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Published in:

Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development

Publication date:

2011

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Citation for published version (APA):

McClure, D. (2011). Scottish literature on the international scene - evidence from the National Library's: Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 32(4), 387-403. [32:4]. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2011.566341>

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Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmm20>

Scottish literature on the international scene: evidence from the National Library's Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation

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Version of record first published: 01 Jun 2011.

To cite this article: J. Derrick McClure (2011): Scottish literature on the international scene: evidence from the National Library's Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation , Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 32:4, 387-403

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2011.566341>

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Scottish literature on the international scene: evidence from the National Library's *Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation*

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(Received 22 November 2010; final version received 16 February 2011)

A search in the online *Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation* (BOSLIT) reveals that the attention given by translators to a small number of outstanding Scottish writers has been at the expense of others of comparable merit. On the other hand, poetry of the twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance period and later has certainly received some measure of international recognition, despite the problems presented to translators by the extensively and diversely developed use of Scots as a poetic medium.

Keywords: Scotland; Scots; Gaelic; dialect; heritage languages; language ideologies

International interest in the Scottish literary scene, though notoriously patchy and selective, has never been lacking. Robert Burns is one of the most widely translated and admired of poets; Sir Walter Scott not only was renowned throughout Europe in his lifetime but also has exerted a greater lasting influence on the subsequent course of world literature than, arguably, any other writer in English except Shakespeare; Byron has an unchallenged place as a central figure in the European romantic movement; Robert Louis Stevenson is universally acclaimed for at least some of the works in his large and diverse output. Four writers, however magnificent, do not begin to provide an adequate representation of the long and colourful literary history of Scotland; but others too have received and continue to receive the attention of readers and translators in many countries, and it is heartening to observe that at least some of the exuberant literature of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has attracted a fair degree of interest. Recent and contemporary prose fiction, in particular, appears to be making a substantial contribution to Scotland's presence on the international literary scene: landmark works like William McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* and Alastair Gray's *Lanark* have appeared in several languages; Banks, whether writing scientific fantasies as Iain M. or other (sometimes equally imaginative) novels as just Iain, has an international following; and the uncompromising urban *verismo* of such (very different) novelists as Irvine Welsh, James Kelman and Ian Rankin has attracted translators in Europe and further afield. Allan Massie's Roman novels and his *King David* enjoy a far wider reputation than his novels of the Second World War

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and its aftermath, and Alexander McCall Smith's international renown rests on the stories of his lady detective in Botswana and not (yet?) to any extent on his gentle, elegant but highly observant pictures of middle-class Edinburgh; but their contribution to Scotland's literary visibility abroad is likewise considerable. Nonetheless, the fact remains that in view of the abundance, variety and quality of Scottish literature in the modern and contemporary periods, the impression given by a survey of the translation field is of an almost random selection giving a disconcertingly patchy and inadequate picture.

In the National Library of Scotland's online Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BOSLIT, q.v. for bibliographical data on translations cited in this paper), accessible at <http://www.nls.uk/catalogues/resources/boslit>, researchers have an invaluable tool for locating translations: references are given for each individual Scottish writer for whom translations are known to exist, and translations are arranged by language with full bibliographical information. The thoroughness of the research which has produced the Bibliography is exemplary and its scale remarkable: all literary genres are represented; the time-span begins with John Barbour (c.1320–1395), extracts from whose epic *Brus* have appeared in French, Spanish, German, Hungarian, Georgian and Esperanto; and the entire language-map of the world is covered (as a random illustration, the range of languages into which at least one work of John Buchan has been translated includes Estonian, Croatian, Korean, Fijian and Zulu; and that for A.J. Cronin includes Moldavian, Maltese, Azerbaijani, Telugu and Thai).

The range and scope of the corpus of translations from Scottish literature is vast and diverse; yet the information contained in BOSLIT can be applied to summary observations as well as to detailed and highly focused investigations. The present paper will first offer a brief general picture of the extent to which Scottish poetry and fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has impacted through translations on the European scene. This will be followed by a discussion of the changing ideological stances which have underlain the development of Scottish poetry since the period known as the Scottish Renaissance; and in particular the radically new approach to the use of Scots as a poetic medium. Attention will then be given to the question of how this new approach may have affected the possibility of translation, or at least of adequate translation; and to the practical and conceptual issues involved in translating from a language, like Scots, which presents a linguistic difficulty in having no standard form and a philosophical one in having strong and inescapable political and ideological implications inherent in its literary use. Finally, information from BOSLIT will be applied to a more detailed examination of the range of translation of poetry, particularly Scots poetry, of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, concentrating on Europe, in which individual translations from Scots into languages in which the present writer has some competence (French, Italian and German) will be discussed.

The importance of Robert Burns (1759–1796) and Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) in the field of translation from Scottish literature is instantly demonstrated by the fact that their entries in BOSLIT number 3045 and 2829, respectively; and that in both cases, the practice of translating their works into other languages began during their lifetimes and has continued uninterrupted to the present day. For Burns, his earliest ascertained entry onto the international scene was a German translation of *Green grow the rashes O* in 1795 and his latest, a Russian version of *Auld Lang Syne* from 2009; for Scott, the sequence runs from translations of ballads from his

collections in 1808 to a French version of *Redgauntlet* published in 2007, and includes versions of *Ivanhoe* in Croatian, Turkish, Italian, Bosnian and Ukrainian published in the first five years of the present century – bringing the number of known foreign-language editions of that wonderful novel to 609. (Figures throughout are as on 18 November 2010. BOSLIT is regularly updated, and the figures may require to be revised before long).

