

## **'NOW YOU SEE 'EM': THE VISIBILITY OF SCOTS TRANSLATORS**

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In the relatively new field of Translation Studies, the translator's visibility has been a key issue. Translation Studies has redirected scholarly attention away from issues such as narrow linguistic equivalence towards issues such as the cultural relationships which govern the choice and influence the impact of translated texts. To take an example from Brazilian Portuguese into Scots (from the 3rd line of the poem by Manuel Bandeira, discussed below), one would worry less about whether 'peedie' or 'wee' were a better linguistic match for 'pequeninas' (the diminutive of 'pequena', *small*), and one would think more about the cultural conditions which drive a literary translation from Portuguese into Scots: the reasons why a translator might wish to attempt such a translation, the preference for certain types of texts to translate, the kind of publications in which we find the translations, and the kind of reception the translated text has in the host culture. Is it available in small magazines or best-selling publications? What kind of response does the language of the text evoke in the reader?

The American translation theorist, Lawrence Venuti (1995, 1998), argues that the history of Anglo-American translation, at least since the 18th Century, has favoured a style which renders the translator invisible. Adjectives conventionally used to praise translations, such as 'smooth' and 'fluent', effectively describe translations into a standard English that diminishes cultural

difference, and assimilates the translated text into the native canon. The 18th Century Scottish writer, Alexander Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, is identified by Venuti (1995: 68) as a pioneer in advocating a domesticating strategy for translation into English:

I would therefore describe a good translation to be, *That, in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work.*

Ironically, the only Scottish translation Tytler mentions in his *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1790) is Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty's rendition of Rabelais, the linguistic excesses of which certainly correspond in spirit to those of the original. Urquhart's 'transfusion' of Rabelais owes little to standard English (or, for that matter, to Scots). According to Venuti, however, Tytler sets the tone for a developing common-sense notion of translation as a vehicle for assimilating foreign literatures into the native canon by shrouding them in the cloak of the standard variety. Effectively, translation becomes a metaphor for, or indeed a cultural weapon in the armoury of, colonisation. In a recent collection of essays on translation, Venuti (1998: 5) describes this state of affairs as a 'scandal' and in his writings generally, he advocates the use of 'foreignising' strategies in order to render the translator visible and to give a sense, at least, that no translation can give the reader an unmediated experience of the translated culture:

Translations [...] inevitably perform a work of domestication. Those that work best, the most powerful in recreating cultural values and the most responsible in accounting for that power, usually engage readers in domestic terms that have been defamiliarized to some extent, made fascinating by a revisionary encounter with a foreign text.

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However, the way that translated texts are 'made fascinating' by foreignising strategies raises interesting issues if you are concerned with translations into Scots. In *The Translator's Visibility* (1995), Venuti discusses strategies that alienate and historicise the translated text: these strategies include the use of non-standard dialect, unexpected registers, anachronisms and neologisms. Although he does not mention Scots as such (except briefly in an approving discussion of Ezra Pound's foreignising use of 'Scottish and northern dialect', 1995: 35), to anyone with a familiarity with the Scottish literary tradition, Venuti might seem to be advocating the use of the Scots literary medium usually called Lallans (i.e. *Lowland* Scots). In general, the advocacy of Scots as a foreignising medium causes problems if you happen to be — like me — a Lowland Scot. What does it do to my psyche to be told that the linguistic medium best suited to communicate cultural difference and foreign cultural values is in fact the one that signifies my Scottishness? Are we to understand that all vernacular translations from Gavin Douglas's *Aeneid* to Edwin Morgan's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Liz Lochhead's imminent *The Three Sisters* are rendered in Scots precisely in order to signify their foreignness? Of course not — but this does not necessarily mean that Venuti is completely wrong. The fascination of issues of visibility, domestication and foreignisation in Scots translations is partly that these issues cast fresh light on familiar questions about the linguistic construction of national identity. This article explores some of these issues with reference to a Lallans translation of a poem by the Brazilian modernist, Manuel Bandeira.

