude and misappreciation in the recesses of the Doric.”⁶⁵

As MacDiarmid argues in *Lucky Poet*, these older writers were a key strand of the tradition out of which the second-generation Renaissance emerged. Additionally, it is important to bear in mind a number of interwar critical interventions, whose influence on the subsequent development of the Scottish Renaissance was profound. The first of these, G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, published in 1919, introduced the concept of the Caledonian Antisyzygy – the idea that Scottish language and literary culture were marked by a strong sense of duality. This duality, Gregory Smith argued, had been exacerbated by the Reformation and the two Unions, and in particular by the linguistic shocks ensuing from these historical events. Nevertheless, he felt it was a constant, forming a coherent thread from the medieval era to the present time: “For Scottish Literature is more medieval in habit than criticism has suspected, and owes some part of its picturesque strength to this freedom in passing from one mood to another. It takes some people more time than they can spare to see the absolute propriety of a gargoyle's grinning at the elbow of a kneeling saint.”⁶⁶

Eliot, reviewing the book in *The Athenaeum*, found fault with much of Gregory Smith's thesis, arguing that a strong literature requires a single, coherent language, with a long and identifiable

⁶⁴ Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 11.

⁶⁵ See: Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘A Theory of Scots Letters’, *The Scottish Chapbook* 1 (1922), pp. 180-4.

⁶⁶ G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: MacMillan, 1919), p. 35.

tradition of writing in it.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, ‘Was There a Scottish Literature?’ went on to exercise a powerful catalytic effect on the then incipient Renaissance movement. Eliot suggested that Gregory Smith had “written a series of essays, dealing with what appears to be one subject, and the conclusion issues very honestly from his treatment that the unity of the subject is not literary but geographical.”⁶⁸ Referring to two translators, Douglas and Urquhart, he concedes that the former may to some extent be expressing a distinct sense of reality, deriving ultimately from a distinct language. However, a century and a half later one finds that an essentially English Rabelais has emerged from what is now only nominally a Caledonian pen. Interestingly, in his contention that, historically speaking, Scottish literature has developed largely as a kind of provincial outpost of English taste, Eliot anticipates a remark he made in a letter to Douglas Young nearly thirty years later – that as perhaps the last remaining English regionalist he was strongly sympathetic with the intentions of the Scottish Renaissance.⁶⁹ Though Eliot’s warm sympathy was surely welcome, Young would presumably have disagreed with the idea that the Gaelic tradition had contributed nothing of significance to Scottish poetry in Scots or English. No doubt he would also have taken issue with the assertion that readers “are quite at liberty to treat the Scots language as a dialect, as one of the several English dialects which gradually and inevitably amalgamated into one language.”⁷⁰

As Young and the other key poets discussed in this thesis understood, there is nothing inevitable about linguistic change, which is an historical phenomenon like any other societal shift. Perceiving major linguistic discontinuities within the Scottish tradition, Eliot failed to appreciate the possibility of a sense of literary and cultural affinity persisting or re-emerging despite – or indeed through exploration of – these differences in language. As Alan Riach notes, in this emphasis on an apparently irreversible movement towards a unitary English or British culture, Eliot was to some extent reiterating his own views as regards the existence of a distinctly American literature.⁷¹ Suggesting that Pound’s at times overwhelmingly various project and Carlos Williams’ demotic invocation of the American grain are more apposite transatlantic exemplars, Riach concludes that creative writers, Scottish and otherwise, “implicitly understand” that such emphasis on the dominant language and culture tends to obscure “depths and subtleties, traditions and major themes”. Ultimately, it is the task of criticism to “dismantle [‘British’ literature] thoroughly and put the pieces together again in a more responsible way.”⁷²

⁶⁷ T. S. Eliot, ‘Was There a Scottish Literature?’, *The Athenaeum*, (1 Aug 1919), 680-1. Reprinted in Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939, Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), pp. 7-10.

⁶⁸ ‘Was There a Scottish Literature’, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Letter from T.S. Eliot to Douglas Young dated 10th April 1947 (NLS Acc. 6419/ Box 38a).

⁷⁰ ‘Was There a Scottish Literature’, p. 7.

⁷¹ Alan Riach, *Was there ever a ‘British’ Literature?* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2007), p. 1.

⁷² *Was there ever a ‘British’ Literature?*, p. 15.

Many of Eliot's propositions in 'Was There a Scottish Literature?' were further developed by Edwin Muir in his 1936 book *Scott and Scotland*. This work, coming as it did after more than a decade's effort by MacDiarmid and his associates – including Muir himself – was seen by many as a betrayal; an attack on the linguistic principles of the Renaissance movement. *Scott and Scotland* drew considerably upon Gregory Smith, but also upon Eliot's arguments about the need for linguistic and cultural unity, ultimately concluding that Scotland's linguistic and psychological duality was real, but perhaps undesirable:

Scots dialect poetry represents Scotland in bits and patches, and in doing that it is no doubt a faithful enough image of the present divided state of Scotland. But while we cling to it we shall never be able to express the central reality of Scotland, as Mr Yeats has expressed the central reality of Ireland; though for such an end the sacrifice of dialect poetry would be cheap. The real issue in contemporary Scottish literature is between centrality and provincialism; dialect poetry is one of the chief supports of the second of those forces; the first can hardly be said to exist at all.⁷³

MacDiarmid, unsurprisingly, disagreed vociferously. His anger at Muir led to a rift between the two men which never truly healed. It also led to another key text – *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, which appeared in 1940, but had been in preparation for a number of years beforehand. With this anthology MacDiarmid sought to refute Muir's contention that Scotland was weakened by its multiplicity. In terms of the contents, this meant the inclusion of poems translated from Latin and Gaelic, as well as Scots and English works from many centuries of Scottish literary history. In terms of the introductory matter it meant a direct attack on Muir's character and intellect, as it were. For instance: "Mr Muir is on the worst possible ground [...] his whole thesis indeed is like condemning wild strawberries because they have not the attributes of peaches."⁷⁴ Muir's insider opinion on Scottish literary matters is also discounted on the grounds of his Orcadian identity. With specific regard to Scots translation, the passage from *Lucky Poet* already quoted (which of course originally appeared in a slightly different form in the *Scottish Educational Journal* some years before) makes yet another appearance, introduced as follows: "These new Scots poets [are] internationalists in their literary sympathies too, and have translated into Scots a great body of poetry from German, French, Russian, and other European languages."⁷⁵

The Muirs – described by MacDiarmid in 1934 as among "our most distinguished exemplars of the translator's art" – are nowhere to be found in the later, post-*Scott and Scotland* versions of the passage. As Marianne Moore would have it, omissions are not accidents. Nevertheless, as the first English translators of Kafka and many other prominent German and Czech writers, the Muirs are important, though not uncontroversial figures in the history of Scottish literary translation. Indeed, their work, particularly on Kafka, has sometimes been criticised for offering a smooth, eminently

⁷³ Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (Routledge: London, 1936), pp. 179-180.

⁷⁴ *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, ed. by Hugh MacDiarmid (London: MacMillan, 1940), p. xxx.

⁷⁵ *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, p. xxiv.

fluent interpretation of a writer whose prose style is often characterised as dissonant and quite literally unfinished. Reviewing a new translation of *The Castle* in 1998, the South African novelist J.M. Coetzee describes the “faintly scandalous air” which had by then gathered around the Muirs’ version.⁷⁶ Coetzee is an even-handed critic, acknowledging the extent to which the Muirs were influenced in their decisions by the manner in which Max Brod had presented his friend’s writing after the latter’s death. He also points out that contemporary translators of Kafka “would do well to recognise that, if a striving after elegance – fluency is a better term – marks the Muir translation as of its time, then, in its very striving toward strangeness and denseness [Mark Harman’s new version] welcome though it is today – may, as history moves on and tastes change, be pointed towards obsolescence too.”⁷⁷

In *The Translator’s Invisibility*, his polemical history of translation into English from the early modern period to the nineteen nineties, Lawrence Venuti argues that, since at least the early seventeenth century, Anglophone translators have been marginalised by the dominance of precisely the kind of fluency which Coetzee detects in the Muirs’ Kafka.⁷⁸ Domesticating the source, “a fluent translation masquerades as true semantic equivalence [...] reducing if not simply excluding the very difference that translation is called upon to convey.”⁷⁹ In the face of such fluent strategies, Venuti advocates a resistant, foreignising approach which “seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation” by somehow recreating or gesturing towards the otherness of the source text in the target language. To this end he valorises translators like Pound and the Zukofskys, whose interpretations of poets in other languages aim to convey something of their sources’ difference, making English strange in the process.

Venuti emphasises the importance of “extensive archival research, bringing to light forgotten or neglected translations and establishing an alternative tradition that somewhat overlaps with, but mostly differs from, the current canon of British and American literature.”⁸⁰ The present work is in many respects such a project, with the modern tradition of Scots translation which it addresses providing abundant evidence of foreignisation in relation to the broader Anglophone context. On the other hand, for a native Scots speaker, these texts might well be experienced as domesticating, whereas Standard English would be the foreignising medium. As Corbett writes: “The choice of Scots – and particularly the choice of literary Scots, or Lallans – allows the Scottish writer a medium of translation that is simultaneously foreignising and domesticating.”⁸¹ It is also interesting to note that

⁷⁶ J.M. Coetzee, ‘Translating Kafka’, in *Stranger Shores: essays 1986-1999* (London: Vintage, 2002), pp. 88-103 (p. 89).

⁷⁷ ‘Translating Kafka’, p. 103.

⁷⁸ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 2.

⁷⁹ *The Translator’s Invisibility*, p. 21.

⁸⁰ *The Translator’s Invisibility*, p. 40.

⁸¹ *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, p. 185.

for some twentieth-century poets, fluency within the Scots language was itself a highly desirable, if perhaps only partially achievable goal. Above and beyond purely literary motivations, the Scots translations of poets like Young, Garioch, Goodsir Smith, Scott and Tait were actuated, to some extent at least, by these writers' wish to regenerate their synthetic language. By foreignising in relation to Standard English, they hoped to clear a domestic space within which a fully revitalised spoken Scots might flourish. Naturally, this ambitious linguistic programme was predicated on the eventual realisation of Scottish political independence.

Recalling Eliot's 1919 intervention, Corbett has argued that, unlikely though the comparison might seem, "Eliot's view of the interaction of cultures turns out to be remarkably similar to that of Venuti" given that the latter's "interest in the periphery lies in its power to refresh and sustain the culture of the centres: visible translation therefore becomes yet another weapon in the armoury of the cultural colonialist."⁸² Suggesting that Venuti has to some extent failed to come to terms with the implications of minority-language translation, especially within world English, Corbett also points out that it would be "a gross oversimplification to hold MacDiarmid up as a paragon of democracy in opposition to the centralist, hierarchical Eliot and his heirs." After all, "MacDiarmid has his own peripheries – the regional dialects of Scots, which were to be appropriated and transformed for his own grand project."⁸³ Against the grain of this tendency towards centralisation and fluency (though it remains a heavily-qualified form of fluency) Corbett reads the work of Tom Leonard, which is at least as resistant to what he terms hegemonic Lallans as it is to hegemonic English. In its own way, so is the work of a writer like William J. Tait, whose poems and translations are predicated on a sense of language, identity and locality which is Shetlandic first and Scottish second (at times Garioch makes comparable use of the Edinburgh vernacular). Corbett's critique of both Venuti and Eliot highlights the potential that the study of minor or marginal literary cultures has for redefining the parameters of theory more generally. As Edwin Gentzler argues in his influential overview of the field, *Contemporary Translation Theories*, scholars of translation "no doubt can learn much from scholars of ethnic minorities, women, minor literatures, and popular literatures." Moreover, the most "exciting work in the field today is being produced by scholars from 'smaller countries' and cultures in transition [...]" Indeed, Gentzler goes so far as to suggest that by "recognizing the limits imposed by the receiving culture, by problematizing those discursive constraints, critics not only open up the discourse of translation theory for its own possible transformation, but help open the receiving culture for possible social change (through the practice of translation)."⁸⁴ Certainly, this was the intention of

⁸² John Corbett, 'World Scots and Global Culture', in *Translation and Literature*, Vol. 9, Issue 2 (2000), 171-174 (pp. 171-172).

⁸³ 'World Scots and Global Culture', p. 173.

⁸⁴ Edwin Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories: Revised 2nd Edition* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001), p.202.

the principal poets discussed in this thesis, who hoped to effect meaningful change in their own culture through their work as translators.

In 1998 Coetzee referred to the “faintly scandalous” character of the Muirs’ translations, highlighting the lengths they went to in order to put a domesticating gloss on Kafka’s rough, unfinished texts. Coincidentally or not, the same year saw the publication of Venuti’s influential *The Scandals of Translation*. Building on the arguments advanced in *The Translator’s Invisibility*, Venuti proposes that translation itself

is scandalous because it can create different values and practices, whatever the domestic setting. This is not to say that translation can ever rid itself of its fundamental domestication, its basic task of rewriting the foreign text in domestic cultural terms. The point is rather that a translator can choose to redirect the ethnocentric movement of translation so as to decenter the domestic terms that a translation project must inescapably utilize. This is an ethics of difference that can change the domestic culture.⁸⁵

Venuti’s discussion of the scandalous aspects of translation can be fruitfully explored in the context of the modern Scots texts with which this thesis deals. For instance, at one point he asserts that “not only do translation projects construct uniquely domestic representations of foreign cultures, but since these projects address specific cultural constituencies, they are simultaneously engaged in the formation of domestic identities.”⁸⁶ Indeed, as the Irish scholar Michael Cronin puts it in his book *Translation and Identity*, translation is not simply a matter of “what we do with other languages. It is also, pointedly, to do with how we experience and think of our own.” Cronin goes on to argue that the “canonical exclusion” of translated texts does considerable violence to many peoples’ understanding of their national languages and literary histories, as well as to their appreciation of foreign literature and culture in general.⁸⁷ He also suggests that “the future reform of national literature curricula would almost inevitably lead to the surprising discovery of a rich past of translated literature.”⁸⁸ A comparable impulse lies behind Tomlinson’s *Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, as well as the other translation anthologies referred to at the beginning of this introduction.

How and why does the impulse towards verse translation manifest itself in the oeuvres of each of the five key poets addressed in this thesis? To what extent were these writers drawn to translation because they felt it provided them with an opportunity to reinvent or reform their national identity? Certainly, MacDiarmid’s critical interventions, notably the passage reproduced in various forms in *Lucky Poet*, *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* and *The Scottish Educational Journal*, tended to present Scots translation as a means for modern writers to assume “the Good Europeanism

⁸⁵ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 82.

⁸⁶ *The Scandals of Translation*, p. 75.

⁸⁷ Michael Cronin, *Translation and Identity* (Routledge: London, 2006), p. 30.

⁸⁸ *Translation and Identity*, p. 33.

of [their] mediaeval ancestors". While it remains questionable in terms of medieval literary historiography, MacDiarmid's valorisation of Douglas' *Eneados* is comparable to his better-known appropriation of Dunbar, in that he links Middle Scots poetry with avant garde tendencies which he claimed were latent in contemporary Scottish culture. As with much else in the field of modern Scots translation and its enabling criticism, this instrumental use of medieval literature is simultaneously estranging (in that it refers to language and literature obscure to most contemporary readers) and familiarising (in that it situates that literature within and understands it primarily in terms of the contemporary context). Again, Pound and Eliot made much of certain classic texts in their cultural criticism. In contrast to MacDiarmid, how influential were these writers' creative and critical interventions for the poets of the post-war Renaissance? This line of inquiry helps explicate the decisions, aesthetic principles and ideology underpinning Scots translations of highly canonical poets in the Romance languages such as Dante, Villon, Baudelaire and Corbière – all of whom had been central to Eliot's and Pound's attempts to form "a new literary movement, constructing an authorial subject through an affiliation with a particular literary discourse."⁸⁹ As well as issues of identity, the question as to what extent these poets saw translation (of drama or avant-garde poetry for example) as a means by which perceived gaps within their own literary tradition might be filled is an interesting one. A key issue to be addressed in this context is the role of Gaelic-Scots translation, particularly in terms of the investment of the writers in question in a multilingual, polyglot model of Scottish nationhood and literary culture (in opposition to the monolingual versions of tradition proposed by Muir and Eliot). Similarly, a major concern for this thesis will be to investigate the linguistic nature of these writers' translations, notably as regards the interplay between Lallans-style synthesis – the desire to translate into a language which is to some extent a literary creation – and an attachment to the various local strands of Scots. As Corbett notes, this interplay of inherited and invented language has important implications for the domestication-foreignisation binary, though these are by no means straightforward.

Surveying the landscape of Scots verse translation in the interwar years, one is left with an impression of considerable activity on the part of various hands, with a single towering figure acting as a catalyst. These decades form the immediate background to the post-war years upon which this thesis focuses. Key milestones for this period are the drawing up of the 1947 *Scots Style Sheet*,⁹⁰ the dispute sparked by the publication in 1959 of the *Honour'd Shade*⁹¹ anthology and the foundation of *Lallans* magazine in 1973.

⁸⁹ *The Scandals of Translation*, p. 76.

⁹⁰ 'Scots Style Sheet: As proposed at the Makars' Club meeting on 11th April 1947 in Edinburgh'. Reproduced at: http://www.electricscotland.com/poetry/purves/Grammar_Style.pdf [accessed 09/03/2015].

⁹¹ *Honour'd Shade: An Anthology of New Scottish Poetry to Mark the Bicentenary of the Birth of Robert Burns*, ed. by Norman MacCaig (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1959). See also the tape recording *Dishonour'd Shade: Seven non-Abbotsford Poets* (1960).

After the Second World War, MacDiarmid continued to be an important living figure, though he had largely moved away from Scots and translation proper. Instead the baton was passed to a group of younger writers – notably Robert Garioch, Tom Scott, Sydney Goodsir Smith, William J. Tait and Douglas Young – some of whom had been active before the War, but who largely produced their best or most characteristic works from the mid-nineteen forties onwards. The Scots verse translations of these poets are the subject of this doctoral thesis, which builds upon the groundwork laid by my 2012 MPhil dissertation.⁹² While I remain indebted to the work of several scholars, particularly John Corbett and J. Derrick McClure, this thesis is the first extended research project to deal principally with the Scots verse translations of the post-MacDiarmid makars. The canon of translators and translations which it maps out is not intended to be final; rather a pioneering effort of primary research which, it is hoped, will help to open up this immensely rich terrain to subsequent critique and, in an ideal world, new readers.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. This introduction has situated the post-war translators' work in the context of wider twentieth-century and contemporary discourses around translation and modernity, as well as the interwar or first-generation Scottish Renaissance. While the individuals discussed are diverse, one key point to take from this short survey of interwar Scots translators is that they are, for all MacDiarmid's boasting, more of a loose collection of individual names than a coherent movement. With the exception of MacDiarmid, they are also notably less radical in their cultural and political aims than their post-war successors.

Building on this background, the first chapter discusses the translations of the polyglot Douglas Young (1913-1973). Young remains an underappreciated writer, not least because much of his finest work is in translation. A figure of decisive importance to modern Gaelic poetry as translator and enabler of Sorley MacLean and George Campbell Hay, he translated from many other languages, notably Ancient Greek. His Scots versions of Aristophanes are key texts for modern Scottish drama, anticipating later translations by Liz Lochhead and Edwin Morgan. Young was also a writer in dialogue with contemporary European poetry, exemplified by his Scots version of Paul Valéry's *Le Cimetière Marin*. The second chapter deals with the translations of Sydney Goodsir Smith (1915-1975). Goodsir Smith's wartime versions of Czech, Gaelic, French and Polish poets are considered in light of his commitment to a left-leaning, cosmopolitan sense of Scottishness. Goodsir Smith's better-known later versions of Corbière and Blok are considered in terms of his engagement with the broader legacy of European symbolism and modernism. The third chapter focuses on Robert Garioch (1909-1981). Garioch's celebrated versions of Giuseppe Belli are one of the high points in this tentative canon of modern Scots translations. Less well-known are his versions of many other poets in various

⁹² Stewart Sanderson, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialectic: Scots Translation and the Second Generation Modern Scottish Renaissance* (2012). See: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4380/> [accessed 09/03/2015].

languages, including Sorley MacLean, George Buchanan and Pindar. The fourth chapter addresses the verse translations of Tom Scott (1918-1995). Scott's early translations of Villon were undertaken at the suggestion of T.S. Eliot. He went on to translate many other poets, from Dante to Baudelaire. Scott's translations are symbolic of his attempt to meld the aesthetics of late modernism with the cultural politics of the Scottish Renaissance. The final chapter of this thesis discusses the translations of the Shetlandic poet William J. Tait (1918-1992). Tait translated many French poets into Shetlandic, notably Baudelaire, Corbière and Villon, but also a number of modern Scandinavian writers. The great distinctiveness of his language provides an opportunity to complicate and question the cultural politics of translation in this post-war generation. The conclusion examines the legacy of these poets as translators, pointing forwards to the writers emerging in the late nineteen sixties and early seventies, of whom Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) is the most important as regards translation.

This thesis argues that a more nuanced appreciation of the middle generation, which came into its own in the nineteen forties and fifties, broadens our understanding of the traditions in which these younger translators worked. It seeks to emphasise the importance of verse translation to these writers' oeuvres, showing how a concern with the practice informs and energises their work as a whole. It also argues that, individual as each of these five key writers is, they are united by this preoccupation with verse translation, which for all of them was an act related to the forging of new kinds of Scottish nationhood and national identity (translation being an art by which one could valorise both international solidarity and cultural cosmopolitanism). Taken together, they form a coherent group in the landscape of modern Scottish poetry, unified aesthetically and politically as well as socially. Major trends include the translation of Gaelic poetry, verse drama and European modernists. There are also many instances in which the same poet is translated by several poets, often in revealingly divergent ways. For example, Young, Goodsir Smith and Garioch all translate MacLean; Goodsir Smith, Scott and Tait translate Villon; Scott and Tait both translate Ronsard; Goodsir Smith and Tait translate Corbière; Young and Garioch are both involved in translating drama from Classical languages. Perhaps more than anything else, it is their shared concern with language as a medium for communication, artistic expression and cultural revival that unites these writers. This is nowhere more evident than it is in their translation work, which for each of them was a method by which the imaginative possibilities of their language and poetic vision might be extended and refined.

Douglas Young (1913-1973) was a divisive, indeed somewhat diffuse figure. A classical scholar by profession, he was also a poet, politician and polyglot translator. Writing in 1976, fellow classicist Donald Carne-Ross suggested that while a man “of various achievement, Young left no one great monument behind him” though for all that “there was something in his life and work – a zest, a reach of interest, a *praeferendum ingenium* not often found in the academic community and least of all in the classical part of it.”¹ A few years earlier, also in Carne-Ross’s periodical *Arion*, a former student remembered a man “[busy], witty, learned, accomplished, a bit of a gossip, quirky, he must have set the solemn and narrow on edge” whose “views were progressive and any conservatism not a position, but a sense of continuities and communities.”²

Educated at Merchiston Castle School and the Universities of St. Andrews and Oxford, Young spent much of his academic career collating and studying the fragments of the sixth-century poet Theognis (incidentally the subject of the young Nietzsche’s first scholarly publication). In his 1950 memoir *Chasing An Ancient Greek*, Young describes his travels round various European libraries examining the scattered manuscripts of Theognis’ poems.³ The son of a Fife mercantile clerk, part of the poet’s childhood was spent in Bengal, where he acquired his first foreign language: Urdu. His first academic appointment was as an assistant Greek lecturer at Aberdeen from 1938-1941. This was a three year contract, which came to an end just as Young’s wartime activities as a Nationalist pundit were increasingly bringing him to the attention of the British authorities. In their introduction to *Douglas Young: Poet and Polymath* (a posthumous collection of poems, translations and prose pieces) David Murison and Clara Young, the poet’s daughter, recall how one morning early in the war “the British Secret Service momentarily panicked and [...] descended on several prominent Nationalists [...] to raid their homes for seditious or treasonable articles. Douglas was one of these and his voluminous correspondence [...] was carted off with himself to the Aberdeen police office.”⁴ This time, Young’s stay in the hands of the police was brief, not lasting till the end of the day. Soon, however, he found himself behind bars for conscientious objection. Arguing, on constitutional grounds, that the two Acts of Union made no provision for the conscription of Scottish soldiers by a British government, Young was twice imprisoned in HMP Saughton. As he was, from 1942-1945, the chairman of the SNP, there was clearly a political aspect to his imprisonment. In 1944 he stood in the Kirkcaldy Burghs by-election, winning 42% of the vote, narrowly losing to the Labour candidate,

¹ Donald Carne-Ross, ‘Douglas Young: The Bounty of Scotland’, *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1976), 518-523 (p. 518).

² James Hynd, ‘Douglas C.C. Young’, *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* Vol. 1, No. 3, (1973/1974), 527-529 (pp. 528-529).

³ Douglas Young, *Chasing An Ancient Greek: Discursive Reminiscences of a European Journey* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1950).

⁴ *Douglas Young: Poet and Polymath*, ed. by Clara Young and David Murison (Loanhead: MacDonald, 1975), p. 16.

former coal miner Thomas Hubbard.⁵ Also a member of the Labour Party, Young left the SNP in 1948, when dual membership was forbidden. In 1953 he returned to St. Andrews to teach Greek. Nevertheless, his political convictions continued to drive his cultural activities. Notably, in 1957 he became President of Scottish P.E.N, while in 1967 he was involved in the foundation of the 1320 Club. The following year Young moved to Canada to take up a post at McMaster University. In 1970 he moved to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where on 24th October 1973 he died suddenly while reading Homer.⁶

As well as his prolific creative and scholarly output, Young played a key role in the development and publication of two of Scotland's major twentieth-century Gaelic poets – Sorley MacLean and George Campbell Hay. His work as a translator and linguistic activist unites the several strands of his remarkably heterogeneous oeuvre. His importance as correspondent and facilitator makes his translations an ideal focal point through and around which other writers can be discussed in terms of their relation to Scots, the translation of poetry and the wider Scottish Renaissance project as it developed and reformulated itself in the post-war environment.

Having published a number of Nationalist political pamphlets in the early nineteen forties, in 1943 Young's first book of poems appeared. *Auntran Blads*, dedicated to MacLean and Campbell Hay, carries a foreword by Hugh MacDiarmid, opening with the simple statement "This is a significant book."⁷ MacDiarmid goes on to discuss Young chiefly in terms of his relationship with the Scottish Renaissance, emphasising the degree to which he expresses the true characteristics of the ideal Renaissance poet. MacDiarmid argues that it is necessary to develop Scots, then build upon this work by restoring Gaelic to its former pre-eminence. MacDiarmid attempts to reverse the violence done to indigenous Scottish languages by notions of the priority of English, asserting an alternative hierarchy in which first Scots, then Gaelic comes to signify a growing amount of rightness or truthfulness in a Scottish context. In a sense, this is simply to reconfigure the logic of the oppressor in favour of the oppressed, sharing the weakness of many nationalist ideologies, which often culminate in a reformulation of the existing situation, but no radical material transformation.

The numerical balance between poems and translations in *Auntran Blads* is equally striking. Out of a total of fifty eight poems, thirty seven are translations. From Gaelic there are thirteen poems from Sorley MacLean, one from George Campbell Hay, one from William Livingstone, one from the 'Erse' and one from the Scottish Gaelic. From the Greek Young translates two poems from Sappho,

⁵ According to Thomas Hubbard's grandson Tom (himself a distinguished poet, translator and scholar) Young admired and got on well with his Labour opponent, who would represent Kirkcaldy for the next fifteen years, standing down at the 1959 general election.

⁶ See: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40382?docPos=1> [accessed 21/11/2013]

⁷ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Foreword', in Douglas Young, *Auntran Blads: An Outwale o Verses* (Glasgow: Maclellan, 1943), pp. 5-9 (p. 5).

four epigrams from Theognis and a section of the Iliad – as well as two renderings of Burns into Greek dialects. From Latin there are two poems by Catullus. From Italian Dante contributes several stanzas. From French Young translates a sonnet by Paul Valéry (a poet he would later return to at greater length). From German there are versions of Hofmannstahl, Theodor Storm and Emanuel Geibel. From Lithuanian there are two poems, from Chinese one. The final translation into Scots in the volume is from Pushkin. *Auntran Blads* evidences Young's remarkable linguistic facility, all the more impressive given the intensity of his political and scholarly commitments. As J. Derrick McClure notes: "Of the many poet-translators who have given cosmopolitan colouring to the Scots literary scene, none has ranged more widely in his choice of source languages than Douglas Young."⁸

Four years later, in 1947, Young's second collection, *A Braird O Thristles*, appeared. Again published by MacLellan in Glasgow, the volume came twelfth in the *Poetry Scotland Series* of collections. Previous numbers had included books by George Bruce, Adam Drinan, W.S. Graham, Robert Herring, William Jeffrey, Maurice Lindsay, Hugh MacDiarmid, Sydney Goodsir Smith and Ruthven Todd. As before, translations play an important role in the collection. Out of a total forty-seven poems, twenty-four are translations, all but one into Scots. This time Young includes two poems from George Campbell Hay's Gaelic; two from Sorley MacLean; one from the Welsh of D. Gwenallt Jones; one from the traditional Gaelic; one from the Lithuanian, one from Paul Valéry (a fascinating version of *Le Cimetière Marin*); a version of the twenty-third psalm; out of Russian one from Rilejev; one from Nekrasov and three from Pushkin; from German two from Erich Fried; one from Lili du Bois-Reymond; one from Christian Morgenstern and one from Ludwig Uhland. From Greek, Young includes one from Sappho, one anonymous poem and one from Theognis. The final poem in the book is a version from the Chinese "Shi King."⁹ Stylishly adorned with "Pictish Decorations by George Bain,"¹⁰ the book remains an eye-catching object.

After *A Braird O Thristles*, Young continued to write and translate poetry, but never gathered the results of these activities up in a third slim volume. A great deal of his energies in the years between the end of the war and his death must have gone into teaching, research and political activism. In the nineteen fifties he also found time to translate two of Aristophanes' comedies into Scots. These plays, *The Puddocks*¹¹ and *The Burdies*¹² (from *The Frogs* and *The Birds*, respectively) are fascinating, if again rather eccentric works. The impetus behind them comes, at least in part, from a sense that Scottish drama, especially in Scots, required a new infusion of energy; that, after all the

⁸ J. Derrick McClure, 'The Puddocks and the Burdies 'by Aristophanes and Douglas Young'', in *Frae Ither Tongues: Essays on Modern Translations into Scots*, ed. by Bill Findlay (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004), pp. 215-230 (p. 215).

⁹ Douglas Young, *A Braird o Thristles* (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1947) p. 56.

¹⁰ *A Braird o Thristles*, p. 1.

¹¹ Douglas Young, *The Puddocks: A verse play in Scots* (Tayport: Douglas Young, 1957).

¹² Douglas Young, *The Burdies: A comedy in Scots verse* (Tayport: Douglas Young, 1959).

promise of David Lindsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, as well as lesser-known texts like *Pamphilus de Amore* and *Philotus*, Reformation and Union had left drama all but absent from the Scottish tradition. Historically speaking, this was far from the full story; it was nonetheless an influential point of view in the early to middle twentieth century, proving a spur to many dramatists.

Like A. E. Housman, Young was a poet professionally committed to the close textual editing of ancient literature. His academic career clearly differentiates him from the four other key poets discussed in this thesis, only one of whom – Tom Scott – took a postgraduate degree. Similarly, while all of these writers were in their own way politically motivated, Young was the only one of them to lead a political party and indeed go to prison in that capacity. His creative work as a translator can be linked to both these concerns, emerging on the one hand from his politically-inflected belief that Scottish culture and language had to be enriched through translation, and on the other from his professional involvement with and training in various languages. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a strong didactic strain throughout Young's writing.

Responding to the key questions posed in the introduction, this chapter explores the various ways in which Young sought to reshape the Scottish linguistic, literary and political landscapes through translation. Situating his achievement in the context of MacDiarmid's enabling influence, it proposes a number of alternative co-ordinates in terms of which the main sentiments and commitments feeding into his work can be understood. One major issue to be addressed is Young's intensive engagement with Gaelic poetry, particularly as regards the ways it feeds into wider debates around the validity and possibility of a multilingual Scottish literature. Another important aspect of his work – dramatic translation – provides an opportunity to reflect upon the belief, shared to some extent by all of the poets discussed in this thesis, that translation might help them fill perceived gaps in their literary tradition, extending Scottish writing into new areas and tonalities. A third key issue for this thesis – the nature and extent of the modernist influence on the Scottish Renaissance – will be explored with reference to Young's version of Valéry's *Le Cimetière Marin*.

I. Gaelic

Like MacDiarmid, Young seems to have had a sense of Gaelic as an ancestral tongue; a linguistic state to which Scotland should return. Unlike MacDiarmid, Young could read Gaelic literature in the original. Considering the role Gaelic played in his writing, it is important to recognise the language's privileged position and emotional significance for so committed a nationalist. One has also to emphasise the importance of Young's activities as correspondent, facilitator and critic for a number of modern Gaelic poets. In the words of Gaelic scholar Michel Byrne, he "cemented the relationships between Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean, introduced Hay and MacDiarmid to each other's

work, was instrumental in bringing MacLean and Hay together, played an important part in the publication of both Gaels' work and also promoted their poetry through his own Scots versions."¹³ It is no exaggeration to suggest that, without Young, the textual landscape of modern Gaelic poetry would be markedly impoverished.

In many ways, Young's work as translator was emblematic of his position between Gaelic and Scots (and, it must be said, English). As a gifted but largely self-taught learner, it was where his relationship with the language began – and ultimately ended. In a searching article, J. Derrick McClure points out that while "Young's enthusiasm for the challenge of translating MacLean's poetry into Scots can easily be appreciated, the natures of the two languages ensured that his task would involve far more difficulty than the general problems of poetic translation",¹⁴ qualifying his conclusion that "Young has worthily played Gavin Douglas to MacLean's Virgil."¹⁵ A glance at the contents of Young's collections reveals how important this work was for him as a writer. For instance, the second poem in *Auntran Blads* is a translation, from MacLean. The poem, *Dàin do Eimhir LIV*, is taken – as are the other translations from MacLean's long work collected in the book – out of sequence, presented as part of a larger selection but also treated as a standalone item. Young's translation reinvents MacLean's Gaelic poem in an elegant synthetic Scots, whose dactylic cadences may reflect a long familiarity with Homeric hexameters:

Ye were the dawn on the hills o the Cuillin,
the bousum day on the Clarach arisan,
the sun on his elbuck i the gowden flume,
the whyte rose-fleur that braks the horizon.

Gesserant sails on a skinklan frith,
gowd-yalla luft and blue o the sea...
the fresh mornan in your heid o hair
and your clear face wi its bonnie blee.

Gowdie, my gowdie o dawn and the derk
your loesome gentrice, your brou sae rare...
albeid wi the dullyart stang o dule
the breist o youth's been thirlit sair.¹⁶

And MacLean's original:

*Bu tu camhanaich air a' Cuilithionn
's latha suilbhir air a' Chlàraich,
grian air a h-uilinn anns an òr-shruth*

¹³ Michel Byrne, 'Tails o the Comet? MacLean, Hay, Young and MacDiarmid's Renaissance, *ScotLit* 26 (Spring 2002), 1-3 (p. 3).

¹⁴ J. Derrick McClure, 'Douglas Young and Sorley MacLean', in *Gaelic and Scots in Harmony: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Languages of Scotland*, ed. by Derick Thomson (Glasgow: Department of Celtic, University of Glasgow, 1988), pp. 136-148 (pp. 136-137).

¹⁵ 'Douglas Young and Sorley MacLean', p. 147.

¹⁶ *Auntran Blads*, pp. 11-12.

agus ròs geal bristeadh fàire.

*Lainnir sheòl air linne ghrianaich,
gorm a' chuain is iarmailt àr-bhuidh,
an òg-mhadainn 'na do chuailean
's 'na do ghruaidean soillear àlainn.*

*Mo leug camhanaich is oidhche
t' aodann is do choibhneas gràdhach,
ged tha bior glas an dòlais
tro chliabh m' òg-mhaidne sàthte.¹⁷*

Young's translation follows the surface structure of his original, keeping the twelve-line, three-quatrains shape of MacLean's poem and rhyming the second and fourth lines of each of his stanzas. Christopher Whyte notes that the Gaelic poem is composed of lines bearing "three or four stresses, with end-rhyme on pairs of even lines and consistent use of *aicill* within each couplet."¹⁸ Young's four-beat lines can therefore be viewed as a formalist response to a highly intricate pattern of stress and vowel rhyme. As well as this clear desire to provide a metrical interpretation of MacLean's prosody, Young's characteristically recondite literary Scots facilitates a lexically rich rendering of MacLean's complex symbolism and imagery – a translation which is satisfying as a poem in its own right.

The next poem in the book, after *Dàin do Eimhir LIV*, is 'My Een are Nae on Calvary', from MacLean's *Calbharaigh*. This eight-line poem, one of the Gaelic poet's most memorable, is characteristically engaged in both political and spiritual matters, seeing them as two halves of an indivisible whole:

My een are nae on Calvary
nor on the Bethlehem they praise,
but on shitten back-lands in Glesga toun
whaur growan life decays,
and a stairheid room in an Embro land,
a chalmer o puirtith an skaith,
whaur monie a shilpit bairnikie
gaes smoorit doun til daith.¹⁹

And MacLean's original:

*Chan eil mo shùil air Calbharaigh
no air Betlehem an àigh
ach air cùil grod an Glaschu
far bheil an lobhadh fàis,
agus air seòmar an Dùn Èideann,
seòmar bochdainn 's cràidh,*

¹⁷ Sorley MacLean, *Dàin do Eimhir*, ed. by Christopher Whyte (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2002), p. 109.

¹⁸ *Dàin do Eimhir*, p. 263.

¹⁹ *Auntran Blads*, p. 12.

*far a bheil an naiodhean creuchdach
ri aonagraich gu bhàs.*²⁰

In the first line of the Gaelic poem, only one of the poet's eyes is on Calvary. Young, who could have written the singular "ee" without breaking the metre, elects to use the plural form. This has the effect of catching the /n/ sounds of "nae" and "on", as well as reminding the reader familiar with earlier Scots poetry of the many instances, particularly in ballads, of "een" being referred to at moments of heightened intensity. Young's second line has a third person plural, as well as an active verb, perhaps being reminded of the French *on* by definite article in the Gaelic "an àigh" (the(ir) blessed/joyous/happy). MacLean's third line, which literally reads something like "but on a rotten corner in Glasgow", is both expanded and intensified. With "shitten", Young qualifies his inserted back courts with a stronger adjective than rotten. The classic Scots "land" for tenement seems to toy with pastoral, undercutting it as it does so. The poem continues to develop its central conceit of the poet's sight torn from both Calvary and Bethlehem – respectively the savage and tender poles of Christian sublimity – by a modern vision of urban catastrophe. Examining these two translations, it becomes clear that, above and beyond the nationalist ideology which undoubtedly motivated his translations from MacLean to some extent, Young was driven by the desire to produce versions of these poems which conveyed something of the formal and metaphorical excitement he found in the originals.

As well as translating MacLean, Young played a central role in the genesis and eventual publication (also in 1943) of the *Dàin do Eimhir*, widely regarded as the most important collection of Gaelic poetry in modern times.²¹ His Scots translations of MacLean, especially those printed in *Auntran Blads*, are best seen as emerging from a long process of correspondence and collaboration between the two writers. Replying to an undisclosed correspondent from prison late in 1942, Young answers a number of enquiries relating to the forthcoming volume of MacLean's poems, currently awaiting a complete typescript. Interestingly, Young reports that around fifteen of his own Scots translations of the poems are to be included in the collection, revised by MacLean.²² He also notes that John MacLean, the poet's brother, had objected to the publication of several poems given their potential to offend their parents on religious grounds, particularly *Dàin do Eimhir XVIII*, and that MacDiarmid and Hay had been vocal in their opposition to what they perceived as bowdlerisation. Several extracts of letters sent by the poet to Young are quoted from, in which MacLean regrets the trouble his work is causing and suggests that a volume with the former's Scots versions (rather than his own English translations) would be infinitely preferable. MacLean is quoted as saying that the

²⁰ Sorley MacLean, *Caoir Gheal Leumraich: White Leaping Flame: Collected Poems in Gaelic with English Translations*, ed. by Christopher Whyte and Emma Dymock (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2011), p. 21.

²¹ Sorley MacLean, *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile* (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1943).

²² Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland [hereafter NLS] Acc. 6419/6 (Douglas Young Correspondence July-December 1942).

thought of his own English versions appearing makes him physically ill. Young discusses the desirability of a bilingual edition of the *Dàin do Eimhir*, with prose translations into English, as well as questioning the linguistic accuracy of Robert Garioch's recently published version of *Dàin do Eimhir III*. Most interestingly in terms of his own theoretical understanding of where his own work stands in relation to the Scottish Renaissance as a whole, Young argues that while MacLean's Gaelic poetry emerged under the influence of MacDiarmid, his own more recent Scots writing has been largely enabled by MacLean in Gaelic. The suggestion that the origin of MacLean's poems was MacDiarmid is familiar; less so is his contention that his own work came principally as a response to MacLean's Gaelic poetry. It is almost to place the two languages on a sort of dialectic seesaw, with poetic developments in each occurring in response to those taking place in the other. Considering the close creative relationship Garioch and Goodsir Smith also enjoyed with MacLean at this time, one starts to appreciate the Gaelic poet's huge importance for his Scots contemporaries.

Immediately after the thirteen MacLean versions collected in *Auntran Blads*, Young places a single translation from George Campbell Hay, 'Thonder They Ligg'. This poem, whose original bears a rather different form and title (*Grunnd na Mara*: 'The Bottom of the Sea'), contrasts strongly with the versions from MacLean immediately preceding it. Instead of a brief, intense evocation of romantic despair, poetic pride or political conviction – or rather that unique blend of all three which so distinguishes MacLean's writing – 'Thonder They Ligg' is a dramatic dialogue between a woman and a drowned man, which is also a lament for Hebridean sailors lost at sea in the Second World War. The first two lines of the poem are quoted from the eighteenth-century lament *Ailein Duinn shiùbhlainn leat*, composed by Anna Campbell of Scalpay²³: "Tha iad ann an grunnd na mara,/ is cha b'e siud an rogha cala."²⁴ This Young renders as "Thonder they ligg on the grund o the sea,/ nae the hyne whaur they wald be."²⁵ Here the meaning of the Gaelic is amplified somewhat. Literally, the first line simply states that the third person plural subjects are there at the bottom of the sea. Young dispenses with the verb "tha" (to be) and opts for the richer "ligg." Instead of the literal "bed" or "bottom", he renders "grunnd" as "grund", simply eliding one consonant. In the next line, "hyne" (glossed "haven" at the end of the poem) replaces "rogha cala" – the best or chosen harbour, with "cala" having the additional meaning of "resting place". The third line of the poem is Hay's, moving from the eighteenth century to the contemporary moment:

*rug siud orm o dh'fhalbh mo mhacan,
an cuilean a bhithinn ga thatadh
a dhèanadh gàire na mo ghlacaibh.*

²³ *Poems and Songs*, Vol. II, p. 122.

²⁴ George Campbell Hay, *Poems and Songs*, Vol. I, ed. by Michel Byrne (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 62.

²⁵ *Auntran Blads*, p. 20.

This Young translates:

Siccan a thing has happenit me
sin my son's been gane. When he was wee
I dannlit the bairn like a whelpikee
and he leuch i ma airms richt cantlilie.
It's the auld weird nou I maun dree.²⁷

One notices the slight difference in length between the five-line Scots stanza and the four lines of Gaelic (Hay's original lacks almost all Young's stanza breaks). Young has however attempted to reflect the end-rhyme of his original, which, since it is a Gaelic poem, falls on the vowel not the consonant. This is not sustained throughout the poem, a Germanic tongue precluding the same emphasis on the vowel in isolation, but provides enough of an echo of the Gaelic poem's form that the reader is aware of the translation's idiosyncratic prosody (for a Scots poem). Similarly, Young's lexical choices often expand upon or depart from the literal meaning of the Gaelic behind them. For instance, in the transition from "cuilean" to "whelpikee", a common word for a young dog or leveret is replaced by an unfamiliar one, making the reader pause to consider the root of Young's coinage. Further on, "an seann sgeul" – the old story – again shifts into a murkier world of Scots allusion, becoming "the auld weird", inevitably followed by the verb "dree". Structurally, too, Young has expanded on the original, breaking the stanza where he feels the poem requires a brief pause. Despite these departures, Young rarely makes decisions unauthorised in some way by the Gaelic. As with the MacLean translations already discussed, the point to bear in mind is that Young was not writing a dryly literal paraphrase of Hay's poem, but a creative rendition of it in Scots. Though his translations of Gaelic poetry are eminently political texts, making links between Scotland's other tongues in direct contradiction to the ideas advanced by Eliot in 1919 and Muir in 1936, he also sought to make them into effective poems in their own right, which would require no special ideological pleading to convince readers of their worth.

Turning to the Scots translations from Gaelic collected in *A Braird o Thistles*, one finds, again, a mixture of MacLean, Hay and traditional material. The first of these in the book is 'Guestless Howff', a version of Hay's *Aonarain na Cille* ('The Lonely Ones of the Churchyard'). The Scots poem runs in its entirety as follows:

Wae for the lanely kirkyard fowk,
ilk ane in his lair, pit past for aye,
maister o a hous whaur nane chaps,
nane ettles tae speir gin he's inby.

²⁶ *Poems and Songs*, Vol. I, p. 62.

²⁷ *Auntran Blads*, p. 20.

Sun risena, nor starn thonder,
 cloud nor shouer nor wind move,
 bluein o day comesna nor derkenin,
 peace nor tulzie, grame nor luve.²⁸

Hay's Gaelic original reads:

*Ochan, aonarain na cille,
 gach aon 'na ionad fhèin fa leth,
 'na thigearna air taigh gun tathaich
 far nach dèanar farraid air.*

*Chan èirich grian ann no reul,
 cha tig neul no fras no gaoth,
 gormadh an là no 'n dùthrath,
 sìth no ùspairt, gràin no gaol.*²⁹

Young's first line catches the central meaning of Hay's ("sorrow, solitaires in the graveyard"). There is, nevertheless, a change of character entailed by the movement between Gaelic and Scots. Hay's "aonarain na cille" are lonely bodies in the ground, yet might also be construed as hermits living in a cell – an image reminiscent of early Christianity in Ireland and Scotland. The second stanza (in both languages) turns from the graves towards the open sky. Hay informs us that, in this world of the solitary, one finds neither sunrise nor star, no clouds, no showers and no wind. In the penultimate line, Young brings out the root behind the Gaelic word "gormadh" (daybreak) – "gorm", meaning blue or green. This retention of the root suggests the original language lurking below the surface of the translation, a world in which the colour spectrum is subtly different and the morning brings both blue and green tones to the landscape.

Over the page from 'Guestless Howff' Young places a second Hay translation, 'Lass Wi The Keekin-Gless' and few pages later the first Sorley MacLean translation of the book, 'Frae Somhairle MacGhilleathain', with the original title given immediately below: 'Reothairt.' This is the 'Springtide' of *Reothairt is Contraigh* ('Springtide and Neap Tide') MacLean's selected poems first published in 1977.³⁰ The first stanza of this three-quatrains poem reads:

While eftir while, and me broken,
 my thocht faas on you i your youth,
 and a tide sall flow, unkent, unspoken,
 wi a thousand sails on the sea's fouth.³¹

And MacLean's Gaelic:

Uair is uair agus mi briste

²⁸ *A Braird o Thistles*, p. 31.

²⁹ *Poems and Songs*, Vol. I, p. 74.

³⁰ Sorley MacLean, *Reothairt is Contraigh: tagadh de dhain 1932-1972* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1977).

³¹ *A Braird o Thistles*, p. 33.

*thig mo smuain ort is tu òg,
is lionaidh an cuan do-thuigsinn
le làn-mara 's mìle seòl.*³²

Young follows his original sensitively, with characteristic small departures here and there. MacLean's poem functions as a kind of semantic map for the Scots poem; a starting point from which Young is able to extrapolate his own poem. For instance, the first line of the Scots clearly follows the structure of the Gaelic, whose bare meaning is approximately "Hour upon hour and me broken." In the second line one finds Young departing from the surface structure but retaining the deeper meaning.

Translating "thig mo smuain ort is tu òg" as "my thocht faas on you i your youth", he conveys the sense of the Gaelic line (comes my thought upon you and you young) without falling into overly literal clumsiness. The last two lines of the quatrain (and fills the ocean without understanding/ with high tide and a thousand sails) see Young departing more decisively from his original, padding the lines and altering the overall structure of the statement. The final line, with its mention of a thousand sails, is a key one for the poem and MacLean's work as a whole. The *Reothairt* of the title is the springtide carrying the Greek army to Troy, the "làn-mara" of the poem the more than generally high tide at the culmination of the *Reothairt*. The woman addressed by the poem is, presumably, Helen of Troy, resituated on the other side of a different sea – Hebridean rather than Aegean. Just as Yeats had inserted Helen into an avowedly Irish frame of reference, so MacLean, then Young, translates and adapts Homeric themes to Scottish contexts. This is to be seen as part of what Peter Mackay describes as a wide-ranging "innovation of traditions from both within and outwith Gaelic culture."³³ One might argue that in their translations, both from Gaelic and other languages, poets like Young were engaged in a comparably innovative renovation of the Scots tradition.

At any rate, Young was by no means the only poet of his generation to interact with Gaelic writers and translate their works into Scots. Robert Garioch, Sydney Goodsir Smith and MacDiarmid were similarly active in this area. What distinguishes Young is his enormous industry (Campbell Hay and Iain Crichton Smith are, in quite different ways, of comparable significance). Before moving on to discuss other important aspects of his work as a translator, it is appropriate to raise a number of key questions about this particular type of minority-language translation, to be borne in mind in future chapters dealing with Scots versions of Gaelic poems.

In Scotland, Gaelic is a language sixty thousand speakers (give or take) from extinction. There are concomitant difficulties for those who would write in and translate from it. One critic – and practitioner – who has written extensively on this subject is the poet, novelist and MacLean scholar Christopher Whyte, who begins an article titled 'Translation as Predicament' by observing "The country I come from, Scotland, is waking slowly from a prolonged torpor. Much of what awakens is

³² *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, p. 183.

³³ Peter Mackay, *Sorley MacLean* (Aberdeen: AHRC Centre for Scottish and Irish Studies, 2010), p. 54.

monstrous, or nearly so.”³⁴ Whyte argues that, while Scots and Gaelic were certainly “in the vanguard of developments on the Scottish poetry scene” from the nineteen twenties to the nineteen fifties, that situation “is emphatically no longer the case.”³⁵ He claims that the rhetoric of Scottish linguistic nationalism has failed to live up to the reality, blaming the Scottish people, particularly the middle classes, for allowing their indigenous languages to wither through a combination of apathy and denial. Whyte describes a situation where for “many Scottish people, Gaelic is like a grandmother dying in a far-off room in the attic. Life would be infinitely simpler if she were to breathe her last [...] But, frustratingly [...] there is life in the old besom yet.”³⁶

In another essay, ‘Against Self-Translation’, Whyte expands upon these points, treating translation not just in terms of Gaelic, but also with reference to contemporary European poetry. While his comparison of Gaelic and minority Spanish languages is closer, Whyte’s discussion of self-translation in terms of a major Russian poet like Joseph Brodsky suggests certain avenues down which critics concerned with language and Scottish literature might profitably proceed. There are similarities between English versions of Brodsky’s work and those of MacLean’s. Both proceed from an original which remains inaccessible to the target audience of the English version. Both poets translated their own work into English, but also oversaw its translation by other hands. For a shared English-speaking audience, the translation of these writers’ work has a habit of eliding its original. The translation becomes the poem.³⁷

Whyte’s arguments about Gaelic translation can be read against Venuti’s suggestion, in *The Scandals of Translation*, that translation in general is “often regarded with suspicion because it inevitably domesticates foreign texts, inscribing them with linguistic and cultural values that are intelligible to specific domestic constituencies.” Acknowledging the at times mendacious propensity of translation to create “stereotypes for foreign cultures, excluding values, debates and conflicts that don’t appear to serve domestic agendas”, Venuti also points out that this process can be “double-edged”, since whether or not “the effects of a translation prove to be conservative or transgressive depends fundamentally on the discursive strategies developed by the translator” as well as the wider context within which the translation is received.³⁸ Identifying a scandalous movement towards the invisibility of Gaelic poetry in translation, even where the original text is present on the facing page, Whyte does not explicitly address the role of potentially foreignising tactics such as the use of Scots

³⁴ Christopher Whyte, ‘Translation as Predicament’, *Translation and Literature* Vol.9 No.2 (2000), 179-187 (p. 179).

³⁵ ‘Translation as Predicament’, p. 180.

³⁶ ‘Translation as Predicament’, p. 181.

³⁷ Christopher Whyte, ‘Against Self-Translation’, *Translation and Literature* Vol.11 No. 2 (Spring 2002), 64-71 (pp. 64-65).

³⁸ *The Scandals of Translation*, pp. 67-68.

in either of the two essays just referred to. However, in his own practice as a creative writer this has, at times, been his preferred way of presenting his work to a non-Gaelic readership.

It would be wrong to suggest that Scots constitutes a mid-point between Gaelic and English. Such is the vexed issue of Scots' putative linguistic status that, at this point, ideology often precludes further discussion. Nonetheless, it does seem reasonable to suggest that, at least in terms of historical experience, Scots and Gaelic have more in common with each other than either does with English. Both have been systematically rejected by the central authority, weeded out of education and stigmatised as inferior alternatives to English. In his classic study, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, Derick Thomson wrote that there "is now no linguistic hinterland to which the Gaelic writer can retire, except for that hinterland of the imagination which can be summoned up at times" but also noted "the novel development of Lowland learners of Gaelic contributing to the literature."³⁹ Whyte is one such learner. The Skye poet Aonghas MacNeacail's poems in Scots pass the other way across the Highland line. It is too soon to say how effective current efforts, at last with a measure of state endorsement behind them, will be in changing attitudes to and knowledge of language in Scotland. In such a context it is salutary to consider whether translations of Gaelic verse – such as Young's – which seek to foreignise in relation to the potentially compromised medium of English might help to avoid or even heal the wounds of which Whyte speaks. To what extent does Scots translation also threaten to elide the original poem? Might it even lead us back to it? These questions will be considered in future chapters, particularly as regards Goodsir Smith and Garioch. Part of the worth of Young's translations of Gaelic poetry resides in their potential to arouse the reader's curiosity as to their answers. Moreover, one of the most exciting things about poetic translation – between any two languages – is the role it often plays in motivating and enabling new kinds of original writing. As Young himself suggests, close engagement with Gaelic helped to catalyse his own endeavours in Scots. This points towards a mode of reading these translations which might begin to move beyond divisive debates around the ethics of minority language translation, recognising the urgency of these discussions, but also emphasising the sense of creative opportunity which Young seems to have found in MacLean's work in particular.

II. *Drama*

Translation often occurs in situations where a variety of text is apparently present in one language or culture and absent in another. In such a context, translation sometimes seems akin to the grafting together or genetic modification of plant species. As regards the role of translated texts for the poets of the twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance, and particularly those of them who reached literary

³⁹ Derick Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (London: Victor Gollancz: 1974; 1977), p. 250.

maturity during or immediately after the Second World War, reflection on this sort of translation has particular relevance for drama in the Scots language.

