

French Theatre Translated into Scots

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The development of Scots as a literary language is extensive, and the corpus of literary works in Scots includes some writings which can rank among the finest in European literature: Scotland, indeed, has produced far more than a small country's fair share of poets and prose-writers of outstanding quality. An essential fact regarding the Scots tongue, however, and one which has if anything added to rather than detracted from its potential for literary expression, is that it has never had a standard canonical form. In the late-mediaeval and Renaissance period, by some estimates the era in which it reached its highest literary development, it was no more standardised in orthography or grammar than any other European language; and if the possibility ever existed of its developing an independent canonical form as Irish and Italian had done and as English, French and other vernaculars were eventually to do – a question which, though unreal in the sense that it can never be verified, arouses passionate and unending debate in Scotland – it certainly was never realised. But though English, standardised on the basis of the London dialect, came to usurp the position of a canonical written form in Scotland as well as England, Scots (still, of course, the normal medium of *spoken* communication among all classes in non-Gaelic Scotland) continued vigorously in being as a literary vehicle: or more accurately, after a bleak period in the seventeenth century in which it suffered a partial eclipse, it was revived in the early eighteenth by the deliberate and determined efforts of such poets and anthologists as James Watson, William Hamilton and above all Allan Ramsay, and re-instated as a medium first and always primarily for poetry, but soon afterwards also for prose in the special branch of dialogue in novels and stories. Precisely because no form of Scots could claim precedence over any other as a national standard, writers could, and did, make free use of

the various regional dialects and of the developing urban vernacular of Edinburgh, could utilise the archaic expression and vocabulary of Middle Scots poetry both seriously and for pastiche effects, and could exploit with various implications the ambiguous relationship of Scots to English, which by then in Scotland had become fully naturalised in its distinctively Scottish form.

Scots and Scottish theatre

As with the eighteenth-century Vernacular Revival, the twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance¹ found an abundant source of material to employ poetically in the diversities of social and geographical dialects existing within Scots; and as eighteenth-century writers had, at least to a limited extent, drawn on the mediaeval period for vocabulary and for poetic themes and forms, so those of the twentieth century drew on those *and* their Vernacular Revival predecessors: Hugh MacDiarmid, the unchallenged leader of the Scottish Renaissance, concocted the slogan “Not Burns – Dunbar”, and other poets carried the practice of writing in language with a mediaeval colouring much further than MacDiarmid in fact ever did. And the cultural patriotism which had motivated the eighteenth-century poets was even more strongly expressed, and allied to an outspoken political nationalism, in those of the twentieth century.

Scots as a literary language, therefore, in our time not only has an enormously rich and diverse vocabulary and range of styles and registers: it has an inherent political “loading”.² This is unmistakably present in one of the most striking developments in modern Scots literature: the remarkable importance of translations. Literary translation has always been recognised as a means of extending the scope of languages; but it can have, and in Scotland certainly has, another purpose: by naturalising canonical works from other cultures into a new language and a new setting, it can proclaim the fitness of the target language and its culture as a vehicle in which the great thoughts and expressions of foreign writers can be adequately re-stated; and thereby demonstrate the cosmopolitan outlook of the culture which has adopted them. One of the central aims of the Scottish Renaissance movement was to reclaim for

Scotland the status of a major European cultural power, participating with other nations in productive and mutually stimulating literary interaction: an aim admirably furthered by a programme of translation.

Poems ranging widely in space and time have been translated into Scots in recent decades: almost every one of the great post-MacDiarmid Makars included some translations in his output.³ In the field of drama, the importance of translated works is if anything even greater. Whereas in poetry Scotland possessed a national tradition of a quality, abundance and antiquity to match that of any other country in Europe, it failed totally to develop a native drama of any scale or importance until the twentieth century. The many possible reasons for this failure, all the more noticeable in view of the scale and quality of the national achievement in poetry and the novel, are beyond the scope of the present paper: the essential fact, however, is that as the Scottish Renaissance progressed, the absence of a native tradition of drama was seen with increasing urgency as a defect which would have to be rectified in order to establish beyond cavil Scotland's claim to a fully-developed national literature. For this, the translation of benchmark European plays into Scots was self-evidently an ideal means.⁴

