3. Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation: a new beginning

By Kirsteen McCue & Lorna Hughes

As some readers of *The Bottle Imp* will already know, the Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BOSLIT) was established in 1994 and, until recently, was based at the National Library of Scotland (NLS). Created as an open, online database, it currently lists over thirty-two thousand literary works translated into over a hundred languages, with particular strength in the reception of canonical Scottish writers in European languages. The NLS ensured that its new acquisitions were tagged to be added to the database. Initial funding was obtained from a variety of bodies indicating the value which was placed on this resource. Indeed, you can find out all the details of the history and the wonderful team of instigators and workers (both paid and voluntary) on the new BOSLIT BLOG.

As with many older data resources, continuing with successful funding bids and day-to-day support has been increasingly difficult. There has been no major BOSLIT funding since 2005. The data is still downloadable from the NLS data foundry, but this is very different from using a live bibliographical resource, working with an active community of researchers, publishers, and authors. More important still, the database is no longer being updated.

In Spring 2020 the University of Glasgow (UofG) funded a small scoping exercise, examining the possibility of moving BOSLIT to the UofG as an open resource. The College of Arts at UofG is the ideal location, since it hosts an independent unit in Scottish Literature (the only one in the UK) and is also a pioneer in Digital Humanities. It has a diverse portfolio of humanities research projects using digital content, tools and methods, as well as considerable expertise in data development and management. And colleagues in both language and linguistics have key research and teaching interest in Translation Studies. Furthermore, UofG is the founding institution of the International Association for the Study of Scottish

Literatures (IASSL) which held its inaugural World Congress in Glasgow in 2014. The recent scoping project allowed us to investigate the possibilities of moving the data from the NLS onto a new digital platform (using the open source OMEKA platform) to enable full public access to the current BOSLIT data. Realising that we needed to explore the options further and experiment a little more with ongoing data capture, we applied to the Royal Society of Edinburgh for a network grant to enable further discussion with specialists. We wanted to see if we were able to launch the database in a new format to encourage new work and new conversations across a range of key stakeholders about BOSLIT's longer-term sustainability. We were successful with our bid, and since March 2021 we've been running the network called *Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BOSLIT): Creating Digital Futures & Networks.*

The project has been exploring two major issues about BOSLIT's digital future. The first is building a deeper understanding of the use of emerging digital tools and methods to develop BOSLIT as a data resource for the twenty-first century and beyond. We want a system that also supports enhanced analysis and re-analysis of the data to map patterns in Scottish literature and its global reach. We wish to enhance the resource to encourage wider participation in the creation of data by the worldwide community of experts on Scottish literature. BOSLIT has captured data not available in any other repository and has already underpinned some important research (such as the Bloomsbury series of 'Reception' volumes on a range of Scottish writers), helping us understand how the work of Scottish writers was/is circulated and received across the world. While research to date has focused on earlier periods, there is much potential to use BOSLIT's data on contemporary literature to establish the global reach of the work of Scotland's writers in the twenty-first century and to stimulate new translations for the future.

The second issue concerns BOSLIT's long-term sustainability. Without the work of key volunteers in the past ten years, the resource would have become redundant. It is timely to seek new directions for ensuring its survival and future development, otherwise Scotland will lose a vital piece of research infrastructure. BOSLIT is not unique in being an historically developed resource which needs to adjust to a new digital world (see for example the *Bibliography of the History of the Czech Land,* recently developed as an open research infrastructure*).* The challenges of sustaining such resources can be seen by the loss of the digital

bibliographic resource *The Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts, 1450–1700 (CELM).* Collaborating with others working with similar resources, we have been learning a great deal about their experiences which can underpin a longer-term strategy for BOSLIT's sustainable future.

The Network, wider BOSLIT collaboration and opportunities for growth:

The former Advisory Committee for BOSLIT is an example of collaboration across several different Scottish institutions. But at this stage of BOSLIT's development it is crucial to widen this group and to bring in new voices and new ideas from data specialists and national and international scholars, translators and publishers, who can find new ways of enhancing the data and stimulating new work in the field. In 2022 we were able to share our project and launch the prototype of the new BOSLIT at the meeting of World Congress of Scottish Literature in Prague. The International Association for the Study of Scottish Literature is a partner organisation in our network and has enabled us to reach established and emerging colleagues in the field and in all corners of the world. This network has capacity to provide BOSLIT with links to current and future translators and the final workshop on 13 June at the NLS is enabling us to bring just such a group of colleagues together. When in Prague we were also able to meet with the teams who run *Czech Literary Bibliography* and *Bibliography of the History of the Czech Land*, alongside Polish bibliographers from the *Polska Bibliografia Literacka*. This proved a very successful meeting: Czech and Polish colleagues were thrilled by BOSLIT and offered to share their (almost) exhaustive records of Czech and Polish translations of Scottish literature for comparison. They encouraged our BOSLIT team to integrate the database to an online library management system. A potential host might be found in the platform Libri, where the Czech, Polish, and Finnish literary bibliographies are currently developing a joint catalogue. Developing key links with Literature Alliance Scotland, the Association of Scottish Literature and the Scottish Publishers Association has also been a welcome development and we hope to build further on these working relationships beyond the end point of this network. Such conversations are key to encourage further Scottish collaboration while simultaneously building broader UK- and Irish-based and international networks to support furtherance of knowledge about Scottish writers and their work.