Unlike England, which boasts a magnificent surviving corpus of medieval miracle plays, Scotland has no *Everyman*; no *The Harrowing of Hell*. This is not to say that a comparable body of dramatic works did not exist. There were evidently many theatrical performances of this sort in towns throughout medieval Scotland. Moreover, recent scholarship and thought on the subject urges readers to expand their definition of drama. As John J. McGavin writes, in medieval and renaissance Scotland “various kinds of activity, while not plays or even ceremonial in the modern sense, were nonetheless theatrical in nature and effect.”⁴⁰

Whatever the true nature of medieval and early modern Scottish drama, many twentieth-century writers were troubled by this apparent absence in the tradition. MacDiarmid called repeatedly for a specifically Scottish theatre, whose avowed purpose would be to give dramatic form to the national *geist*. In 1928 he suggested that a fraction of what Sir Harry Lauder “earns annually would serve to subsidise a Scottish National Theatre in perpetuity – but Sir Harry will never contribute to that or to anything else of the slightest consequence”.⁴¹ In 1946, an unsigned article appeared in MacDiarmid’s periodical *The Voice of Scotland*, arguing that there

has been no experimental theatre in England since Jacobean times and none in Scotland since the experimental work of Sir David Lyndsay. Lyndsay’s *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* represents, to a great extent, the kind of theatre we want. It extends the great satiric line of Aristophanes and reaches forward across almost a hundred years of time to Jonson. Like all great theatre it has its roots firmly planted in folk art (which, as far as theatre is concerned, means in the survival of ritual magic), and combines all that is best in the classical tradition with all that is most vital in contemporary life.⁴²

Appropriately, given MacDiarmid’s perhaps questionable reference to its “experimental” character, a watershed moment for modern Scottish theatre was the revival of David Lindsay’s *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* at the 1948 Edinburgh Festival. In his introduction to the acting text, Robert Kemp wrote: “When the Festival Committee announced that Scottish drama was to be represented by a four hundred year old morality play, which had not held the stage in the interval and did not so much figure in the leaving certificate examinations, even the most patriotic seemed to feel that here was

⁴⁰ John J. McGavin, *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 1.

⁴¹ Special Correspondent, ‘Scotch People and Scotch Comedians’ *The Stewartry Observer* 23rd August 1923. Reprinted in Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto uncollected prose*, Vol. II, ed. by Alan Riach, Glen Murray and Angus Calder (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp. 113-115 (p. 115).

⁴² Unsigned, ‘Theatre Workshop’ *The Voice of Scotland* (June 1946). Reprinted in Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto uncollected prose*, Vol. III, ed. by Alan Riach, Glen Murray and Angus Calder (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp.95-101 (p. 97).

boldness to the point of recklessness.”⁴³ However, the production was a great success, proving that recondite Scots drama could be a draw at the box office. As well as this kind of theatrical revival, the post-war years also saw the translation of many canonical European plays into Scots (this thesis, given its central concern with poetry, concentrates on translations of verse drama undertaken by poets). As with lyric poetry, many writers felt that this might be an effective way to enlarge the repertoire and imaginative scope of the Scottish stage. Introducing the anthology *Serving Twa Maisters: Five Classic Plays in Scots Translation*, John Corbett and Bill Findlay note “the emergence, dating from the 1940s, of a now established tradition of translating plays into Scots for stage performance.”⁴⁴

As regards Douglas Young’s own role as a playwright and translator of drama, there are two principal texts to consider, both dating from the late nineteen fifties (over a decade after the period in which he seems to have been most involved in the composition and translation of lyric poetry). These are *The Puddocks* (1957) and *The Burdies* (1959), respectively translations of Aristophanes’ comedies *The Frogs* and *The Birds*. Young’s introduction to the former makes it abundantly clear that a large part of his intention was to give the Scots language an airing on the stage:

Scotch whisky undiluted passes the lips of many keen connoisseurs all over the world every day and night, but the Scots language, in contemporary mouths, is increasingly diluted with standard English or popular American infusions [...] Though the plays of Aristophanes have more than enough theatrical vitality to come over successfully to modern audiences in English, Italian and other contemporary vernaculars, the attempt seems not to have been previously made to render his Attic salt into an undiluted Scots comparable to neat Scotch.⁴⁵

Young does not situate his version in the context of a longer, perhaps disrupted Scots tradition of drama (though one remembers MacDiarmid’s 1946 valorisation of Aristophanes in connection with a revitalised Scottish stage). Instead, he concentrates on the linguistic argument, which is phrased with a certain couthiness, the comparison of the Scots language with single malt being perhaps a little overdetermined. He goes on to write that the inaugural performance of *The Puddocks* by a group of his students will take place in the Byre Theatre, St. Andrews, and that it was by one of the cast that he was persuaded to undertake his Scots translation.

The play opens between the houses of Herakles and Pluto. The god Dionysos, sloppily dressed up as Herakles, and his slave Xanthias, riding on a horse, are first to enter, the latter offering to entertain the audience with his jokes. There follows a brief dialogue in which Dionysos dismisses

⁴³ Robert Kemp, *The Satire of the Three Estates by Sir David Lindsay of the Mount* (Edinburgh: The Scots Review, 1949), p. i. See also: David Lindsay, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* ed. by Roderick Lyall (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994).

⁴⁴ *Serving Twa Maisters: Five Classic Plays in Scots Translation*, ed. by John Corbett and Bill Findlay (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2005), p. vii. One of the five classic plays is Young’s *The Burdies*.

⁴⁵ Douglas Young, *The Puddocks* (Makarsbiel: Douglas Young, 1957; 2nd edition 1958), p. 3.

the comic routines proposed by Xanthias and bemoans his own kindness as a slave-owner, allowing his slave to ride while he goes on foot. The god then knocks on Herakles' door, the hero appearing "wi anither lyon's hide." Dionysos explains his urgent desire to see Euripides – "him that's juist deid" – since "I want a richt wyce makar./ A feck o them's deid. The livan are nae guid." There follows a brief torrent of language in which the god of wine numbers the inadequacies of the contemporary literary scene:

Di: Och, they're juist draff and druttie, bletherskytes,
like choirs o speugs, corruptors o the Airt.
Gie them ae chorus, and they're hyne awa,
efter a brief befylement o the Muse.

Dionysos, it transpires, has come to Herakles to ask the way to the Underworld. The latter knows this due to his encounter with Cerberus during his trials. After some persuading, the hero tells the god to jump off a tower. Understandably, Dionysos objects to this. Relenting, Herakles tells him how to get to Charon. There are references to Loch Ness, Saint Andrews and Kenneth MacAlpin, as well as more genuinely Hellenic entities. Xanthias is too tired to carry their baggage, but luckily a dead body is being carried out as they speak. The dead man offers to carry "a pickle o gear til Hades" for a mere "Twa pund". They try to beat him down to "thretty bob" but he refuses. At this point Charon appears, spouting a heteroglossic stream of Scots and Greek terms for the world below. He refuses to carry Xanthias, because he is a slave, and tells him to wait "Aside the Drouthy Stane,/ at rest and be thankful."⁴⁶ With much humorous deliberation as to oars and sea regulations, the mariners set out. At this point an invisible "Chorus o Puddocks" starts singing offstage:

Brekekekex, coax, coax,
Brekekekex, coax, coax,
Bairns o the Moss and the spring,
pipes nou bonnily ring,
bonny our voices sing,
Koax, coax,
the sang that we were chantin
for the son o Zeus, Dionysos,
frae Nysa's ben, whan the rantin
mengie wi drucken devices
raiks throu our howff at the Moss
and the haly kailpats joss.
Brekekekex, coax, coax.⁴⁷

The clattering refrain is evidently how Aristophanes and his audience apprehended the croaking of frogs. Young's song naturally draws upon the choric interludes from Greek drama, but also the later songs composed by Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights. It is also reminiscent of the Scottish folk

⁴⁶ *The Puddocks*, pp. 8-11.

⁴⁷ *The Puddocks*, p. 14.

and court song traditions, with the ballads and art lyrics for music by Renaissance poets such as Alexander Montgomerie apparent in the puddocks' literary genomes.

Young writes that he produced the translation at the request of one of his students, a group of whom subsequently performed the play. He also notes that, as far as he himself is aware, his version is the first attempt to render Aristophanes' "Attic salt" in Scots. As regards the complete transposition of an entire comedy into Scots, this is essentially correct. However, some years earlier, in the Winter 1954 issue of *The Saltire Review*, a curious poem, 'Doon By', had appeared, signed A. L. Taylor. A short extract suffices to link it to those parts of *The Puddocks* already quoted:

Brekekex koax koax!
Brekekex koax koax!
Spawn o the mud
An the muir an the flude,
Get o the glaur
O the lochan shore,
Friens o the rain
Frae the sheuch an the drain
Lift noo the lilt o the puddocks' refrain:
Brekekex koax koax!⁴⁸

'Doon By' does not seem to be a direct translation from Aristophanes. It is essentially a dialogue between boatman and passenger – a dramatic account of a human's *katabasis* over the Styx – with choric refrains from the puddocks. At no point is the protagonist's identity disclosed – given various references to mortality, it does not seem to be Dionysus. Nevertheless, the debt to Aristophanes and shared genealogy with *The Puddocks* is evident. Was A. L. Taylor (incidentally a regular contributor of poetry and critical comment to the *Saltire Review*) a pseudonym used by Young? While this cannot be absolutely excluded, it remains unclear why Young – who unlike C.M. Grieve in 1922 was in 1954 publicly involved in writing and translating in Scots – would feel the need to use another name. Another candidate for the authorship of 'Doon By' is Alexander Lucas Taylor. Born in 1858, Taylor graduated from the University of Glasgow with an MA in 1887, going on to teach classics in a number of schools in Glasgow and Ayrshire.⁴⁹ This Taylor was the author of a translation of Horace's odes,⁵⁰ but would on the other hand have been ninety six years old in 1954. He may or may not be connected to the A. L. Taylor who wrote *The White Knight: A Study of C.L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)*.⁵¹ There is also A. L. 'Ross' Taylor, a Rector of Cumnock Academy who, along with Alexander MacMillan and Thomas Limond, published a volume of Scots poems for children titled *Bairnsangs* under the pseudonym Sandy Thomas Ross in 1955.⁵² Whichever A. L. Taylor penned

⁴⁸ A. L. Taylor, 'Doon By', *The Saltire Review*, Vol.1. No.3 (Winter 1954), 13-17 (p. 14).

⁴⁹ 'Graduate Record for Alexander Lucas Taylor' at:

<http://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk/biography/?id=WH9818&type=P> [accessed 16/03/2016].

⁵⁰ A. L. Taylor, 'The Odes of Horace' (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1914).

⁵¹ A. L. Taylor, *The White Knight: A Study of C.L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1952).

⁵² Sandy Thomas Ross, *Bairnsangs* (London: MacMillan, 1955).

‘Doon By’, the poem is clearly relevant to *The Puddocks*, given that it represents an attempt to make use of Aristophanes’ play in Scots only a few years before Young produced his full version for the stage. However, it is inevitably difficult to determine the precise extent and nature of the text’s relationship to Young’s work.

The Burdies, Young’s second dramatic experiment, is generally considered to have been the less successful of the two plays, partially as a result of a disappointing performance at the 1959 Edinburgh Festival.⁵³ As with *The Puddocks*, the catalyst for the translation was the request by the students involved in the production of the earlier version for a second play to perform. Young’s introduction places the play in a firmly nationalistic context, in which the Scottish tradition and Scots language loom large:

The *première* is fixed for Thursday, August 27th, being the five hundred and ninth anniversary of St Salvator’s College, St Andrews, whose poetic alumni include such Makars as William Dunbar, Gavin Douglas and Robert Fergusson. Twenty performances are planned in the Cathedral Hall, Albany Street, Edinburgh, between August 27th and September 12th, 1959.⁵⁴

When the curtain opens, the scene is “a roch hillside wi craigs and busses: at the tap o the brae a waa o naitural rock wi a tree on the tap o’t.” Clearly, this mountainous prospect invites comparison with the Scottish Highlands. The entry of Peisthetairos and Euelpides (Sir Wylie Bodie and Jock MacHowpfu as Young translates them) into this wild terrain brings the city to the hills, an incongruous juxtaposition which the play exploits. Similarly, the juxtaposition of Greek comedy and synthetic Scots has the character of a never quite resolved incongruity. Whether or not they are aware of the Tereus – Procne – Philomela legend, the reader is delighted by the appearance of the Hoopoe from the mountain’s rocky face. Young’s gradual exposition of this character abounds with significant intertextual and linguistic references, for instance ll.100-101, in which the Hoopoe castigates Sophocles for the “mischievous fashion” the tragedian “mishandles [him] i the tragedies.” In l.103, Euelpides asks him whether he is “a burd or a paycock?” One thinks of Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*, and perhaps wonders what influence the modern Irish drama exercised on Young. Discussing the ideal state with the two Athenians, the Hoopoe asks whether they are satisfied with the then Conservative government. Euelpides replies “I’m scunnered at MacMillan.” A number of supposedly ideal places are mentioned, one of them being Langholm, “caufground o the makar Hugh MacDiarmid.”⁵⁵ MacDiarmid’s residency at Langholm is apparently the reason Euelpides refuses to live there, leading eventually to a comparative discussion of life among the birds, the Hoopoe having experience of both realms.

⁵³ For the 1966 Festival the play was revived by the Royal Lyceum Company.

⁵⁴ Douglas Young, *The Burdies* (Douglas Young: Makarsbield, 1959), p. iii.

⁵⁵ *The Burdies*, pp. 1-5.

This section of the play, like Plato's *Republic*, is in essence a dialogue on the constitution of the state. Aristophanes and Young, writing through him, ask: what is the manner in which society – in Young's case specifically Scottish society – ought to be administered? This being a comedy, the serious question is undercut by the action and spoken words of the play. Nevertheless, Young's was an intellect very much concerned with the administration of the good society; his articulation of the situation with specific reference to Scotland was always predicated on this point. *The Burdies*, like *The Puddocks*, is a play first and foremost, and a comic one at that, but it also provides scope for Young to stretch his idiosyncratic form of Scots to accommodate both political commentary and poetic extravaganza. For instance, the Hoopoe's call to Procne "*fraemang the busses*":

C'wa, nichtigall wife, gie owre your sleep.
 Lowse the melodies o halie sang,
 as frae yon ferly mou ye threep
 waefu Itys, my son and yours,
 dirlan aa owre as the sangspate poors
 frae your gleg broun hause, and the echoes gang
 clear throu the hinnysuckle bouers
 til the haas o Zeus on Olympus' steep,
 whaur gowdenhaired Apollo hears
 and, thrumman his clarsach ivory-dicht,
 matches your tunes wi harmony-slicht,
 tae marischal the choirs o his daethless fiers;
 syne frae mous immortal ranged aa round
 wi unison thrang
 the Blest Anes' sangs o joy resound.⁵⁶

The Hoopoe's call is highly effective as a lyrical interlude to a dramatic work. The change from nightingale to nichtigall is exquisite, pulling the reader away from an over-familiarity – in English – with the former oft-invoked bird, and into a fresher, linguistically pliable zone which allows Young a great deal of room to manoeuvre, in a real sense making his language as he translates. The Hoopoe cries out to Procne, who mourns Itys, their son whom she has murdered and fed to his father. The nichtigall's song proceeds from this grotesque tragedy. Her song, so the Hoopoe says, echoes up to Olympus, where Apollo and the other gods join in with her chirruping lament. A few lines later the Hoopoe begins to sing again, opening with a string of mimetic, animalistic sound reminiscent of that employed by the Frog Chorus in *The Puddocks*:

Epopopoi popoi, popopopoi popoi,
 io, io, c'wa, c'wa,
 c'wa, burds o my fedder, flock thegidder,
 ye that pyke pleumen's weel-sawn ackers,
 ye countless barley-guzzlan breeds,
 an ye gleg clans that nibble seeds,
 saft-chirplan i your swithwinged dackers;
 and ye, the furs endlang,

⁵⁶ *The Puddocks*, p. 7.

that whitter owre the glebe *con brio*
wi *allegretto* sang –
tiotio tiotio tiotio;⁵⁷

The song goes on for some time, with references to Camlachie, Auchtermuchty, Ecclefechan, Milngavie and Skye, as well as Marathon. It is a tour de force, mixing the Burnsian rant of “c’wa, c’wa” with the Aristophanic chitter of “Epopopoi popoi.” Throughout the two plays, contemporary Scottish place names intermingle with those of fifth-century Athens; Fife humour collides with the gossip of the Agora. Once one accepts the conceit and makes an effort with Young’s generally recondite expressions, the result can be extremely rewarding as both comic drama and unabashed linguistic play.

Young’s dramatic translations are, like much of his work, idiosyncratic. C. W. Marshall, a scholar of classical drama, finds in Young’s practice “an odd self-indulgence, marking the habits of a scholar for whom no textual variant is insignificant.”⁵⁸ He goes on to argue that readers “cannot approach Young’s sparkling versions today apart from their politics and the positioning of Scots identity in the 1950s and 1960s. They admit no naive reading. As a political statement by a poet-scholar, or a scholarly argument by a political poet, or a poetical outpouring of an academic politician, Young’s Aristophanes versions demand consideration and careful study.”⁵⁹ J. Derrick McClure finds that “Young’s daring experiment [...] enlightened many drama critics in England and further afield, as well as at home, to the potential of Scots as a dramatic medium.”⁶⁰ The testimony given on the inside cover of the second edition of *The Puddocks*, which includes praise from such luminaries as Eliot, Sir C.M. Bowra, *Time* magazine and Ronald Mavor (James Bridie’s son), underscores the authority of some of these critics both at home and abroad.

Interestingly, given his own much later theatrical translations, another of Young’s early critics was none other than Edwin Morgan. Reviewing *The Puddocks* in 1958, Morgan suggested that

The use of Scots does undoubtedly give Aristophanes a transformation. It is difficult, in the intellectually denuded state of the Scots language, to avoid relying so much on the bauchles and scunners and nyaffs and shouers o sumphs that the translation becomes more comic than the original. Dionysus calls Euripedes a “sleekit deil” and to Euripedes Aeschylus is a “thrawn auld bummer.” These are delightful, and certainly not mistranslations, yet the continual presence of such phrases subtly alters the tone of the drama, and something of its seriousness, its grown-up-ness, gives way to a blunter, more homely sort of fun.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *The Puddocks*, p. 8.

⁵⁸ C. W. Marshall, ‘Aristophanes and Douglas Young’, *Comparative Drama*, Volume 44, Number 4 (Winter 2010) / Volume 45, Number 1 (Spring 2011), 539-544 (p. 541).

⁵⁹ ‘Aristophanes and Douglas Young’, p. 543.

⁶⁰ J. Derrick McClure, ‘The Puddocks and The Burdies ‘by Aristophanes and Douglas Young’, in Bill Findlay, ed., *Frae Ither Tongues: Essays on Modern Translations into Scots* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004), pp. 215-230 (p. 216).

⁶¹ Edwin Morgan, ‘After Aristophanes’, *The Saltire Review* Vol.5 No.14 (Spring 1958), 67-68 (p. 67).

Morgan's own translations of Rostand and Racine belie this 1958 reference to the "intellectually denuded state" of the tongue, which is to be understood in the context of the poet's still developing view of Scots. Discussing Young's plays, Bill Findlay places *The Puddocks* and *The Burdies* in the context of later, better-known Scots dramatic translations by other poets, notably Liz Lochhead and, of course, Morgan himself.⁶² Findlay argues that Scots dramatic translation is a modern phenomenon, initiated by Robert Kemp's nineteen forties and fifties versions of Molière. He suggests that Young ought to be judged more on the merits of his dramatic translations than is currently the case.

Intriguingly, Findlay argues for the significance of these works on the grounds that drama "as a quintessentially speech-based genre, was a means by which the 'vitality o the leid' could be exercised and demonstrated"⁶³ and that Young's practice as a dramatist went against the linguistic elitism of some of his prose writings. Defining a lineage – a modern tradition of Scots dramatic translation – Findlay puts forward a convincing case for the prioritisation of drama in any reassessment of Young's career, as well as twentieth-century Scots writing as a whole. The place of this kind of Scots translation will be discussed further with reference to Robert Garioch and others, not always translators themselves but holding the same opinions as to the desirability of an ambitious modern Scots drama.

III. *The Kirkyaird by the Sea*

As well as the classics, Young was a writer saturated in modern European poetry. On a basic level, this was an attitude absorbed from his wider literary environment, with both Scottish Renaissance and Anglo-American modernism keen to promote familiarity with the contemporary exemplars of the great tradition. More specifically, this literary commitment led to Young's making a large number of translations from European poets, past and present. This work in turn influenced his original poetry, the formal and intellectual concerns of which developed alongside his translations. In light of the dominance of these principles among his Scottish Renaissance colleagues, as well as the reaction against them in much English poetry of the nineteen fifties, it is important to attempt to understand the nature of Young's Europeanism; the impulse driving it and the sensibility which gave it poetic form.

As a professional classicist and magpie-like language learner, Young was a writer with direct access to European literature from its beginnings to the present day. Scotland was for him a starting point. In a more combative sense it was the front line, where the fight against inarticulacy and cultural bankruptcy began, but quite emphatically did not end. Scottish independence and the restitution of Scotland's languages were top priorities. Rather than isolationist measures, however, these

⁶² Bill Findlay, 'Towards a Reassessment of Douglas Young: Motivation and his Aristophanic Translations', *Études écossaises* 10 (2005) *La Réputation*, 175-186 (p. 175).

⁶³ 'Towards a Reassessment of Douglas Young', p. 184.

commitments were always held to be part of a wider project, involving many cultures, art forms and languages. In order to understand the Scottish Renaissance's approach to international (which is to say national) culture, it is essential to appreciate the character of this politically-committed cosmopolitanism. Key points to flag up are the relationship of this Europeanism to that of canonical modernists such as Eliot and Pound; the role of translation (the central concern of this discussion of Young's writing); and the possibility that a desire to escape the supposedly narrowing sphere of English cultural influence may sometimes have led to an exaggerated idealisation of European culture, uncomfortable given certain twentieth-century historical realities.

MacDiarmid, a writer of great importance to Young as a poet, translator and political thinker, enjoyed a close, but rarely uncritical relationship with Anglo-American modernism. This is evident in his critical prose, as well as *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, where *The Waste Land* is claimed, somewhat obliquely, as a great work of Scottish literature. Given Eliot's preoccupation with tradition (a preoccupation which, like MacDiarmid's, was deeply exclusive) it is understandable that the American poet fascinated his Scottish contemporary, even as he resisted the siren song of the centre and the city. It is more surprising to find the reference, in a footnote to the suppressed *After Strange Gods*, to the views of "Mr. Allen Tate and his friends as evinced in *I'll Take My Stand*, and those of several Scottish Nationalists."⁶⁴ These views (presumably those of MacDiarmid and Muir) are explored further, in the context of an extended exegesis of the underlying nature of tradition:

Tradition is not solely, or even primarily, the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs; these beliefs have come to take their living form in the course of the formation of a tradition. What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent blood kinship of 'the same people living in the same place' [...] We are always in danger, in clinging to an old tradition, or attempting to re-establish one, of confusing the vital and the unessential, the real and the sentimental.⁶⁵

After Strange Gods offers a number of extensions and revaluations of the views expressed in the earlier 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. It is worth noting that Eliot's main concern in the three lectures collected in the volume is moral and religious, rather than aesthetic. The final lecture, the most provocative, considers blasphemy and the question as to whether it is still possible, in a world as godless as the present one has evidently become. Blasphemy, Eliot argues, is only possible where there is also genuine belief. Nowadays, when the political and racial opinions of Allen Tate and his friends seem, if not blasphemous, then certainly problematic to many readers, it is easy to detect in *After Strange Gods* both more personality (that from which poetry is an escape) and more ambivalence than in those critical works Eliot did not repudiate. In his 1995 study *T. S. Eliot, anti-Semitism and literary form*, Anthony Julius addresses the "notoriety" of *After Strange Gods*, which,

⁶⁴ T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber, 1934), p. 21n.

⁶⁵ *After Strange Gods*, p. 18.

notwithstanding its ugly reference to the undesirability of free-thinking Jews, he suggests “cannot be detached without rupture from the generality of Eliot’s prose [...] to overlook it is to miss a clear statement of his larger critical undertaking.”⁶⁶ It is at the very least interesting for scholars of Scottish literary nationalism to note that this most scandalous of Eliot’s prose works also provides one of his few points of public engagement with their subject after 1919. Similarly, readers of Young’s work may recall the following passage: “If Lallans fails, coin something from Latin or Greek if you like, as King’s English does; if all else fails admit a Hottentotism rather than another Anglicism. This should be our intransigent policy for the next five hundred years or so.”⁶⁷ One might argue, following Julius, that whatever contemporary readers might think of Young’s references to Hottentotism and Anglicism, in themselves such statements cannot easily be detached from the generality of his work.

In Young’s writing, one is aware of certain dogmatic beliefs being stringently maintained, not to mention many habitual actions which it is easy to relate to the writer’s passion for “the same people living in the same place.” The value of Eliot’s writings on tradition to twenty-first century criticism of the Scottish Renaissance is that so much of his thought, with caveats, remains applicable to the work of these other writers engaged in the revitalisation and rewriting of received cultural material. Conversely, one of the most attractive things about many of the second-generation Scottish Renaissance poets remains their vernacular, democratic reading of tradition and language, which at its best avoids the more reactionary postures thrown by High Modernism, as well as the Movement’s antithetical wallowing in human limitation.

The idea of Europe evidently occupied a central position in Young’s poetic consciousness. This is evident throughout his writing, from his pamphleteering on behalf of a more experimental attitude in contemporary Scots poetry (“If Blok and Rilke and T. S. Eliot and Paul Valéry are difficult in their own languages, even to persons well acquainted with Russian, German, English, and French, naturally they will remain difficult when translated into Lallans”⁶⁸) to his application of insights gleaned from the study of various later European cultures to Homer and Hesiod.⁶⁹ None of this is particularly surprising, given the overwhelming preponderance of such pro-European attitudes among MacDiarmid’s younger contemporaries. Questions remain, however, as to what extent these attitudes were governed by tradition, and to what extent they were motivated by the sense – perhaps the shock – of the new. It is therefore interesting to address a particular instance in which Young translated a major modern work, undeniably challenging and difficult to incorporate into overly backward-looking

⁶⁶ Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, anti-Semitism and literary form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 150.

⁶⁷ Douglas Young, “*Plastic Scots*” and the Scottish Literary Tradition (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1946), p. 23.

⁶⁸ Douglas Young, “*Plastic Scots*” and the Scottish Literary Tradition (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1946). Reprinted in *Poet and Polymath*, pp. 62-64 (p. 63).

⁶⁹ Douglas Young, ‘Never Blotted a Line? Formula and Premeditation in Homer and Hesiod’, *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* Vol.6. No.3. (Autumn 1967), 279-324 (p. 279).

narratives of tradition. As regards his putative relationship to modernism Young's interaction with Eliot and the latter's remarks about this particular translation are of great interest.

Young's translation of the French poet Paul Valéry's *Le Cimetière Marin* (published in *A Braird o Thistles*) is a remarkable work. Eliot, who corresponded intermittently with Young throughout the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties, after admitting to the possession of two copies of *Auntran Blads*, wrote of *A Braird o Thistles* that 'The Kirkyard by the Sea' was the only poem he already knew, having seen it (he thinks) in Maurice Lindsay's *Poetry Scotland*.⁷⁰ Eliot adds that he was greatly impressed with the technical skill of Young's translation and that in some respects he finds the Scots preferable to C. Day Lewis's well-known English version. Eliot's response is equivocal to an extent, yet it is clear that it is not just the language of Young's translation which leads him to equivocate; rather the very great difficulty of satisfactorily rendering a poet of Valéry's complexity in another language. In this letter Eliot goes on to regret that he cannot introduce *A Braird o Thistles* as MacDiarmid did *Auntran Blads*. He gives several reasons why this is the case, principally that if he did so more often he would be in constant demand for introductions (having broken this rule only twice, for Pound and Marianne Moore – both published by Faber) as well as claiming a certain disqualification on linguistic grounds, given that he feels more comfortable in French than Scots. Eliot does, however, indicate his support for the Scottish Renaissance, claiming that as an English regionalist he is in a sense working towards the same goal.⁷¹

Of the other responses to 'The Kirkyard by the Sea', J. Derrick McClure's is the most critical. McClure describes the translation as "the largest and most enterprising of all Young's published translations except for his Aristophanean plays" but adds that his "valiant attempt to render Valéry's masterpiece in Scots [...] is not an unqualified success."⁷² Taking the opposite view, Donald MacKenzie, reviewing France and Glen's *European Poetry in Scotland*, in which Young's version of Valéry later appeared, went so far as to claim the translation "must on any reckoning be one of the great Scots poems of the century [...] One might marvel that a Mediterranean poem can be so recreated in Scots – until perhaps one remembers that the literature it has entered includes the burnished lyric of Dunbar, the ardour of transcendence in some MacDiarmid."⁷³

Le Cimetière Marin is one of Valéry's best-known poems, lying at the centre of the modern Francophone canon. It is also the work of a poet whose great popularity in his home culture is belied

⁷⁰ In actual fact the poem was first published in MacDiarmid's *Voice of Scotland*: 'Paul Valéry; owreset by Douglas Young, 'Le Cimetière Marin', *The Voice of Scotland* Vol.2. No.2. (December 1945), 10.

⁷¹ Letter from Eliot to Young dated 10th April 1947: NLS Acc. 6419 Box 38a.

⁷² J. Derrick McClure, 'Three Translations by Douglas Young', in *The Nutt's Schell: essays on the Scots language presented to A J Aitken*, ed. by Caroline MacAfee and Iseabail MacLeod (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 195-203, p. 201.

⁷³ Donald MacKenzie, 'Bardachd na Roinn-Eorpa an Gàidhlig (*European Poetry in Gaelic*) by Derick Thomson; *European Poetry in Scotland: An Anthology of Translations* by Peter France; Duncan Glen, *Translation and Literature*, Vol.1. (1992), 187-189 (p. 188).

by the great subtlety of much of his work. Born in the south of France in 1871, Valéry died in 1945, leaving an oeuvre dividing into two generic halves: a small but undeniably formidable body of poetry and a much larger corpus of prose writings on philosophy and aesthetics. The previous year, Eliot had described Valéry as the writer “who will remain for posterity the representative poet, the symbol of the poet, of the first half of the twentieth century – not Yeats, not Rilke, not anyone else.”⁷⁴ He also considered him at some length in a 1949 essay purporting to deal with Poe, but in actual fact an extended meditation on the modern French tradition and the role translation can play in altering the aesthetic principles of a target culture. Eliot argues that Valéry has brought to its conclusion and culmination “the *art poétique* of which we find the germ in Poe”,⁷⁵ the other principal exponents of this poetic being Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Suggesting that the method in question can no longer be of importance to the work of contemporary poetry, Eliot admits that he is unsure of a clear line of development.⁷⁶ By 1949 he had in any case produced the vast majority of his canonical oeuvre. Being at this point primarily concerned with the development of his poetic drama and criticism, there is a sense in which Eliot implies that his own work, as well as Valéry’s, is the culmination of this intellectual poetry, highly conscious of its artifice of form and, beyond it, the more wide-ranging artifice of tradition itself.

Young left little in the way of critical comment on Valéry save his statement that, like Rilke and Eliot, his work remains difficult when translated into Scots. This is a refutation of those critics of the Scottish Renaissance who argued that literary Lallans was, generally speaking, incomprehensible even to native Scots speakers. Young suggests that, on the contrary, it is not Scots poetry but modern poetry in general which is difficult for many readers. However, like MacDiarmid, he believed that this difficulty was not insurmountable and that it was vitally important for everyone to have access to potentially challenging works of art. This belief lay behind much of his work in Scots – in a sense, the language of the people. Despite the difficulty of his synthetic language, Young would perhaps have argued that, like much difficult art, his poems and translations intended an ideal situation in which they would be widely understood – and that this was a more honest approach than to simply accept the current state of things as final. The famous first stanza of Valéry’s poem runs as follows in his rendition:

This lown riggin-side, whaur whyte doos gang,
quhidders amang the pines, the graves amang;
thonder perjink midday compounds frae fires
the sea, the sea, that’s aye begun anew.
Braw guerdon efter musardry to view
canny and lang the verra Gods’ lown lires.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ T. S. Eliot, ‘Paul Valéry’, *Quarterly Review of Literature* 3, (1946), 212-214 (p. 213).

⁷⁵ T. S. Eliot, ‘From Poe to Valéry’, *The Hudson Review* Vol.2. No.3 (Autumn 1949), 327-342 (p. 342).

⁷⁶ ‘From Poe to Valéry’, p. 342.

⁷⁷ *A Braird o Thistles*, p. 41.

From Valéry's French original:

*Ce toit tranquille, où marchent des colombes,
Entre les pins palpite, entre les tombes;
Midi le juste y compose de feux
La mer, la mer, toujours recommencée!
O récompense après une pensée
Qu'un long regard sur le calme des dieux.*⁷⁸

Valéry presents the sea as a tranquil roof, just visible between swaying pines. The white doves flying over the water evoke the olive branch episode from *Genesis*, though here the branch is metaphorical – *sagesse* itself. The trees are implicitly compared with the tombs; their palpitations may signify the inconstancy and mutability of living things, or that of nature as a whole. Young dispenses with the roof metaphor, making the focal point of the first stanza a “lown riggin-side”. This is perhaps to Scotticise Valéry's image, domesticating the French poem through a re-situation of its integral symbols.

Le Cimetière Marin is a challenging poem. Particularly for non-native French speakers, it can be hard to gauge the level of irony or scepticism implied by Valéry's confrontation of death and the sublime. It is almost impossible to know to what extent he may be merely entertaining the concepts which he purports to unpack (something Auden, Eliot and many other commentators on his writing have noted). The second stanza continues where the first left off:

Wi what pure wark fine fuddrie-leams consume
monie an unseen diamant frae the spume.
Hou lown a peace is kendlit keethanlie.
When the sun liggs abune the abysm o swaws,
pure craturs o an everbydan cause,
time skinkles and the dream is savendie.⁷⁹

From Valéry's French original:

*Quel pur travail de fins éclairs consume
Maint diamant d'imperceptible écume,
Et quelle paix semble se concevoir!
Quand sur l'abîme un soleil se repose,
Ouvrages purs d'une éternelle cause,
Le Temps scintille et le Songe est savoir.*⁸⁰

Valéry's poem is concerned with observation, with the effect of beauty and that which is beyond beauty – longing – on the observer. More than that, *Le Cimetière Marin* is a poem written by a man very much concerned with art and artifice; an aesthete who purported to scorn the specificity of finished artworks, finding all in the act, the description of the motion of the mind (something

⁷⁸ Paul Valéry, *Poésies* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 100.

⁷⁹ *A Braird o Thistles*, p. 41.

⁸⁰ *Poésies*, p. 100.

contradicted by the faultless polish of his best poems). The value of Young's version inheres in its attempt to carry this extremely challenging, abstruse poetic over into a language with little history of wilfully obscure symbolism and aesthetics, at least until MacDiarmid and his early contemporaries in the nineteen twenties. The literary genealogy of Valéry's poem is largely that of late nineteenth-century symbolism, which prefigured literary modernism in a number of ways, and indeed went beyond many modernist writers in its desire to reduce (or elect) language to a state approaching music – *la poésie pure*, so-called pure poetry. It is tempting to suggest that one of the most valuable things about the Scottish Renaissance's approach to the high modernist and symbolist heritage is its tacit recognition of the importance of impurity; its vulgar revelling in the kind of linguistic and cultural heterogeneity which Eliot had rejected in 1919. For all the problematic character of some of Young's critical interventions (as well as the remark about "Hottentotism" one might cite his references to "certain debased *patois* of Scots" and "the Hibernicised slang of the Cowcaddens"⁸¹) this recognition comes through very strongly in his original poetry and translations.

Bearing in mind MacKenzie's assertion that Young's 'Kirkyaird by the Sea' is one of the outstanding Scots poems of the modern era, one realises the grand ambition of this sort of translation. A desire to see the literature of the contemporary moment translated into Scots was central to MacDiarmid's proselytising throughout his life. In Young's daring version of *Le Cimetière Marin* one finds that desire fulfilled – the translation is informed by MacDiarmid's own Scots translations and original poetry, but also brings into being something rather different. A long poem like *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* seeks to energise Scots by the appropriation of various European poets and ideas. However, it might be a fair criticism of MacDiarmid's poem to argue that its ideas and symbolic modes of representation return continually to Scotland – arguably a necessary limitation for his purposes in 1926. Young's version of *Le Cimetière Marin*, while of course a work on a much smaller scale than *A Drunk Man*, follows its French model in its evasion of national specificity. Valéry's object of contemplation is not a national symbol, but the endless variation of the natural world, enveloping the visible markers of past human lives. As well as looking back to other manifestations of the Scots language, this translation of Valéry points forward, to later experimental translations such as Edwin Morgan's Mayakovsky or Garioch's Apollinaire. In the context of Watson's demotic Scots modernism, it seems appropriate to describe Young's writing, somewhat paradoxically, as the work of a very democratic elitist.

This paradox is to some extent symptomatic of the post-MacDiarmid, post-war-context in which Young, as well as the other writers discussed in this thesis, emerged as a poet and translator. Throughout the nineteen forties and fifties Young was engaged in ground-breaking translation work in

⁸¹ Douglas Young, 'Dialect and Standard English', *The Scotsman* (16 October 1952). Reprinted in *Poet and Polymath*, pp. 81-83 (p. 82).

several areas – notably Gaelic, drama and modernist poetry – whose promise had been recognised by MacDiarmid in the interwar years. Despite this inheritance, his translations are best understood as works of re-reading and re-interpretation, extending the Renaissance project into registers, regions and tonalities inaccessible to MacDiarmid. Young’s assertion that his writing proceeded from a fusion of MacDiarmid and MacLean is useful, but not the full story. Like Campbell Hay and, in a different way, the later Morgan, Young’s is a poetic of the polyglot. His academic training as a Classicist and remarkable linguistic gifts set him at a clear remove from the monoglot MacDiarmid, an autodidact whose heteroglossic experiments remained necessarily rooted in Anglophone syntax. Young’s writing is also, in no negative sense, of its moment. The majority of his extant lyric poetry and translation dates from the nineteen forties; his Scots dramatic translations were confined, essentially, to the nineteen fifties. This period character may go some way to explaining the sore neglect of Young’s work in recent decades, though there are signs that this is beginning to change.⁸² This chapter has sought to reposition him in light of his central importance at a transitional moment for twentieth-century Scottish poetry. Later chapters will demonstrate that key aspects of this achievement, far from being matters of purely individual sensibility, went on to be integral to the modern tradition of verse translation of which this thesis is an exposition.

⁸² Emma Dymock of Edinburgh University is currently preparing a collected edition of Young’s work.

Of all twentieth-century poets writing in Scots, Sydney Goodsir Smith is at once the most peculiar and, arguably, underappreciated. Born in New Zealand in 1915, the son of Sir Sydney Smith, later Professor of Forensic Medicine at Edinburgh, initially the young poet seemed set to follow in his father's footsteps. Unfortunately, the dissections proved too much for his stomach (see pp. 26-28 of *A Clamjamfray of Poets*, cited below). Most accounts of Goodsir Smith's subsequent academic trajectory hinge on his expulsion from Oriel College, Oxford, without taking a degree. Tom Hubbard's more detailed *Dictionary of National Biography* entry awards him a poet's third in Modern History, attained in 1937.¹ Given Goodsir Smith's evident intelligence and erudition, it is tempting to attribute this poor showing to a combination of Bacchanalian indulgence and intellectual difference with his institution. Stanley Roger Green records a disagreement between the poet and his tutor, with the former expressing an interest in writing a thesis on the Highland Clearances, only to find the latter presuming that his intention was to demonstrate their necessity. He goes on to describe a similar misunderstanding, which occurred while Goodsir Smith was in Paris en route to the Spanish Civil War, where he intended to fight for the Republicans. Running into an acquaintance from his English public school, Malvern College, in Montmartre, the poet was delighted to learn that he, too, was travelling to the front. The ensuing Dionysian evening came to a sour conclusion when it transpired that they "were heading for quite separate destinations." In Paris Goodsir Smith then suffered an asthma attack which prevented him from continuing his journey, an event Green links with this darkly comic coincidence, also suggesting that it was fortunate the poet never reached the International Brigade; given his extremely kind disposition he might have found it impossible to take another life, for which refusal he would have been executed.²

As many commentators have pointed out, there is something remarkable about a writer who, "though his mother was a Scot, [...] was born in New Zealand, educated in an English school and an English university and did not settle in Scotland till he was in his late teens", nevertheless "in that at first almost foreign tongue [of Scots] went on to write poetry [in it] of a quality hardly equalled in this century – and for a long time before that."³ This was something Goodsir Smith could be prickly about. Responding to the criticism (by none other than his friend Douglas Young) that he was attempting to become a Scotsman by writing in Lallans, he asked whether or not it would be more appropriate for him to write in Maori? Goodsir Smith goes on to argue that on these grounds those Scots-Canadians who teach their children to speak Gaelic would be equally guilty of attempting to become Scottish. He

¹ <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58855?docPos=1> [accessed 23/06/2014].

² Stanley Roger Green, *A Clamjamfray of Poets: A Tale of Literary Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 2007), pp. 26-28.

³ Norman MacCaig, 'Introductory Note' in *For Sydney Goodsir Smith* (Midlothian: M. Macdonald, 1975), pp. 7-10 (p. 7).

also refers to the Lithuanian-born Adam Mickiewicz, generally considered to be Poland's greatest Romantic poet.⁴ These remarks suggest that Goodsir Smith saw nationality – and nationalism – less in terms of genetics, and more in the way of tradition and cultural inheritance, particularly as regards a poet's language. Though he clearly felt an ancestral connection to Scotland, he was no narrow-minded jingoist. The reference to Mickiewicz is also indicative of his strongly sympathetic attitude towards the poetry of a number of eastern European nations.

Translation occupies an interesting place in Goodsir Smith's poetry. Less numerous than those of many of his contemporaries, his versions of poets in a number of languages, namely Gaelic, Greek, French, Polish, Czech and Russian, were nonetheless integral to his vocation as a writer. They are a potentially unifying presence in a remarkably, sometimes bewilderingly, diverse oeuvre, combining poetry, art criticism, drama, song and experimental prose – not to mention occasional forays into visual art, documented in the 1998 volume *The Drawings of Sydney Goodsir Smith*.⁵ This second chapter situates Goodsir Smith's poetic translations in their wider literary and cultural context, as well as in terms of his work as a whole. One of the key issues to be investigated is the degree to which Goodsir Smith was interested in translation because he felt it might allow him to rewrite his language and identity, making connections with other times and places, but also affirming his own sense of belonging in his adopted homeland and mother tongue. This is particularly pertinent with regard to translation from Gaelic. Building on this, Goodsir Smith's engagement with foreign-language poetry is discussed in terms of wider Scottish Renaissance debates around modernity and tradition, as well as the desire to bring new varieties of texts and source languages into Scots through translation. Moving forwards, Goodsir Smith's legacy is considered in light of the developing dialogue between what might be characterised as the Muir/Eliot and MacDiarmid positions as regards the language(s) of Scottish literary nationalism and translation.

I. *The Deevil's Waltz (Gaelic)*

As with Garioch, one of Goodsir Smith's earliest extant translations is from the Gaelic of his close friend (and sometime housemate)⁶ Sorley MacLean. In addition, a Scots version of *Dàin do Eimhir LVII* survives in typescript in Goodsir Smith's files in the National Library of Scotland, dated August 1941. This is, at any rate, when MacLean's poem was completed, as well as Douglas Young's Scots translation (a note to the inventory for National Library of Scotland Acc.10397 suggests that this

⁴ Letter from SGS to Douglas Young, dated 19th February 1942 (NLS Acc.6419/38b).

⁵ *The Drawings of Sydney Goodsir Smith*, ed. by Joy Hendry and Ian Begg (Edinburgh: The New Auk Society, 1998).

⁶ *The Correspondence Between Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean*, ed. by Susan R. Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 7.

version of *Dàin do Eimhir LVII* is in fact an early draft of Young's translation; however, on the basis of evidence internal to Goodsir Smith's collection *The Deevil's Waltz* it seems possible to add something to this).⁷ On the 30th of July, 1941, Goodsir Smith wrote to Young, apologising for keeping MacLean's poems for so long.⁸ Later that year the poet, physically unfit for active service, took a British Council job in rural Perthshire, teaching English to Polish troops.⁹ He could not have seen *Dàin do Eimhir LVII* at this time, as the poem had not yet been written. Nevertheless, evidently Goodsir Smith had access to both the originals of MacLean's poems (which he could not have read) and Young's cribs and translations of them (which he of course could).¹⁰ Intriguingly, while the contents' page of the poet's 1946 collection, *The Deevil's Waltz*, suggests that a poem "Frae the Gaelic o Somhairle Maclean"¹¹ [sic] will appear on page 47, no such poem is to be found at the relevant page. However, on the next page there is a poem titled 'On the Don, 1942' – clearly thematically linked to the translation of *Dàin do Eimhir LVII* in the National Library of Scotland (MacLean moves, at the poem's close, from the face of his composite Eimhir to the Red Army's ongoing struggle against the *Wehrmacht*). Was Goodsir Smith, always keen to make thematic links between his versions of other poets and his original work, planning a translation of the poem?¹²

The MacLean poem certainly translated by Goodsir Smith is a more finished, perhaps more mature work than the doubtful version of *Dàin do Eimhir LVII*. Working from the Gaelic *An Trom-laighe*, 'The Nightmare',¹³ Goodsir Smith writes a Scots poem entitled 'The Widdreme' (literally the mad dream). The Gaelic title carries associations of heavy lying and weighted sleep, rewarding etymological dissection. Similarly, the Scots title rewards speculation into its various potential components – 'wid-' could be interpreted as hinting at the potential 'would' or the darkened 'wood' of visions and dream states, as well as the metaphorically wooden heaviness of a disturbed mind:

Ae nicht o thae twa year
 Whan I thought ma luve
 Was strak wi a skaith as dure
 As wumman's had sen Eve,
 We ware thegither in a dwaum
 By the stane dyke that stauns
 Atween the loons' an lassies' yards
 O' ma first schuil.

⁷ *Dàin do Eimhir* (2002), p. 265.

⁸ Letter from SGS to Young, dated 30th July 1941 (NLS Acc.6419/38b).

⁹ Letter from SGS to Young, dated 31st October, 1941 (NLS Acc.6419/38b).

¹⁰ However, in a letter to Young dated November 26 1941, Goodsir Smith revealed that the Minister, Gillies, with whom he had been billeted was a passionate nationalist and Gaelic speaker from Skye, who was personally acquainted with and admired MacLean. He was, therefore, in the company of someone who could have furnished him with workable cribs for MacLean's work. (NLS Acc.6419/38b).

¹¹ Sydney Goodsir Smith, *The Deevil's Waltz* (Glasgow: William Maclellan, 1946), p. 7.

¹² The marginalia in Goodsir Smith's own copy (NLS Acc. 10397/53) are inconclusive on this point. On the contents page the second, putative Gaelic translation is scored through. Furthermore, virtually every poem is peppered with pencilled corrections to the Scots spelling and other minor alterations.

¹³ *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, pp. 181-183.

Ma airms

Ware round her an ma lips
Seekan her mou
Whan the laithlie gorgon's heid stuid up
On a sudden frae hint the waa,
An the lang mirk ugsome fingers graipt
Ma craig wi a sidden grup –
And then the words o weirdless dule:
“Owre blate, ye fuil!”¹⁴

As Joy Hendry writes, the Gaelic poem derives ultimately from MacLean's experience with a “Scottish woman, whom he had met briefly when she was in her teens, then again in Edinburgh in 1939.” Hendry adds that in “August or September, 1939, he began to feel strongly attracted to her, and by December 1939 had committed himself by declaring his love for her. Her response gave him to understand that because of an operation she had been left incapable of enjoying a full relationship with a man.”¹⁵ Goodsir Smith's translation is included in his *Collected Poems* in the section of poems deleted from *The Deevil's Waltz* (1946) and *So Late into the Night* (1952). However, it also appears in the former collection (Goodsir Smith's posthumous *Collected Poems*, edited by Tom Scott, is notoriously disorganised). Nevertheless, if ‘The Widdreme’ was originally translated around the time that the poet was working on the other poems later to be collected in *The Deevil's Waltz*, it adds weight to the argument on behalf of the 1941 date for the Scots version of *Dàin do Eimhir LVII*. At any rate it is clear that Goodsir Smith, as well as Garioch and Douglas Young, was engaged in the translation of MacLean's Gaelic poems almost as the poet was writing them.

Goodsir Smith's single surviving version of Sorley MacLean comes towards the start of his career as a translator. It is important because, as with Garioch and Young, it reveals a second-generation Scots poet in dialogue with Gaelic. Part of the complex nexus of Scots-Gaelic interaction in the nineteen forties, emblematised by the translation of MacLean and, to a lesser extent, Campbell Hay, this shows the poet attempting to come to terms with Scotland's linguistic reality – as well as, more importantly, its range of linguistic possibilities. The “stane dyke” of ‘The Widdreme’/*An Trom-laighe* refers on one level to material reality. On another, it is the wall between languages, complementary modes of expression separated by difference. Goodsir Smith's translation, from one marginal form into another, seeks to surmount that difference, while preserving its integrity. This is valuable, despite the gorgon's pronouncement of lateness – clearly, this signifies language loss as much as erotic despair. Goodsir Smith's version of MacLean might be viewed as foreignising, in that it ventriloquises the source in a partially synthetic language, whose orthography and vocabulary distinguish it very visibly from Standard English. Recalling Whyte's arguments concerning the ethical problems of minority language translation, one might argue that the way in which Goodsir Smith's

¹⁴ *The Deevil's Waltz*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Joy Hendry, ‘The Man and his Work’, in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, ed. by Joy Hendry and Raymond Ross (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986), pp. 9-38 (p. 25).

Scots foregrounds its mediated, translated character helps allay the scandal of the original's erasure to some extent. The poem is, at any rate, a text in sympathy with MacDiarmid's campaigning on behalf of a multilingual Scottish Literature, as well as one written against the grain of Muir's and Eliot's arguments in favour of English in isolation.

II. *The Deevil's Waltz (French, Czech and Polish Translations)*

Divided into three sections – 'Venus', 'Prometheus' and 'Mars' – and boasting sumptuous illustrations by the artist Denis Peploe, Goodsir Smith's second collection, *The Deevil's Waltz*, is an impressive object, the organising principles of which govern both the translations included and their position throughout the volume. There is a prologue in quatrains, or 'Prolegomenon', preceded by quotations from Dunbar, Burns, Shakespeare, Rimbaud and Baudelaire, all dealing with at least one of two principal themes: the powers of darkness, and dancing. Before coming to the translations, it is important to note that many of the original poems make explicitly intertextual statements as regards poetry in other languages, especially French. For instance, the assertion in 'Verses' that "Men sic as Villon are my kith" or the use in 'In Time o Deepest Wanhope' of both Dunbar ("Timor mortis non conturbat me") and Mallarmé ("O tous les livres sont lus").¹⁶ The former citation twists the famous refrain of 'Lament for the Makaris', reversing the meaning; the latter takes the French poet's cry in *Brise Marine* – "La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres"¹⁷ (the flesh is sad, alas! and I have read all the books) – and refers back to it: all the books have been read, and there is no ideated sea breeze to carry the speaker away.

The first translation in the book is the aforementioned 'Widdreme'. The second is from the French of Villon, a fine translation inexplicably omitted from the *Collected Poems* – an omission rendered even more baffling by Goodsir Smith's posthumous editor, Tom Scott's, own distinguished translations of Villon, published in the nineteen fifties.¹⁸ Unlike Scott, Goodsir Smith does not translate from one of the French poet's celebrated ballades, instead making a Scots version of *Le Lais*, stanzas 2-4. Passing over the opening stanza of the poem, the meandering syntax of which undercuts Villon's professions to scholarly incisiveness, the Scots translation, given alongside the French, begins as follows:

At this time, as I have tauld
Roun Christmas, the deid hin-enn

¹⁶ *The Deevil's Waltz*, pp. 15-20.

¹⁷ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 38.

¹⁸ It might be uncharitable to suggest that therein lies the explanation for this particular editorial omission; at any rate, Goodsir Smith was, apparently, Villon's earliest Scots translator, though William J. Tait was working on his Shetlandic translations as early as 1936 or 1937 (Scott and Tait's Villon translations are discussed, respectively, in the fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis).

Whan wolves eat the wund an the cauld
 Hayr gars aa fowk keep ben
 Huddered roun the bleezan gleid,
 There cam on me a wull tae brak
 Frae the loosum jail I lang hae dreed,
 That aye ma hert does rack.¹⁹

*En ce temps que j'ay dit devant
 Sur le Noel, morte saison,
 Que les loups se vivent de vent
 Et qu'on se tient en sa maison
 Pour le frimas, pres du tison,
 Me vint ung vouloir de brisier
 La tres amoureuse prison
 Qui souloit mon cuer debrisier.*²⁰

Goodsir Smith employs a light touch in his rendering of Villon's fluid octosyllables, keeping largely to a correspondent four-beat line, with some unpredictability as to the precise position of each stress and the number of unstressed syllables between it and the next. In the eighth line, he foreshortens by one beat, concluding his first stanza with a trimeter. This deviation will not be repeated, though the Scots poet consistently departs from Villon's tight a-b-a-b-b-c-b-c. As regards the meaning of the translation, Goodsir Smith has stayed fairly close to his original, finding equivalents – sometimes fairly loose ones, but equivalents nonetheless – for most of what is going on in the French poem. In less literal, arguably more meaningful terms, it is tempting to look to the architecture of *The Deevil's Waltz* as a whole, and juxtapose this with the structures of Villon's own poetry in order to appreciate the productive tension which this particular translation, rather than another one which Goodsir Smith might have produced, brings to the collection.

The opening stanza of *Le Lais* is not simply a send-up of overly scholastic modes of discourse. It is part of a frame, within which the poet's legacy is revealed (the other side of this frame is the poem's conclusion, where Villon signs away his earthly leavings). Famously, it opens with a date – “L'an quatre cens quinquante six”²¹ – fourteen fifty six. Goodsir Smith, cutting away the original context of stanzas 2-4, inserts them into his own frame, ably illustrated by Peploe, but laid out more explicitly by the ‘Prolegomenon’ and the collection's closing poem, ‘The Arbroath Declaration, April 6th, 1320’. The context is, on the primary level, Scotland in World War Two. Within this, Goodsir Smith subdivides his canvas into a triptych – the aforementioned sections titled, respectively, ‘Venus’, ‘Prometheus’ and ‘Mars’ – each panel of which has its own delicate internal structure. By placing his Villon translation in the ‘Venus’ section, the Scots poet is determining how he wishes this poem to be read: as a love lyric in a time of conflict.

¹⁹ *The Deevil's Waltz*, p. 22.

²⁰ *Poems*, p.16.

²¹ *Poems*, p.16.

On the page facing the translation from *Le Lais*, Goodsir Smith's translation 'Ae Shouer o Hail an Three o Rain', from the Czech poet Ivan Jelinek (1909-2002), provides a complementary perspective. A note, appended below the poem, reveals that the poem's author was "Born 1912; Czech Armoured Brigade; Author of *Basne* 1938-44."²² Among other things, then, this poem is a reminder that the Anglophone translation of Eastern European poets as part of a wider project of political sympathy predates efforts such as the *Penguin Modern European Poets* series of the nineteen sixties and seventies, not to mention the English-speaking world's adulatory reception of Czech and Polish writers like Miłosz, Herbert, Holub and Szymborska in the nineteen sixties.