Scots and French theatre

As a source for Scots translations of both poetry and drama, the literature of France has always held first place. In recent times, poems by Villon have been translated into literary Scots by Tom Scott and into Shetland dialect by William Tait; Sandy Hutchison has used North-East Doric for translations from poets as unlike as Ronsard and Queneau; Douglas Young made a valiant but (it must be admitted) not very successful attempt at a Scots version of Valéry's *Le Cimetière Marin*, and the modernist experiments of Rimbaud and Apollinaire have been much more convincingly replicated in Scots by Alasdair Mackie and Robert Garioch. In drama, the productive influence of French has been if anything even more noteworthy than in poetry. The popularity of Molière in Scots translations and adaptations has been such as to prompt the

principal scholar of the phenomenon to christen it the “MacMolière industry”. Molière, indeed, in a curious sense holds a small but seminal place in the history of Scottish theatre: Allan Ramsay’s first contribution to the drama in Edinburgh was a prologue which he wrote for Molière’s *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, performed in a translation by Thomas Otway in 1719, in which he vigorously challenged the prevailing attitude of disapproval towards theatrical performances. Besides the great comic dramatist of the Grand Siècle, Beaumarchais’s *Le Barbier de Seville* has been translated into Scots by Hector MacMillan, Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Racine’s *Phèdre* by Edwin Morgan and *Ubu Roi* (as “King Bozo”) by Sydney Goodsir Smith; and a different aspect of the Francophone theatre is represented by the remarkable series of translations from the Montréal *joual* plays of Michel Tremblay by Bill Findlay and Martin Bowman.

In the case of the last-mentioned group, the most appropriate translation medium would seem obvious: to match the urban basilect of the originals, the working-class vernacular of the Glasgow conurbation is a natural counterpart. Not only are its sociolinguistic implications comparable – in Scotland, Glasgow demotic has traditionally been a notoriously low-prestige form, despised as neither good Scots nor good English – but the aptitude for quick-fire arguments, insults, put-downs and point-scoring shown by Tremblay’s characters can be replicated with perfect ease and appropriateness in “Glesga”. The question of what form of Scots to use for translating classic French drama such as Molière, however, is a much more searching one. The first Scottish translator to confront the challenge was Robert Kemp, already an established writer of scripts for stage, radio and television drama, whose *Let Wives Take Tent*, his version of *L’École des Femmes*, was first produced in 1948. Kemp had seen the original in a production by the company of Louis Jouvet as part of the Edinburgh Festival of 1947; and was impressed not only by the sympathetic resonance of Molière’s disciplined, subtle and ironic humour with much in the Scottish tradition but by the similarity in acting styles of the French players and the actors in the Scottish theatre: not only in serious

drama, of which (as already noted) there was at that time virtually none, but in the well-developed tradition of comedy and pantomime.

L'Ecole des femmes

His play is set in Edinburgh in the late seventeenth century: Kemp in fact gives it a more specific location than Molière does the original play, the stage showing “a house in the Canongate” (a street in Edinburgh) and references to other Edinburgh districts occurring in the text. The characters are given Scottish names: Arnolphe becomes Mr Oliphant, Chrysalde Mr Gilchrist, Horace Walter, and so on: the naturalisation of Agnès is accomplished simply by putting her name into the native form as Agnes: in fact a very common name, until recently at least, in Scotland.⁵ Conformable to this geographical translocation, the language used, though not presented as a historically accurate reconstruction, deliberately evokes a period when Scots was still the normal language of all classes of society (soon after this English came to be preferred as a mark of social standing, a situation frequently evoked in plays and novels with eighteenth-century settings). A fully-detailed linguistic analysis would show elements of North-Eastern Doric (Kemp’s native dialect, still one of the richest and best-preserved in Scotland and one which contains conservative features of pronunciation and vocabulary no longer heard elsewhere), the words and idioms (and sometimes exact and specific quoted phrases) of the Ayrshire-Edinburgh axis of the three greatest figures in eighteenth-century poetry, Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns, and the syntactic structures and intonational rhythms of contemporary spoken Scots. According to Kemp’s introduction to the first published edition of the play, “The actor must speak a good standard Scots without too localised an accent. He should remember that, with the exception of Alan and Alison [the servants: Alain and Georgette in the original] all the characters are people of good standing”: that is, the practice commonly found in stage and (now) television comedy in Scotland of adopting accents characteristic of urban basilects is to be carefully avoided. It is probably in order to avoid tempting the actors into this mistake that his orthographic practice makes the Scots appear

less distinctive than it actually is: he follows the well-established practice of frequently using standard English spellings in words which the two dialects share, even if the Scots pronunciation is not unambiguously suggested (his spelling *father* would in fact be pronounced *faither*, *enjoyment* as *enjeyment*, *marriage* as *mairiage*, etc.)