With those two giants, Scotland acquired a prominent place on the international literary landscape. Their enormous popularity did not, apparently, have any retrospective effect, in the sense that foreign readers and scholars who were impressed by Burns were not tempted to examine the works of his immediate predecessors: even the most important, Allan Ramsay (1686–1758) and Robert Fergusson (1750–1774), who at their best can at least be mentioned alongside Burns and without whose influence he would certainly not have been the poet we know, were not translated in their lifetimes and have been only to a derisory extent in the intervening years. And the fame of Burns almost totally eclipsed the talents, by no means inconsiderable in many cases, of his Scots-writing poetic contemporaries and immediate successors (as, indeed, it has to a deplorable extent even in Scotland to this day): as one illustration, the BOSLIT listing of ‘Scottish poetry 18th century: translations into German’ includes an impressive 868 entries; but only 121 are of poets other than Burns. Of these, by far the most frequently translated in and shortly after their own time were James MacPherson (1736–1796), purportedly translator but actually author of the highly influential Ossianic poetry, and James Thomson (1700–1748), author of *The Seasons*, both of whom wrote in English: in the German list, MacPherson has 80 entries and Thomson 25. French translations show similar proportions in a much smaller corpus, 148 being from Burns, 29 from MacPherson and 17 from Thomson out of a total of 208; in Russia, though Burns has been famously popular there in recent times, it is noteworthy that MacPherson and Thomson were far more frequently translated than he during and shortly after their own lifetimes. (The same is true of several other languages, including Czech, Danish, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian, Polish and Portuguese). Apart from those three, no eighteenth-century Scottish poet either was or ever has been translated except in penny numbers.

For as long as the torch of Scottish literature burned brightly, international interest was maintained and demonstrated by translations. Scott’s friend and informant James Hogg (1770–1835), a colourful and highly individual literary figure, attracted immediate attention, a respectable sequence of translations into German and French being initiated, respectively, by *Winterabenderzählungen* (*Winter Evening’s Tales*) in 1822 and *Trois Périls de l’Homme* (his fantastic novel *The Three Perils of Man*) in 1824. The novelist, essayist and poet John Galt (1779–1839), a decidedly more sober personage, first appeared in Europe with a French translation of his *Voyages and Travels in the years 1809, 1810 and 1811*, translated in the year of its publication (1812); and his masterly social novels such as *The Ayrshire Legatees*, *Sir Andrew Wylie*, *Annals of the Parish*, *The Provost* and *The Entail* were all translated into German and French, and in one or two cases Russian and Danish, shortly after their original appearance: one of his French translators, Auguste-Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret, had also translated many of Scott’s novels, and his translation of *The Entail* is described as *par le traducteur des romans de W. Scott*. In poetry, the dominant figure in the nineteenth century, after Scott, was Byron: both among their contemporaries and for translators of subsequent periods they come near to monopolising the field of translations into major Western European languages, at

least until the arrival of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894). A notable exception among nineteenth-century German translations is a set of renderings of Robert Tannahill (1774–1810) and William Motherwell (1797–1835), two accomplished poets otherwise almost unknown in translation, by Heinrich Julius Heintze (who had a reputation as a translator of both Scottish and English poetry, including Burns) in 1841; and one among recent Italian translations is the presence of several poems by Joanna Baillie (1762–1852) and Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne (1766–1845), two of the most popular of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century poetesses and songwriters but likewise scarcely ever translated, as well as some other Scottish items in a collection entitled *Poeti romantici inglesi* (!) by the distinguished poet, scholar and translator Franco Buffoni. (The frequency with which Scottish poets are included in anthologies in which the word for *English* appears in the title is disconcerting: that even Scots-writing and Gaelic-writing poets should be classed as English was never excusable, and by now is simply absurd.)

The picture that emerges of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish literature as known abroad through translations is thus one of a few mighty figures who dominated the field in their lifetimes and have continued to do so ever since, at the expense of other writers of unquestioned merits. The field of Scottish poetry from the late nineteenth-century revival onwards shows a very similar pattern. Robert Louis Stevenson is, and always has been, one of the most widely translated of Scottish authors: indeed, the BOSLIT figures suggest that he is the *very* most, with 3437 entries. Sweden was the first country to adopt him, with a translation of his short story *The Story of a Lie* in a journal which had already published some Burns and Byron translations, and France followed with a version of *Treasure Island* in 1884, thus setting the scene for a truly remarkable abundance of translations – so far 1106 in all – of that novel into almost every language from Afrikaans to Zulu, including Latin. But writers who were likewise making significant contributions to the Scottish literary revival, contemporaneously or nearly so, were and always have been almost entirely overlooked. The first two poets of the North-East dialect school, Mary Symon (1863–1938) and (a much finer poet) Charles Murray (1864–1941), have no entries in BOSLIT at all; no more has Logie Robertson (1846–1922), who as a Scots poet was compared in his time – albeit unrealistically – to Stevenson. Lewis Spence’s (1874–1955) imaginative and highly attractive poems in archaic Scots remain untranslated (though several of his writings in the fields of mythology and folklore were translated both in his lifetime and more recently); Pittendrigh Macgillivray (1856–1938), idiosyncratically praised by C.M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) as the greatest living Scottish poet (see Grieve 1925), has no entries in BOSLIT; and of an outstanding trio of poetesses from the county of Angus, all of whom began writing in the late teens and twenties of last century, Helen Cruickshank (1886–1975) is unrepresented in translation, Marion Angus (1866–1946, arguably the best of the three) by a single poem in Italian published in 1996, in a selection of Scottish poems by various authors translated by Enzo Bonventre in a magazine called *Aurelia*, Violet Jacob (1863–1946) not by any of her poems (not counting a translation of one of them into Esperanto) but by one item in what looks like a remarkable 2003 anthology of Scottish short stories, from Scott, Hogg and Galt to contemporary writers such as James Kelman, Allan Spence and Janice Galloway, in Croatian.

