

## WHEN *MACBETH* BECOMES SCOTS<sup>1</sup>

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In 1992, two Scots translations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, by David Purves and Robin L.C. Lorimer, were published almost simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> These had been made independently, though each translator was aware of the other's intention; and they represent two unmistakably different approaches to the project.

Before examining the translations themselves, I propose to submit certain assumptions—some almost axiomatic, some perhaps deserving of more detailed consideration—regarding poetic translation, and apply them in turn to the specific question of translating Shakespeare into Scots.

First, literary translation is a creative act. The translator of a work of literary merit, assuming that his intention is to produce something more than a mere crib (say, for the use of learners of the language in which the original work is written), must be capable of handling his own language with skill: ideally, with a skill at least equal to that of the original writer. A translation grossly inferior in literary quality to its model is not only a poor advertisement for the expressive resources of the target language: it is, in a perfectly comprehensible sense, not a

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valid translation, since the literary merit of the original is one of its features as are its theme, imagery, etc., and must be reflected in the translation.

From this, what follows should be a mighty big caution. Presumably any translator of poetry intends that his work should be worthy of its original; ideally, a translation of a great literary work should be itself a **great** literary work. There is no difficulty in principle in accepting that a translation may be better than its original; and if such an aim is, as we may concede, unrealistic when the author to be translated is Shakespeare, it remains *prima facie* true that a translator who aims at producing something even **nearly as good** as a Shakespearean play must be a bold spirit. On the other hand, there has been no dearth of such bold spirits in the history, especially the recent history, of Scots letters. Gavin Douglas's sixteenth-century rendering of Virgil's *Aeneid* is recognised as one of the greatest secular translations ever made; John Stewart of Baldynneis's *Roland Furious* and Sir Thomas Urquhart's *Gargantua* are also landmarks in the history of literary translation. In the present century, many of the first- and second-magnitude stars in the European poetic firmament—Homer, Catullus, Dante, Petrarch, Villon, Heine, Mistral, Mayakovsky—have provided material with which Scots poet-translators have done admirable work; and William Lorimer's Scots version of the New Testament is a conclusive demonstration of the potential of Scots as a language for literary translation. That is, the enterprise of Purves and Lorimer is daring, but not preposterous; and "if they should fail", no excuses can shield them from the full severity of adverse criticism.

Closely related to this is the second consideration: the claim of literal fidelity to an original is specious. The ancient assumption that a translator must strike a balance between two competing claims, that of word-for-word accuracy and that of grammatical and/or stylistic acceptability in his own language—what I call, not only when discussing Shakespeare, 'the "either true or fair" fallacy'—has neither theoretical grounding nor practical demonstrability. The claim of fidelity to the

original work must be met on a deeper and subtler level than verbal accuracy: a translator's task is to exploit the resources of his own language, which will of necessity be different from those of the original, to make a poetic statement of comparable content, and comparable expressive power, to his model. From this it follows that a valid translation can only be made if the resources of the translator's language are, or can be made to be, as extensive as those of the language of the original work.

The most cursory glance at the canon of literature in Scots, from the fourteenth century to the present, demonstrates beyond cavil that its literary potential is enormous: rich enough for any task, one might assume. *Macbeth*, however, presents a specific problem: an essential feature of its language is its experimental, innovative quality. Shakespeare, to an extent almost unique even by his own standards, in this play raises the English language to expressive heights never achieved before or since; and therefore challenges a translator to replicate this achievement by not only exploiting, but extending, the full range of linguistic effects attainable in his language. A Scots translator, however, need not in principle be daunted by such a prospect. The development of the language as a poetic medium in the present century has been along highly experimental lines: as English in Shakespeare's period was enjoying a period of burgeoning growth unique in its history, so recent and contemporary literary Scots has undergone an astonishing linguistic efflorescence. An exuberant delight in verbal experimentation—the use of words and idioms from the full diversity of Scotland's local dialects, of words which have acquired strong emotive power from their appearance in well-known literary contexts, of archaic, obsolete and even invented words—is characteristic of modern Scots poetry: imaginative use of language is in fact a hall-mark of the entire tradition. One would therefore expect—using that word in the sense of “consider it as due”—that a Scots version of *Macbeth* would be boldly innovative in its language: this would be one of the criteria on which such a venture would have to be judged.

(For instance, there was no such verb in English as *incarnadine* until Shakespeare used it in this play, and a translator incurs the responsibility of conveying the shock of a new expression as the original did. Lorimer succeeds, by concocting the word *incrimponate*; Purves fails, though his translation is perfectly good and expressive Scots, by using a circumlocution *turn the haill / o the seas in aw the warld frae green / tae crammassie*.) Modern literary Scots lends itself to an almost unlimited degree of individual experimentation: the opportunities which it therefore affords for translating an original written in idiosyncratic language are enormous, and enticing. This conclusion further aggravates the responsibility of the translators to produce worthy results.