The translation is in prose. In this respect Kemp might at first seem to have taken a wise decision in view of the fact that Molière's rhymed couplets have very rarely been used in Scots, or for that matter English, drama;⁶ and Kemp may well have been warned away from any such attempt by the unconvincing English versions of Molière plays in rhymed couplets which had been performed in his time: versions in which the patent straining of the writer's linguistic ingenuity often proved an irritating distraction. As will be discussed later, Liz Lochhead has more recently ventured on an imaginative and idiosyncratic use of rhyme to translate some Molière plays; but the poetic and dramatic scene in Scotland in the 1990s and 2000s is very different from the 1940s; and if Kemp from a modern perspective might be seen as taking the line of least resistance in translating Molière into prose, this is hardly a matter for censure in view of his radical innovation of translating him into Scots.

As *Let Wives Tak Tent* shows, the translation is, on the level of simple verbal equivalence, notably close. Many French words long ago naturalised in English and Scots are simply translated by their direct equivalents (*docilité* – *humilité* – *respect* giving *docility* – *humility* – *respect*):⁷ an interesting extension of this practice is Kemp's use of French loan-words which either did not survive or were never adopted into English but remain part of Scots, examples from this play being *puissance* (more often written *pissance* in Scots) and *devoir* (pronounced “devore”). An appropriately pompous impression is conveyed by the formal *it behoves you* and such features of literary (rather than spoken) language as *the whilk* and the subjunctive *were this glorious knot untied*, and the circumlocution *bed and bodily favours*: the rhythm and alliteration contribute here to the stately tone; and the careful cadencing of *Daes the sodger, trained in his duty, obey his commander-in-chief, the man his maister, the bairn his father, the beadle his minister?* likewise suggest a stately rhetorical delivery. (The reference

to a *beadle*, a minor official in the Church of Scotland whose principal duties were bell-ringing and grave-digging, is an apt cultural naturalisation of *le moindre petit frère*.) In the context of this highly formal language, the colloquial phrase *puir kintra quine* is recognisable as a deliberate adoption of a colloquial register as a means of emphasising the addressee's inferior position: the last word is characteristic of North-East dialects, and put into the mouth of an Edinburgh bourgeois conveys a disdainful attitude to her rural origin. A delicate touch of characterisation is the rendering of *engagements* by the more overtly disapproving *entanglements* and *partis fort capables de plaire* by *dainty creatures*: this would be uttered with a sneer of Presbyterian disdain which the more neutral French expression does not suggest.

Le Malade imaginaire

Let Wives Take Tent has the status of a landmark work not only in Scots drama translation but in the twentieth-century history of the Scottish theatre: as well as standing at the fountainhead of the series of Molière translations, it confirmed the status of Edinburgh's recently-established Gateway Theatre as the main centre for native drama in Scotland, and has been revived more frequently than any other translated play in the Scottish repertory. Kemp followed it in 1955 with a translation of *L'Avare* as *The Laird o' Grippy*, in 1963 *Le Malade imaginaire* appeared as *The Hypochondriack* by Victor Carin, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* became *A Wee Touch o' Class* by Rikki Fulton and Denise Coffey in 1983, Liz Lochhead's version of *Tartuffe*, the first of her (so far) three Molière translations, was produced in 1987,⁸ and a new translation of *Le Malade imaginaire*, again called *The Hypochondriack*, was made by Hector MacMillan also in 1987. MacMillan's translation differs in one immediately obvious respect from Kemp's: the names of the original characters are retained, and there are few specifically Scottish references in the text (one conspicuous exception is the transformation of Toinette's *notre jeune amant* to "Young Lochinvar!"). On the other hand, the linguistic and social attributes of the Scots language are exploited by MacMillan fully as deliberately and effectively as by Kemp: as MacMillan wrote in the programme notes for the first production, "Having read of