The poets listed in the preceding paragraph (for discussion of their language usages, see McClure 2000) lead us chronologically into the period of the Scottish

Renaissance. Stevenson's Scots poetry, small in extent though it is in the context of his entire output, is of decisive importance in setting the scene for a key aspect of this movement, the changes both linguistic and ideological in the use of Scots as a poetic medium; and we may now examine this development. Stevenson in the preface to his 1887 collection *Underwoods* set the precedent for the use of a register deliberately eclectic and to some extent archaic, drawing on words from various dialects and earlier literature, by his claim to have chosen his words 'not caring if it [his Scots] hailed from Lauderdale or Angus, from the Mearns or Galloway' (quoted from Lewis 2003, 71). The tone of nonchalance implied by the phrase 'not caring' need not be taken at its face value: Stevenson was a meticulous literary craftsman and assuredly took great care over his choice of words. His pose disguised a radical new stage in the literary development of Scots, namely the discarding of the assumption that dialectal accuracy was a necessary condition for writing successfully in the language. Not long afterwards, Lewis Spence took the practice a logical step further by employing a markedly archaic form of the language, sometimes approaching pastiche Middle Scots. In a contrasting movement, a regional dialect literature, using an accurate literary representation of the speech of a specific area of Scotland, arose at the turn of the century: this began in the North-East with, as the finest early exponents, William Alexander in prose and Charles Murray in poetry; but soon took root in other parts of the country. The two developments were differently motivated: the dialect writers, seeing the traditional way of life in the rural communities as increasingly threatened by urbanisation and mass education, deliberately cultivated the folk-speech of their respective areas in a poetry designed to commemorate the old farm and village cultures before they disappeared; the archaising writers thought, paradoxically, to revitalise literary Scots by injecting it with words and verse forms from the era when Scotland itself was an independent kingdom with one of the greatest vernacular literatures in Europe. A vigorous cultural patriotism, that is, was behind both of the new strands; but it was in one case a local and in the other a national patriotism.

Scottish poetry was thus already well on the road to recovery from the decline into which it had fallen since the death of Burns, an integral feature of this being the rise to literary prominence of a number of markedly different forms of the Scots tongue, when the greatest of twentieth-century Scottish poets, Hugh MacDiarmid, raised the stakes in the burgeoning Scottish Renaissance by developing the language for poetry in an uncompromisingly modernist vein, exploring political and philosophical issues in boldly experimental language and with an intellectual range and rigour which had not been seen in Scottish poetry since Burns. His poetic technique is not my present concern, but rather the political aspect of his work and its effects in politicising the entire Scottish literary scene. MacDiarmid wrote as an ardent Scottish nationalist – that is, he was in favour of reclaiming full Scottish sovereignty – and also a radical Communist. His mastery of the Scots language (and of English too) was harnessed to a poetry inspired and inflamed by his revolutionary social and political views; and by expressing these in Scots he shattered the association of the language, established all too firmly in the previous century, with backward-looking nostalgia. Scots was now a language at the very cutting-edge of contemporary political thought: at any rate, when this was expressed poetically. (For a ground-breaking study of MacDiarmid's contribution to Scottish letters, see Glen 1964; for discussion of his enduring influence, see Scott 1992; for an invaluable

compilation of source documents from the Scottish Renaissance period, see McCulloch 2004.)

Nor was this all: Gaelic, which like Scots (though not to anything like the same extent) had suffered a decline in the quality of its literary productions in the nineteenth century, at much the same time enjoyed its own sudden and brilliant recovery in the poetry of Sorley MacLean and George Campbell Hay, and a deliberate effort was made by poets in both languages to unite the two as complementary aspects of a common Scottish Renaissance. The radical nature of this development should not be underestimated. The traditional view of Scotland as divided between Gaelic-speaking 'Highlanders' and Scots-speaking 'Lowlanders', though of course simplistic, has been broadly true for much of the nation's history; and the difference in culture as well as language between the two peoples ensured that the literary heritage of each of them remained almost unknown to the other. A major conceptual shift was involved in the developing perception of 'Scottish Literature' as including Gaelic literature, literature in Scots and literature by Scottish authors writing in English as parts with equal status in an all-inclusive whole. Hay, by writing poetry (both original and translated) in Scots, English and Gaelic, was a key figure in this movement of cultural reconciliation (for discussion see McClure 2009); another was Douglas Young, whose Scots translations of Gaelic poems by MacLean and Hay helped to spread their renown among the Scots-reading public (Young 1943, 11–21). (On MacLean and his influence, see Mackay 2011; on the Gaelic poetic scene in general, see the introduction to Black 1999.)

A further new development in the politicisation of Scottish literature was the insistence by MacDiarmid and his Scots-writing successors on the status of Scots as a *language*. Many writers of the Vernacular Revival period, including the three greatest, Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns, had made a clear distinction between their Scots and their English poetry. Nonetheless, the title of Burns' first collection (the Kilmarnock Edition of 1786) was *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (my emphasis), and this precise wording was adopted by other poets publishing their works; and in the eighteenth century, as still (popularly at least) today, the word *dialect* was taken as implying something lesser in status and more limited in scope than what was suggested by *language*. MacDiarmid and his successors, however, countered this assumption by overtly insisting that Scots was a language which existed, or should and must be made to exist, on equal footing with English: an idea closely related to the new developments in linguistic thought contingent on the growth of dialectology as a scientific discipline. Concomitantly, whereas the choice of Scots against English had, since the eighteenth century, always been motivated at least to some extent by cultural patriotism, this sentiment was hardened now into a dogmatic belief that Scottish poets should, as a patriotic duty, use Scots and not English. This ideological development was dramatically intensified when poet Edwin Muir, after trying unsuccessfully to write in Scots, proclaimed in a now-notorious book (Muir 1936) that Scots was an irretrievably lost cause and that the future hope for Scottish literature lay exclusively in English; and though Muir went on to write some of the finest English-language poetry of modern Scotland, he was from that moment seen as a cultural quisling by MacDiarmid and his school.