A third general reflection on translation is the following. Any literary work is produced against the background of the author's own political and ideological assumptions and those of his time and place, which will in the nature of things not be the same as those of the translator. The translator may choose to ignore, to confront or even to exploit the ideological differences between himself and his model; but an ideological aspect to the translation of poetry is integral to the whole practice.

A bedrock of Shakespeare's ethos as a writer, as with other literary figures of his time, was the celebration of English identity. Shakespeare, besides being an English dramatist (and one whom, it is safe to predict, no amount of revisionist thought or theory will, or should, ever dislodge from his position of supremacy in the English literary pantheon), was an English nationalist. It is not only because of his literary genius in itself, but also because he used it so brilliantly in celebration of England and Englishness, that he holds a central place in the English national self-image. His plays, at least until roughly the middle of his career, abound in magnificently stirring expressions of English patriotism: an opinion of *Henry V* which I have heard endorsed by Scottish students is that it makes you momentarily wish you were English so that you could pat yourself on the back. And as is all too frequent, the reverse

side of his wholly just and admirable pride in his own country is an unwarranted denigration of its rivals: the slighting or outrightly insulting treatment of the French in several of the historical plays is ample expression of that; and though in *Macbeth* the Scots are presented with dignity, they too are the object of denigratory references in earlier plays. This in itself confronts Scottish translators of his work with at least a potential difficulty: since the use of Scots, as will be argued shortly, is inescapably a political statement of Scottish identity, there is a *prima facie* inappropriateness in using it to translate the supreme celebrant of the identity of the rival culture.

The choice of *Macbeth*, out of the canonical thirty-seven Shakespearean dramas, can clearly be interpreted as an attempt to disarm this difficulty. This is Shakespeare's "Scottish" play; and its symbolic Scottishness is indeed profound. It is an accepted fact of Shakespearean scholarship that the play was written shortly after James VI's accession to the English throne, and tailored specifically for his approval: the enormous emphasis on the sacred nature of kingship and the iniquity of rebellion, the favourable presentation of James's putative ancestor Banquo (to which the blackening of Macbeth is a dramatic complement), the centrality of the supernatural element and the imaginative effort bestowed on it, the "prophecy" of the union of the Scottish and English crowns, are all patently chosen to appeal to the King's known proclivities. Furthermore, by basing the play on an episode from Scottish history but one dating from long before the onset of the Three Hundred Years' War between Scotland and England, Shakespeare ensured that the play could be seen as a tribute to the new king's native country without countering his expressed desire to bring the long-standing enmity between his old and his new kingdoms to a close. The play is, therefore, a tribute on many levels to a Scottish king; and though English historians have generally presented James I in an unflattering light, in Scotland James VI was recognised, and is remembered, as a monarch of exceptional skill whose accession to the English throne was regarded at the time not as desertion but as a triumph

of national policy. It is not too fanciful to see in Shakespeare's Scottish play an underwriting of this triumph.<sup>3</sup>

This is an agreeable fact to Scottish readers, and one which might seem to make the translation of *Macbeth* an attractive prospect from a political as well as a literary point of view. Yet the issue is much more complex. The plot of the drama bears almost no relationship to the actual facts, so far as they can be ascertained, regarding the historical Macbeth: in particular, Shakespeare's presentation of him as a murderous tyrant appears to be a complete falsehood. The story of Macbeth which had become the historical orthodoxy by the time of Holinshed and Shakespeare, in fact, is a spectacular example of the process often found in historiography, of denigrating a defeated opponent: Shakespeare's Macbeth, like his Richard III, is based on an image not of the man as he was but as his enemies wished him to be seen. It is, of course, true that the development of Macbeth's story from his own time to Holinshed's is in Scottish and not English writings: Holinshed's source, for this as for most of his Scottish material, is Hector Boece's *Scotorum Historiae*, published in 1526.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, however, takes the process of blackening Macbeth's character further than Boece or Holinshed, or any earlier Scottish sources: for instance, by adding to his story the treacherous murder of the king, an episode based on Holinshed's narrative of a king (Duff) who lived almost a century earlier than Duncan. In Scotland, Macbeth is regarded in a more realistic and more favourable light: indeed, he appears to be acquiring the status of hero-figure rather than villain-figure in popular thought. This is not only because of his amply demonstrated qualities of wisdom, courage and political skill: since Malcolm III availed himself of English help to defeat Macbeth and seize his throne, and since Malcolm's reign and those of his sons were marked by the deliberate adoption of Anglo-Norman forms of both state and church organisation, Macbeth is now often perceived as the last champion of Scotland's Celtic identity, and by extension of her historic independence and integrity: a simplistic notion but a very appealing one. (In a recent experimental drama called *An*