Lallans is a dialect of Scots peculiar to literature, an invention of the 19th and 20th Centuries, though there are earlier precedents, even in the 18th Century. A Lallans writer usually holds the belief that Scottish identity should correlate with a distinctive language. Lallans is therefore constructed as a national language rather than as, say, the language of a particular locality or region. Lallans writers consequently strip their local variety of its most peculiarly

distinctive features, and at the same time supplement it with Scots usages from different eras and places. The extent to which this is done varies from writer to writer and from text to text — some Lallans writers stick fairly closely to the speech patterns of their local community, while others are more experimental, coining neologisms freely and ransacking dictionaries in the search for expressive terms. Lallans is therefore a synthesis of Scottish dialects, past and present, and so it is often derided as an ‘artificial’ medium, not the ‘natural’ mode of expression of the people it purports to represent. Indeed not all Scottish translators choose Lallans: some prefer dialects which are more localised in specific urban or rural speech communities. There are translations into urban Glaswegian, rural Aberdonian and insular Shetlandic by writers who sometimes passionately refuse the ideological trappings of Lallans. Other Scottish translators, like Willa Muir and Alistair Reid, work exclusively in English, which appears ‘natural’ insofar as it is the medium which generations of anglophone education policies, schoolteachers, and the media have constructed as the ‘common sense’ medium of written literature. Lallans can be thought of as an ideal vehicle for defamiliarising translations precisely because it refuses the ‘natural’ — whether the natural is construed as the localised language of a speech community or the hegemonic standard language of English. Nevertheless the foreignising issue remains — how do we resolve the paradox that Lallans translations construct us simultaneously as national and foreign readers of the translated text? It is this paradox that, I feel, is at the heart of Lallans literature in general and also catches the limitations of Venuti’s discussion of the translator’s visibility.

It is significant that while Venuti praises Ezra Pound’s use of anachronism and dialect in his foreignising translations, he also dismisses translation into dialect. He sets up the standard variety of English at the top of a hierarchy of language varieties, with ‘minor’ language varieties (i.e. slang, non-standard English, archaic English, pidgins, etc.) occupying the position below as a ‘remainder’. He then writes (Venuti, 1998: 11):

Good translation is minoritizing: it releases the remainder by cultivating a heterogeneous discourse, opening up the standard dialect and literary canons to what is foreign to themselves, to the substandard and marginal. This does not mean conceiving of a minor language as merely a dialect, which might wind up regionalizing or ghettoizing the foreign text, identifying it too narrowly with a specific cultural constituency — even though certain foreign texts and domestic conjunctures might well call for a narrow social focus (e.g. Québec during the 1960's and 1970's, when canonical European drama was translated into *joual*, the working-class dialect, to create a national Québécois theater: see Brisset, 1990). The point is rather to use a number of minority elements whereby “one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:106).

There seems to be an alarming ethnocentricity about Venuti's approach here: the expressions '*merely* a dialect', 'substandard' and '*too narrowly* with a specific cultural constituency' suggest that he is a translator who, metaphorically speaking, wants to allow a few linguistic minorities into his club in order to shock the older members. But he doesn't want the upstarts running the place. To be fair, he does acknowledge the legitimate aspirations of a specific speech community, namely working-class French Canadians, to enrich their experience by appropriating 'canonical European drama'. But he remains blind to the possibilities, which have been realised in Scotland, of marginal cultures supporting each other through translation: witness Bill Findlay and Martin Bowman's successful translations of Michel Tremblay's *joual* plays into Scots. The standard hegemonic languages (here French and English) can be completely bypassed. A hierarchy of standard versus 'substandard' languages is therefore not the most fruitful way of conceptualising the role played by varieties such as Scots in translation. Rather, the adoption of a variety such as *joual* or Scots — whether a regional form or a literary form like Lallans — is a

powerful way to challenge the hegemony of majority cultures, whether francophone or anglophone. It is no accident that the eponymous hero of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is a provincial Gascon in Paris — Edwin Morgan's Glaswegian translation gains force from the challenge the peripheral language poses to the hegemonic complacencies of the standard. Clearly the super-articulate Cyrano cannot be considered to speak a 'substandard' language.

What, then, of Venuti's main point, that foreignising language is a medium whereby 'one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming'? I suggest that Lallans, rather than, say, Glaswegian or Shetlandic, is the medium best suited for this. On the one hand, its stripping away of highly-localised features should increase its readership, at least within Scotland. On the other, its occasional use of archaisms, stray local forms, neologisms and calques should remind the reader that all language is artificial, and the language that constitutes national and foreign identities is always a cultural construct, open to challenge and continual refashioning. Let us now look in some detail at one recent Lallans translation, and consider the strengths and limitations of 'domestic foreignisation'. John Manson's rendering of Manuel Bandeira's poem is 'owerset' from the Brazilian Portuguese ('owerset' or 'translated' is itself a literary extension of the traditional Scots meaning of 'overturned', by way of a calque on the German *übersetzen*). The translation was published in the Scottish literary magazine Lallans, which has long had an editorial policy of promoting the literary and non-literary uses of written Scots. Translation of prestige literatures has for 500 years been a favoured strategy of Scottish writers. For over 25 years, Lallans has continued this tradition by consistently publishing translations from a range of classical and modern languages — an anthology of writing from Lallans, *Mak it New*, even has an article, 'Frae Ither Leids' by A.D. Mackie, arguing (in Scots) for the importance of translation to the native literary tradition. John Manson's translation is one of a number he has made from mainly South American poets such as the Peruvian César Vallejo. These

are usually published in little magazines with relatively small but faithful readerships.