The tenet is now accepted as 'given' that Scotland has a trilingual literature, and that the national creative spirit can be expressed in Gaelic, Scots or English. In the straightforward sense that there *are* Scottish writings in diverse literary genres, including some of outstanding quality, in all three languages, this is undoubtedly

true. Yet, the familiarity of this doctrine – now – makes it easy to overlook the fact that the clearly defined notion of an overarchingly ‘Scottish’ literature with branches in each of three national languages was to a large extent deliberately engineered for ideological reasons: noble reasons certainly, in that one of the aims of the Renaissance movement was to heal the long-standing mutual ignorance and suspicion between Scotland’s Gaelic-speaking and Scots-speaking communities, and another was to liberate Scots (in the 1920s, still the mother tongue of most of the population) from its chronic lack of social and educational prestige. It cannot be claimed that those specific aims have been achieved even yet: that Gaelic and Scots speakers are still not mutually reconciled is painfully obvious from the tone of letters in the correspondence pages of newspapers whenever any measure in support of Gaelic is adopted or even proposed; and although the status of Scots in education and the media is at least somewhat better than it was in the 1920s much remains to be done. (At the time of writing, the Scottish Government has responded favourably to a detailed report and set of recommendations presented by a Ministerial Working Group on Scots, and active policy moves in support of the language are awaited.) Nonetheless, the impassioned debates which those issues engendered in the 1920s have ensured that the entire Scottish literary scene from then to the present day has remained vibrant with arguments and controversies, and the period has witnessed the most distinguished and most sustained literary productivity since the eighteenth century if not the fifteenth and sixteenth. But the idea that Gaelic and non-Gaelic literature in Scotland were parts of the *same* national oeuvre, and the idea that Scots was a language fit to meet Gaelic and English on equal terms, would have seemed strange if not outlandish in the eighteenth or the nineteenth century (for further discussion, see Barnaby 2000 and McClure 2010).

Even since this new development in Scotland’s literary self-perception, the political and ideological territory of Scottish literature in the modern period has visibly shifted over the decades. Nationalism and national identity have become much less conspicuous as poetic themes, a development probably related to the establishment of the semi-autonomous Scottish parliament in 1999. The literary status of Scots itself, on the other hand, has continued to evolve in unpredictable ways. The term ‘Scots’ comprehends a remarkable number of different language forms, capable of being broadly categorised under four headings (for a more detailed discussion and schematisation, see McClure 2003): (1) dialects recalling those of eighteenth-century poets such as Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns; (2) traditional rural dialects, still alive as community languages and (in some cases) the vehicles for substantial regional literatures, such as that of the North-East; (3) recently formed urban basilects, such as those of Greater Glasgow;¹ (4) the literary and to some extent artificially constructed register favoured by MacDiarmid and his immediate successors, each of whom developed it in his own individual ways. (The masculine form is strictly correct: this great poetic coterie was exclusively male. More recently, the Scottish poetic scene has come to include several highly regarded female poets, such as [in Scots and English] Jackie Kay, Kathleen Jamie, Kate Armstrong, Carol Ann Duffy and Angela MacSeveney, and [in Gaelic] Meg Bateman, Anne Frater, Catriona Montgomery and Mary Montgomery.) This last was the form associated with the boldly and overtly nationalistic poets of the mid-century, and its fall from popularity is surely related to the decline in nationalism per se as a literary theme: from one point of view, this particular poetic movement and its associated language have been victims of their own success. The third group, by contrast, has been the vehicle of arguably

the most innovative, challenging and radical poetry of the last few decades: urban dialectal Scots is now closely associated with experimental poetry in which ideological debates currently more fashionable than nationalism, such as race and gender issues, are worked out. It is a paradox indeed that a language with as small a demographic base as Scots, and one with a social history which would seem to militate against, rather than to favour, a flourishing literary tradition, should have developed such an extraordinary variety of styles and forms.

The existence of this kaleidoscopic literary medium has been and remains a superb asset to Scottish writers, yet the problem which it presents to translators is substantial: it may indeed have been to some extent a liability in the dissemination of Scottish poetry worldwide in translation. Firstly, much modern poetry in Scots is difficult enough for Scottish readers to understand, let alone foreign translators. Not even the twentieth century's magnificent achievements in Scots lexicography and dialectology, readily available now for consultation in both paper and electronic form,² can always provide immediate clarification of, say, a poem in phonetically spelt Glasgow demotic. And this contingent problem is less challenging than a more fundamental one: what will a translator select as an equivalent medium in the target language? A poem in standard English, or Gaelic, can *ceteris paribus* be translated non-controversially into standard French or German. But a standard language could be seen as inherently inappropriate as a translation medium for poetry in a language which has no canonical standard form: of course it is always possible for the literal meaning to be rendered into whatever language, but the implications of the choice of medium, an integral part of the original poetic effect, will be lost without trace.

A possible solution might, in some cases at least, be for the translator to select a regionally or socially marked dialect instead of the standard language: say, to translate Sheena Blackhall's North-Eastern rural dialect or William Herbert's Dundee urban basilect into a medium based on the speech of some agricultural or urban-industrial region in France or wherever. No doubt most national communities possess a sufficient range and variety of non-standard dialects and sociolects for this to be at least theoretically feasible. But even if the linguistic resources were available, there would be no guarantee, or even likelihood, that the literary implications of using them would be comparable: how many of Europe's national literatures include substantial corpora of poetry in dialects strongly associated with the distinctive cultures of rural communities, or in urban sociolects suggestive of poverty, deprivation and consequent political radicalism? Italian would be one such, perhaps; but French, by contrast, has almost nothing of that kind: an Italian translator who rendered a Scots poem into a form of Sicilian, say, or the dialect of Rome or Milan, would have perfectly respectable literary precedents; but an attempt to use Parisian argot, or a rural dialect of Gascony, would entail starting almost completely anew. And the mere fact of writing in Scots – any form of Scots – carries implications absent from the fact of writing in English or Gaelic: the political 'loading' of Scots, though it has certainly changed over the decades, is as unmistakably present now as ever in the past. On the general level, a writer using Scots is proclaiming a choice *not* to use the official standard language, which is English; on the individual, *which* of any number of possible forms of Scots a writer chooses to select is invariably the result of a conscious and motivated decision. Experienced readers of Scots poetry will recognise the particular form of Scots in which a given poem is couched and respond to its overtones (arising from the dialect or sociolect itself and its associated literary corpus, for by now each individual form of Scots is well on the way to having, or has already acquired, a poetic tradition of its

own). Ideally, a translator working on a corpus of poetry in Scots should be able to utilise a language of which the inherent nature is to possess a prolific diversity of forms, each with its own specific social, political and literary implications; but such an ideal would assuredly not always be easy to realise in practice. It is no doubt for this reason that the practice of finding sociolinguistic and literary equivalents in the target language for whatever form of Scots is being used in a particular poem has very rarely been attempted (cf. Barnaby 2000).