the ‘great vigour’ of Molière’s language, and having failed to find very much of it in English and American translations, I had been delighted to discover it in the originals and to find that translation into Scots rather than English was not only more satisfying but a great deal easier.” His language is, if anything, a lexically denser Scots than Kemp’s; and in notable contrast to his predecessor, he uses phonetic spellings such as *Ab* [I], *ma* [my], *oan* [on], *yirsel* [yourself] and the like to emphasise the pronunciation. He also draws much more extensively on the colloquial register: in particular, the wonderful character of Toinette, the servant who will not keep in her place and in fact is the dominant personality of the household, gives unlimited scope in her many arguments with her master for reprimands and retorts in a register which Scots possesses in abundance: *Hell mend ye, ye idle limmer – Ye impident besom – an impident jaud o a skivvy – Dinnae be thrawn – Fowk’ll say ye’ve gane gyte – Ye’re nocht but spawn o some tinkler’s gett* – and so on.

MacMillan’s lively and lifelike vernacular Scots is readily recognisable in the extract quoted above. The unadorned *Je le dirai à Monsieur Purgon* becomes the more vividly physical *Ab’ll hae a ward aboot this in Maister Purgon’s lug* [ear]. *Somebody tak this stuff oot ma road* is considerably more brusque than *qu’on m’ôte tout ceci*, and Argan’s apostrophising the bell as *Useless damned article!*, which has no exact equivalent in the original, aptly conveys the speaker’s growing irritation. The replacement of *Ab, mon Dieu! Ils me laisseront ici mourir* with the decidedly vulgar *Great Goad, they’ve left me here tae snuff it!* is a marked change in register, but far more effective if spoken by a Scottish actor than a literal translation would be; and the exasperation conveyed by the final *Ting-a-bluidy-LING!* is a miniature masterpiece of dramatic inventiveness. By contrast, in rendering the stilted and affected diction of Thomas, MacMillan resorts to almost word-for-word translation, suggesting an affectedly learned register of Scots by a maximal use of French loan-words to translate their originals and by features of legal language like *hereinefter*. The range of styles by which Scots has traditionally been distinguished is brought into good service here.

The translations of Kemp and MacMillan demonstrate most effectively that a language which lacks a standard canonical form can nonetheless serve to translate – and not only in the simple sense of conveying the actual meaning of the words, but in the deeper and more comprehensive sense of providing a literary work of comparable artistic merit and cultural value to the original – works written in a great world language at the highest level of its literary development. The principle followed by those translators, of making free and imaginative use of the expressive resources of their own medium rather than accepting the constraints of a maximal literal fidelity to the words of the original, is applied in a much more radical manner, however, by Liz Lochhead in her three (so far) Molière translations. Whereas both Kemp and MacMillan ground their linguistic practice in the well-established tradition of literary Scots, Lochhead draws for her language on the contemporary speech of the central conurbations, with its wide range (to some extent predictable from the age of the speaker) in density of Scots features and its free use not only of the inventive vocabulary of low-class patter but of the barren and monotonous recurrence of two or three all-purpose obscenities.

Le Misanthrope

In each of Lochhead's Molière translations – *Tartuffe*, 1986; *Miseryguts* [*Le Misanthrope*], 2002; *Educating Agnes*⁹ [*L'École des Femmes*], 2008 – the language varies from one character to another and within the speeches of individual characters; and besides this the sociolinguistic world of each play is distinctive and different from the others. In the author's words, "More than twenty years ago as I worked on *Tartuffe*, it came out (and no one was more surprised than I was) in the robustly Lowland Scots tongue of my Lanarkshire granny. [...] By contrast, when I did *Le Misanthrope*, as *Miseryguts*, for the same theatre [Edinburgh Royal Lyceum] in 2002, that play seemed to demand to be set in a specific, here-and-now Edinburgh media-world, and its language was even more rife with Americanisms, clichés, buzzwords and casual profanity than with Scotticisms – of which, nevertheless, there are many." *Educating Agnes* is in a still less markedly Scots register for the most part, the

kind and proportion of marked Scots features in the various characters' dialogue varying from virtually non-existent to that associated with modern urban low-prestige speech. All three plays, however, use rhymed verse, though the rhymes are often fanciful and deliberately strained, and there is no attempt at regular metre.

The opening lines of *Tartuffe*:

Pernelle: C'moan, Flipote, afore Ah get masel' inty a state.