Perhaps less well-known in the English speaking world than these four writers, Jelinek has nevertheless exercised a tangible influence on both Anglophone and Czech poetry. After his death in 2002, the following tribute appeared in the 'Deaths' section of *PN Review*, directly beneath that of the Czech writer and artist, Jiri Kolar:

In late September Ivan Jelinek, another Czech poet and Kolar's senior by five years, also died, in Surrey. He was a Classicist whose earliest public work (poetry and theatre) in the 1930s included translations of Auden and Isherwood. After he fled from Czechoslovakia, he came to Britain and worked for the BBC, returning to Prague after World War II, and then tasting exile once more in 1947. He lived in Canada and the United States before returning to the United Kingdom. There is a spiritual dimension to his poetry, rooted in his childhood Roman Catholicism but overlaid with Sanskrit and other elements.²³

Following his return to London, Jelinek worked in London for the Czech language component of the BBC World Service, continuing to broadcast until his death in England at the age of 93. Banned for decades, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, his work began to be published once more in his home country, to which the poet never returned on a permanent basis. As with so many other twentieth-century writers, exiled from their place of origin for one reason or another, there is a painful irony in the figure of a poet, cut off from the main body of his or her language as it is spoken, but still compelled to write in that tongue, dwelling within it in a Heideggerian sense. In Jelinek's case, the irony is deepened by the existence of his radio broadcasts, which were heard in his native Moravia but of course brought no corresponding reply. His 1947 poem 'To the Czech Language', translated into English by Edwin Muir, captures this sense of exile. Beyond the poem itself, it is interesting to note the connection with Muir, whose influence as a translator and cultural figure on Scottish writers of Goodsir Smith's generation belied his rift with MacDiarmid (the crucial enabling influence for most of the poets discussed in this thesis). In Muir's translation Jelinek writes that

When it rains in England
I hear from mothers' mouths the names of their children
And my own among them in the still-life of vowels.

²² *The Devil's Waltz*, p. 23.

²³ 'News and Notes: Deaths', *PN Review* 148, Vol. 29, No.2 (November-December 2002), 2-3 (p. 3).

When it rains in England
I hear two women tenderly speaking in Czech
And the words are only another name for love [...] ²⁴

Cut off from his homeland, Jelinek's language becomes the site of belonging, but also a reminder of his exile. There are suggestive parallels with the Scottish Renaissance's construction of an as-yet-unrealised polity, a strong component of which generally hinged on the restitution of Scots and Gaelic.

Addressing the poem itself, which follows the Scots translation of *Le Lais* 2-4, one finds the four following ballad-like quatrains:

Throu a shouer o hail an three o rain
We twa gang – and no alane;
Gin the tyke I had wi me is ane
Wha's by me then?

Efter ilk rain the sun's bleezan;
I' the efternuin
The hail's dingan –. Cauld are yir hauns
And wha may kiss them?

Leaf o the aik, did ye luik in her een?
Ower the brig juist lean,
Let faa yir tears i the burn
Frae luve alane.

Ye can greit in sang anerlie
Until the Dee
Ahint the hous, spates owre the land
For the blytheness o yee. ²⁵

This translation is interesting, not simply because of the cultural sympathies which it encapsulates, but also because of the degree to which it reveals Goodsir Smith's language as a perpetual work in progress. The probable typo in the first line – “Throu *a* shouer”, not *ae* shouer – is indicative of a wider flux and mutability of spelling convention and syntax, predicated on the ideal but also unreal concept of a fully realised synthetic Scots. This is to emphasise the point that, while one reading of Goodsir Smith and his contemporaries' MacDiarmidian project would focus on its preoccupation with the past of the Scots language, another might seek to foreground its investment in a never fully tangible future, destabilising conventions of spelling and grammar towards this end.

Moving now to the final pair of translations collected in *The Deevil's Waltz*, two poems in the 'Mars' section from the Polish poet Stefan Borsukiewicz, the reader finds the following biographical

²⁴ Ivan Jelinek, 'To the Czech Language', trans. by Edwin Muir, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, No.17 (2001), 167.

²⁵ *The Deevil's Waltz*, p. 23.

footnote, similar to the one appended to the Jelinek translation: “Stefan Borsukiewicz, born 1914, died 1941. Polish Parachute Brigade in Scotland. Author of *Kontrasty* 1941 (Kolin, London).”²⁶ This second note underscores the apparent importance, for Goodsir Smith, of poets’ wartime conduct – as well as his intimate connection to the Polish soldiers he was teaching at Kenmore. Recalling his own farcical Spanish Civil War story and inactivity on health grounds during the Second World War, it is tempting, if uncharitable, to identify a certain vicarious enthusiasm in this. For Young, conscientious objection was a politically urgent, morally justified action, even if it meant going to prison. Goodsir Smith found a greater moral urgency in the fight against Fascism, despite being unable to take part in it as a combat soldier. Teaching English – a language towards whose imperial pretensions he was deeply critical – to Polish soldiers in Perthshire, Goodsir Smith perhaps sought to balance the scales in favour of minority speech by translating Borsukiewicz into Scots. Given that a key motivating factor for these writers’ translations was their desire to bring Scotland into contact with global culture, it is revealing to consider how each responded to the ethical and aesthetic challenges of worldwide conflict.

Discussing Goodsir Smith’s translations from these poets – forced, as he was not, to flee their homes by the destructive sweep of historical forces – it is not this chapter’s intention to dismiss these works out of hand as the vicarious indulgences of a Scottish intellectual, watching the European disaster from a safe distance. It is nonetheless important to point out that this criticism might be made in order to refute it through close reading of the poems themselves, the first of which from Borsukiewicz, ‘Ma Brither’, is briefly discussed in my 2012 MPhil thesis. One must add that Goodsir Smith’s familiarity with Polish and other Eastern European literature went well beyond the immediate historical moment. Writing to Young, he asks him for help locating English translations of the Polish Romantic poet Slowacki, whom he had come across in Madame Pilsudski’s memoirs. He also writes that he has recently read Adam Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*. Possibly inspired by Mickiewicz, he is presently working on a heroic poetic drama.²⁷ Whether or not this is a reference to an early incarnation of *The Wallace*, it is clear that Goodsir Smith was open to the whole Polish tradition – not just those parts of it rendered topical by recent events.

‘Ballad o the Defence o Warsaw, 1939’, is a poem rather different in terms of its formal strategies than the preceding ‘Ma Brither’. The latter shows Goodsir Smith adopting the kind of modernist verse-form – strongly rhythmical but experimenting to some extent with lineation – he was later to use to great effect in his masterpiece, *Under the Eildon Tree*. In contrast, the ‘Ballad’, as its title suggests, stays closer to traditional modes:

The nicht was reid wi whorlan munes

²⁶ *The Deevil’s Waltz*, p. 44.

²⁷ NLS Acc.6419/38b.

(It neer wald faa again),
Ootwith the toun the suburbs clung
In fear lik a drunkart's wean.

Warsaw, o steermen brave as gyte,
On rifles ye piped a hymn,
A feylike sang o the saikless lyft
Whaes licht nae cloud wald dim.²⁸

The first line sets the scene, reiterating the nightmarish, infernal urban landscape of 'Ma Brither'. The "whorlan munes" are, presumably, incendiaries and bombs falling on the city. Referring to the incredible spectacle of this, the poem's second line suggests an Apollinaire-like fascination with the inferno of Nazi invasion. This comparison is strengthened in the third and fourth lines of the first quatrain, the pathetic fallacy of which is reminiscent of poems such as the French poet's *Zone*, in which the Eiffel Tower is compared to a shepherdess watching a flock of bleating bridges. Needless to say, Borsukiewicz's image of Warsaw's suburbs clinging fearfully to the city like a drunk's child – scared by the parent but more afraid of the surrounding darkness – is a more scarred, and scarring, use of this trope.

Goodsir Smith, transfiguring Borsukiewicz, elegises Warsaw, arguing in effect that, whatever tragedies followed the Poles' inability to hold back the Germans, the example of their sacrifice endures. In this, an important detail seems to be the choice of image, in the second line of the second quatrain: the city playing a hymn on its citizens' rifles, as though they were the stops and keys of a great organ. This image is reminiscent of the Russian Futurist Vladimir Mayakovsky, memorably translated into Scots by Edwin Morgan, who urged his readers to play on drainpipes as though they were flutes. Apollinaire and Mayakovsky, in their different ways emblematic of the exuberant creativity released during the first few decades of the twentieth century, both, at different times and for different reasons, endorsed violence. Borsukiewicz, caught between nationalism and communism, provides a haunting formal echo of the optimism of 1913 and 1917. On this note Goodsir Smith, who always sought to use translations to add to his collections in particular ways, concludes the series of versions of other poets collected in *The Deevil's Waltz* (though not the collection itself).

III. Apollinaire and Éluard, *Under the Eildon Tree*

In 1948, two years after *The Deevil's Waltz*, Goodsir Smith published what many consider to be his masterpiece – the long poem, *Under the Eildon Tree*.²⁹ Discussing this work in *For Sydney Goodsir Smith*, Alexander Scott described it as the poet's "greatest poem [...] which is also the greatest

²⁸ *The Deevil's Waltz*, p. 44.

²⁹ Sydney Goodsir Smith, *Under the Eildon Tree: a poem in XXIV elegies* (Edinburgh: Serif, 1948; 2nd revised edition 1954).

extended poem on passion in the whole Scots tradition.”³⁰ Scott goes on to spend some time attacking Robin Fulton’s critique of the poem and Goodsir Smith’s work as a whole in his critical study *Contemporary Scottish Poetry*.³¹ It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with *Under the Eildon Tree* more extensively, since, despite echoing, quoting and drawing extensively on poetry in languages other than Scots or English, the book contains no explicit translations from other writers. Goodsir Smith’s novel *Carotid Cornucopius*, the first part of which appeared in 1947, is similarly intertextual, owing as much to Rabelais and Urquhart as it does to Joyce.³²

In *The Deevil’s Waltz* Goodsir Smith used translations to add nuance and texture to a heterogeneous, but still carefully structured collection. The strict elegiac series of *Under the Eildon Tree* leaves little room for a comparably inclusive strategy. Nevertheless, in the same year, 1948, Goodsir Smith published a pair of translations in MacDiarmid’s periodical *The Voice of Scotland*. Never subsequently collected, these texts are of clear interest as regards the larger work. Both, significantly, were from modern French avant garde poets – one from the aforementioned Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) the other from Paul Éluard (1895-1952).

It is easy to understand Goodsir Smith’s attraction to Apollinaire. Restlessly inventive; never entirely secure in his nationality; given to hiding his sensitivity behind a facade of clownish boisterousness: these descriptions apply to both writers. Both were interested in the visual arts. Indeed, Apollinaire was one of the most important art critics of his time, whose manifestos and reviews helped to establish the taste by which many of the key painters and sculptors of the twentieth century came to be appreciated. Moreover, the French poet’s inventive, abstruse work must have presented a challenge to the Scots translator. How could this writer, more radical in 1913 than most of Goodsir Smith’s nineteen forties contemporaries, exist in a language with little tradition of experimental poetics, comprising a fusion of medieval and early modern vocabulary and the under-developed contemporary vernacular? Translating Apollinaire’s poem *La Jolie Rousse*, at around the same time as he was working on the series of experimental elegies which became *Under the Eildon Tree*, Goodsir Smith sought to make a link between the second-generation Scottish Renaissance and the glory days of *l’esprit nouveau*.

La Jolie Rousse is the last poem in Apollinaire’s 1918 collection, *Calligrammes*, published just a few months before his death. His editors Marcel Adéma and Michel Décaudin describe it as “le testament poétique d’Apollinaire.”³³ *Calligrammes* followed Apollinaire’s major 1913 collection

³⁰ Alexander Scott, ‘Goodsir Smith’s Masterpiece: *Under the Eildon Tree*’, in *For Sydney Goodsir Smith*, pp. 11-22 (p. 11).

³¹ Robin Fulton, *Contemporary Scottish Poetry* (Loanhead: Macdonald, 1974), p. 174.

³² Sydney Goodsir Smith, *Carotid Cornucopius* (Glasgow: Caledonian Press, 1947; 2nd edition Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1964).

³³ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, ed. by Marcel Adéma and Michel Décaudin (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 1104.

Alcools, building on the formal and tonal breakthroughs of the earlier volume. In particular, typographical experimentation is carried much further in *Calligrammes*, a book whose neologistic title conflates the words ‘calligraphy’ and ‘telegram’. *La Jolie Rousse* is among the more conventional poems in the volume, employing a relatively straightforward unpunctuated *vers libre*, to which Goodsir Smith adds full stops in his Scots version. In the opening strophe the poet describes himself, emphasising his war service and that “l’effroyable lutte” has killed the best of friends.³⁴ Here there is to some extent a parallel with ‘Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’ and *The Waste Land*, though unlike Pound and Eliot, Apollinaire had himself served at the front. Goodsir Smith renders “l’effroyable lutte” as “the gastrous stour”,³⁵ suggesting the dusty, muddy chaos of the fighting, as well as the gas used as a weapon for the first time in the First World War. The strophe concludes, first in Goodsir Smith’s version, then the original, by stating

I ken new and auld as weill as ae bodie can
 And wiout fashan myself wi war the-day
 Atween and for wirsels, my fieres
 I judicate the lang tulyie atween tradition and invention
 Atween Order and Adventure.

*Je sais d’ancien et de nouveau autant qu’un homme seul pourrait des deux savoir
 Et sans m’inquiéter aujourd’hui de cette guerre
 Entre nous et pour nous mes amis
 Je juge cette longue querelle de la tradition et de l’invention
 De l’Ordre et de l’Aventure.*

From the life of the artist and critic in wartime, Apollinaire turns to the less bloody, if frequently rebarbative conflict between successive aesthetics – old and new, tradition and invention, order and adventure. Goodsir Smith’s “new and auld” is a fair match for “d’ancien et de nouveau”, though the line is shortened considerably in his translation. His “lang tulyie” for “longue querelle” is a neat Scots equivalent. Perhaps sensibly, he keeps tradition, invention, order and adventure much as they are in Apollinaire.

Apollinaire’s writing is difficult in the sense that the cubism of Picasso and Braque is. Just as the cubists’ paintings drew upon earlier artists’ use of genre, colour and perspective, so Apollinaire’s poetry is strongly traditional, drawing upon writers from Villon to Baudelaire in a highly conscious manner. Again, just as the cubists never entirely abandoned the representation of concrete realities, so Apollinaire’s poems never cease to explore the concrete significance of words, however expansive that significance might sometimes become. While there are certainly continuities, Apollinaire is a slightly more conservative poet than proponents of surrealism (another movement whose name he coined) such as Éluard. In Goodsir Smith’s version of the latter’s poem *Grand Air*, the reader finds a

³⁴ *Oeuvres Poétiques*, pp. 313-314.

³⁵ Sydney Goodsir Smith, ‘The Bonnie Reidheid’, *The Voice of Scotland*, Vol.5, No.1 (September 1948), 28.

much more challenging text in both Scots and French. Shorter than *La Jolie Rousse*, the version of *Grand Air* is in some ways a more intractable work than the Apollinaire translation – which, though it presents the reader with some conceptual difficulties, is a comparatively straightforward poem. The poem was first published in Éluard's 1936 volume *Les Yeux Fertiles*. In their notes to the *Oeuvres Complètes*, Éluard's editors Dumas and Scheler write that the fruitful eyes are Picasso's.³⁶ The first stanza of Goodsir Smith's 'Open-Air' reads as follows:

The shore the hands trummlan afluther o fareweill
 Cam doun under the rain
 A stair o haars
 Reid-naukit ye outgaed
 Like breathan marble
 The hue o a rosie-fingert daw
 Treisure gairdit by the muckle beasts
 That gairdit the sun-lassies neth their wings,
 For thee
 Beasts that ye kent but didna see.³⁷

From the French:

La rive les mains tremblantes
Descendait sous la pluie
Un escalier de brumes
Tu sortais toute nue
Faux marbre palpitant
Teint de bon matin
Trésor gardé par des bêtes immenses
Qui gardaient elles du soleil sous leurs ailes
Pour toi
*Des bêtes que nous connaissions sans les voir*³⁸

Éluard, and through him Goodsir Smith, provides a lyrical series of images, loosely revolving around littoral seascapes of water and air. There is another person apart from the speaker, referred to in the intimate form. There are also vague allusions to the Classical, Mediterranean world – marble and the Homeric rosy-fingered dawn – as well as to strange, inhuman presences somewhere at the edges of perception. It is possible to extract some sort of a narrative sequence from the poem; whether this is the best way to read it is a moot point. In terms of the often political import of Goodsir Smith's writing, one remembers that the surrealist approach to reality often involved a radical rejection of what its practitioners perceived as the tyranny of self-proclaimed rationalism. Both versions present intricately-worked, highly suggestive surfaces, which resist paraphrase. The added estranging effect of the Scots, in the context of surrealism, strengthens this feeling of difficulty (one notes that again Goodsir Smith adds full stops in his translation). Nonetheless, 'Open-Air' seems a successful, if

³⁶ Paul Éluard, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol.I, ed. by Marcelle Dumas and Lucien Scheler (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 1476.

³⁷ Sydney Goodsir Smith, 'Open-Air', *The Voice of Scotland*, Vol.5, No.1 (September 1948), 29.

³⁸ *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol.I, p. 509.

perplexing poem, to this reader at any rate. Picking out one deft touch, “A stair o haars” is a lovely interpretation of “Un escalier de brumes”. Together with ‘The Bonnie Reidheid’, the poem is an important piece of evidence as to Goodsir Smith’s literary preoccupations around the time he was working on *Under the Eildon Tree*. Like Young’s versions of Aristophanes and Valéry, these texts highlight Goodsir Smith’s interest – also evident in his translations from Gaelic, Czech and Polish – in introducing new types of writing into Scots and so expanding the tongue’s poetic possibilities.

IV. *Figs and Thistles*

Figs and Thistles,³⁹ published by Oliver and Boyd in 1959, was the first Goodsir Smith collection in thirteen years to contain translations. Like Tom Scott’s *The Ship and Ither Poems*, the volume is a career high point, in which, for the moment, the poet’s voice fills with renewed authority and conviction. Reviewing the book for *Poetry*, Norman MacCaig described the translations as “tours de force”,⁴⁰ concluding that “These poems belong to no school: any two lines are immediately recognizable [sic] as Smith’s and that is because they are idiosyncratic, not eccentric. Sometimes they fall into typically Scottish faults of sentimentality and rhetoric, but these faults are the excesses of its virtues. For this is a poetry of the passions, not the intellect.”⁴¹ Formally speaking, the book lies somewhere between *Under the Eildon Tree* and the 1952 collection *So Late into the Night*, with the poems – as always concerned mainly with Goodsir Smith’s certainly idiosyncratic high romantic view of Scotland and his emotions – often longer than those contained in the latter volume, tending towards middle length. There are three poems in translation: ‘Sappho’, ‘The Twal’ and ‘The Gangrel Rymour and the Pairdon o Sanct Anne’, placed in this order at the end of the collection.

‘Sappho’, dedicated to Edith Sitwell, is not explicitly identified as a translation (save for the reader proficient in Ancient Greek). However, it is clearly an adaptation of Sapphic fragment 168B, the first of whose four lines Goodsir Smith includes as an epigraph. The Scots poem, in its entirety, runs as follows:

Dwynit is the mune awa
And the Pleiades, the nicht
Is at her mid, the hours flee, and I
– My lane I ligg.⁴²

³⁹ Sydney Goodsir Smith, *Figs and Thistles* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959).

⁴⁰ Norman MacCaig, ‘A Living Poetry’, *Poetry*, Vol.96, No.5 (Aug.1960), 320-322 (p. 321).

⁴¹ ‘A Living Poetry’, p. 322.

⁴² *Figs and Thistles*, p. 52.

Given the extreme brevity of Fragment 168B – which seems, suffice it to say, luxuriantly fulsome when set beside many of the other surviving Sapphic texts – it may be useful to now supply the following alternative renditions of the poem, the first by Robert Lowell, the second by Anne Carson:

The Moon slides west,
it is midnight,
the time is gone –
I lie alone!⁴³

Moon has set
and Pleiades: middle
night, the hour goes by,
alone I lie.⁴⁴

One notes the wide divergence between these three translations of the same four-line poem – deriving from a common source, but in point of fact strikingly disparate in their technique, tone and economy of means. Read together, the three versions begin to weave in and out of one another, playing a subtle series of variations on a common theme.

Carson and Lowell both begin with the moon, with Lowell capitalising after the initial definite article and Carson at first eschewing even the indefinite form, pushing the poem in a more abstract direction. This pattern of syntactic sparseness continues, with Pleiades and middle night both denied further specificity, until the middle of the poem's third line – "*the* hour goes by". This emphasis on the particularity of the moment in time is counterpointed by the generality of space in Carson's poem. The hour is like a lens; a small focal point moving slowly across a vast, darkened surface. There is then a deft, significant shift in the final line, where Carson allows herself the end rhyme of "lie" with "by", breaking the dry stillness and providing the further counterpoint of self and world. Lowell's poem (the third in a sequence made up of Sapphic fragments) seems, at first glance, a slightly less subtle artefact. The moon slides, *it is* midnight, the time is gone, the poet lies alone in bed – these seem initially to be simply a series of plain statements, minimalistic in a blunter way than Carson, and relying on content for their impact. Given the nature of the Sapphic poems, however, it would be churlish to deplore plain statement too strongly. There is also the near rhyme of "gone" and "alone" in the final two lines, though no Pleiades.

Goodsir Smith's translation is not simply distinguished from Carson and Lowell by its language, though clearly this is the main point of divergence. His version begins not with the moon but with a past participle – "*Dwynit* is the mune awa" – bringing the fading process of the astral body, and consequently the human, to the forefront of his poem. There is none of the delicate interplay of articles which is perhaps the main distinguishing feature, even subject, of Carson's poem. However,

⁴³ Robert Lowell, *Imitations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 5.

⁴⁴ Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Vintage, 2003), p. 343.

Goodsir Smith has allowed himself the equally delicate interplay of his line endings, which flirt with – but never quite – rhyme. Closing the first line on “awa”, he catches this with the ultimate “I” of the third; ending the second line with “the nict”, he closes the fourth with “I ligg.” Evidently, the attraction here is not simply aural; there is also the subtle semantic interaction of each of the nearly rhymed words.⁴⁵ As well as their aesthetic and prosodic interest, Goodsir Smith’s interpretative decisions are significant in terms of his wider project as a poet and translator. In the introduction to *Imitations*, Lowell, evoking Dryden, characterises his translation practice as an attempt “to write alive English and to do what my authors might have done if they were writing their poems now and in America.”⁴⁶ For all that there is a strong current of foreignising spikiness running through *Imitations*, Lowell’s description of his approach could be construed as a defence of narcissistic domestication. Carson, conversely, seeks to write an English which preserves as much as possible of Sappho’s Greek syntax – to make her own language strange through contact with an ancient other. Indeed, in the introduction to her translations she writes that “the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through.”⁴⁷ Like Sappho herself, Goodsir Smith has not left much in the way of explicit critical commentary on his translations. However, his approach might be construed as falling somewhere between Lowell’s and Carson’s descriptions of their process – to seek to write a living Scots reflective of what Sappho might have done had she lived in 1959 and in Edinburgh, but also to tease out something of the peculiarity latent in his synthetic tongue, making language strange and so expressive.

After the minimalism of ‘Sappho’ comes Goodsir Smith’s much longer version of the Russian Symbolist poet Alexander Blok’s ‘The Twelve’ (‘The Twal’). The version is preceded by a title page giving the poem’s title in Scots and Russian, the year of its first appearance (1918) and its source “Frae the Russian of Alexander Blok”. There is also a dedication “Til” C.M. Grieve.⁴⁸ This information and separate dedication (not given below the title and immediately below the poem as usual) sets ‘The Twal’ apart from the rest of the book, indicating its importance.

Blok (1880-1921) was the son of a well-to-do St Petersburg intellectual family, whose parents later divorced. While not a Bolshevik or Communist himself, his work is nevertheless essentially a product of the cultural prehistory and fallout of the 1917 Revolution, which event he responds to in ‘The Twelve’. Peter France and Jon Stallworthy write regarding his early life:

⁴⁵ The sober melancholy of ‘Sappho’ is undercut, in the *Collected Poems*, by the addition of an appended ‘Another Version’, dedicated to Hector MacIver, which reads in its beery entirety: “The howffs are shut langsyne,/ The late snugs tae;/ The whures are all abed/ - And the Auk his lane.../ Pissed, of course!” *Collected Poems*, p. 109.

⁴⁶ Robert Lowell, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), p. 195.

⁴⁷ *If Not, Winter*, p. x.

⁴⁸ *Figs and Thistles*, p. 53.

The really important events of his youth were the mystical experiences which inspired his first book of verse. [...] They all centre round the Beautiful Lady, who appears as a female figure of perfection and harmony. On rare occasions she might reveal herself to men, as she did to Blok in 1901.⁴⁹

This figure of the Beautiful Lady, derived from the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov's visions of the Gnostic Sophia,⁵⁰ was influential for MacDiarmid, who included a Scots version of Blok's 'The Stranger' in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. In light of the translation's dedication, Goodsir Smith's version of Blok's most famous poem is probably best read in continuity with the Scots echoes of the Russian poet MacDiarmid wove into *A Drunk Man*.⁵¹ There is an occasional aspect to the poem, which was the subject of a BBC Third Programme in the nineteen fifties. Produced by the North East poet George Bruce, the dramatic reading of the poem was preceded by a brief introduction from Goodsir Smith.⁵² This introductory matter evidences Goodsir Smith's ability to present complex literary material in a format readily comprehensible to the listener unfamiliar with modern Russian poetry. It demonstrates his great fascination for and knowledge of this subject, as well as his desire that this be shared with a wider audience. Crucially for the translation itself, Goodsir Smith's comments indicate a firm awareness of the linguistic and stylistic context of the original poetry, as well as his recognition of the centrality of the "mysterious symbolic atmosphere" to Blok's achievement. He continues to outline the narrative progression of the Russian poem, which in twelve numbered sections describes the progress of twelve unlikely disciples through the snowbound streets of St. Petersburg at the height of the Revolution (appropriately enough the poem occupies twelve pages in *Figs and Thistles*). Despite their unruly, violent temperaments and habit of scorning divinity in the name of freedom, Christ, at the poem's close, is shown watching over the revolutionaries, who represent the vanguard of the new order.

Reading 'The Twal' itself, one finds a much more ambitious translation than Goodsir Smith had hitherto attempted, requiring him to mingle verse forms and sustain tension and interest throughout the poem's various sections. His version begins as follows:

Mirk the nicht,
White the snaw,
The snell wind blows,
Caa'an aa fowk down –
The snell wind blows
Through aa God's mappamound.

Frae the white grund

⁴⁹ Aleksandr Blok, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Jon Stallworthy and Peter France (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000), p. 13.

⁵⁰ See: Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 7-8.

⁵¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. by Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 89.

⁵² NLS Acc.10397/20.

The yowden-drift
 Blaws in lacy wreithes,
 Under the snaw is ice –
 Slidder and glaizie...
 Aabodie skites around
 And down they faa
 Puir craturs aa!⁵³

Helpless, man is at the mercy of the elements. On a dark winter's night with the snow falling and the world obscure all manner of things may seem possible which might be more easily dismissed in the bright summer sunshine. The dark ice on such windy nights is also deceptive, sending skaters and walkers flying when they slip and lose their balance. This is a liminal, changeable point in space and time, where things are undecided and humans overwhelmed by the weight of events. Stallworthy and France translate these two stanzas as follows:

Darkness – and white
 snow hurled
 by the wind. The wind!
 You cannot stand upright
 for the wind: the wind
 scouring God's world.

The wind ruffles
 the white snow, pulls
 that treacherous
 wool over the wicked ice.
 Everyone out walking
 slips. Look – poor thing!⁵⁴

In the English the distinction between the darkness of the night and the whiteness of the snow is more pronounced than in the Scots poem, where the unfamiliarity of the “mirk” and the “grund” pulls the reader towards an aural experience of the poem at the expense of the English version's imagistic visual familiarity. The Scots poem achieves, certainly, a far greater level of semantic complexity, encouraging the reader to unpick the various linguistic layers and elemental gestures Goodsir Smith deploys to set the scene. Symbolically speaking, the language of Goodsir Smith's poetry, which is a cluttered assemblage of words from many times and places, could be understood as mirroring the poet's understanding of the various Scottish historical periods from which these words sprang. Goodsir Smith's language is alienated from itself, presenting the reader with the paradoxical vision of a Scotland in which a plethora of diffuse lexical terms, neologisms and multifarious intertextual references could inhabit the same space on the page without internal contradiction.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Figs and Thistles*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ *Selected Poems*, p. 94.

⁵⁵ For a wider discussion of the Scottish reception of modern Russian literature, with some reference to Blok, see: Peter McCarey, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Russians* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987).

In the shorter second section of the poem the Twelve themselves are revealed, perhaps for the first time – since one cannot be sure theirs were not among the swirling, interchanging voices of the first section:

The storm roves on: the snaw swirls round...
Twal men are mairchan throu the toun.
Their rifle slings are black...
Around them fires, lights, in the mirk.

Fags in their mous and bannets a-cock,
They should hae Braid Arrows on their backs.
Freedom! Freedom! Libertie!
Nae Kirk for me!
Aroo! Aroo! Aree!
It's gey cauld, fellies, gey cauld!⁵⁶

For the time being there is no one else. The Twelve are alone in the snowbound city. The black of their rifle slings is silhouetted against the opaque white of the falling snow, punctuated by the delirium of half-perceived fires, flaring into view within the storm. It may only be briefly that they are alone, with fire and violence threatening to erupt all around them. They are smoking, hats set at a jaunty angle, singing about freedom, liberty and the rejection of the Orthodox Church. The air is very cold. Stallworthy and France opt for a rather different stanzaic arrangement:

The wind plays up: snow flutters down.
Twelve men are marching through the town.

Their rifle-butts on black slings sway.
Lights left, right, left, wink all the way...

Cap tilted, fag drooping, every one
looks like a jailbird on the run.

Freedom, freedom,
down with the cross!

Rat-a-tat-tat!

It's cold, boys, and I'm numb!⁵⁷

Where the Goodsir Smith version rhymes, roughly, a-a-b-b-b-c-c-c-d, Stallworthy and France rhyme a-a-b-b-c-c-c-d-c. The English version is, therefore, drawn together by its tighter, less expansively fluctuating rhyme scheme, while the Scots mirrors many of Goodsir Smith's longer original poems in its shifting, multi-rhythmic alternation between descriptive verse, lyric digression and supposedly mimetic vocalisation of the Twelve. With regard to the proletarian utterance of the soldiers themselves, one might argue that the demotic vulgarity of the Scots version is particularly

⁵⁶ *Figs and Thistles*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ *Selected Poems*, p. 97.

appropriate. Recalling MacDiarmid's comparatively cannibalistic approach, wherein foreign poems are digested and absorbed into the larger body of *A Drunk Man*, one reflects that Goodsir Smith, though evidently influenced by the older poet's use of Blok, allows the Twelve to stand apart, prominently placed at the end of a collection of original lyric poems.

The Blok translation enabled Goodsir Smith to engage with aspects of twentieth-century radical art and history which clearly attracted him. The dedication to MacDiarmid highlights this – the older poet presumably representing the strongest Scottish incarnation of the spirit of 1917. The third and final translation in *Figs and Thistles*, from the Francophone Breton poet Tristan Corbière (1845-1875) pushes the volume in another direction.⁵⁸ Like Blok, Corbière is a key figure in the strand of symbolism leading towards literary modernism. Wallace Fowlie describes him as “the spiritual descendent of François Villon, especially in his self-disparagement. He looked upon himself as a failure both as a man and poet, and he looked upon his life as a marriage with disaster.”⁵⁹ Paul Verlaine devoted one chapter of his classic study *Les Poètes Maudits* to the Breton poet, born Édouard-Joachim Corbière, but who adopted the pseudonym Tristan for its Celtic and Wagnerian connotations.⁶⁰ In terms of his Anglophone legacy in the twentieth century, Corbière, along with Jules Laforgue, was an important influence on Eliot and Pound, particularly the former.⁶¹ The American poet and critic Randall Jarrell, himself translator of Corbière's *Le Poète Contumace*, wrote to Hannah Arendt that the Breton “is a *wonderful* poet – good beyond belief” and suggested that anyone who could successfully translate *La Rapsode Foraine* had truly distinguished themselves as a translator. Another major middle-generation American poet, John Berryman, dedicated his 1971 volume *Love & Fame*, the last book whose publication he oversaw before his suicide in January 1972, to “the memory of the suffering lover & young Breton master who called himself ‘Tristan Corbière’ (I wish I versed with his bite)”.⁶²

Dedicated to Norman MacCaig, Goodsir Smith's version of Corbière's *La Rapsode Foraine et le Pardon de Sainte-Anne* (‘The Gangrel Rymour and the Pardon of Sanct Anne’) is a second tour de force to set beside ‘The Twa’.⁶³ The dedication to MacCaig is indicative of the collection's background in the linguistically brackish milieu of the later Scottish Renaissance; it is also a reminder that the next decade would see a swerve away from the more idealistic formulations of Scots and

⁵⁸ This translation clearly had a long gestation period. In a letter to Young dated 23rd October 1953, Goodsir Smith thanks him for his help with the Corbière, suggesting that the pair might soon join Rimbaud in Abyssinia, such was their immersion in the French poetry of the later nineteenth century. (NLS Acc.6419/38b).

⁵⁹ Wallace Fowlie, *Poem and Symbol: A Brief History of French Symbolism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), p. 93.

⁶⁰ Paul Verlaine, *Les Poètes Maudits* (Paris: Léon Vanier: 1888), p. 1.

⁶¹ See: Francis Burch, *Tristan Corbière: l'originalité des Amours jaunes et leur influence sur T.S. Eliot* (Paris: Editions A.-G. Nizet, 1970).

⁶² John Berryman, *Collected Poems 1937-1971*, ed. by Charles Thornbury (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989), p. 167.

⁶³ *Randall Jarrell's Letters*, ed. by Mary Jarrell (London: Faber, 1986), p. 180.

Scottish poetry prevalent in this milieu, with the publication of Edwin Morgan's *The Second Life* in 1968 definitively marking the emergence of a new trend. With this in mind, and despite the various collections Goodsir Smith published over the next decade and a half, it is tempting to see a book like *Figs and Thistles* as in a sense the swansong of the Scottish Renaissance project, at least in terms of its more overt MacDiarmidian inclinations. *Sangschaw* had signalled a beginning, the *Dàin do Eimhir* a flowering. The late-nineteen fifties Goodsir Smith was a creature of the decadence, and 'The Gangrel Rymour and the Pairdon o Sanct Anne' a key text in the long, drunken evening of his decline. The translation begins as follows:

Sainit is the fouthless shore
 Whar, like the sea, aa is nude,
 Hailie is the fremmit kirk
 O' Sanct Anne-de-la-Palud,

O' the Guidwife Sanct Anne,
 Guid-Auntie til the bairnie Jesus,
 In the rotten wuid o her soutane
 Rich, mair rich nor Croesus.

By her, the shelpit wee Virgin,
 A spindle, onwytes the *Angelus*;
 Joseph, wi his candle, skouks in a neuk,
 Nane nou to fête his sanctliness.⁶⁴

From the French original:

*Bénite est l'infertile plage
 Où, comme la mer, tout est nud.
 Sainte est la chapelle sauvage
 De Sainte-Anne-de-la-Palud....*

*De la Bonne Femme Sainte Anne,
 Grand'tante du petit Jesus,
 En bois pourri dans sa soutane
 Riche ... plus riche que Crésus!*

*Contre elle la petit Vierge,
 Fuseau frêle, attend l'Angelus;
 Au coin, Joseph tenant son cierge,
 Niche, en saint qu'on ne fête plus ...*⁶⁵

Goodsir Smith's translation, like the French, is written in loose tetrameters, sticking closely to the meaning and linear structure of Corbière's poem. By doing so, he writes a translation which, through its faithful adherence to the Breton poet's curious blend of liminal and littoral imagery, infuses his Scots poem with a doubled strangeness. In the first line, Corbière describes the shoreline near the chapel of Saint Anne as "bénite", that is to say, consecrated or blessed. He develops this description in

⁶⁴ *Figs and Thistles*, p. 71.

⁶⁵ Tristan Corbière, *Les Amours Jaunes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 128.

the second line, informing the reader that everything on this wild Atlantic shore is “nud”, bare. By translating “bénite” as “sainit” and “nud” as “nude”, Goodsir Smith sets the poem firstly in an archaising and domestic field of reference, where, as in medieval Scottish religion, blessed things are saint. The word nude, as opposed to bare, adds a pathetic fallacy to the description of the Scots “fouthless shore” – which is not simply an empty space, but one in which the nakedness of the human before nature becomes apparent.

La Rapsode is a work which emerges from the same crisis of faith as many of Baudelaire’s poems, as well as one with a strong sense of belonging in a particular locality. As Corbière’s poem and Goodsir Smith’s translation of it develop these themes, many surprising and illuminating symbolic shifts occur in the surface narrative and the deeper, syntactic, prosodic and lexical structures behind it. For instance, the second twelve line section of the Scots poem:

It is the Pairdon – blythness and mysteries –
 The cowit gerss is routh wi lice
 – *Sanct Anne, consolatioun o spouses,*
Balm o the guid wifes!

Frae Plougastel and Loc-Tudy,
 The burghs round about,
 Fowk comes to set their tents,
 Three days and nichts – or Monday’s out.

Three days, three nichts the muir graens
 Heedan the auld ritual,
 – Seraphic choir and drucken sang –
THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE.⁶⁶

From Corbière’s original:

C’est le Pardon. – Liesse et mystères –
Déjà l’herbe rase a des poux.
Sainte Anne, Onguent des belles-mères!
Consolation des époux!...

Des paroisses environnantes :
De Plougastel et Loc-Tudy,
Ils viennent tous planter leurs tentes,
Trois nuits, trois jours, jusqu’au lundi.

Trois jours, trois nuits, la palud grogne,
Selon l’antique rituel,
Chœur séraphique et chant d’ivrogne –
*Le CANTIQUE SPIRITUEL.*⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Figs and Thistles*, p. 71.

⁶⁷ *Les Amours Jaunes*, pp. 128-129.

Humanity enters the poem as a presence, rather than an absence, in the second section, appearing through the *Pardon* alluded to in the title. This word, which Goodsir Smith translates as *Païrdon*, does not just refer to Saint Anne's conferring forgiveness on her petitioners, but also denotes the Breton tradition of making mass penitential pilgrimages to the shrines of saints. These annual rituals continue to this day, and are a central element of Breton vernacular culture. Indeed, the one Corbière describes, the *Pardon de Sainte Anne-d'Auray*, remains one of the largest. The poet presents his Breton neighbours in fairly grotesque terms, describing them proffering their chancres and scars like medieval flagellants. As well as Baudelaire, earlier in the nineteenth century Goya's black paintings are a strong visual co-ordinate point. In the context of Goodsir Smith's own work as a newspaper art critic and amateur artist, one also thinks of Gauguin's Breton works, particularly the *Vision After the Sermon* (which hangs, incidentally, in the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh).

The poem concludes with the image of the ragged rhapsodist of the title – an old woman “cried Miserie” in Goodsir Smith's version, *Misère* in Corbière's original. She wanders the country singing ballads for a half-farthing – “*L'Istoyre de la Magdaleyne,/ Du Juif-Errant ou d'Abaylar*”,⁶⁸ tales Goodsir Smith translates as “*The Ballant o the Vagabone Yid,/ Abelard, or The Magdalen*.”⁶⁹ The archaic spelling of *histoire* (ballant is an appropriate equivalent) is significant, given the strongly medieval overtones of the whole poem. As well as the counterpointing of archaic folk-ritual and nineteenth-century disease and madness, there is now the allegorical figure of *La Rapsode Foraine* herself, supplanting the wooden Saint and, like Dostoevsky's God-bearing scapegoats, taking on the sufferings of the collective. In the poem's last quatrains, Corbière seems to address himself:

Gin ye suld meet wi her, makar,
 Wi her auld sodjer's poke:
 It's our sister ... gie her – it's holidays –
 A bit baccy, for a smoke!

Ye'll see her runklie face runkle
 Wi a smile, as in a tree;
 And her sca'd hand will mak
 A true sign o the Corse for ye.⁷⁰

And in the French:

– *Si tu la rencontres, Poète,
 Avec son vieux sac de soldat:
 C'est notre soeur... donne – c'est fête –
 Pour sa pipe, un peu de tabac!...*

*Tu verras dans sa face creuse
 Se creuser, comme dans du bois,*

⁶⁸ *Les Amours Jaunes*, p. 135.

⁶⁹ *Figs and Thistles*, p. 78.

⁷⁰ *Figs and Thistles*, p. 79.

*Un sourire; et sa main galeuse
Te faire un vrai signe de croix.*⁷¹

With her trove of medieval ballads, *La Rapsode* is explicitly identified as a tradition bearer, providing a strong symbol for Goodsir Smith's cultural and linguistic preoccupations. Readers may recall Iain Crichton Smith's preoccupation with the old woman on the margins of the community. In the fifth chapter of this thesis William J. Tait's Shetlandic versions of Corbière will be discussed – as will his Shetlandic Villon, including a number of poems hinging on female faith and suffering. Returning to Fowlie's assertion that Corbière is the spiritual successor to Villon, one might imagine *La Rapsode* as in a sense the nineteenth-century incarnation of Villon's mother – perhaps even of *Grosse Margot* or *La belle Heaulmière*. As opposed to the lifeless icons in the church, she is presented as a vital figure, whose signed cross is a gesture of acceptance and self-abnegation, rather than aggrandisement. In light of MacDiarmid and Goodsir Smith's parallel engagement with Blok and Russian Symbolism, it is tempting to cite Solovyov's Sophia as sharing some of *La Rapsode*'s significance. Though very different in tone to Corbière's poem, the Socratic dialogue *Ion* investigates the nature of the eponymous rhapsodist's skill, concluding that it is not learnt or acquired, but ultimately divine in origin.⁷² Not himself a poet, Ion is presented as having a very limited understanding of the Homeric material he has memorised and performs. There is, moreover, a slightly mocking aspect to the urbane manner in which Socrates leads the rhapsodist towards an admission of his own lack of independent skill. Goodsir Smith would, no doubt, have disagreed profoundly with this view of the folk tradition, feeling that figures like his "gangrel rymour" are on the contrary in possession of extremely valuable skills of memory and performance, sustaining aspects of the tradition which would otherwise pass out of existence.

V. *How to Read*

Although in purely numerical terms, Goodsir Smith was a less prolific translator than contemporaries such as Douglas Young and Edwin Morgan, translation was a very important aspect of his work as a writer, allowing him to make links with other cultural moments and voices with whom he was in sympathy. As well as extending his own voice into new areas, his translations – like those of the other poets discussed in this thesis – can be read in terms of a desire to resist a narrowly provincial nationalism in favour of a more cosmopolitan approach. Given the New Zealand-born poet's sometimes defensive feelings as regards his own Scottishness, it is interesting to reflect on the manner in which his translations into Scots contribute to a view of national identity which is open to voices

⁷¹ *Les Amours Jaunes*, p. 135.

⁷² Plato, *Early Socratic Dialogues*, edited and translated by Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 47-65.

from many different cultures and seeks to avoid essentialist constructions of exclusivity. It could indeed be argued that, by translating foreign and Gaelic material into Scots, Goodsir Smith affirmed his own sense of cosmopolitan belonging in his adopted home country.

Despite his third-class degree, Goodsir Smith was an extremely intelligent person who seems to have had a strong sense of the limits of the translator's art, as well as its more expansive possibilities. He touches upon this subject in a letter to Young sent sometime in March 1943, returning the latter's version of MacLean's *An Cuilithionn* with praise, but also making the sensitive suggestion that Young do a little more work on the text. Goodsir Smith emphasises the way in which his own recent experience of translation from the Polish has taught him how difficult it can be to adequately render another author's work into one's own language – unless the translator feels so strongly in spiritual and mental sympathy with the foreign writer that the poem slips seamlessly into their oeuvre. In the latter case he feels that the translation often renders the foreign text less faithfully, but on the other hand achieves a greater degree of aesthetic excitement.⁷³ Drawing a clear distinction between freedom and fidelity, Goodsir Smith finds a tension between the wishes of the reader – whom he feels will be happiest with a relatively smooth, domesticating translation which purports to provide comparatively unmediated access to the original – and the poet's own wishes, which in his case tend more towards foreignising creative imitation. Goodsir Smith goes on to suggest that, while MacLean manages to escape the worst of this due to the difference in situation as regards Gaelic, Anglophone or Scots translators have to be careful with his work lest they fall into the trap of easy sentimentality and *faux-vatic* furore. In light of these hesitant comments and the small, carefully chosen body of works collected in his various volumes, it would be possible to detect a certain diffidence in Goodsir Smith's critical presentation of his translations – a doubt, common to many of the best writers, as to the ultimate value of his work. Particularly in terms of how he uses translation to extend his range and add to his own voice at some points in his career but not others, he has more in common with Eliot than Pound. However, as the annotations in his copy of Pound's *How to Read*⁷⁴ show, the latter writer was clearly an equally important figure to engage with and, at times, resist. This realisation becomes especially pertinent when one considers that Goodsir Smith's Scots translations are in a sense refutations of Eliot's position as expressed in 1919. Pound's heteroglossic multiplicity may, in some respects, be a better co-ordinate for what the Scottish Renaissance poets hoped to achieve.

There are fairly frequent marginalia throughout the battered copy of Pound's essay, correcting the American poet's facts or French spelling here, adding a thought about the Scottish situation there. The real interest of the volume, as regards Goodsir Smith's own development (and of course one cannot say exactly when he read the book, though it is likely to have been early in his career) is in two

⁷³ NLS. Acc.6419/38b

⁷⁴ Ezra Pound, *How to Read* (London: Harmsworth, 1931). (NLS Acc.10397/53).

lists at the very end, ‘Pound’s Courses’ on the final page; ‘SGS’s Course’ on the inside cover. In the former, Goodsir Smith lists the various works and authors Pound cites as essential reading in his essay. In the latter he provides his own. Starting with the Greeks, Goodsir Smith’s ‘Course’ includes Homer, Sappho, Sophokles, Catullus, *The Seafarer* and *Wayfarer*, the *Carmina Gadelica*, *The Book of the Dean of Lismore*, Mark Alexander Boyd, Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair, Burns, Scott, Alexander Scott (one imagines the original Alexander Scott is meant), George Douglas Brown and so forth. Of Shakespeare’s writings, he prefers the tragedies, apart from *King Lear* – *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* – and the sonnets. From French Literature, he finds Villon, Rabelais, Racine (*Phèdre*), Voltaire (*Candide*), Balzac (*Père Goriot*), Stendhal, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Corbière essential. From the Russians he selects Dostoevsky and Gogol. The fact that Blok (as well as various Polish and Czech poets) is absent adds to the circumstantial feeling that this is Goodsir Smith in his very early twenties at the latest. If this is correct, for so a young man the list displays an impressive range and variety of reading.

In the context of the poet’s translation work, this shows that, from early on, Goodsir Smith was a writer determined to engage with international currents in human creativity and ideas, ancient and modern. The dearth of translation in his work post-1959 can be seen in relation to the movement of synthetic Scots away from the centre of Scottish poetry from this time on, for which Douglas Young’s own quietus as poet and translator, followed by his eventual move to America, is similarly emblematic. Like Young, whose more protracted engagement with MacLean shadows his own one, Goodsir Smith found his voice as a writer in the nineteen forties, gradually moving away from early, somewhat derivative attempts in English towards the idiosyncratic Scots macaronica of his mature work. For both writers, the interwar Renaissance was a catalyst, with MacDiarmid’s early polemics on translation constituting key pretexts for their own work in this area. Goodsir Smith was able to modify and reinterpret this inheritance for his own creative ends, notably writing modern Polish and Czech poetry into the nineteen forties Renaissance narrative. He was also one of a number of key second-generation poets to translate Villon into Scots (a practice to which this thesis will return).

The previous chapter discussed Young’s remarkable ‘Kirkyard by the Sea’ at some length. Goodsir Smith’s versions of Apollinaire and Éluard find common ground with a very different, no less formidable strand of French modernism, the nineteenth-century roots of which the poet went on to explore in his version of Corbière. In the same volume, ‘The Twal’ draws on MacDiarmid’s ground-breaking use of modern Russian poetry in his early Scots work, pointing forward towards Edwin Morgan’s Scots translations of Mayakovsky, while the deft, minimalist version from Sappho testifies to Goodsir Smith’s long view of the tradition. In the absence of an adequate collected edition of his poems, prose work and translations, it is inevitably difficult to appreciate the full extent of Goodsir Smith’s achievement. By focussing on his translations, this chapter has sought to illuminate an aspect of his writing which is creatively rich and characteristic of the poet, individually and in

terms of the wider literary landscape in which he worked. The next chapter will discuss the verse translations of Goodsir Smith's close friend Robert Garioch, a writer who arose from the same milieu, but whose writing reflects a very different sensibility and chronological sequence of peaks and troughs in creativity.

The Scottish poet D. M. Black, writing in *The Dark Horse* magazine, argues on behalf of the quality of much of Robert Garioch's work, which he divides into four principal phases. The first of these encompasses the poet's years in Edinburgh up to 1940, the defining and concluding document of this period being the slim volume Garioch self-published along with Sorley MacLean, *17 Poems for 6d*.¹ Black feels the Scots and English poetry in this collection is "best described as gifted juvenilia."² He does, however, single out for praise the Scots version of MacLean's *Dàin do Eimhir III* included in the volume. Black's second phase runs broadly from 1941-1948. In these years, he argues, "we see Garioch wrestling with his experience of the war, and attempting to hold to his own values in spite of it."³ Black also notes that this period, overlapping with a third running 1946-1959, in which many of Garioch's Scots translations were completed, contains a large proportion of poetry written in English. The last phase in Black's schema, 1959-1981, sees Garioch's return to Edinburgh after a lengthy spell teaching in London. This closing period – of twenty two years – sees the composition of the great proportion of the comic work for which Garioch has often been celebrated, and ends, incidentally, with the translation of the Belli sonnets.

Garioch's extensive re-ordering of his poems through successive collections, as well as a somewhat irregular publication history throughout his lifetime, makes chronological appreciation of his oeuvre difficult, if not impossible. After *17 Poems for 6d* in 1940, Garioch continued to write but, partly due to his three year internment in German and Italian POW camps, published no second collection until he again self-published *Chuckies on the Cairn* in 1949.⁴ In 1954 *The Masque of Edinburgh*⁵ appeared – a vigorous exercise in drama which precedes Garioch's two theatrical translations from George Buchanan. These little-known Scots plays, published by Oliver and Boyd in 1959,⁶ were the poet's favourites among his own works. In 1966 Garioch's first proper collection of poetry, his *Selected Poems*,⁷ appeared. In 1971 *The Big Music*⁸ came out. In 1973 Garioch published another volume, *Doktor Faust in Rose Street*.⁹ In 1975 his war memoir, *Two Men and a Blanket*¹⁰ appeared, though it had in fact been written much earlier. Two years later his first *Collected Poems*¹¹

¹ Robert Garioch and Somhairle MacGhill-Eathain, *17 Poems for 6d: In Gaelic, Lowland Scots and English* (Edinburgh: Chalmers Press, 1940).

² D. M. Black, 'Handling Wildcats: Robert Garioch Reconsidered', *The Dark Horse* 31 (Autumn/Winter 2013), 18-36 (p. 22).

³ 'Robert Garioch Reconsidered', p. 23.

⁴ Robert Garioch, *Chuckies on the Cairn: poems in Scots and English* (Hayes: Chalmers Press, 1949).

⁵ Robert Garioch, *The Masque of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1954).

⁶ Robert Garioch Sutherland, *Jephthah; and The Baptist: translatit frae Latin in Scots* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959).

⁷ Robert Garioch, *Selected Poems* (Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1966).

⁸ Robert Garioch, *The Big Music* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971).

⁹ Robert Garioch, *Doktor Faust in Rose Street* (Loanhead: Macdonald, 1973).

¹⁰ Robert Garioch, *Two Men and a Blanket* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1975).

¹¹ Robert Garioch, *Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1977).

came out. Two further collections, both edited by Garioch's friend, the poet Robin Fulton, appeared subsequently: the *Complete Poetical Works*¹² in 1983, two years after the poet's death, and the second *Collected Poems*¹³ in 2004.

This glance at Garioch's publication history reveals an intermittent pattern of early publishing, comprising a mixed bag of poems, dramatic works and prose, with only the final decade or so of his life seeing the sort of regular volume and collection appearances many of his contemporaries enjoyed throughout their writing lives. Concentrating on Garioch's work as a translator, this chapter explores an aspect of his writing which virtually all previous criticism on him has praised to one degree or another. Areas of particular interest are his relationship with Gaelic poetry (especially MacLean); the importance of Classical languages and cultures as regards his translations; his work as a translator for the stage; and finally a discussion of his last and longest work as a translator, the Romanesco sonnets of Giuseppe Belli. The latter have occupied a central space in secondary critical discussion of Garioch's writing. Coming as they do at the end of a long, complicated lifetime of writing, the Belli sonnets are key to an understanding of Garioch's own attitudes towards translation at the end of his life, and a compelling statement as regards the situation of Scots, prosodic, lexical and linguistic, in the latter decades of the twentieth century. This chapter will address a number of major issues – key among them the impact of Garioch's translation work on his sense of political identity, nationhood, language and tradition. By exploring Garioch's major cultural touchstones, this chapter aims to better appreciate the originality of his responses to debates around nationalism and modernity in twentieth-century Scotland. Moving forwards, it situates his individual achievement in its wider context, making links with major figures like MacDiarmid and Eliot, but also considering the distinctiveness of Garioch's versions of other poets, notably in relation to the various collaborations which enabled their production. Exploring language and identity in his verse translations, Garioch ultimately came to quite different theoretical and practical conclusions than those arrived at by Young and Goodsir Smith. As a result, his writing in this area has clear implications for scholars engaging with the modern Scottish Renaissance as a whole, not to mention the wider context of translation studies.

I. Gaelic

The key document for Garioch and Gaelic is undoubtedly *17 Poems for 6d*, co-written with his close friend Sorley MacLean. The volume's importance in this respect is partly due to the symbolic excitement of two of twentieth-century Scotland's major poets making their inaugural appearance side

¹² Robert Garioch, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Robin Fulton (Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1983).

¹³ Robert Garioch, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Robin Fulton (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, citations of the *Collected Poems* refer to this text.

by side – in all three of their country's national languages. With regard to Scots translation from Gaelic, Garioch's version of *Dàin do Eimhir III*, his first published translation, is a rare instance of his drawing directly on a poem written in the language (whose political status and history of decline were subjects he returned to on several occasions in original poems):

I never kent sic glaumerie
nor stauchert frae sae stark a stound
at thocht of Christ's dule on the yird
or millions of the mappamound.

I hae taen nae sic thochts of haiveral dreams,
mirk-wrocht mirligoes of gleid
as my dour hert hankert for the smool
of her smile, and the glint of her gowden heid.

The shadow frae her beauty lay
owre puirtith and a waesom scauth,
and the warld of Lenin's intellect,
his pouer of patience and his wrath.¹⁴

From MacLean's original:

*Cha do chuir de bhuaireadh riamh
no thrioblaid dhian 'nam chrè
allaban Chrìosda air an talamh
no milleanan nan speur.*

*'S cha d' ghabh mi suim de aisling bhaoith –
coille uaine tìr an sgeòil –
mar leum mo chridhe rag ri tuar
a gàire 'cuailein òir.*

*Agus chuair a h-àilleachd sgleò
air bochdainn 's air creuchd sheirbh
agus air saoghal tuisge Lenin,
air fhoighidinn 's air fheirg.¹⁵*

Glossed by MacLean as follows:

Never has such turmoil
nor vehement trouble been put in my flesh
by Christ's suffering on the earth
or by the millions of the skies.

