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Author: Peter Mackay

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An Guth and the Leabhar Mòr: Dialogues between Scottish Gaelic and Irish Poetry

Peter Mackay

In an article in *Translation and Literature* in 2000, Ian Galbraith suggested, in the context of a discussion towards an anthology of Scottish poetry in German, that parallel English translations are now so important to Gaelic poems that to exclude them from his anthology would be to remove 'an essential component of the life of the Gaelic text in the context of its real cultural constituency'.[1] The following discussion will use Galbraith's tendentious phrase, the 'real cultural constituency' of the Gaelic text, as a springboard from which to discuss the translation of Gaelic poetry, parallels with the situation in Ireland, and collaborations featuring Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry over the last ten years. In response to the political overtones of Galbraith's carefully chosen 'constituency', I offer the notion that these 'devolved' dialogues between Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry offer a way out of the impasse in which the translation debates and the pervasive and debilitating binary opposition between Gaelic and English appears to have placed Gaelic poetry.

Galbraith's paper intervened in the debates over the soul of Gaelic poetry and the place of bilingual translation that had been underway from the mid-nineties. Since the Donald MacAulay edited 1976 *Nua-Bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig*, parallel translation into English has been the norm for collections of Scottish Gaelic poetry, although there has also been an outlet in Gaelic-only journals, *Gairm* and, following its demise in 2002, *Gath*. This prevalence of bilingual translations proved the subject of a virulent debate over the cultural and political significance of this mode of translation and the subsequent status of the Gaelic and English texts; a debate between what could be caricatured the 'hello sailor' and 'every time we say hello I die a little' attitudes to translation. It is not my intention to go over that argument again and, indeed, the main points have been summarised in Ronald Black's *An Tuil* and articles by Corinna Krause.[2] Suffice here to say that, on one side, those in favour of

[1] Iain Galbraith, 'To Hear Ourselves as Others Hear Us: Towards an Anthology of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry in German', *Translation and Literature*, 9 (2000), 161.

[2] Corinna Krause, 'Translating Gaelic Scotland: The Culture of Translation in the

parallel translation generally returned to audience and reception – increasing the audience for Gaelic poetry and attracting more people to the language. Those against parallel translation (and especially, as in Christopher Whyte's case, against parallel self-translation) generally felt that the Gaelic texts were undermined irrevocably to the extent, in Wilson McLeod's phrase, that 'with English being universal, Gaelic is no longer needed for communication, indeed no longer *needed* at all'.[3]

These debates merit comparison with the situation of Irish-language poetry. In Ireland it is different; the questions rising out of translation into English arose not out of the historical prevalence of such translation, but with a shift in the cultural landscape in which translation was becoming more common. Until the 1980s Irish-language poetry was published almost entirely in mono-lingual collections. Since then there has been a drift towards bilingual editions; however, these are still the exception rather than the rule. Self-translation is also not as dominant, as Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill's *Pharaoh's Daughter* (1990) – with multiple translators – or Frank Sewell's translation of some of Cathal Ò Searcaigh's 1996 *Na Buachaillí Bána* as *Out in the Open* (2000) testify. Yet, perhaps the most succinct statement of the problems with translation into English actually came from the Irish critic Michael Cronin, in *Translating Ireland*, as part of the debates in Irish literature about this growing trend towards parallel translation:

> The translators and editors of translation anthologies defended their work on the grounds that the translations would bring the work of Irish-language poets to a wider audience. . . The acceptance of translation by many prominent poets in the Irish language could be seen as an endorsement of a policy of openness, delivering poets in a minority language from the invisibility of small readerships. However, the target-language, English, was not innocent. In a situation of diglossia where the minority language is competing for the attention of the same

Contxt of Scottish Gaelic Literature' http://www.aber.ac.uk/mercator/images/CorinnaKrause.pdf [accessed 2 August 2007]; Corina Krause, 'Finding the Poem: Modern Gaelic Verse and the Contact Zone', *Forum: The University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and Arts*, 1 (2005), http://forum.llc.ed.ac.uk/issue1/Krause_Gaelic.pdf [accessed 2 August 2007]; Cornna Krause, 'Gaelic Scotland – A Postcolonial Site? In Search of a Meaningful Theoretical Framework to Assess the Dynamics of Contemporary Scottish Gaelic Verse', *eSharp*, 6:1, http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41178_en.pdf [accessed 2 August 2007].