Elmire: I can't keep up, you're going at such a rate!

at once illustrate the use made of different registers: the older woman uses demotic pronunciations and the colloquialism *get intae a state*; the younger uses an informal register of English. Pernelle's dialogue is marked throughout by a lack of the restraint and decorum which would – at least ideally – be expected of an elderly woman of respectable breeding: her lines in the first scene convey most effectively her unsuccessful attempts to impose her will and authority on the other characters by crude bluster (“Can you no learn to shut your cheeky face?” to Dorine, “You're staunin' in a dwam like a big daft dug! Get a move oan or Ah'll gie ye a skelp on the lug!” to Flipote, “Her pair, deid mither would turn in her grave, to see you spend, spend, spend what she scrimped to save” to Elmire, “Lukkin'oot that big blue een and never blinkin' – Ah bet your daddy's never shair whit you're thinkin'!” to Marianne). Orgon employs a similar register, saying to his more sensible brother “You ken nothin' aboot nothin' so will you shut that mooth o' yours, brither, afore I get upset?”: the similarity between him and his mother, Tartuffe's two dupes, is suggested by their shared linguistic habits. The more clear-sighted Cléante, by contrast, though capable of underlining a point by colloquial language uses fewer vulgarisms and demotic pronunciations:

– If we're as silly 's
To believe in False Heroes and Holy Willies –
To fall for kidology and lose the place –
Not look for the true phizzog behind the falseface.
‘The guinea-stamp is not the gold!’

The two Burns references in this short speech are significant: the resemblance between Tartuffe and Burns's "Holy Willie" is obvious.

In this play, Liz Lochhead, while retaining the French names, achieves a cultural translocation by the markedly Scottish expressions and idioms; though her language is far from the traditional Scots of the earlier translators. In *Miseryguts* the Scotticisation is made more emphatic by re-naming the characters (Alceste is Alex Frew, Philinte is Phil Innes, Célimène is Celia Mann, and so on), but the language is less overtly Scots: it is, however, more pervaded with obscenities, suggesting the profoundly unpleasant social atmosphere of smart sophistication combined with moral and ethical bankruptcy. This is conveyed by other means too: the opening stage direction associates the scene with "a noisy and rather drunken opening" in an art gallery; Act II opens with Alex and Celia in bed together and Celia plays out the entire scene in a "flimsy shift"; the poem which Oscar (Oronte) reads to Alex and Phil is a piece of sexually explicit doggerel of devastating crudity. (Alex contrasts it with, as a counterpart to Molière's *Si le roi m'avait donné...*, Burns' "Mary Morrison".) The play is set specifically in Edinburgh and the focus of the satire is shifted to the pretentiousness of much of the contemporary artistic scene and the unedifying quest for public acclaim irrespective of merit. However, a radical departure from Molière's characterisation is that the integrity and plain-speaking of Lochhead's Alex is founded not on honesty, or no longer on this alone, but on a wilful opinionatedness and refusal to countenance even reasonable views opposed to his own: in a speech greatly expanded from its equivalent in the original play (and only partly quoted here) he runs through a series of put-downs he has administered to incompetent (in his estimation) artists but inadvertently reveals his own limitations at the same time:

Kelvin Cardiff glowered at me – the guy was on drugs
I said: apart from your first book, folk that read you are mugs!
I told yon young black polo-necker Willy Waddle
his *theatre of boring ideas* was absolute twaddle!
He was drinking Chardonnay with yon Arts Council chappy
who smiled at me. I said: you look happy!

Christ knows why, but, since
 The state of the Arts in this country is absolute mince.
 Oh – the bitch was absolutely beeling, but fuck it, I’ll live –
 I told Roz Riverbed her plays are rubbish, derivative!
 I goes can you no dae nuthin original? ‘The nation’s
 up to here with your numpty doggerel ‘translations’?
 She was there with a tribe of haun-knitted lost-the-plots
 who wanted me to sign their petition lobbying for Scots
 – Scots *the language* – to be taught in schools.
 New devolved Scotland? It’s a ship of fools!
 I said I’m signing nothing, she says *But Alec!*
 I says next you’ll be asking me to support the Gaelic?
 Gaelic! No cunt speaks it! It’s moribund!
 So ‘Oh let’s shall we set up a special fund!’
 See, I’m the only person that’s no too polite
 to tell new devolved Scotland it’s a bag of shite.