*Gaisgeach* ("The Hero"), which embodies a sympathetic presentation of Macbeth against a highly imaginative reconstruction of his military, political and cultural background, Malcolm's lines are in English, the rest of the cast speaking literary Scots, North-East dialect or Gaelic.) Lorimer and Purves obviously could not, in a translation, alter Shakespeare's plot; and it must be acknowledged that an element of impropriety could be detected in the act of adopting into the Scottish literary canon a play in which a Scottish hero is effectually libelled. The justification, should such be felt to be required, must inhere in the brilliance of the play itself, considered as a fictional drama: a further obligation on the translators to convey that brilliance in their renderings.

Fourth, translation is appropriation. It has not the moral stigma of theft, or even of plagiarism: on the contrary, the translating of a literary work is almost *ipso facto* a gesture of homage to the text and to the culture from which it emerged. But an artefact in a given language, such as a poem or play, is the property of the speakers of that language; and by creating an artefact in another language which purports to be a translation, a second group of speakers is laying claim to a work which was not originally their own.

When Shakespeare is translated into Scots, this fact acquires a peculiar potency. To appreciate its importance, allow me to digress briefly (for the benefit of this predominantly non-Scottish audience) on the vexed question of Anglo-Scottish cultural relations. The history of Scottish cultural life in the second half of this century shows the clear developing and maturing of a sense of autonomous national identity. One illustration of this is the remarkable abundance of translations in recent Scottish literature: a clear statement, in intention at least, of the international character and cosmopolitan outlook of Scottish culture. Another is a vigorous rejection of the "tartan and heather" iconography of Scottish identity: a trivial and largely specious set of images derived principally from a nineteenth-century romanticisation of the now destroyed culture of the Highlands. A full-scale revision, almost a revolution, in Scottish historical studies, achieved through the

recognition and abandonment of the assumption that the social and political history of England represented a universal standard against which that of Scotland had to be measured, has assisted this development: key events in Scottish history and such quasi-iconic historical figures as Robert Bruce, Mary Queen of Scots and Bonnie Prince Charlie are now interpreted in a more accurate and more informative manner than was the case not long ago. The rehabilitation of Macbeth is one illustration of this. (Incredibly, until at least the 1950s Shakespeare's version of the Macbeth story was taught in school **history** classes, and even in the 1980s Edinburgh's very attractive Wax Museum had, among a series of tableaux depicting scenes from Scottish history, a representation of Macbeth with the three witches!) Yet Scotland in 1995 is still far from having attained to the full maturity of autonomous nationhood: a fact which is shown by, for one thing, the stark contrast between its outstandingly rich and lively cultural life and its chronically sterile political landscape; and for another, the disproportionate place still held by England as "other" in the national consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

To a fully autonomous Scotland, England will simply be one among many partner states in the European and the world comity of nations. Since that has not yet happened, however, a translation into Scots from English literature (with the emphasis on the political, not the linguistic, sense of the word "English") cannot be seen as having the same implications as a translation from, say, French: especially if the author to be translated is as insistently English as Shakespeare. The canon of modern Scottish literature now includes, among many other possible examples, *Seivin Poems o Maister François Villon* by Tom Scott, *Let Wives Tak Tent* [i.e. *L'École des Femmes*] by Robert Kemp and *The Drucken Boat* [*Le Bateau Ivre*] by Alastair Mackie: trophies which are displayed with due pride as representing new developments in Scotland's long-standing and productive cultural association with France. But the status of France as ally and England as rival—a situation originating in the facts of mediaeval military and political history and



still very much alive in folk-memory—ensures that whereas a translation from the literature of France can be seen in the vein of a gift bestowed and accepted in an atmosphere of amity, one from the literature of England will inevitably suggest something more in the nature of a border raid for booty. To put it less fancifully, to the obvious challenge of translating one of the supreme masters of European literature is added the incentive of showing, **if** the translation is successful (a very important reservation), that the greatest literary Englishman can become a naturalised Scot. Tradition has it that at the close of the first production in Edinburgh of John Hume's play *Douglas*, an enthusiastic member of the audience called out: "Whaur's your Wullie Shakespeare nou?" Purves and Lorimer are attempting nothing less than a resurrection of this question in a context in which the answer can be "Here, sitting comfortably in the *Scottish* literary pantheon!"—an act of cultural subversion as bold and flamboyant as the recovery of the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey, which, if not carried off with panache, might leave the perpetrators looking very undignified indeed.