And I took no heed of such a vapid dream –
green wood of the land of story –
as when my stubborn heart leaped to the glint
of her smile and golden head.

And her beauty cast a cloud

¹⁴ *Collected Poems*, p. 87.

¹⁵ *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, p. 99.

over poverty and a bitter wound
and over the world of Lenin's intellect,
over his patience and his anger.¹⁶

Garioch's version is a fine rendering of one of the key lyrics in the *Dàin do Eimhir* sequence. As always with translation, even the smallest choices he makes are significant, offering his readers routes towards a better understanding of his creative practice, as well as his interpretation of the original poem. Comparing his Scots version to MacLean's English crib, one remembers that this text, rather than the Gaelic, was where Garioch began. *Buairleadh*, the unlenited form of "bhuaireadh", which MacLean glosses as "turmoil" and Garioch as "glaumerie", has in fact a number of related meanings – allure, temptation, molestation, trouble, disturbance, perturbation and provocation among them. The term's semantic field, then, contains a powerful positive sense of attraction combined with an equally powerful negative sense of the uncanny. Comparing what MacLean and Garioch each elects to do with "bhuaireadh", one finds that while the English gloss – "turmoil" – emphasises the disruptive, negative side of the word, the Scots – "glaumerie" – reflects the word's connotations of attraction and allure to a far greater degree. Indeed, MacLean's rendering of his first line might be said to play down the erotic, even fey implications of the original, while Garioch foregrounds them, arguably at the expense of the more dramatic sense of disruption present in the English gloss. Given the subject matter and symbolism of *Dàin do Eimhir III*, it is interesting to reflect that the two versions each prioritise a certain sense of these in their handling of the first stanza. MacLean's English states, clearly enough, that this turmoil the poem's narrator is experiencing has not struck him to such an extent before, not as a result of Christ's suffering – his "allaban", a term signifying both wandering and aberration – on earth, nor the millions of the heavens. This last image is a curious one, particularly as MacLean in fact avoids the term "heaven" in his English version. Are these millions to be understood as souls in paradise? Or, given the historical context of the *Dàin do Eimhir*, are they figures closer to Yeats's Irish Airman, resolutely confronting his lonely fate among the clouds? The Irish poet was certainly a key influence on MacLean, particularly in the *Dàin* due to his own romantic *allaban* and fascination with the figure of Emer, and so the reading is perhaps a suggestive one.

Coming back to Garioch's version of the poem's first stanza, one finds a subtle but equally suggestive shift in meaning. MacLean's English gloss is vatic; it begins with "Never" and ends with "skies". Garioch's is more reflective, beginning as it does with "I". It is also more open to the beguiling possibilities of his language, for instance in his use of a word like "mappamound". There is a slight note of surprise in the poet's voice, which seems startled by an awareness of unusually intense emotion. MacLean's English version, while full of determination, resolve and indeed wonder, does not betray surprise. Focussing for a moment on "mappamound", one sees that Garioch's version has moved away from the astral "speur" and "skies" of MacLean's two versions. The Scots word, derived

¹⁶ *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, p. 98.

from the Latin *mappa mundi*, may look down upon the earth from a great height; it is, however, firmly rooted in the goings on below. Douglas Young, for one, found fault with this sort of shift in meaning, suggesting that Garioch's version of *Dàin do Eimhir III* was not a literally faithful rendition of MacLean's poem.¹⁷ As a translator acquainted at first hand with many languages, not to mention intimately connected with publication efforts on behalf of an absent MacLean, Young no doubt felt aggrieved at the thought of Garioch's working solely from cribs supplied by the Gaelic poet. Without direct access to the original, the metrical and rhyming format (present in the Gaelic but not attempted in MacLean's English version) in which Garioch worked here had the potential to lead him away from strictly literal correspondence with the original. Nonetheless, the version was clearly acceptable to MacLean, given its first appearance in a collection co-authored with him. One wonders whether objections like Young's discouraged Garioch from translating and publishing Scots versions of other Gaelic poems. At any rate, it is interesting to find Whyte's objection to what he perceives as the scandalous appropriation of Gaelic poems by English monoglots anticipated by Young in 1942. On the other hand, like Young's own translations from MacLean, Garioch's Scots version of *Dàin do Eimhir III* is anything but an exercise in what Venuti describes as "cultural narcissism". Indeed, one might argue that, in light of the vulgar, resistant tendencies of their language, such Scots translations do indeed seek to "restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation".¹⁸ Certainly, they reflect a strand of political sentiment which intends a heterogeneous, multilingual version of the nation, potentially capable of containing and sustaining multiple languages and intertwined traditions.

II. Translation from Classical Languages

Andrew McCulloch, introducing a recent *TLS* feature of Garioch's version from Pindar, 'Dithyramb', describes the Scots aspect of the Scottish Renaissance project as "a hybrid of vernacular and archaic Scots that recalled the golden age of William Dunbar and Robert Henryson."¹⁹ He also alludes to Garioch's collaboration with the Anglo-American Classicist Donald Carne-Ross, which became central to his development as a verse-translator. Carne-Ross, whose tenure at the BBC ultimately resulted in Christopher Logue's *Homeric War Music*,²⁰ was a formidable instigator of new versions of classical poems by contemporary poets. As the first chapter of this thesis showed, he was also sympathetic to the work of Douglas Young – and indeed to vigorous reinterpretation of Greek and Latin culture in general. With regard to Garioch's translations of poetry originally written in Greek,

¹⁷ NLS Acc. 6419/6 Douglas Young Correspondence July-December 1942.

¹⁸ *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. 20.

¹⁹ <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1285320.ece> [accessed 24/02/2014].

²⁰ Christopher Logue, *War Music: an account of books 16-19 of Homer's Iliad* (London: Cape, 1981).

Latin and Italian (or Romanesco) it was Carne-Ross's role to provide his collaborator with detailed cribs of the originals, as well as encouragement and a sympathetic editorial presence.

Garioch first came to Carne-Ross's attention in the early nineteen fifties, when a mutual acquaintance showed him 'The Hierodules', the poet's recently completed Scots translation of Pindaric fragment 122. Shortly after reading the version, Carne-Ross wrote to Garioch, praising the poem in the highest terms.²¹ Pindar, as it transpired, was a particular interest of his.²² Despite Carne-Ross' great erudition, however, his attraction to ancient poetry was anything but dryly academic. He believed that the literary masterpieces of classical civilization could only be adequately translated by gifted modern writers with a strong, essentially formalist sense of tradition. In this respect, he and Garioch were made for one another. Offering Garioch free rein to select from the classical and romance languages, Carne-Ross enclosed two cribs to be getting on with, as well as suggesting various texts they might try out in future. One of these, a sonnet by Marino, apparently came to nothing. The other, a second Pindar poem,²³ became the 'Dithyramb' – the translation discussed by McCulloch in the *TLS* and one of Garioch's most successful outings as a translator.

Certainly, the two versions from Pindar provide ample opportunity for exploration of the formal possibilities of Scots, as the first two stanzas of 'The Hierodules' demonstrates:

In Corinth glittering wi gowd and gules,
ye hartsome servants of Persuasioun,
guid-willie lassies, leifsome hierodules
are nou arrayit as oblatioun
til Aphrodit' in dedicatioun:
ane hundert vicars al of that Godess
lykerus her to sair in lustiness.

Your daywerk is the amber tears to brenn
of frankincense in reikie sacrificie
and aftentimes ye ettle, fidgan-fain
to birl in tourbillions of ecstasie
abuin the beryall firmament on hie
whaur luve consecrat bleizes til a sterne
and preclair Aphrodite reigns superne.²⁴

These two stanzas are adapted from Pindaric fragment 122 – one of the key pieces of evidence in support of the idea that so-called sacred prostitutes, the Hierodules of Garioch's title, were present at Corinth in the late-sixth century BC. Unlike Garioch's other Greek translations, undertaken in

²¹ Letter from Donald Carne-Ross to Robert Garioch, dated 7th January 1953 (NLS MS.26561/f.56).

²² Indeed, he later published a book-length study of the poet: D.S. Carne-Ross, *Pindar* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985).

²³ Carne-Ross writes of this poem that, compared to the Marino, it was much more challenging and would, he believes, be impossible to manage in modern English. However, given Garioch's proven rhetorical facility in Scots he ought to be able to take the weight of Pindar's literary stylistics. Garioch was evidently a translator who relished a challenge (NLS MS.26561/f.56.).

²⁴ *Collected Poems*, p. 113.

partnership with Carne-Ross, there is no identifiable source crib for this poem. However, a literalist English translation (from a recent critical work disputing the reliability of this and other such evidence for Classical sacred prostitution) of the whole fragment reveals the considerable creativity with which Garioch has reinterpreted the text:

Young women visited by many, attendants
of Persuasion in wealthy Corinth,
who burn the fresh, amber drops of frankincense
often fluttering in thought to the mother of loves,
Ouranian Aphrodite.
To you without blame she granted,
O children, on lovely beds,
to have plucked the fruit of soft youth.
With necessity all is lovely

...

But I wonder what the masters of the Isthmos will say to me
finding such a beginning to a honey-minded *skolion*
a companion to shared women.
We reveal gold by a pure touchstone.

...

O Mistress of Cyprus, here to your grove
the hundred-limbed herd of grazing girls
Xenophon brought, delighting in his prayers fulfilled.²⁵

The fourteen lines quoted represent a considerable expansion on the first five of Pindar's surviving text, with perhaps several intromissions from elsewhere in the fragment. Garioch has, in a sense, not translated the Greek text line by line, but comprehensively rewritten it, imposing a new order on its constituent parts. As well as being adapted towards a regular seven-line, rhyme royal stanza (a-b-a-b-b-c-c) the original has also been considerably expanded upon – growing from sixteen surviving lines of Greek to thirty five in the Scots poem. In this there is a more radical interrogation of the source than in the version of *Dàin do Eimhir III*, which if it adapted Gaelic sense and syntax to a Scots metrical schema still preserved the formal outline of MacLean's poem. 'The Hierodules', as with many verse translations of classical poetry, both historical and contemporary, asks different questions as to the loci of a poem's nodes of meaning – the sense-bearing concepts and verbal artefacts through which it means itself and gradually becomes tangible across its several versions.

In the movement from cracked and disparate Greek words transcribed from stray papyri to a coherent metrical Scots poem, Garioch has again adopted a markedly medievalist diction, syntax and rhyme scheme. Vocabulary such as "gules", "lustiness", "beryall", "preclair" and "superne" brings

²⁵ Stephanie Lynn Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 112.

with it the unmistakable tang of Dunbar's aureate style. Equally, spellings such as "oblaioun" and "dedicatioun" suggest the kind of language used by the makars in their more Latinate modes. As regards the form into which Garioch has cast his source, it is worth noting that the seven-line rhyme royal stanza is one familiar from Middle Scots literature, for instance in Henryson's fifteenth-century *Testament of Cresseid*, written – apart from the famous 'Complaint of Cresseid' in which the stanza expands to nine lines of a-a-b-a-a-b-b-a-b – in unvarying rhyme royal. Given that Henryson's *Cresseid* is a poem concerned with female sexuality, promiscuity and the relation these bore, in the medieval mind, to degradation and redemption, it is tempting to infer that Garioch, always deliberate in his choice of forms, decided on rhyme royal not simply because it was a stanza familiar from the literature of the Middle Ages, Scottish and otherwise, but also because of the conceptual connection he found between the Pindaric fragment and *The Testament of Cresseid*.

The connection between Garioch's Pindar translations and Henryson is strengthened by the 'Dithyramb'. Having employed the rhyme royal of the main body of the *Testament* to translate Fragment 122, Garioch now employs the nine line stanza of the 'Complaint'. This is also the stanza Dunbar employs in 'The Golden Targe' – in another letter Carne-Ross refers to this poem as a possible model for a Scots translation of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.²⁶ Carne-Ross adds that Shelley's ottava rima translation of the Homeric Hymn to Mercury – which Jeffrey C. Robinson argues is "Shelley's longest, and perhaps best, translation" – might provide an alternative model.²⁷ Adapted from Pindaric Fragment 75, the poem's title refers to its prosodic genre – "an antistrophic composition dealing with special themes taken from divine and heroic legend, but still maintaining its particular connection with Dionysus, who is celebrated, apparently at or near the opening of the song, whatever its subject."²⁸ Aristotle also associated the dithyramb with the beginnings of Greek tragedy, writing in the *Poetics* that

[Drama] originated in improvisation – both tragedy itself and comedy. The one came from the prelude to the dithyramb and the other from the prelude to the phallic songs which still survive as institutions in many cities. Tragedy then gradually evolved as men developed each element that came to light and after going through many changes, it stopped when it had found its natural form.²⁹

The publication of Garioch's two Scoto-Latin tragedies in 1959 would seem to confirm Aristotle's account of the birth of tragedy. Without pushing the analogy too far, it is presumably true of many poets who translate long, challenging texts into verse that they begin, as did the Greek tradition

²⁶ NLS MS.26561/f.60. This translation was apparently never attempted by Garioch. Carne-Ross' English crib can be consulted at: NLS MS.26561/f.61.

²⁷ *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 108.

²⁸ A.W. Pickard Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 24f.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe (London: Heinemann, 1927), pp. 17-18.

according to Aristotle, with shorter efforts of a more improvisatory character than the later works. The first stanza of Garioch's treatment of the Pindaric fragment runs as follows:

Frae habitakle on Olympus' hicht
bowne, lemand, til the daunce, ye Goddis bricht;
teem out your breerand bontie, bot stynting,
ye that in sacrate Athens, cleir in sycht,
schynand in celsitud mak ingain stricht,
til incense-rich Omphalos awntering
whaur thousandfald the feet forever thring,
the namekouth Agora maist nobly dicht:
for ye we gaither violets and sangs in Spring.³⁰

This is again a highly aureate version of a Greek poem. As with 'The Hierodules', it is not difficult to imagine that this is a translation by Henryson, Dunbar or even David Lyndsay – "ye Goddis bricht", "schynand in celsitud" and "maist nobly dicht" could all have come straight from a Middle Scots poem, though "namekouth" is evidently a neologism. Once again, the classical has become medieval. While Carne-Ross' literalist English gloss is not without literary interest, it seems safe to conclude that Garioch's version is infinitely superior as a poem, if perhaps not in terms of its direct reference to a Greek text of which he was aware.³¹ This was of course Carne-Ross' intention – to which end he supplies his translator with extensive explanatory notes and variant readings. These are largely, but not exclusively technical. For instance, Carne-Ross prefaces his crib with the remark that most translations of the poem suggest a superlatively rich poetical language, throughout emphasising the degree to which the liturgical material of the original is transformed into great literary art by Pindar's hugely complex and skilful use of Greek.

In his classic statement on translation, the 1680 'Preface to Ovid's *Epistles*', Dryden, praising Abraham Cowley's comparatively liberal treatment of the Greek poet, wrote "Pindar is generally known to be a dark author [...] So wild and ungovernable a poet cannot be translated literally; his genius is too strong to bear a chain, and Samson-like he shakes it off."³² The Laureate here defines three modes of translation – metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation, the first following the original as closely as possible, even to the detriment of the poem in the target language; the second following the sense closely, but taking a little more creative licence; the third – Cowley's sort – using the source text as a springboard for more extravagant creative departures. Of the translators addressed by this thesis, most hover between paraphrase and imitation as understood by Dryden (Morgan, discussed in the conclusion, is a notable exception). Sometimes the approach taken impinges on a more recent view of poetic translation – the version. As defined by Don Paterson in the appendix to his 2006 book *Orpheus: A Version of Rilke*, versions "are trying to be poems in their own right", whereas a

³⁰ *Collected Poems*, p. 114.

³¹ For Carne-Ross' crib see: NLS MS.26561/f.82.

³² John Dryden, 'Preface to Ovid's *Epistles* Translated by Several Hands', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Keith Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.155-164 (p. 162).

translation “tries to remain true to the original words and their relations, and its primary aim is usually one of stylistic elegance”.³³ This definition is, of course, useful for Paterson in that it pre-emptively rebuts criticisms of his decisions as regards Rilke’s original German text. On the other hand, while many translators do intend the kind of stylistically elegant domestication Paterson describes, there are also many practitioners of less fluent, potentially foreignising forms of writing who would quite naturally resist the suggestion that what they do is anything other than translation. In a recent essay addressing the emergence of the version, which he describes as “an unprecedented form of translating poetry and poetic drama practiced mostly by poets”, Venuti writes that, generally speaking, a version

derives from a specified source, but it may depart so widely from that source as to constitute a wholesale revision that answers primarily to the poet-translator’s literary interests. Or it may involve a source language of which the poet has limited knowledge or is completely ignorant, therefore requiring the use of a close rendering prepared by a native informant, an academic specialist, or a professional translator.³⁴

Garioch’s translations fit this model in that they were generally made with the help of cribs prepared by other writers such as Carne-Ross or MacLean. On the other hand, his versions tend not to depart so far from their sources (in whatever language) as to constitute a wholesale revision of the kind produced by Pound, Lowell and, on occasion, Paterson. Crucially, Venuti does not view the emergence of the version as a uniformly scandalous development which translation scholars ought to resist and debunk. On the contrary, he argues that “the question should never be whether [a translation] successfully captures the features of the source text” since a translation “can only communicate an interpretation, never the source text itself or some form of meaning believed to be inherent in it.” The point to bear in mind is rather that, instead of exonerating themselves on the grounds that their productions aim to be literary texts in their own right, translators must “take responsibility for bringing a foreign text into a different situation by acknowledging that its very foreignness demands cultural innovation.”³⁵ As close reading of his formally innovative, deftly-versified translations demonstrates, this was a responsibility of which Garioch was well aware.

In the wake of their fruitful collaboration on the Pindaric ‘Dithyramb’, Carne-Ross and Garioch began work on a more ambitious Greek translation – an extract from Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. While the English crib for this poem survives, Carne-Ross’ covering letter is not to be found among Garioch’s papers in the National Library of Scotland.³⁶ Nevertheless, on the basis of references to the translation elsewhere in the two men’s correspondence, Garioch’s receipt of Carne-Ross crib can be dated fairly securely to the summer or early autumn of 1953.

³³ Don Paterson, *Orpheus: A Version of Rilke* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006; 2007), p. 73.

³⁴ Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 174.

³⁵ *Translation Changes Everything*, pp. 191-192.

³⁶ Garioch and Carne-Ross were both living in or near London at this point. Presumably not all of their communications or exchanges of manuscripts were carried out by post.

Rather than the aureate glide of the Pindar translations, for the Hesiod version Garioch avoids the iambic or loosely iambic rhythm familiar from many other translations by him and other Scottish Renaissance writers, scraping back the prosodic soil to unearth a rugged alliterative measure suggestive of a medieval poem such as Dunbar's 'The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo':

In Februar come foul days, flee them gin ye may,
wi their felloun frosts, days that wad flype a nowt,
whan Boreas blaws owre Thrace, whaur they breed the horses,
and brulyies the braid sea, and gars it blawp;
and the winterous warld and the woddis warsle aathegither.³⁷

The dip and surge of these lines strikes a chord familiar from any Middle Scots description of winter; moreover it achieves what many prosodists have declared difficult, if not impossible in Scots or English: a sustained hexameter which is neither awkward metrically nor padded in terms of content. Once again, Garioch has expanded upon his source text with great audacity and skill.³⁸ Carne-Ross provides a semantic map of the poem, a flat surface essentially stripped of prosody. Onto this armature the poet adds texture, rhythm; the dip and surge of a more fully metrical existence. Garioch's lines, like the lines of Old English verse,³⁹ divide into two halves – two breaths, perhaps, or the regular systole, diastole of a heart beating. The complex patterns of call and response, statement and re-statement set up by the poet render each six-beat line an indivisible whole, as opposed to a pair of trimeters strung together.

As with the other translations from the Greek, one can read the 'Anatomy of Winter' as an arbitrary or near-arbitrary literary event – occasioned by Carne-Ross's cribs and encouragement as much as the poet's own sensibilities. Or one can read more susceptibly, finding in the extraordinarily responsive 'Anatomy o Winter' something more persuasive – an attempt to trace the historical lineaments of the human character, perhaps. In a postscript for Garioch's Hesiod translation, which he eventually published in the Spring 1966 number of his journal *Arion*, Carne-Ross wrote:

Cavafy, E.M. Forster once said, hoped to be understood in Alexandria and tolerated in Athens; he never dreamed of being admired in distant England. Substitute Edinburgh for Alexandria, London for Athens, and the United States for England and much the same holds good for Garioch. [...] He selects from his literary tradition the metre and diction and dialect appropriate to his matter. In this he seems to me both Scots and Greek.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Collected Poems*, p. 115.

³⁸ For Carne-Ross' crib see: NLS MS.26561/f.63.

³⁹ In this connection it is salutary to recall Garioch's translation of the Old English 'Wanderer', 'The Traivler' (*Collected Poems*, pp. 156-159).

⁴⁰ Donald Carne-Ross, 'Note' to 'The Anatomy o Winter: Hesiod, "Works and Days", 504-553', *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* Vol.5, No.1 (Spring 1966), 32-33 (p. 33).

The comparison with Cavafy is initially a surprising one, though the sense in which it is made may well go some way towards explaining the nature of the cultural situation out of which this translation emerges. To set Garioch – shy, unworldly and apparently devoted husband as he is usually presented – beside another twentieth-century poet who, if he sometimes seemed unworldly, sang a more transgressive form of love, not to mention a far more stringent sense of aestheticism, offers a potentially striking illumination. After all, could not Garioch’s Edinburgh, depicted in sonnet sequences, translations and elegies, be described as an unreal city; a work of the imagination just as Cavafy’s Alexandria clearly was? Rather than belabouring this point, it is worth noting that Carne-Ross places Garioch (who appears with a translation of a classical poem) in a markedly medieval field of reference. Readers of Australian poetry in English may also be interested by this Scottish anticipation of Les Murray’s self-identifying valorisation of Hesiod, wherein rustic Boeotia is opposed to metropolitan Athens, personified by the expatriate Peter Porter.⁴¹

In March 1954, Carne-Ross sent Garioch English cribs for two epigrams by the Hellenistic poet Anyte, writing that he thought the poet might be ready for another translation and that while the poems might not be to Garioch’s taste, the originals are so vivid that something might be made of them in Scots.⁴² Carne-Ross writes that, while the Greek epigram is often rendered into English as a rhyming quatrain, he personally finds this strategy less than convincing. He insists that Garioch is not to worry about finding a strict formal equivalent, but should as before strive above all for contemporary vitality.

Nothing seems to have come of the second epigram. However, the first text, glossed ‘Poem for a Hermes’, did lead Garioch to experiment with the epigrammatic form. The original four-line crib describes the image of Hermes standing by a windy orchard, at a crossroads near the sea, set there to refresh weary travellers with the spring water which pours forth at that spot.⁴³ Garioch’s response to this four-line text has not generally been grouped with his other translations – it is, indeed, not marked as such in his *Collected Poems*. However, reading ‘Proem and Inscription for a Hermes’ in light of Carne-Ross’ crib, it is clear that interaction with this source was central to the poem’s conception and execution. Discussing Shelley’s version of the Homeric Hymn to Mercury, Robinson writes that “Hermes, or Mercury, seems the perfect god of translations, one who can play tricks of language and yet is also the god of crossroads – in this case, the intersection between one language and another.”⁴⁴ In the case of Garioch’s response to Anyte, the branching roads lead in several directions – back towards the Greek epigram and Carne-Ross’ crib, but also towards the Scots poet’s own ‘original’ writing. After a vivid evocation of a weary traveller, confused after long wanderings down “lime-dry

⁴¹ Les Murray, ‘The Boeotian Strain’, *Kunapipi* Vol.2, Issue 1 (1980), 45-64.

⁴² Letter from Donald Carne-Ross to Garioch, dated 7th March 1954 (NLS MS.26561/f72.)

⁴³ NLS MS.26561/f72.

⁴⁴ *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 110.

roads”, Garioch breaks stanza before concluding the poem with a version of the Anyte epigram, set out in quotation marks as it is taken to be the voice of the god addressing the wanderer from a stone:

“Hermes I am; here I bide,
whaur the saft souchs whish in the lime trees,
marking the airts of the cross-roads,
near the glittering sea.
Wearyit traivlers, I offer ye cool shade,
biieldin for hairt’s ease,
caller and colourless spring water
that bubbles out free.”⁴⁵

In his letter, Carne-Ross discusses the elegiac metre of the original, indicating the position of the stresses on a couplet by Ovid employing the same rhythm. Garioch renders this into Scots with four two-cola dactylic lines, each split in the middle and rhyming a-b-a-b. The poem is interesting not only because of its highly reflexive and creative understanding of translation, but also because of its enactment of a redemptive journey. That the redemptive turn occurs in the translated section at the end of the poem is significant. Clearly, the act was a liberating one for the poet, allowing him to range formally and conceptually across the European tradition, reshaping his own poetic voice as a result.

Praising Michael Longley’s sonnet ‘Ceasefire’, which distils Book 24 of Homer’s *Iliad* into fourteen lines, using the Greek subject matter to address the end of hostilities in Northern Ireland, Susan Bassnett goes on to raise the question as to whether or not such writing “can be defined as a translation, given the extent of the differences between the two texts.” Devoting less attention to the potentially problematic aspects of the poetic version than Venuti, she argues that, though his poem “would not be acceptable in a language classroom”, what

Longley does is to rewrite Greek and Latin authors as an integral part of his own poetic universe, not denying their presence but revitalizing them, bringing the dead back to life in another language and at another time and, since there is so little clarity about the precise nature of the ancient ‘originals’, his writing then becomes an exemplification of piecing together fragments to make a new vessel.⁴⁶

This is moreover, Bassnett suggests, not unlike the manner in which medieval and early-modern verse translators approached their task (contradicting Venuti’s assertion that the version is something symptomatic of twentieth- and twenty first-century translation). Elsewhere, Bassnett writes that much “time and ink has been wasted attempting to differentiate between *translations*, *versions*, *adaptations* and the establishment of a hierarchy of ‘correctness’ between these categories.”⁴⁷ Rewriting the epigram as part of a largely original poem, one might argue that Garioch does not deny Anyte’s presence, but rather brings her text back to life in his own language and time, assembling a new vessel

⁴⁵ *Collected Poems*, pp. 114-115.

⁴⁶ Susan Bassnett, *Translation* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 160.

⁴⁷ Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (London: Routledge, 1991; fourth edition 2014), p. 90.

from the broken sherds of the Greek as apprehended through Carne-Ross' crib. This is not dissimilar to what Lowell does with some of his Sappho translations, discussed with reference to Goodsir Smith's version of Fragment 168B in the previous chapter. It also has affinities with MacDiarmid's approach in *A Drunk Man*, where the fragmentary skeins of poems translated from English cribs are woven into the larger warp and weft of the narrator's intoxicated vision.

Carne-Ross refers to the epigrams once again, in a letter sent sometime later in March 1954, writing that he is glad Garioch is making some progress (though apparently the poems were initially intractable). He goes on to discuss Pound, who he evidently admires considerably, albeit with some reservations. He also mentions that he is working on more Hesiod, building upon the forty nine lines for which he has already provided English cribs. Interestingly, given the more experimental mode of translation Garioch has been trying out on Anyte, Carne-Ross suggests that they might render Hesiod's *Works and Days* as a series or sequence of extracts. He further develops this idea in a letter dated January 15th of the next year, in which he proposes a radio programme made up of 30-40 minutes of Hesiod in Scots translation, inviting Garioch to join him for dinner at his home in order to discuss this.⁴⁸

It is unclear what, if anything, came of this idea. At any rate, Garioch seems to have translated no more Hesiod. It is probable that he was already too busy translating George Buchanan to take on a similarly extended project.

The first Renaissance Latin poem to appear in Garioch's *Collected Poems*, not in the fifth section containing the bulk of his other classical translations but in the first, which is made up largely of 'original' work, is his version of George Buchanan's *Quam misera sit conditio docentium literas humaniores Lutetiae*. This poem, which Garioch translates as 'The Humanists' Trauchles in Paris', is one of Buchanan's best known, largely due to its world-weary evocation of the problems faced by those unfortunate enough to find themselves on the educational front line, both in the sixteenth century and the present day. Its modern reputation in Scotland was also consolidated by its appearance in MacDiarmid's *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* in an English prose version by the philosopher George Elder Davie. In fact, given that the other Renaissance Latin poem translated by Garioch, Arthur Johnstone's 'A Fisher's Apology',⁴⁹ also appears in MacDiarmid's *Golden Treasury*, it seems plausible that this, rather than the rare original text of Buchanan's poems, was the source for 'The Humanists' Trauchles in Paris'.⁵⁰ As with his versions of Pindar, Garioch imposes a

⁴⁸ NLS MS.26561/f.84.

⁴⁹ *Collected Poems*, pp. 107-112.

⁵⁰ The much shorter 'Swan Song' is a translation from the medieval German collection of Latin lyrics, the *Carmina Burana* (*Collected Poems*, pp. 159-160). In a sense, this poem links Garioch's single translation from the German vernacular – Goethe's 'Prometheus' (pp. 117-118) – with his more sustained exploration of the classical linguistic tradition.

stanzaic system absent in the original, though this time it is a regularity far more reminiscent of the eighteenth century than the medieval period of Scots poetry, as the opening stanza of the translation demonstrates:

Muses, fareweill! Fikefacks, awa!
 and yon Castalian spring anaa,
 whaur Phoebus' choir maist likes to blaw
 and bumm and blatter,
 awa wi ye, I've had eneuch!
 Fu lang ye've coupt me owre the heuch;
 see wha can syke a lyric souch
 on nocht but water.⁵¹

The difference in tone and register between this and the Greek translations is striking. Irony, which was not a significant ingredient in the makeup of the Hesiod translation, and if it was present in the Pindar took a highly abstruse form, dominates here. As with Burns' and Fergusson's great satirical works, Garioch's version seems intent on setting up statements of considerable mock pomposity, in order to immediately undercut them. The first line's farewell to the Muses, for instance, is rendered particularly absurd by its inaugural position at the start of a poem of considerable length. The increasing stridency of the speaker's tone is expertly handled and fully exploits the opportunities for crescendo and pause which the eight line stanza's three rhymes and alternation of tetrameter triplets and two beat lines, in this case with a hanging unstressed syllable, offer. However, the undoubted brilliance of Garioch's high comedy is darkened somewhat by a lexical reading which notes that the guard in his war poem, 'The Wire', shooting a prisoner, "blatters at him till he's deid."⁵² Such associations of vocabulary between poems may be particularly revealing of the ultimate tenor of a piece, given the manner in which Garioch, from poem to poem, constructs and reconstructs his language. Comedy, at times, may be more tragic than tragedy proper.

Garioch, turning six lines of Latin into eight of Scots, has, it turns out, brought over a good deal of the original's finer nuances. The first line for instance ("Muses, fareweill! Fikefacks, awa!") echoes Buchanan's original imperative banishing of "leues nugae" – flimsy jests – and the "Camenae" – the sterile Muses – closely.⁵³ However, the similarity between his version and Davie's prose crib printed in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* is also marked:

Away, useless trifles! Farewell, barren Muses! and the Castalian spring, favourite
 haunt of Apollo's choir! Away with you! I've had enough of you – I've passed youth

⁵¹ *Collected Poems*, p. 30.

⁵² *Collected Poems*, p. 44.

⁵³ *Georgii Buchanani Scoti Franciscanus et fratres. Elegiarum lib. I. Sylvarum lib. I. Hendecasyllabōn lib. I. Epigrammatōn lib. III. quibus jam recens accedunt De sphaera libri V* (Heidelberg: In Bibliopolio Commeliniano, 1609) p. 60. See: <http://eeb.chadwyck.com/search/displayImageItemFromId.do?BackTo=docImage&FormatType=fulltextpdf&ResultsID=&ItemNumber=1&ItemID=hin-wel-all-00000073-001&ImageNumber=2&PageNumber=2> [accessed 31/1/2014].

in your company and the best years of my life have been wasted. Seek someone who sees attractiveness in a life of song in hungry solitude; seek someone who can write lyrics with nothing to drink but water.⁵⁴

Davie's version, which MacDiarmid never found time to revise into a poem, simply communicates the drift of Buchanan's argument; as an English introduction to a poem few nineteen-forties readers would have known in the original, whatever their knowledge of Latin, it fulfils its purpose well. One thing it does not intend to be is a poem. Garioch, by transposing the rough semantic grid of the poem (and Davie's translation is close enough to the original that similarities between Garioch's version and the Latin could theoretically be traced to it) seeks to create an artefact of less pedagogic but more aesthetic value.⁵⁵ As Philip Ford writes with reference to Buchanan: "Imitation lies at the heart of all Renaissance writing, whether in Latin or the vernacular, yet the gap between a mere reworking of a classical theme and the creative use of classical sources to form a new composition can be enormous."⁵⁶ Needless to say, if Davie's prose version best fits the former description, Garioch's fulfils the challenge of the latter with some considerable style. Writing in the same volume, another modern Buchanan translator, Robert Crawford, seems to concur: "[by translating Buchanan] Davie performed many services to Scottish literature. But to turn poems into prose is to alter the medium, like making a film of a book. For those who really love poetry, prose will never do [...] Later in the twentieth century Robert Garioch made a Scots version".⁵⁷ Of course, to translate Latin into Scots is also to adapt the medium considerably. Rather than viewing the presence of line breaks and end rhymes as evidence of greater fidelity than Davie's close but somewhat prosaic crib, one might argue that Garioch's version is best seen as an imitation of Buchanan, emerging from a creative conversation with his work just as the latter in turn imitates and plays with the conventions of Classical satirists like Juvenal. Imitation, *pace* Ford, was central to the sixteenth-century European Renaissance; one of the central points of this thesis is that it was no less so to the twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance.

The case for the centrality of Buchanan to Garioch's work is highlighted by the presence, immediately after 'The Humanists' Trauchles in Paris' in the *Collected Poems*, of 'Garioch's Repone til George Buchanan'. This response to his translation of Buchanan's own poem expands upon the foregoing catalogue of misery in a loosely alternating series of rhyming tetrameters and trimeters, formally reminiscent of Lindsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. As always, Garioch's choice of form is significant. Here it seems plausible that Lindsay's play, with its allegorical corruption and

⁵⁴ *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, p. 25.

⁵⁵ A note in NLS Acc.9476/7 acknowledges the great help Davie's English version was.

⁵⁶ Philip Ford, "'Poeta sui saeculi facile princeps': George Buchanan's Poetic Achievement", in *George Buchanan: Poet and Dramatist*, ed. by Philip Ford and Roger P.H. Green (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2009), pp. 3-17 (p. 6).

⁵⁷ Robert Crawford, 'George Buchanan's Half Millennium', in *George Buchanan: Poet and Dramatist*, pp. 289-312 (p. 289).

purging of the realm, not to mention considerable bawdry, was useful not only for these reasons, but also because of the dramatically satisfying example set by its use of rhyme and metre. In the poem Garioch continues with his less than idealised depiction of the teaching profession:

A dominie wi darnit sark,
raxan his harns frae daw til dark,
 maun luik gey like a fule,
whan couthie dunces pey him hauf
of what he'd mak on onie staff
 outside a council schule.

Here the poet's great facility is again displayed to his advantage. In the opening line, the first syllable of "darnit" anticipates not only "harns" in the second line, but also the final rhyme of "dark". In the third line quoted, the use of "gey" prepares the ear for "pey" in line four. Equally, Garioch also displays some considerable allusive dexterity, for example in the lines: "A kep and gown – what dae they maitter?/ a kep and bells wad suit him better" and the final line of the main section of the poem, before the three-line moral coda, which describes the muse "sans merci".⁵⁸ The subtle references to Yeats's 'The Cap and Bells' and Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' reiterate the educational subject matter of the poem, perhaps suggesting that, no matter how many literary allusions an individual is capable of recognising and responding to, the world beyond the poem will still retain its ability to hurt and constrain them. Erudition alone will not save us, Garioch intimates, very eruditely. This, as discussion of his dramatic translations from Buchanan will now demonstrate, is not to imply that it cannot help. The key inference to be drawn from 'Garioch's Repone' is that, as Bassnett argues with reference to Longley's sonnet, an extended project of translation by a gifted poet almost inevitably impinges on their work more generally. Rewriting Buchanan's Latin text in Scots, Garioch consequently found himself drawn – translated, even – into a broader interpretative conversation with the sixteenth-century poet, which resulted in a creative work which, though not a translation in any traditional sense, would not have come into being had its author not been a translator also.

III. *Garioch and Drama*

In 1954, the year in which he completed his versions of Pindar, Garioch finally published *The Masque of Edinburgh*, which he had at this point been working at, on and off, for two decades. This work presents a highly comic, over-the-top version of the night life of Scotland's capital and remains a fascinating work in terms of Garioch's development as a writer of verse, and in particular as a writer of dramatic verse up to 1954. Discussing the two versions of Pindar, the question of the relationship between the choral dithyramb and tragic drama proper was raised. Given that *The Masque of*

⁵⁸ *Collected Poems*, pp. 35-37.

Edinburgh was published in the same year as the Pindaric translations, it is tempting to make a parallel assertion to the effect that Garioch's two tragedies, published five years later in 1959, have similar roots in his writings of the early and middle nineteen fifties. It seems reasonable to conjecture that several decades of habitual translation, coupled with at least one previous large-scale experiment with verse drama, boosted Garioch's confidence as dramaturge and verse translator. At any rate, in the mid to late nineteen fifties he began to feel strong enough in these two areas to attempt a task of the magnitude posed by the two Buchanan tragedies.

To see the plays in this light is to return them to the centre of Garioch's oeuvre as a translator – to regard them as the end result of many years of perhaps unconscious preliminary labour. Certainly, this was how their author saw them:

I translated both *The Baptist* and *Jephthah* and published them under my full name, meaning to switch over to that, which seemed a good idea at the time, but remarkably little notice has been taken of this, my pet work.⁵⁹

Robin Fulton, as always a sympathetic supporter of Garioch's work, has also made the case for the centrality, rather than marginality, of the Buchanan tragedies in relation to it:

Robert Garioch's 'The Humanists' Trauchles in Paris (translated frae George Buchanan)' together with 'Garioch's Reponne til George Buchanan' are deservedly among his most popular works [while his] Scots translations of Buchanan's Latin plays, *Jephthah* and *The Baptist*, never became so popular. This disappointed Garioch, for he felt (rightly) that he had done a good job⁶⁰

Garioch's decision to publish the translations under his proper name, Garioch Sutherland, is indicative of the significance which these plays took on for him. Since the poet had published under the legitimate enough, but still slightly pseudonymic Robert Garioch for so many years, the attempt to revert to his given name, whether a bid for authenticity or a new poetic personality, is certainly important. To set this in context, it is perhaps useful to imagine how readers would have felt if in 1959 Thomas Stearns Eliot had suddenly fleshed out his initials, or if Hugh MacDiarmid had vanished for good, permanently replaced by C. M. Grieve. At any rate, it is fascinating to find the Buchanan translations endorsed by both writers, with MacDiarmid describing an early extract from *Jephthah* as excellent in the September of 1955, as well as expressing his hope that Garioch will also be able to translate *Baptistes* once he has finished the first play.⁶¹ Eliot, reading a draft version of the latter play two years later, wrote to Garioch that, while the text was by no means easy reading for a Southerner like himself, he found the translation ingenious.⁶² Eliot added that, while it would be difficult to find a

⁵⁹ Letter to David Black, dated 26 November 1969, reprinted in *A Garioch Miscellany*, ed. by Robin Fulton (Edinburgh: MacDonald, 1986), p. 43.

⁶⁰ Robin Fulton, "'Tak him awa again": Notes on Robert Garioch's Scots Versions of George Buchanan's Latin Plays', *Translation and Literature*, Vol. 11. No.2 (Autumn 2002), 195-205 (p. 195).

⁶¹ Letter from C.M. Grieve to Robert Garioch dated 9th September 1955, NLS MS.26561/f.97.

⁶² Letter from T.S. Eliot to Robert Garioch dated 13th November 1957, NLS MS. 26561/f.131.

London publisher, he felt that in light of the celebrated revival of *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* in 1948, the play might be a great success at the Edinburgh Festival. One wonders whether the Pope of Russell Square ever came across Garioch's well-known send-up of the Festival, 'Embroid to the Ploy'.

Garioch's Scots preface to the two plays makes clear both his sympathies and intentions for the translations, referring to the

lang line o the auld Scottish Latinists – men wha spoke Scots, wrote in Latin, and haunnit English as a fremmit tongue, wha, in keeping wi the peculiar Scottish tradition o literary criticism, prelectit on Buchanan wi muckle fervour and by their skeelie analysis o his warks garred ilka generation luke upon poetry as a makar's weill-wrocht wark, naething in the nature o rhapsodical whigmaleerie being likely to impress them.⁶³

Inserting his own work into this Scottish Latinist tradition, Garioch distances himself from the more effusive forms of Romantic nationalism. In light of the strong classical strain in his poetry and translations, observed throughout this chapter, this is surely interesting. Referring to Buchanan's eighteenth century reception, he argues that "already [...] the Scottish men o ingyne, nae langer citizens o Europe, as Buchanan and the lave had been as a maitter o course, were lukan til England [...] the mycelium o this dry-rot was creepan throu the haill fabric o Scottish culture."⁶⁴ This second prong of his attack, sustained throughout the preface and, it might be argued, in the example of the plays themselves, is that pro-European, anti-provincial ideal familiar from MacDiarmid's work from the nineteen-twenties onwards. In the reference to dry rot and mycelium it is also tempting to speculate that, as the son of a house painter, Garioch was drawing upon lived experience for his castigatory vocabulary.

The plays themselves are, once one's ear has adapted itself to their music, probably among Garioch's most considerable achievements, not to mention two of the most interesting texts in the canon of twentieth-century Scots verse. Looking first to *Jephthah*, for instance, one finds the following exchange between Storge and Iphis, respectively the wife and daughter of Jephthah:

Iphis

Dear mithers, cast faur frae your mind
thae forbodings that weary your hairt
wi sorrow that has nae substance:
despise sic haverel fancies and forget them.

Storge

I wish I nicht forget, but aye as I mind,
terror aince mair taks haud o me:

⁶³ Robert Garioch Sutherland, 'Preface', in George Buchanan, *Jephthah and the Baptist: Translatit frae Latin in Scots by Robert Garioch Sutherland* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), pp. 5-7 (p. 5).

⁶⁴ *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 5.

the sights o yon fey dream stert up afore me
 and my hairt grues wi horror.
 Saft sleep silence had already stilled
 aa breathing things, and nicht had brocht
 its howe-dumb-deid, whan I saw in a dream
 a pack o wolves, rinning like the wind
 wi ganschan chafts chackit in blude and froth
 on a helpless flock, faur frae the shepherd.⁶⁵

This prophetic exchange, coming near the start of the play's first thirteen scenes, is integral to the action, setting as it does the tenor of the whole piece and from the start inculcating it with the inevitable catastrophe of Iphis' death. This portentous dialogue is a device employed frequently in classical or neoclassical tragedy, for instance in Racine's seventeenth-century *Iphigénie en Aulide*, in which the inevitability of Iphigenia's sacrifice is communicated subtly through a pre-dawn conversation between her father and one of his attendants. In both plays the action, which is always off-stage, unfolds through the voice alone, observing the Aristotelian unities. Reading Garioch's *Jephthah* closely, one notes the use of "haverel", a word previously familiar as "haiveral" in the translation from MacLean already discussed. Similarly noteworthy, considering this sort of literary cross-pollination between texts, is the use of "how-dumb-deid", a term immediately MacDiarmidian, and the retelling of the dream of wolves, which seems reminiscent of Sorley MacLean's eponymous dogs and wolves, chasing down the deer of language. In this context the wolves represent the Ammonites, whom Jephthah, represented by a "leal-collie", has driven off. However, on the same page Storge goes on to disclose that the collie subsequently "reivit a lamb" from her arms: this is to say, in exchange for military victory, Jephthah has sworn to sacrifice his daughter – another semi-parallel with Agamemnon and Iphigenia.

The Baptist is equally powerful in linguistic and prosodic terms, relying on the same loose regularity of forceful lines, which tend to recall the pentameter, though they do not stick to it closely. The prologue of the play is particularly interesting for the points at which, plausibly enough, Garioch seems to use his translation of another writer's words to comment upon his own situation:

Leean makars o langsyne tell us there levit
 a certain Proteus, wha had the pouer
 to cheenge himself, just as he chusit,
 til ilka form that tuke his fancy;⁶⁶

This and subsequent discussion of protean nature in the prologue ("I'se warrant I see sae monie a Proteus,/ wha can tak on new looks just as he likes,/ and cheenge colour like onie chameleon"⁶⁷) however much it may originally have been inspired by Buchanan's concerns with changeability and the chameleon, for example in his satiric essay of the same title, seems admirably applicable to

⁶⁵ *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 55.

⁶⁷ *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 55.

Garioch's own nature and concerns as a translator. Equally, it seems plausible that there is an allusion to his own work – and in particular to its undeservedly scanty reception – in the following lines:

For if some makar suld bring out an auld story
they grommil awa, gey ill to please,
they hoast and mak a brulyie, and bock,
but if he serve up onie new thing,
strechtwey they seek something auld-farrant
that pleases them graund, and wins their gude will.⁶⁸

Recalling for a moment the rather scanty performance history of Douglas Young's two versions of Aristophanes, one at least remembers that they were performed. Garioch, against his wishes and those of a number of twentieth-century Scotland's most distinguished writers and critics, never saw his own plays put on; neither, sadly, have they appeared in a professional production subsequent to his death.⁶⁹ As he put it in the Scots preface to the printed works:

Anent the language o this my translation, I wad dearly like to see and hear thae tragedies presentit on the stage, and hae ettled to set them furth in the practiceable leid o the Scottish theatre. An actor wi a gude Scots tongue in his heid will maist likely mak the words soun mair Scots nor the orthography wad suggest by the luke o'd; and I wad willingly traist him to speak them in his ain way.⁷⁰

There are clear analogies to be drawn between this openness to potentially interpretative collaboration with actors and directors and Garioch's similarly collaborative use of cribs and other intermediate texts. Bassnett, in a short essay on Shakespeare and stage translation, writes that in her view translating "for the theatre is not like translating poetry or a novel; it is not and should not be solitary work". This being the case, translators "for the theatre should be bold and collaborative and should remember that the image of Shakespeare at a desk writing a perfect finished play is nothing but a myth." Indeed, literary translators in general would tend to give the lie to the more solitary constructions of artistic genius, given that their works inevitably arise out of a process dependent on the triangulation of multiple voices and linguistic perspectives.⁷¹ This is particularly true of Garioch's translations, which in each case involve at least three texts – the original in the other language, an intermediate text and lastly the Scots version itself. It is to be hoped that future developments in Scottish theatre may one day allow Garioch's two dramatic translations, along with such other distinguished but unperformed plays as Edwin Morgan's adaptation of *Gilgamesh*, to be collaboratively interpreted as part of a professional production. Garioch, in his instruction to actors to make their own minds up on the orthography and its relationship to their pronunciation, offers a

⁶⁸ *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 55.

⁶⁹ I am grateful to J. Derrick McClure for informing me of a rare student production of the plays some years ago in Aberdeen.

⁷⁰ *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Susan Bassnett, 'Plays for Today', in *Reflections on Translation* (Multilingual Matters: Bristol, 2011), pp. 98-101 (pp. 100-101).

remarkable degree of freedom. One can imagine different directors overseeing startlingly different productions from the plays, aware that no single linguistic or dramatic interpretation can be final. Sometimes, of course, one wishes to see such openness curtailed, if momentarily, by the temporary closure of performance.

IV. *The Belli Sonnets*

The Roman Sonnets of Giuseppe Belli (1791-1863) remain Garioch's best-known adaptations from another writer. In an essay on the poet entitled 'The Power of Craftsmanship', his friend Iain Crichton Smith begins by stating that Garioch's work has neither "the intellectual adventurousness of MacDiarmid's nor the glamour and sensuousness of Goodsir Smith's, and yet it seems to me to have a quality which neither of these had to the same extent, that is, accessibility to the consciousness of the ordinary reader."⁷² Crichton Smith goes on to suggest, revealingly, that "by choosing to translate Belli he has distanced himself from his material and can comment on it freely and almost impersonally. Belli is his necessary mask."⁷³ The implications of the last sentence quoted are considerable, particularly when Crichton Smith's own proclivities as a translator are brought to mind. Would it be as true to suggest that MacLean and Duncan Ban MacIntyre are the Gaelic poet's own necessary masks in English? Why, ultimately, did Garioch translate more poems by Belli than he did any other writer?

As with many of Garioch's other translations, it was Carne-Ross who first introduced him to Belli and suggested that he might bring him over into Scots, providing him with English cribs from which to work from for the purpose.⁷⁴ Later on, Antonia Stott, an Italian lecturer resident in Edinburgh (and incidentally the mother of the actor Ken Stott) would intercede with Belli's originals.⁷⁵ Introducing the sonnets in the posthumous *Complete Poetical Works*, Stott suggests a few reasons for Carne-Ross' intuition that this particular Italian poet would slip naturally into Garioch's voice:

There was a lot in common between G. G. Belli and Robert Garioch: above all, of course, their love for and use of, respectively, the Roman dialect and Scots. They were both realistic and dramatic poets, penetrating observers of life, and were both endowed with humour. Belli's humour ranged from gentle, almost affectionate

⁷² Iain Crichton Smith, 'The Power of Craftsmanship', in *Towards The Human: Selected Essays* (Edinburgh: MacDonald, 1986), pp. 167-170 (p. 167).

⁷³ 'The Power of Craftsmanship', p. 168.

⁷⁴ Letter from Donald Carne-Ross to Garioch, dated 3rd February [1958] (NLS. MS.26595).

⁷⁵ The poet's correspondence with Stott is reprinted in *A Garioch Miscellany*, pp.148-171. They collaborated for six years (1975-1981) adding sixty eight translations to the fifty two printed in the 1977 *Collected Poems*. In terms of Garioch's process, it is interesting to note that he began each poem by deciding on the end rhymes, then fleshing out the structure of octave and sestet like a painter filling in a cartoon. On the whole, he strove to retain Belli's rhyme scheme, though the sounds of the Scots language sometimes necessitated certain minor deviations.

mockery to the most savage sarcasm. He was a satirist, whereas Garioch was a much gentler person.⁷⁶

In his introduction to Garioch's 2004 *Collected Poems*, Robin Fulton argues that the versions of Belli are, collectively, the poet's "most remarkable achievement" in the field of translation, ascribing something of this to the Italian's sense of "street life and gossip, [his] ear for the vigours of local speech; he could combine satire and compassion almost in the same breath."⁷⁷ As Fulton suggests, central to Garioch's interest in Belli was his sense that the Italian's Romanesco sonnets, written in a proletarian form of language marginalised by elite discourse, were in some ways a good parallel for what he himself was trying to do in Scots. Though Garioch was not a particularly politically demonstrative writer, there are clear political implications in his locating this link between himself and Belli. Unlike MacDiarmid, Young and Goodsir Smith (but similar to Tait, discussed in the final chapter of this thesis) with the Belli translations Garioch sought to enrich his own dialect of Scots through translation and lexical borrowing, rather than writing towards a more clearly synthetic literary Lallans of the kind employed in the Pindar and Hesiod translations. In this respect, Belli's vulgar celebration of the local and obvious antipathy to elitist pretension, especially as represented by the nineteenth-century Vatican, maps very neatly onto Garioch's less savage but nonetheless deep-rooted attachment to the local and demotic (which the more extreme forms of synthetic Scots tend to leave behind to some extent).

This linguistic aspect of the Belli sonnets, in particular, has attracted a number of critics. Christopher Whyte has argued forcefully for a radical re-reading of the sequence, and consequently of Garioch's oeuvre as a whole:

his Belli translations are a stunning performance, a testament to his exhilarating technical invention and mastery, his sympathy for the not infrequently bawdy humour of his *romanesco* originals and his ability effortlessly to cross the relevant cultural barriers [...] The sonnets can be looked upon as a logical development of the depersonalisation which had always been an aim of Garioch, one he paradoxically shared with MacDiarmid.⁷⁸

The radicalism of Whyte's discussion of Garioch is perhaps salutary, and the other side of the now familiar re-reading which seeks to emphasise the poet's preoccupation with the darker side of things. Whyte's reading may be necessary as a counterweight to those parts of Garioch's work which lend themselves to an overly comic, unambiguous response. His critique seeks to re-position Garioch as one of the more radical Scottish writers of the twentieth century. Translation is central to this reading, and according to Whyte, the sequence of Belli sonnets translated between 1958 and 1981 remains "his

⁷⁶ *Complete Poetical Works*, p. 217.

⁷⁷ Robin Fulton, 'Introduction', in Robert Garioch, *Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004), pp.ix-xxiv (p. xvii).

⁷⁸ Christopher Whyte, *Modern Scottish Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 121.

major achievement, in its way no less of an open, cumulatively borrowed text than MacDiarmid's *In Memoriam James Joyce*".⁷⁹

As regards the translations themselves, one finds an almost bewildering diversity of subject matter and register. This profusion, surprising after an extended consideration of those instances in which the poet translated only one or perhaps two of a writer's poems, is analogous to that of the city, the urban environment which is both Garioch and Belli's home turf and subject of choice. It is, however, concentrated by a number of prevalent concerns, one of which is – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the foregoing discussion of poetry from many times, places and tongues, linked always to contemporary Scotland by the poet's shaping intellect – history itself. For example, the fourth sonnet to appear in Garioch's sequence, 'Campidoglio':

This is Campidoglio, whaur Titus ran
his retail mairket, selling Jewish folk,
and here's whit they cry the Tarpeian Rock
whaur Cleopatra coupit her guidman.

Marcus Aurelius thair, aa spick and span
in his topcoat, fearing nae tempest-shock,
says Abbot Fea, keeper of antique trock,
sall turn to gowd, believe it if ye can.

Jist hae a guid luik at the mannie's face
and at the horse's rump, I think ye'll say
that ye can glisk a kinna yellie trace.

Whan the hail thing turns gowd, as weill it may,
that spells the end of even the statue's base,
because it shaws we're gey near judgement day.⁸⁰

The sonnet's opening line alludes directly to the particular area of Rome's known past, its great antiquity apparent from the references to Titus, the Tarpeian Rock and Cleopatra, as well as the not infrequent brutality recorded in the annals of that known past. The reference in the second stanza of the octave to Carlo Fea (1781-1836), the clergyman and antiquary nicknamed the Pope's archaeologist, turns from this invocation of history, its grandeur and its malignity, to the resurrection and re-evaluation of historical and archaeological material. The first line of the poem states, with some assurance, that this is Campidoglio, before cataloguing three further apparent truths which, by virtue of being textually attested in the historical record, the speaker accepts as fact. The second stanza admits apparently more doubtful material from the archaeological record, as well as a rather satiric reference to this material's producers and custodians. There is, indeed, almost a contempt for the leaps of logic and deduction which archaeology requires of its practitioners. Moving forward from the final line of the octave and on through the sestet, Fea's supposition that the statue of Aurelius is

⁷⁹ *Modern Scottish Poetry*, p. 120.

⁸⁰ *Collected Poems*, p. 164.

slowly turning into gold is both mocked and given a more serious twist. In the last line of the first tercet of the sestet, the use of “glisk” with reference to the statue’s face and, more pointedly, his horse’s rump, echoes Garioch’s celebrated sonnet ‘Glisk of the Great’, which subtly mocks the hubristic excesses of the so-called great. The last three-line stanza turns the sonnet once again, invoking judgement day and, in a sense, returning to the violence of the events alluded to in the first quatrain.