An interesting case in point is the anthology *La Comète d'Halcyon: Poésie en Écosse Aujourd'hui* (Glenday and Pagnouille 1998). This excellent representative selection of modern Scottish poetry includes poems in English, Gaelic and Scots; but each of the Scots-writing poets uses an individually identifiable form of the language: Kate Armstrong's *nicht* is in the traditional literary dialect ultimately based on the Ayrshire-Edinburgh axis of Vernacular Revival poetry, with no words (except perhaps *pleep*, the bird known in English as oyster-catcher – not a *pluvier* [plover] as in the translation) that are notably rare or local; Sheena Blackhall uses a markedly North-Eastern dialect, characterised by features of pronunciation and vocabulary; William Herbert's *Grey thrums* begins in a register suggestive of traditional children's poetry (the title phrase is a direct quote from *Wee Willie Winkie* by William Miller, of which the first verse is known throughout the English-speaking world in English translation), the implications of which are menacingly subverted; and by contrast his *Halcyon's comet* exploits the abrasive force of modern urban vernacular; Harvey Holton presents his highly charged and concentrated poetic vision in a correspondingly dense and literary register of Scots; Raymond Vettese combines a rich traditional vocabulary with the pungency of modern demotic idiom: yet the language of translation is uniformly standard literary French, making for, in many cases, admirable poetry, but losing entirely that part of the original poets' messages which is contained in their choice of medium. And yet, when we examine the respectable number of translations from Scots poetry into many other languages that exist, the fact, at first sight disappointing, that so few translators have even attempted to use anything but their standard literary languages becomes less worthy of remark than the fact that translators have ventured into the Scots literary and linguistic minefield at all.

The picture that BOSLIT conveys of the fortunes in translation of Scottish poetry from the twentieth-century Renaissance period onwards is that it took the rest of the world quite a time to realise that a Scottish Renaissance was in progress: a fact, of course, at which there is no need for surprise. Hugh MacDiarmid's contribution to the Renaissance extended beyond his own poetry: as founder and editor of the monthly literary magazine *Scottish Chapbook* and the annual poetry volume *Northern Numbers*, he vigorously encouraged the publication of new Scottish poetry; and although both these series were short-lived, their influence at the time was far from negligible. But scarcely any of the dozens of poets whose work first appeared in those outlets ever came to be known beyond his (or her) place and time (a major exception is John Buchan, translations of whose novels began to appear from their first publication; but none of the *poems* which he published in *Northern Numbers* and elsewhere have ever been translated); and although it is true that many of the poems there are without distinction, it is equally true that many others deserve to be remembered.

The sequence of translations of MacDiarmid's own poetry began impressively with French versions of four of his lyrics by Denis Saurat, a renowned professor who

published scholarly articles in both English and French on, among others, Milton, Blake and Hugo, and who is credited with first applying the phrase *Renaissance Écossaise* to the poetry of MacDiarmid and his followers (in Blaeser 1958, 5); but since these translations were published in *Scottish Chapbook* (vol. II, no.1, August 1923, 13–14) their international influence was probably slight. Interestingly, they are poetic renderings, freely altering the vocabulary and grammar of the originals in order to produce well-turned and expressive French verse. The use of rare and highly charged words which is part of MacDiarmid's stock-in trade has no counterpart in the translations, but if *Dans les minuits froids des mornes durées* not only implies something different in several respects from 'I' the howe-dumb-deid o' the cauld hairst nicht' but loses entirely the force of the unusual compound word, it is nonetheless a potent line in its own right. Likewise, the one word *yowdendrift* is changed in successive lines to *neige d'un ouragan* and *neige pressée*, which though powerful enough lack the onomatopoeic effect of MacDiarmid's word; the vividness of 'Like greeshuckle the petals lie/O' rosies tashed to bits' is equalled in intensity, even at the cost of literal accuracy, by *Charbons ardents éparpillés, / Les pétales du vent pillés*; if the key phrase 'Feery o' the feet', with its catchy rhythm and reverse-rhyme, is rendered much more prosaically as *les pieds bien agiles*, this is compensated by the neat rhyme with *les jambes fragiles*; not only is the expressive word *smeddum* (unlike *yowdendrift* a very popular word in Scots conversation) lost but also the entire sense of 'She's showin' the haill court/The smeddum intil her!' is changed out of recognition in *Elle force très rudement / Toute la cour à marcher droit*, but the result still conveys the desired comedic effect. In other instances too MacDiarmid's meaning is radically altered: one wonders if it was the sound of the word rather than its sense which prompted Saurat to translate 'an ashypet lassie' as *une laveuse d'assiette*: but overall the verdict must be that Saurat was wiser, and more clearly justified by the results, to produce fairly free paraphrases of poetic merit than if he had attempted to strain the French language sufficiently to concoct a near-literal translation.