The political overtones of translating Shakespeare into Scots are further emphasised by the status of the Scots language itself. By writing, from choice, in a language which lacks official recognition, the writer is at the very least proclaiming its value as a literary medium as against that of the dominant language; and given that there have been many cases in history where writers have contributed actively to the preservation of languages which government policy has been aimed at exterminating, the act of writing in a subordinate language may be overtly and inescapably political. Furthermore, translation into an oppressed language enlists the original author as one of its active supporters: a gain all the more valuable if the author is of exalted stature. However, the linguistic status of Scots is itself a matter of controversy: the question "Is Scots a language or a dialect of English?" is raised with wearisome regularity in Scotland, the fact that no simple or conclusive

answer is possible not yet having penetrated the collective consciousness. This brings me to my final general point.

The popular contrast between a “language” and a “dialect” is, it goes without saying, a hopeless over-simplification; but in its unexamined form it is universally made. And what is accepted by sociolinguists as a defining quality of a speech form lacking the status of a “language” in all senses, namely heteronomy with respect to a dominant tongue, has a somewhat crude analogue in popular thought: the notion that a “dialect” is an inferior form of a “language”.

It is in the light of this that an answer can be offered to the obvious question: what is the point of translating *Macbeth* into Scots, when every educated person in Scotland is perfectly familiar with the original play? Normally the primary purpose of literary translation is to render the original work comprehensible to a new group of readers; but that certainly does not apply here: even among readers accustomed to modern literary Scots (and that is not a very large section of the Scottish populace: a corollary of the experimental nature of recent Scots writing already referred to is that the language of the texts often presents difficulties even to native speakers of vernacular Scots), there can be few if any who actually find it **easier** to read than Jacobean English. No doubt Purves and Lorimer, on one level, wrote simply in order to exercise their undoubted skill in writing Scots (Purves has an established reputation as a dramatist and short story writer). But neither can have been unaware of the implications of his endeavour for the controversy regarding the status of the tongue. As the Scottish self-perception has not yet, as already noted, fully emancipated itself from a heteronomous position with respect to England, so English is the language against which the status of Scots is measured. What clearer proof could there be that Scots is indeed an autonomous literary language than by successfully translating a great work in the language with reference to which it is defined? If Scots is sufficiently developed to encompass *Macbeth*, it is incontrovertibly a fully mature literary medium; if the translation is linguistically distinct from the original—as a rough guide, so distinct

as to present monolingual Anglophones with serious problems of comprehension—then it is in a different language. A translation into Scots from English, as from no other tongue, is an acid test of the claim of Scots to be accepted as an autonomous language and not a mere “dialect”. (I request this company to take on trust the fact that I would be perfectly capable of discussing the issue in full detail in acceptable linguistic terms if time permitted. I have been an active participant in the Scots linguistic controversy for a quarter of a century).

All those factors, then, cumulatively amount to the laying of a truly awesome responsibility on any Scots writer who undertakes a translation of *Macbeth*. How successfully have Purves and Lorimer discharged it? An immediately obvious consideration is that the two texts differ, not only in detail but in several instances of what is clearly principle.<sup>6</sup> Firstly, Lorimer has put not only the actual dialogue of the play but the stage directions into Scots. “Enter...” is *Ben comes...* and “exit...” *But gaes...*; the opening direction is *Thunner an lichtning: Ben comes the Three Weirds*, and others are *But gaes MacBeth & Lennox baith, intil the King’s chaumer, He rises an gaes owerby til the Murtherer*, and *Pipes & banners: Ben comes Malcolm, Siward, MacDuff & their Host, wi green beuchs o trees cairriein*. The cast list, too, is in Scots, and has some interesting alterations from that found in standard editions: Lady Macbeth is designated by her historical name of Gruoch and Malcolm by his sobriquet Malcolm Canmore (Gaelic *ceann mór*, “great head”), Banquo (so spelt) is designated Thane of Lochaber, as in Boece, and Setoun “MacBeth’s Gille Mór (i.e.—approximately—chief steward)”. Purves does none of these things, and not only keeps the stage directions in English but interpolates several not found in any other edition of the play: a particularly odd group refer to Lady Macbeth’s mental workings in the sleepwalking scene: “She remembers the bell struck on the night of Duncan’s murder”—“Returning to her past conversations”—“Pointing her finger, as if at the banquet”. The obvious suggestion is that Lorimer’s version is designed principally for reading and Purves’s as a practical acting text.

This impression is supported by the presence of some scholarly footnotes in the former referring to alternative readings: for the well-known crux “bank and schoole of time”, if taken to mean “bank and stool”, he offers the translation *Aye, here, upò this bink an stuil o time*; if “bank and shoal”, *here on thir banks an shiftin shaulds o time*. A further implication, however, is that Lorimer has been concerned in a way that Purves has not to relate the play to its origins in Scottish historiography (if not history).