[3] Wilson McLeod, 'The Packaging of Gaelic Poetry', *Chapman*, 89 – 90 (1998), 151.

> group of speakers, Irish people, then translation cannot be divorced from issues of power and cultural recuperation.[4]

Translation is – in Maria Tymoczko's words – 'a matter of power', and translating into English risks ceding power to the very language which is pressing on and surrounding the linguistic group of Irish or Scottish Gaelic speakers.[5] Thus the stance of a poet such as Biddy Jenkinson, who refuses to allow her Irish-language poetry to be published into English, is resolutely political and is an attempt to maintain whatever power the Irish language has in the face of English. (Seemingly aware of this, both sides in the debate about Scottish Gaelic explicitly held that their stances were political, and contributed towards the development and renewal of the language.)

The imbalance in power between English and Gaelic, or English and Irish allows translation practices which favour, in T. S. Eliot and George Steiner's words, 'translucencies', versions which reveal the source language as an exotic other. For Steiner such translations are not possible for languages that are in close contact, that do not have 'the innocence of great distance', but are 'complicated by a legacy of mutual contact' and whose 'determining condition is simultaneously one of elective affinity and resistant difference'.[6] However, too often what is missing in translations into English is this 'legacy of mutual contact'. Instead, what one is left with is precisely the 'conventionally negotiated immediacy of exoticism', in which Gaelic literature (even more so than Irish) as a whole functions as one thing only (whether it be anti-British resistance language *par excellence*, or dying grandmother in the attic, to borrow Whyte's memorable, emotive phrase), rather than acknowledging the multi-faceted and often contradictory nature of contemporary Gaelic poetry, the complex historical relationship between the Gaelic and English languages (a relationship which has been little studied or theorised, one must admit), and the distance between the Scottish Gaelic cultural milieu and that of Scotland as a whole (or between Irish-language literature and the Irish cultural milieu – distances that are by no means equal).

Here I would like to take discussion of the reception of, and audience for, parallel translations a little further. This ground has partly been opened

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[4] Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Culture* (Cork, 1996), 92.

[5] Bernard O' Donoghue, 'Review of *Translation in a Postcolonial Context* by Maria Tymoczko and *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation* by John Corbett', *Translation and Literature*, 11 (2002), 143.

[6] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford, 1998), 380–1.

by Corinna Krause, with her discussions of Scottish Gaelic literature in an interlingual 'contact zone'. Krause quotes Mary Louise Pratt to the effect that a contact zone is 'a place where cultures, previously separated, come together and establish ongoing relations'.[7] Krause has related this to the tendency towards parallel Gaelic-English translations, suggesting that the 'contact zone' between Gaelic and English, with its

> combination of self-translation and bilingual en-face edition . . . provides a highly rigid format for Gaelic as literature and language, leaving little space for flexibility for the original with the interpretative engagement on the reader's part occurring through English rather than Gaelic.[8]

These two factors – the prevalence of self-translation and the dominance of parallel *en face* editions – bind and constrict Gaelic poetry. This 'contact zone' is, in effect, productive of what Galbraith viewed as the 'real cultural constituency' for Gaelic literature. For Galbraith, 'Gaelic poetry from [Sorley MacLean's] 'Hallaig' to [Aonghas Macneacail's] 'cùnntas' . . . has existed in a permanent sense of tension with the English language'.[9] To envision these poems outside the 'permanent state of tension with the English language' – what Krause laments as the 'highly rigid format for Gaelic as literature and language' – would be, for Galbraith, 'to remove them to a convenient utopia – a non-place or un-reality – whose isolation from the current polyvocal site of their primary engagement would seem to add to rather than resolve their history of displacement'.[10] As Krause has commented, Galbraith's argument is inherently flawed.[11] 'Hallaig', for example, appeared in Gaelic years before it appeared in English translation; similarly, a great deal of Gaelic poetry appeared first in the Gaelic-language journals *Gairm* and *Gath*, with their English *doppelgängers* only appearing at a later stage. This is not to say, however, that the tension with the English language is not present and pervasive. It can hardly be avoided since almost every Gaelic speaker is, in this day and age, also an English speaker, and indeed usually more confident and able in English. There is a risk that every speaker of Gaelic finds themselves bound within the rigid 'contact zone'.