And the deliberate contrast between Alex Frew and his French original is ironically underlined by Phil’s answer in the following speech: instead of

Ce chagrin philosophe est un peu trop sauvage.
 Je ris des noirs accès où je vous envisage,
 Et crois voir en nous deux, sous mêmes soins nourris,
 Ces deux frères que peint *L’École des maris*...

we now have

You’re melodramatically morose! It is intolerable!
 Haw! That thing at the Lyceum!¹⁰ You’re as miserable
 as yon Alceste character, that gloomy wee dope
 in yon Molière play, Alex! The Misanthrope!

The title of the play is itself significant: whereas *misanthrope* is a descriptive rather than a judgemental term, the Scots colloquialism “miseryguts” is decidedly insulting; appropriately for a character whose moral stature is sadly diminished in comparison with his model.

Lochhead’s *Educating Agnes* is much closer in tone to the French original; and though the pointedly contemporary language suggests a substantial cultural shift, the moral atmosphere is not darkened as it is in *Miseryguts*, or not to anything like the same

extent. As the last passage quoted above shows, too, the language of at least some of the speeches has virtually no Scots markings: the opening line serves as a reminder of the Scottish setting (and though “tak tent” is a well-known phrase, its use here may be intended as a reminiscence of Kemp’s version of the same play, underlining the contrasting methods of the two translators), but apart from this the character’s idiosyncratic swinging from pompous bombast (“Matrimony and the comfort of the marriage bed”) to dismissive colloquialism (“don’t get all dolled up”) is performed in English (though of course, in stage presentations, in a Scottish accent). In other speeches, notably to his servants, Arnolphe becomes more Scottish, sometimes combining this with crude insults and swear-words: the impression of an essentially vulgar man trying, in the last analysis pathetically, to mask his nature with a façade of assumed elegance is neatly conveyed by his language.

Cyrano, Phèdre

The Scottish scene evoked in Liz Lochhead’s translations is unmistakably contemporary, in contrast to the suggestion of a period setting conveyed by Kemp and MacMillan. This is also notably true of Edwin Morgan, recognised as one of the greatest Scottish poets and translators of the twentieth century, in his two translations from French drama: Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Racine’s *Phèdre*. The contrast between these two plays, clearly, could hardly be greater: a fast-paced, high-spirited and action-packed tragic-comedy and an intense and relentless emotional tragedy; correspondingly, the language of Rostand’s play shows, at least in parts, a racy vernacular quality which is wholly absent from Racine’s style. Morgan in his introduction writes: “I decided that an urban Glaswegian Scots would offer the best basis [for a translation], since it is widely spoken, can accommodate contemporary reference, is by no means incapable of the lyrical and the poetic, and comes unburdened by the baggage of the older Scots which used to be thought suitable for historical plays”: the last point being a reference to the fact that in the urban basilects the traditional vocabulary of the rural dialects has largely disappeared, its place being taken by

colourful, earthy, often vulgar and sometimes highly inventive lexical concoctions¹¹.

Morgan like Liz Lochhead uses rhymed verse; and given that this, as already mentioned, is rare on the Scottish or English stage and therefore necessarily calls attention to itself, turns the fact to his own advantage with characteristic audacity, by using rhymes which are often deliberately strained and contrived, even outlandish, for humorous effect. (Though rare in drama there is of course no dearth of models for rhymed verse in Scots poetry; and the device of trick rhymes has been well-developed: all three of the greatest figures of the Vernacular revival, Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns, make use of it; and among the poets of the Scottish Renaissance, most notably Alexander Scott, it became something of a stock-in-trade.) Morgan's rhymes in this play are often deliberately imperfect (*teacup* – *hiccup*, *introduce ye* – *dishy* [handsome], *loat'll* – *boattle*, *aristo* – *swizz to*, *doublet* – *unstubble it*, *frog-eyes* – *choc-ice*, *cundy* [drain] – *Burgundy*; or make use of unusual or unexpected words (*Bushido* – *finito*, *folks* – *bubblyjocks* [turkeys], *desecration* – *crockanition* [ruin], *riddance* – *middens* [dungheaps], *inklin'* – *Englan'*); and a frequent device is to make French names rhyme, of necessity imperfectly, with words from the dialect of the play: *Rouen* – *wrong*, *D'Assoucy* – *boozy* [drunken], *D'Artagnan* – *gong*, *Montfleury* – *hurry* (and later) *hara-kiri*, *Valvert* – *that's rerr!* [local pronunciation of *rare*, meaning fine, splendid]).