Those translations were published in 1923: in 1955 two of MacDiarmid's early lyrics appeared in Czech and in 1956 four more recent poems in Hungarian, but the first major sign that his full importance had been recognised was in a German inaugural dissertation (Blaeser 1958). This landmark study discussed, in the context of a summary history of Scottish literature and the changing status of the Scots language, the achievement of MacDiarmid and several other poets of the 'Synthetic Scots' school (an unfortunate term introduced by MacDiarmid, which has reinforced many ignorant comments on his work from then till now), such as Douglas Young, Albert Mackie, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Robert Garioch and Maurice Lindsay (the last of whom wrote in Scots only occasionally). The thesis ends with a *Kleine Auswahl von Gedichten MacDiarmids*, 13 lyrics being given in the original and in translations: the register chosen being a workmanlike, conservative literary German. German is obviously closer to Scots than French is both in its stress-timed rhythm and – a more specific asset – its aptitude for onomatopoeia; and since Blaeser like Saurat has aimed at poetic translations rather than mere cribs, altering the sense of his originals quite freely for the sake of metre and rhyme, the opportunity was certainly available to produce translations which would not only read well in German but convey something of the tone of the originals. In many instances, undoubtedly, this opportunity has been skilfully taken. The animal noises and actions in *Farmer's Death* are rendered by very appropriately chosen words: the hens (reduced to *one* hen

in the translation) *tuckert und gackt* (for ‘keckle and bouk’), the pig *gruntzt und schlürft* (for ‘slotters and slorps’) and in *The Last Trump*:

Ower the haill warl’ there’s a whirrin’
 An’ a reishlin’ an’ a stirrin’
 An’ a muckle voice that cries:
 “Let aal men rise!”

comes across admirably as:

*Über das Welt, da ist ein Schwirren,
 ein Getümmel und ein Flirren,
 und ein lauter Ruf erschallt:
 “Weckt jung und alt!”*

The potent if sometimes obscure words and compounds of which MacDiarmid makes such effective use likewise present a challenge which Blaeser often faces boldly, though never, be it noted, by any use of words from any form of German other than the standard: ‘I’ the *howe-dumb-deid o’ the cauld hairst nicht’* here becomes *In der kalten Herbstesmitternacht*; ‘i’ the *yowe-trummle’* becomes *im Schäfermond*, a genuine if somewhat old-fashioned compound which keeps part at least of the surface meaning of the word if not its full semantic complexity; the ‘*bonnie wee craturie’* (the infant Christ, in one of the most audacious and most emotive of MacDiarmid’s lyrics) becomes *der kleine Racker*. And invariably, the diverse metrical structures and rhyme patterns of the originals have been reproduced in the German translations.

On the debit side, however, the sense is often substantially altered: in many cases this is patently simply due to the translator’s need to preserve a rhyming or metrical pattern, and the result is often well within the limits of translator’s licence, as when ‘...my eerie memories fa’/like a yowdendrift’ becomes... *furchtsames Erinnern fällt/ Schneesturmgleich, ein Traum* or ‘...or ha’e sic a rotten, stinkin’/Corpse as mine in ‘s sunlicht blinkin’ becomes... *mich stinkend faules Sarggebein/im hellen, warmen Sonnenschein*; but all too often the suggestion is of a failure of comprehension. As the title *Hungry Waters* should have shown, ‘the auld men o’ the sea’ are waves, not *alte Matrosen, seebleichen Haar* looks like a sheer guess at ‘their daberlack hair’ (‘daberlack’ is a kind of seaweed), and ‘dacker’, though ‘search’ (*sie suchten*...) is one possible meaning, here means ‘wear away’. ‘There was nae reek i’ the laverock’s hoose’ is a famous and classic example of an idiomatic metaphor: ‘laverock’ is lark, but the expression means ‘the night was dark and stormy’: neither the poetic nor even the literal sense is retained in *Kein Rauch aus unsern Häusern steigt*. And as a last example, although others could be given, *Ein guter Ruf ist gold’ner Ruhm* simply bears no relationship whatever to ‘The aidle-pool [puddle in a dung-heap] is a glory o’ gowd’: I personally can find no clue to how he arrived at this translation. In the context in which they appear, such mistakes are more serious than they would have been in Saurat’s French translations, had any such appeared there: Saurat’s formed a self-contained feature in a poetry magazine, but Blaeser’s are an appendix to a scholarly study, and on the whole an excellent and most timely one, of the poetry of MacDiarmid and his school; and the question inevitably arises whether a critic whose understanding of the originals is so uncertain is qualified to introduce them to a literary and academic readership in another country.

Despite Blaeser's ground-breaking study, Western Europe at least remained largely oblivious to MacDiarmid and his followers for some years yet. (A small but notable exception is his four-line gem *Little White Rose*, translated into Breton [along with two poems by Douglas Young] by Per Denez, latterly Professor of Celtic at the University of Rennes.) The languages in which the next group of translations appeared were Czech again, Bulgarian, Hebrew and Hungarian: the last in the periodical *Nagyvilág*, which in 1961 also published MacDiarmid's contribution to a discussion of the relationship between world peace and world literature. Some French translations (including one of *On a Raised Beach*, a poem consisting largely of highly recondite geological terms) appeared in the 1970s, and the first Italian selection – significantly, the translators being the Sicilian poet Nat Scammacca and other members of the *Antigruppo Siciliano* – in 1974. Bonventre (1996) compiled a set of 11 poems by MacDiarmid in Italian translation, including some from later collections than his first two volumes *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* which had been the source of most translations till then: his technique was invariably to provide a straightforward literal translation in standard Italian, making no attempt at rhyme, metre or any other poetic device. Often the result is, if nothing else, an adequate rendering of the literal meaning:

*Una sera umida di vento freddo
io vidi una cosa rara,
un arcobaleno di luce tremolante
prima della partenza,
e pensavi al tuo ultimo sguardo selvaggio
prima di morire!*

apart from the word *partenza* (*on-ding* is 'downpour', not 'departure'), at least refers to the same set of events as:

Ae weet forenicht i' the yow-trummle
I saw yon antrin thing,
A watergaw wi' its chitterin' licht
Ayont the on-ding;
An' I thoct o' the last wild look ye gied
Afore ye deed!