7 Corinna Krause, 'Finding the Poem – Modern Gaelic Verse and the Contact Zone' (2006), 1: forum.llc.ed.ac.uk [accessed 2 August 2007].

8 Ibid., 9.

9 Galbraith, 'To Hear Ourselves', 162–3.

10 Ibid.

11 Krause, 'Translating Gaelic Scotland', 8–9.

As every Gaelic speaker is normally as fluent, if not more fluent, in English as in Gaelic, the question that Wilson McLeod raised – of whether Gaelic is needed at all in these collections – becomes the central one. Christopher Whyte goes even further when he comments that parallel text editions 'cannot but be addressed primarily to a monoglot English-speaking public, and the original text is allotted the same amount of space as the facing translation, which usurps its right to our undivided attention'.[12] The Gaelic text, from this viewpoint, has become no more than window dressing, providing the *frisson* of encountering an intelligible 'other', while the real work of the poetry takes place in the English text. It is not necessary to be quite so pessimistic, however; one would still hope, surely, that the ideal reader of Gaelic poetry is one who can fully appreciate the play of words and sound in the Gaelic text, and that the primary audience is still Gaelic speaking (even if the secondary, English speaking, audience outnumbers the primary audience by a ratio of some ten thousand to one). For this Gaelic speaking – and so bilingual – audience, however, the parallel translations present a distinctive reading experience. As Krause has noted, when faced with parallel translations even native Gaelic speakers will read the two texts together, using the English text to understand (or complicate) the Gaelic, line by line, stanza by stanza or poem by poem.[13] In Eric Falci's memorable phrase, everybody approaching these collections is 'reading in the gutter' between the two texts.[14] The reading experience has been 'decentred' away from the Gaelic text, without coming to rest in the English text. Instead it balances in-between the two. There is a similar decentring for English speakers as the Gaelic text provides a pull away from the English, at least offering the *frisson* of difference, at most completely undermining the authority of the English text.[15] Everybody

[12] Christopher Whyte, 'Review of *Oideachadh Ceart*, *Aotromachd,* and *Fax and Other Poems*', *Lines Review*, 141 (June 1997), 45.

[13] Krause, 'Finding the Poem'.

[14] This is the title of a paper that Falci gave at 'The Way it Had to Be Said', an Irish-Scottish Poetry Symposium held in Belfast in November 2007.

[15] C.f. Corrina Krause 'Translating Gaelic Scotland: The Culture of Translation in the Context of Modern Scottish Gaelic Culture', Paper originally presented at the Fourth Mercator International Symposium on Minority Languages, Aberystwyth, 26 – 28 October, 2005. http://www.aber.ac.uk/mercator/images/CorinnaKrause.pdf.6 [accessed 2 August 2007]; quoting Lance Hewson, 'The Bilingual Edition', *Visible Language*, 27 (1993), 155: 'Arguing that with the text published in its original format only, it is firmly embedded in the source culture it sprang from, inviting the reader to appreciate the text from within such a perspective, Hewson contrasts that the bilingual edition is, in Meschonnic's terminology, "decentered" towards the second language-culture, seen in the light of the translation it has undergone'.

is reading in the gutter, although only some are looking at the Gaelic text.