As with much of his other work, the Belli sonnets are alternately humorous and tragic, Romanesco and Edinburgh – as well as being, like many other Scots translations, in a sense both domesticating and foreignising. Translating a poet working in an urban dialect, Garioch stays comparatively close to the spoken language of his own Edinburgh roots (though he does make use of some synthetic vocabulary, for example “grugous” in the poem discussed immediately below). If Scots translations tend to hover between the estranging and the intimate, the language of these particular texts would seem to incline more towards the latter than the former. However, there is also a complementary dialectic of domestication and foreignisation in the sonnets as regards their relation to two specific places, Edinburgh and Rome. Often Garioch is content to leave the location of his translation Italian; sometimes place and personal names are transposed to Scotland. While the latter tactic might be construed as quite literally domesticating – inserting the foreign poem into a domestic cultural context – it could also be argued that, by referring directly to parts of Edinburgh or employing Scots personal names, the poet is quite clearly signalling the translated, mediated character of the text and so resisting fluency.

The subject matter of the poems is equally various, gesturing towards the full gamut of nineteenth-century urban experience. Throughout the sequence, Garioch and by extension Belli speak directly to and remain very much on the side of the workers whose language the sonnets celebrate and affirm. Linguistically, they can be contrasted with the more synthetic productions of a poet like Young, which though predicated on the idea of a fully realised and modernised contemporary Scots, were, at least initially, limited to a highly literate coterie readership by the language in which they were written.

Young’s work was, of course, not intrinsically conservative but in its own way radically political. One of the key points to make about Garioch’s Belli sonnets is that they are no less engaged, though their linguistic and political radicalism is of a more local, arguably less nationalistic character. It is also expressed in terms of the sonnets’ content. Though there is sometimes little direct condemnation of or attack on the powerful and corrupt, often these – particularly the clergy – are let off far less lightly. The note on which the sequence closes, however, is neither completely civic nor completely personal. Rather, in the final Belli sonnet, ‘The Cholera Morbus’, it is the human, transcendent of these categories, who speaks:

– Bit whit wanchancy times are ours! We hae
freedom, fludes and weir, the pest, the rain
that nivver gies owre, England, France and Spain,
aa faain in our times, my Agatha.

Richt nou, there's cam upon us muckle wae,
this grugous nestie seikness that has gane
throu the distressfu Kingdom, and has taen
yon puir Punchinello yesterday.

Hard luck on Punch, bit nae calamity
compared wi Jesus Christ's, duin out o's richts,
nae novena for his Nativity.

This is the first Christmas we ivver saw
without a hope of cribs or alter-lichts
and nut wan piper here to gie a blaw.⁸¹

As the last poem in Garioch's *Collected Poems*, before the appendices at least, the final Belli translation is leant added significance by its place at the end of a life by turns comic and tragic, medieval and classical. It seems fitting that the main body of his *Collected Poems* should close on this note, however much it is belied elsewhere in the volume. Perhaps it is more fitting still that this should be expressed in a translation, owing its ultimate position in the Scots sequence to that which it holds in a foreign text. There is something almost, but not quite, arbitrary about this. As Garioch understood and communicated, it is in an ambiguous space between necessity and freedom that the individual life exists within its historical moment. Translation, and in particular the forms of strict metrical translation which Garioch practised, is often like this. As with the composition of an original poem, it is on the smallest things – the choice between one preposition, one vowel sound and another – that the success of the whole depends.

It is appropriate that Garioch's life's work as a translator and poet should conclude with the melancholy realisation that, from now on, there will be no more cribs. When he died, Garioch had been translating Belli for a little over twenty three years. Few of his contemporaries translated so much of any poet. Edwin Morgan is the closest parallel, though in temperament and style the two writers could hardly be further apart (Morgan was of course a keen advocate for Garioch's writing). The comparison returns one to Whyte's contention that the Belli sonnets are to be read, like *In Memoriam James Joyce*, as a single polyphonic text.⁸² Unlike *In Memoriam James Joyce*, however, the sonnets are fundamentally demotic works. They pretend to no grand synthesis of language or experience; nor do they aspire to give a completely faithful account of any foreign text or collection of texts. There is a radical openness to the sequence, which catches the life of the city scrap by scrap,

⁸¹ *Collected Poems*, p. 222.

⁸² Christopher Whyte, 'Robert Garioch and Giuseppe Belli', in *Frae Ither Tongues: Essays on Modern Translations into Scots*, ed. by Bill Findlay (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004), pp.188-214 (p. 212).

cluttered, chaotic and vital as it undoubtedly is. This being the case, it is nevertheless arguable that, rather than *In Memoriam James Joyce*, truer analogues are other sonnet sequences such as Alistair Mackie's *Back Green Odyssey* (in which original sonnets alternate with translations), Morgan's *Glasgow Sonnets* and his later *Sonnets from Scotland*, published three years after Garioch's death brought closure to the Belli translations. This somewhat arbitrary conclusion to the sequence also drew a line under what had been, since the young poet's tinkering with his friend MacLean's own early work, a lifetime's labour of love.

On the primary level, Garioch's exploration of the formal and conceptual possibilities of poets in other tongues provided a purely personal means of expanding the range of his own writing. The close readings and discussion of secondary literature in this chapter provide ample evidence of the enduring artistic interest of these translations, aside from their wider cultural significance. Taken as a whole, Garioch's translations comprise a body of work emblematic of the impulse towards a cosmopolitan, intellectually adventurous vernacular literature, the interwar roots of which were discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Moreover, their creator's commitment to living speech, his wariness of received ideas and, crucially, his immense skill as a writer of verse allowed him to build upon MacDiarmid's legacy, while at no point becoming an uncritical propagandist for the Renaissance cause. In their own way, they are as significant a contribution to discourses around what verse translation in the twentieth century could be as the more voluminous oeuvres of poets like Lowell and Morgan.

Chapter Four – A Harsklike Singin: the Translations of Tom Scott

Poet, critic, editor and translator Tom Scott (1918-1995) was a determinedly Scottish writer who, while he may have begun his literary career furth of Scotland, produced his most enduring work by returning to his roots. Indeed, there is something of the zeal of the convert in Scott's later enthusiasm for the culture, and in particular the language, of his native place. Writing in 1963, for the inaugural issue of *Studies in Scottish Literature*, he opined: "Since the late 13th century, Scotland has been oppressed by a neighbour, England, whose amiable intentions towards Scotland have been, and are consistently, those of cultural and political genocide."¹ Certainly, it is hard to imagine Garioch – generally wary of uncritical nationalism – summarising the past seven centuries in this manner. While a committed nationalist like Goodsir Smith might have appreciated the sentiment, he would perhaps have expressed himself in less extreme terms. As with the sometimes problematic pronouncements of Young and MacDiarmid, it is important to acknowledge this side of Scott's nationalism. Such statements need not invalidate the more positive aspects of these writers' achievements as poets and translators, but do express an important part of their cultural thinking – a side of the Scottish Renaissance which prominent younger writers like Liz Lochhead and Tom Leonard increasingly sought to move away from in the later nineteen sixties and early seventies.

In 1987 *Chapman* magazine jointly dedicated an issue to Scott and his half namesake, Ann Scott-Moncrieff. Joy Hendry's editorial put it succinctly: "Surely one of the most neglected poets in Scotland is Tom Scott, whose single-minded dedication to poetry remains an example to us all."² The cover of the issue carried an appropriately striking portrait of the poet by Alasdair Gray. Inside, as well as a generous selection of unpublished poetry, were three critical essays by Christopher Whyte, Raymond Ross and Robert Calder. Whyte, focussing on *The Ship and Ither Poems*, compares Scott to Edwin Muir, writing that there "is nothing casual, then, in Scott's turning his powers as translator to Dante and Villon, and to such a profoundly (post-) Catholic poet as Baudelaire"³. Ross suggests that "Scott, like MacDiarmid, has been in the forefront of a battle to re-take for poetry some of the ground it has lost to prose [...] the most valuable characteristic of Scott's work lies in his evocation of "the Real".⁴ Calder mentions David Jones' fondness for Scott's poetry, also writing, somewhat mysteriously, that "apart from versions from Villon, Baudelaire, Dante, there is an ear for classical French cadence through a lot of Scott's poetry."⁵

Born in Glasgow in 1918, Scott was the son of a shipyard boilermaker, whose working class childhood instilled with lifelong socialist convictions and a deep respect for skilled labourers, of

¹ Tom Scott, 'Observations on Scottish Studies', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol.1 Iss.1 (1963), 5-13 (p. 5).

² Joy Hendry, 'Editorial', *Chapman* Vol.IX No.4-5, 47-8 (1987), 1.

³ Christopher Whyte, 'Tom Scott: An Imaged World', *Chapman* 47-8 (1987), 7-13 (p. 10).

⁴ Raymond J. Ross, 'The Real Tom Scott', *Chapman* 47-8 (1987), 17-23 (p. 23).

⁵ Robert Calder, 'An Overview of Tom Scott's Poetry', *Chapman* 47-8 (1987), 28-34 (p. 29).

whatever nationality. In a handwritten ‘Autobiography’, dating from the mid-nineteen sixties, Scott writes about his early memories of his parents and the Partick area of Glasgow.⁶ When his father was laid off by Harland and Wolff in 1931 the family moved to St Andrews and a more secure job with Scott’s maternal grandfather’s building firm. This was a crucial event in the poet’s early life, transporting him from the dark smoke of industrial Glasgow to the more open landscape of small-town Fife. It was in St Andrews, a place in no short supply of medieval monuments, that Scott spent his formative teenage years, laying the foundations for an oeuvre which returns again and again to the European Middle Ages.⁷ The art and literature of this period was Scott’s perpetual fascination, albeit not his only historical or intellectual preoccupation. As with MacDiarmid, Scott’s dialectics and aesthetics tended towards grand syntheses, though one might argue his poems were generally more successful when dealing with the particular.⁸

Scott’s early work was, like that of his Scottish contemporaries J.F. Hendry, G.S. Fraser, Norman MacCaig and W.S. Graham, closely associated with the New Apocalypse Movement. Exploiting an oblique and frequently nonsensical style, influenced by Surrealism and psychoanalysis, the New Apocalypse sought to reflect the apparently overpowering experience of mid-twentieth century history. David Daiches, writing in the June 1943 issue of *Poetry*, suggested that this group’s emergence signified “the birth of a new romantic movement.”⁹ Like their namesakes nearly two centuries before, these new romantics were defined by their innovative approach to language. In his essay Daiches singles out “Tom Scott, a former stone-mason, who writes unfettered by formulas or programs [sic]. He has a Hopkinsesque sense of language and imagery [...] and an unselfconscious virtuosity rare in modern poetry.” He also describes Scott’s ‘Sea-dirge’ as “a fine example of the contemporary English elegy.”¹⁰ As regards the course of Scott’s mature poetry, the linguistic re-fashioning of the Apocalypse poets was clearly important.

Daiches’ representation of the twenty five year old Scott to an American audience makes no mention of the poet’s nationality. This is significant, coming as it does from the pen of a critic who would surely have been quick to comment on the Scottishness of Scott’s work, had he felt it appropriate to do so. The first version of ‘Sea-dirge’, published in M.J. Tambimuttu’s *Poetry in Wartime*, the Faber anthology Daiches was reviewing for *Poetry*, opens thus:

I found him drowned on the rock that night
And the wind high; moonlight it was
And the hungry sucking of the sea

⁶ Tom Scott, ‘Autobiography’, (NLS Acc.11751/1).

⁷ In terms of Scott’s original poetry, the key St Andrews document is the long poem *Brand the Builder* (London: Ember Press, 1975).

⁸ <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57753?docPos=1> [accessed 18/03/2014].

⁹ David Daiches, ‘Contemporary Poetry in Britain’, *Poetry* Vol.62, No.3 (June 1943), 150-164 (p. 158).

¹⁰ ‘Contemporary Poetry in Britain’, p. 162.

At my feet, stretching away in front of me;¹¹

The version entitled ‘Sea Dirge: A Mither’s Keenin’ which appears in Scott’s *Collected Shorter Poems* has undergone a striking translation, now beginning with the lines:

I found him droun on the rock that nicht
and the wind high. Muinlicht it wes
and the hungry suckin o the sea at ma feet
streikin awa in front o me.¹²

The poem has been transformed, becoming, in this second version, an undeniably Scots artefact.

William Cookson, the founder (with Ezra Pound) of the prominent poetry magazine *Agenda*, wrote in his obituary of Scott, published in *The Independent* shortly after Scott’s death in 1995: “The first version of [‘Sea-dirge’] was in English, but Scott later realised that the rhythm of it was that of Scots and he altered the spelling accordingly.” Cookson discusses Scott’s transition from Neo-Apocalyptic English to Scots, arguing that the poet wrote “memorably in both forms of language”, neatly avoiding the question as to Scots’ linguistic status. He also emphasises the importance of translation as regards this transition, suggesting that “Scott found his voice in Scots by visiting Europe, in particular Sicily. He then realised that he belonged to the great tradition of Scottish poets (Dunbar, Henryson, Gavin Douglas) which was more European and less insular than much of English poetry.”¹³ It seems fitting, then, that one of the first poets Scott seems to have translated into the tongue was himself.

Translation was to be a central part of Scott’s mature work, allowing him to refashion his poetic persona, experiment formally and, crucially for this most traditional of poets, enter into dialogue with writers ancient and modern. The late translation of Ronsard’s sonnet *Quand vous serez bien vieille*, the source text for Yeats’s ‘When You Are Old’, seems the work of a different writer to the twenty five year old anthologised by Tambimuttu:

Ay, when you are auld left yourlane
In a hauf-lit room dozan fornenst the fire,
Ye’ll mind this poem – or read it in some quair –
By Tam Scott scrievit in lang-remeidit pain.

Syne ye will mind the time, my bonnie ain,
His love he rantit in the caller air,
And sawed his poet’s kisses in your hair,
Afore ye lichtlied baith in prood disdain.

He himself will be under the mool, his bane,
Gien owre by the frugal worm, nou bare;
And you, tae, by Daeth will suin be taen,
Aye greinan for the love ye’s get nae mair.

¹¹ Tom Scott, ‘Sea Dirge’, in *Poetry in Wartime*, ed. by M.J. Tambimuttu (London: Faber, 1942), p. 157.

¹² *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 46.

¹³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/obituary-tom-scott-1596211.html> [accessed: 15:43 21/03/2014].

O come while ye can, your beauties willna bide:
Mak for the shore while aye it's rinnan tide.¹⁴

From the French original:

*Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir à la chandelle,
Assise auprès du feu, devidant et filant,
Direz chantant mes vers, en vous esmerveillant,
Ronsard me célébroit du temps que j'étois belle.*

*Lors vous n'aurez servant oyant telle nouvelle,
Desja sous le labour à demy sommeillant,
Qui au bruit de mon nom ne s'aille resveillant,
Benissant vostre nom de louange immortelle.*

*Je seray sous la terre et fantôme sans os
Par les ombres myrteux je prendray mon repos:
Vous serez au fouyer une vieille accroupie,*

*Regrettant mon amour et vostre fier desdain.
Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain:
Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie.*¹⁵

Imitating the same poem in 1891, Yeats turned Ronsard's sonnet into three quatrains, inconceivable without the French behind them, but whose implications are ultimately very different. In the final two lines of his poem, Ronsard turns away from his evocation of his Helen, aged and recalling the young man whom she refused, who is now survived and indeed immortalised by the poetry he wrote in a doomed attempt to woo her. Anchoring his poem in the present moment, the French poet urges his lady not to delay, but to gather the rosebuds of life while she still can. Yeats, thinking presumably of Maud Gonne, leaves out the last two lines, concentrating solely on the anticipated remembrance of things past, wherein the woman addressed may "Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled/ And paced upon the mountains overhead/ And hid his face amid a crowd of stars."¹⁶ Similarly, Scott's response to Ronsard's poem is indicative of his own priorities and intentions as a translator. As with 'When You are Old', the Scots version is written in the translator's voice, not Ronsard's – indeed, "Tam Scott" is explicitly identified at the end of the first quatrain, with the lover figure shifted from the first to the third person. Following the tight Petrarchan rhyme-scheme in the octave, as with Yeats it is in his response to the sestet that Scott is more innovative, both formally and in terms of subject matter, replacing Ronsard's rose gardens with an arguably more northern race towards the shore (one notes the similar absence of shadowy myrtles in the Scots poem).

In its attempt to bring the present moment and Scottish context into contact with a longer tradition of utterance and literary form across borders and languages, Scott's version of the French

¹⁴ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 167.

¹⁵ Pierre de Ronsard, *Oeuvres complètes: I*, ed. by Jean Céard, Daniel Ménager and Michel Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), pp. 400-401.

¹⁶ W. B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright (London: Everyman, 1992), p. 62.

poem points to a possible triptych of texts: Ronsard's sonnet, Yeats's 'When You are Old' and finally the Scots translation, which balances the perspectives of both (versions by George Mackay Brown and William J. Tait will be discussed in the next chapter). This final perspective – the Scottish vernacular reinforced by both European and English poetry, notably the late and high modernist strands of the latter – is symptomatic of Scott's work as a translator; the end result of his long haul towards cosmopolitan lucidity, and the principal subject of this chapter. Building on this insight, this chapter considers his Scots versions of poems in a number of different European languages, exploring the significance of these foreign texts for Scott's understanding of his own Scottish linguistic and cultural identity. The importance of his key modern influences – MacDiarmid and Eliot – is also addressed in light of his translations and the extended engagement and argument with tradition which they represent.

I. Villon

In 1953, Scott's first book, a series of translations from the fifteenth-century French poet François Villon appeared, published by Peter Russell in Tunbridge Wells.¹⁷ A decade after the five early works collected in *Poetry in Wartime*, it is as though one is reading a different poet, whose firm but sensual grasp of the Scots language is a world away from the tight, Neo-Apocalyptic English of the nineteen forties. This change in direction is meaningful not just as regards Scott's individual case, but also in terms of the wider linguistic landscape of Scottish poetry during the late nineteen forties and early nineteen fifties. As exemplary Scots translations by one of the tongue's most interesting modern practitioners, the seven poems Scott brings across are, taken together, a composite text comparable to Garioch's Belli sonnets. Just as the Edinburgh poet's translations from the Roman sonneteer are in a sense a reading of the possibilities of Scots across the later decades of the twentieth century, so Scott's Villon forms a snapshot of the tongue in the immediate post-war years, as well as highlighting the Scottish Renaissance's connections with and indebtedness to Anglo-American modernism.

A key aspect of the Villon translations' interest is their creation at the suggestion of no lesser a writer than T.S. Eliot.¹⁸ Relaying a series of anecdotes from Scott's London years, Green links the translations to Eliot and Pound, but seems unaware of their genesis at the behest of the former (not to mention the actual nature of Villon's poetry, very little, if any, of which seems actually to have been composed in the dungeon of the Châtelet):

Another memorable meeting was with T. S. Eliot. Tom had translated into Lallans the last poems of Francois [sic] Villon, written as the poet awaited execution. Tom wanted the opinion of the "inscrutable mandarin". At his invitation Tom had gone

¹⁷ Tom Scott, *Seven Poems of Maister Francis Villon* (Tunbridge Wells: Pound Press, 1953).

¹⁸ A small cache of letters from Eliot to Scott, now held in the manuscript collections of the National Library of Scotland, sheds some light on the relationship between the two men.

round to his house to present his work, and was rewarded by a gravely approving nod.¹⁹

Comparing Eliot's perusal of Scott's Villon with Ezra Pound's editorial role in the composition of *The Waste Land*, Green goes on to describe the latter, incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, writing to the young Scottish poet in praise of his achievement. Pound "had written to congratulate Tom on his Villon translations, which he regarded as the finest in existence. It was written on a postcard which Tom showed to me, with a poor attempt at concealing justified pride."²⁰ On the 21st of May 1953,²¹ Eliot wrote to Scott from Faber and Faber's London offices, apologising for the lateness of his letter and explaining how very successful he had found his Scots versions of Villon.

This promising beginning to the extant correspondence is undercut somewhat by Eliot's polite rejections of Scott's poetry for volume publication, in letters dated 25th of August 1954 and 17th of June 1959. Citing a linguistic failure of appreciation on both occasions – in essence, that he does not understand Lallans sufficiently to publish Scott at Faber and Faber – a remark found in a lecture given at Nice on the 29th of March 1952 may be revealing. This essay, titled 'Scylla and Charybdis', appeared for the first time in an Eliot special number of *Agenda*:

I have gained in the course of my life a very extensive acquaintance with bad and indifferent verse. It comes to me daily, from all quarters of the world; chiefly, of course, in English; but in other languages too, and even in languages wholly unknown to me – for the last, I can only guess at its quality from the laws of probability.²²

It is the contention of this chapter that Scott's poetry, both original works and translations, is a great deal more than merely bad or indifferent verse. However, given Eliot's readiness to acknowledge the linguistic status of Scots (in his correspondence with Scott and other modern Scottish poets, if not in the much earlier essay 'Was There a Scottish Literature?') this aside may be revealing – for if Scots was not wholly unknown to Eliot, then neither was it a tongue in which he ever felt completely at home. In terms of his high praise for the Villon translations, one recalls his equally enthusiastic assessment of Douglas Young's Valéry, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Is it too much to infer that the presence of a French original in both cases helped Eliot to a fuller appreciation of the Scots poem? While this may have been a largely linguistic matter, it seems reasonable to suggest that the undeniable cultural authority of Valéry and Villon helped Eliot to a greater confidence in the text before him than might otherwise have been the case. One might add that for Scott and Young too, the presence of canonical originals – authorities in the true medieval sense – probably functioned in much the same way, allowing them to claim a larger portion of cultural capital than they might easily have done by writing a poem from scratch.

¹⁹ *A Clamjamfray of Poets*, p. 60.

²⁰ *A Clamjamfray of Poets*, p. 61.

²¹ Letter from Eliot to Scott dated 21st of May 1953: NLS Acc. 11750/5.

²² T.S. Eliot, 'Scylla and Charybdis', *Agenda* Vol.23 Nos.1-2 (Spring-Summer 1985), 5-21 (p. 10).

As Jane Taylor writes in her 2001 study, *The Poetry of François Villon: Text and Context*, “every age creates its own Villon.”²³ Born in Paris in 1431, Villon the man remains somewhat indistinct, emerging blurrily from a loose tatter of primary sources, most of them relating to his brushes with the law on charges of murder and theft, as well as the obviously problematic autobiographical references in his poetry. Nothing is known of Villon’s movements after 1463, when he was banished from Paris for brawling. This open-endedness, not to mention the novelty of a great poet who was also a convicted priest-killer, has provided many subsequent writers with material for occasionally striking biographical speculations. Discussing the fascination the fifteenth-century poet held for writers such as Théophile Gautier, Rossetti, Swinburne and Stevenson (whose short story ‘A Lodging for the Night’ resuscitates Villon) Robert E. Morsberger suggests that the “vigor and sometimes brutal realism of Villon” offered a potentially valuable corrective to “the effete insipidity of overrefined aesthetics”²⁴. The Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, a victim of Stalin’s purges and so perhaps a modern parallel for the incarcerated medieval writer, detected this same potential for modernity in Villon, linking him to Verlaine and writing that the “contemporary French symbolists are in love with things [...] Villon was highly conscious of the abyss between subject and object, but understood it as the impossibility of possession.”²⁵ Another twentieth-century Russian writer, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, describing the Gulag hierarchy in which habitual criminals terrorised political prisoners, wrote – with a little more irony than Mandelstam – “indeed, has not all world literature glorified the thieves? It is not for us to reproach François Villon [...]”²⁶

Whether or not Villon in fact understood the world – and himself – in the rather definite terms Mandelstam proposes, it is true that, for many writers and artists concerned with possession, subjectivity and social breakdown (notably the modern movement and its immediate antecedents) Villon has been of great value. Of many such responses to the poet, Pound’s and Eliot’s are probably those with the greatest direct significance for Scott’s translations. In 1919 Eliot had used the opening lines of Villon’s *Le Testament* for the epigraph of ‘A Cooking Egg’²⁷ and in his 1921 critical work *The Sacred Wood* cited “the right seriousness of great literary art: the seriousness which we find in Villon’s *Testament* and which is conspicuously absent from *In Memoriam*”²⁸ as well as “the peculiarity of all great poetry: something which is found (not everywhere) in Homer and Aeschylus

²³ Jane H. M. Taylor, *The Poetry of François Villon: Text and Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

²⁴ Robert E. Morsberger, ‘Villon and the Victorians: The Influence and the Legend’, *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Language Association* Vol.23 No.4 (Dec.1969), 189-196 (p. 193).

²⁵ Osip Mandelstam, ‘François Villon’, trans. by Sidney Monas pp.633-639, *New Literary History* Vol.6 No.3 (Spring 1975), 633-639 (p. 636).

²⁶ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956*, trans. by Thomas P. Whitney and Harry Willets; abridged by Edward E. Ericson, Jr. (London: Harvill, 1986; 2003), p. 261.

²⁷ T.S. Eliot, *Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 44.

²⁸ T.S. Eliot, ‘Imperfect Critics’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Knopf, 1921) pp. 15-41 (p. 39).

and Dante and Villon.”²⁹ Pound adopted him as one of his *Personae* in several poems, notably ‘Villonaud for this Yule’ and ‘A Villonaud. Ballad of the Gibbet’³⁰. He also devoted one chapter of his study *The Spirit of Romance* to ‘Montcorbier, alias Villon’, declaring that “Villon paints himself, as Rembrandt painted his own hideous face; his few poems drive into one in a way unapproached by the delicate art of a Daniel or a Baudelaire.”³¹ Closer to Scotland, the Northumbrian poet Basil Bunting structured his first sonata, ‘Villon’, in terms of a juxtaposition of the contemporary moment and the fifteenth-century words of the French writer.³²

Given this considerable body of modern or modernist response to Villon, through direct translation as well as more oblique methods, it may be useful, in close reading Scott’s own versions, to ask what makes these distinctive. To what extent is their response conditioned by the Anglo-American modernist tradition? To what extent are they informed by a more MacDiarmidian approach? If these two commitments are not mutually exclusive in Scott’s work, then this presumably makes it of greater interest than its currently neglected status would suggest. It may also point to cultural connections and modes of reading which have been to some extent overlooked by the poet’s predominantly Scotocentric public.

Villon’s *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis* is a good place to begin discussion of Scott’s translations. As its title would suggest, the poem is a ballade of three eight-line stanzas, each ending with the refrain “Mais ou sont les neiges d’antan?” followed by a four-line envoi, also ending with this refrain. A textbook instance of the *ubi sunt* topos, the *Ballade* lists a number of famous women of the Classical and Medieval periods, asking where they are now, before concluding that they are no more substantial than the melting snow. The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, discussing this topos as one of the three motifs by which the “endless complaint of the frailty of all earthly glory was sung” in the Middle Ages, reduced its essence to the question: “Where are now all those who once filled the world with their splendour?” Huizinga argues that “Villon gives [this complaint] a new accent of soft tenderness in his *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis*”, quoting the refrain to support his case.³³ Wyndham Lewis described the poem as “[one] of the master songs of the world, with its gentle rhymes in *-is* and *-aine*, the exquisite ache of its music, caressing and soothing to dreams, and its lovely refrain. Its melancholy inquiry and evocation and its concern with Death are common to large

²⁹ T.S. Eliot, ‘Blake’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Knopf, 1921), pp. 137-143 (p. 137).

³⁰ Ezra Pound, *Poems and Translations* (New York: Library of America, 2003), pp. 28-30.

³¹ Ezra Pound, ‘Montcorbier, alias Villon’ pp.176-190 in *The Spirit of Romance: An Attempt to Define Somewhat the Charm of the Pre-Renaissance Literature of Latin Europe* (London: Dent, 1910), p. 183.

³² Basil Bunting, *Complete Poems*, ed. by Richard Caddel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 7-11.

³³ Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. by F. Hopman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 134-135.

masses of medieval poetry: but it is incomparable.”³⁴ The first stanza of the French poem, followed by Scott’s version of it, reads as follows:

*Dictes moy ou, n’en quel pays,
Est Flora, la belle Rommaine?
Archipiades ne Thaïs
Qui fut sa cousine germaine?
Echo parlant quant bruyt on maine
Dessus riviére ou sus estan
Qui beaulté ot trop plus qu’humaine?
Mais ou sont les neiges d’antan?*³⁵

Tell me whaur, in whit countrie
Bides Flora nou, yon Roman belle?
Whaur Thaïs, Alcibiades be,
Thon sibbit cousins. Can ye tell
Whaur cletteran echo draws pell-mell
Abune some burn owre-hung wi bine
Her beautie’s mair nor human spell –
Aye, whaur’s the snaws o langsyne?³⁶

Considering the two versions side by side, it is apparent that Scott has been remarkably successful in rendering his original, staying close to the source text but also making occasional interpretative departures from it. The opening line of the Scots poem reflects the French metre, establishing a loose tetrameter which is maintained throughout. The first two lines of ‘Ballade O the Leddies O Langsyne’ follow the pattern of Villon’s poem practically without deviation, rhythmically and syntactically. It is in the third line of Scott’s poem that one finds the first real swerve from the source text, with the order of dead ladies being reversed and the verb brought forward from the fourth line of the French stanza. Scott also corrects Villon’s misprising of his own sources. Readers familiar with Greek literature and history will perhaps be surprised to find the figure of Alcibiades in a catalogue of deceased women; the Scots poem reasserts his masculinity, replacing the erroneous Archipiades with her male original.³⁷ This strategy, while of course justifiable in terms of fidelity to the poem’s Classical cultural background, has the awkward side effect of leaving Alcibiades’ presence in the *Ballade* unexplained. Scott’s wonderful rendition of the three lines dealing with “cletteran” Echo, enormously effective in their fusion of sound and sense, again follows the original loosely; not least in the absence, perhaps unintended, of an upper-case *e*- to denote the lady in question.

Scott’s poem seems to admit a certain candour, a certain resistance to the impersonality of his topos. He is not content to simply sigh softly over the departed ladies’ memory, but sees at once a black joke and an enduring tragedy in their immateriality. This duality is characteristic of Villon. His

³⁴ *François Villon: A Documented Survey*, p. 348.

³⁵ François Villon, *Poems* (London: Anvil, 2001), p. 74.

³⁶ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 26.

³⁷ This misunderstanding apparently derives from Boethius. See: Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 406.

poems do not resolve into sublimity; neither are they limited by a banal realism denying the validity of abstract and religious modes of experience. Like Baudelaire, Villon is an essentially urban poet of sin and salvation. In this lay his inspirational value for modern writers confronting a crisis of faith and culture. Scott was clearly invigorated by this aspect of Villon's poetry. One sees this in his 'The Prayer Scievit for his Mither to Pray our Leddy', from the French *Ballade Pour Prier Nostre Dame*:

*Femme je suis povrette et ancienne
Qui riens ne sçay, oncques lettre ne lus.
Au moustier voy dont suis paroissienne
Paradis paint ou sont harpes et lus
Et ung enfer ou dampnez sont boullus.
L'ung me fait paour, l'autre joye et liesse
A qui pecheurs doivent tous recourir
Comblez de foy sans fainte ne paresse:
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.*³⁸

A puir carlin I am, forfochen, duin,
And never larnt to scribe my name nor spell.
But in our parish kirk I've often seen
Picters o Hevin, whaur angels harp and mell,
And ithers whaur the sinners byle in hell:
Tane cuist me down, and tither heich again.
The heich alane, heich Goddess, lat be mine!
Whase lamp o faith maun aye undimmit shine.
In this douce faith I willin live and dee.³⁹

The *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis* presents the reader with a vision of mortality, yet does so with a far softer sense of finitude than the *Ballade Pour Prier Nostre Dame*. The latter looks behind the snows of yesteryear, perceiving a somewhat warmer underlying reality. The poem's first stanza deals with this directly, addressing the Virgin as "Emperiere des infernaux palus"⁴⁰, a title Scott memorably renders as "Empress o the ill-reekin bogs o hell".⁴¹ This stanza, which counterpoints the two states in a manner reminiscent of Gregory Smith's famous juxtaposition of grinning gargoyle and praying saint, particularises Villon's speaker, and not only at the level of the title (Villon's titles were in any case added after his death by his sixteenth-century editor Marot, with most of the poems previously referred to simply as *Ballade* or *Autre Ballade*). The first line of the French stanza lacks a separate indefinite article, and as a consequence seems to gesture towards the universality of "Woman I am, poor and very old." If the speaker is indeed Villon's mother, then she is also Everywoman: a universal voice to set alongside *Grosse Margot* and *La belle Heaulmière*, both of whom also sustain the antinomies of heaven and hell, abject and sublime, which the poet develops here.

³⁸ *Poems*, p. 120.

³⁹ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 27.

⁴⁰ *Poems*, p. 118.

⁴¹ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 27.

Scott's translation is again very successful in capturing the pathos and high seriousness of his original. To do this he interprets Villon's poem creatively, sacrificing wooden fidelity to metrical and lexical vigour. The second line of this stanza, for instance, might more literally be rendered "Who knows nothing, can neither write nor read." Scott provides more background information – she never "larnt to scribe [her] name nor spell." Despite the arguably foreignising tendencies of his language, at times he takes decisions which might be described as domesticating, for instance turning Villon's "moustier" into a rather Scottish sounding "parish kirk". In his marvellous solution to the fourth line, Scott adds angels absent in the French, turning Villon's harps and lutes into verbs: the harping and melling of these angelic musicians. Catching the *volta* in the middle of the stanza, Villon's fire in which the damned are boiled changes, becoming further images (the French emphasises the depiction less, staying closer to the otherworldly experience itself). In this manner, Scott's version moves towards the lyrical refrain "In this douce faith I willin live and dee", which while a successful line sacrifices the twin infinitives of the French "In this faith I wish to live and die" as well as sweetening the faith in question.

Like Eliot, Scott is a modern poet much concerned with the place and nature of belief in society. His translations of Villon, his first book-length publication as well as his first large-scale work into Scots, are of great importance as regards the linguistic direction of his poetry. They are equally important in terms of the other large themes to which his work attempts to do justice: history, European culture, social change and the possibilities of faith in the twentieth century. For the late-medieval Villon, Christianity was an unquestionable, palpable part of reality; potentially more real than the physical world around him. For a twentieth-century poet like Scott, the divinity of existence was far less secure, requiring a concomitantly greater leap of faith.

II. *Dante, Saint John of the Cross, Baudelaire*

Co-editing a special 'Hugh MacDiarmid and Scottish Poetry' double issue of *Agenda*, Scott also contributed an essay discussing MacDiarmid's long poem 'Lament for the Great Music', which he rates above 'On a Raised Beach'.⁴² This essay is revealing in a number of ways, not only as regards Scott's great enthusiasm for the work of the older Scottish poet, who is in many respects his master, and his own concern for the language(s) of Scottish poetry. It also contains a digression in which Scott sets down something of a credo, a manifesto even, for his own work. In 'Lament for the Great Music' Scott writes that as he understands it

⁴² Tom Scott, 'Lament for the Great Music', *Agenda – Double Issue: Hugh MacDiarmid and Scottish Poetry*, (Autumn-Winter 1967-68), 19-26.

the movement of European poetry leads up to the allegorical form dominant in the Middle Ages; and when that breaks up, takes the twin lines of realism and symbolism; and in the twentieth century (beginning earlier, probably with Goethe), the realist and symbolist lines re-integrate into a new polysemous art in which, instead of the abstract theology (or theory) of allegory proper, reality itself in the historical and scientific senses, becomes the adequate “symbol” or allegorical term of a new vision. I call this new art, to which all modern art is moving, “Polysemous Veritism”, to distinguish it from Dante’s “Polysemous Allegory”.⁴³

This potted theory of European poetry, from Dante to Goethe to Scott, must have come as something of a surprise to more than a few of *Agenda*’s subscribers, who had been led to believe they were reading an essay dealing with MacDiarmid’s work of the nineteen thirties.⁴⁴ Whether or not it verges on arrogance to implicitly compare oneself with Goethe and Dante, this extract is in any case of some considerable relevance as regards the poet’s translations of the great writers of the Christian tradition, particularly in terms of their relation to the rest of his work, both creative and critical. This section will focus on three writers in particular, whose works in a sense describe the development of European religious experience from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century: Dante, Saint John of the Cross and Baudelaire.

The earliest of these three poets is also the most difficult. The difficulty of the text belies the huge number of translations, particularly of *The Divine Comedy*. Confronted with the plethora of modern renditions, many of them by well-known poets, the budding verse translator might well feel somewhat embarrassed by the riches on offer: what is there for a new version to contribute?

There will always be new readings and re-interpretations of old texts. As Eliot, Pound, MacDiarmid and Scott all appreciated, the central problems of being and of society do not evaporate with the passing of a single generation. For Dante, one key period of re-reading and translation was the nineteenth century, as evinced by works such as Longfellow’s metrical translations and Doré’s illustrations. Another was the early twentieth century, during which period the Italian poet joined Villon, the Troubadours and others in the revitalisation (some might say appropriation) of the canon by Anglo-American modernism. Beside a number of iconic citations – the epigraph to *Prufrock*, the dedication of *The Waste Land* and so on – one finds also a great deal of critical and creative engagement with the medieval Florentine and his world. In the aforementioned *Spirit of Romance*, Pound, translator of Daniel and Cavalcanti, eulogised Dante:

One might indefinitely continue the praise of Dante’s excellence of technique and his splendours of detail; but beneath these individual and separate delights is the great

⁴³ ‘Lament for the Great Music’, 20.

⁴⁴ Discussing MacDiarmid’s importance to him in the ‘Autobiography’, Scott writes that he immediately took to the older poet, finding him to be an infinitely more liberating presence both as a man and a writer than he had Muir, whom he concedes was MacDiarmid’s equal intellectually (‘Autobiography’, p. 96).

sub-surge of his truth and his sincerity: his work is of that sort of art which is a key to deeper understanding of nature and the beauty of the world and of the spirit.⁴⁵

Earlier in the same chapter, Pound had affirmed: “Any sincere criticism of the highest poetry must resolve itself into a sort of profession of faith.”⁴⁶ It is easy to imagine Scott assenting. In terms of the Pound connection, one also wonders at the following lines from John Fuller’s 1973 verse epistle ‘To Ian Hamilton’, occasioned by the tenth anniversary of the latter’s magazine *The Review*: “At least ten years ago there were no/ Worse than those who, sipping *Pernod*,/ In Lallans ruined the *Inferno*/ With tips from Pound.”⁴⁷

Another key text as regards the modern appreciation of Dante is Eliot’s long essay on the poet, published as a slim volume in 1929. Setting aside the poise of mandarin inscrutability characteristic of his critical work, for once Eliot neither professes nor implies omniscience:

I am not a Dante scholar; my Italian is chiefly self-taught, and learnt primarily in order to read Dante; I need still to make constant reference to translations. Yet it has occurred to me that by relating the process of my own gradual and still very imperfect knowledge of Dante, I might give some help to persons who must begin where I begin – with a public school knowledge of Latin, a traveller’s smattering of Italian, and a literal translation beside the text.⁴⁸

One reflects that out of this apparently imperfect appreciation of Dante (in combination with many other texts, perfectly or imperfectly understood) Eliot made *The Waste Land*. As regards Scott’s knowledge of the Italian poet, one is tempted to infer that, while the Scottish writer lacked a public school education, Latin was a far more integral part of the general curriculum in the early twentieth century than it is today. This, coupled with documented visits to Florence and Sicily and a plethora of English translations, seems to place him at no considerable disadvantage compared to Eliot.

The Collected Shorter Poems contains two translations from Dante – the canzone *Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro* and an extract from *Canto XXVI* in the *Inferno*. The former, whose incipit Scott translates as “I want to be as harsklake in my singin”, is the fourth and final poem in the short sequence of canzoni known as the *rime petrose*. These canzoni, apparently composed in the middle of the last decade of the thirteenth century, postdate the *Vita nuova* and predate the *Commedia*. The collective label, *rime petrose*, refers to the comparison, made in each canzone, of the woman addressed to a stone.⁴⁹ *Così nel mio parlar*, according to the Oxford commentary, is while “generally regarded as the most remarkable stylistically and the most successful poetically in the Pietra group” furthermore “experimental, and [though] not evidence of a break with traditional poetics [...Dante’s]

⁴⁵ *The Spirit of Romance*, p. 172.

⁴⁶ *The Spirit of Romance*, p. 162.

⁴⁷ John Fuller, *Collected Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), pp. 110-111.

⁴⁸ T.S. Eliot, *Dante* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929), p. 11.

⁴⁹ Robert M. Durling and Ronald R. Martinez, *Time and the Crystal: Studies in Dante’s ‘Rime petrose’* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 32.

later poems certainly gain considerably in lexical and therefore expressive range from this experience, and the unorthodox approach to poetic diction that is evident here was obviously one of the most important prerequisites for the lexical richness and variety of the *Comedy*.⁵⁰ This is therefore a transitional work, concluding the *rime petrose* but also pointing forwards towards the *Commedia*. Scott acknowledges this by placing the canzone immediately before the *Inferno* extract in his *Collected Shorter Poems*.

As regards the translation itself, Scott rises admirably to the canzone's intricacies, which call for some considerable virtuosity in terms of the poet's maintenance of fluidity over a large, thirteen-line stanza. In an age dominated by the breezier aesthetics of enthusiastic *vers libristes*, it is easy to forget the degree of formal skill required to handle a roomy stanza of varying line length, necessitating the conjunction of four different rhyme sounds. Scott's opening stanza reads as follows:

I want to be as harsklike in my singin
 As yon wee queyn ti me is whunstane hertit,
 She wha, since we first stertit
 Grouws mair coorse and stane-door ilka minute,
 Diamant the dress that's roond her clingin.
 And for that, or she's sae gleg depairtit,
 There is nae flane is dairtit
 Can skart her nakit skin nor billet in it.
 She'll murder ye, and there's nae help agin it,
 Nae use to hide yersel frae her fell dingin
 That, as gin it tae wes wingan,
 Raxes ye and caas down aa defences:
 Bumbazed I thole near reivit o my senses.⁵¹

In the first line of the Scots there is a meaningful indeterminacy of intention, resolved by the entrance, in the second line of the "bella petra", Scott's "wee queyn".⁵² If one regards the Scots language as, stereotypically at least, more "harsklike" in its nature than Standard English, the first line of Scott's translation can be read as an expression of his volition for the vernacular. This adds a fresh significance to the translation. As with many medieval works of art, it may be that, unlike the work's original audience, the reader's response is conditioned by the degree to which one is able or even wishes to step away from the allegorical structure. Aware, like Dante's thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audience, that the reality of the "bella petra" is to a certain extent irrelevant to her significance, twenty first-century readers naturally search for other interpretations. One of these, particularly in light of Dante's exemplary status as vernacular writer and author of *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, might parse this poem in terms of Scott's confrontation with the linguistic landscape of

⁵⁰ K. Foster and P. Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Vol.II, Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 273-275.

⁵¹ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 43.

⁵² For Dante's original see: K. Foster and P. Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Vol.I, The Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 170.

his own time.⁵³ Certainly, Scott's translations of canonical European poets, as well as those of his contemporaries, might be understood as intending a socially radical form of vulgar eloquence, expanding the range of their own vernacular that it might do justice to reality and experience.

With the canzone it is possible to propose an analogy between the language of Scott's poem and what is being said. The extract from *Canto XXVI*, although largely composed of recounted speech, makes no similar interpretation plausible. The *Canto* takes place in the Eighth Circle of Hell, having just passed from the seventh to the eighth *bolge*. In the course of Dante and Virgil's descent from the seventh *bolge* – populated by thieves – to the eighth – fraudulent counsellors – they catch sight of many pinpricks of flame in the darkness below. A beautiful simile follows, likening the poet to a herdsman on a summer hillside, perceiving innumerable fireflies or glow-worms in the darkened valley below. This pastoral simile is swiftly undercut by a closer glimpse of these flames, each of which contains an evil counsellor. As they come closer, Dante asks Virgil about the contents of a particularly impressive double-pronged fire. The elder poet informs him that within it burn Diomedes and Ulysses, Greek heroes from the Trojan War. Dante, amazed, asks Virgil to intercede with the spirits, at which point Scott's translation begins:

Syne, cairryan back and furth, the tap o it
 As gin it were the tongue itsel that spak,
 Beverit furth a voice that uttert: "When
 I took my weygaein frae thon Circe, wha
 Near Gaeta, had abuin a year backheld me,
 Lang or Enie gied the place its name
 Neither browdenan on my son, nor thocht
 For my auld faither, nor yet the aucht love
 That should hae made Penelope sae crouse
 Could get the better in me o the yare
 I had for mair experience in life,
 The warld, and ilka human vice and virtue."⁵⁴

Rendering Italian hendecasyllabics in Scots blank verse, Scott makes no attempt to reflect the *terza rima* of the original.⁵⁵ This decision is understandable, since the interlocking sequence of rhymes which the Italian scheme requires is proverbially hard to match in a rhyme-poor language. Nevertheless, recalling Scott's version of the canzone, it is clear that, had he believed a Scots *terza rima* (necessitating three rhymes on each sound used to end a line) was required then he would have been fully capable of producing such. The potential for *terza rima* to sound strained or unnatural,

⁵³ See: Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia* trans. by Stephen Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Dante did not, like Scott, wish to liberate colloquial language from elite dominance; quite the reverse. His discussion of eloquence in the vernacular does not see all forms of speech as equal, promoting highly prescriptive attitudes as regards form and the relative worth of the various tongues of medieval Europe.

⁵⁴ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1947), pp. 245-246.

compared to blank verse, when coupled with the semantic requirements of the source text, may also have been a factor here.

Dorothy L. Sayers, in an essay dealing with translation of the *Commedia* in general, writes that this passage is “the most astonishing synthesis of the classical and romantic in all literature. The difficulty here is to achieve anything like the sheer, unornamented, limpid simplicity of the original.”⁵⁶ Scott’s decision to translate one of the most discussed passages of the poem is clearly significant. Writing, in a sense, from the margins, one might expect him to reclaim a less well-known episode involving a less notorious sinner. That he did not do this is symptomatic of his work as a whole. Scott rarely valorises the marginality of his language; rather, he wishes to demonstrate its right to centrality. Equally, Scott’s habits of reading and translating were governed by a strong conviction, influenced in no small degree by Eliot’s example, as to the simultaneity and contemporary significance of past literatures. The Ulysses passage from the *Inferno*, which in a single scene presents a Homeric character, a Roman poet and their medieval Florentine narrator, is in a sense the ideal pretext proving the longevity and historical validity of this conviction.⁵⁷

Scott’s Dante translations draw upon his wider exploration of medieval European culture and religion. His single translation from Saint John of the Cross follows on from this exploration, bringing it forward into the sixteenth century. While Scott’s versions of Villon and Ronsard map similar late-medieval and renaissance territory, they are nevertheless distinct; secular rather than religious literary artefacts, for all their preoccupation with the transcendent. His translations from Dante engage directly with a more metaphysical strand of European literary experience, in which the *Divine Comedy* constitutes something like an enormous encyclopaedia of philosophical, liturgical and mythological expression. Saint John of the Cross, a sixteenth-century martyr of the Counter-Reformation, offers another perspective.

The Saint, born Juan de Yepes y Álvarez in 1542, died in 1591. He left a number of prose works, including the famous *Dark Night of the Soul*, as well as a handful of remarkable devotional poems, the longest of which is the *Spiritual Canticle*, apparently initiated in a tiny prison cell in Toledo. The single poem by Saint John which Scott translated, *En una noche oscura*, takes the form of a monologue comprising eight stanzas of five lines each, all rhyming a-b-a-b-b with occasional use of refrain.⁵⁸ The forty-line poem describes the progress of an individual, slipping out in secret one night to an eroticised rendezvous, with the other party explicitly defined as masculine. At no point is

⁵⁶ Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘On Translating the *Divina Commedia*’, *The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement and Other Posthumous Essays on Literature, Religion and Language* (London: Gollancz, 1963), pp.91-125 (p. 122).

⁵⁷ The sparse minimalism of ‘I’ve Tint My Bairnskip’ and ‘Me a Craitur’, Scott’s two translations from the modernist poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, shows a very different side of his engagement with Italian poetry (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 167).

⁵⁸ San Juan de la Cruz, *Poesías*, ed. by Paola Elia (Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1991), p. 115.

the allegorical significance of this narrative remarked upon – all lies in the interpretation. Scott, domesticating in more ways than one, titles his translation ‘The Tryst’. The reader, perhaps reminded of William Soutar’s poem of the same title, may recall the complex weave of the erotic and the sublime in that much shorter work, and wonder whether Scott was consciously aware of this connection. The first two stanzas of the Scots read as follows:

Upon a midnicht dreary
 My sperit wi the lowes o love aleamin
 (O ferlie ploy and eerie!)
 I gaed, a lover scheming,
 While aye my feres were deep in sleep or dreamin.

Sauf frae speiran leerie
 I gaed oot by the secret stair, unseemin
 (O ferlie ploy and eerie!)
 Sauk frae ill-willie deemin,
 While aye my feres were deep in sleep or dreamin.⁵⁹

Alluding to Poe’s ‘The Raven’, Scott’s translation of the first line, “Upon a midnicht dreary”, immediately places his version in the context of the more archaic forms of Scots verse, particularly Dunbar’s religious poems. Following the word order of the Spanish, the word choice nevertheless moves the poem’s frame of reference away from that of the original. *En una noche oscura* conjures up a far more abstract, metaphorical dark night than the dreary midnight of the Scots, which seems to reflect a more concrete experience. Whether this is a strength or a weakness depends, presumably, on the individual sensibility. While deviating occasionally in terms of strict meaning, Scott nevertheless follows the structural movement of his source text fairly closely. He varies the length of his lines accordingly, and reflects the entirely feminine rhyme-scheme as far as is possible in Scots (the Spanish lines all end on –a, and consequently rely on the initial syllable of the rhyme to establish the quality of the sound).

‘A Voyage to Cythera’, Scott’s version of Baudelaire’s *Un Voyage à Cythere*, appeared in the third issue of *Lines Review*, published in summer 1953. Unaccountably, it was not reprinted in the *Collected Shorter Poems*. Baudelaire’s poem takes its inspiration from Gérard de Nerval’s prose description, in his 1851 *Voyage en Orient*, of a cliff-top gibbet he had witnessed while sailing just off the Greek island of Cythera, formerly the site of the cult of Venus.⁶⁰ The poem blends luxuriant images of the goddess and her priestess with grotesque description of the decaying body in the gibbet and the wild beasts feeding upon it (Villon’s *Ballade des Pendus* is a clear precedent). Scott translates the opening quatrain as follows:

Ma hert, lik a bird, breenged hiech wi ecstascie,

⁵⁹ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 42.

⁶⁰ Gérard de Nerval, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. II., ed. by Jean Guillaume and Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 240.

An flirtit an flung amang the stars up-by.
The ship fair lurched alow a cloudless sky
Lik an angel bricht wi the sunlicht's haedie bree.⁶¹

From Baudelaire's French:

*Mon coeur, comme un oiseau, voltigeait tout joyeux
Et planait librement à l'entour des cordages;
La navire roulait sous un ciel sans nuages,
Comme un ange enivré du soleil radieux.*⁶²

The lurch and dip of Scott's loose five-stress lines, reminiscent of the medieval metrics of his master Dunbar, catches the boat ebbing and rolling on the blue Aegean. When Cythera itself appears in the next quatrain he describes it as a "dismal inch" (for Baudelaire's "île triste et noire").

In the third quatrain Venus' "gorgeous spreit/ Smools roond yir seas on aramatic feet,/ An gars the saul wi lykerus langors move." The reader notes the Scotticising trend in "aramatic" and "langors", as well as the Chaucerian use of "lykerus" (a word the reader may recall Garioch using in 'The Hierodules', intriguingly published the same year as 'A Voyage to Cythera'). Scott excels in the description of the hanged man and the carrion creatures devouring him:

The een were holes, an frae the gawpan waim
The swollen thairm hung doun aboot the hurds.
Gluttit wi obscene sweetmeats, the birds
Had libbit him allutterlie wi ferlie faim.

Ablow the feet, a pack o yalpan dogs
Mulled roon aboot wi droolin jaws.
The biggest ane, heezan on his paws,
Stuid lik a hangman surroundit bi his thugs.⁶³

From Baudelaire's:

*Les yeux étaient deux trous, et du ventre effondré
Les intestins pesants lui coulaient sur les cuisses,
Et ses bourreaux, gorges de hideuses délices,
L'avaient à coups de bec absolument châtré.*

*Sous les pieds, un troupeau de jaloux quadrupeds,
Le museau relevé, tournoyait et rôdait;
Une plus grande bête au milieu s'agitait
Comme un exécuté entouré de ses aides.*⁶⁴

The grotesquery of this part of the poem is captured wonderfully in Scott's translation. Scots words like "waim", "thairm" and "libbit" are far earthier than their French originals. There is a real brutality

⁶¹ Tom Scott, 'A Voyage to Cythera (from the French of Baudelaire)', *Lines Review*, No.3 (Summer 1953), 24-25 (p. 24).

⁶² Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. by Y.-G. Le Dantec and Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 111.

⁶³ 'A Voyage', pp. 24-25.

⁶⁴ *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 112.

to the image of the “yalpan” and “droolin” dogs snapping up the birds’ leavings at the base of the scaffold. The poem ends with a characteristically Baudelairean turn, with the poet identifying himself with the man in the gibbet (“Ridicule pendu, tes douleurs sont les miennes!” for Scott’s “Puir strung-up fuil, yir doole’s the same’s ma ain!”). Like the reader and the albatross elsewhere in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the body on the gallows becomes a symbol for the speaker’s self-disgust and sense of dissipation. The vanished cult of Venus, identified with a kind of decadent, perfumed potential energy, provides a vivid counterpoint for this image. Scott’s translation, unread in a literary magazine from sixty years ago, shows the importance of linguistic minutiae – words and the minimalia of medieval echoes – to his transplantations of the great writers of the European tradition into modern Scots. In terms of Scott’s often very deliberate interventions in the Scottish canon, the thematic parallels between ‘A Voyage to Cythera’ and his version of Villon’s *Ballade des Pendus*, published in the same year by Peter Russell, are surely significant.

‘Gloamin’, Scott’s translation of Baudelaire’s *Le Crépuscule du Soir*, the first translation in his *Collected Shorter Poems*, appeared in *The Ship and Ither Poems* in 1963, with the more recondite Scots words glossed in the left-hand margin. These glosses were dropped for the *Collected Shorter Poems*, though incorporated into the word list at the back of the volume. The original poem, the tenth in the sequence of *Tableaux Parisiens* which appeared in the second, 1862 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, is a far cry from the kitsch gloaming of popular song. Baudelaire describes the day’s end in nightmarish terms, depicting the various low-lives and pleasure seekers who emerge from the Parisian shadows once the sun sets and the streets are lit by the dim illumination of the new gas lamps. Scott’s version of the poem’s opening, given alongside the original, runs as follows:

Comes the gloamin hour, the cut-throat’s freend:
Comes on sleekit fuit wi wowfish mien.
The lift like an auditorium dims down,
And man waits till his change to baest comes roun.

O Nicht! O freendly nicht, fair dear ti men
Whase arms and harns can say: ‘This day, Guid kens,
We’ve duin our darg!’ The nicht alane can cure
The faroush pain in eident spreits and dour –
The trauchlit scholar’s, as he rubs his brou:
The forfairn workman’s, hapt in the bedclaes nou.⁶⁵

And Baudelaire:

*Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel;
Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup; le ciel
Se ferme lentement comme une grande alcove,
Et l’homme impatient se change en bête fauve.*

Ô soir, aimable soir, desire par celui

⁶⁵ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 23.