'Foundness'

owerset frae the Portugese o Manuel Bandeira, bi John Manson

|                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Ma foundness        | <i>fondness</i> |
| For deid burds:     | <i>dead</i>     |
| For peedie speeders | <i>tiny</i>     |

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| Ma foundness                                 |                           |
| For the wemen wha wir aince                  | <i>were once</i>          |
| Sic bonnie lassies and grew up sour as whig; | <i>Such...buttermilk</i>  |
| For the wemen wha wir aince sae braw         | <i>so beautiful</i>       |
| And juist left aff.                          | <i>just ceased caring</i> |
| For the wemen wha loed me                    | <i>loved</i>              |
| And I culdna loe.                            | <i>couldn't love</i>      |

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Ma foundness                               |                          |
| For the lassie I loed wha haes growin auld | <i>who has grown old</i> |
| Wi sic bountee.                            | <i>with such bounty</i>  |

|                                  |                       |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ma foundness                     |                       |
| For the nipples o watter that ir | <i>of water...are</i> |
| Maist table-tombs                | <i>most</i>           |
| Lane beadin.                     | <i>only beading</i>   |

The Scots used here is largely accessible, with only a few expressions causing the jolt of unfamiliarity we expect from Lallans writing or indeed of foreignising translations. The title indeed is one such expression, 'foundness' respelling 'fondness' as it is pronounced in some north-eastern and insular areas of Scotland (namely, Caithness and Shetland). The *Concise Scots Dictionary*

(*CSD*) notes that Scots adds the senses of ‘foolishly keen’ and ‘infatuated’ to the current English denotation of ‘fond’. The respelling accentuates the Scots pronunciation but also introduces the fatalistic notion of ‘found-ness’ to the poem: the speaker is ‘fond’ of what he ‘finds’ as he progresses through life, from dead birds and insects in childhood, fading beauty, unrequited passion and enduring love in adulthood, to the simple decoration of the grave as he approaches death. In the fusion of finding and being fond, the title is a punning neologism. In ‘peedie’ (small; which, according to the *CSD*, is now confined to north-east Scotland and the Orkney and Shetland islands) we have one of the translation’s few local expressions — ‘wee’ would have been a more general Scots term, but its use would have lost the childlike assonance and consonance with ‘speeders’ (cf ‘peerie-weerie’, a tiny creature). The only other term which suggests the kind of synthesis associated with Lallans is the archaic spelling of ‘bountee’ (bounty, goodness, generosity; a late 15th Century form of the word, according to the *CSD*). In Venuti’s terms, then, this should be a good ‘foreignising’ or ‘minoritising’ translation: its combination of the familiar with the obscure forces us to consider the language as a construct which is ‘specific’ (it is a literary variety of Scots), ‘unforeseen’ (its neologisms, localisms and archaisms are unexpected), ‘autonomous’ (it is rule-governed on its own terms), and ‘becoming’ (while Lallans has aspirations to be a national language, it never quite achieves that status). Venuti’s discussion of visibility is valuable in helping us to understand Manson’s translation as a simultaneous appropriation and distancing: the construction of a Scottish *Bandeira* at the same time as pointing out that this *is* only a construction (a strategy sometimes called ‘abusive fidelity’). Even so, there is much about Lallans that does not quite fit into Venuti’s perspective on translation. Again, Venuti, while claiming to favour ‘minoritizing translations’ which expose the ideological transformations which are a necessary part of rendering a text in a different language, consistently writes from the standpoint of the dominant culture. He admits (1998: 4):



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The focus on the marginality of translation is strategic. It assumes that a study of the periphery in any culture can illuminate and ultimately revise the center. Yet in the case of translation, of cross-cultural exchange, the peripheries are multiple, domestic and foreign at once. They take the form of marginal cultures, so defined by their position in national or global frameworks, situated in relation to hegemonic languages, a standard dialect at home and English generally, still the most translated language worldwide. The overriding assumption of this book is perhaps the greatest scandal of translation: asymmetries, inequities, relations of dominance and dependence exist in every act of translating, of putting the translated in the service of the translating culture.