Lorimer’s clear desire to emphasise the Scottish “roots” of the play takes other interesting forms. Shakespeare’s notorious “As cannons overcharged with double cracks” becomes *lik Monce Meg surcharged an double-shott*. Mons Meg is the nickname of an actual cannon now on the battlements of Edinburgh Castle. The last line “Whom we invite to see us crown’d at Scone” becomes *an bid ye come an set me on the Stane o Scoun*: a change made, no doubt, because in historical fact Scottish kings in Macbeth’s period (and until much later) were not crowned, but inaugurated by being ceremonially placed on a sacred stone. Shakespeare’s “show of eight Kings” becomes *a paidgean o seiven Kings & a Queen*: restoring Mary Queen of Scots, whom Shakespeare may have thought it tactful not to mention, to her rightful place in the Stewart royal line. The witch scenes include the lines *Horse an hattock, horse an ride* and *Dance the Reel o Gillatrypes*: references to actual invocations recorded in Scottish witch trials. Malcolm’s line “’Tis call’d the evil”, simply *It’s cawed the Keing’s ailment* in Purves, becomes in Lorimer *In Scots it’s cried / the cruels, but in English the King’s Evil: the cruels* (from French *écrouelles*) is a Scots word for scrofula. And—a remarkably subtle trick—the three English characters in the play, Siward and his son and the Doctor who appears in Act 4 Scene 3, actually speak English: the Siwards’ lines are Shakespeare with slight alterations, but the Doctor’s only speech is re-written. Nothing of this kind is found in Purves’s text, and the conclusion is clearly that he has been less concerned than Lorimer to take the cultural

naturalisation implicit in translation beyond the primary fact of language transfer.

A second important difference is that Lorimer preserves the Shakespearean iambic pentameter much more strictly than does Purves. The latter claims in an introductory note that “the underlying scansion remains in iambic pentameters but fairly freely”; but “fairly” should at times be “**very**”: lines like the following, whatever their other merits, can by no stretch of the imagination be read as Shakespearean blank verse:

*O ay, A'm gled ti hear it. A daursay  
ye nicht be cawed men o a kynd — lyke hoonds,  
stray curs, toozie tykes, shilpit whuppits,  
an ill-faured mongrels is aw cryit dug.  
Thair pedigrees refleks thair mony byuss  
qualities — sum guid ridders, sum soumars,  
sum gleg, sum strang, an sum guid huntars —  
ilkane haes sum spaicial meith Naitur  
haes gien it.*

Lorimer's rendering of the same lines is:

*Aye, i the register ye pass for men,  
like hunds an grewhunds, ratches, lyin-dugs,  
sleuths, collies, spainyels, messan-tykes, hauf-wowffs,  
at's aa caa'd dug, but in the kennel-beuk  
they'r sorted out intil the swift, the slaw,  
the weirers, hunters, hame-keepers, ilkane  
according til the giftie Naitur's bountith  
in him hes set.*

There is no question that Scots **can** sustain the iambic pentameter: Lorimer's verse does not convey any particular sense of strain, or

impression that the natural rhythms of the language are being distorted: and Purves's use of a much less disciplined verse form than his model is clearly a deliberate decision. His introductory reference to the scansion, quoted a moment ago, is preceded by the statement "... weight has also been given to ease of reading, comprehension and performance." Whether relatively free verse is necessarily easier to read or to recite than verse written to a more rigid pattern is a moot point; however, it is clear that Purves, in abandoning an essential aspect of the original as a literary work, has in this respect set his sights as poet-translator a good deal lower than has Lorimer.

That in itself does not necessarily lessen the worth of his translation: there is of course no rule that a translation must, even if the structures of the two languages permit it, be in the same metre as the original; and that part of the expressive power of Shakespeare's play which inheres in his prosodic effects could in principle, if those are lost, be compensated for in other ways. But in another respect in which the two translations differ, Purves must be condemned as not only producing work inferior to Lorimer's, but in failing in a translator's responsibility to his model: Lorimer translates the whole text, whereas Purves on several occasions paraphrases, summarises or simply omits whole passages. Shakespeare's

... Let us rather  
 Hold fast the mortal sword, and like good men  
 Bestride our down-fall'n birthdom. Each new morn  
 New widows howl, new orphans cry; new sorrows  
 Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds  
 As if it felt with Scotland and yell'd out  
 Like syllable of dolour.

becomes in Lorimer

... *Lat's raither*

*grip the shairp swuird, an stalwartlie defend  
our whummelt kintra. Ilka day at daws,  
new widdas yowls, new orphans rairs, new sorras  
scuds heiven on the chafts an gars it dinnle  
as gin it grievied wi Scotland an skirlt out,  
'Och, ochanie!'*

and in Purves

*... Shuirlye ferr better we  
soud tak up airms lyke aw true men in defense  
o oor mither-land. Ilk day that daws,  
new weidaes maen an murn, new orphans skirl  
or Heivin abuin graens back in seimpathie  
wi Scotland, an greits for its dule.*

Purves's version is readily comprehensible and reads well; and his alliterations on the evocative words *maen an murn, graens ... greits* are an attractive embellishment. But what has become of Shakespeare's startling "strike Heaven on the face"? Lorimer could be criticised for using *chafts*, which means "cheeks": the image thus becomes too clearly and exclusively that of a literal human face, focussing on the implication of violence and pain but losing the familiar sense of the expression "the face of Heaven" for the visible firmament; but he has at least incorporated Shakespeare's poetic fancy instead of simply jettisoning it.