The quoted extracts show this device in abundance, and also other features characteristic of Morgan's exuberant technique: vulgarisms (*snaffle the dosh* [run off with the money]), eye-dialect spellings (*kulchur* [culture]), interpolation of specific references absent from the original (*a Munich tankard*, *Saint Francis*) and in many cases wholly foreign to it (*Muckle Flugga* [a rock with a lighthouse off the north tip of Yell in the Shetland Islands, the most northerly piece of land in the British Isles], *Captain Hornblower*, *Boady Shoap* [Body Shop, a franchise dealing in soaps and cosmetics], *Guccis*). Morgan's exploitation of the racy and colourful quality of the dialect not only adds a sparkle to the translation which a rendering in standard literary English could not hope to match: it vindicates what

has traditionally been a low-prestige form among Scots dialects by demonstrating the imaginative and inventive linguistic tricks to which it lends itself.

If the use of an urban basilect to translate *Cyrano* is a radical experiment, however, it is as nothing to the use of the same dialect to translate *Phèdre*. Racine is notoriously difficult to translate: in striking contrast to Molière, he has no Scots translations at all except this one; and by the mere fact of attempting a Scots version of *Phèdre* Morgan is breaking new ground.¹² And though the earthy, boisterous tones of Glasgow demotic have intuitively a certain appropriateness for *Cyrano*, intuitively no register could be *less* appropriate for the stately, formal, disciplined verse of Racine: the form of literary Scots used by Kemp for *Let Wives Take Tent* would suggest itself as the most obvious medium. Besides the lexically and phonologically distinctive qualities of the dialect itself, it is intimately and inescapably associated with a social world as remote from that evoked by Racine as could be imagined: Phaedra now finds herself in the convivial, rowdy, vulgar, materially impoverished though physically and verbally energetic culture of the Clyde conurbation. This setting has a literary identity of its own: it is the world evoked in the novels and short stories of Alan Spence or James Kelman, and on a more popular level in many novels and television dramas depicting, more or less imaginatively, the criminal underworld of the region. It is, certainly, a world in which emotions can reach fever heat: furious quarrels and exchanges of insults, often drawing on the propensity for lexical inventiveness already mentioned, abound in dramatic presentations of urban working-class life; but it is not a world of high tragedy: the prevailing moods in literary evocations of Glasgow life and Glasgow language are boisterous energy, reductive humour, virulent personal antipathies, squalid meanness and grim despair; and tragedies, when they occur, result much more often from violent crime or sheer accident than from passionate love and heartbreak. It is the polar opposite of an aristocratic society: ridicule of social pretensions is almost a cultural hallmark, and a stock situation in stories or plays is the antagonism between the plebeian, demotic-speaking characters and “establishment” figures, such as

teachers, employers or social workers, who speak English. Something of this attitude is conveyed in Theseus's *Whit's the Amazon for snob?* (52), which has no equivalent in the original. Whatever the social assumptions underlying his classical sources, for Racine such figures as his Phèdre, Thésée, Hippolyte and Aricie were monarchs and nobles as he knew them at the court of Louis XIV; but now they converse in the language of tenements and pubs. The adjective *radge*, regularly used of Phaedra by herself and other characters, in its strongest sense¹³ conveys the precise combination of overwhelming passion and sexual lust; but the use of such a word in the original play is utterly unthinkable. And, intriguingly in the present context, it is a strongly masculine and macho world: not one in which a love-maddened queen would be expected to appear.