Venuti here seems simultaneously to embrace and attack neocolonialism: the value of the periphery to the centre is that the centre can exploit the periphery for ideas and insights — in short, for cultural capital. Yet his interest is clearly in what the marginal can do to revive the Anglo-American tradition of translation practice and scholarship. While recognising the multiple status of the periphery (both domestic and foreign) and the asymmetries of power, his blind spot is in the uses the periphery can make of not just the centre, but of other peripheries. The interactions between peripheries and centre, and between periphery and periphery, are more subtle and supportive than seems sometimes to be acknowledged here. Certainly, in rendering *Bandeira* into another language, the translating culture inevitably makes use of the translated. In translating him into *Scots*, however, questions of periphery and centre are complicated. By implication, the literature of a third world country is 'owerset' into the language of another marginalised nation. As with Bill Findlay and Martin Bowman's *Scots* translations of Michel Tremblay's *joual* plays, the translation can be seen as an act of co-identification between peripheral nations, in mutual alliance against the centre. In translating *Bandeira* into *Lallans* the very idea of Scotland is further complicated: *Lallans* is,

after all, the artificial language of an imagined community, and one whose self-fashioning as a peripheral, post-colonial nation must, given Scotland's historical involvement in the British Empire, also be considered strategic rather than uncontested. There is also more, of course, to Manuel Bandeira than his role as representative of a peripheral nation. Bandeira is one of the major Brazilian poets of the first half of the 20th Century, a leading exponent of the modernist movement in São Paulo. Brazilian modernism is a complex phenomenon summed up by Candido (1997: 70) as follows:

A sua contribuição fundamental foi a defesa da liberdade de criação e experimentação, começando por bater em brecha a estética acadêmica, encarnada sobretudo na poesia e na prosa oratória, mecanizadas nas formas endurecidas que serviam para petrificar a expressão a serviço das idéias mais convencionais. Para isso, os modernistas valorizaram na poesia os temas quotidianos tratados com prosaísmo e quebraram a hierarquia dos vocábulos, adotando os expressões coloquiais mais singelas, mesmo vulgares, para desqualificar a solenidade ou a elegância afetada. Neste sentido, combateram a mania gramatical e pregaram o uso da língua segundo as características diferenciais do Brasil, incorporando o vocabulário e a sintaxe irregular de um país onde as raças e as culturas se misturam.

[Its fundamental contribution was the defence of the freedom of creation and experimentation, beginning by forcing a breach in the academic aesthetic, embodied above all in poetry and oratorical prose, mechanised in set forms that served to petrify expression to the service of the most conventional ideas. To do this, the modernists valorised in their poetry everyday themes, treated prosaically, and broke the hierarchy of words, adopting the most simple, even vulgar, colloquial expressions, in order to dispel solemnity or affected elegance. In a sense, they fought the mania for grammaticality, and appealed to the use of language according to the different characteristics of

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Brazil, incorporating the vocabulary and irregular syntax of a country where races and cultures are mixed].

It is easy to see how a late 20th Century translator into Scots can draw inspiration from earlier 20th Century Brazilian modernism. The use of Scots in literature must always be experimental, given the lack of an accepted standard variety, the appeal to everyday themes and everyday speech is attractive, and Scots has often been used to dispel solemnity and prick pomposity. What is missing in the translation, of course, is 'caraterísticas diferenciais do Brasil' — Lallans poetry (whether or not in translation) tends not to position the reader, explicitly or implicitly, as a member of an ethnic and cultural melting-pot. Given the diverse ethnic make up of Scotland, past and present, it clearly could do so, but nationalistic literature tends to downplay this factor, instead trying to constitute a homogeneous nation through a language that belongs to everyone precisely because it belongs to no-one. While regional dialect poetry tends to appeal to a traditionally-conceived local speech community, consisting of the urban working-classes or of rural farmers and fisher-folk, Lallans effaces regional differences and presents us with a strangely timeless and rootless, imagined Scotland. Evidently, when the two cultures are peripheral, the translated culture is still put to the service of the translating: the scottification of the Brazilian modernist appropriates his unaffected idiom and everyday themes, but neglects the difficulties that he confronts when constructing his own sense of identity in a post-colonial patchwork of cultures, races and languages.

'Foundness' is a translation of a late Bandeira poem, 'Minha Grande Ternura' published in the collection *Estrela da Tarde* in 1963. The Scottish version alters the meanings of the original in various ways, some subtle, others less so.