*Dont les bras, sans mentir, peuvent dire: Aujourd'hui
 Nous avons travaillé! – C'est le soir qui soulage
 Les esprits que dévore une douleur sauvage,
 Le savant obstiné dont le front s'alourdit,
 Et l'ouvrier courbé qui regagne son lit.*⁶⁶

Scott retains the rhyming couplets of the original, whose alexandrines he converts into pentameters. It is in terms of the sense itself that one finds his most revealing interpretative decisions. In the first line, Baudelaire's "criminel" has been particularised, becoming a "cut-throat". Just before this, the French poet's "soir charmant", which clearly undercuts the tropes of romantic poetry, has become less charming. Scott's "gloamin hour" is a key change, since it seeks to do the same thing for overly nice representations of Scottish sunsets: to damage them and reveal the unpleasant reality underpinning the ideal.

Scott is a remarkably effective translator of Baudelaire. He himself had his doubts, writing to Tom Hubbard on 6th March 1985 that he had at one time translated "more than half of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but all but a few have long been lost. His French is too subtle, sophisticated, urbane, neurotic and hyper-sensitive for Scots: unlike the roaring extrovert Villon, who is a gift for Scots."⁶⁷ Marguerite Caetani, the Italian aristocrat and editor of the magazine *Botteghe Oscure*, disagreed, writing to Scott from her Palazzo in Rome that she was delighted with his Lallans versions of Baudelaire and that Robert Lowell, who had been staying with her, had found them better than any English translations of the same poems which he had read.⁶⁸ This section of *Crépuscule du Soir* is intimately concerned with corruption and violence, and how much and at what times it is possible to see these things. Baudelaire, the *flâneur* who strolls, observing and commenting, through the filth and glory of the great city, is a vital poet because of his ability – and willingness – to look at those aspects of urban existence which the narratives of power often seek to erase. His refusal to look away is exemplary, as is his frustrated longing for a better world. Scott, capturing something of this and transplanting it into his own place and time, uses Baudelaire's poem to make similar statements about the reality, as opposed to the romantic fiction, of twentieth-century Scotland. Later in the nineteen sixties, Tom Leonard would use a stripped-back, extremely terse Scots prosody, derived from American demotic modernists like William Carlos Williams, to comment on the Scottish urban condition. Scott's work as a translator offers many instances of a similarly committed, vernacular reading of a different strand of the modern tradition: his few surviving translations from Baudelaire are key texts.

⁶⁶ *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 90.

⁶⁷ Letter to Tom Hubbard dated 6th March 1985. I am grateful to Tom Hubbard for making this personal correspondence available to me.

⁶⁸ Letter from Marguerite Caetani to Scott, dated June 3rd (year missing). NLS Acc.11750/3. In a letter from Florence to Elizabeth Bishop, dated April 24 1951, Lowell writes: "We've been to Pisa, Siena, seen 5 or 6 of the wonders of the world, and visited the Princess (*Botteghe Oscure*) Caetani – a mad, sympathetic aristocratic Mrs. Ames, not deaf and really nice and kind, at least to us – but mad, so that though a grand and tireless manager, she thinks of nothing except her magazine – like an only child, a simile I understand so well." *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. by Saskia Hamilton (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 171.

III. Greek Anthologists and Anglo-Saxon Seafarers

The core of this chapter's argument is that a wide-ranging, cosmopolitan approach to tradition and modernity, informed by Eliot as much as MacDiarmid, lies at the heart of Scott's mature achievement. To some extent this is true of all the poets discussed in this thesis, though particularly evident in Scott's work.⁶⁹ As the juvenilia published in *Poetry in Wartime* shows, he might very easily have taken a different route, becoming another Norman MacCaig or W.S. Graham; perhaps another Ruthven Todd or G.S. Fraser. These poets all chose English as their primary poetic language. That he did not do so, instead choosing Scots, or perhaps being chosen by it, is the remarkable fact of his career. To move translation to the centre of this still underappreciated and little understood oeuvre is to emphasise the importance of this choice, for, as this chapter has demonstrated, an ideological commitment to European culture – anathema to his Movement contemporaries – was integral to it. Focusing on Scott's translations from canonical poets in Romance languages, all Christians of one sort or another, this chapter has situated the main strand of his writing in the context of modernist re-evaluations of this tradition.

Scott also translated from several Ancient Greek poets. As always, his choices are revealing. Most of the Romance poets he translated might be located fairly close to the centre of the Western Canon. With the Greeks, Scott stays closer to the edges, as in his metrical version of the Hellenistic poet Meleager (c.140-70 BCE).⁷⁰ Here Scott's imposition of the ballad form and what appears to be some considerable creative licence makes it difficult to work out, at first, exactly which poem of Meleager's lies behind the Scots stanzas. The most likely candidate is the one numbered 182 in the seventh book of the *Greek Anthology*.⁷¹ Tellingly, this poem also appears, untranslated, in the 1930 edition of *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse*.⁷²

Significantly for the anthologist Scott, Meleager was one of the most important compilers of Greek epigrams, whose *Garland* is one of the principal sources for the tenth-century *Palatine Anthology*, assembled at Byzantium. Scott was co-editor, with John MacQueen, of *The Oxford Book of Scottish Verse*, later editing *The Penguin Book of Scottish Verse*.⁷³ It is worthwhile noting that these anthologies, key introductory texts for Scottish poetry which therefore played an important role

⁶⁹ That his *Collected Shorter Poems* were published by *Agenda*, a magazine co-founded by Pound, and *Chapman*, a magazine which explicitly continued the Scottish Renaissance project, is emblematic of this.

⁷⁰ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 29.

⁷¹ *The Greek Anthology: II*, ed. and trans. by W.R. Paton (London: Heinemann: Loeb Classical Library, 1925), pp. 102-105.

⁷² *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse*, ed. by Gilbert Murray, Cyril Bailey, E.A. Barber, T.F. Higham and C.M. Bowra (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 558.

⁷³ *The Oxford Book of Scottish Verse*, ed. by John MacQueen and Tom Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); *The Penguin Book of Scottish Verse*, ed. by Tom Scott (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

in canon formation, were not uncontroversial projects. For instance on the 17th March 1965 Edwin Morgan replied to Ian Hamilton Finlay's complaints about the supposedly conservative choices (i.e. no concrete poetry) Scott and MacQueen were making, writing that "it is monstrous if what you say about the [*Oxford Book*] is true" but conceding that Oxford University Press "have made him editor and an editor is perfectly free to include or exclude as he thinks fit; the mistake (as we all knew at the time) was in appointing someone so unobjective in the first place."⁷⁴ Of course, Finlay could himself be a somewhat unobjective personality – though wildly dissimilar in formal and linguistic terms, he and Scott were alike in their readiness to take up cudgels. Morgan (who was included in both the *Oxford* and *Penguin* anthologies) clearly bore no lasting grudge – he later wrote a poem for Scott at seventy five. This poem, entitled 'Macaronicon', is appropriate in the context of Scott's translations, comprising as it does the description of a battlefield, repeated in English, Scots, French and Italian, concluding with a sentence made up of all four languages.⁷⁵

James Hutton, discussing the origins of the *Greek Anthology* before his main thesis as to its reception and survival in Italy to 1800, writes: "What we know as the Greek Anthology is a product of Constantinople. The foundation was laid by Meleager, a Syrian Greek, who gathered his *Garland* [...] probably at Cos, in the early part of the first century before Christ."⁷⁶ W.R. Paton, introducing the Loeb edition, details the compilation of the *Anthology* from three previous collections in the tenth-century, as well as its survival in a single manuscript in the Palatine Library at Heidelberg. Paton also suggests Meleager was a "quite unique personality in his own age", adding in a footnote that "Antipater of Sidon is however [Meleager's] contemporary."⁷⁷ The likelihood that the Loeb edition of the *Anthology* is the source of Scott's original is increased greatly by this footnote, since in the issue of *Chapman* jointly dedicated to him and, posthumously, to Ann Scott-Moncrieff, one finds a short version of one of Antipater's poems, absent from the *Collected Shorter Poems*. The version appears, acknowledged as a translation, directly underneath the Meleager poem, not explicitly identified as a derivation from another poet. This second epigram, 'Corinth Sacked' reads:

Whaur hes your saer-socht beautie, O Dorian Corinth, gane?
 Whaur your garlandit, touered was, the trophies ye won?
 Whaur's your temples, your mansions, whaur ilk fablit queyn?
 Whaur are your thoosant heroes, the chiels ye bore langsyne?

There's little left o aa thon passion, ma begrutten Queen.
 The maw o war's devorit aa like they'd never been.
 We oorlane, we mermaid swaws, dochters o the sea,

⁷⁴ Edwin Morgan, *The Midnight Letterbox: Selected Correspondence 1950-2010*, ed. by James McGonigal and John Coyle (Manchester: Carcanet, 2015), pp. 133-134.

⁷⁵ Edwin Morgan, *Sweeping out the Dark* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), p. 22.

⁷⁶ James Hutton, *The Greek Anthology in Italy to the Year 1800* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1935), p. 9.

⁷⁷ *The Greek Anthology: I*, ed. and trans. by W.R. Paton (London: Heinemann: Loeb Classical Library, 1927), p. v.

Byde here to dree your dule, the halcyons greet for thee.⁷⁸

The version of Meleager's sepulchral epigram mourned an individual loss. Antipater's poem (written in the voices of the Nereids, the daughters of Ocean) mourns for the collective tragedy of the Sack of Corinth by the Romans in 146 BCE. This epigram, number 151 in the ninth book of the *Greek Anthology*, also appears in the 1930 edition of the *Oxford Book of Greek Verse*.

Paton, noting Meleager and Antipater's lateness with regard to their own age, seems to hit upon something of the attraction of these poems to Scott. Like the Alexandrian Cavafy, the Scottish poet is an artist in the late style, to adopt Edward Said's use of the term. His work, like that of many of his Scots contemporaries, is marked by an often involuntary sense of an ending; its more jarring dissonances occur when he unsuccessfully attempts to resist this sense of finitude. His great successes come through a more stoical, nuanced exploration of it. Through Villon, the younger Scott had posed the question *ubi sunt*? The Greek epigrams, at the end of his career, ask substantially the same question, particularly the translation from Antipater. The Nereids' lamentation over the rape of Corinth prefigures Ben Jonson, asking what it means, for those who were Greeks, to die as Romans? What does it mean when your language and culture are being replaced? What can one say that is adequate to such a situation?

One has to say something, in any case, and Scott said a great deal, much of it in English. Some of his work went further, to the very beginnings of English poetry. His two translations from the Anglo-Saxon, 'The Seavaiger' and 'A Dream O the Rude', turn to a period in the history of the British Isles predating such divisions as England and Scotland. Where Scott's many versions of Romance and Classical poets sought to make connections with other times and places, one feels that as with Alexander Scott his Old English translations almost intend a confrontation with the southern tradition. The language of 'The Seafarer' is, after all, the ancestor of Scots as well as English – a fact of which Scott, with his keen interest in medieval history and language, would have been well aware. His own version rewrites the Anglo-Saxon in an appropriately rugged trochaic measure:

A suthfast sang I can sing o my life,
Vaunt o vaigins, hou I vexious tyauvin
In days o sair darg hae dreeit aften.
Bitter the breist pangs I hae abydit,
Kent abuin keels care-trauchlit wonnins,
Mangset o the mainswaw. Mountit I aft there
Nitherin nichtwauk in the neuk o the forestam
As she nidgit close cliffs.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Tom Scott, 'Corinth Sacked', *Chapman* 47-8 (1987), 26.

⁷⁹ *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 83.

Scott maintains a close count of three alliterations per line, with two coming before the caesura and the third after. His translation has therefore a greater regularity of form than Pound's 'The Seafarer', in many ways its ancestor:

May I for my own self song's truth reckon,
Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days
Hardship endured oft.
Bitter breast-cares have I abided,
Known on my keel many a care's hold,
And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent
Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship's head
While she tossed close to cliffs.⁸⁰

Both versions are eminently successful, with each translator drawing upon the original metric – quite opposed to the Latinate liquidity of a Villon or a Baudelaire – to remake his language in a more Germanic, more identifiably northern mould. For Pound, it is the possibility of finding a metre and outlook, distinct from the ubiquitous postromantic iambics of the Edwardians, which attracts him to the Anglo-Saxons. For Scott, it is to do with laying bear alternative cultural histories; resisting the overarching narratives of English Literature and making more energising links with the past. Comparing several Scots and English versions of 'The Seafarer' (by Pound, Tom Scott, Alexander Scott and Edwin Morgan), John Corbett acknowledges Pound's influence on the Scottish Renaissance, as well as the more oppositional aspects of the modern Scots translation of Old English poetry, whereby "the past is refashioned according to the concerns of the present." Discussing the visibility and scandalous potential of the various translations, Corbett reiterates the point that "visible translation in Venuti's terms is still dependent on a hegemonic model of the English language. For visible translation to exist, there has to be a notion of a standard variety, and non-standard varieties that depart from it."⁸¹ Complicating the notion of visibility by addressing the numerous ways in which different translations – some not prototypically visible – can signal their translated status, Corbett argues that Scots translation cannot be reduced to a simple binary of fluency and foreignisation. Even Lallans – "a fusion, or synthesis, of Scots characteristics" which seeks "to represent the disparate nation as a unified whole" – has domesticating possibilities.⁸² Similarly, there are ways in which less obtrusive translations into, say, regional varieties of Scots can announce themselves as versions of another text. Ultimately, Corbett argues, "no clear-cut correlation can be drawn between the visibility of the translator and the variety of language used." After all, "there are no simple dichotomies in a field awash with candidates (faithful *vs* free, visible *vs* invisible, ethical *vs* scandalous) [...] each of which embodies a complex of ideological assumptions about the purposes of translation, and about how individual texts are best read."⁸³

⁸⁰ Ezra Pound, *Personae* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 60.

⁸¹ John Corbett, "'The Seafarer': Visibility and the Translation of a West Saxon Elegy into English and Scots," *Translation and Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2001), 157-173 (pp. 157-159).

⁸² 'Visibility and the Translation of a West Saxon Elegy', p. 162.

⁸³ 'Visibility and the Translation of a West Saxon Elegy', pp. 170-171.

Corbett links a synthesising approach to the Scots language with an at least theoretically unified and resurgent Scottish nationhood. As André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett once argued, historically speaking, translation has often been “one of the means by which a new nation ‘proves’ itself, shows that its language is capable of rendering what is rendered in more prestigious languages [...] Translation, in this case, amounts to a seizure of power, more than anything else, any transfer of anything at all.”⁸⁴ Scott’s translations of poets as central to the Western canon as Baudelaire, Dante and Villon can certainly be understood in terms of such an antagonistic attempt to lay claim to cultural authority. Indeed, this desire to simultaneously vulgarise the classics and classicise Scots as part of a wider anti-provincial cultural project is something which all the poets discussed in this thesis shared to some extent. Of course, one might argue that to claim authority through the appropriation of another culture’s productions may itself be a characteristically provincial gesture. Valorising what he termed the parochial, the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh once wrote that the provincial “has no mind of his own; he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis – towards which his eyes are turned – has to say on the subject. This runs through all activities.” The parochial “on the other hand never is in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish.” Describing Joyce and George Moore as “great Irish parishioners”, Kavanagh goes so far to maintain that all great civilisations have been founded on parochialism, but that in Ireland the tendency is very much towards provincialism, with most attempts at “having the courage of our parish” foundering through the wish of those concerned to “play up to the larger parish on the other side of the Irish Sea.”⁸⁵

Kavanagh believes that, whereas provincials define themselves in relation to some elsewhere or other, parochials are bold enough to make their local reality the centre of their own universe. A parochial, in his view, is never jingoistic or xenophobic. On the contrary, as his reference to Joyce as a great parishioner suggests, one of the main principles of Kavanagh’s parochialism is a cosmopolitan appreciation of the achievements of other cultures. Parochials are not required to keep within their own parish, but in a sense carry it with them wherever they go. Scott’s translations – which were for him a way of engaging not just with European culture, but with trends in previous periods of Scottish literary history which he felt were creatively important – can certainly be read in light of Kavanagh’s writing on centre and periphery. At their best, one might argue, they represent a conversation, a friendly exchange between different parishes, rather than a barbarian assault on the metropolis. One can, moreover, have affinities with more than one parish. In the same essay Bassnett and Lefevere suggest that, above and beyond a purely textual understanding of translation, predicated on detailed

⁸⁴ André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett, ‘Introduction: Proust’s Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights: The ‘Cultural Turn’ in Translation Studies’, in *Translation, History & Culture*, ed. by André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett (London: Pinter, 1990), pp. 1-13 (p. 8).

⁸⁵ Kit Fryatt, ‘Patrick Kavanagh’s ‘Potentialities’’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, ed. by Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 181-195 (p. 193).

close reading and the investigation of the relationship between source and target, the importance of the cultural contexts of translation is paramount. After all

Cultures make various demands on translations, and those demands also have to do with the status of the text to be translated [...] ‘Faithfulness’, then, does not enter into translation in the guise of ‘equivalence’ between words or texts but, if at all, in the guise of an attempt to make the target text function in the target culture the way the source text functioned in the source culture.⁸⁶

Moreover, since “languages express cultures, translators should be bicultural, not bilingual.”⁸⁷ As the translations discussed in this chapter show, Scott was a translator very much concerned with the value and literary status of the texts in question. His fidelity in this respect was not just to the words and cultural context of his originals (though he clearly believed that these were important) but to the Scottish literary tradition within which he sought to reinvent them. By so doing he hoped not merely to become a Scottish writer, but a European one.

For much of his life, Scott was a poet at odds with the prevailing literary climate in Britain. As a young man in London, he found his first voice through negotiating the various permutations of Neo-Apocalyptic late modernism, shortly to be swept aside by what Al Alvarez termed the gentility principle governing English verse in the nineteen fifties.⁸⁸ Slightly younger than Young, Goodsir Smith and Garioch, Scott’s most characteristic, enduring works – key among them the Villon translations – emerged as he embraced MacDiarmid’s legacy as linguistic and political theorist, leavened by the influences of Muir, Eliot and Pound. The previous chapter explored Garioch’s sustained strength as a writer, which lasted until the poet’s death in 1981. Scott, too, outlived the heyday of the post-war Renaissance by several decades. Unlike Garioch, whose late translations retain the wary, intermittently humorous scepticism which distinguishes him from so many of his contemporaries, Scott kept the Renaissance faith alive into the nineteen nineties. Perplexed by Hamilton Finlay and finding little value in Morgan’s more experimental work, it would be easy to dismiss him as an aesthetic reactionary, a dinosaur from a pre-devolutionary epoch. This would be an unfair judgement on a writer whose best work, much of it in translation, retains its capacity to delight and entertain – as well as, for better or worse, its desire to instruct.

⁸⁶ Lefevere and Bassnett, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁷ Lefevere and Bassnett, p. 11.

⁸⁸ See: *The New Poetry*, ed. by Al Alvarez (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

The work of the Shetland poet William J. Tait (1918-1992) draws upon many of the same Scottish and European traditions as Garioch, Goodsir Smith, Scott and Young. However, it remains something of a special case. The principal reason for this is Tait's Shetlandic identity, the most striking expression of which is his language. While he wrote many fine poems in Scots and English, it is in the Shetlandic tongue that he truly comes into his own as a poet and translator. Tait's language has strong implications for the broader significance of his work, which can be read in ways which go beyond the specifically national aspects of the Scottish Renaissance project. Having explored the ways in which a number of twentieth-century translators into Scots sought to construct forms of language which they hoped might express the nation as a whole, it is interesting to now turn to a writer who sought instead to speak for a remote archipelago on the edge of that nation. As Garioch's career as a translator and poet suggests, these two intentions need not be mutually exclusive. However, as discussion of Tait's translations shows, in his case the commitment to the local – the parochial in Kavanagh's terms – was a much more important motivating factor than it was for the vast majority of his contemporaries.

Born on the remote island of Yell in the last year of the First World War, Tait, unlike his close Shetlandic contemporary Vagaland (T.A. Robertson), never sought to retreat into a pastoral, bucolic vision of his native archipelago. On the contrary, just as MacDiarmid had attempted to internationalise Scottish culture, so the younger Shetlandic poet was keenly aware of the wider relevance of his experience; not to mention the importance of an international dimension to his own appreciation of that experience. Having read English at Edinburgh, like Garioch, MacLean and many other twentieth-century poets, Tait earned his living as a teacher, spending extended periods of his life outside Shetland (in the south of England and Dundee, as well as Edinburgh). Again like Garioch, for a number of years Tait lived in and around London. He seems to have regretted this experience less than the Edinburgh poet, though in his correspondence he often expresses his desire to return to Shetland if only there was a secure teaching position available there. Translation was a particularly important aspect of his work in the vernacular, and it might not be too far from the truth to suggest that, by writing his own poems and making Shetlandic versions of foreign poets, Tait sought to make fresh connections with his geographically distant native place.

The story of Tait's development and growth towards his full achievement is complicated by his irregular publishing history, with the poet only seeing one volume, his 1980 book *A Day Between Weathers: Collected Poems*,¹ through the press in his lifetime. In 2011 his Shetlandic translations of Villon, Alfred (Olivier) de Magny, Paul Scarron, Ronsard, Baudelaire, Corbière, Georges Brassens, Martin Melsted and Gunnar Heros were published, some for the first time, by Hansel Cooperative

¹ William J. Tait, *A Day Between Weathers: Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris Publishing, 1980).

Press.² His single Scots version of Maurice Scève, a poet translated at greater length by Edwin Morgan, has not been reprinted since the *Collected Poems*. In contrast to this relatively sparse history of book publication, Tait was a frequent contributor to many key Scottish periodicals of the second half of the twentieth century. He also socialised with the key Scottish literary figures of the day and his lack of widespread acclaim is belied by various fulsome professions of admiration from a number of his better-known contemporaries. In a reference dated 13th May 1949, Robert Kemp praised Tait in the highest terms, emphasising his work as a translator and extensive knowledge of canonical and contemporary literature in several languages.³ A few days earlier, in a reference dated the 5th of May, MacDiarmid had written of Tait's achievements in terms even more glowing than Kemp's, suggesting that the poet's writing placed him at the head of the contemporary Shetlandic scene. He states that, to his mind, Tait "unquestionably deserves a high place in the ranks of contemporary British poets generally" having brought to his poetry a very broad knowledge of literature, a keen intellect and an expansive range of experience and sympathy with others. In his reference, MacDiarmid emphasises Tait's interest in translation into Shetlandic from several European languages, particularly as regards his intention to bring Shetland poetry into contact with the Scandinavian tongues. This he describes as a tremendous project, which may ultimately have a transformational effect on the prospects of Shetlandic as a literary language.⁴

In the reference and the personal letter which accompanies it, MacDiarmid shows a side of his personality to which many of his friends and acquaintances have testified, but which nevertheless has often been lost in the spiny thicket of rebarbative anecdote. One feels his enthusiasm for Tait's work and is touched by his generosity, remembering the not insignificant material difficulties from which the older poet was only just emerging after his rough period of domestic upheaval and subsequent unemployment in Glasgow during and after the Second World War.

In terms of secondary criticism, Tait has been somewhat neglected since his death, though there are signs that this may be beginning to change. In *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, Corbett discusses him in terms of "local Scots literature outwith the central belt", writing that like the north-eastern poets Alexander Hutchison and Sheena Blackhall, Orcadian and Shetlandic poets like Tait often write in "variety of Scots designed to serve a clearly defined speech community within the Scottish nation."⁵ Again linking Tait to the broader mainland Scottish tradition, the 2011 volume of translations includes an appreciative introduction by J. Derrick McClure, situating him in the distinguished line of Scots translator-poets going back to Gavin Douglas. McClure writes that the "quality and importance of this poet's original verse is unquestioned; but these translations provide a

² William J. Tait, *Villon: Le Testament and other translations* (Shetland: Hansel Cooperative Press, 2011).

³ Shetland Archives, Lerwick [hereafter SA] D30/44.

⁴ SA D30/32: quoted in *The Literature of Shetland*, p. 189.

⁵ *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, p. 168.

new dimension not only to Tait's oeuvre but to Shetlandic poetry, and a splendid contribution to the rich field of Scottish poetic translation."⁶ There is also a short preface by the volume's co-editor, Mark Ryan Smith, who emphasises the Shetlandic affinities of Tait's work, arguing that they must be understood in the context of the "major renaissance in Shetland's literature"⁷ which took place during the twentieth-century. This Shetlandic background, he argues, is at least as important to Tait as the Scottish Renaissance of which he was also a part. It may at times be a more useful framework within which to understand his writing. Smith's recently published study, *The Literature of Shetland*,⁸ breaks new ground in the canonisation and systematic historicising of the islands' writers; Tait is the subject of the penultimate, seventh chapter, in which he is presented as the key figure in twentieth-century Shetlandic writing. Indeed, Smith suggests that in Tait's work "the local tongue was stretched further than it had ever been before,"⁹ before going on to argue, convincingly, that Tait's intellectual range, political radicalism and quantity of achieved work separates him from most of his contemporaries in the islands. In terms of translation, he was not the only twentieth-century Shetlandic writer to work in this area – Vagaland, for instance, made a number of fine versions from Latin, French and Scandinavian poets.¹⁰ However, Tait was the one who translated the most and, by so doing, did more than any of his contemporaries to broaden the range and subject matter of Shetlandic writing. This chapter deals with his translations at greater length and in greater detail than ever before, resituating Tait in terms of modern interventions in the wider Scottish tradition of verse translation – asking what his Shetlandic language and identity contribute to this tradition, but also to what extent they complicate or call it into question.

I. Villon

Tait was not the only twentieth-century Scottish poet to translate Villon. As discussed in chapters two and four of this thesis, Sydney Goodsir Smith and Tom Scott also made interesting versions, the former translating the single poem published in *The Deevil's Waltz* in 1946, the latter the seven published in *Seven Poems o Maister Francis Villon* in 1953.¹¹ He was, however, the modern poet

⁶ J. Derrick McClure, 'The Translations of W.J. Tait', in *Villon: Le Testament and other translations* [introductory matter unpaginated].

⁷ Mark Ryan Smith, 'Introduction', in *Villon: Le Testament and other translations* [introductory matter unpaginated].

⁸ Mark Ryan Smith, *The Literature of Shetland* (Lerwick: The Shetland Times, 2014).

⁹ *The Literature of Shetland*, p. 187.

¹⁰ See: *The Collected Poems of Vagaland*, ed. by M. Robertson (Lerwick: Shetland Times, 1975; 1990). Vagaland's achievement is real and substantial. However, his work does not share the Scottish Renaissance and modernist tendencies which link Tait's writing to the wider re-appropriations of tradition with which this thesis deals. As a romantic pastoralist in the vernacular, Vagaland is in continuity with the Orcadian Robert Rendall and, on the Scottish mainland, Soutar.

¹¹ For a comparison of several of Scott and Tait's versions with the English translations of Norman Cameron see: Richie McCaffery, "'Maister Francis Villon'" and the Translations of Tom Scott, William J. Tait and

who, throughout his life, translated the largest quantity of Villon's verse, which he rendered into a semi-synthetic Shetlandic Scots. He was therefore the French poet's first Scots translator, with his first attempt taking place in 1936 or 1937, while still a student in Edinburgh.¹² A decade or so later (i.e. after Goodsir Smith's translation but before Scott's) the final version of this poem, *Les Regrets de la Belle Heaulmière*, appeared in MacDiarmid's magazine *The Voice of Scotland*.¹³ It is republished in *A Day Between Weathers* and *Villon: Le Testament and other translations*. Is there a chronological link between Goodsir Smith's three stanzas of Villon, published in book form the previous year, and the younger Tait's reworking and eventual publication of his first version in *The Voice of Scotland*? The two poets knew one another personally, drinking together as well as contributing to the same periodicals (notably, both published translations in *The Voice of Scotland*). It seems highly probable they would have been aware of each other's simultaneous work on Villon. At any rate, in the immediate post-war climate, Scots translations of Villon multiplied. Something in the fifteenth-century French writer seemed to speak to a number of modern Scottish poets, all of whom would have been well aware of Eliot and Pound's instrumental use of his work.

Les Regrets de la Belle Heaulmière comes at the beginning of Tait's long career as a translator of poetry. It is therefore the ideal poem with which to begin discussion of this central aspect of his oeuvre. Unlike the majority of the Villon translations discussed in previous chapters, *Les Regrets* is not a ballade; it is rather a sequence of nine eight-line stanzas within *Le Testament*, in which an elderly prostitute, *la Belle Heaulmière*, mourns the passing of her youth and beauty. *Les Regrets* are preceded by a further stanza, in which Villon, moving from other exempla of the fragility of earthly things, sets out his subject matter. The earlier, stand-alone version of *Les Regrets* includes only this introductory stanza; the version reprinted in *Le Testament* is placed in sequence:

*Aussi ces povres fameletes
Qui vieilles sont et n'ont de quoy
Quant ilz voient ces pucelletes
Emprunter elles a requoy,
Ilz demandent a Dieu pourquoi
Si tost naquirent, n'a quell droit?
Nostre Seigneur se taist tout quoy
Car au tanker il le perdrait.*¹⁴

Laekwise da poer aald hoors at's by
Dir days o oese ta man or baest,
Whin dey see haet young tings at lie
Wi ony man at peys da maist,
Dey aks da Loard bi what behaest

Norman Cameron', in *Quaich: An Anthology of Translation in Scotland Today*, ed. by Madeleine Campbell, Georgina Collins and Anikó Szilagyi (Cnoc Sceichín: Evertime, 2014), pp.13-22.

¹² SA D1/122; *The Literature of Shetland*, p. 190

¹³ William J. Tait, 'Les regrets de la belle heaulmiere' [sic], *The Voice of Scotland*, Vol.4, No.1 (Sep 1947), 21.

¹⁴ Villon, *Poems*, p. 82.

Dey saw da licht sae lang ago.
Goad hads his wheesht: he widna waste
His braeth on a divine forsmo.¹⁵

In 1880 Matthew Arnold had written of this poem that it was one of the handful of “happy moments” where Villon rose to “more of this important poetic virtue of [high] seriousness than all the productions of Chaucer.”¹⁶ With Tait’s translation of it, Shetland dialect poetry enters a new world. Gone are the tushkars and crofts of familiar pastoral tradition, replaced by the destitution and degradation of the city: the human comedy as it is, rather than as it ought to be. Tait’s translation takes a firmly historicised original – the armouress of the poem’s title is known as such for the *heaulmes* (“helms”) among which she supposedly works or worked – and translates it into an equally historicised language, whose frame of reference is essentially pre-industrial. By doing so, he reveals the universal referents latent in both source text and target tongue.

Discussing Scott’s versions of Villon, one of the most striking aspects of the poetry was its openness to various female voices, which it represents without the overwhelming idealism of much medieval literature. The allegory, at last, begins to strain from contact with reality. It is important not to overstate this; in this instance, at least, Villon remains a man being translated by men. Nevertheless, in two literary milieus (medieval French and middle twentieth-century Scottish) in which the role of gender remains a thorny, sometimes uncomfortable subject, the women whose voices Villon and his Scottish translators purport to imitate are rendered significant by virtue of their comparative scarcity. It may be helpful to bear this in mind, moving on to an analysis of the ballade immediately following *Les Regrets de la Belle Heaulmière – La Belle Heaulmière aux Filles de Joie*. The first stanza of the original, followed by Tait’s translation (not included in *A Day Between Weathers* but printed in *Le Testament and other translations*), reads thus:

«Or y pensez, belle Gantiere,
Qui m’escoliere souliez estre,
Et vous Blanche la Savetiere,
Or est il temps de vous congnoistre:
Prenez a destre et a senestre.
N’espargnez homme, je vous prie!
Car vieilles n’ont ne cours ne estre,
Ne que monnoye qu’on descrie.”¹⁷

Bella, whin niest a laad du lucks
Bi drain aff a gliv [as weel
Du lairnt fae me] an Blanche, at smucks
An pantans sells, you kain da dreeel.
Grab wi baith hands till every peel
O siller’s yours: spare nae man’s wack,

¹⁵ *A Day Between Weathers*, p. 61.

¹⁶ Matthew Arnold, ‘The Study of Poetry’, in *English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. by R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973), pp. 161-188 (p. 177).

¹⁷ Villon, *Poems*, p. 90.

Fur whin you're aald you'll fin yoursel
Laek clippit coins at nane will tak.¹⁸

As the square brackets suggest, the ballade is slightly rougher around the edges than *Les Regrets de la Belle Heaulmière*. It is, nevertheless, a striking response; a cautionary address from the fair armouress to her younger counterparts, which burrows deeper into the unedifying sub-strata of the *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis*. The rhetorical question posed by the better known poem, *ubi sunt*, here receives its scabrous answer: *sunt ibi*. The historical materiality of the original is underscored by the names and epithets of the girls – Gantiere the lovely glover, Blanche the shoemaker and so on. These Tait does not attempt to carry over, though he preserves a vestige of their occupations with Bella's "gliv" and the description of Blanche "at smucks/ An pantans sells". Bella's name comes not from her occupation but from the adjective applied to "la belle Gantiere" in Villon's poem. Following the pattern established in *Les Regrets*, he does not attempt to catch every particle, but dances engagingly round the structure and argument of the French. As a result, he fulfils the exiguous demands of the tight rhyme scheme wonderfully, maintaining a believably conversational tone in conjunction with the delicate heightening this ornate poetry requires if it is to grow in its new language.

As many critics of Villon have noted, the great power of his poetry proceeds in no small part from his refusal to look away from certain negative aspects of the time in which he lived. The question as to whether this is due to personal temperament or a broader swerve in the aesthetics of the later Middle Ages is an interesting one. Huizinga, whose classic critique of late medieval culture and art was discussed with reference to Scott's translations, inclines towards the latter. Pound argues for individuality. In any case, the poems exist. One of the best to discuss in this context is the ballade, *Les Contrediz de Franc Gontier*, which Tait translates as 'Da Simple Life'. The first stanza of the poem has already described the luxuriantly carnal existence of certain fifteenth-century clerics. The second, in which poet and translator counterpoint this vision of velveteen comfort with the plainer contentment promised by the pastoral tradition, continues as follows:

*Se Franc Gontier et sa compaigne Helaine
Eussent ceste douce vie hantee,
D'oignons, civotz qui causent forte alaine,
N'acontassent une bise tostee!
Tout leur mathon ne toute leur potee
Ne prise ung ail, je le dy sans noysier.
S'ilz se vantent couchier soubz le rosier,
Lequel vault mieux? Lict costoyé de chaise?
Qu'en dites vous? Faut il a ce musier?
Il n'est tresor que de vivre a son aise.*¹⁹

If Frank Gontier an Helen, his helpmate,
Hed tried dis jantil life, A'll gie my aith

¹⁸ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Villon, *Poems*, p. 170.

Dan wid dey no hae been sae glig ta aet
 Aingins an moericks at mak strang da braith.
 Dir stap an liver-muggies, hamespun claith,
 I haaldna wirt a strae. Dey mak a sang
 Becaas dey boel dir boadies doon amang
 Da heddir-cowes. Whaar wid ye reddir swife,
 Abrod or warm abed? What, tink ye lang?
 Dir no a traisir laek an aisy life.²⁰

Gontier, a figure familiar to Villon's readers from his appearance in the works of the pastoral poets Philippe de Vitry and Pierre d'Ailly, is the uncomplicated, good-hearted swain of bucolic nirvana. Watching their flocks to the apparently unambiguous sound of oaten flutes, the likes of him and "sa compaigne Helaine" float in and out of European literature from antiquity to the present day. It is important to add the caveat of apparently because, as Jane H. M. Taylor suggests in her study of Villon, the pastoral mood often turns out to be rather more ambiguous than it initially appears: "Neither [de Vitry nor d'Ailly] claims – on the contrary – that simple foods and pleasures are in themselves absolutely preferable; rather, their poems are designed to show how far *court* life, specifically, is a source of moral and physical danger".²¹ While not blind to the mode's reactionary possibilities, William Empson, in his classic study *Some Versions of Pastoral*, wrote that "the person described as outside society because too poor for its benefits [...] is independent, as the artist claims to be, and can be a critic of society; so far as he is forced by this into crime he is the judge of the society that judges him."²² George Mackay Brown's *Greenvoe* is a strong example of pastoral in a modern Scottish context, with the Orkney islanders' lives presented allegorically – though not unambiguously – until the incursion of militarised industrialism in the guise of Operation Black Star interrupts their insular idyll. Ian Hamilton Finlay put it more succinctly when he observed that some gardens were described as retreats, when in reality they were attacks.

Villon's poem is certainly attacking something. Taylor argues that he exaggerates the cupidity of his sources, strengthening the absolute claims of pastoral in order to disrupt them by bringing them into contact with the realities of homespun existence. The situation is to an extent comparable with George Douglas Brown's inversion of the kailyard, with the French poet seeking to throw back the proverbial other window in Thrums, revealing the none-too-pleasant objects lurking behind the dark glass. Tait's translation of this poem into Shetlandic is an equally disruptive gesture; an attempt to give the lie to the idealised island, to which many modern Shetland poets have opposed the dark forms of oil and the big city. Vagaland's poem 'Da Wal Gaet' is a classic instance of what might be classed as 'straight' Shetlandic pastoral. Taking Horace's "O fons Bandusiae, splendidior vitro" for an epigraph, Vagaland addresses the "Aald Roman poet", comparing the "Bandusian spring" to "a wal at

²⁰ *A Day Between Weathers*, p. 31.

²¹ *The Poetry of François Villon*, p. 122.

²² William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950), p. 17.

Translation, in a persuasive sense, is the modulation of voices. As regards lyric poetry, most of the time this will be, if not quite a simple operation, then at least one which involves a relatively straightforward transition from one voice to another. Occasionally, however, the source text will itself comprise the movement of several voices in dialogue, arguing or agreeing with one another. At this point one starts to move away from pure lyric – the loneliness of the first person singular – towards more sustained forms such as drama or epic. Tait's translation of *Le debat du cuer et du corps de Villon*, 'Da Kollyshang', is far from epic, but certainly involves the dramatic.

Qu'est ce que j'oy?
Ce suis je.
 Qui?
Ton cuer
Qui ne tient mais qu'a ung petit filet.
Force n'ay plus, substance ne liqueur,
Quant je te vot retraict ainsi seulet
Com povre chien tapy en reculet.
Pour quoy est ce? Pour ta folle plaisance.
Que t'en chault il?
J'en ay la desplaisance.
 Laisse m'en paix.
Pour quoy?
 J'y penserai.
Quant sera ce?
 Quant seray hors d'enfance
Plus ne t'en dis.

²⁴ Tait's poem *A Day Among Waddirs*, which Smith describes as his "masterpiece, and [...] one of the key Shetland poems" (*The Literature of Shetland*, p. 201) combines an infinitely detailed knowledge and love of the islands with a refusal to look back in nostalgia. Tait's explanatory notes for the poem can be examined in the Shetland Archives, SA D30 26.

Et je m'en passeray.²⁵

These lines Tait translates:

What's dis I hear?

Hit's me.

An wha is du?

Dy hert at hings bit bi a straandin treed.

Strent hae I nane, foeshin nor bloed, I voo,

Tae see some skultin dere wi nane ta heed,

Laek some aald dug at's crawled below a steid.

An what's da caase?

Dy horn-mad reebaldry!.

What's dy erse haet fur? Heth, he's mine 'll swee!

Lave me in pace!

For why?

A'll tink aboot it.

Yea, dat sall du?

Whan bairndom's by, du'll see!

I'se speak nae mair.

An A'll mak dae ithoot it.²⁶

Villon's poem, once its distinctive lineation (which is not original, but replicated in many modern editions) is compressed, turns out to be a characteristically well-constructed ballade, with refrain and concluding *envoi* both present and correct. Tait, though in subsequent stanzas he follows the ten-line structure of the original, in the quoted opening stanza fits Villon's matter into nine lines. This seems to come about in his decision to move the heart from the end of the first metrical line to the beginning of the second. Like the "*straandin treed*" or "*petit file*" by which Villon's heart hangs, this is a slim point of variance, but a significant one. Pushing "*Dy hert*" down a line, Tait frees up the foot immediately preceding it, allowing him to extend his question tonally, as well as in terms of length. His incredulous "An wha is du?" adds far more to the poem than a simpler question like "wha's du?" would have. This extension picks up on the distinctively Shetlandic "dis" in the body's first question, sustaining the comic tone until the start of the four-line italicised section in which the heart describes itself.

Tait heightens the comedic tension and suspense of Villon's poem, for instance in the heart's Shakespearian interjection "*Dy horn-mad reebaldry!*" This is a far more emphatic statement than the heart's "*desplaisance*" at the poet's "*folle plaisance*", which suggests a markedly medieval system of values, only loosely transferable to a modern frame of reference. Most readers are likely to remain unconvinced as regards the sincerity of the body's promises to reform itself in future, though the highly Shetlandic interplay of d- for th- and "*I'se*" for 'I will' produces undeniably powerful

²⁵ Villon, *Poems*, p. 230.

²⁶ *A Day Between Weathers*, p. 36.

rhetorical effects. Indeed, the poem does more than merely render Villon; it begins to open up a space which might potentially be occupied by a Shetlandic verse drama.

In *The Literature of Shetland*, Smith foregrounds Tait's Villon translations as one of the major twentieth-century contributions to the archipelago's poetic tradition. He is particularly keen to stress the innovative nature of the poems' engagement with language, arguing that the Shetlandic in which they are written is "a construction, a composite" drawing on the spoken tongue, but also using "Scots words not commonly used in the isles and little-known and archaic words". In this respect he links Tait's work to MacDiarmid's early Scots writing, suggesting that the "fidelity of Tait's poetic language is not to the spoken tongue" and that he does not "as Johnson does, try to write in the way he speaks, but creates a synthetic *literary* idiom which draws on all the poetic and linguistic elements available to him." The end result, Smith proposes, is a series of translations from Villon which are "Scots poetry, Shetland dialect poetry, and European poetry all at the same time."²⁷

Tait's versions of Villon form the core of his translation work, and an integral part of his oeuvre as a writer. It must have been a blow to him when, in 1987, seven years after he had finally been able to collect some of them in *A Day Between Weathers*, the larger selection posthumously published by Hansel Cooperative Press in 2011 as *Le Testament and other translations* was rejected by Polygon.²⁸ Tait supplemented his submission with references from relevant authorities. The first, from Dafydd Evans, Emeritus Professor of Romance Philology at the University of London, in a letter dated 3rd May 1986, stated that Tait's translations from Villon were of the highest merit and deserving of a much wider readership. He also suggests that Tait's Shetlandic versions would be of great interest to the many readers who view Villon as one of Europe's greatest poets.²⁹ Moreover, Evans emphasised the degree to which he felt that Tait's versions captured Villon in a manner seldom seen in Standard English translations. In a second letter of reference dated 16th November of the same year, Peter France concurred with Evans' point of view, writing that Tait's translations go far beyond the bare meaning of their French originals, for all that they communicate this very well. He emphasises how impressed he is with Tait's ability to bring Villon's difficult verse forms across. France also writes that he feels Corbière's maritime and rural subject matter makes him a natural poet (like Brassens) to translate into Shetlandic, though he finds the Ronsard and Baudelaire translations perhaps less transferable from their original language.³⁰ Both referees stress the degree to which Tait's Shetlandic is a foreign tongue to them. Nevertheless, they are voluble in their recommendations. France also compares the Shetlandic poems to Edwin Morgan's Mayakovsky, one of the key texts for Scots translation in the later twentieth century. Sadly, in the case of poetry publishing the acclaim of

²⁷ *The Literature of Shetland*, p. 192.

²⁸ The short rejection letter from Murdo Macdonald, dated 4th March 1987, can be consulted at SA D30/15.

²⁹ SA D30/13/1.

³⁰ SA D30/14.

even the highest authorities may matter little when opposed to the book-buying public's relative coolness to the form, compared with less risky propositions such as the novel or certain non-fiction offshoots. As well as the obvious marginality of Tait's language, one also remembers the relatively small market share of translations in the English-speaking world, which Venuti has described as "appallingly low".³¹ At any rate, following the publication of *Le Testament and other translations* in 2011, Tait's Villon translations are now available to readers in the collected edition he had envisaged in 1987.

II. *The Wider French Tradition*

Peter France's mixed testimony as regards Tait's translations of French poets other than Villon is an appropriate starting point for an extended consideration of these poems. Naturally enough, the extract from *Le Testament* and the other Villon poems form a coherent whole, and demand a reading which respects this essential unity. This is less so with Tait's versions of a number of other French poets, which connect with the Francophone tradition at a number of points, but do so individually, on an occasional basis rather than in terms of a protracted engagement with a single writer. On the other hand, one might argue that Tait's translations from other French writers far apart in time does constitute a protracted engagement with the French tradition itself – this is certainly a productive way to read them. Though some of these poems are little-known, they are all, to some extent, canonical – one might expect to find each of their authors in a comprehensive anthology of French poetry. Tait's degree in English belies the strength of his engagement with Francophone literature – as with Eliot's remarks on Dante, quoted with reference to Scott's version of the twenty-sixth *Canto* of the *Inferno*, these translations show what is possible with a good secondary school knowledge of the basics and an autodidactic urge to find out more. The Shetlandic Villon is the best indication of Tait's virtuosity and long-term commitment to translation; his other translations from the French showcase this commitment in all its magpie-like, wide-ranging variety.

In *A Day Between Weathers*, these translations are dispersed around the book, according to their principal preoccupations. *Le Testament* groups them roughly according to their original date of composition in French; where a poem appears in both books it is this later text which will be quoted from.

Tait seems to have published no versions of any French poet (indeed, any poet at all) chronologically earlier than Villon. The first post-Villon poem to appear in *Le Testament*, Alfred de Magny's 'Charon an da Skald', presents the critic with an initially insurmountable problem: its author

³¹ *Translation Changes Everything*, p. 158.

seems never to have existed. The poet's name is the same in both *A Day Between Weathers* and *Le Testament*. Nevertheless, when one searches the web or the library stacks, he is nowhere to be found. Was Tait a more radical, more ludic writer than hitherto suspected, playing Borgesian tricks of pseudotranslation on his readers? Sadly not, implies *Sonet LXIV* of *Les Souspirs* ("The Sighs") by Olivier de Magny (c.1529-1561) in which poet and grim ferryman enjoy the following memorable exchange. M. stands for Magny, C. for Charon:

M. *Hola, Charon, Charon, nautonnier infernal.*
 C. *Qui est cest importune qui si pressé m'appelle?*
 M. *C'est l'esprit éploré d'un amoureux fidelle,*
Lequel pour bien aimer n'eust jamais que du mal.
 C. *Que cherches-tu de moy? M. Le passage fatal.*
 C. *Qui est ton homicide? M. O demande cruelle!*
Amour m'a fait mourir. C. Jamais dans ma nasselle,
Nul subget à l'amour je ne conduis à val.
 M. *Et de grace, Charon, reçois-moy dans ta barque.*
 C. *Cherche un autre nocher, car ny moy ny la Parque*
N'entreprenons jamais sur ce maistre des dieux.
 M. *J'iray donc maugré toy, car j'y dedans mon ame*
Tant de traicts amoureux, et de larmes aux yeux,
*Que je seray le fleuve, et la barque, et la rame.*³²

One imagines that at some point, probably in the proofs of *A Day Between Weathers*, Magny became confused with the much later Alfred de Vigny. A contemporary of Ronsard now little known in the English-speaking world, in France Magny's reputation has also been eclipsed by his more famous peers. Full-length studies are rare; the most comprehensive physically available in Glasgow, Jules Favre's 1885 doctoral thesis on the poet, begins with this rather guarded statement (my translation): "Olivier de Magny does not make up part of the Pléiade: however, he would have merited inclusion in this celebrated group. Much inferior to Ronsard and du Bellay, he equals Remi Belleau and Baïf, and leaves far behind him Pontus du Thyard and Dorat. I do not speak of Jodelle, who was the tragic poet of the band."³³

As Favre's series of comparative judgements suggests, Magny is something of a marginal figure for the poetry of his age, usually defined in relation to his better-known contemporaries (even those less artistically distinguished than he) rather than on his own terms. Indeed, *Les Souspirs* is rarely mentioned in the scant secondary literature without a corresponding nod to du Bellay's

³² Olivier de Magny, *Les Souspirs: Edition critique par David Wilkin* (Genève-Paris: Librairie Droz, 1978), pp. 72-73.

³³ Jules Favre, *Olivier de Magny (1529?-1561) Étude Biographique et Littéraire: Thèse Présentée à la Faculté des Lettres de Paris* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1885), p. 1.

Regrets.³⁴ One suspects Tait would have sympathised, for all the vigour and ingenuity of his translation:

Da Skald
Hoi, Charon! Du fordoen aald flitman o da daid!
Charon
In sic a himmelsfyaird, wha maks my name sae free?
Da Skald
A ganfer greetin sair at eence loved leedfully
An naethin hed fur kyoab bit knaag an soaroo baid.
Charon
Whit seeks du mair fae me?
Da Skald
Da hoidin-fair o draid.
Charon
Whit haand wrocht dy doonfa?
Da Skald
Whit haand hed it ta be
Bit Love's at gae da straik?
Charon
Never sall ship wi me
Ee sowl at awns Love loard, till Domesday sood he plaid!
Da Skald
Charon, fur peety's sake! I hae ta cross some wy.
Charon
Some idder flitman fin, fur nidder Fate nor I
'Ill ever niffer wi yon scourge o man an Goed.
Da Skald
Dan bide ye baid, fur see! Sae tik Love's erows stang
Da hurt at wis my hert, my tairs hae flowed sae lang,
At I mysel sall be raimick an faar an floed!³⁵

The introduction of the speakers' full names at the beginning of each utterance breaks up the poem, masking its Petrarchan unity, whose strict series of rhymes and alexandrine line Tait mirrors in the Shetlandic. It also brings out the dramatic quality of the piece, which feels more like a mini-script in this version than in the original (there is a clear link with 'Da Kollyshang'). In the French, Magny abbreviates his own and Charon's names, which the reader passes over in silence. Tait makes this silent acknowledgement and passing over much harder, with the names breaking up the otherwise smooth hexameters, forcing the meter into various verbal ruptures and fissures, key among them the propensity for Anglophone hexameters to become doubled trimeters: where two cola are separated by "Da Skald" or "Charon" this is particularly evident.

³⁴ Both sequences draw upon time spent in Rome, a formative city for sixteenth-century French sonneteers. See, for instance: Alistair R. Mackay 'Olivier de Magny's Roman Sketches', in *Crossroads and Perspectives: French literature of the Renaissance*, ed. by C. D. E. Tolton and Catherine M. Grisé (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1986), pp. 49-64.

³⁵ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 42.

The strongly articulated names also push the poem towards a richly patterned, ritualistic play of interwoven figures. Magny has himself debating with the Ferryman; Tait could have written a poem around the rather comic spectacle of Charon arguing with the modern, distinctly anti-heroic Shetlander he is happy to present himself as elsewhere in his work. Instead he deploys “Da Skald” – an abstract, archaizing personification of the Shetlandic poetic *geist*, who looks back across the Styx to the pale crowd speaking Norn on the opposite bank. This is to complicate Magny’s conceit greatly. The French poet claims that love itself has brought him to the brink of death; Charon answers that love in itself is insufficient to end a life. This is to agree, *avant la lettre*, with Rosalind’s witty rejoinder to Orlando – “Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.”³⁶ Love, of course, is not solely a carnal force. Tait takes Magny’s inspired statement, conventional in the best sense, and adds another level of meaning: the cultural-historical, of which the linguistic strand is most important here. Magny seems to argue that to render love’s anguish poetically is to kill desire, momentarily at least. For the poet in a minority language whose writing is synthetic to some degree, every achieved poem is a kind of life-in-death. Implicitly, the poet must be river, boat and oar.

The next translation in the sequence of French poets presented in *Le Testament* takes the reader forward a century, away from the Pléiade (to which this chapter will return) and on into the milieu of Corneille, Molière and Racine. Interestingly, while most Scottish translators who have engaged with the poetry of seventeenth-century France have done so via the stage, Tait elects to do so by again making a Shetlandic version of a more marginal figure, at least in the English-speaking world, where Paul Scarron (1610-1660) is, if not entirely unfamiliar, hardly a household name. Tait translates the most famous of his epitaphs for himself, the *Épitaphe de Monsieur Scarron*:

*Celuy qui cy maintenant dort
Fit plus de pitié que d’envie
Et souffrit mille fois la mort
Avant que de perdre la vie.*

*Passant, ne fais icy de bruit:
Garde bien que tu ne l’esveille,
Car voicy la premiere nuit
Que le pauvre Scaron sommeille.*³⁷

Wha laich lies here in life wid gaaze,
Fur een he grypit, ten tink sin;
An dreed da daeth-yock on his haase
A thousand times or braeth gae in.
Sae be da green greff-haid stramp lycht
Fur faer he waakens fae his swoond,

³⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), p. 632.

³⁷ Paul Scarron, *Poésies Diverses*, ed. by Maurice Cauchie (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1960), p. 273.

Fur dis will be da first lang nicht
At poer Scarron is sleepit soond.³⁸

Tait eliminates the break between the two quatrains of the original, translating fairly freely to retain the tight tetrameters and rhyme scheme, changing the sense as well as the sense's general slant on more than one occasion. Scarron, for instance, says nothing about gazing or ten others thinking something sinful. He says, much more simply, that the one who lies here caused more pity than envy. The final couplet of the first quatrain is kept closer to the French, which "daeth-yock" and "haase" embroider without fundamentally restructuring. Funnily enough, the same division occurs in the second quatrain, with Tait diverging significantly from his original, which talks of sounds not steps, in the first couple of lines, before returning to it, very successfully, in his final couplet.

Over the page, the next translation pulls the reader back to the sixteenth century and the Plèiade. Pierre de Ronsard is, however, a very different figure to Olivier de Magny, occupying the centre of the canon as opposed to hovering at its margins. Appropriately enough, then, Tait translates his famous *Sonnet Pour Hélène*, XLIII, Tom Scott's translation of which, as well as the earlier, classic version by Yeats, have already been discussed (see chapter four for the French original):

Some nycht whin du is aald an, glansin on da brace,
Da candle lychts dy wheel, weel set in ta da fire,
Noenin my sangs, du'll hark; "Whin I was eence da vyre
O aa da laand, Ronsard, du roessed my boannie face."

Dan no a servant lass at neeb's ower her hap-lace
An dovers ower oot-doen wi darg o hoose an byre,
Bit, whin shoe hears my name, her haand 'ill slip da wire
An rise as if ta bliss dee, daethless bi my grace.

Toh under fael my banes in some aeth-kent kirkyaird,
Amang da mychty skalds A'll tak my aise at last.
Ower da hertstane du'll cooir, failed, craapen, nigh twa-faald,

An graim ower my lost love an dy prood disregaird.
Live, if du'll ent me, noo: waitna till du's grown aald.
Gadder Life's flooers afore dy day an dirs is past.³⁹

Again Tait has the courage to write in a hexameter line, eschewing the loose, somewhat splenetic pentameters of Scott's translation. The latter approach has its virtues – the question as to what extent a six-foot line can be successfully sustained in an Anglophone context remains. One might in fact characterise Tait's use of this metre as in itself a foreignising, resistant tactic comparable to his initial decision to write in Shetlandic, given the relative rarity of hexameters in Anglophone verse outwith the final line of a Spenserian stanza. Nevertheless, reading Tait's translation, it is hard not to be impressed by the smoothness with which he renders Ronsard's liquid alexandrines. One feels the

³⁸ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 43.

³⁹ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 44.

Shetlandic landscape behind the words – no small achievement on the part of the translator, given the inimitably French and irreducibly sixteenth-century character of the original. A few deft touches such as the retained candle, the servant lass, the byre and the kirk suggest the nineteenth century, at the latest; it is telling to note that “les ombres myrteux” have been transfigured into “da mychty skalds”. As with *Charon an da Skald*, Tait uses the word to imply a Shetlandic tradition extending down into the darkness under the earth and back to the islands’ earlier Norse inhabitants. Given the retention of Ronsard’s name, which Scott replaces with his own, one might add that this Shetlandic poetic ideal intends cognisance of a world of poetry beyond the archipelago itself.