Similarly, the opening of the "dagger" soliloquy reads thus in Lorimer:

*What's this I see afore my een — a bityach,  
heftit towart my haund? Come, lat me cleik ye —  
I grip ye no, but ey can see ye yet!  
Ar ye, weird vision, oniething at may  
as weill be ticht as seen? Or ar ye but*

*a bityach o the mind, a fenyit craitur  
ingenrit o the heat-afflickit harns?*

and in Purves:

*Is this a dirk A see afore me;  
the haunil at ma haund? Cum lat me grup ye!  
A canna feel ye an it seems ye are  
nae mair nor a dirk that's in my mynd,  
a fanton norie in ma fevert brain.*

*Fanton norie* is appropriate and suitably evocative, but apart from that, the diminution of both range and power in Purves's version is patent: the loss of the double rhetorical question, the reduction of the potent "heat-oppressed" to the prosaic and clinical *fevert*, the guarded tone of *it seems*... . Undoubtedly Purves can claim, as Lorimer could not, to be writing within the bounds of familiar vernacular Scots; but this, as already suggested, is a dubious defence when the language of the original is neither familiar nor vernacular but highly-charged poetry. Lorimer is much more successful in raising his Scots to the appropriate level of style, for example by the words *fenyit* and *ingenrit*, which recall the dignified registers of Middle Scots poetry, the compound *heat-afflickit*, which though obviously suggested in the first instance by Shakespeare's phrase exemplifies a type of word-formation paralleled elsewhere in modern literary Scots (Douglas Young in his *The Kirkyaird by the Sea*, a rendering of Valéry's *Le Cimetière Marin*, translates *ébloui* as *licht-bumbazeit*), and by *weird*—not, of course, used in the post-Shakespearean English sense—as an etymologically literal equivalent of "fatal".

Sometimes even passages which should present no difficulty whatever are omitted by Purves, such as the Porter's "lechery" speech: Scots poets have assuredly never been shy of bawdy language, and Lorimer translates the passage competently, elaborating slightly on the



final pun in *it gies him the líe, but leaves him lyin*. (*Leave* in Scots is pronounced [li:].) Both translators, incidentally, allow themselves some indulgences in this scene. Lorimer renders “he should have old turning the key” as *ye’ll no see the corns speylin on his haunds for want o employment!*, adds some traditional insulting epithets for a tailor (*seam-bitin, lous-prickin*) and elaborates “stealing out of a French hose” to *pauchlin claith out o a French whure’s wirkin claes*, and (in accordance with his practice of naturalising the play on other levels than the linguistic) changes “the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire” to *the braid road at leads owre the lillie-leven til the burnin fire*— quoting the Scottish ballad of *True Thomas*. Purves interpolates at the reference to the tailor *Ye’ll hae a ticht erse gin ye hae bocht yeir breiks frae him*, and makes Macduff give the Porter the very un-Shakespearean dismissal

*Ay, A daursay! Ye maun speak for yeirsell!  
But here, A haena tyme ti kill, bletherin wi you  
this mornin!*

Worst of all, the incomparable

... his virtues  
will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
the deep damnation of his taking-off

which Lorimer at least attempts, is reduced by Purves to

... *the’re shuir  
ti be ane unco dirdum at his daith.*

Purves’s seeming reluctance to confront the highest flights of Shakespeare’s poetic imagination certainly lays his translation open to the charge of failing to meet the standards set by the original; and if at

times Lorimer too falls short — as when “heaven’s cherubin, hors’d / upon the sightless couriers of the air” is weakened in *cherubs ridin heiven’s unseen coursers*, and the obtrusive rhyme and rhythm of

*Haud up your face wi clear een:  
in shiftin o them, fear’s seen*

detract from the subdued menace of

Only look up clear,  
To alter favour ever is to fear

at least he can never be charged with refusing to make the attempt.