The result is not that the texts are interchangeable, with a one-to-one equivalence; rather, the texts are in interlingual dialogue. The English text is, inevitably, at least subtly different from the Gaelic, either in terms of translation loss or gain (when the target language is more or less precise than the source language) and so the two texts modify and alter each other, changing the way we read the other text. With this comes the risk that – for Gaelic speakers more confident in English than in Gaelic (in other words the vast majority) – the English self-translated text is more familiar, more authoritative. The Gaelic text does not, however, cede power completely to the English text; instead, the 'poem' that is read by a Gaelic speaker *is*, in effect, the interlingual dialogue between the two languages – it is a text that is part Gaelic and part English, and which, strictly speaking, is centred in the white space between the two columns of print. The text that the (bilingual) Gaelic speaker reads is then in-between the Gaelic and English texts, or rather 'outside' them, to follow George Steiner's discussion of Goethe and the Persian singer Hafiz: 'This meeting and melting takes place "outside" German and Persian – or, at least, "outside" German as it has existed *until* the moment of translation'.[16]

The parallel text is, as Steiner claims, a new 'entity', a new poem or what would be in Foucault's terms a new 'statement'.[17] For bilingual readers a Gaelic text alone and a Gaelic text with an English translation are different entities: a Gaelic speaker, confronting Sorley MacLean's 'Hallaig' published in Gaelic alone in *Gairm* in 1954 and bilingually in *Calgacus* in 1975 is meeting two *different* texts, just as the translation of 'Hallaig' by Seamus Heaney that appeared in pamphlet form and then in the *Guardian* (without any Gaelic) in 2002 is a different text. Whyte notes that any poem in Gaelic 'proceeds from the language and is an event, no matter how minor, in the life of that language'.[18] The publication of 'Hallaig' in *Gairm* and *Calgacus* mark two distinct events in the

[16] Steiner, *After Babel*, 273.

[17] 'Even if a sentence is composed of the same words, bears exactly the same meaning, and preserves the same syntactical and semantic identity, it does not constitute the same statement if it is spoken by someone in the course of a conversation, or printed in a novel; if it was written one day centuries ago, and if it now reappears in an oral formulation. The coordinates and the material status of the statement are part of its intrinsic characteristics'. Michel Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (*L'Archéologie du savoir*, 1969) (London, 2005), 112–3.

[18] Christopher Whyte 'Translation as Predicament', *Translation and Literature*, 9 (2000), 183.

life of the language (and more troublingly still, so too might the publication of Heaney's translation).

There are questions that the bilingual reading raises about the nature and accuracy of the translation, and so about the relationship between the two languages. Even though, as is still the case, the translations are generally literal with minor divergences or losses or gains in precision/imprecision, the Gaelic text is still, in Hewson's words, 'seen in the light of the translation it has undergone'.[19] Thus, in 'Toileachas' ['Happiness'], published as part of Meg Bateman's recent collection *Soirbheas/Fair Wind* (2007), the adjective 'òrbhuidh' [golden] is applied to a communion in the Gaelic, while in the English the communion becomes 'expansive' and the adjective 'golden' slips down to the next line, to describe 'awareness'. Such divergences bring to the fore questions that are always latent in the Gaelic–English text; questions of the equivalence between the two languages, between how the languages deal with different situations. Similarly, when in 'Naomh' ['Saint'], there is the use of 'geologists' in the English where 'eolaiche' [experts] had been used in the Gaelic; the use of 'geologists' does not simply elucidate the Gaelic text, but it raises various questions about the nature of the relationship between the two languages and the twin subject areas of science and religion (with perhaps the suggestion that there is a more *naïve* or *faux-naïve* voice in the Gaelic text, which is then interrogated by the English).[20] Bateman's collection as a whole is inextricably tied up with questions of translation, from the near-scatological epigraph from Dwelly's dictionary which translates the title variously as 'Fair Wind on the Sea' (for Gaelic speakers from Skye and wind/flatulence for people from Argyll) to the 'Envoi' which ponders the uncertain fates of the Gaelic and English texts (with the irony that the Gaelic text is already meeting its fate, to some degree, being faced by an English translation).