Having already compared Scott’s version of this poem with Yeats’ interpretation, it is interesting to set George Mackay Brown’s English response beside Tait’s Shetlandic translation. Brown’s poem reads as follows:

Some night when you are gray
And lonely, by muttering flame
(Closed your sweet womb,
Your breasts fallen away,

The rose of one tremulous day
Haunting that loaded room)
Take up my book with your name,
Turn yellow leaves and say,

‘That spring, whatever the parish talk,
We made one blessed rhyme
On a shaken branch of love.
Then the eye of a hawk
Down the huge convex of time
Measured our dove.’⁴⁰

Titled ‘When You Are Old’, it is evident that Yeats’ poem, as much as Ronsard’s, lies behind Brown’s free rendition of the sonnet, which Paterson would probably view as a version and Dryden an imitation. The latter is, incidentally, the term which Brown uses to describe his rewritings of the poems of Rognvald Kolson, preserved in the *Orkneyinga Saga*.⁴¹ Indeed, Brown does not distinguish this poem as a translation (though it is clearly the result of textual interaction with Yeats and, through him, Ronsard). In striking contrast to Tait’s Shetlandic hexameters, Brown chooses to cast his poem in an irregular three-stress line, with the gear change to a tetrameter at the start of the sestet highlighting the beginning of the beloved’s imaginary speech. Again in contrast to Tait’s consistently full rhymes, Brown makes characteristic use of half-rhyme at the end of several lines in the octave, with the transition to consistently full rhyme in the sestet undercut to some extent by the varying line

⁴⁰ George Mackay Brown, *Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 2005; 2006), pp. 80-81.

⁴¹ George Mackay Brown, *Winterfold* (London: Chatto & Windus with the Hogarth Press, 1976), p. vi. In the same collection Brown includes a version of the Old English ‘Deor’, as well as a poem titled ‘Seven Translations of a Lost Poem’.

length. To some extent, both versions insert Ronsard's poem into their author's domestic context and habitual poetic diction – for instance one might compare Tait's "byre" and "kirkyaird" with Brown's "parish talk", not to mention the various details (the rose, the hawk, the dove) which are reminiscent of the Orcadian's work more generally. The significance of this comparison as regards Tait's version is that it emphasises his interest in close metrical translation. Of all three versions of Ronsard's sonnet discussed in this thesis, Tait's is the only one to follow the French poet's argument through to the end of the sestet, as well as the only one written in hexameters. To point this out is not to intend any value judgement or insistence on models of translation based on fidelity – rather to elucidate Tait's own understanding of his craft through comparison with other, equally valid responses to Ronsard's sonnet.

Tait skips the eighteenth century in his translations (though the fragmentary draft of an essay on Fergusson's 'Braid Claith', which he evidently admired greatly, shows that the period was not without poetic merit for him).⁴² As with the leap forwards in sequence between Magny and Scarron, then back to Ronsard (at least in *Le Testament and other translations*), one reflects that a poet's affinities and touchstones are often unpredictable in their chronological and cultural distribution. Throughout this thesis, it has been argued that a sustained project of translation is, among other things, a reading of tradition. Evidently, it is necessarily a highly partial, even biased mode of reading, at all times governed by factors outwith the translator's control. As regards the eighteenth century in the roughly historical sequence of French poems in *Le Testament and other translations*, one is tempted to cite the critical interventions of modernism as being of potentially equal importance to any innate sensibilities Tait may have possessed.

Eliot and Pound made much of Villon in their canonical interventions. The seventeenth century the former in particular valued highly, if eccentrically, ascribing the degeneracy of taste he perceived in much eighteenth and nineteenth-century verse in no small part to Milton's grandiose but unrepeatable achievement. Anglo-American modernism's reading of the western canon is, of course, one view among many. Nevertheless, surveying the various translators discussed in this thesis, it would be hard to deny its influence, as one among a number of approaches to tradition which the Scottish Renaissance found persuasive. It is worth foregrounding this influence in the discussion of the next of Tait's translations, the *Recueillement* of Baudelaire:

*Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.
Tu réclamaïs le Soir; il descend; le voici:
Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville,
Aux uns portant la paix, aux autres, le souci.*

*Pendant que des mortels la multitude vile,
Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci,*

⁴² SA D30/42.

*Va cueillir des remords dans la fête servile,
Ma Douleur, donne-moi la main; viens par ici.*

*Loin d'eux. Vois se pencher les défunes Années,
Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées;
Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant;*

*Le Soleil moribund s'endormir sous une arche,
Et, comme un long linceul traînant à l'Orient,
Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche!*⁴³

Hae wit, my wanliss doel: tak aise, tak aise, my bairn.
Du griens fur nycht an lyeuk! See whaar da hoemin faalds
Hits mirknin hap doon ower da aald toon's shaila shaald
Ta bring some pace an some wanrest an wits despairin.

Sae while da mad lavairnie flag an fitch ta airn,
Anunder Plaisir's wheep, eeraster iron-sauled,
Wi nycht's darg at his foy, agment an knaag oontaald,
My wanhop, gies dy haand. Faar fae da hale consairn,

Come du wi me an see da years at's taen dir gaet
Lin doon fae Heevin's daek-end wi duds lang oot o date;
Syne up trow watter swart soom Soaroo smilin-faced;

Da deein sun dwaams laich below an erchwy's hycht;
An, laek a lang mort-cloot ey tyailin ta da Aest,
Hark du, my lamb, an hear da scoefflin fit o Nycht.⁴⁴

Formally at least, Tait has kept to the parameters defined by the translations of Magny's and Ronsard's sonnets: French alexandrines rendered with great skill and fluidity by Shetlandic hexameters. The matter of the poem, however, particularly in terms of its setting, could hardly be more different.

The conversation reported in *Charon an da Skald* occurs in an otherworldly no place – the Stygian bank, whose existence is implied by the dialogue rather than described in any detail. The *Sonnet Pour Hélène* made some concessions to reality, but ultimately eschewed the particular and, what is central here, the historical extension of that reality. Baudelaire's poem is, to put it mildly, a different proposition, representing the increasingly industrialised cityscape symbolically, though no less forcefully for that. The poem's title implies reflection on some romantic commonplace of landscape or sentiment, leading ultimately to resolution in climactic sublimity. This conventional movement is subverted, though left structurally intact, by the progress of Baudelaire's sonnet. Beginning with an invocation to his "Douleur", memorably rendered by Tait as "wanliss doel", the French poet passes from contemplation of "la multitude vile" – "da mad lavairnie" of the Shetlandic poem – to a faraway, almost extra-temporal zone from which he and his personified grief can observe

⁴³ *Oeuvres Complètes*, pp. 173-174.

⁴⁴ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 45.

the fall of lost time; the old years decked out in their superannuated robes, bereft of potential energy. There, at least, is the turn between octave and sestet. The poem twists again in the final line, in which the beloved “Douleur” is enjoined to be attentive to the coming night, like a long grave-cloth trailing away into the East. In the closing verb, “marche”, one feels the black jackboot descending over the city – the return of a sinister potentiality, into which the twenty-first century reader is liable to read the various convulsions of European history subsequent to Baudelaire. Tait’s translation turns away from this pregnant historical sense, perhaps remembering the antic energy of the *Crépuscule du Soir* in his “scoefflin fit o Nycht.” The Shetlandic poem ends on the noun, “douce” no longer as it passes, gibbering, into the darkness.

Baudelaire is one of the key French poets of the nineteenth century, around whose works much else revolves. Underappreciated in his own relatively short lifetime, after his death he came to exercise a determining influence on the course of subsequent European poetry. Corbière is somewhat different, exercising a less pervasive, though no less potent influence on his successors, whose Scottish exemplar is probably Goodsir Smith. Discussing the latter’s Scots version of *La Rapsode Foraine et la Pardon de Sainte Anne*, it was evident that, as with Tait and Villon, the two poets’ personae and languages were in remarkably close accord. Tait’s two translations from Corbière, *La Fin* (given with the masculine form of the definite article in *Le Testament and other translations*, though not in Tait’s papers in the Shetland Archives) and *Paria* are similarly distinguished, bringing Brittany and Shetland into startlingly felicitous dialogue. This said, Corbière is as much a poet of inner states and psychological landscapes as he is of places in and of themselves. As Michael Hamburger writes: “[Corbière] tells us more than any other poet of his time about what it was that made the need for masks so acute and imperative at the end of the Romantic period. From now on a poet’s self was what he chose to make it, his identity to be found only in the bodies that he chose to fill.”⁴⁵ One does the poet a disservice, then, if one reduces him too readily to a cypher for a place; Corbière speaks to far more than a politics of coastal marginality. So, of course, does Tait, for all the centrality of certain locales to both writers’ imaginative resources. Before passing to the poems themselves, it is worth quoting from the poet’s draft introduction to the recording of his translations, in which he writes:

I have decided to end this side of the tape with two translations from Tristan Corbière. ‘La Fin’ and ‘Paria’, which I have called respectively ‘Da End O’t and ‘Toetak’. ‘La Fin’ starts with a 13-line epigraph taken from a poem ‘Oceano Nox’ by Victor Hugo, which Corbière proceeds to ‘send up’ in his own poem. To mark the contrast between Hugh [sic] & Corbière, I have translated the epigraph into what you might call ‘Literary Scots’ and the Corbière poem into Shetland-Scots.

⁴⁵ Michael Hamburger, *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modernist Poetry Since Baudelaire* (London: Anvil Press, 1982), p. 50.

One ought, therefore, to refer to these translations not by their French titles but by the Shetlandic alternatives proposed by Tait. For simplicity's sake, however, this thesis will continue to use the titles as given in *Le Testament and other translations*.

In this case it is expedient to begin with the end. As Tait indicates, *La Fin* is, essentially, a rejoinder to *Oceano Nox*, in which Corbière takes a hatchet to Hugo's preconceptions about the sea and the death of drowned men. The Shetlander's tactic of translating the metropolitan poet's epigraph into Lallans is an intriguing one, particularly in terms of the way it implicitly identifies the translator with Corbière, while at the same time raising an eyebrow at overly homogenising, mono-cultural conceptions of Scottish nationhood. The epigraph, followed by Tait's Scots translation, reads as follows:

*Oh! combien de marins, combien de capitaines
 Qui sont partis joyeux pour des courses lointaines,
 Dans ce morne horizon se sont évanouis!...*

*Combien de patrons morts avec leurs équipages!
 L'Océan, de leur vie a pris toutes les pages,
 Et, d'un souffle, il a tout dispersé sur les flots.
 Nul ne saura leur fin dans l'abîme plongée...*

*Nul ne saura leurs noms, pas même l'humble pierre,
 Dans l'étroit cimetière où l'écho nous répond,
 Pas même un saule vert qui s'effeuille à l'automne,
 Pas même la chanson plaintive et monotone
 D'un aveugle qui chante à l'angle d'un vieux pont.*⁴⁶

Och! Hou mony sailors, hou mony captains tae,
 Wha cantily cuist aff for the wide sea at lay
 Benon the dowie skyline are aa wede awa!...

Hou mony skippers deid wi crews an equipages!
 The Sea frae their life's quhair has reft awa the pages
 An, wi ae sough, dispairplit them ower aa the swaws,
 Sae nane sall ken their end i the undeimous deep...

An nane sall ken their names, no e'en a modest stane
 Tae tell the kirkyaird echoes whaur their corpses ligg:
 No e'en the green willan whase leaves turn broon an faa;
 No e'en the waesome ballant, sae lang-drawn-oot an slaw,
 Sung bi an aald blin beggar couryan bi the brigg.⁴⁷

The linguistic difference between the epigraph and Tait's more usual (for translation, at least) Shetlandic is striking. The hexameters are, as always, followed with an admirable regularity. Nevertheless, it is tempting to conclude – and this may of course be intentional – that the lines lack

⁴⁶ Tristan Corbière, *Les Amours Jaunes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 177. For the full text of Hugo's poem see: Victor Hugo, *Oeuvres Poétiques: I*, ed. by Pierre Albouy (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 1116-1117.

⁴⁷ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 46.

something of the hard sharpness of Tait's Shetlandic, which is after all his mother tongue. Reading the epigraph, one feels the use of classic 'Literary Scots' words and phrases such as "dowie" and "wede awa", both with heavy balladic associations. There is also a strong synthetic strand to Tait's Lallans here, with "dispairplit" and "undeimous" smelling strongly of Jamieson. The epigraph would, in fact, fit in fairly comfortably in Goodsir Smith's anarchic *Collected Poems*.

Before examining the Shetlandic Corbière itself, it is worth briefly mentioning another aspect of the epigraph: its inaccuracy. Checked against Hugo's own text, numerous inconsistencies emerge. Where Corbière has the ocean having taken all the pages from the sailors' lives, the original has "l'ouragan", the hurricane. Where Corbière has "Nul ne saura leurs noms", Hugo has "Rien ne sait plus vos noms", shifting sense, tense and person. In the penultimate line of the epigraph (Corbière splits the poem up, omitting large chunks; Tait's deletion of the dotted lines between passages glosses over this) it is a "chanson naïve et monotone" not "plaintive et monotone" in Hugo's poem. Perhaps most interestingly, the final line quoted by Corbière originally read "Que chante un mendiant à l'angle d'un vieux pont". Given that Tait translates a blind beggar, combining the two versions of the epigraph, it is tempting to speculate that he may have been aware of Corbière's discrepancies and sought to exploit them creatively. Whether or not he did, one is left with the peculiar spectacle of a Scots translation, epigraph to a Shetlandic poem, which in fact represents a flawed text incorrectly (intentionally or not) quoted, perhaps from memory, in the late nineteenth century.

Turning now to the Shetlandic version of the poem proper, it is immediately clear that, linguistically speaking, Tait is working on a different level entirely. Thus the opening two stanzas, alongside Corbière's original:

*Eh bien, tous ces marins – matelots, capitaines,
Dans leur grand Océan à jamais engloutis...
Partis insoucieux pour leurs courses lointaines,
Sont morts – absolument comme ils étaient partis.*

*Allons! c'est leur metier; ils sont morts dans leurs bottes!
Leur boujaron au coeur, touts vifs dans leurs capotes...
– Morts...Merci: la Camarde a pas le pied marin;
Qu'elle couche avec vous: c'est votre bonne femme...
– Eux, allons donc: Entiers! enlevés par la lame!
Ou perdus dans un grain...⁴⁸*

Yea, feth, aa da crewmen – baid skippers an deck-haands
Nou swallied i da dyoob, deep-sucken i da haaf –
Wha glig an gallus for da far grunds stoed fae laand
Ir daed – and dats as shoer as dat dey e'er coest aff.

So! Hit's whit dey signed for – ta dee wi sea-boets on
An yit soe'wasters fast, dir last dram's haet no gone.

⁴⁸ *Les Amours Jaunes*, p. 177.

Daid, said I? Madam Daeth? Dat black hag's nae seadug!
 Atween **your** sheets shoe'll smool, be **your** goed wife at last.
 For dem, anidder gaet: live-hyeukt bi da twarbog
 Or bi da black swaal's blast.⁴⁹

Randall Jarrell, in his essay on Corbière, wrote that the poet “is an extremely hard job for any translator, as his rhetoric depends to an unusual degree on antitheses, puns and half-puns, idioms, clichés, slang, paradoxes: often there is no equivalent word or phrase in English.”⁵⁰ Jarrell implies that the central aspect of this difficulty is linguistic – both lexical and deriving from the inimitable fervour with which the poet spits out his words, many of them peculiar to the French of Brittany. In the extract given above, two forms concern us in this respect: “boujaron” and “Camarde”, both italicised in the original. The former appears in *Littre* (which provides no examples but a Spanish root – *bujaron*) as “*Terme de marine. Petite mesure de fer-blanc qui sert dans la cambuse à distribuer les divers liquides à l'équipage, et contient le seizième d'une pinte (un peu moins du seizième d'un litre).*”⁵¹ As opposed to the dictionary's small tin vessel containing one sixteenth of a pint and a little less than one sixteenth of a litre, used in the storeroom to distribute various liquids to a ship's crew, in *Les Amours Jaunes* the word is glossed at the foot of the page as “ration d'eau-de-vie”; *uisge-beatha*, in other words. And indeed, this is the meaning Tait renders with “dir last dram's haet no gone.” As regards *Camarde*, the word does not appear to be a dialectal peculiarity – *Littre* cites Saint-Simon, Hugo and Scarron as having used it, centring the word fairly conclusively. The word denotes an allegorical representation of death and is apparently reasonably common in French literature, though often in the masculine form *Camard*. One is therefore tempted to suggest that Corbière italicised the word to emphasise both the gender of his spectre and his incredulity at her potential insertion into so markedly nautical a context. Tait's translation, “Madam Daeth”, seems to recognise this, following the original in its rejection of a *belle dame sans merci* for “da twarbog/ [and] da black swaal's blast.”

On one level, *La Fin* criticises Hugo's burlesque romantic gush over the dead sailors. On another, it reflects the invalid Corbière's physical incapacity in its attempt to reimagine the – grammatically feminine – sea as a masculine *locus mortis*. There is a negative capability here, as well as a negative femininity. As with Scarron's epitaph, one is aware of the various types of dying, as well as the several sublimities and sublimations implied by each. Moreover, Tait's use of literary Scots to reflect Hugo's metropolitan French and Shetlandic to represent Corbière's more peripheral voice impinges interestingly on discussions around domestication and foreignisation. Seen from one angle, in this translation Lallans stands in for the standard language – the dominant, fluent medium – which Tait plays off against his foreignising, resistant Shetlandic. On the other hand, considered from Tait's

⁴⁹ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 46.

⁵⁰ Randall Jarrell, ‘A Verse Chronicle’, in *Poetry and the Age* (New York: The Noonday Press (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux), 1953; 1972) pp. 149-176 (p. 158).

⁵¹ ‘<http://www.littre.org/definition/boujaron>’ [accessed 06/10/2014].

point of view it is clear that Shetlandic would be the domestic medium and Lallans the foreignising, comparatively estranging form of language. The poles of the domestication-foreignisation binary (which like all binaries has its limitations) shift depending on whether one views Tait's writing in terms of the Scottish Renaissance or the modern Shetlandic renaissance identified by Smith.

The second Corbière poem translated by Tait, *Paria*, is, like *La Fin*, one of his most interesting and complex statements as a poet and translator. The poem speaks to the peculiarities of his often exilic existence outwith Shetland, as well as his critically self-aware stance as regards the impersonal imperatives of nation, state and archipelago:

*Qu'ils se payent des républiques,
Hommes libres! – carcan au cou –
Qu'ils peuplent leurs nids domestiques!...
– Moi je suis le maigre coucou.*

*– Moi, – cœur eunuque, dératé
De ce qui mouille et ce qui vibre...
Que me chante leur Liberté,
A moi? toujours seul. Toujours libre.*

*– Ma Patrie... elle est par le monde;
Et puisque la planète est ronde,
Je ne crains pas d'en voir le bout...
Ma patrie est où je la plante:
Terre ou mer, elle est sous la plante
Des mes pieds – quand je suis debout.⁵²*

Lit dem keep dir commonweals!
Free men – wi collars on dir craigs!
Lit dem fill dir nestin-creels –
Da scrawny gowk's, my aigs!

My eunuch hert, gyippit sae lang
O whit can bloed an baet – for me
Whit grammerie haes dir “freedom sangs”,
My lee-lane alwies, alwies free?

My midderland's da Mappamound,
An sin, dey say, da warld is roond,
A'm shoer A'll fin nae end tae it...
An my bonnhoga's whaar I plant
My flag or boet-soles – never ant
Be it sea or laand – while A'm on fit.⁵³

Corbière does not so much entertain doubts as to the efficacy of socio-political discourse as attempt to drown it out with his cynical laughter and his howls of rejection. Tait modulates the Breton poet's voice into a beautifully pitched Shetlandic commentary on the multiple contingencies of nation, state

⁵² *Les Amours Jaunes*, p. 118.

⁵³ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 49.

and self. Where the French poem rejects republics, the Shetlandic spurns “dir commonweals”. The Scottish connotations of the word are suggestive. Similarly, the shake of the head with which the poet dismisses “freedom sangs” and “da Mappamound” imply an eyebrow raised at a particular political tradition, as well as at political discourse in and of itself. That Tait was himself a passionate proponent of this political tradition makes his questioning of it all the more interesting. Like Corbière, a Breton poet writing in French, the Shetlandic writer, working in Scots and English as well as in his native dialect, persists at the cultural interstices. For both writers, what might initially seem to be a disadvantage – the highly provisional nature of their identity, particularly as regards language – turns out to be their greatest strength.

Structurally, *Paria* toys with the sonnet, proceeding in an irregular series of quatrains and sestets. This is as close as Tait takes us to modernism, at least in his translations. Chronologically at least, his dialogue with French poetry concludes with ‘An Ill Name’, his Shetlandic version of the French poet and singer-songwriter Georges Brassens’ *La Mauvaise Réputation*. Born in 1921 in Sète, fifty years after the birth of Paul Valéry in the same small Mediterranean town, Brassens, who died in 1981, is a unique figure among the various poets translated by Tait. Ronsard recited his poems at court. Baudelaire declaimed his in the cafes of Paris. Brassens performed his *chansons* on radio and television, accompanying himself on the acoustic guitar. *La Mauvaise Réputation*, among the most iconic of these, fits Tait’s persona perfectly:

*Au village, sans prétention,
J’ai mauvaise reputation.
Qu’je m’démène ou qu’je reste coi
Je pass’ pour un je-ne-sais-quoi!
Je ne fais pourtant de tort à personne
En suivant mon chemin de petit bonhomme.
Mais les brav’s gens n’aiment pas que
L’on suive une autre route qu’eux,
Non les brav’s gens n’aiment pas que
L’on suive une autre route qu’eux,
Tout le monde médit de moi,
Sauf les muets, ça va de soi.⁵⁴*

Ida toonship at I caa hame
A’m gotten somewy an ill name.
Whidder I dance or whidder I sit,
A’m taen fur I-kenna-whit.
Wrang, bi my will, I never did ta nonn,
As I traivel in pace my ain rod hom.
Bit da braa sheelds is whick ta blem,
If ye tak a differnt gate fae dem.
Aa da warld speaks ill o me –
Aa bit da dumb fock, dat you’ll see!⁵⁵

⁵⁴ <http://www.paroles.net/sinsemilia/paroles-la-mauvaise-reputation> [accessed 28/10/2014].

⁵⁵ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 52.

Tait's verses are shorter by two lines as he omits the repetition, in the negative, of "les brav's gens n'aiment pas que/L'on suive une autre route qu'eux". In performance, one imagines, the refrain could easily have been reinstated.⁵⁶ While there is a certain change in *metier* inherent in the transition from record or stage to page, Tait nevertheless finds some wonderful equivalences for Brassens' lyrics. The substitution of "Ida toonship" for "au village" moves the Shetlandic element to the fore. The replacement of "je-ne-sais-quoi" with "I-kenna-whit" is similarly inspired. The subsequent three verses of the song expand upon this persona of wayward innocence, in the Shetlandic describing how everyone but "da haandliss" points the finger, all but "da laigless" trip over him and all but the blind will come to see him hanged. There is, however, a real anger beneath the humour – Brassens, unlike, say, Charles Trenet, was a French singer with strong radical sympathies. In a Scottish context, one thinks of Hamish Henderson and, more recently, Dick Gaughan.

Tait's Shetlandic versions from the French poets of five centuries form the core of his work as a translator. They are the fruits of a lifelong engagement with the language, culture and intellectual history of France, as well as with creative readings of that history by Anglo-American modernism and the Scottish Renaissance. They point to an exemplary desire to move the centre to the periphery and vice versa, which finds as much worth in a modern song as a fifteenth-century ballade or a renaissance sonnet. The prosodic variation and diverse forms of discourse which poets as far apart as Corbière and Ronsard require of a translator are considerable. Tait proves, again and again, that he is equal to the challenge and prepared to learn from it. One can ask little more of a poet.

III. *Nordic Models: Scotland, Scève and Scandinavia*

Tait's single Scots version of Maurice Scève (ca.1501-1564) does not appear in *Le Testament and other translations*, which concentrates on his Shetlandic work. It is, however, collected in *A Day Between Weathers*. Born at the turn of the sixteenth century, some years before the principal figures of the Pléiade, Scève is in this sense a transitional figure, lying between Ronsard and du Bellay and earlier French poets. Nevertheless, his work has far more in common with these poets than Villon, an obviously late-medieval poet who writes almost in another language to these Renaissance sonneteers. Edwin Morgan, whose 1975 volume of translations, *Fifty Renaissance Love Poems*, is dominated by Scève's *dizains* to his *Délie*, places the poet firmly in the Petrarchan tradition which, he argues, had essentially fizzled out by the later seventeenth century.⁵⁷ The collection, which follows a

⁵⁶ There was evidently a strong performance culture in twentieth-century Shetland. Mark Smith writes that Tait's contemporary Rhoda Bulter (1929-1994) made "hundreds" of appearances "at concerts and shows in community halls all over the islands" (*The Literature of Shetland*, p. 158).

⁵⁷ There is no evidence that Morgan and Tait were directly influenced by each other's Scève translations. However, appearing for decades in the same literary magazines and sharing many friends and acquaintances, the two poets would certainly have been aware of one another's work to some degree.

chronological arc through Petrarch, Scève, Garcilaso de la Vega, Tasso and Marino, is a fascinating survey of one central strand of European poetry over several centuries and in three languages. While drawing upon a wider pool of source texts, linguistically speaking, it bears comparison with the kind of immersion in tradition evinced by Tait's own translations; as with the Shetlandic Villon, Morgan's Scève translations were the product of a long engagement with the French poet. James McGonigal writes in his biography that Morgan's earliest translations from Scève "are dated October 1945 to January 1946, just before he re-entered civilian life. His early choice of this complex syntax as a poetic challenge, perhaps matching his own experience of a tangled emotional life, suggests the aptness of [Edwin] Muir's description of the young poet as 'too involved'."⁵⁸

A few pages earlier, McGonigal makes more explicit links between Morgan's sexuality and his attraction to Scève's syntactically convoluted, neoplatonic love poetry.⁵⁹ The sublimation of problematic desire into poetry is, of course, a phenomenon which transcends gender and preference. In this context, 'Vertue Rewardit', Tait's Scots translation of *Délie XLI*, a poem also translated by Morgan,⁶⁰ allows for an interesting reading across versions and languages:

*Le veoir, l'ouyr, le parler, le toucher,
Finoient le but de mon contentement,
Tant que le bien, qu'Amantz ont sur tout cher,
N'eust oncques lieu en nostre accointement.
Que m'à valu d'aymer honnestement
En sainte amour chastement esperdu?
Puis que m'en est le mal pour bien rendu;
Et qu'on me peult pour vice reprocher,
Qu'en bien ayment i'ay promptement perdu
La veoir, l'ouyr, luy parler, la toucher.*⁶¹

Tae see, tae hear, tae speak, tae touch her haund
Was aa the bliss an mair I ever socht;
Sae the remeid aa luvers else demaund
I had abjurit baith in deed an thocht.
But nou what rich remeid has vertue brocht
Tae me, still fettered wi this haly chain?
Sen ill for guid is aa the grace I gain;
An, waur, I maun the clype o tongues withstaund
That my aince vauntit vertue wad arraign,
For that I see not, hear nor touch her hand.⁶²

As with the epigraph to *La Fin*, one feels the slight artificiality of the language. Tait, flawlessly naturalistic in his Shetlandic, despite the use of many arcane and dictionary-derived words, is less

⁵⁸ James McGonigal, *Beyond the Last Dragon: A Life of Edwin Morgan* (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2010), pp. 85-86.

⁵⁹ *Beyond the Last Dragon*, pp. 79-80.

⁶⁰ (*Collected Translations*, p. 168).

⁶¹ Maurice Scève, *Délie*, ed. by I.D. McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 141.

⁶² *A Day Between Weathers*, p. 95.

virtuosic in the Lowland tongue. For all the formal artistry of his *dizain*, the final fusion of medieval and contemporary colloquial speech is never quite completed, with a sometimes bewilderingly various scatter of registers and linguistic forms across different parts of the poem. The first line, for instance, is essentially modern (one notes in passing the two spellings of “haund/hand” which appear in the poem). The second is reasonably close to the vernacular. The third’s deployment of a word like “remeid”, repeated in the sixth line, is markedly medievalist, as is the unusual spelling of “vertue” in the fifth and ninth lines and the use of “abjurit” in the fourth. To point this out is not to invalidate Tait’s translation, but may be to suggest that, had he attempted Scève in Shetlandic, ‘Vertue Rewardit’ might have possessed a somewhat harder, more consistent tonal edge. It is at any rate telling that this is, apparently, Tait’s only published translation into Lallans apart from the Hugo epigraph to *La Fin*, which was implicitly entered into an unfavourable comparison with the Shetlandic used to render the body of Corbière’s poem. Clearly, the speech community he hoped to serve in his translations was generally centred on Lerwick rather than Edinburgh.

The Scots version of Scève, omitted from the exclusively Shetlandic *Le Testament and other translations*, provides another perspective on both the Scottish and French traditions in Tait’s oeuvre. The final pair of translations included in the collection, as well as *A Day Between Weathers*, embody a departure from both these traditions, taking poet and reader in another, more northerly and easterly direction.

Tait’s translations from the French are, while sometimes from fairly recondite or otherwise obscure originals, essentially canonical in derivation. If de Magny and Scarron are names which will elicit little recognition from the average reader, one would at least expect to find a few of their poems in a representative anthology of French sixteenth or seventeenth-century verse. The only contemporary Francophone, Brassens, was internationally famous at the time of translation. In his French versions, then, Tait was not engaged in a campaign of critical support for writers without advocates in the English-speaking world. He draws upon the established canon, leaving it intact. The same could hardly be said of the two versions from twentieth-century Scandinavian poets collected in both *A Day Between Weathers* and *Le Testament and other translations*, the original authors of which remain practically unknown in their own countries, let alone Scotland or England.

The Danish poet and novelist Martin Melsted is a little-known figure in the canon of twentieth-century Scandinavian writers. Discussing Virginia Woolf’s European reception, Ida Klitgård writes of the “new energy, a new faith in experiment and trust in the freedom of art and

aesthetics unencumbered by the often bleak outlook of social realism”⁶³ in Danish literature in the years immediately after the Second World War. Klitgård goes on to discuss

a newly founded publishing house, Borgen, which from the outset specialized in new works in Danish, primarily poetry, visual art and non-fiction. Borgen’s first publication in 1949 was a small pamphlet, printed in 300 copies, containing a translation of Woolf’s essay [*A Letter to a Young Poet*] (Brev til en ung digter) by a fairly unknown writer, Martin Melsted. The choice of this particular essay functioned, I believe, as an appeal to young Danish writers to reconsider literary history and then begin to write.

Borgen is still in business today. Melsted has, alas, remained fairly unknown, presenting the English-speaking reader lacking Danish with some considerable difficulties as regards his original works and life story. It seems that Martin Melsted was the pseudonym of a writer named Rau Levinsohn (1911-?).⁶⁴ He appears to have published a number of novels and collections of poetry in Danish before, during and in the first few decades after the Second World War. His presumably Jewish name suggests an obvious reason for the use of an ethnically Danish pseudonym at this dark moment in European history. If this is correct, the question arises as to whether or not Tait was aware of Melsted’s dual identity. He clearly knew him personally to some extent (in a letter to Peter Jamieson dated 1st November, 1949, he mentions refers to Melsted by name in the context of a Danish translation of his own poem ‘Gallow Hill’).⁶⁵

In the curious absence of extant correspondence between Tait and Melsted, one is left with poetry. The one translation from Melsted in Tait’s published works, ‘Da Draimin Skald [Tae Marc Chagall]’ is, regardless of the various identities of its original author, a remarkable work, though it must be admitted that the poem gains greatly in meaning if it is taken to be the work of a Danish Jew who survived the Holocaust by assuming a Nordic name. Seen in this light, ‘Da Draimin Skald’ (a poem none of Tait’s few critics have so far discussed in detail) starts to look like far more than a footnote, indicative of the poet’s liberality and Scandinavian inclinations but little more. One might also read it as an enduring meditation on faith, historical catastrophe and the doubtfully redemptive possibilities of art:

In Vitebsk da fock waitit
An baigit an gret
An dir prayer wis da lyood
Fae da feerie fiddlers’ knowe
An da midder’s saat tairs
Goed rowin in streams
Oot ta da faar haaf
Whaar da maalie loems mirrored

⁶³ Ida Klitgård, ‘Waves of Influence: The Danish Reception of Virginia Woolf’, in *The Reception of Virginia Woolf in Europe*, ed. Mary Ann Caws and Nicola Luckhurst (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 165-185 (p. 170).

⁶⁴ <http://www.litteraturpriser.dk/aut/mm.htm#MMartinMelsted> [accessed 24/10/2014].

⁶⁵ SA D9/121/2.

Da lily an rose
An oot an in da hooses
Goed da nycht's moen an staars
An da moarn's sun gloored raid
I da cock's kame on da toonmals.⁶⁶

Vitebsk, the now Belorussian city near which Chagall was born in 1887 and where the Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevich lived and taught between 1919 and 1922, was the site of a Jewish ghetto during the Second World War. Between the 8th and 11th of October 1941 the Nazis massacred most of the Jewish population. This event, it seems, lies behind Melsted's poem. Tait's translation, ebbing and flowing in a *vers libre* quite foreign to the spirit of his versions from the French, attempts to use Shetlandic to address twentieth-century traumas of a far darker character than the tongue had hitherto been called upon to deal with. The Danish poet, dreaming in Chagall-like images, is rendered as a skald – the familiar representative of the island tradition. Similarly, the music rising from the “feerie fiddlers' knowe” is the plaint of the Shetland landscape itself, juxtaposed with Chagall's no-less fantastical green-faced fiddler, sawing out a tune against a background of skewed, angular houses, churches and snowy fields. The “hooses” and “toonmals” are at once those of Yell, Vitebsk and the painter's imagination.

In the succeeding strophes, the poem juxtaposes idyllic evocations of place and human attachment with explicit references to Auschwitz, Belsen and the Russian Revolution, the second stanza referring to the latter's “dowd an feddit flags” and the next beginning with the couplet “Dy lass waits dee nakit/ I da tree's green laives”. Alternating between the utopian claims of totalitarianism and the fleeting consolations of pastoral romance, this female figure is said to wish that the one addressed, who seems to be simultaneously Chagall, the skald and the reader, come “An draim her a horse/ An a coo an a hoose” for all that “draim at Belsen-berge/ Is aunly a wanrestit draim.” Painter's and poet's skill to create beautiful images – essential in their own way as livestock or farmhouse – does badly when set against the memory of the gas chambers. In the fourth strophe one is presented with the twilit image of lover and beloved wandering “doon ta da moedoo” in the twilight “While da fires o Auschwitz ir slockin/ In yallow daala reek.”⁶⁷ Confronted with a historical catastrophe of such proportions, God is blinded; reincarnated as Chagall's itinerant fiddler, but now unable to find his way back to the sites of human charity and forgiveness – in essence, to forget. Only the artist retains the power to dream; to return, however momentarily, to a gentler vision of the species' propensities and capabilities. Though the pastoralism of the poem's conclusion is bittersweet in the extreme, one imagines that Melsted – and through him Tait – would not have agreed with Adorno as regards the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz. It is also interesting to note that, while much of Tait's original poetry engages explicitly with the moral and aesthetic challenges posed by the Second World

⁶⁶ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 54.

⁶⁷ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 54.

War, the version of Melsted is the only one of his translations which touches directly on the conflict. It is equally significant that this attempt to do justice to twentieth-century atrocities through translation comes via one of the “Norse languages”, which as MacDiarmid noted in 1949 were a key imaginative touchstone for Tait in his efforts to construct a distinctive Shetlandic literary identity at the fringes of the Scottish literary tradition. Rather than the kind of romantic nostalgia for the Viking age of which Smith’s *The Literature of Shetland* provides plentiful evidence, Tait’s work in this area retains a firm commitment to contemporary reality.

The final poem in *Le Testament and other translations*, the free verse sonnet ‘Lantern’, follows ‘Da Draimin Skald’ in its engagement with Scandinavian poetry and culture. The subtitle informs the reader that the poem has been translated “from the Norwegian of Gunnar Heros”; sadly, further information on this poet has proved elusive. Nevertheless, on the basis of evidence internal to the poem itself, it seems possible to point to a number of key strands within the text. Thus the two closing quatrains which follow the poem’s sestet:

If I sood dee at sea,
My deckhaand’s strood o dirty dungarees
Sall launch my sowl
Laek a lantern – tae eternity.

An whin my sowl glaims, pacefil an white,
In place amang da fixed staars,
O mak Du hit fast
Wi a haidlycht half-hitch on da towe o Heeven!⁶⁸

The first stanza of the poem⁶⁹ presents the reader with the image of a lantern shining in the dark, hanging from a boat’s masthead far out to sea. The poem then moves from this symbol of literal light and life, first down into the black absence of the drowned, then up, ascending to “da fixed staars” in oil-stained dungarees. The pair of quatrains quoted are, in effect, a prayer, which seeks to elevate and elegise the sailor in grubby working clothes, who becomes a kind of Everyman in Tait’s translation. While the two poems move in the same waters, there is a very marked difference of tone, orientation and intention between ‘Lantern’ and *La Fin*. One also remembers the translation from de Magny, ‘Charon an da Skald’, a poem in which the poet articulated a desire for finitude; in effect for the end of the poem. ‘Lantern’ does not desire this end, but admits its inevitability. Coming as it does at the conclusion of this reading of Tait’s long, productive career as a translator, it is very tempting to link this awareness of closure, of the beyond, with the poet’s cultural affinities for Scandinavia. Norway lies beyond most Scottish poets’ close frame of reference. For Tait, and other modern Shetlandic poets

⁶⁸ *Le Testament and other translations*, p. 56.

⁶⁹ Discussed briefly in my 2012 MPhil thesis.

like Vagaland, it may be something of an alternative, desired centre; one of the fixed stars in, if not their Plèiade, then their Septentrion.

As with most of the writers discussed in this thesis, the full range of Tait's achievement as poet and translator was never fully recognised in his lifetime, for all his enduring popularity in his native archipelago. The previous chapter addressed Scott's long writing life, which outlasted the Scottish Renaissance as a living movement by several decades. Tait too wrote on into the nineteen nineties. However, whereas Scott remained a recalcitrant Renaissance man, as it were, until the very end, with Tait one feels the pull of a different set of priorities and obligations. Though the poet was formed in no small degree by his time outwith the islands, particularly as a young man in Edinburgh, his writing always returns, linguistically and imaginatively, to Shetland. Uniquely among the poets discussed in this thesis, Tait was able to some extent to address himself to a coherent community. Despite the frustrations of his later years as regards publication and a wider appreciation of his writings, particularly the Villon versions, which stand securely as one of the high points of twentieth-century verse translation anywhere in the Anglophone world, Shetland offered Tait a freedom enjoyed by very few of his Scottish contemporaries. Formed by the Scottish Renaissance's cosmopolitan ideals and radical spirit, Tait is in no straightforward sense a Scottish writer. Certainly, Shetland was the place from which his writing ultimately derived and to which it was responsible, above and beyond his sense of responsibility to a wider Scottish culture. In his 2011 anthology, *These Islands, We Sing*, Kevin MacNeil explores the idea that, taken together, the poetry of Scotland's three archipelagos in some ways constitutes a separate tradition within Scottish poetry as a whole. While being understandably keen to celebrate the creative possibilities of this insular distinctiveness, MacNeil also notes the ways in which various forms of marginality – chief among them geography, language and gender – tend to intersect, with the ultimate effect being that in many cases "Scottish island poets are the sidelined of the sidelined."⁷⁰ Like Mackay Brown and MacLean, Tait was an islander educated in Edinburgh, whose writing was enabled by debates around Scottish nationalism and cultural renewal in the early twentieth century, but which also has important implications for the local limitations of overly centralising views of Scottish language and literature. The paradoxical, peripheral nature of his Scottish identity, coupled with the inventiveness and great linguistic energy of his translations, makes him the ideal figure with whom to conclude this analysis of his gifted, complex generation.

⁷⁰ Kevin MacNeil, *These Islands, We Sing: An Anthology of Scottish Islands Poetry* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2011).

Conclusion: Beyond the Renaissance – Language as Anti-Hero

Like “Irish Revival”, “French Symbolism” and “Anglo-American Modernism”, “Scottish Renaissance” is a periodically indispensable, though potentially misleading term. In its most useful sense it denotes the local manifestation and development of a number of trends perceptible elsewhere in the cultural production of the early to middle twentieth century. Hugh MacDiarmid and his associates were, after all, hardly the only artists of their time to react with vigour against a perceived cultural centre. Nor were they alone in their radical questioning of language and creative form, one of the results of which was the emergence of a new, determinedly anti-provincial poetry in Scots. The international aspirations of this poetry are exemplified by the large numbers of translations, mostly from European languages, undertaken by its early practitioners, discussed in the introduction to this thesis. The five chapters which followed have examined the role of translation in the work of the key Scots poet-translators of the succeeding generation, all born in or just before the decade stretching from 1910 to 1920.

Translation from many languages was central to the writing of classicist and nationalist politician Douglas Young. His two collections, *Auntran Blads* and *A Braird o Thristles*, brim with Scots versions of other poets. In these books the proportion of translated to original work is such that the former is clearly foregrounded as being of greater importance to Young’s project as a poet. Indeed, whereas many poets use translations to extend particular aspects of their original work within a larger volume, in this case the relationship is to some extent reversed. The pair of comedies from Aristophanes testify to Young’s dedication to his task, as well as comprising a cornerstone in the canon of modern dramatic verse-translation into Scots. Young’s role as a theorist and publicist for the Scots revival remains underappreciated, as does his importance as an enabler and translator of modern Gaelic poetry in the nineteen forties. As his term “plastic Scots” implies, he saw language as something infinitely malleable, which writers might reshape and recombine in many different ways. In terms of Young’s creative work, this understanding of the remarkable plasticity of Scots often manifested itself in a synthesising Lallans, drawing on the speech and written language of various moments and localities within the Scottish tradition. By making links between Gaelic and Scots through translation, Young sought to achieve a comparable synthesis across linguistic boundaries. Above and beyond the aesthetic implications of such gestures, this kind of approach to Scottish language, which sought to fashion a heterogeneous but unified whole out of cultural diversity, was eminently political – not to mention nationalistic. Linking Scots and Gaelic to a vision of restored Scottish nationhood, Young’s attempts to broaden the linguistic and literary range of his tongue through translation were central to a wider programme of anti-imperialist resistance and cultural restitution. Reading through the lens of his Scots translations, one can argue Young was a creative writer of greater importance than is generally acknowledged, building on MacDiarmid but also

drawing upon the legacy of Anglo-American modernism (particularly his occasional correspondent Eliot) in a Scottish context.

To consider the role of translation in the oeuvre of Sydney Goodsir Smith is equally revealing. Born two years after Young, the New Zealand-born poet made Scots versions of writers in other languages throughout his writing life, from the Gaelic, French, Czech and Polish poems he translated during the Second World War, to the French and Russian symbolists he worked on throughout the nineteen fifties. Whereas Young's slim volumes are overwhelmingly dominated by poetry in translation, Goodsir Smith uses translated texts in a more targeted manner, drawing upon them to expand and clarify key aspects of particular collections. Again like Young, Goodsir Smith was a politically conscious writer, whose translations sought not only to transplant foreign poets into a left-wing nationalist canon, but also to achieve a more general liberalisation of attitude towards language in Scotland. Though his work is often explicitly located in Edinburgh, he too responds to cultural diffusion with a Lallans-style attempt at linguistic synthesis. Again as with Young, one sees this reflected in his desire to bring poetry in Gaelic closer to the centre of the Scottish literary mainstream.

For a long time seen by many as the natural successor to MacDiarmid and the key poet of the middle generation, Goodsir Smith's drinking grew progressively debilitating in the nineteen sixties and early seventies (during which period he seems, coincidentally or not, to have been translating very little). Coupled with Edwin Morgan's apotheosis around the same time, this shift reflects ongoing linguistic changes in Scottish poetry. Scots was still important, but was no longer put forward with the kind of programmatic fervour characteristic of the first- and second-generation writers. This is not to suggest that Scottish writers had ceased to question linguistic forms and hierarchies. Indeed, as the decade wore on, it was increasingly the more chauvinistic expressions of MacDiarmid-inspired literary nationalism that were being challenged. As Roderick Watson points out, the sixties saw "the rise of demotic and dynamic speech as a powerful literary form in the work of James Kelman and a whole generation of younger writers."¹ Writing in the same volume, John Corbett argues that by this time "even MacDiarmid's restless experimentalism had moved him away from the movement he inspired, and the generation of Lallans poets who had followed him were now in competition with new cultural forces who looked beyond Scotland for new heroes."² One might add that the Lallans poets, who as this thesis has demonstrated were nothing if not committed translators, had done this too – only that for many young writers the outside cultural forces were more likely to be Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac than Baudelaire or Ronsard.

¹ Roderick Watson, 'Scottish Poetry: The Scene and the Sixties', in *The Scottish Sixties: Reading, Rebellion and Revolution*, ed. Eleanor Bell and Linda Gunn (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 69-92 (pp. 87-88).

² John Corbett, 'Photographing Lallans', in *The Scottish Sixties*, pp. 261-283 (p. 280).

Robert Garioch, whose activities as a translator were central to enlarging the imaginative and formal scope of his writing from the nineteen fifties on, remained productive throughout the later sixties, seventies and very early eighties. These years saw his appointment as writer-in-residence at Edinburgh from 1971-1973, as well as the florescence of the Belli sonnets in collaboration with Antonia Stott. They might also be said to inaugurate the post-Renaissance phase of Scottish writing, key negative milestones for which are Young's death in 1973 and Goodsir Smith's two years later, followed shortly by MacDiarmid's in 1978. More positive markers of the sea change taking place in the Scottish scene are the aforementioned publication of Morgan's *The Second Life*³ in 1968, Tom Leonard's *Six Glasgow Poems*⁴ in 1969 and Liz Lochhead's *Memo for Spring*⁵ in 1972. All three of these poets play with a wide variety of Scots and English linguistic forms and registers in their work. All three of them have translated poetry into Scots (for all Leonard's resistance to the label). Garioch, though only eleven years older than Morgan and for a time his fellow *Scottish International* (1968-1974) editor, belongs clearly to the previous generation. Nevertheless, he shares something of these younger writers' openness of outlook; their simultaneous awareness and wariness of received tradition (as regards gender, national politics and sexuality, as well as literature). In its own simultaneously wry and elegiac manner, Garioch's is a political poetry, driving ultimately towards the familiar ideal of a heterogeneously multilingual Scottish republic of letters. With that said, it is also the case that his work is rooted in a demotic sense of local specificity and intimacy. Like Goodsir Smith, Garioch was an Edinburgh poet. One can find many links between their writing – not least the way in which both were Scots writers who made sympathetic cause with the work of their close friend MacLean. On the other hand, unlike Goodsir Smith and Young, both of whom were educated at public school and Oxford, Garioch was a working-class poet who grew up speaking a language far closer to the Scots of his verse than either of the other writers just named. Though his work undoubtedly is synthetic to some extent – notably in his versions from the Greek – one also sees, in the Belli sonnets especially, a concomitant attachment and sense of responsibility towards local particularities of expression; the Scots tongue as it is spoken in actuality, rather than as it occurs in the pages of Jamieson. Rearranging the order of his poems across different books, Garioch's various collected volumes sometimes set his translations beside original work, playing the two strands of his writing off against one another (for instance, the Buchanan version and the 'Repone' which responds to it). Towards the end of his career, however, translation became his preferred method of poetic composition. This is reflected by the final section of his *Collected Poems*, which is exclusively made up of translations from Belli.

³ Edwin Morgan, *The Second Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968).

⁴ Tom Leonard, *Six Glasgow Poems* (Glasgow: Midnight Publications, 1969).

⁵ Liz Lochhead, *Memo for Spring* (Edinburgh: Reprographia, 1972).

Tom Scott, another figure with working-class origins, outlived Garioch by nearly a decade and a half. A gifted translator into Scots, he continued to write and make versions of foreign poets until very near his death.⁶ Deep into the movement's afterlife, Scott never stopped believing in the nationalist and internationalist ideals of the Scottish Renaissance. His refusal to compromise is remarkable, whatever pitfalls this refusal may ultimately have entailed. Scott was a writer haunted by tradition, whose early contact with Eliot was decisive, leading to his translations of Villon and lifelong engagement with the Romance touchstones of Anglo-American modernism. While his debt to MacDiarmid is evident, his affinities with Muir (as translator and maker of symbols) may have been equally important, for all his occasional resistance to his sometime teacher at Newbattle. To read Scott through the prism of his translations is to focus on one of his great imaginative resources, which enabled him to travel widely in the history of culture and ideas, while remaining rooted in his own vernacular locality. In light of this one can interpret Scott's project of translating classic European poets like Dante as an attempt to develop a vulgar eloquence – a "harsklike singin" – which would balance Scottish and European cultural perspectives, as well as the various registers and historical strands of Scots available to modern writers. Like Goodsir Smith, Scott uses his translations to add integrally to volumes primarily composed of original poetry. However, the fact that his first published book contained only translations of Villon is significant, constituting a clear statement of intent at the start of his writing life in a manner comparable to the way in which Garioch's Belli sonnets bring his own career to a close.

William J. Tait, who died a few years before Scott, was frustrated by the lack of public success of his translations during his lifetime, during which they never appeared in the collected volume he envisaged. Now that they are available in this form, the magnitude of his achievement as a translator, as well as an original poet, can be more fully appreciated. Translating the French classics into Shetlandic, Tait sought to bring the centre to the periphery. A close associate of many of the other writers discussed in this thesis, his poetry complicates critical conceptions of the Scottish Renaissance, which in him finds a voice not easily reducible to the national narratives all too rarely questioned by MacDiarmid, Goodsir Smith and Young. In this inheres the great importance of his work in a Renaissance context – its affordance of an insular perspective which, by definition, is never unambiguously nationalistic. Tait is a writer deeply attached to the particular, but also suspicious of this attachment, which he often ironises. Here there is a similarity with Garioch, and perhaps one reason for both poets' enduring popularity among their small but intensely loyal constituencies. After all, even more than Garioch, one might argue, Tait writes a form of Scots which is irreducibly local – linked by peculiarities of vocabulary and grammar to a specific speech community. Of course, as Smith points out in *The Literature of Shetland*, literary Shetland dialect is to some extent like Lallans

⁶ Tom Hubbard, pers. comm.

in that it is often a synthesis of the spoken tongue and recondite, textual material. As with the other writers discussed in this thesis, Tait used translation as a means of remaking and refashioning his language, which it was his intention to aggrandise and render contemporary through this interaction with the foreign text.

This thesis has argued that these five writers were the key Scots poet-translators of the middle twentieth century. While their work will not be entirely unfamiliar to keen readers of Scottish poetry, it seems fair to say that none of them (with the possible exception of Garioch and, in Shetland at least, Tait) is a household name. The principal reason for this is the language in which they wrote, which for all its rich interplay with the spoken tongue, can be a stumbling block for a readership unfamiliar with (and perhaps unsympathetic to) Scots. In his 1960 review of Goodsir Smith's *Figs and Thistles*, Norman MacCaig wrote that "Scottish poets have three languages to choose from (or to be chosen by) – English, Gaelic, and Scots. There is an ancient tradition of poetry in the last two, which are dying; and no native tradition worth speaking of in English, which is killing the other two."⁷ MacCaig chose English, or was chosen by it. Certainly, his poetry merits its enormous contemporary popularity; it might never have achieved it had MacCaig set out to write in Scots or Gaelic, his mother's native tongue.

The five poets discussed at length in this thesis chose otherwise or rather, like Gavin Douglas, had no other choice. Their Scots versions of poems in other languages are conscious interventions in a long tradition, the most important recent milestone in which was the emergence of the interwar Renaissance, to which internationalist ideals and translation were central. Indeed, the Italian scholar Marco Fazzini has argued that translation is "the pivotal element of the Scottish tradition."⁸ This is a big statement, but to some extent a justifiable one, particularly once a grander definition of translation than the simple search for functional verbal equivalents is accepted. Scotland, as Iain Crichton Smith put it in his poem for the opening of the Scottish parliament, 'The Beginning of a New Song', is at the very least a "three-voiced country".⁹ Historically, as Thomas Owen Clancy's anthology *The Triumph Tree* shows, one would have to add Brythonic, Irish, Latin, Norse and Old English (not to mention Pictish).¹⁰ One might also split hairs about the point at which Middle Scots and English finally diverge. More recently, Polish, Urdu and many others have added their voices to the growing list of

⁷ 'A Living Poetry' p. 320.

⁸ Marco Fazzini, *Crossings: Essays on Contemporary Scottish Literature and Hybridity* (Venezia: Supernova Edizioni, 2000), p. 15.

⁹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1999/06/99/scottish_parliament_opening/377516.stm [accessed 21/07/2015].

¹⁰ *The Triumph Tree: Scotland's Earliest Poetry AD 550-1350*, ed. by Thomas Owen Clancy (Canongate: Edinburgh, 1998). See also: *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, ed. by Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

Scotland's tongues.¹¹ In light of all this, one might well follow Fazzini in arguing that if the nation exists anywhere, it is in the everyday acts of translation facilitating communication between its various languages. Any model of the Scottish literary tradition cognisant of this would almost by definition rely upon translation in order to make connections between texts and writers within Scotland, as well as further afield.

This kind of approach to the Scottish tradition would valorise the work of writers like Douglas and MacDiarmid – two poets who were at the forefront of developments in verse translation in their respective times. It would also prize the work of the five principal poets discussed in this thesis, situating their writing above or at least alongside that of their more famous contemporaries for whom translation was less important an activity. Without denying the power and great persuasiveness of MacCaig and Mackay Brown, formidable poets writing in English, both of whom translated little or nothing, one might argue that Young, Goodsir Smith, Garioch, Scott and Tait are in some ways more characteristic of their literary culture's historical strengths. Certainly, reading them one rarely forgets the mediated, endlessly negotiable nature of their language, hovering as it does between the dictionary and the spoken word. In terms of their translations, the existence of an original works similarly on the reader, containing the possibility of any number of alternative renditions. Seen from this perspective, these writers' Scots translations come to seem strikingly provisional works, reminding their readers of the practically limitless possibilities language offers to put something in another way. They are in this respect texts eminently suited to a contemporary critical climate increasingly focussed on the insecure and unstable aspects of literary expression. As Venuti puts it in *The Scandals of Translation*: “Translations can precipitate a disciplinary revision because the representations they construct are never seamless or perfectly consistent, but often contradictory, assembled from heterogeneous cultural materials, domestic and foreign, past and present.”¹² The provisional nature of the Scots translations discussed in this thesis inheres both in this heterogeneity of cultural materials – the various words from dictionaries, other texts and the spoken language out of which they are constructed – but also in the reader's awareness that even the most persuasive translation is only ever one response among many. This comes across in those instances where a particular text or poet is translated by more than one writer, with the divergent decisions taken often being very revealing as regards the translator's own literary affinities and commitments.

On the other hand, despite the apparent instability of these texts, in which language is continually reinvented with varying degrees of grammatical consistency, these translators share a remarkable solidity of purpose. While their educational backgrounds were diverse, they all passed through institutions which were in the early twentieth century essentially opposed to the development

¹¹ The recent multicultural turn in Scottish writing is typified by publications such as *Wish I was here: a Scottish multicultural anthology*, ed. by Kevin MacNeil and Alec Finlay (Edinburgh: Morning Star Publications, 2000).