To this complete transformation of the language and implied setting of the play, Morgan adds, an astonishing fidelity, on one level, to the actual words of the original. His dialogue abounds in words and idioms which could have emanated from no place but the Glasgow conurbation, and which have a resonance which brings that social world before a hearer with insistent vividness; yet almost every phrase in the Scots text is specifically suggested by something in the French: *let that flee stick tae the waw* represents *épargne-moi le reste*, *yir birse is up noo* is for *votre colère éclate*; *Ah kid pit his gas at a peep* for *j'ai sur lui de véritables droits*; *loss the heid* is suggested by *mes sens égarés*; *loss the place* ("he hud loast the place") by *je l'ai vu se confondre*; *that's gote ye* by *ce reproche vous touche*; *that's no oan* by *l'artifice est grossier*; *cosyin up tae me* by *soupirer pour moi*; *pit ye in the pictur* by *vous devoir avertir*; *Ah dinny kid masel* by *sans vouloir me flatter*; *Ah'm aheid a masel* by *je me suis engagé trop avant*; *in wan tick* by *un moment*; *Ah'm wae ye aw the wey* by *je t'avouerai de tout*. And close examination of the language reveals details that raise it above the level of a straightforwardly realistic representation of urban basilect: words from a more literary register appear unobtrusively, and the verse is often beautifully cadenced with alliteration and expressive classical words contributing to the effect. Yet it must be acknowledged that Racine himself is virtually unrecognisable in this play: here is poetic and cultural translocation *in extremis*.

The French theatre, as these and many other examples show, has been a splendidly effective stimulus to the development of Scots drama in recent decades. Clearly the Auld Alliance is still very much alive in the literary sphere; and since the Scottish literary and theatrical scene shows no sign of losing its accustomed energy, we may hope for more of its beneficial effects.

1 It was a French scholar and critic, Denis Saurat, who first coined the expression Renaissance écossaise: see “*New Scots Renascence*”: *literarhistorische und linguistische Einführung in das Wesen der Dichtung MacDiarmids und seiner Schule, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophischen Fakultät der Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-Universität Frankfurt / vorgelegt von Rolf Blaeser aus Dillengen/Saar*, Frankfurt am Main: Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, 1958, p.5.

2 This, of course, is why the Labour-controlled government of Scotland during the first two sessions of the semi-autonomous Scottish Parliament obstinately refused to take any action in support of Scots, though it made several important contributions to Gaelic; and why the SNP government currently in power has instituted a major research project on the state of Scots in education and the media and based a decisive policy statement on its findings.

3 For an excellent selection see *European Poetry in Scotland*, eds. Peter France and Duncan Glen, Edinburgh University Press 1989; for discussion see the present writer’s “European Poetry in Scots” in T. Hubbard and R.D.S. Jack (eds.), *Scotland in Europe*, Amsterdam and New York (Rodopi) 2006, 89-104; for a full examination see J. Corbett, *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, Clevedon (Multilingual Matters) 1999.

4 *Serving Two Masters: Five Classic Plays in Scots Translation*, eds. John Corbett and Bill Findlay, Glasgow (Association for Scottish Literary Studies) 2005, with its excellent critical apparatus and extensive bibliography, is the natural starting-point for any study of Scots drama translation. The translations by Robert Kemp and Hector MacMillan discussed in the present paper are in this collection.

5 Discussion of the names is included in Peacock’s excellent article “Robert Kemp’s translations of Molière”, in *Frae Ither Tongues: Essays on Modern Translations into Scots*, ed. Bill Findlay, *Multilingual Matters* 2004, 87-105.

6 Though a major exception is Allan Ramsay’s *The Gentle Shepherd*, a work of fundamental importance to the entire European Romantic movement.

7 It is important to avoid the common fallacy of perceiving those and their like as *English* words in the exclusive sense. Having been borrowed into the

English language well before Scots and English had diverged into distinct national forms, they belong to Scots as fully as they do to English.

8 For discussion see Randall Stevenson, “Triumphant Tartuffification: Liz Lochhead’s translation of Molière’s *Tartuffe*”, in *Frae Ither Tongues*, op.cit., 106-122.

9 The title is probably suggested by that of *Educating Rita*, a popular play and film about the relationship between a working-class English girl and her ageing alcoholic Open University tutor; and that in turn by *Educating Archie*, a radio and latterly television children’s programme of the ‘50s and early ‘60s featuring a ventriloquist’s dummy called “Archie Andrews”.

10 Where this play was first produced, be it remembered.

11 For the best scholarly study see C. Macafee, *Varieties of English Around the World: Glasgow*, Amsterdam (Benjamins) 1983; for the most entertaining popular account, see Michael Munro, *The Complete Patter*, Glasgow 1996.

12 For discussion see the present writer’s “Edwin Morgan’s *Phaedra*: Apotheosis of Glesga?”, in *Studies in Scottish Literature XXXV-XXXVI*, 2008, 76-91.

13 That is, as opposed to its frequent use as a casual insult.