Another important difference between the two translations is that Purves determinedly anchors his language in the idiom, as well as the vocabulary, of vernacular Scots. At times the results are entirely appropriate: the most notable instance is perhaps Lady Macduff’s scene with her child, where such expressions as *Ye’re a wee blether, sae ye are! Ye fairlie yammer on* fit very well with the playfully affectionate tone; and there is nothing incredible in Macbeth saying to his wife, instead of “Prithee, peace”, *Juist haud you yeir tung!* But the colloquial tone of *What are ye on about?* and *Ye’re lossin yeir grip* make them wholly unfitting for Lady Macbeth to say to her distraught husband after the murder of Duncan; Macbeth’s *This is whaur ye cum in* to the murderers is not only colloquial but discordantly modern, and to make Banquo react to the lady’s swoon with *A dout we’re aw sair fasht thenou* — a line which does not correspond to anything in the original — or Lady Macbeth describe her husband’s reaction to the ghost as a *daftlik cairrie-on*, borders on the ridiculous: **if**, at least, we are to take these as Shakespeare’s characters. Individuals of aristocratic rank and heroic personal stature, engaging in actions which not only determine the destiny of nations but carry awesome cosmic significance, simply do not talk like this at moments of crisis.

The scaling down, so to speak, of Shakespeare's drama which is thus manifest in Purves's version is visible in another quite striking feature of his text: the characters' utterances are often diminished in force by a grammatical change, or by some expression which implies a distance between the speaker and the content of his speech. Shakespeare's imperative "Bring forth men-children only" becomes a mere statement of a desire, *Ye soud beir only laddie bairns*; and similarly the apostrophe "Thou sure and firm-set earth, Hear not my steps..." is reduced to *A wadna want this steive-set yird ti hear / ma quaet feet*. Banquo's "I dreamt last night of the three Weird Sisters", dramatically unportended in Shakespeare, is here prefixed by a quasi-apologetic *Dae ye ken....* Tags such as *A think... A'm shair... A wush... shairlie...*, where no such expressions occur in the original, occur with a frequency too great to be accidental, and have the effect of weakening the force of the characters' pronouncements.

Purves, in fact, appears to be presenting a version of *Macbeth* which is overtly lesser, in several respects, than the original: not only aiming short of the sublime heights of poetic inventiveness, but suggestive of the actions and utterances of characters conceived on a smaller scale than Shakespeare's. This is directly related to the view he apparently takes of Scots as a literary medium. His introduction contains a telling phrase: "Allowing for the constraints of the Scots language...": he writes with the *a priori* assumption that Scots cannot be equal to a translation of Shakespeare that matches the original; and accepting this limitation in his medium, he limits his drama accordingly. The limitation is a very wide one: it is, after all, no great shame in a language to lack resources, or in a writer to lack skills, of a Shakespearean order; and on any showing Purves's Scots is a richly expressive medium of which he has availed himself with skill and enterprise. Often a neatly-chosen Scots word strikes the precise note to evoke the Shakespearean mood: *an fan our fowk wi nitherin northern cauld...*, *nae mair yon Thane o Cawdor wul begek us...*, *hae we ett sum puzzint ruit that's cawed us gyte...*, *it's douce an caller here, an lowns ma senses...*,

on yeir blade an hilt is **slagert** bluid..., what's aw this **dirdum** an **bullerin** at the sleepers in this houss...?, sum auld wife's **haiverin** tale..., his secret murders **claggin** his guiltie haunds.... But this translation, despite its merits, does not in the last analysis achieve all that a work purporting to be a translation of *Macbeth* should do.

Lorimer, for his part, shows a skill no less developed than Purves's in exploiting to the full the semantic and phonaesthetic force of familiar Scots words: a few examples are *Cawdor's yet lívin*, a **cosh** an *thrivin laird...*, *this scowthert muir...*, *an wi the smeddum o my tungraik screinge* aathing that hains ye..., *the vera corbie's rauk at crowps...*, *sae doucelie an cannilie* exerced / his pouers..., *hes it dovert syne?/ waukens it nou tae goave sae peelie-wallie...*, *tae be ruggit out o'd...*, *this ill warld's mischievous blaws an blaffarts*.... Like Purves, too—indeed, more conspicuously—he embellishes his text with such sound-effects as alliteration and vowel-harmony: *Praisent fears / bouksna sae big's birse-raisin fantaisies, fell flauchts o fire, his siller skin browden wi's gowden blude, their býtyachs / ill-breeked wi bluidy gour, tho pailaces an píramids bou doun / their heids as laich's their larachs*. His approach to the task of translation, however, is fundamentally different.