This last poem appears to be influenced by Ní Dhomhnaill's 'Ceist nan Teangan', the final poem in *Pharaoh's Daughter* (1990), where the poetess casts her poem off on the waters to be picked up by whoever (and whichever translator–in this case Paul Muldoon) finds it. Ní Dhomhnaill's collection offers a tempting exemplar for Scottish Gaelic poets; the 2007 collection

[19] Hewson, 'The Bilingual Edition', 155.

[20] This is not limited to Bateman's work. Similar questions are raised, for example, in Aonghas Macneacail's work. In 'am fior mhanaifeasto / the real manifesto' the Gaelic text has 'lergh do chunntas', *cunntas* being a broad term covering 'account' or 'enumeration', while the English text has the more precise 'read your invoice'. Aonghas MacNeacail, *Laoidh an donais òig / hymn to a young demon* (Edinburgh, 2007), 12–13.

edited by Christopher Whyte, *Dreuchd an Fhigheadair*, explicitly follows the example of Ní Dhomhnaill and attempts to assemble a stellar cast of translators to rival those who translated Ní Dhomhnaill's work (although the Scottish poets had to work from literal cribs of the Gaelic texts). Peculiarly, to gain the full effect of the divergent English and Scottish Gaelic or Irish texts while reading *Pharaoh's Daughter* or *Dreuchd an Fhigheadair* one needs to be bilingual. This is also the case with Frank Sewell's translations of some of Cathal Ó Searcaigh's poems from *Na Buachaillí Bána*, which again takes 'Paul Muldoon's co-piloting of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's *Astrakhan Cloak* voyage' as its model. Sewell is quite explicit in noting that to 'appreciate or, indeed, tolerate the dialogue between the Irish and English versions of these poems, the ideal reader must be bilingual'.[21] This demand for a bilingual ideal reader is not a new phenomenon – George Steiner rather sniffily quotes Stephen MacKenna, who translated Plotinus's *Enneades*, to justify the use of free translations:

> Like others who have thought the problem through, MacKenna favours a parallel text, but a free parallel. 'My total testimony,' he writes in 1919, 'would be that nothing could serve the classics more than superbly free translations – backed of course by the thoroughest knowledge – accompanied by the strict text. The original supplies the corrective or the guarantee; the reader, *I* find, understands the depths of his Greek or Latin much better for the free rendering – again, I think of a chaste freedom, a freedom based rigidly on a preservitude'.[22]

Though such a pompous attitude cannot be taken towards the classics any longer when the reading population is entirely bilingual, the use of free translations – whether chaste or otherwise – is more easily justified.

In light of this, a bilingual reader could complain that in Gaelic poetry, with the possible exception of *Dreuchd an Fhigheadair*, the dialogues initiated by parallel translation are rarely followed through: the translations tend not to be free enough, but are rather like dogs and wolves held on a tight rein which only occasionally escape to trouble the Gaelic text (partly because of the tendency towards self-translation which Whyte and Krause have written vigorously against). Even when Gaelic texts have only ever appeared with

[21] Frank Sewell, 'Preface' to Cathal Ó Searcaigh, *Out in the Open,* Frank Sewell (translated) (Connemara, 1997), 14.

[22] Steiner, *After Babel*, 282.

English translations alongside them, a full dialogue between the two texts (and so a more challenging experience of the new bilingual entity for the bilingual reader) is rarely allowed or encouraged to develop. Writing interlingual entities for a bilingual ideal reader, as in Sewell's translations and perhaps *Dreuchd an Fhigheadair*, would liberate the English text and provide a much fuller experience for that ideal bilingual reader. By the very fact that it is a dialogue, interaction between the two texts would also then be maieutic rather than dogmatic, and perhaps avoid the 'social conditions prevailing within Gaelic literature as a collective medium' in which even the Gaelic-speaking readers are more confident and competent in English: as a dialogue, both sides are allowed their say.[23]

Another – and perhaps even more disturbing – feature that arises when Gaelic poetry is considered from the perspective of a bilingual reader appears in some Irish and Scottish Gaelic poems in which there is no English *doppelgänger* present, but in which there is still felt the 'latent presence of English' (a presence felt by a readership that can respond to the use of English words or grammatical structures or Gaelic words that suggest English homophones, for example). In his response to Ian Galbraith's article, and with Scots as his focus, Roderick Watson suggests that 'there is a similar, implicit, "dual text" effect even in what is published on its own as a modern poem in full Scots'; that is, because the target audience (or ideal reader) for a Scots poem is necessarily bilingual, there may be the 'latent presence' of English in the Scots text.[24]