As part of our work so far we've been commissioning a series of BLOGs about BOSLIT, both from colleagues who already knew about its treasures, and also

from a variety of younger colleagues who are new to the resource. Several of our new users have begun to identify some gaps in the coverage. We already know that the database is detailed in its records of translations of the work of Robert Burns, Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson and has already supported a number of research projects and ongoing reception study research, such as the aforementioned series of volumes on Burns, Scott and James Macpherson for the Bloomsbury Reception of writers in Europe series. The coverage is particularly strong in the twentieth century, with around six thousand records covering the pre-1901 period and a smaller number covering texts in the twenty-first century. In most recent years a team of dedicated volunteers has worked at the NLS to build further areas of the database, particularly of lesser-known Enlightenment non-fiction authors (recording the global impact of the Scottish Enlightenment was a priority for the advisory committee). Since 2010 over three thousand records have been added including new NLS acquisitions, several hundred exotic language translations of Byron's work and over two thousand records of Gaelic to English translations.

The BOSLIT blogs are also exploring case studies of major Scottish writers, examining what we can see exists and highlighting where there might be room for new translations for new and future readers. It is our hope that BOSLIT can be an active resource in creativity of new work, as much as a repository of what has been.

Our network will complete at the end of September 2023, when we will launch the new BOSLIT publicly and complete delivery of our other outputs. Our website, blog posts and network discussions with digital specialists, librarians, writers, translators and publishers have been central to an emerging strategy for BOSLIT's digital future. Such conversations are enabling us to share information and exchange ideas across and beyond the academic disciplines, building wider and more diverse user groups with greater understanding of Scotland's literary traditions old and new. Do keep a look out for the new BOSLIT! And we are keen to hear from anyone working with translations of Scottish literature.

As some readers of *The Bottle Imp* will already know, the Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BOSLIT) was established in 1994 and, until recently, was based at the National Library of Scotland (NLS). Created as an open, online database, it currently lists over thirty-two thousand literary works translated into over a hundred languages, with particular strength in the reception of canonical

Scottish writers in European languages. The NLS ensured that its new acquisitions were tagged to be added to the database. Initial funding was obtained from a variety of bodies indicating the value which was placed on this resource. Indeed, you can find out all the details of the history and the wonderful team of instigators and workers (both paid and voluntary) on the new BOSLIT BLOG.

As with many older data resources, continuing with successful funding bids and day-to-day support has been increasingly difficult. There has been no major BOSLIT funding since 2005. The data is still downloadable from the NLS data foundry, but this is very different from using a live bibliographical resource, working with an active community of researchers, publishers, and authors. More important still, the database is no longer being updated.

In Spring 2020 the University of Glasgow (UofG) funded a small scoping exercise, examining the possibility of moving BOSLIT to the UofG as an open resource. The College of Arts at UofG is the ideal location, since it hosts an independent unit in Scottish Literature (the only one in the UK) and is also a pioneer in Digital Humanities. It has a diverse portfolio of humanities research projects using digital content, tools and methods, as well as considerable expertise in data development and management. And colleagues in both language and linguistics have key research and teaching interest in Translation Studies. Furthermore, UofG is the founding institution of the International Association for the Study of Scottish Literatures (IASSL) which held its inaugural World Congress in Glasgow in 2014. The recent scoping project allowed us to investigate the possibilities of moving the data from the NLS onto a new digital platform (using the open source OMEKA platform) to enable full public access to the current BOSLIT data. Realising that we needed to explore the options further and experiment a little more with ongoing data capture, we applied to the Royal Society of Edinburgh for a network grant to enable further discussion with specialists. We wanted to see if we were able to launch the database in a new format to encourage new work and new conversations across a range of key stakeholders about BOSLIT's longer-term sustainability. We were successful with our bid, and since March 2021 we've been running the network called *Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BOSLIT): Creating Digital Futures & Networks.*

The project has been exploring two major issues about BOSLIT's digital future. The first is building a deeper understanding of the use of emerging digital tools

and methods to develop BOSLIT as a data resource for the twenty-first century and beyond. We want a system that also supports enhanced analysis and re-analysis of the data to map patterns in Scottish literature and its global reach. We wish to enhance the resource to encourage wider participation in the creation of data by the worldwide community of experts on Scottish literature. BOSLIT has captured data not available in any other repository and has already underpinned some important research (such as the Bloomsbury series of 'Reception' volumes on a range of Scottish writers), helping us understand how the work of Scottish writers was/is circulated and received across the world. While research to date has focused on earlier periods, there is much potential to use BOSLIT's data on contemporary literature to establish the global reach of the work of Scotland's writers in the twenty-first century and to stimulate new translations for the future.