His introduction opens with the bold statement: "I have endeavoured to translate Shakespeare's only Scottish play into a relatively modern Scots capable of sustaining the same levels of style, and of achieving the same dramatic effects, as his English verse and prose." *Relatively* modern, because as he then proceeds to say, "... the lexis which Shakespeare's huge vocabulary has required me to adopt is somewhat archaic, and I have employed a good many words and expressions which are no longer current in contemporary urban or rural spoken Scots." This is proved at once: Act I, scene ii alone includes the forms *tythance*, *vilnie*, *surrigians*, *recrue*, *recryand* and *forfait*, ("tidings", "villainy", "surgeons", "recruit", "recreant" and "forfeit"), none of which is attested later (as being in regular use) than the seventeenth century, the greeting *hailse ye*, and the legal term *umwhile*

("former"). The same propensity is visible throughout, and imparts a distinctly "period" flavour to the language. Similarly, syntactic patterns such as *Whaurtil saunt they awà?, he bad me him-frae style ye..., new claes sairs-him-na weill*, cannot be associated with the modern spoken language. (Lorimer credits his father's *New Testament*, which he edited for publication, with being the principal influence on his Scots grammar; and this is evident throughout his translation).

Polysyllabic words derived from Latin or French, most of them at least passively familiar in English but not normally thought of as Scots, also appear in Lorimer's version with far greater frequency than in Purves's: *interrogate, apportionment, corroborate, allegiance, recollections*. Several occur, however, in forms different from the contemporary English, and either actually attested or *of a kind with* forms that are attested in mediaeval Scots: *contrafait, solistâtion, temptisement, transpone*; and others still have no historical authenticity in themselves but are formed in the manner of authentic words: *discurrior, pertroublement* (this one occurs in one of the Doctor's speeches, in a particularly polysyllabic sentence that is possibly intended to suggest a pedantic speaker) and the already-mentioned *incrimponate*. Here Lorimer, in a manner not uncommon among modern Scots writers but more consistently and systematically than most, is restoring to Scots a faculty which it possessed in its period of greatest literary maturity, namely the later fifteenth and early sixteenth century; that of adopting words, or roots, from learned languages to augment its own formal and learned register. And as this was a faculty established and exuberantly exploited in Shakespeare's English, Lorimer's claiming it for a Scots translation of Shakespeare is inherently most fitting. Lorimer is not simply using a pseudo-archaic language in the manner of, say, Lewis Spence: he is reviving a whole productive feature which the language once possessed.

Using the now well-recognised distinction between source-oriented and target-oriented translations, Lorimer's clearly represents the former and Purves's the latter. Purves has given a modern Scots-

reading (and hearing) audience as much of Shakespeare as he thinks they will understand and tolerate in Scots; Lorimer has endeavoured to convey as much of Shakespeare as can possibly be conveyed at the risk—indeed, in the certainty—of startling and challenging his audience. Excessively source-oriented translations often lay the translators open to the charge of lack of enterprise; but here the contrary is true. Lorimer's text, on the level of verbal correspondence, resembles its original much more closely than does Purves's; and thus directly invites (and will certainly be subjected to by every reader) comparison with Shakespeare's—comparison not only with the play as a supreme individual work of literature, but as a demonstration of the potential of the language which was the author's medium—in a way that Purves's does not. Here is *vowtin ambition* indeed. And Lorimer, in my judgement at least, emerges from the comparison with no discredit. Purves's version of *Macbeth* is in itself a fine sample of Scots literature; but I venture to predict that Lorimer's will be recognised as one of the greatest and most important works produced in Scotland in the last quarter of the century.

### Notes

- 1 This paper was originally presented at the Linguistic Aspects of Translation conference held at the University of Liverpool in September 1995.
- 2 *Shakespeare's Macbeth Translated into Scots*, R.L.C. Lorimer. Edinburgh (Canongate Press) 1992. pp.104. £12.95. ISBN 0 86241 389 3; *The Tragedie o Macbeth*, David Purves. Edinburgh (Rob Roy Press) 1992. pp. xvi + 75. £8.59. ISBN 1 85832 000 3.
- 3 But for an impressive demonstration that Shakespeare's attitude to James as expressed in the play is far from straightforward, see Sally Mapstone, "Shakespeare and Scottish Kingship: a Case History", in *The Rose and the Thistle: Essays on the Culture of Late Mediaeval and Renaissance Scotland*, eds. S. Mapstone and J. Wood, Edinburgh (Tuckwell Press) 1998, 158-193.
- 4 For a detailed examination of this topic, see Kenneth Farrow, "The Historiographical Evolution of the *Macbeth* narrative", *Scottish Literary Journal* 21:1, May 1994, 5-23.

- 5 In May 1999, a Scottish parliament, with extensive though limited powers, will be established: the most important constitutional development in British political history since the founding of the independent Irish Republic. The imminence of this event [in January 1999] is not only raising the pitch of political debate in Scotland but demonstrating with disconcerting clarity, in the reactions of the English media, the deplorable ignorance and lack of understanding of Scottish affairs that prevails in the heartland of government.
- 6 I will not discuss the different orthographic systems used by the two translators. This is an important issue in itself, but not relevant to the study of their works as translations.

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