– but when serious misunderstandings occur, the result, since it cannot be judged as a poem in its own right, has no redeeming features: in 'When the world's couped soon' as a *peerie*', the word *couped* has the sense of 'fallen over in sleep' and *soon*' as a *peerie* is simply the familiar expression '[to sleep] as sound as a top': to render this as:

*Quando lo spento rumore del mondo
si fa sibilo di trottola che gira*

simply betrays a total failure of comprehension. This exercise, faults notwithstanding, is one of the more substantial in a quite healthy flow of MacDiarmid translations that has continued over the last few decades, poems and sections of poems selected from his entire output appearing in a steady sequence into numerous languages (Hungary, for whatever reason, being apparently a country in which he arouses particular enthusiasm), although it is curious that the only language into which his masterpiece *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* has ever been translated in its entirety is Japanese (for discussion, see McClure 2002b).

Unfortunately, the *other* great Scots-writing poets of the Renaissance fare as poorly in translation compared to MacDiarmid as those of the eighteenth to Burns; and the lack of international renown of (among others) William Soutar, Douglas Young, Sydney Goodsir Smith, T.S. Law, Robert Garioch, Alasdair Mackie, Tom Scott, Alexander Scott and William Neill – by any standards a company the like of which has rarely been seen together in Scotland’s or any other nation’s poetic history – is indeed a matter for regret, although no doubt partly explained by the undeniably difficult and recondite language of at least part of their oeuvre. Some attempt to rectify the deficiency was made in an impressive anthology by Blaeser (1982). In its coverage of the entire chronological span of Scottish poetry, including Gaelic, this anthology includes a notably generous selection from poets, some very little-known, of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and several of the post-MacDiarmid Scots-writing makars. As with his MacDiarmid translations, the language is standard literary German irrespective of that of the original; and although the German verses are unfailingly poetic their metrical and rhyme formats this time do not always match those of the originals (which are not included): the flowing lines of Douglas Young’s *On the Akropolis at Skoplje, July 1936*:

Here on the hillside garden the dusk closes;
elderly gardeners shuffle about, watering
green graves of old Turkish pashas among the roses, –
bones and dust after their lust and slaughtering. . .

are melodiously if inaccurately (*dusk* taken to be *dust*?) rendered as:

*Auf diesem Gartenberg verweht der Staub
wo greise Gärtner stumm die Gräber pflegen
der alten Herren unter Rosenlaub,
Gebeine, Staub, nach Raub und Lustersegen. . .*

but the irregular patterns of Sydney Goodsir Smith’s lyric *Loch Leven*:

Tell me was a glorie ever seen
As the morn I left my lass
Fore licht in the toun o’ snaw,
And saw the daw
O’ burnan cramasie
Turn the gray ice
O’ Mary’s Loch Leven
Til sheenan brass –
And kent the glorie and the gleen
Was but the waukenin o her een?

appear in a suspiciously similar prosodic guise:

*Sagt, war den solche Glorie je gesehen
als an dem Morgen, als ich von ihr ging,
noch vor den Licht in der verschneiten Stadt;
sah, wie die Dämmerung aus roter Glut umfing,
verwandelnd jetzt das graue Eis
von Mary’s Loch Leven
in messinggelben Schein
War alle Glorie, aller Wandel denn
nicht das Erwachen ihres Blicks allein?*

Several of his earlier MacDiarmid translations are included with errors uncorrected, and it must be acknowledged that liberties are frequently taken in translating; one of the most astonishing examples, from the beginning rather than the end of the book, is John Barbour's famous apostrophe to Freedom in his epic *Brus* (completed in 1375), in which the keyword is replaced by *Treue!* Yet, all criticisms notwithstanding, this is one of the most substantial anthologies of Scottish poetry in any language, and one which gives at least a modicum of recognition to the post-MacDiarmid school. Blaeser's anthology apart, almost the only country in which they have received any welcome is Italy: a landmark example is Scammacca and Glen (1997), and other selections have appeared in various publications with Enzo Bonventre and Carla Sassi as the principal translators (for discussion, see McClure 2006); an exception is a single issue of a Slovak journal called *Revue Svetovej Literatúry* (18:2, 1982) which printed translations of a wide selection of contemporary Scottish poems in Scots, English and Gaelic.

Poets using the last two languages have, predictably if regrettably, fared somewhat better than their Scots-writing contemporaries. Edwin Muir, Edwin Morgan and Norman MacCaig, three of the greatest poets whose principal or only poetic language is English, have been extensively translated, single poems or selections appearing in many languages (Hungarian, once again, being particularly receptive), often in anthologies of 'English' poetry; for Gaelic poets, interestingly if not surprisingly, the languages into which they are most often translated are Irish and Welsh, with an occasional appearance in Breton; but, again to mention only three of the finest, Sorley MacLean appears also in Polish, Slovak, French, Italian and Spanish (not the language which has been most receptive to Scottish poetry), Derick Thomson in German, Slovak and Swedish, and Aonghas Mac Neacail in Polish, Serbo-Croat, German, Spanish and Italian. Although the BOSLIT researchers have only just begun to incorporate the information into the catalogue, there are also a respectable number of translations from Gaelic poetry into Scots, including some by outstanding poets: Douglas Young's translations from Sorley MacLean, already mentioned, provide one example; another is those from Derick Thomson by Alexander Scott (Robb 1994, 74–79). (For discussion of the field, see McClure 1994, [a follow-up] 2010.) A German collection (Heinz 2001) includes a selection of poems by Thomson and Mac Neacail (the translator, Ursula Pritscher, has studied at Sabhal Mór Ostaig, the Gaelic college in Skye): it is perhaps permissible to wonder why Scottish Gaelic is represented in this anthology by only two poets, since Irish, Welsh and Breton have three each! – and Tratnik-Uí-Cheallaigh (1996), a very attractively produced collection in which selected poems from all four surviving Celtic languages are arranged under such headings as *Sehnsucht*, *Lob*, *Errinerung*, *Verlust*, *Abschied* and *Tod* includes poems by MacLean, Thomson, Mac Neacail and several other Gaelic poets, including young contemporaries. This collection and the Serbo-Croat one of Whyte (1993) between them include most of the translations so far made, at least into non-Celtic languages, of several Gaelic poets of high distinction. Whyte provides an outstanding example of the importance of personal initiatives in the field of poetic translation: the translations in the 1993 collection were the result of his contacts with a number of literary and scholarly figures in Croatia, most importantly Slobodan Novak of Zagreb University; and he has also collaborated in translations of Gaelic poetry into Hungarian (in *Parnasszus*, winter 2004, 116–7 and *Korunk* XVI/10, October 2005, 13–15), Catalan (*Poétiques* XX, Café Central, Barcelona) and Albanian (*Rilindja*, 22 December 1994). An important