The second issue concerns BOSLIT's long-term sustainability. Without the work of key volunteers in the past ten years, the resource would have become redundant. It is timely to seek new directions for ensuring its survival and future development, otherwise Scotland will lose a vital piece of research infrastructure. BOSLIT is not unique in being an historically developed resource which needs to adjust to a new digital world (see for example the *Bibliography of the History of the Czech Land,* recently developed as an open research infrastructure*).* The challenges of sustaining such resources can be seen by the loss of the digital bibliographic resource *The Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts, 1450–1700 (CELM).* Collaborating with others working with similar resources, we have been learning a great deal about their experiences which can underpin a longer-term strategy for BOSLIT's sustainable future.

The Network, wider BOSLIT collaboration and opportunities for growth:

The former Advisory Committee for BOSLIT is an example of collaboration across several different Scottish institutions. But at this stage of BOSLIT's development it is crucial to widen this group and to bring in new voices and new ideas from data specialists and national and international scholars, translators and publishers, who can find new ways of enhancing the data and stimulating new work in the field. In 2022 we were able to share our project and launch the prototype of the new BOSLIT at the meeting of World Congress of Scottish Literature in Prague. The International Association for the Study of Scottish Literature is a partner organisation in our network and has enabled us to reach

established and emerging colleagues in the field and in all corners of the world. This network has capacity to provide BOSLIT with links to current and future translators and the final workshop on 13 June at the NLS is enabling us to bring just such a group of colleagues together. When in Prague we were also able to meet with the teams who run *Czech Literary Bibliography* and *Bibliography of the History of the Czech Land*, alongside Polish bibliographers from the *Polska Bibliografia Literacka*. This proved a very successful meeting: Czech and Polish colleagues were thrilled by BOSLIT and offered to share their (almost) exhaustive records of Czech and Polish translations of Scottish literature for comparison. They encouraged our BOSLIT team to integrate the database to an online library management system. A potential host might be found in the platform Libri, where the Czech, Polish, and Finnish literary bibliographies are currently developing a joint catalogue. Developing key links with Literature Alliance Scotland, the Association of Scottish Literature and the Scottish Publishers Association has also been a welcome development and we hope to build further on these working relationships beyond the end point of this network. Such conversations are key to encourage further Scottish collaboration while simultaneously building broader UK- and Irish-based and international networks to support furtherance of knowledge about Scottish writers and their work.

As part of our work so far we've been commissioning a series of BLOGs about BOSLIT, both from colleagues who already knew about its treasures, and also from a variety of younger colleagues who are new to the resource. Several of our new users have begun to identify some gaps in the coverage. We already know that the database is detailed in its records of translations of the work of Robert Burns, Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson and has already supported a number of research projects and ongoing reception study research, such as the aforementioned series of volumes on Burns, Scott and James Macpherson for the Bloomsbury Reception of writers in Europe series. The coverage is particularly strong in the twentieth century, with around six thousand records covering the pre-1901 period and a smaller number covering texts in the twenty-first century. In most recent years a team of dedicated volunteers has worked at the NLS to build further areas of the database, particularly of lesser-known Enlightenment non-fiction authors (recording the global impact of the Scottish Enlightenment was a priority for the advisory committee). Since 2010 over three thousand records have been added including new NLS acquisitions, several hundred exotic language translations of Byron's work and over two thousand records of Gaelic to

English translations.

The BOSLIT blogs are also exploring case studies of major Scottish writers, examining what we can see exists and highlighting where there might be room for new translations for new and future readers. It is our hope that BOSLIT can be an active resource in creativity of new work, as much as a repository of what has been.

Our network will complete at the end of September 2023, when we will launch the new BOSLIT publicly and complete delivery of our other outputs. Our website, blog posts and network discussions with digital specialists, librarians, writers, translators and publishers have been central to an emerging strategy for BOSLIT's digital future. Such conversations are enabling us to share information and exchange ideas across and beyond the academic disciplines, building wider and more diverse user groups with greater understanding of Scotland's literary traditions old and new. Do keep a look out for the new BOSLIT! And we are keen to hear from anyone working with translations of Scottish literature.

(c) The Bottle Imp