‘Minha Grande Ternura’

Minha grande ternura  
 Pelos passarinhos mortos;  
 Pelas pequeninas aranhas.  
 Minha grande ternura  
 Pelas mulheres que foram meninas bonitas  
 E ficaram mulheres feias;  
 Pelas mulheres que foram desejáveis  
 E deixaram de o ser;  
 Pelas mulheres que me amaram  
 E que eu não pude amar.  
 Minha grande ternura  
 Pelas poemas que  
 Não consegui realizar.  
 Minha grande ternura  
 Pelas amadas que  
 Envelheceram sem maldade.  
 Minha grande ternura  
 Pelas gotas de orvalho que  
 São o único enfeite  
 De um túmulo.

The poem, although later than those of the first wave of Brazilian modernism, exhibits some of the qualities associated with that movement. Its themes of vulnerability, love and death are everyday, and the Portuguese is thoroughly colloquial. For example, the second and third lines contain the characteristic diminutives ‘passarinhos’ (little birds) and ‘pequeninas’ (‘teeny-weeny’) which help distinguish Brazilian speech from the Portuguese spoken elsewhere. The collocation ‘peedie speeders’, mentioned earlier, does give a happy parallel to the sound effects of ‘pequeninas aranhas’. However, in other ways the Scots is very different. As noted earlier, Manson’s Scots translation adds the sense of ‘found-ness’ to the non-punning

title of the original: 'minha grande ternura' translates into English as something like 'my great tenderness' or 'affection'. Interestingly, Manson makes singular the 'amadas que/Envelhecera sem maldade' (loves who /Have grown old without malice), significantly changing this to 'the lassie I loed wha haes growin auld/Wi sic bountee'. The Scots version thus introduces a notion of fidelity to one person, lacking in the original. The sequencing of the final four lines also alters the focus of the conclusion: the Portuguese ends with the grave, while the Scots version climaxes with the decoration of the grave, 'gotas de orvalho' (drops of dew) already sexualised as 'nipples o watter'. The translation inevitably interprets, modifies, appropriates, and domesticates. The translation offers a more deterministic vision of life and death, and it embraces a more conventional morality and a greater concern with the trappings of death than the original. Whether this makes it more 'Scottish' is open to question, but what is certain is that in the course of translating a Brazilian poem into Scots the meanings and nuances must be transformed. What Venuti advocates is a translating medium which calls attention to the non-transparency of the intercultural contact, and it should by now be evident that Lallans is an ideal medium for signifying this kind of constructedness.

The Brazilian modernists came up with a more vivid way of expressing the inevitable domestication which accompanies cross-cultural interaction: they called it anthropophagy, or 'cultural cannibalism'. From 1928-29, at the end of the decade of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, the *Revista de Antropofagia* sought to destroy and recreate European civilisation in an unrepressed, anti-authoritarian mode (Candido, 1997: 73-4). The concept of devouring and regorging is a powerful metaphor for translating, and for cultural interaction in general, and anthropophagy was revived as the theme of the 1998 Biennial in São Paulo. At that time, car bumper stickers were much in evidence, bearing the legend, 'Só a antropofagia nos une' ('Only Cannibalism Unites Us'), an allusion to the Manifesto Antropófago's 'Só a

antropofagia nos une. Socialmente. Economicamente. Filosoficamente'. It is fair to observe that the anthropophagic movement also raised a legitimate concern about who was cannibalising whom: Brazilians were being cannibalised by Portuguese, and Europeans were cannibalising native Indian culture. For example, the Movimento Antropófago criticised the romantic idealisation, found in the operas of José de Alencar, of native Indians as imperial senators or British statesman, mouthing Portuguese sentiments. To mix our metaphors, cultural cannibalism might unite us in a carnival of cross-dressing, but it nevertheless implies asymmetries of power.

Translators into standard, hegemonic languages can be thought of as 'secret' cannibals. Where translators into Scots are distinct from their anglophone counterparts is purely on the issue of visibility, openness. Scots as a medium of translation is as inescapably foreignising as it is simultaneously domesticating — domesticating, at least, if you are a Scottish reader. It is enough of a surprise, however liberating, to see one's own local speech forms on the printed page; it is even more of a shock to struggle with the Scots literary variety, Lallans. Yet all varieties of Scots, local and literary, have the potential to signify aspects of Scottishness for Scottish readers. Therefore, translations into Scots are both foreignising and domesticating — this is a necessary outcome of centuries of marginalising of Scots as a written medium. Translators into Scots are therefore always visible, their ideological hearts permanently displayed on their sleeves. Venuti ignores the long history of visible Scots translators — but, as we have seen, his interest in the peripheries is largely confined to what they can do for the centre. There are also many who are quite happy on the margins, translators who are more concerned with exploiting the centre for their own ends, and even — through translation and other means — making links (both faithful and abusive) with other 'peripheral' cultures abroad.

### Note

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