consideration is that Whyte, though not a mother-tongue speaker of Gaelic, is sufficiently accomplished in the language to be a highly regarded poet and critic. Many translations of Gaelic poetry into other languages have been made not from the originals but from English versions: for example, Sassi and Fazzini (1992) include poems by MacLean and Mac Neacail, but the versions which face the Italian translations are English, the Gaelic poems not being included in the book.

Finally, to consider the contemporary scene, a glance at the BOSLIT catalogue shows that twenty-first century Scottish poetry already has acquired a respectable number of translations, French being so far the most receptive language. Since the work of the contemporary generation of young or early middle-aged poets is not my primary field of specialised interest, I asked a colleague to pick for me six of the most highly regarded, and he gave me the names of Don Paterson, Kathleen Jamie, Robert Crawford, Robin Robertson, Carol Ann Duffy and John Burnside: all of whom, I was pleased to note, have come to be known in translation. It is a mark both of the conspicuous Scottish presence on the international literary scene and the diligence of the BOSLIT research team that the number of entries for some of them has actually increased during the time of writing of this paper! The one who has so far achieved the smallest degree of recognition abroad is Robertson, with only 14 entries in BOSLIT: except for a single poem in Italian, all in a 2003 Finnish anthology of recent English, Scottish and Irish poetry in which he appears along with several Scottish contemporaries (in fact, as it happens, the ones mentioned in the above list; except that Jackie Kay is included and Robert Crawford is not). Carol Ann Duffy, whose poetic language is English but much of whose early poetry is inspired by memories of her experiences as a Glasgow-accented child in a family having migrated to England, scores highest with 67, the most recent chronologically being in Hungarian and the earliest in Macedonian: two German anthologies each contain several of her poems. John Burnside comes next with 54, an interesting detail being two cases where one of his poems has been given three renderings by different French translators; and Kathleen Jamie, the only one of the six who regularly writes in Scots (some of Robert Crawford's earlier poems were in a Scots so extravagant as to raise suspicion of a parodic intention, but his more recent work is mostly in English), scores a respectable 47, including a German translation of one of her first collections and an appearance, again along with several contemporaries, in a Hungarian publication arising from a Scottish literary festival in 1995.

Scottish poetry, including that of our own time, thus appears to be far from unrecognised abroad. Yet, there is scope for much more to be done, and initiatives are being taken. Most obviously, the coverage is woefully inconsistent: obviously a crude playing of the numbers game does not give anything like a complete picture, but on any showing there is something radically wrong when a search in the BOSLIT catalogue for Robert Fergusson shows a mere nine entries – two of them for different printings of the same poem rendered by a Scottish translator into Esperanto – to Robert Burns's 3045, and Tom Scott has also nine, in only one language (Italian), to Hugh MacDiarmid's 258. Given that the listing for Scott includes reprints but also sections of anthologies which contain several poems, the actual number of his poems which exist in Italian (or any) translation appears to be 16: still an astonishingly low figure for one of the greatest Scottish poets of the twentieth century. Even the proportionate scale of MacDiarmid's entry to Burns's is far from reflecting their relative stature. Active efforts at rectifying the gross under-representation in the translation field of Scottish writers other than the very greatest

are urgently required. Besides initiatives taken by individual poets and scholars, and by institutions, a Scottish centre for literary translation is in the planning stage: this, if and when it is established, will certainly initiate collaborative projects between poets and translators in Scotland and in other countries, augmenting not only the recognition of Scottish poetry abroad but also Scotland's own splendid tradition of poetic translation. There is also room for a far greater measure of official support: the semi-independent Scottish Government took a very long time to develop a coherent artistic and cultural policy, but there are signs of improvement; and the Government's vigorous efforts to raise the profile of Scotland on the international scene could surely be directed in part towards supporting collaborations with other countries in the field of literary translation. Future developments may be awaited with interest.

Notes

1. The history of thought regarding the vexed question of how the highly distinctive working-class speech of Scotland's urban centres – self-evidently not the same as the traditional rural dialects but even more certainly not Scottish Standard English – is an interesting study. Since its existence was first remarked upon, it has been customarily contrasted unfavourably with both those varieties and has accordingly been stigmatised as 'neither good Scots nor good English' (for a witty and incisive examination of this see Aitken 1981). That of Glasgow and the Clyde conurbation, which arose during the rapid industrial development of the nineteenth century, was the first to emerge and its literary use is now well established; those of Edinburgh and Dundee can claim as their most notable literary celebrants the fiction writer Irvine Welsh and the poet William Herbert: that of Aberdeen, linguistically the most interesting of them all in respect of its growing differentiation from the traditional dialect until recently (and still by the older generation) spoken in the city as well as its rural hinterland, still awaits its literary recognition. The sociolinguistic fact that the emergence of urban basilects is a common and well-attested development has yet to have any perceptible effect on popular attitudes to those speech forms in Scotland. On Glasgow speech, see Macafee (1983, 1994); on Aberdeen and the North-East, McClure (2002a) and Millar (2007).
2. The multi-volume *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and *Scottish National Dictionary* are combined in the online *Dictionary of the Scots Language* <http://www.dsl.ac.uk>. For information on those and the several (completed and projected) derived works, see <http://www.scotsdictionaries.org.uk>.

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