The latent presence of English is most intrusive in Gaelic or Irish texts where the structures – and indeed lexical elements used – are almost intelligible to an English speaker. This is relatively rare (although there is still a subtle shifting implicit, once more, when every Gaelic speaker is bilingual); however, one example of a poet whose work revels in such linguistic games is Gearóid Mac Lochlainn who is also one of the poets who plays most with the presence of bilingual texts and a bilingual reader. In 'Rannta Mhic na Míchomhairle' ['Verses of the Erring Son/Contrary Fellow/Scapegrace'], a rant about the narrator's hates, italicised English and French words merge into the Irish text, while proper names recognisable to the vast majority of Irish people (or at

[23] C.f. Krause, 'Finding the Poem', 8: 'Indeed, the increased physical presence and interlingual influence of English on Gaelic poetry leading the bilingual reader to find the poem back and forth between the facing versions is not only the result of the bilingual nature of the individual author but rather has to be seen in the light of social conditions prevailing within Gaelic literature as a collective medium'.

[24] Roderick Watson, 'The Double Tongue', *Translation and Literature*, 9 (2000), 175.

least those with the most tenuous knowledge of the Irish language) appear in a mix of Irish and English. Mac Lochlainn's bile is linked by two phrases 'Is fuath leam' (I hate) or 'foc', which is treated as an Irish word (and so is not italicised).[25] 'Foc', however, is most obviously and most entertainingly an Irish rendering of the English 'fuck', and so when Mac Lochlainn writes (and especially when he reads) 'foc bocan Séamas ó Heaney is focan EMINEM' most of the audience (whether they speak Irish or not) gets at least the gist. This is certainly not the first Irish or Gaelic-language poem to include English words, but it takes a rare delight in rampaging through the *cordon sanitaire* that tends to separate the two languages in poetry; it is – at a basic level – a denial of the pre-occupations and petty conceits of the unhappily bilingual Irish speaker, a scattershot attack at bilingual communities that are reluctant to acknowledge their bilingualism. When in the last three lines Mac Lochlainn slips into English for a disclaimer, '*(And if you don't get the joke,/Then your heart gets broke./ And remember, it could always get worse)*' the reader, whether or not they get it, does at least realise that the joke is on them.[26]

Mac Lochlainn's poem appeared in the annual anthology *An Guth*, edited by Rody Gorman, an anthology which goes some way to debunk Iain Galbraith's argument about doppelgangers and the 'real cultural constituency of Gaelic', troubles Krause's discussions to date of the 'contact zone' of Gaelic literature, and in doing so also contradicts any view of Gaelic that sees it first and foremost as a (homogenous) means of resistance to Britain, or indeed contender for the poison chalice of being 'English's other'. It is most valuable for showing how Gaelic literature can exist in a broader international context outside any rigid 'contact zone' defined by a lop-sided binary opposition with English; *An Guth* testifies to the fact that Scottish Gaelic literature can and does exist internationally, interlingually – and just in fact – outside its relationship with English.

While it has always been possible to publish poetry – if not collections of poetry – in Gaelic alone, in the journals *Gath* and its predecessor *Gairm*, and as is the norm in Ireland, the creation of *An Guth* provided the first international poetry journal linking the Irish and Scottish Gàidhealtachd. Communication between the realms of Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry was

[25] The closest Irish word to Mac Lochlainn's 'foc' is 'focail' [word]; this is, of course, germane to his linguistic games – he is the poet to put the 'foc' into 'focail'. As has been noted, the poem reminds you of the old joke 'Nìl focail Gaeilge agam' [I don't have a word/I have 'fuck-all' Irish].

