

# Bad Harsk Speech and Lewit Barbar Tung

## By The Unreliable Narrator

*Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water.*

*—King James Bible, 1611: 'The Translators to the Reader'*

The word 'translation' holds a variety of meanings, from the synthesis of proteins, to a geometrical operation, to the redistribution of a saint's relics. All however stem from the concept of 'carrying across' - of taking something and moving it over a boundary, over some divide between this and that, between here and there.

In this issue of *The Bottle Imp* we concern ourselves with linguistic and literary translations: the movement of meaning from one language to another (and we would be remiss if we did not point out that the Robert Louis Stevenson short story from which we take our name was derived from a German *Märchen*; that it was expressly written to be translated; and that before it ever appeared in one of its author's native languages it was published first in Samoan as "O Le Fagu Aitu" - which Google Translate renders for me as "The Ghost Bottle").

Within the last ten years, machine translation, powered by Big Data and brute-force computation, has enabled readers around the world to read a multitude of languages, breaking down barriers in understanding - albeit with all the subtlety of a main battle tank. But it is one thing to translate a menu, or a news report, and entirely another to convey the essence of a poem, or the mood of a novel. Literature is at its heart an act of translation: an author has to take the world and squeeze it into words, to conjure up a vision within the reader's head. To be a literary translator is to continue this process through yet more layers, of language, of sound, of allusion and intent. They must immerse themselves not

only in the author's language but in their beliefs, their point and purpose, and the music of their words; further, they must comprehend the historical and cultural context of the author's work, and make themselves the medium through which a foreign voice can be transformed so it can speak to a new audience and still be understood.

No translation can ever be wholly neutral: any translation carries with it the breath of its translator, and all the more so when political imperatives are in play. In **Sunset Song: A Scottish Gift to German Readers**, Regina Erich examines the history of German translations of Lewis Grassie Gibbon, first in the GDR and latterly in a reunified Germany; then, in **Talking about a Revolution?**, Carla Sassi explores the reception, interpretation, and assimilation of *La freccia nera*, the late-1960s Italian television adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's galloping adventure story *The Black Arrow*.

In **The Auld Man**, Stuart A. Paterson remembers William Auld, a Scottish poet thrice nominated for the Nobel Prize for his poetry - not in English, nor in Gaelic, nor in Scots, but in Esperanto. Paul Malgrati follows with **Towards a post-colonial alliance?** Some perspectives on Franco-Scots poetry translation, exploring questions of voice and place and power. And finally, John Corbett gets down to the nitty-gritty, chasing shape and sense in **Transcreating Concrete Poetry**.

And there's more, too: under *Upon Another Point*, in **The Cailleach of the Borehole**, Allyson Shaw pricks out the tale of Janet Horne - or perhaps 'Janet Horne' - who may, or may not, have been the last person executed for witchcraft in Scotland. And to close off this issue, we have **book reviews** and a selection of the **Best Scottish Books of 2019**.

Lo, this is aa. Nou, beau sirs, hae guid day.

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