¹² *The Scandals of Translation*, p. 70.

and retention of Scots as a central part of Scottish culture. This coolness was reflected by society as a whole, with the then emerging broadcast technologies, newspapers and other media all geared heavily towards official English and Received Pronunciation. MacDiarmid's 1931 essay 'English Ascendancy in British Literature', published by Eliot in *The Criterion*, begins by sketching the lineaments of this situation, going on to argue in favour of a vigorous anti-imperialist turn in contemporary letters.¹³ Interestingly, MacDiarmid devotes almost no space to the question of political independence, in fact predicating his argument on a coherent, albeit heterogeneous sense of archipelagic unity. He does however make a number of specific points of direct relevance to the five key translators discussed in this thesis, particularly with regard to the "necessity to bridge the gulf between Gaelic and Scots."¹⁴ Taking his lead from the already established modern tradition of translation from Irish, integral to the cultural revival in Ireland, MacDiarmid writes that Scots poets are now realising that "they cannot get back to major forms until they recover their lost Gaelic background" and that "the services of such re-translators and literary historians as I have named in connection with Ireland are still sadly to seek [...]".¹⁵ One reflects that, for the five key writers discussed in this thesis, the literature and language of their country were political facts. While 'English Ascendancy in British Literature' makes little mention of an explicitly politicised Scottish nationalism, the essay's prioritising of marginalised forms of speech like Scots and Gaelic, particularly as regards the links to be made between them, valorises a key aspect of the second-generation poets' project. MacDiarmid's key insight here was that, in a multilingual nation or literary tradition, translation is vitally important because through it writers can seek to forge a whole out of the often confusingly diffuse mass of language with which they are confronted.

Writing in 1919, Eliot declared that it was Scotland's linguistic multiplicity, above all else, which militated against the existence of an independent and internally consistent literary tradition. In 1936 Muir went on to suggest that in contemporary terms to write in Scots, and especially in local dialect, was a fundamentally provincial gesture. Arguably, these judgements say as much about their makers' centrist understanding of cultural interactions and literary history as they do about the actual nature of literature and language in Scotland. After all, one might contradict Eliot, pointing out that, historically speaking, many literary traditions have been formed and sustained through precisely the kind of heterogeneous multilingualism which he rejects in a Scottish context. A good case in point, as MacDiarmid stresses in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, might be the central role played by Latin literature in the traditions of many European countries. Refuting Muir, one might argue with Patrick Kavanagh that it is, finally, up to individual writers and readers to decide whether or not their own culture and language are provincial – that is to say, defined in relation to another centre – or

¹³ C.M. Grieve ('Hugh MacDiarmid'), 'English Ascendancy in British Literature', *The Criterion* Vol.X, No.XLVI (July 1931), 593-623.

¹⁴ 'English Ascendancy', p. 606.

¹⁵ 'English Ascendancy', p. 611.

parochial, centring themselves in cognisance of the wider world. Certainly, the interactions across language, time and space which the Scots translations discussed in this thesis embody could be identified as a series of exchanges between the sorts of cultural parishes Kavanagh describes – Young’s Fife and Aristophanes’ Athens, Garioch’s Edinburgh and Belli’s Rome, Tait’s Shetland and Corbière’s Brittany. This is by definition a very different kind of relationship between places and cultures than that envisaged by Eliot when he suggested that the role of the periphery was only occasionally to challenge the centre, and more usually to keep the metropolis supplied with a steady stream of significant individuals. As Robert Crawford acknowledges, it would be rash to simply dismiss Eliot’s 1919 review. Indeed, in both ‘Was There a Scottish Literature?’ and ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, published very shortly afterwards, Eliot is “honing his own, more sophisticated ideas against the simpler perceptions of Gregory Smith. But he is also adapting some of the material from Smith’s book for his own purposes.”¹⁶

The catalytic effect of Eliot’s review upon the Scottish Renaissance is notorious – a frequently invoked narrative of the demotic periphery resisting the aloof centre. Less familiar are Eliot’s later points of engagement with Scottish literary culture, notably his correspondence with MacDiarmid and publication of his work in *The Criterion*, as well as his professed indebtedness to the thinking of “several Scottish Nationalists” in *After Strange Gods*. One might also cite the various letters he wrote to Young, Garioch and Scott, alternately encouraging and rejecting the work of these writers, but generally recognising the validity of their project. Notably, in each case one finds Eliot being explicitly asked or himself choosing to respond to a Scots translation – Young’s Valéry, Garioch’s Buchanan and Scott’s Villon. As the individual chapters of this thesis have shown, the canonical interventions of high modernism, especially within the Romance canon, have clear implications as regards these writers’ decisions to translate particular texts. As well as a desire to rewrite their language and identity with reference to a MacDiarmid-inspired “Good Europeanism”, the Scots translations discussed in this thesis were conditioned to a considerable degree by contemporary Anglo-American engagement with canonical European literature (here there may be a parallel with the way in which Douglas was himself responding to Caxton’s French-mediated English *Aeneid* and attempting to improve upon it). Clearly, this was motivated to some extent by a desire to remedy perceived lacunae in the Scottish tradition (drama, for instance). It is also clear that the 1919 review was by no means Eliot’s last word on the subject of Scottish letters – that his views continued to develop and that, had he been called upon to review an up-to-date study of Scottish literature in 1959, say, he might have come to some rather different conclusions.

¹⁶ Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature: Second Edition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 254.

In *Scott and Scotland*, Muir, building on Eliot and Gregory Smith, dismisses Scots, particularly its regional or local dialects, as an unsuitable medium for contemporary literature. His proposition that the best way forward for Scottish writers would be to follow Yeats in writing in English, so avoiding the putative provincialism of minority speech, is largely undercut by subsequent literary history. As the striking linguistic heterogeneity of twentieth-century Scottish poetry shows, while writing in English was certainly one response to Scotland's cultural situation, it was hardly the only one. Nonetheless, while Muir's central argument in *Scott and Scotland* is no longer tenable in its essentials, the dichotomy of centrality and provincialism which he was concerned to foreground has significant implications for other aspects of modern Scottish language and literature. Whether or not one agrees with Muir's conclusions, it remains the case that many Scottish writers of his generation and the next were similarly actuated by the desire to resist provincial trends of the kind epitomised by the Kailyard. A global language like English, no longer the property of any single country, provides one potential mode of resistance to these trends. In this respect the body of English-language poetry produced by twentieth-century Scottish writers – among them MacDiarmid, MacCaig, Mackay Brown, Morgan and Muir himself – speaks for itself. Where Muir was wrong, however, was in his rejection of minority speech as necessarily provincial. On the contrary, the rich corpus of modern translations into Scots suggests anything but provinciality, though there are differences to how this cosmopolitan aspiration manifests itself in the work of individual writers. Lallans, for instance, of the kind written by Young and MacDiarmid, seeks to synthesise the various regional and historical strands of Scots into a contemporary unity. This could be viewed as an attempt to resist the metropolis by creating an alternative centre, which would in turn exert a problematic centralising effect on its own peripheries. Proposing the alternative label "reintegrated Scots", Tom Hubbard – a rare contemporary figure who has explicitly situated his own work in continuity with the Scottish Renaissance project – writes that, to his mind, the term suggests "not only the reunification of a language which has fractured into dialects, but also the reconnection of its unique culture to other cultures at home and abroad: implied in this is a determined response to the urgent questions of man in society and the cosmos."¹⁷

Strikingly, one realises that Muir, MacDiarmid and Young were basically in agreement as regards the "fractured" undesirability of dialect poetry. The other route, to write in a particular local variety of Scots, is expressed particularly strongly in Tait's work and has much in common with Kavanagh's parochial alternative to provincialism. As Corbett points out in *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, when it comes to translation these two tendencies – the demotic and the synthetic – combine to make Scots a medium which can facilitate a process of simultaneous

¹⁷ See: Tom Hubbard, 'Reintegrated Scots: The Post-MacDiarmid Makars', in Cairns Craig, ed., *The History of Scottish Literature Volume 4: Twentieth Century* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 179-193. (p. 179).

domestication and foreignisation, complicating the established paradigm.¹⁸ The situation becomes more complicated when one considers that even the most foreignising form of synthetic Scots may have roots in the writer's mother tongue, which will not always be apparent to readers from elsewhere. Similarly, even a form of language like Tait's, which is evidently directed towards and deriving from an identified speech community, may itself contain synthetic elements and so foreignise in relation to the spoken tongue (or indeed towards other, perhaps more literary forms of Scots like Lallans). Corbett argues that translators "who do not participate in the tradition of reconstructing a literary Scots, a tradition which, as we have seen, extends from the sixteenth century" to the present day "can be seen as treading common ground with the 'Lallans' writers: if their chosen medium is indeed closer to 'the language of the people', its status is nevertheless raised above that of regional literature by the long tradition of writing in Scots, for a Scottish nation."¹⁹ As with the title of the present study, Corbett's invocation of Douglas' reference to the language of the Scottish nation highlights the connection between this tradition of Scots translation and, after 1707 at least, political nationalism. Although the occasionally challenging nature of their language and high cultural preoccupations arguably precluded a mass readership, Young, Goodsir Smith and Scott sought sincerely to speak for and to the nation as a whole. There are sometimes problematic aspects to this, notably as regards the potential marginalisation of local dialects. In this context, one of the most interesting things about the work of a writer like Tait is that, while it draws upon the long tradition of Scots poetry and verse translation, it is not primarily directed towards the Scottish nation. Whether the Shetlandic version of *La Fin* is viewed as domesticating, foreignising or indeed enacting a blend of both in relation to the Scots epigraph from Hugo, the approach to translation which it embodies is no less valid than that espoused by Young.

With the title of his 1931 essay, 'English Ascendancy in British Literature', MacDiarmid was referring not just to the English nation but the English language. As well as escaping the provincialism which perturbed Muir and Eliot, MacDiarmid was concerned with resisting and debunking linguistic imperialism – and not just within the British Isles. In light of this it is important to note that the intense, occasionally heated discussions around language and literature in twentieth-century Scotland have parallels in other cultures. It is, for instance, illuminating to compare Muir's position on writing in English with that outlined by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe in his essay, 'The African Writer and the English Language'. Achebe argues that within African literature there are both ethnic and national literatures, with the former term referring to writing in the various languages spoken by particular groups of people within a country, but not by everyone, while the latter denotes writing in a language which is, more or less, understood across ethnic and tribal boundaries. Of

¹⁸ *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, p. 185.

¹⁹ John Corbett, 'Writtin in the Lamage of Scottis Natioun: Literary Translation into Scots, in *Translating Literature*, ed. by Susan Bassnett (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997) pp. 95-118 (pp. 112-113).

necessity, this national language will usually be that of the former colonial power. In this distinction between ethnic and national literature, it is not hard to find an echo of Muir's earlier distinction between provincialism and central reality. Discussing the immense variety of African languages, Achebe asks how he can possibly

find the time to learn the half-a-dozen or so Nigerian languages each of which can sustain a literature? I am afraid it cannot be done. These languages will just have to develop as tributaries to feed the one central language enjoying nation-wide currency. Today, for good or ill, that language is English. Tomorrow it may be something else, although I very much doubt it.²⁰

Despite this national currency, Achebe suggests, African writers "who have inherited the English language may not be in a position to appreciate the value of the inheritance" as an – understandable – consequence of the "positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice" which facilitated its imposition on their indigenous cultures. Nonetheless, he believes that "the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings."²¹ In a Scottish context, there is a clear connection with Grassie Gibbon's Scots-inflected prose, which is readily comprehensible to English readers, yet retains a deep commitment to the language of the Mearns.

In another essay, 'The Language of African Literature', the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o took issue with Achebe's position, arguing that the body of writing by Africans in European languages "is not African literature" but "another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature [...] literature written by Africans in European languages in the age of imperialism."²² Writing from an explicitly Marxist perspective, Ngũgĩ suggests that in the African context such literature, while often excellent in and of itself, is an essentially bourgeois, even reactionary phenomenon. Literature in indigenous tongues, on the other hand, has the potential to connect with "the African masses in their own languages without any challenges from those with alternative visions of tomorrow who have deliberately cocooned themselves in English, French or Portuguese."²³ In the political radicalism of Ngũgĩ's critique, as well as its insistence on the importance of marginal and vernacular forms of expression, it is possible to find links with some of MacDiarmid's statements on the language question. For instance, addressing an East German audience in 1965, MacDiarmid began by discussing the "virtual monopoly" given to English literature and language by the Scottish education system, at the expense of, "our two native

²⁰ Chinua Achebe, 'The African Writer and the English Language', in *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (Heinemann: London, 1975), pp. 55-62 (p. 58).

²¹ 'The African Writer and the English Language', p. 62.

²² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 'The Language of African Literature', in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Curry; East African Educational Publishers; Heinemann: Oxford; Nairobi; Portsmouth, 1986), pp. 4-33 (pp. 26-27).

²³ 'The Language of African Literature', p. 26.

languages, Scots and Gaelic.”²⁴ Against the grain of this linguistic marginalisation, the Scottish Renaissance sought to “revive the use of Scots as a literary medium, to encourage creative literature in Gaelic, and alongside these to improve the literary standard of writings in English by Scottish authors.”²⁵ He concludes that all three of these aims have been achieved. Beginning with English, MacDiarmid grudgingly acknowledges Muir’s reputation as “the great modern Scottish poet writing in English” though he adds that it is “questionable if he did not pay too great a price for this” before pointing out a few apparently characteristic faults in Muir’s work. These faults are linked to Muir’s overly keen acceptance of English, though MacDiarmid admits that he does not find these faults in the English work of MacCaig, Crichton Smith and Mackay Brown. However, “it is generally agreed that it is the poets who have written in Scots (or Lallans) who have done the most important work” and “in Gaelic too there have been great developments since 1920.”²⁶ Like Ngũgĩ and African languages, MacDiarmid connects the importance of developments in Scots and Gaelic with issues of class and (either appropriately or unfortunately given that the lecture in question was delivered in East Berlin) with revolutionary politics.

As well as a catalyst for writing in English, Achebe’s despair at learning so many African languages could be taken as an injunction to translate from and between them. So, of course, could Ngũgĩ’s insistence on literature in indigenous tongues, which requires translators if it is to reach readers beyond its immediate local context. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi write with regard to contemporary India, in so “inveterately multilingual” a country “not only is most literature being written now in the indigenous languages but the majority of translations being done are from one Indian language into the others.”²⁷ Despite the persistence of what Michael Gardiner has termed “the wearied and misleading” question “of whether Scotland ‘is postcolonial’ and therefore qualifies for critical connection”, these discussions have implications for our understanding of the linguistic landscape of modern Scottish Literature.²⁸ For instance, in ‘English Ascendancy in British Literature’, MacDiarmid emphasised the importance of translation from Gaelic – and by implication many other minority or otherwise marginalised languages across the world. As the chapters on Young, Goodsir Smith and Garioch have demonstrated, the next generation of Scots poets endeavoured to bridge the rift with Gaelic identified by MacDiarmid. Building on the broader proto-postcolonial points raised by the 1931 essay, it seems reasonable to view this project of Gaelic-Scots translation as part of a wider

²⁴ Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘Contemporary Scottish Literature and the National Question’, in *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. by Duncan Glen (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 205-215 (p. 205).

²⁵ ‘Contemporary Scottish Literature and the National Question’, p. 213.

²⁶ ‘Contemporary Scottish Literature and the National Question’, pp. 213-214.

²⁷ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, ‘Introduction’, in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-18 (p. 11).

²⁸ Michael Gardiner, ‘Introduction’, in Michael Gardiner, Graeme Macdonald and Niall O’Gallagher, eds., *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

critique of language and power in the British Isles (and indeed throughout the Empire). It is also interesting to reflect that this was one area in which the second-generation Scottish Renaissance went far beyond its interwar precursor, spurred on by the presence of outstanding younger Gaelic poets like George Campbell Hay and, especially, Sorley MacLean, described by Seamus Heaney as “the redemptive genius of modern poetry in Gaelic.”²⁹

In the same Oxford Lecture, delivered on the 22nd of October 1992, Heaney suggests MacDiarmid “more or less singlehandedly created a literature in [Scots] and acted as an inspiration for [MacLean] who was to change the course of poetry in [Gaelic].”³⁰ He also touches on MacDiarmid’s use of translation and desire to open Scottish poetry up to a world of extraneous influences, notably European and particularly Russian revolutionary modernism (an aspect of his legacy Goodsir Smith’s Blok translation builds upon, to cite one important post-war text). Heaney’s criticism of MacDiarmid, not to mention other Scottish poets like MacCaig and Muir, is an appreciative, insightful and welcome presentation of these writers to a wider readership. It is, however, far from being a comprehensive survey of achievement in modern Scottish and especially Scots poetry. Introducing Ross’ and Hendry’s *Critical Essays* on MacLean, Heaney writes of how he first discovered the poet in Crichton Smith’s English translations (my italics):

opening the book was like opening the door on a morning of sea-filled brightness; there was a feeling of unspecifiable freedom and intensity. The voice in the poems was at once unleashed and stricken. There was a tremendous sense of capacity, of emotional lift-off, a boldness and ardour that had a high romantic voltage; yet there was also a deeply modern guilt, a self-castigating intelligence which struck like a hook in the throat of rapture [...] *Lines like these came through so strongly that I almost forgot I was reading a translation* [...] ³¹

For all that his introduction reads marvellously – it is hard to imagine anyone unfamiliar with MacLean finishing it and not wanting to turn immediately to the poet’s work – the reader cannot be allowed to forget that Heaney was, at least initially, reading a translation. Discussing the poet’s 2002 English version of ‘Hallaig’,³² Seàn Haldane has pointed out that, while his knowledge of Irish may have allowed him to appreciate the original poems to some extent, it remains unclear “whether or not Heaney’s translation is of MacLean’s original Gaelic text or MacLean’s English version.” Whatever the source of Heaney’s text, to Haldane’s mind at least, “some of his translation fails to do justice to the Gaelic.”³³ He is similarly unconvinced by Crichton Smith’s English translations from MacLean,

²⁹ Seamus Heaney, ‘A Torchlight Procession of One: On Hugh MacDiarmid’, in *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 103-123 (p. 102).

³⁰ ‘A Torchlight Procession’, p. 103.

³¹ Seamus Heaney, ‘Introduction’, in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, ed. by Joy Hendry and Raymond Ross (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986), pp. 1-7 (pp. 1-2).

³² Seamus Heaney, ‘Hallaig’:

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/nov/30/featuresreviews.guardianreview35> [accessed 11/05/2016].

³³ Seàn Haldane, ‘A Dying Tongue: Reading Sorley MacLean’, *The Dark Horse* 20 (Summer 2007), 44-55 (pp. 51-52).

arguing that Garioch's Scots version of *Dàin do Eimhir III* comes closer to the forcefulness of the Gaelic original. These judgments are inevitably subjective to some extent – in the same essay Haldane writes that poetry is “untranslatable except into prose” and that “translations always subtract from a poem.”³⁴ Either of these well-worn dictats could easily be refuted with reference to poems in translation by Young, Goodsir Smith, Garioch, Scott or Tait.

In preferring Garioch's translation from MacLean to the various English versions by other translators, Haldane valorises the foreignising potential of Scots – the manner in which poems translated into it are foregrounded as such, resisting the overt fluency of English texts like Heaney's 'Hallaig'. It is also interesting to note that Haldane's suggestion that there is something scandalous about Heaney's possible reliance on English cribs finds an echo in Young's similar criticism of Garioch's translation from MacLean, discussed in the third chapter of this thesis. As Venuti points out, “translations that are not transparent, that eschew fluency for a more heterogeneous mix of discourses, are equally partial in their interpretation of the foreign text, but they tend to flaunt their partiality instead of concealing it.”³⁵ In other words, Garioch's Scots translation of *Dàin do Eimhir III* – and indeed the Scots versions of MacLean poems by Young and Goodsir Smith – are not necessarily any closer to the Gaelic than Heaney's English version of 'Hallaig'. In fact, closeness and fidelity may not be very useful criteria in this context. What the Scots translations do is arguably to signal their mediated, translated nature by virtue of their linguistic strangeness in an Anglophone context (though as already discussed the foreignising status of Scots is complex and often balanced by domesticating trends in particular strands of the language).

Whatever one thinks of Haldane's critique of Heaney, much in his essay can be considered in terms of Christopher Whyte's arguments concerning minority language translation. Introducing MacLean's *Collected Poems*, Whyte praises the Scots versions of MacLean by Garioch, Goodsir Smith and Young, writing that for a time at least “the concept of a Scottish literature written in three languages [...] interacting on terms approaching equality was a still living and almost credible one.”³⁶ Citing Heaney's essay, he acknowledges the role such high-profile critique has played in securing MacLean much of what wider recognition his work has received, but questions the ultimate value of a readership unable or unwilling to appreciate the poems in the original. Whyte notes that the Anglo-American literary world “could do little with [MacLean's] contemporary George Campbell Hay” whose irreducibly multilingual writing seems to appeal less to a global audience.³⁷ Similarly, for all that many readers outwith Scotland have felt compelled to familiarise themselves with MacDiarmid's

³⁴ 'A Dying Tongue', p.54.

³⁵ *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. 34.

³⁶ Christopher Whyte, 'The Poetry of Sorley MacLean: Reinvention and Reparation', in *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, pp. xxiii-xxxiii (p. xxviii).

³⁷ 'Reinvention and Reparation', p. xxxii.

work, comparatively few of them have then gone on to investigate the equally interesting poets discussed in this thesis. Inevitably thorny questions of merit aside, this is in some ways a consequence of the lack of publicity they have received internationally. As regards their translation work, it may also reflect the resistant, foreignising aspects of the language in which they wrote. In terms of the ethics of Gaelic translation as presented by Whyte, it is worth stressing the point that if some Scots translations have the potential to make the translator visible to some extent, then this visibility has the concomitant effect of making the existence of the original language much harder to ignore. Discussing the comparable translation of Irish literature into English during the nineteen eighties and nineties, Michael Cronin writes that translation was seen by many as an “exit visa from the ghetto of linguistic isolationism [which] would bring the level of achievement of contemporary Irish-language writers to the attention of the English-speaking world.” As in Gaelic Scotland, the fact “that so many Irish-language poets allowed their work to be translated does indeed point to the desire for a form of recognition in the wider literary community.” For some, however, “translation was a form of dispossession that threatened the integrity of writing in Irish.”³⁸ Whatever the truth of this, it is irrefutable that Scottish Gaelic poets like Campbell Hay and MacLean encouraged their friends to translate their work, seeming to feel that this was something which broadened its reach, as opposed to compromising its monolingual purity.

Heaney’s work as a translator is extensive and in many respects exemplary. As well as ‘Hallaig’, particularly noteworthy in a Scots context are his versions of Henryson and the recent, posthumously-published *Aeneid: Book VI*, which can be viewed as a conscious intervention in the long tradition of vernacular response to Virgil going back to Douglas.³⁹ In ‘The Impact of Translation’, an essay collected in his 1988 volume of criticism, *The Government of the Tongue*, Heaney writes eloquently about the transformational effects which verse translation can have for a literary culture. Discussing the Cold War reception of Eastern European poets in the West, he suggests that what

translation has done over the last couple of decades is not only to introduce us to new literary traditions but also to link the new literary experience to a modern martyrology, a record of courage and sacrifice which elicits our unstinted admiration. So, subtly, with a kind of hangdog intimation of desertion, poets in English have felt compelled to turn their gaze East and have been encouraged to concede that the locus of greatness is shifting away from their language.⁴⁰

Invoking “us”, Heaney implicitly addresses himself to a securely defined Anglophone community. One could read into this something of Eliot’s – and in a qualified sense Venuti’s – understanding of

³⁸ Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 175.

³⁹ Robert Henryson, *The Testament of Cresseid and Seven Fables*, trans. by Seamus Heaney (London: Faber & Faber, 2009; Seamus Heaney, *The Aeneid: Book VI* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016).

⁴⁰ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Impact of Translation’, in *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), pp. 36-44 (p. 38).

the periphery as a reservoir of fresh talent and new ideas, to be drawn upon when required by the metropolis. The function of the Eastern Europeans is to elicit the unstinting admiration of Western readers who come to their work via English translations. There is, however, another strand in Heaney's essay, which comes through in the shift from the first to the third-person plural in the second sentence quoted. As a result of the work of translators, poets in English are increasingly being compelled to question their insular superiority – "displaced from an old at-homeness in their mother tongue and its hitherto world-defining poetic heritage" by these "wraiths from beyond" who have "begun to move in the Elysian background."⁴¹ Heaney links this feeling of displacement to what he sees as the slow death of Anglo-American modernism after the Second World War. Interestingly, he proposes that Muir's experiences and some of the scenes he witnessed in Eastern Europe, not to mention his translation work, link his writing to revolutionary and dissident voices from behind the Iron Curtain to a considerable degree. Conversely, he argues, Lowell was in his *Imitations* one of the last Anglophone writers still confident in his "cultural and historical self-possession." His versions of canonical poems in various European languages were "offered as bridges to link up with an undemolished past. The breach made by the war years did not succeed in dissociating Lowell and his contemporaries living under the roof of English from the enterprise of the great modernists."⁴²

'The Impact of Translation' connects on a number of levels with the central issues addressed in this thesis. Heaney's main theme – the significance of poets translated from other traditions, notably Eastern European ones, for renewing poetry in English – can be linked to the way in which MacDiarmid and his successors sought to revive Scottish literary culture through translation. Equally, the Elysian wraiths moving in the Eastern European and Russian background – for Heaney figures like Brodsky, Herbert and Miłosz – are evoked by Scots translators such as MacDiarmid, Young and, especially, Goodsir Smith. The latter's translations of Blok, Borsukiewicz and Jelinek testify to precisely the kind of unstinting admiration for these writers' courage that Heaney describes. One might add that Goodsir Smith was himself engaging with these poets and their traditions – in a foreignising form of synthetic Scots – long before the nineteen sixties Eastern European translation boom made it fashionable to do so. This kind of encounter might have had a disruptive effect on certain sections of an Anglo-American literary culture which remained heavily invested in its "world defining" heritage. However, the Scottish Renaissance, even at its most bombastic, had fewer pretensions to such overweening cultural hegemony – indeed it may itself have been in some ways symptomatic of Heaney's putative twentieth-century shift of the "locus of greatness" away from the traditional centre and towards its peripheries. This notwithstanding, there are several ways in which Heaney's remarks about Lowell could be applied to the American poet's post-war Scottish contemporaries. For instance, it seems incontrovertible that the writers discussed in this thesis did

⁴¹ 'The Impact of Translation', pp. 38-40.

⁴² 'The Impact of Translation', p. 42.

indeed produce their translations, sometimes from marginal poets but more often from canonical European writers, in an attempt to build bridges with “an undemolished past”. Although their cultural and historical self-possession was far from stable, often the instabilities had more to do with quite specific questions of language and identity within Scotland than they did with broader, post-modern insecurities around aesthetics and culture in general. Like Lowell, the war years did not manage to dissociate these poets sheltering under the roof of Scots from the grand enterprises of modernism. Their translations of Baudelaire, Villon and many other classic European figures seek to express these poets’ works in a living Scots, which whether or not it reflects what they would have done had they been writing in mid-twentieth-century Scotland, does indicate a strong sense of continuity with these earlier foreign figures which is quite at odds with the subsequent fragmentation and dissociation described by Heaney.

It would be egregious to imply that Heaney’s generous and timely interventions are without value. However, there are central aspects of modern Scottish poetry which his criticism has not appreciated. If, like Brodsky and Miłosz, MacDiarmid and MacLean offer the redress of poetry – “where the co-ordinates of the imagined thing correspond to and allow us to contemplate the complex burden of our own experience”⁴³ – are Young, Goodsir Smith, Garioch, Scott and Tait conversely unable to do so? Despite the difficulty of their language and, sometimes, theoretical approach to their craft, this thesis has shown that these poets’ Scots translations do contain the possibility of redress. Their comparative obscurity is not the result of any aesthetic inferiority, rather of the marginal position of Scots in the Anglophone world (not to mention that of literary translation – a form in which many of these writers’ key works were written). This marginality was something the modern Scottish Renaissance sought to challenge (a project both explicated and made remarkable when the global context of increasing linguistic homogeneity and erosion is considered). As attitudes and official stances towards language in Scotland continue to shift, it is still too early to dismiss this attempt as an unmitigated failure.

As MacDiarmid remarked in the *Lucky Poet* passage quoted in the introduction, the importance of translation to modern Scottish poetry was profound. On the one hand, the sheer diversity and range of source texts and tongues engaged with is impressive. On the other, there are many texts which reveal a striking unity of purpose and cultural background on the part of the writers in question. Particularly as regards their approach to the Scottish linguistic situation, Gaelic was integral. As dramatic translations and critical remarks by Young and Garioch show, the stage was another area in which the post-war writers went beyond their immediate predecessors. The large number of Scots versions of Villon reflects the poet’s growing contemporary popularity, driven in part by Eliot and Pound’s sometimes polemical boosting. However, it also reflects a shared feeling on the

⁴³ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Redress of Poetry’, in *The Redress of Poetry*, pp. 1-6 (p. 10).

part of Goodsir Smith, Scott and Tait that the French writer's simultaneously canonical and rebellious works spoke powerfully in a tongue at once central (in the makars' writings, say) and peripheral to Anglophone literary history. At any rate, Villon's rhetoric rings true in Scots – something equally true of Baudelaire and Corbière, as Goodsir Smith's, Scott's and Tait's translations prove. The importance of translation from Classical tongues, more easily acquired at school in the early twentieth than early twenty first century, is also clear – as is the post-war Renaissance's engagement with more recent, often formally or conceptually radical European poets like Apollinaire, Éluard and Valéry. Both of these aspects of this modern corpus of Scots translation – Classicism and engagement with more recent poetics – can be linked to the desire to lay claim to cultural authority. Like Douglas many centuries earlier, these poets sought to strengthen and indeed reinvent their own language through translation from other tongues. For Young, Scott and Goodsir Smith in particular, the connection with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century poetry and translation which MacDiarmid emphasised in his own critical interventions was explicit. In light of this, these poets sought to repair perceived historical rifts in their language and literary tradition through translation. For other writers – notably Tait but to some extent also Garioch – this connection with past literature was there, but also balanced by a commitment to a more particular, more local vision of what their own language could be. Far from a narrowing perspective, this vision – like the synthesising ambitions of MacDiarmid and Young – relied upon a deep sense of connectedness with languages other than the writer's own.

In 1943 MacDiarmid had praised the younger generation for their enthusiasm as regards translation, which he suggested carried the “the work of their immediate predecessors still further”.⁴⁴ Each of these writers brought their own sensibility and literary affinities to their translations. While the first-generation Scottish Renaissance was a determining influence on all of them, it was not the only authority to which they appealed. Over and above key shared concerns such as Gaelic, French poetry and dramatic translation, one defining characteristic of these writers' work is its sheer variety. Another point of continuity between them is their shared sense of vernacular rootedness, for all the markedly synthetic character of much of their writing. Above and beyond this, these poets' breadth of reference, linguistic innovation and formal ingenuity are excellent reasons for re-situating them somewhat closer to the centre of the modern Scottish canon than the peripheral position they currently occupy. Through extensive close reading of their creative work, supported by ground-breaking archival research, this thesis has demonstrated that these five writers form an important, unified group within the complex landscape of modern Scots translation – not to mention a key part of the long tradition of Scots translators stretching back to Gavin Douglas and the first Scottish Renaissance. Discussing their writing in light of the major twentieth-century literary developments which informed it or impinge upon it, as well as in terms of major debates within the wider theoretical landscape of

⁴⁴ See: pp. 10-11 of this thesis.

translation studies, the foregoing chapters have shown not only how these writers relate to one another, but also how they relate to a much broader field of critical enquiry. Having begun with a discussion of the first-generation, interwar Renaissance background to these writers' work, by way of conclusion it is salutary to now consider their legacy, with particular reference to a number of their key successors and near contemporaries.

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) was born only two years after Scott and Tait. To position him after them in generational terms is therefore something of a subjective decision; an aesthetic judgement, as much as it is a chronological one. Nevertheless, while Morgan draws productively upon the legacy of MacDiarmid and the other earlier Scottish Renaissance writers, he stands apart from the five writers on whom this thesis concentrates. Unlike Young, Goodsir Smith, Garioch, Scott and Tait, he found a major imaginative resource in the works of the late twentieth-century *avant garde*. Of course, unlike most of the late twentieth-century *avant garde*, he also found a major imaginative resource in the various approaches to vernacular national tradition enabled by the Scottish Renaissance. Much of his strength as a poet derives from extensive re-combination of these two literary strands, to which a third might be added – magpie-like translation from many languages. This last is something most of Morgan's critics have seen in the context of his other writings. For instance, in his 2002 book *Edwin Morgan: Inventions of modernity*, Colin Nicholson notes the poet's "voracious appetite for language learning" and prolific output as a translator, going on to show how Morgan's translations relate to currents in his original writing.⁴⁵ As regards Morgan's translations, Scots occupies a curious, yet undoubtedly significant position, the interest and importance of which is belied by the absence, as yet, of a book-length study principally addressing his work in this area.

Morgan's 1996 *Collected Translations*⁴⁶ was, according to his biographer James McGonigal, the poet's "major publication" of the decade.⁴⁷ While not exhaustive, the volume gathered the best part of sixty years' uncollected work, from the English version of Verlaine's *Ariettes oubliées VIII*, made in 1937 when Morgan was seventeen, to the version of St Columba's *Altus Prosator*, also in English, made earlier in 1996. It collects his individual volumes of translations up to that point in chronological order,⁴⁸ not counting the book-length *Beowulf*⁴⁹ or his acclaimed Scots version of

⁴⁵ Colin Nicholson, *Edwin Morgan: Inventions of modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 4.

⁴⁶ Edwin Morgan, *Collected Translations* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996).

⁴⁷ *Beyond the Last Dragon*, p. 346.

⁴⁸ *Poems from Eugenio Montale* (Reading: School of Art, 1959); *Sovpoems* (Worcester: Migrant Press, 1961); *Sándor Weöres* [trans. EM] and *Ferenc Juhász* [trans. David Wevill]: *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 1970); *Wi the Haill Voice: 25 Poems by Vladimir Mayakovsky* (Oxford: Carcanet, 1972); *Fifty Renaissance Love Poems* (Reading: Whiteknights Press, 1975); *Rites of Passage* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1976); *Platen: Selected Poems* (West Linton: Castlelaw Press, 1978); *Sweeping out the Dark* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994).

⁴⁹ Edwin Morgan, *Beowulf: A Verse Translation into Modern English* (Aldington: The Hand and Flower Press, 1952; Manchester: Carcanet, 2002).

Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*.⁵⁰ His *Sixty Poems*⁵¹ from Attila József postdates the appearance of the volume, as does his Scots version of Racine's *Phèdre*⁵² and *The Play of Gilgamesh*,⁵³ never performed but published in 2005.

To turn from Young or Scott's translations to Morgan's *Collected* is to move from a context where Scots, synthetic to one degree or another, is ubiquitous, to one in which it plays a more occasional role. Among his earliest experiments with the tongue are the six poems from Heine, translated at the beginning of 1956⁵⁴ and finally collected in the 1996 volume.⁵⁵ The regular quatrains of these poems are reminiscent of Alexander Gray's earlier versions of the German poet and, formally at least, MacDiarmid's Scots poems and translations of the nineteen twenties. The Mayakovsky translations, published as a volume (the poet's first with Carcanet) in 1972 but initiated in the late nineteen fifties, are a very different set of texts. In his versions of Heine Morgan had stayed relatively close to the norms of traditional Scots verse. With the Russian Futurist he exploits the possibilities of his non-standard medium more fully, coining neologisms and delighting in extravagant leaps of register and logic. His versions of Mayakovsky are in the tradition of MacDiarmid and Goodsir Smith, whose dizzy circumlocutions and meandering Scots syntax Morgan echoes. G.M. Hyde, writing in 1992, opined that while "an English reader can form only a distorted view of a phenomenon only partly understood, [...] it is not the translator's task to explain. I have not come across a more convincing encounter with Mayakovsky's proletarian rhetoric than [Morgan's], and its Scottishness is by no means incidental to its effect."⁵⁶

Writing to the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1957, Morgan took issue with Robert Graves, who had accused Donald Davie of "too brusquely" dismissing Frost's dictum as regards poetry being that which is lost in translation. On the contrary, Morgan argued, the power "of a great poet stretches across language." It is, in a sense, beyond language. At any rate, poetry has been recreated in different languages "often enough now for us to be chary of denying the validity of translation."⁵⁷ In his 1967 essay 'Poetry and Translation' Morgan wrote, in a similar vein, that "[some] will argue that somehow the translator must produce the emotional 'lift' of poetry, and to get this he has to throw out ballast of various kinds, and the first thing to go, the least indispensable thing, will be literal accuracy."⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Edwin Morgan, *Cyrano de Bergerac: a new verse translation* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992).

⁵¹ *Attila József: Sixty Poems*, trans. by Edwin Morgan (Glasgow: Mariscat, 2001).

⁵² Edwin Morgan, trans. *Phaedra* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000).

⁵³ Edwin Morgan, *The Play of Gilgamesh* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005).

⁵⁴ *Beyond the Last Dragon*, p. 116.

⁵⁵ *Collected Translations*, pp. 402-405.

⁵⁶ G.M. Hyde, 'Mayakovsky in English Translation', in *Translation and Literature*, Volume I (April 1992), 84-93 (p. 92).

⁵⁷ *The Midnight Letterbox*, p. 40. The editor declined to publish the letter.

⁵⁸ Edwin Morgan, 'Poetry and Translation', in *Nothing Not Giving Messages: Reflections on Work and Life*, ed. by Hamish Whyte (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), pp. 227-231 (p. 228). Originally published in *New Hungarian Quarterly* VII (Spring 1967), 27-30.

However, the poet went on to challenge this approach to translation, drawing upon Walter Benjamin's notion of a non-linguistic ur-text to which it is the translator's task to do justice.⁵⁹ Morgan later expanded on these statements in the 'Introductory Note' to *Rites of Passage*, the volume of his selected translations published in 1976, writing that despite "the forceful exemplars of Ezra Pound, Robert Lowell, and Christopher Logue, I have persistently refused myself their freedom of approach, and have tried to work within a sense of close and deep obligation to the other poet."⁶⁰ He also informs the reader that all translations collected in the book have been prepared from the original texts, rather than an English intermediary. This insistence on direct interaction sets Morgan apart from many of his contemporaries. Garioch, for instance, undertook nearly all of his translations with the help of one collaborator or another. MacDiarmid translated freely from English cribs. On the other hand, it seems that in most cases Goodsir Smith, Scott and Tait had at least some knowledge of the original languages from which they were working. Young worked closely with the original texts of all his translations. As regards Morgan's theory of high fidelity translation, it is worth pointing out that there is more than one way to express a "close and deep obligation" to a source text. Benjamin's Kabbalistic supra- or inter-linguistic version of the poem gestures towards a symbolic pure language, beyond human speech. Against it one might set a version of translation which is at once more conservative and more radical, situating the act of translation not in some unknowable realm of pure forms, but in terms of a series of determinate textual encounters – encounters which may, in themselves, lead to many possible outcomes. Lowell's imitations, to this way of thinking, are not necessarily less faithful than Morgan's translations, though readers curious about what Pasternak or Racine actually wrote are more likely to be satisfied by Morgan's versions.

Despite the potentially foreignising tendencies of their translations, it is difficult to imagine Young, Goodsir Smith, Garioch, Scott or Tait engaging with a theorist like Venuti. At any rate, apart from possibly Scott, who died in 1995, none of them lived long enough to read *The Translator's Invisibility*. That Morgan did read the book attentively is interesting in itself, indicative of a different kind of critical and theoretical engagement with the art of translation.⁶¹ Equally interesting is his reference to the work in a 1998 letter to poet and translator Peter McCarey, where Morgan writes:

You ask about Venuti: he's Lawrence Venuti, American translator and theorist, author of (amongst other things) *The Translator's Invisibility* [...] where he argues for 'foreignizing' as against 'domesticating' translations and claims there's been an Anglo-American colonizing agenda of recent years, making all foreign texts too readable/fluent/smooth, so that *Aeneids*, *Iliads*, and *Odysseys* all sound as if they'd

⁵⁹ See: Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator: an introduction to the translation of Baudelaire's Tableaux Parisiens*, in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp.70-82.

⁶⁰ *Collected Translations*, p. 185.

⁶¹ Morgan's annotated first edition of *The Translator's Invisibility* can be consulted in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow (reference only; shelfmark VEN).

been written by the same person. He has a point, though he pushes the case to some bizarre lengths.⁶²

Acknowledging the importance of Venuti's work, Morgan nonetheless expresses his reservations. Recalling the poet's stated sense of strong obligation towards his originals – which might be construed as an argument in favour of domestication – it is important to remember that, particularly in his Scots translations, he often took decisions which, while grounded in a model of translation based on close fidelity, are indubitably foreignising in their implications. The experimental Mayakovsky translations would be a case in point, with the close grammatical and syntactical attentiveness to the Russian arguably making the strangeness of the other tongue more apparent than Morgan's more usual Standard English might have. As Edwin Gentzler writes, one translator's "resistance might be another's conformity." Gentzler goes on to argue that, although Venuti has presented a persuasive challenge to certain oppressive conventions in the United States, elsewhere and particularly in smaller or peripheral cultures, his "preferred form of translation might appear to be perpetuating violent and abusive strategies that have served to oppress and colonize."⁶³ In certain contexts, approaches to translation such as Morgan's close and deep obligation to the source, however that might be expressed, may be more ethically justified than the kind of aggressive, even colonising foreignisation practiced by Pound and Lowell. Gentzler makes no direct mention of Scots or Scotland. However, as this thesis has shown, the work of Scots translators presents scholars with an opportunity to question and refine theories of translation developed in other cultural situations. This is not to suggest that translations into the Scots language are, in themselves, directly comparable with translations into, say, Hindi or Swahili. Closer to home, to translate into Gaelic would be an act with very different implications. Rather, this kind of comparative exploration of translation in particular linguistic and cultural contexts would tend to compel scholars to be wary of applying theoretical models uncritically, no matter where those models originated. By enabling such insights, discussion of what might seem to be a fairly niche subject – twentieth-century verse translation into Scots – becomes of pressing relevance to a much larger potential readership.

In *Beyond the Last Dragon*, McGonigal describes Gaelic culture as "the main area of Scottish experience that is missing from [Morgan's] poetry."⁶⁴ A writer in Scots and English, as well as Gaelic, William Neill (1922-2010) took a very different position as regards the latter language. A native Scots speaker, Neill enrolled as a mature student at Edinburgh University in 1968 after his discharge from the RAF, graduating with an honours degree in Celtic in 1971. He became sufficiently fluent in the Gaelic language to win the Bardic Crown at the 1969 Mod, and saw himself as an

⁶² *The Midnight Letterbox*, p. 435.

⁶³ Edwin Gentzler, 'Translation, Poststructuralism, and Power', in *Translation and Power*, ed. by Edwin Gentzler and Maria Tymoczko (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), pp. 195-218 (pp. 205-206).

⁶⁴ *Beyond the Last Dragon*, p. 269.

essentially trilingual writer. In this respect his work continues the tradition of modern Scots-Gaelic interaction within a single poet's writing, typified by Young and George Campbell Hay, which has more recently been taken up by Aonghas MacNeacail. As well as Gaelic, he translated from a number of continental European languages, including French, Latin, Italian and Ancient Greek – in the latter case most notably in his *Tales Frae the Odyssey o Homer*.⁶⁵ Like Garioch, Neill translated George Buchanan, not to mention many of the Romanesco sonnets of Giuseppe Belli.

Alastair Mackie (1925-1995) was a third Scots poet and translator, born in the nineteen twenties, who found his voice comparatively late in life. Like Garioch, Scott and Tait, Mackie's mature poetry is bilingual between Scots and English. Unlike them he translated into English as well as Scots, though it is arguably the latter in which the poet is at his most characteristic. And of course another thing he shares with Garioch and Tait is his profession as an English teacher, which all three poets found chafing, for all its intermittent rewards.

Taken as a whole, Mackie emerges as one of the outstanding poets of his generation in Scotland, irrespective of language. He also emerges as a translator of rare discernment and versatility, making Scots versions of Akhmatova, Annensky, Apollinaire, Baudelaire, du Bellay, Yuli Daniel, Von Eichendorff, Esenin, Von Hoddiss, Horace, Hugo, Laforgue, Leopardi, Mallarmé, Mandelstam, Pasternak, Pushkin, Quasimodo, Richepin, Rimbaud, Saba, Tyutchev, Valéry, Verhaeren, Verlaine and Virgil (setting aside the English translations here). Beyond speculation as to the existence of a 'third-generation' Scottish Renaissance, Mackie's achievement owes much to that susceptibility to the particular which was perhaps the best legacy of MacDiarmid, the Muirs, Grassie Gibbon, Gunn and the writers who came immediately after them.

Morgan, Neill and Mackie were three writers born shortly after the five poets discussed in detail in this thesis, but who came into their own as poets somewhat later. In terms of their engagement with earlier manifestations of the Scottish Renaissance project, Morgan was the most consistently inventive in his revisions of the received tradition. Neill and Mackie were both highly individual poets and translators, but ultimately diverged less from the critical and creative precepts of their predecessors (of course, this is not necessarily a fault). Turning to successive generations of Scottish poets, one finds the same mixture of acceptance and deviation from the Renaissance narrative.

Tom Leonard, mentioned earlier in this conclusion, is one writer whose response to the cultural essentialism and national preoccupations of the Renaissance has been uniformly negative. For

⁶⁵ William Neill, *Tales Frae the Odyssey o Homer: Owreset Intil Scots* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1992).

instance, in a brief essay written shortly after Edwin Morgan's death, Leonard writes warmly of the poet, while voicing his contempt for those whose

judgements on his output and "the position of poetry in Scotland" etc can seem overly if predictably lugubrious: flags planted on a cairn for empire builders to spend the rest of their lives adding critical chuckies of their own making; others, as always in the case of poetry, wanting to meld bonds between classroom, poetry and a pompous notion of state.⁶⁶

And in his interview with Attila Dósa, published in *Beyond Identity*, Leonard says that as a young writer he "didn't find any of the traditions that Lallans writers were working in meant anything to me."⁶⁷ For him at least, Morgan, Ian Hamilton Finlay and W.S. Graham were much more useful senior presences in the Scottish literary landscape. So was the nineteenth-century poet, translator and essayist James 'B.V.' Thomson. Born in Port Glasgow in 1834, Thomson spent most of his life in London, where he died penniless in 1882. He wrote in English and seems to have moderated the Scottishness of his speech depending on whom he was talking to. In his 1993 critical biography of Thomson, *Places of the Mind*, Leonard emphasises the importance of translation to the poet, who "taught himself French, German and Italian, translated Heine as well as Novalis, and made pioneering translations of Leopardi."⁶⁸ Like Eliot, on whose work he was an important influence, Thomson was initially motivated to learn Italian in order to read Dante. Though his translations are written in English, they form a part of the wider tradition of linguistic recreation within which the Scottish Renaissance poets sought to situate their own work. Notably, given the strong current of political radicalism in the writings of MacDiarmid and his successors, Leonard cites a letter to Thomson from no less a personage than Karl Marx, in which the latter writes of the Scottish poet's Heine translations that he has produced "no translation, but a reproduction of the original, such as Heine himself, if master of the English language, would have done."⁶⁹ Given Marx's central importance as an ancestral figure for literary theory and, therefore, translation studies, it is certainly interesting to find him praising Thomson's Heine translations for their domesticating fluency.

In the aftermath of the recent referendum, during which much ink was spilled attempting to make unproblematic links between the productions of writers like MacDiarmid and Morgan and the political sphere, it is hard to deny the value of Leonard's critique of certain tendencies within Scottish literary nationalism. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, it is possible to read the Scottish Renaissance (particularly the second-generation writers) in less culturally prescriptive ways. Rather

⁶⁶ Tom Leonard, 'From a Room in Scotland (2): Edwin Morgan', in *Definite Articles: Selected Prose 1973-2012* (Edinburgh/London: Word Power Books/Etruscan Books, 2013), pp. 156-157 (pp. 156-157).

⁶⁷ *Beyond Identity: New Horizons in Modern Scottish Poetry*, ed. by Attila Dósa (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 177.

⁶⁸ Tom Leonard, *Places of the Mind: The Life and Work of James Thomson ('B.V.')* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), p. xii. Edwin Morgan's annotated copy of the book can be consulted at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow (Shelfmark: C0046 59508 EM/THO).

⁶⁹ *Places of the Mind*, p. 311.

than see the works of Young, Garioch, Goodsir Smith, Scott and Tait as simply expressive of a particular political point of view, their best writing rewards re-reading, looking outward and inward at the same time. Leonard, ultimately, is not so dissimilar in his intentions as poet, critic, editor and translator. This last aspect of his work has most recently been expressed in his version of *Mother Courage and her Children*, written partially in the language of Glasgow. In his preface Leonard writes that, in the alienated, war-ravaged world of Brecht's play, "Nationality is an irrelevance, nationalism an excuse, patriotism an exhortation", adding that "the play like all literature is made of language; and the true hero of this play is the language it is written in. But it is an anti-hero."⁷⁰

Throughout the body of this thesis, the idea of language as an anti-hero resonates, with the tongue central to these writers' literary achievement to some extent precluding wider appreciation of that achievement. It might also apply to 'Jist ti Let ye No', Leonard's well-known translation "from the American of Carlos Williams".⁷¹ The reader literate in Scots notes the choice of "No" as opposed to "ken", as well as the citation "of Carlos Williams" rather than "o" or "ae" him. The more pedantic or curious might also query Leonard's use of the adjective "American" to describe Williams' language. America, as Leonard is no doubt well-aware, is not an exclusively English-speaking continent. At a time when many white North Americans are anxious about the growing presence of Hispanics in the United States, it is worth remembering that Spanish was widely spoken in the Americas long before the Mayflower set sail. Quebecois, too, exists – sometimes in Scots translations – not to mention the many indigenous languages which survive, against the odds, in North, Central and South America.

Pedantry aside, it is not this thesis' intention to score critical points by picking holes in Leonard's version of Williams, which is a wonderfully successful gesture of sympathy with one strand of the twentieth-century US *avant garde*. However, in light of his rebarbative (often just) criticisms of the Scottish Renaissance, it is worth remembering that it is sometimes impossible to avoid cultural essentialisms completely; sometimes it is not even desirable to do so. Discussing resistant translation in an Indian context, Gentzler writes that the "use of essentialism to support an antiessentialist project, the use of memory to construct a counter-memory, the use of the explicit to chart the implicit, is a complex and rather controversial move." Nonetheless, he suggests that such an approach has the potential to enable "affirmative production", as opposed to a rigorously anti-essentialist but perhaps overly abstract response to a real-world cultural situation.⁷² It is inevitably difficult to draw direct comparisons between Scottish and Indian experience. However, Gentzler's critique, especially his idea of using memory to construct a counter-memory, points towards one way in which the work of the translators discussed in this thesis might be understood. Rejecting essentialist

⁷⁰ *Mother Courage and Her Children*, trans. by Tom Leonard (Middlesbrough: Smokestack Books, 2014), p. 7.

⁷¹ Tom Leonard, *Intimate Voices: Selected Work 1965-1983* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 37.

⁷² 'Translation, Poststructuralism and Power', pp. 207-208.

constructions of British identity and memory, the Scottish Renaissance constructed its own national essentialism – its own Scottish (or Shetlandic) counter-memory. As the previous chapters show, translation was of great importance to this construction, not least in terms of how it linked twentieth-century utterance with ancestral figures like Douglas, while also allowing writers to look both forwards and outwards from their immediate situation. Rejecting Scottish nationalism, Leonard goes one step further, though one can certainly draw comparisons between his use of vernacular speech and the work of writers like Garioch and Tait.

As with Leonard's *Mother Courage*, Liz Lochhead's dramatic translations are not attempts at a monolingual stage Scots. However, their energetic use of many forms and registers of speech often involves the tongue. In her preface to *Miseryguts and Tartuffe*, Lochhead writes that her translations use "Scots, yes, some Americanisms, lots of clichés and buzz-words, much casual profanity, I'm afraid. Like life."⁷³ This is perhaps a more reflexive, certainly more realistic position than that taken by many of her male predecessors (one recalls Young's unfortunate remark about sooner admitting a Hottentotism than an Anglicism). It reflects the changed environment at the end of the century, by which point Scottish poets and dramatists had largely accepted the multilingual resources at their disposal, as opposed to constructing utopian visions of a fully synthesised, re-integrated Scots, to use Tom Hubbard's term. This said, Lochhead is capable of writing a fairly strong Scots when the text demands it.

Like Young, Goodsir Smith, Garioch, Scott and Tait, Morgan, Leonard and Lochhead are poets and translators working in a long tradition, which each modifies and re-interprets. To some extent, they all draw upon (or in Leonard's case react to) the approach to the past advocated by the Scottish Renaissance, questioning as well as assenting. Lochhead, for instance, has found MacDiarmid a less than unambiguously positive precursor, but responded far more positively to Garioch.⁷⁴ The nineteen fifties, when the putative second wave of the Renaissance was at its height, were bleak years for Morgan, who blossomed in the next decade as the second-generation Renaissance petered out. Probably the least ambiguous aspect of these writers' inheritance from the post-MacDiarmid makars is their strong concern with language and the movement of meaning between languages – in a word, translation. This is something they share with many younger Scottish poets, who have continued to engage with literatures from around the world and bring them over into Scots. Notable recent examples include James Robertson's versions of Baudelaire,⁷⁵ Christie

⁷³ Liz Lochhead, *Miseryguts and Tartuffe: Two Plays by Molière* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2012), p. xii.

⁷⁴ Liz Lochhead, pers. comm.

⁷⁵ James Robertson, *Fae the flouers o evil: Baudelaire in Scots* (Kingskettle: Kettillonia, 2001). See also: *Scottish Spleen*, ed. by Tom Hubbard, James W Underhill and Stewart Sanderson (Lumphanan: Tapsalteerie, 2015).

Williamson's Shetlandic Lorca⁷⁶ and J. Derrick McClure's *Sangs tae Eimhir*,⁷⁷ the first comprehensive Scots translation of the *Dàin do Eimhir*. These writers (not to mention poets such as Sheena Blackhall, Tom Hubbard, David Kinloch and Alan Riach, to name only a few) continue to translate into Scots from many different languages. This strong continuing tradition of verse translation emphasises the need for critical re-appraisal of the second-generation Renaissance's contribution to the art. Just as Lochhead and Morgan's dramatic translations have built upon foundations laid by Garioch and Young, so Robertson's poems from Baudelaire exist in dialogue with those undertaken by Scott and Tait. The latter writer prefigures Williamson's Shetlandic translations of Spanish and Gaelic poems, while McClure's *Sangs tae Eimhir* is explicitly a continuation of linguistic interactions initiated in the nineteen forties by Young, Garioch and Goodsir Smith. Identifying these major themes in post-war Scots translation, this thesis has flagged up a number of elements which remain important in contemporary Scottish literature. While much has changed in the cultural landscape since Young, Goodsir Smith, Garioch, Scott and Tait started writing, the adventurously cosmopolitan spirit in which they undertook their translations remains integral. As this thesis has argued, this highlights the importance of contemporary re-assessment of their work in this pivotal area, as well as a broader reconsideration of their historical importance to modern Scottish culture as a whole.

⁷⁶ Christie Williamson, *Arc o Möns* (Orkney: Hansel Cooperative Press, 2009).

⁷⁷ *Sangs tae Eimhir: The Dàin do Eimhir o Sorley MacLean Owerset intae the Lawlan Scots Tung*, trans. by J. Derrick McClure (Stornoway: Acair, 2011).

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