[26] Rody Gorman (ed.) *An Guth -2* (Dublin, 2004), 129.

re-engaged in earnest in the late sixties and early seventies following more than two centuries of almost total mutual indifference, and has continued apace over the last ten years (with some political and financial backing). In his foreword to the first *Guth*, Gorman (a Dubliner who makes his home in the Isle of Skye and who writes in Scottish Gaelic, Irish and English) places *An Guth* firmly in a tradition of co-operations between Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry which stretches back to the annual international visits on the Bardic circuit which began in 1971, and which largely consists of occasional publication of poems in journals on either side of the Sea of Moyle and a series of poetry collections with parallel translations between Irish and Scottish Gaelic published by the Dublin-based Coiscéim (which also publishes *An Guth*). These collaborations go some way to justifying Christopher Whyte's claim in his 2004 *modern scottish poetry* that 'for the past four centuries. . .the significant intertext, rather than writing elsewhere in Scotland, would be writing in the Irish language of the same period'–although this is still a troubling claim for the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and there is no reason why there cannot be more than one 'significant intertext'.[27] The two most significant recent projects in this regard are the *An Guth* series of annual collections/anthologies, which first appeared in 2003 and which currently runs to four volumes and *An Leabhar Mòr/The Great Book of Gaelic* which was a touring exhibition in its first incarnation and a 2002 publication in one of its later forms.

These two projects, *An Leabhar Mòr* and *An Guth,* are substantially different; one of the things they do have in common, however, is that they were enabled by the constitutional changes in these islands (and subsequent funding for the cross-border initiatives in minority languages and the arts). In his introduction to the *Leabhar Mòr*, Malcolm MacLean, the director of the Gaelic Arts Project and general editor of the eventual book, describes how the project became possible as a direct result of constitutional change and the peace process, as well as sketching how the poetry (and art contained within the book) paralleled these processes.[28] From its inception in 1997, the *Leabhar Mòr* was to be a celebration of '1,500 years of shared Gaelic heritage'–it was a millennial project, a retrospective that marked the nominal milestone of the turn of the millennium. MacLean links this celebration to an anti-national shared cultural heritage that does not respect state boundaries:

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[27] Christopher Whyte, *modern scottish poetry* (Edinburgh, 2004), 20.

[28] Malcolm MacLean (ed.), *An Leabhar Mòr/The Great Book of Gaelic* (Edinburgh, 2002), 1.

> it transcends political boundaries to celebrate the unity and diversity of Gaelic culture as an integral part of contemporary life in both countries. A language map of Europe reflects cultural realities that bear little resemblance to political boundaries. This is particularly true of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. There are no two countries in Europe with more in common. We share a mythology, three languages, a rich music tradition and some significant history, and yet a great deal of this enduring connection has been consistently glossed over or deliberately obscured.[29]

There is a strange slippage here from talking about 'Gaelic Scotland and Ireland' to 'no two countries in Europe with more in common': it is unclear if it is Scotland or Gaelic Scotland that is being treated as a country. This is perhaps beside the point, but it is also symptomatic of the sense of political fluidity and possibility out of which the project arose.

However, for all the rhetoric of 1,500 years of shared culture in MacLean's introduction to the *Leabhar Mòr*, the 'sharing' within the collection is rather limited. There are 100 poems in the *Leabhar Mòr*, each nominated by a poet, the editorial panel or an interested party. Of these, ten were nominated by the editorial panel, while twenty-nine were poems nominated by their authors. The remaining seventy-one, however, suggest that the poets (and other nominators) did not feel too comfortable outside their own poetic tradition. Four poets in Scottish Gaelic nominated old or middle Irish poems (poems from the period in which the two poetic traditions were in effect one and the same), while only one Irish poet nominated a Scottish poem – Louis de Paor (along with Hamish Henderson) nominating Sorley MacLean's 'Hallaig'. This is testament, if nothing else, to the limited connections that there have been between Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry over the last two and a bit hundred years, and the task that the *Leabhar Mòr* set itself in trying to bring the two communities back together in a mutual celebration. There are also some more ingrained problems. Presented as a celebration the *Leabhar Mòr* is, to some extent, an endstop, a *fait accompli*, and clears the way for a relationship between the Gaelic communities rather than attempting to develop that relationship. More worryingly, with its use of English translations of the Scottish Gaelic and Irish poems, as well as English introductions, covers and supplementary material, it is clear that the *Leabhar Mòr* is primarily addressed

[29] Ibid., 2.

not to the Irish and Scottish Gaelic communities but to the English-speaking world. Although this has undoubtedly helped the huge success of the project and the collection, it still leaves the feeling that the project is a celebration of the Irish and Scottish Gaelic literatures, but not necessarily for them. It also places the collection firmly in the rigid contact zone that Krause objects to (although there is a tendency – particularly amongst the Irish poets – away from self-translation).

An Guth is presented as a celebration of the Gaelic literatures, but also as a rather opportunistic project, designed to fill the gaps in Gaelic- and Irish-poetry publication that had recently arisen with the demise of the Gaelic quarterly *Gairm* in 2002 after fifty years of publication and of the Irish annual publication *Innti*, and, at least in part, born out of the establishment of *Iomairt Colmcille*, the Columba Initiative, in 1997 precisely to fund projects that involved a combination of Irish and Scottish Gaelic and which was and still is one of the main backers of the *Leabhar Mòr* project. However, *An Guth* tends to avoid the troubles that befall *An Leabhar Mòr*, and is able to largely because it exists in a space – both intellectual and poetic – partly cleared by the *Leabhar Mòr*. A series of annual anthologies, *An Guth* is very much an open-ended process, an attempt to create an ongoing dialogue between the two poetic traditions (although also an attempt which has only been partly successful). And the major difference between *An Guth* and the collections that had come before it was the decision (enabled by Gorman's facility in the two languages) to publish translations from Scottish Gaelic to Irish and vice versa without an English intermediary text or with a glossary between the two languages. In its inception at least *An Guth* was viewed as a meeting point – a space in which Irish and Scottish Gaelic poets could meet, and translate each others' work. This has not quite worked out – in the subsequent three volumes nobody else contributes translations between Irish and Gaelic, and although there is still a policy in favour of translations into the two languages, translation between the two has been replaced first by bottom of the page glosses and then by a glossary at the end of the collection (to the extent that there is no translation between Gaelic and Irish in *An Guth* 4 and the only translations from English into either language are Gorman's own translations of some of Bob Dylan's songs); and Gorman is thus left as the sole mediator of the meeting of these two cultures, a one man walking contact zone, as it were.

The experimentation with different ways of placing Scottish Gaelic and Irish together – translation, bottom of the page glossaries similar to those used between Scots and English, end of the book glossaries – suggests an

uncertainty about the status between the two languages, and the way in which this status should be reflected in the layout of the collections. This is not necessarily unhealthy, and certainly helps Gorman and his readers to discover different ways to pass between the two languages. It might simply be a matter of free play on Gorman's part, a means of keeping the collections (and so the relationship between the languages) fluid and shifting: this is perhaps also one of the reasons (along with a healthy sense of mischief) why in the first *Guth* 'Tá Seabhrán i mo Cheann' [there is a buzzing in my head] Gorman's Irish-language translation of a Gaelic poem by Dòmhnall MacAmhlaigh appears not with its Gaelic original, but with a glossary translating some of the words back into Gaelic. Far from there being a fixed relationship between the languages, translation between them is still fluid and can still be – dare one say it – fun.

The example of *An Guth* suggests that the 'contact zone' between Irish and Scottish Gaelic could, indeed, entail an entirely different form of translation than that between the two languages and English. Although translation from Scottish Gaelic to Irish and vice versa, or indeed between Gaelic and Scots can never be entirely 'innocent' either, due to the 'legacy of mutual contact' between the languages, there is not the same inequality of power, and so not perhaps the same guilt that the poet is hastening the demise of the grandmother in the attic (to once more borrow Whyte's phrase). Whether devolutionary change and the dialogues that have followed them can help avoid her death remains unclear; they will certainly, however, postpone it.

Queen's University, Belfast